

# WWII Primary Source

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Clerk, Timaru, NZ

Private Roger Huia Morris

Service Number: 8225

20 Infantry Battalion

Served: North Africa, and was a Prisoner of War

Died in NZ



Look for further information:

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Archives New Zealand ([archives.govt.nz](http://archives.govt.nz))

## NEW ZEALAND MILITARY FORCES.

S.O.R. 3 CARD SENT TO  
NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT.

WAR.

[Form N.Z. 307.  
(In pads of 100.)]

Army No. 8225.

607 notified  
688  
21-12-45  
20<sup>th</sup> Jan to.

## HISTORY-SHEET.

Discharged.

Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> Bde.

Rank: Pte

Christian Name: ROGER HUIA

Surname: MORRIS

20<sup>th</sup> Bde.

Pte

Christian Name: ROGER HUIA

Surname: MORRIS

Outward.

Inward, ex "

Service.

	Date.	Date.	Place.	From	To	Year.	Days.
Attested ..	16.9.39	Embarked ..	7.4.45	N.M.			92
Entered camp ..	5.10.39	Arrived N.Z.	4.8.45	N.Z.			108
Embarked ..	5.1.40	Discharged ..	20.11.45	Wgtn			212
Disembarked ..	14.2.40	Reason for return and/or discharge:	Medically unfit. 20.11.45 yde3P.				
At Egypt (place.)				58	Total ..	6 47	

Next-of-kin.

Relationship.

Address.

<del>Mr G. S. Morris.</del>	<del>FATHER</del>	<del>Lyttelton.</del>
<del>Miss R. J. Morris</del>	<del>MOTHER</del>	<del>Mr &amp; Mrs. Lyttelton, canteen advt 106/1673/1, 29.4.45</del>
<del>Miss Dorothy Grace Morris wife of G. Morris</del>	<del>Wife</del>	<del>Mr &amp; Mrs. Tenace Lyttelton (Advt advt 13.11.45)</del>

44 MERTON STREET, TRENTON (Form CS + MI 133.50)

Address of soldier on return to N.Z. (Extra spaces are for changes of address or changes of name owing to decease, marriage, &amp;c.)

8885

P.P. 106/1673/1, 29.4.45

CASUALTIES. H.P.R.

MORRIS R.H.

Cable No.	Date of Casualty.	Nature of Casualty.	NOTIFICATION SENT.		
			To	Date.	By
906/1655/1. 11.45		Safe with Allied Forces.	W.O.R.K.	26.4.45	h.c.b.
906/1673/1 29.4.45	25.4.45	Safe in U.K. 25.4.45	"	29.4.45	W.M.P.

## ACTION AFTER RETURN TO NEW ZEALAND OR DISCHARGE ABROAD.

Nature of Document issued.	Date.	By	Address sent to.	Pay Office advised.
10% 74.8A Certificate of Discharge 10.20462. 28-1-46 R.S.		See Schedule P.O. P.815		728.
✓ M.I.D. EMBLEM		ITALY STAR		
✓ 1939-45 STAR		France & Germany Star		
✓ ATLANTIC STAR		✓ DEFENCE MEDAL		
✓ AFRICA STAR		✓ WAR MEDAL, 1939-45		
✓ 8th ARMY CLASP		N.Z. War Service Medal	Appn. No. 38	
✓ PACIFIC STAR			Date 14.3.50	
Assessed by 88	Checked by LR		Initials 47	

80 P.M.  
HIST HISTORY OF 17th Stories Branch  
issued by War 17 Stories Branch  
16/19/51

### ***A Kiwi soldier's diary, from World War Two.***

*This is Roger's story and has been transcribed from his 2 wartime diaries, by his son Geoff. Roger was born, Roger Huia Morris on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1914 to Rebecca and Geoffrey and is their fourth child. The Morris family home, in Lyttelton, New Zealand was named "Flackley Ash" after the original home and estate in England. Roger's dad was an Engineer on the Lyttelton Harbour dredge for many years. Roger died on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1990; in Timaru at age 76 after suffering a stroke. He had the early signs of Parkinson's disease at the time. We miss him.*

*It wasn't until after his death that his two wartime diaries were discovered and in 2004 I decided to copy them to a computer as they were small diaries, written for the most part in pencil and very hard to read.*

*I have copied his script, almost word for word and have added my comments in Italicized script to try and explain what I think he might have been talking about in some places.*

*At age 25 I think that Roger would have been a fairly naive young fellow, who had lived in a boarding house in Timaru, worked as a clerk for a shipping company and sent his washing home by post, for his Mum to do because Laundromats hadn't been invented yet. He had met a young lady and also played tennis and golf in his spare time. He would not have been as confident and outgoing as his older brother Frank, with whom he was able to share his early war experience. Having Frank around must have been a big 'plus' for him in the early days of 1940.*

*Imagine yourself in Roger's situation at this time, being obliged to sign up for a war on the other side of the world and leaving your familiar world behind and not having any idea if you will return in one piece or return at all or how long it will all last. You know you will find yourself being shot at and being obliged to shoot back at people that you have absolutely no personal quarrel with. You are not going to be in control of the situation that you will find yourself in. At times you will be scared "shitless", if you will excuse the expression with bombs going off around you and tracer bullets flying in all directions. Your buddies found blown to pieces and you wondering when it will be your turn and the relative security of your home is now on the other side of this crazy world.*

*It's an adventure for sure, but this one did have it's occasional "down side" as you will see. When Roger was wounded, it was sheer luck that the shrapnel hit him where it did. An inch or two either way and he could have died and had he not been wounded*

*at all, at this time then he certainly may have gone on to be more seriously or even mortally wounded, at some other time as so many of the young lads were. He was one of the lucky ones.*

*There are the inevitable spelling mistakes here, as his entries are hard to read at times and I have not had time to research some of the place names etc.*

*This is Roger's story in his own words and I dedicate it to all his buddies who didn't make it home. Lest we Forget.*

G.N.M.

*Note: His Brother Frank's story would be very similar to Roger's I'm sure.*

*His First Diary begins. . . .*

Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1940. D Day – 4 (Departure day)

Up at 6am, Had a fairly easy day and still preparing for Friday next. Time spent at Burnham, there being no leave. Bed 10pm.

*(Burnham Military camp is just south of Christchurch.)*

Jan 2<sup>nd</sup>, D Day –3

Up at 6am, Parades as usual in morning, Left for Lyttelton as pallbearer for W.C.Toy.

Later had evening at home with family.

Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>, D Day –2

Up at 6am, Parade and left at 8am for Christchurch to march through the city to Cramon(?) Square. Family there to watch, Later they mixed at Burnham and brought D.G.N. (Girlfriend and future wife) and we had a good afternoon, but "goodbyes" were not so good at 5pm. However it is over now,.... so now for the welcome home!

Jan 4th, D Day –1

Up at 6am, Had usual parade and fixing up last minute details such as getting Entraining and Embarking orders. No beer at canteen tonight as orders were evidently out regarding 20<sup>th</sup> (Rifle) Battalion. Handed in Badges today. Wrote many letters tonight.

Friday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, Departure Day

Up at 6am, Time for departure put off and we left Burnham camp at 12.40pm. Arrive Lyttelton (Harbour) about 3pm after straight through run. Saw Family by the Shaw Saville and Albion Co shed and said goodbye. Embarked on H.M.T.S (Her Majesty's Troop Ship) DUNERA at No3 wharf, port side. Left wharf about 4pm and saw (Sister)

Ruth on Dredge. (*Brother*) Frank and I on the Foremast. Stowed gear in No7 Mess (Frank in No1) and later placed rifles and web gear in store and got a hammock. H.M.S. LEANDER escorted us to Wellington. Had a boat drill. Bed 9pm.

*(Roger's only job, as far as I know was with the Shaw Saville and Albion Shipping Company. He started out in Timaru and may have worked in Christchurch or Lyttelton before moving to the Wellington office where he retired after 44 1/4 years, including war service)*

Jan 6<sup>th</sup>, 1st day out.  
Up at 5.45am, Cleaned up and passed in hammock. Had boat drill. Met Wellington ships, ORION, RANGITATA, STRATHAIRD, and EMPRESS OF CANADA, with RAMILIES and CANBERRA as escort. Lyttelton's convoy was, DUNERA and SOBIESKI with LEANDER as escort. We fell into 'line ahead' and then into 3 lines. Sea started out calm but rose and many sick. Great excitement at 6pm, Mt Egmont was sighted. I was to bed at 8pm. LAST OF NEW ZEALAND.

Sunday Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> day out.  
Up 7am, Had parade by companies. Felt only 50% today. Had a good sleep last night. LEANDER and CANBERRA well out on flanks and forward today, otherwise our order is the same. Afternoon on Forecastle. Wonderful evening and sea very calm, Like a painted ships on a painted sea as we maneuvered for night position. Bed 9.30pm.

Jan 8<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> day out.  
Up at 6am, Watches put back 1 hour. Parade P.T. at 8.45am and oiled rifles after Boat Drill at 10am. Parade again at 2pm till 3pm and then stored rifles. Convoy did maneuvers late in the day. Wonderful evening again. Gambling stopped tonight.

Jan 9<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> day out.  
Up 6am, Had a filthy night with Ptomaine Poisoning and was about most of the night. Saw Doctor and others were bad too. Had a quiet day and slept a bit. However was off food. Seas OK with slight swell. Sickness rumoured, EMPRESS OF CANADA into Sydney tonight. Rain squalls tonight.

Jan 10<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> day out.  
Australian coast sighted about midday and Australian convoy joined us about 4pm. Had boxing practice and a 'D' parade. Think we are near Sydney, but course now for Melbourne. 4 ships joined us today. Change also in escort. Wrote D.G.N.

Jan 11<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> day out.

Usual parades etc, with lectures on guard duties and identification patches. Land on Starboard (right) side. Had a piano in shelter deck and a great sing-song. Played cards later.

Friday Jan 12<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> day out.

Passing islands of Bass Straight in early morning. Watches 12noon to 4pm and 8pm to midnight. Thought a lot of you today Darling, as we were on duty at the same time. EMPRESS OF JAPAN arrived today as we are approximately off Melbourne. Watch in No17, Frank at No19.

Monday Jan 15<sup>th</sup>, 10 days out.

Had fun at midday with a fire extinguisher going off prematurely. Ships did maneuvers today. We must be near the West side of Australia now.

Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 11 days out.

Had a mock battle today, but I didn't see it as I was on Hospital duty. Wrote letters home and to D.G.N. in the afternoon. Aero planes over several times today so we must be near land.

Jan 17<sup>th</sup>, 12 days out.

Great day and maneuvers carried out by ship. Nothing much of note today except that rumours are flying about our leave at Fremantle, however we will leave it till we get it. "If"

Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 13 days out.

Land sighted at 1pm, after ships had got into single line at 10am. Steamed into Fremantle harbour (outer) and anchored at 4pm. Great sight as 7 ships berthed in inner harbour. Wonderful sight of lights at night, with a great night. Outer harbour very big.

Friday Jan 19<sup>th</sup>, 14 days out.

Finished sentry duty, Up at 6am. Into inner Fremantle harbour about 1.30pm and "Dressed ship". Off at about 3pm, but held up and got away at 4pm. Ride to Perth on the back of a lorry. Good time had at Adelphi and cabled home and D.G.N. Met 2 girls in trouble and after helping out had supper and back to ship, per a private driver through Kings Drive. Great day, bed 1am. Weather fine, sunny and very hot in our serge uniforms.

Jan 20<sup>th</sup>, 15 days out.

Up at 6am and hard to do too! Left inner harbour 7.30am and lay outside until 1pm then left Fremantle in 'line ahead'. Convoy still 11 ships, with extra protection of about 5 warships. RAMILIES, KENT and an Aussie ship and a French "SUIFREN". Late arrivals from leave, all Aussies and NZ put on board DUNERA and what jobs they were as seas were high later in evening. Wonderful day.

Jan 21<sup>st</sup>, 16 days out.

Up 6am, Had inspection by "Kip" and all are told off re state of uniforms and spent rest of day cleaning same. Had church parade in morning, otherwise nothing done. RANGITATA had man overboard today but he was recovered.

(*"KIP" would have been Kippenberger, a high-ranking officer*)

Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>, 17 days out.

Had usual parades and inspection in serge at 9am. Received Kit bags and changed serge for drill uniforms. Went to 'sing-song' at 3.30pm on prom deck. Spent time writing etc. Also got paid 1 pound. Weather getting hotter. Wonderful night tonight.

Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>, 18 days out.

Usual parades today. We are now in the tropics and the deck awnings were put up today with great 'pantomime' by the coloured crew. (Passed Capricorn today) Did some writing. Mr. Markham (Platoon Commander) had tonsils out today.

Jan 24<sup>th</sup>, 19 days out.

Usual parades today. Swimming bath rigged on deck and is about 10 feet by 5 feet. Slept on deck tonight. Not too well and stomach giving trouble. Sun getting too hot. Wonderful evening. Vaccinations today.

Jan 25<sup>th</sup>, 20 days out.

Saw Doctor re bad head and tummy. RANGITATA stopped again this afternoon and think man overboard. Lay about for rest of day. Won a 'Housey' tonight 17 shillings. Weather very hot and sultry.

Friday Jan 26<sup>th</sup>, 21 days out.

Saw Doctor again but little satisfaction, however feel better today. Wrote letters and slept on deck between parades. RAMILLIES had live round shooting this morning. Housey today and Frank won about 1 pound. Hot and sunny today.

Jan 27<sup>th</sup>, 22 days out.

Usual parades and concert in the afternoon. Wrote letters. Crossing the Equator some time tonight. Wonderful sunset and moon rise. Temperature very hot.

Jan 29<sup>th</sup>, 24 days out.

Usual routine. Ships split up in evening as we are nearing Colombo. Very little of note but my vaccination is taking effect a bit. Head crook and general disposition filthy!

Jan 30<sup>th</sup>, 25 days out.

Did parades and land sighted about 11am and entered Colombo at midday.

Extremely full port and must have at least 30 ships in. Amazing number of small boats and speed amazingly high. The sunset marvelous and night wonderful and imagine typically Oriental.

Jan 31<sup>st</sup>, 26 days out.

Up at 5.30am and on Lunch fatigue at Echelon barracks. Went ashore after 2 hour wait at ship, at 10am. Guarded food till midday and had a 'Rickshaw' ride. Later had a wild ride in a lorry through native quarters. Later reported back to ship about 5pm by ship "RUTH". Great day and enjoyed it very much, but very hot indeed. Bed 9.30pm.

Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 27 days out.

Had hoped to go to Colombo, as promised by Officers, but let down and ship now sailing at 11am. Great sight. An Aircraft Carrier met us outside. Had crook head re vaccination and slept as much as possible in afternoon.

Friday Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 28 days out.

Not feeling too good with bad head from injection. Planes about all day from Carrier. A French troop ship now with us. Aircraft carrier EAGLE passed close to us today. Lots of fun with boats between warships today a rumour of a plane crashing into the sea, but nothing definite. Wrote letters, but now no ports of call to be mentioned in letters. What next?

Feb 6<sup>th</sup>, 32 days out.

RAMILLIES did not leave us as expected. Wrote letters. Paraded in full kit today and put gear away in readiness for disembarking. Near Aden. Passed Perrin Island to Starboard so through "Hells Gate" and into Red Sea. Africa and many islands seen to port, whilst Arabia was further to Starboard. Convoy split last night and some went to Aden. Spent time fixing kit bags and getting ready for disembarking. Very hot.

Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, 36 days out.

Not feeling too well although day is colder. Had afternoon duty on Promenade deck and Frank and I practiced Semaphore. Convoy split up single tonight.

Feb 12<sup>th</sup>, 37 days out. (At this point Roger had 2 days marked as '37' days out, so I will continue with his count rather than change it.)

Approached and entered Port Tofira (SP) Harbour. Some troops unloaded, but not DUNERA. Plenty of Gypsies about wharf. Berthed about 10am. Looks moderately clean, but would rather see at close quarters. Gypsies on wharf look very filthy. Had no money so little trade done from our ship. ORION and RANGITATA arrived today. Aussie boats have gone through Suez Canal to Palestine, we think. Saw several ships in Canal and they looked weird in the Desert.

Feb 14<sup>th</sup>, 39 days out.

Up at 2am and to 4am on guard on wharf. After 4am all rush and we left DUNERA at 5.30am and entrained and left at 6am. Wonderful trip to Cairo and Maardi Camp through desert and cultivated land and canals, a real Eastern country. Should imagine better that Canal (or Camel ??) rides. Detrained and marched past G.O.C. troops, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, N2E already here. Bed 8pm. Weather fine and sunny and hot.

Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 40 days out.

Up at 6am and very cold. Did little else but arrange tents in morning. In afternoon had Battalion parade and dust terrible. However must get used to it. Visit canteen and after tea, Frank and I had walk above camp.

Friday Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, 41 days out.

Up 6am, Had first route march and set out for Napoleon's Fort, however distance deceptive and time short so turn back. Country all shingle and sand and no grass at all. Had a great talk in 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion lines on Cairo etc. Met Lloyd Morrison at 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion Naafi and he is Ord room Corp at 18<sup>th</sup> BN and Bob is with him. Weather fine sunny and hot.

(Naafi is probably one of the main or mess tents)

Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 42 days out.

Up at 6am and had Adjutants parade in morning. Left at 1pm for Cairo. March to Maardi station, 4 miles and very long. Great streamlined trains, Diesel and Steam. Saw the 'Berka' and Soldiers club and also Khtin Kalili Bazaar and got some Lotus sent for D.G.N. Later saw a show, "Goodbye Mr. Chips" and good show. Had several meals. Wild ride to camp in Taxi. Bed 1am. Weather hot and sunny.

Feb 20<sup>th</sup>, 45 days out.

Hell of a day with dust everywhere in clouds. On cookhouse Fatigue today and kept busy all day. Had a night march – compass bearings and very tired. Sand flying.

Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, 46 days out.

Had a Company day out and had lunch on Army (Armour Plated) biscuits and cheese and enjoyed it. Saw 'Light' and 'Bren' Tanks in action and they can certainly move.

Saw "Men with Wings" tonight and quite good. Bed 11pm. Weather, cold as hell and the dust as bad!

Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 47 days out.

Usual parades and day spent in sand hills out in river bed on bayonet and section drills. Saw picture, "It's a bet" with Frank and it was good. Plenty of aircraft about. Sand flying today. Cold and windy.

Friday Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>, 48 days out.

Usual parades, later platoon drill and company maneuvers. In the afternoon we had platoon maneuvers. Had leave in the evening and visited Cairo. Had a good look at Berka and later shampoo and bath. Had a good time and plenty to eat, but times a bit dangerous at times. Bed 1.40am. Weather windy, cold, but fine and cloudy.

Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 50 days out.

Had a church parade at 9am and Colonel in Chief of Brigade and Colonel in Chief of Eastern Command attended. Had a great afternoon at Cheops Pyramids and saw the Sphinx and ??? and went to the Kings and Queens chambers in the former. Had a great entertaining evening in the town. Home to El Maadi by train. FIRST MAIL TODAY!!! Bed 1am, Fine and sunny.

Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 55 days out.

Had bayonet drills and maneuvers all day in the desert and night maneuvers later. Not too well and had diarrhoea trouble tonight. Fine sunny and hot with a very cold wind later.

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 56 days out.

Feeling OK today, Had an inspection by Lieutenant General ....?....this morning and several fainted in the heat. In the afternoon we went to El-Maardi town and hired bikes and had a great time on the banks of the Nile and in native areas. Evening in camp. A perfect day and very hot.

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 57 days out.

Church parade in Naafi owing to wind and flying sand. Went to races at Heliopolis in the afternoon and came out about 20 pr(?) down. Frank and the boys there too. Back to Cairo and later home about 12.30am. Windy and dusty day.

March 4<sup>th</sup>, 58 days out.

Left at 8am by lorry for Abbassia Rifle range. Scored 24 out of 75. Range good but really a 5 years service range. Was at Butts(?) all afternoon. Had a great trip both ways through the Dead City of Cairo. 2nd MAIL TONIGHT! Wrote letters tonight.

Plenty of planes at Heliopolis drome (near Abbassia). Cold morning but a great day.

March 6<sup>th</sup>, 60 days out.

Saw Bren Gun and 2 1/2inch Mortar for the first time today and had lessons thereon. Wrote letters this afternoon. Night maneuvers tonight and we defended against 'C' Company. Fine and sunny and warm.

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 61 days out.

Out on march to look at scene of last nights show. Had periods of Bren and Mortar. Terrible day and a "Simoon" (?) blew all day and dust was terrible all the afternoon. Wrote letters. Hot and dusty all day and flying sand blinding.

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 62 days out.

Franks birthday and he is Corporal of the guard. However we foregathered in Naafi in evening. Had instructions in Bren and Mortar. Had a route march in the afternoon and a farce of a night maneuver attacking "C" Company. Hot and sunny but cloudy.

Sunday March 9<sup>th</sup>, 64 days out.

Frank on special course of training drill today.

Went to Cairo zoological gardens, Saw many things wandering around Cairo. Bought a gong, with NZ on it for home. Brought home a drunk NZ air man tonight. Came home in Police wagon. Fine and sunny.

Friday March 15th, 69 days out.

Up at 6am, Had route march in and late afternoon. Major MacDuff left for Palestine today and thank god for small mercies! Saw "Easy living" with Frank and Aussie and enjoyed it. Flies getting very noticeable. Fine and sunny.

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 70 days out.

On Latrine Guard today. Wrote letters and tried out my camera. Frank to races at Gezira.

March 21st, 75 days out.

Very tired today, Marched to old field engineer's road to the north in the morning. Had defence positions in afternoon. Left at 6pm for Luxor and met Lloyd and Bob Morrison and Chas Paterson on train and celebrated and enjoyed ourselves. Bed about 2am and slept in the luggage racks. Hot and sunny.

Friday March 22<sup>nd</sup>, (Good Friday) 76 days out.  
 Arrive Luxor, 8.30am. Great trip up Nile by train. Saw Luxor Temples and Garden of Allah (latter a washout) and had a row on the Nile. Saw temple of Karmak and its wonders, in the afternoon. Had a great evening. Fine sunny and hot.

March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 77 days out.  
 Up at 7am and crossed Nile about 9am and after a wild ride saw tombs of Sepi 1, Arenhoteb(?) II, Tutankhamen and Ramses III on to Hotsepsud (?) Valley.

Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup> (Easter), 78 days out.  
 Arrived Cairo 7am and straight to Maadi for breakfast. Went to Memphis and Sakaro (?) in excursion and had a great afternoon. Saw tombs of the Bulls (*and some other place but I can't read his writing.*) Straight back to Maadi and a great drive past pyramids at sunset. Fine and sunny.

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 79 days out.  
 To Cairo at 10pm and looked at Royal Palace. Saw Bazaar also and ordered Gong. Saw NZ army team beat English team by 20-0. Great game. Saw a movie and home to bed at 11pm. Hot and sunny.

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 80 days out.  
 Had Battalion in desert formation in morning and late afternoon. Had incendiary bomb demonstration. Wrote letters in evening. SPECIAL ONE!!! Lost glasses today!!!  
*(I have a feeling that this "Special Letter" was to "pop the question" to Miss D.G.N. He received her reply on May 10<sup>th</sup>)*

*(Next couple of weeks were spent doing route marches and maneuvers and suffering from diarrhoea and trying to get to see the eye doctor so he can get his lost glasses replaced, sleeping out in the desert and sand storms.)*

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 107 days out.  
 Battalion moved out for maneuvers at 10am, but I stayed home owing to diarrhoea . Wrote letters. Frank to Hospital.

April 25<sup>th</sup>, 110 days out.  
 Had odd jobs and wrote letters all day, Boys still out (*on maneuvers*) Saw a show after visiting Frank (*in hospital*).

April 26<sup>th</sup>, 111 days out.  
 Troops arrive back at 2pm. Visited Frank at 3pm. Boys wrecked picture theatre tonight and had cause to.

*Second diary....*

## THE GRIFF

**By Roger H. Morris**  
**(A 'PG'(in Italy) and later a 'KG' (in Germany) )**  
**Scribed on and about the end of March, 1945 and covering the**  
**period of several long weary months. (years)**

Dedicated to POW's from Africa, who lived and scratched in Benghazi, The Palms, Tahuna, Swany Camps and later at the Italian hands at the many 'PG' Campo Concentramentos of Italy and of the same men who lived and worked as Kriegsgefangener (KG) in Germany.

Chapter 1

The Beginning.

(July 1942)

Well to have a beginning, one must have an ending, so that is where I must begin! It was dawn and we were slowly moving forward, the first lights of the day were endeavoring, from their Eastern and our half rear position, to subdue the last flickering glimmer from a burnt out Tank 'nearly'.

Things had been fairly quiet for the past half an hour, since we had passed a gun possey and we were getting ready for some hasty work before things got really hot, both in daylight and activity! The boys ahead were strung out and the 'forties' both fore and aft were stopped and not too bunched when the unusual and startling happened! It seemed like a dream, those first few moments, but I soon found it was not for there was a stream of tracers across the front of the first truck and some answering fire which puzzled us for a few seconds and then from behind there suddenly blazed anti tank fire followed by, in all three successive roars of fire. On survey the position was simply that the tanks had moved up on our left front and left rear and assuming a 'hull down' position were proceeding to reduce us. The front fire was at the infantry and that did not immediately affect me although it influenced me to the extent that it left me only two exits from the situation to the right and to the rear. However there is still the rear to be looked at and that gave me quite a bit of necessary immediate thought for already there were three blazing forties and we looked very much like being number four. It is really to be admired the speed of some human beings in the moment of peril and also the slowness of others but I know I was last on that truck and only just got there and how I abused the gentle soul immediately in front of me. However by the time I was there we were on the move in

the only direction left to us, namely to the right. It was a rough course but flat and we took no notice of stones, etc in our way. It was a good 1000 yards and twice I saw tracer MQ lick round our rear falling just short and causing no inconvenience. We cleared the lip of the nearest Wadi and were safe for the time being.

About or just before all this occurred, the 'objective taken' flare went up from slightly in our rear and by the time that we had arrived in the safety of the Wadi the Sun had made it's abrupt appearance in it's usual local manner and so began to make life all the more unsuitable for things in general. On surveying the surroundings we found that it was an old 'Iti' anti tank gun park and there were several of these weapons lying about, their calibre being about 37mm and they did not appear to have much guts.

In this position we now began engaging the opposition and the 27 and 7 went into it full bore, whilst we, not being of much use at that distance endeavored to draw what fire we could to relieve the others, especially the 7. In this move we were very successful and we suffered no casualties until we became the target of mortar fire and that was for me the beginning of the end.

I may say here that the country was what we called the 'slanger' type or in other words it had simply big flat slabs of rock for its upper surface, not projecting more than an inch or two above the surface and some, anything up to several feet long and wide. This of course did not improve the chances of digging in, which our odd gun numbers were entitled to, so that no one had any cover, except that of the truck except an odd man or two who had found and made of the few 'scratches' that the 'Iti's had struggled to make and those who had these holes held them!!!

Well by this time it was 7am or thereabouts and it was then that I received the mortar splinters which necessitated the trip to the R.A.P. These wounds were not, as you now know fatal, however as subsequently I was told, it was only not so by a very meager margin in one case, however the others were there and at the time caused inconvenience. After a short time Captain B decided to take me to the R.A.P. so off we went along this wide-open Wadi to look for it and eventually it was found up near the three big drums that were our previous nights objective. They left me there and found that I was the second case in, the first being a Sgt Sam from Jackson company, with facial wounds and he did not look too good, however the appearance of a wound is often very misleading and he was, when last seen a month ago quite fit and well.

Well at the R.A.P. I made myself as comfortable as possible after being dressed and tagged to await the promised ambulance and to dream of the VAD'S and Nurses at Helwan or Helmeih, for the medical boys told me that the ambulance should be up at any time, including the promised guns and tank support. However as the day got warmer and hotter and likewise the enemies fire, things did not improve.

Our host sent in tanks early at 10am and the RAF arrived and the tanks departed. Mortars and shell however, made the day a semi nightmare and the R.A.P. continued to fill up, all of its inmates feeling the sun as the day wore on and some to fatal finishes.

Towards 3pm word came of relief, but it was wrong and at 5pm or so the enemy put in tanks and armored cars and after a bit of a scrap, surrounded our area of the front, so making it the end of the end.

When we left the field there were trucks and 'forties' on fire all about and many men were left on the ground. All I can say is that we, the walking cases went with the boys who were OK to the local 'Jerry' HQ and the worst cases were left to be picked up later, which evidently happened, because I have since heard of some of these chaps. Well that is the end of the first 2 and a half years and now I must speak of the next 2 and a half years for I do not doubt it will not be much more.

Just a word of my old gun crew, I heard later that Capt B and the other 5 on my 'forty' got out OK, for which I was very glad for I was very worried about them that later afternoon and for the next few days. Well, 'Cheerio' until the next installment.

(A 'Forty' is probably an army truck that can carry forty men)

Authors note, The previous note in pencil, was written during spare moments at Stalag XI B. It was written after the Rhine had been crossed. I had no ink and you will notice that I have taken care not to mention too prominently certain units. I will try to rectify that later. I am now writing this continuation on board H M Trooper 'Mauritania' and on deck D6 to which I will add that, one cannot get much lower on this ship. I will now continue my description of my career as a 'Prigionere di-guerra' to be followed later with my fun and games as a 'Kriegsgefangener'

*(Prigionere di-guerra(PG) and Kriegsgefangener(KG) probably both mean 'prisoner of war' in Italian and German respectfully. 'Iti' and 'Iti's' is slang for Italians as is 'Jerry' for Germans)(Iti pronounced, "eye tie")*

## Chapter 1. Prigionere di-guerra (mit Deutschs) (with Germans)

Well, when I last finished, I was being escorted back to Jerry HQ of the 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer (Tank) Division. Being wounded I was amongst the last to arrive and I found that the boys were losing their army issue knives (Jack knives) so mine with my watch and fountain pen immediately went in to hiding in the lining of my shorts and other places so that I was able to retain them and still have them despite many searches.

Here we were inspected by a very obliging, Jerry MO and I was delegated to stay there with others, whilst the unwounded cases were marched off to the rear. Later more wounded arrived, including Charles Upham (VC) and we settled down for the night without guards, in some local slit trenches and believe me we went dead with sleep.

*(Charles or Charlie Upham was one of a very few Kiwi's to receive a 'double' Victoria Cross (VC) for bravery.)*

However I have a recollection of wandering about, three parts asleep and asking a 'Jerry' Officer for blankets for the worse wounded, for I was senior NCO (full Lance Corporal), however I naturally got nothing and collapsed into my hole again.

*(The following paragraph is about the only indication that I have found where Roger makes reference to actual wartime action that he was fully involved with. He used to talk of being on the island of Crete also.)*

Actually this capture was the end of a series of attacks that we had been mixed up in since the fall of Tobruk and its ensuing action about Mersa Matruh and thereabouts so that we were very tired after a months continuous attack and retire, with most of them at night and very little sleep during the heat of the July Egyptian sun at the Katarra Depression.

The following morning started with a tank battle, during which the German C.O. General Rommel drove past me at about 6ft distance. He was a very short man and wore colored glasses and had a red top to his field gray service peak cap. He halted about 200 yards away on a rise and his local C.O.'s surrounded him. While in this position evidently, our artillery O-pip sighted them for a single 'sighter' 25 pounder shell landed about half way between us and Rommel, upon which he and his cobbers dispersed rapidly just in time to miss a salvo of shells from the New Zealand artillery. It was a pity, for at that time Rommel's 'finis' would have been welcomed and several

had finished up themselves in trying to do what those shells had failed to do. Following this incident the Jerries fed us and quite well too, giving us 2/3 of an English 'Dixi' of M and V (*meat and veg*) ration. (Of course this was captured from us at Tobruk the previous month) However I may say that, under the circumstances I did not eat all of mine and likewise those with me.

To continue, during this morning there was a tank battle over our old battlefield and evidently our side withdrew, for the Jerries suddenly advanced 10 Kilometers, they told us and so we were left almost to our own devices until he (Jerry) brought up six to eight 'Bardia Bill' guns (125 or 150mm guns) and placed them about 100 yards behind us, so we naturally decided it was going to be unhealthy so we were moved to the rear by a very decent young Jerry Lieutenant and he left us at a C.C.S that the Jerries had working. We stayed there until about 1.30pm and really, the Jerries were getting a bashing from our light and medium bombers and our shelling and many Jerries died there in the short time that we were there. Here I first tasted the drink of the Germans in North Africa and very refreshing too and it was coffee (cold) and Cognac.

From here we had a very rough trip by truck (motor of course) to an Italian hospital near Daba and here we left the Germans for a period of about fourteen months. Here the German orderly apologized for handing us over to the Italians and we agreed with him in no time. It was a definite fact that the German looked down on the Italian and the latter hated and feared the German.

Chapter 2     Mit Italianish. (*With the Italians*)         (July 1942)

Well we had left the Germans and were now prisoners of the Italians, to our sorrow. We were in a field hospital and it was the maddest hospital of any type I have been in all of my travels. It consisted of about a dozen Marquee tents and had Iti and Red Cross flags flying all over and around its area. There was no discipline or order of any kind. From the beginning we were looked on as stray dogs to be looted as far as possible. Our wounds, that night were looked at after a fashion, but food or water there was not a sign of in any form. A watch was seen on a Sergeant's wrist and the Iti's had it. Captain Charles Upham, V.C. was our senior and he remonstrated, but the Iti's "nix comperto" (*don't understand*) and in the middle of the night the looting started again when a guard presented his signet ring on which the Sergeant

presented a fist! The Iti did not get the ring and there were no casualties, but the Iti's took certain reprisals to cover themselves with their Orderly Officer.

The following morning the Commandant apologized, the watch was returned, food arrived, likewise water, but the best of all was the arrival of a motor wagon and the twenty of us got aboard and set off for Mersa Matruh and our journey on to Italy by degrees.

At Matruh, we arrived at 5pm and were told that they had no room and we had to go on to Sollom. The English Doctor did his best, but we had twenty more men put on board, some tins of fish and 'bully' and biscuits and that kept us going for two days and the amount of the food put me in mind of the "Fishes and Loaves" parable in the Bible.

That night we all slept under the wagon, the blind and other wounded together. The following day we traveled on to Sollom and after a swim in the bay and then later we went up the escarpment, past the Hospital and on to Bardia to spend another night in the open and to arrive the following day at 10am at the Campo Ospedalo No 457 of the Italian Army at Tobruk.

The trip was of several hundred kilos and we were under charge of civilian drivers, who's one desire was to miss the bombing areas of Sollom, Bardia and Tobruk at nights, hence our slow trip. At Sollom we were left for several hours unattended and were only moved when we asked for a German officer. We were moved in two minutes, for the German would have dealt with those Italians, even to shooting them if they thought the crime fitted.

At Tobruk, I arrived on the 18<sup>th</sup> July and we did not move until the 29<sup>th</sup>, when we were shifted to the Ospedalo Navi or the Italian Navy Hospital ship, "Gradisca" for our final trip to Italy.

This hospital was also Marquee tents and it was better than the other place at Daba, but not much. The food was mainly watery milk and thin rice, with very little meat, but bread was about 150 grams of maize, whilst our jam issue had often substituted some paper sweets. The sanitary conditions were terrible and the flies very bad indeed. There was an Italian nurse there who came from Milan and spoke a little English and who did what she could for us and I gave her my camera before I left and before it was taken off me, as it would have been done if I had been searched. Actually I never really was properly searched until I arrived at Campo 57 on the 6<sup>th</sup>

November 1942, although we had some half-hearted searches in the hospital at Bergamo.

Well on the 29<sup>th</sup> July we were moved by Ambulance from the Hospital, which was situated on the Bardia Road on top of the escarpment and near the perimeter, down the road and into the town of Tobruk and after a wait, for an hour or two in the hot midday sun we went by barge to the "Gradisca" which sailed at about 8pm for Mersa Matruh and from there via the Straits of Messina to Napoli (Naples) where we arrived on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> August.

The hospital ship was a paradise after the Campo 457 and we slept in beds with sheets, a thing I had only done on my few leaves about a half dozen times since I left home. The food was good and there was plenty of it, but the sudden change gave most of us a slight attack of dysentery, which stayed with us, until we settled down at Bergamo a week or two later.

On board this ship (of about 10,000 tons) there were all classes of wounded as well as German and Italians, both wounded and those unwounded going on leave. It was a fact that Germans going on leave from the Africa Corps traveled across the Mediterranean by the only safe route, i.e. per Hospital ship and I saw fully armed men going aboard this ship and also men with packs full of 'Bully Beef', taking it home to their people in Germany, for English Bully Beef was very popular in the Reich. These soldiers were disarmed on arrival on board and given hospital pyjamas and received like treatment and food as the sick men, receiving their clothes etc back on arrival at Naples. Re the sailing of the ship, she sailed with all lights burning and no portholes covered, having also a big Red Cross in lights on the sides and two flags (Iti and Red Cross) flying on the mainmast, lit at night by a searchlight. We were allowed on deck to see Italian movie talkies at night, but we could not understand their humor or lingo and the Germans laughed and loudly criticized all the time, for they were in the same position as we were with regards to the lingo.

On arrival in Naples we had an amusing incident. When the Iti Red Cross came on board they thought our ward were Germans and they gave us a bar of Swiss chocolate and a packet of 10 Iti cigarettes per man. Then they evidently got lost and came in and gave us the same again. On leaving the ward the second time they met an orderly who evidently told them that we were English and then there was a pantomime and rending of hair. However I had eaten my chocolate and had swapped

my cigarettes for two more bars and it was very nice indeed. Anyway we quit enjoying the joke.

About 6am, we had approached Napoli, passing Vesuvius, smoking away and was the air foul with sulfur smoke? It was beautiful for all that.

During the morning we disembarked and were put into trucks and after a drive through the worst part of Naples (so I was told) on for 25 kilos to Caserta Hospital. Caserta is or was the HQ of the Aeronautica d'Italia, or the Italian air force and our hospital was right along side. We were moderately well looked after here, but I was very glad when I left five days later on the 8<sup>th</sup> August. The food was not good and the R.A.M. orderlies as well as the Padre (an Aussie) were thieving rogues, especially with the Red Cross food and cigarettes. I went to a communion service the Padre took and it was simply a meaningless gabble. From Aussies of his battalion (15<sup>th</sup> Queensland) he was a rogue before capture.

The orderlies issued us our Iti rations and they rouged us in all ways. They aught all be Court-martialed en masse, all the R.A.M.C. I have never heard a good word of them yet, behind our lines, in hospitals, or anywhere in P.O.W. life and I am very glad to say that the N.Z.M.C. have a record second to no other medical unit that I know of. At Caserta also the Italian sisters were of a fairly 'low type', being not nursing sisters, but religious sisters. This was the case in most Italian hospitals although there were generally one or two nursing sisters. The rest of the actual nursing was done, or more correctly not done by the 'prontonies' or male orderlies, the laziest people I have ever met. In most of the P.O.W. hospitals we generally got our own men in, for our own safety and for the help for our own Doctors, who did most of the Doctors work. This system was good for everything except that it released men for the Italian fronts, which were in North Africa and Russia in 1942.

The accommodation was not bad, but some of the beds had bugs very badly, but I was very lucky with mine and I did not strike bugs for several months.

As I have said, I was only five days in this place and then on we went by hospital train and it took us two and a half days of travel, both slow and fast before we eventually arrived at our home for the following few months, the Ospedalo Campo P.G. No 201 or "Clementina" Hospital at Bergamo, a town about 30 kilos East of Milan, and prior to being a Campo Concentramento it was entirely an old peoples home, but now we had half of it. We were driven up to it in big busses and Ambulances and we found everything greatly improved on anything we had seen or

had, except for the hospital ship. However we still ran into the incompetent Italian doctors, but luckily only for a few days until our own doctors slowly but surely took over the medical work and left them in the responsible position of being O.C. of the wards, but having nothing to do with the medical side of the work. Actually our English doctors were good, as we had two or three Harley Street specialists, an Aussie and about half a dozen South Africans and they all knew their jobs, especially the Harley Street men, one a very good surgeon and the other an ear, eye and nose man. The food was very good here for the sisters did the cooking themselves and they made a good job of it. That food was to be the best food I was to get until I finally landed in England.

Actually we had still not seen a Red Cross parcel, although we had received a half issue (25) of cigarettes at Caserta. The position with regard to Bergamo, was simply that we were the second party to arrive there and it had only been open about three weeks before our arrival, so we did not get any parcels until early September and then we had two issues of English and three of Canadian followed by a mixture until I left. Actually we saw very little of our parcel as the Iti's claimed that we were all sick men and withheld half the parcel, which we were supposed to get on every second day of the week, whilst every day we were supposed to get, either Tea, coffee or cocoa. Well the tea and cocoa arrived alright, but strange as it may seem the Italians did not know how to make up coffee by brewing it, they tried to make it like cocoa and boy, what a mess!!! Actually the foods removed were meats, fish, tea, coffee, cocoa and other odds and ends, whilst we got in our parcel, milk, jam, butter (or margarine) chocolate, sweets and those other articles that the Italians considered needed no cooking. Cigarettes and tobacco, we received all right per parcel, the full quota per man being 50 cigs or 2 oz of tobacco. As I was (and am) a non-smoker, I rarely had any bother in exchanging my cigs for chocolate or milk or the other articles I fancied. The general rate of exchange in any camp was generally based on cigarettes, but it varied a lot.

The articles we received were all punctured (if tinned) as the convention of Geneva stipulated this and it was stuck to for the most part, although different people read it different ways.

Here, like all other camps where one or two men got control, the 'rackets' got in and it was an English Major who did it here. He was 18 months a prisoner then and talked Iti and worked his way into it over the head of the Colonel and the Padre. The former

could do nothing so he got a move elsewhere and when I left the Padre was trying to do the same. I never heard what finally happened to the Major, but he probably was repatriated before Italy collapsed as he had a bad hand with several severed nerve tendons. In any P.O.W. camp the Detaining Power always had the OK and selection as to who would be made "Men of Confidence" and they generally picked the man who looked best for them.

Well now I will try and give you a picture of our Campo No 201.

As I said it was an old peoples home and just one big building. As we were only about 13 kilos from the Swiss border our hosts were nervous and the wire outside was prodigious in quantity. Outside this again were great quantities of guards, one every 12 yards in fact and we were supposed to be wounded. Our exercising area was about 20 yards by 50 yards, but luckily a lot of our 500 odd men were bed patients. The building was two stories and strangely enough most of the worst cases and amputees were upstairs. There were 14 wards in the 2 wings and that was not overcrowded so that was not so bad. Actually it was not a bad place as I look back, its only drawback being that there was nothing to do, very little to read and all day to do it all in. However that is simply P.O.W. life.

The personnel in this hospital were mainly 'Tommie's' (English), but there were Aussies, Kiwis, South Africans and Indians. The only attempt to keep nationalities apart was with the Indians, but there too it was not wholly to conform to the Geneva Convention it was mainly for propaganda reasons. For the Indians make good renegades. The Indians are supposed to be so clean, for they wash many times a day, but in their very cleanliness they are the filthiest of any troops I have seen.

These same men were in the other end of my ward and believe me we did our best to make them clean, by abuse and otherwise but they do not understand.

As I have already said, the food was good here. Breakfast consisted in true European style with 'Ersatz' coffee, with no sugar and 2 bread rolls. Lunch was 3 rolls. A bowl of rice or macaroni and water and followed by meat and vegetables. Dinner was three then later two rolls and another meal similar to lunch. The bread rolls were about 6 inches long and pointed at the ends and being about one and a half inches in diameter in the middle and made of white Maize flower. They made the best bread I ever had as a P.O.W. When we got the Red Cross food later we had a supplementary meal at 4pm otherwise the hours were, 7am, 11.30am and 5pm, tea was served with the Red Cross food.

From time to time parties were sent out to different camps and more patients came in, especially one or two lots of Aussies and Kiwis from torpedoed ships coming from Benghazi in Africa. We lost a lot of men by our own 'Subs' but that is war.

Late October brought some bad and disgraceful cases of starvation and mal-nutrition from the camps outside Tripoli and many died before they could be properly treated. For myself my wound was causing no trouble and the Doctors were keeping it clean and waiting to see if the shrapnel would work its way out. However it did not, so at 4pm, one October day I was operated on and after a bit of fun they extracted the metal. It caused a lot of amusement generally, but was done all right. After that, I went ahead fairly fast and I was duly put on the Campo list during the last week in October, for the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. (1942)

We left that day for Campo 57 and after an eighteen-hour trip we arrived at the camp at Gruppilano, near Udine (10km) and about 30km from Trieste. It was raining on arrival and thick with mud. On the way up, one of the guards had stolen a Red Cross parcel, as we slept and he was summarily dealt with and given the worst punishment an Italian soldier could get, namely he was sent to the Russian front for the winter. After our search we were taken to our hut, No8 Compound 5, and it was a good hut and clean, never having been occupied before. Here in this camp I met many chaps I knew from the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion and other units and here I stayed for the next 10 months, until Italy finally collapsed.

Campo 57 occupied an area of about 18 acres and it took somewhere about 20 minutes to walk round, that is if you followed the wire. The camp was divided into 5 compounds, the first two on the right of the entrance gate and the other three on the left. The compounds held about 1000 men each, except No 4, which held only about 4-500. All the living quarters were of wood and single storied, whilst in each compound there was a recreation building made of brick and concrete. Some of the cookhouses were wood and some brick-concrete. There was also a dispensary and hospital building, a Dentists shop and a big, yes a nice big "BOOB" or prison. At the time of my arrival things were not so good, because the 'bad boys' of No 3 compound had dug a tunnel and 19 men had departed in several directions. All those men were recaptured in Italy or on the Yugoslav border, which was only 3 or 4 miles away. Also the night before we arrived, a chap had jumped the wire only to be caught that day, so there was a cloud overall. The musical instruments and other things had been confiscated and the movie theatre to have started was stopped, likewise all

plays etc. Actually also there was supposed to be no intercommunication between compounds, but that did not worry us at all.

We had the two parades daily at about 7am and 4pm and they were held, wet or fine and as it was the wet season we had to tramp through the mud on the parade-ground as it could be held nowhere else. If you were sick you could generally get off, one way or another. Owing to the escape, the 'BOOB' had to be kept full (so said the Iti's) so it was not the matter of the crime, it was simply bad luck if you were caught (or selected). The Iti officer used to simply walk along in the front of the parade and if he did not like the look of a man, well he got anything up to 30 days in the Boob. The Boob was a big concrete building with no windows, only wall ventilators. It had common beds and blankets were removed in the morning and returned at night. 7am and 7pm, I think it was. You got no Red Cross parcels or cigarettes whilst there, but if your cookhouse and pals were any good you got them as they had to send up your food and a packet of cigarettes fitted nicely into a Iti 180 gram loaf. The Boob had to be kept full, so if a bunch of chaps were let out one day you had to step warily for a day or so until it was filled up. This went on till we had a visit from the Papal Apostocal (?) Delegate with presents of accordions, books etc, late the following January and at his request, all punishments in or on the camp were suspended so that the Boob was emptied in half an hour and we got our musical instruments back, but no movie ever showed up.

I always smile when I think of this particular Papal Delegate, for he had already visited us, at Bergamo in October. As my bed, in the ward was the first past the Ward Commanders I was the first in the ward to be spoken too as he came around there. Well apparently these Papal people, in the Roman Catholic Church wear a big red ring on the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger of the right hand and as he approached me, he held out his hand to be 'kissed'. Well apparently I did the wrong thing and 'shook it' and the expressions around about were marvelous to behold, but the old boy himself took it very well and gave me a big grin. I will say this, for the Papal people they did a lot for us, and it is a great pity that some of the priests could not have been blessed by the same feelings, because I have seen Italian priests going from bed to bed, asking if you were 'RC' and if you said 'no' you were left in no doubt as to where you stood. The Italian himself is very ignorant, regarding Protestantism generally and one was very surprised to find me reading the New Testament, one day, he thought we were heathens and from then on he used to look at us in a different light. Well, to return to 57 Camp.

The meals were mainly soup here, two days of the week you got meat in it if you were lucky. In the morning it was at 11.30am, rice or macaroni with cheese cut up in it and tomato puree added. The 4pm (about) meal was vegetable and could have been anything. You would have been surprised at what we have found in it, our fowls and rabbits got better fed when we were kids. Besides this we had coffee (ersatz) at breakfast and all meals, but we substituted tea or any other drink from our parcels when we had them, which was nearly all the time. The bread was a small loaf of about 180 grams and shaped like a big penny bun. The cheese was good and half went in the meal and we ate the other half like chocolate 2 days a week. The Olive oil went into the meals too and it helped make it better, sugar we received individually, but it was very small in quantity. The Red Cross situation at 57 was always precarious and we always seemed to be just about out or right out of parcels and towards the finish we were on half parcels a week for sometime. We had a good mixture of types, but they were English, English bulk, Canadian, New Zealand and Argentine bulk. The best individual parcel was the Canadian, sent by the Canadian, Aussie and New Zealand Red Cross from Canada and all the parcels were the same. However for variety, the English could be hard to beat for they were not all the same, however the contents were not up to the Colonial parcels, but that was to be expected, but the English did very well. The New Zealand parcel was good but the method of transport through the tropics was very short sighted and the butter was often rank and likewise the cheese. The bulk parcels, came not as parcels but in cases to be made up at the camp. This method was not good for P.O.W. life as it leaves too many openings for those of the unscrupulous nature and P.O.W. life bring those out only too truly. The English bulk was good, but we only saw them once as the English gave up the idea (of bulk parcels). The Argentine parcel was a good parcel, but you did not always get the full parcel as bits and pieces disappeared enroute and elsewhere.

The method of collection was by hut by compounds. Generally the Iti's stipulated Monday for Nos 1 and 4 after which it just depended on luck whether the other compounds got theirs any day up to Friday and as I was in No 5 we did plenty of growling. The Iti's made it, on the whole no better by going off at all times on the silliest of excuses. As theirs was the word that made things go and as nothing could be done unless they were there, they made it awkward. The actual parcels all had to be opened and all tins punctured and so it is really quite a job, for the whole camp of anything up to 5000 men.

After the compound had received their parcels, there was generally a 'paddy's market' outside the huts where swaps were made for your particular desires for the week or day. Cigarettes were mainly the base for values, but the barter system applied. Everyone having his own particular desires and it is strange how today you want sugar articles and tomorrow meats etc. I suppose that is simply nature's way of getting what you are short of in your system.

With regards to 'swotting' (*studying*) in this camp, when I first arrived the escape restrictions were on which included classes and schools, but later some did start, but I was in sport and did not go in for any. These classes were never well patronized. In the field of sport, we played many games i.e., cricket, baseball, volleyball, tennis, deck tennis, soccer and we also had running sports on two occasions. We had hut teams and compound teams and really we did well, although we had very little room and in such games as cricket and baseball we had to suit the game rules to the field instead of the other way about. I myself played in the "B" teams for my hut in most of these games. My hut had a fair average sprinkling of Kiwis, Aussies and Tommie's and we had a lot of fun. In the compound games the baseball was very keen, but in all these games, whatever they were the crowd went as much to hear the "crows" who sat on the sideline and "barracked" the players and one had to "take it" or the "crows" concentrated on you. I may add that I have done my share of "crowing". In entertainment some very good and funny shows were put on and it was really amazing where the talent came from and also from whence came some of the lovely "ladies" who appeared on the stage, from "flappers" to "old people". There was variety and serious plays.

Then we come to the news of what was going on and how we got it. Practically every night, at varying times we used to watch for our newsreader to arrive in our hut. At the same time a watch was kept for the roving guard, of one Carabannerie and his Iti soldier companion.

The story of the news was simply this. There was a Kiwi who had a flare for the news and he knew most of those who received the odd Iti papers, that came into camp, also he knew men who went outside the camp or spoke to Iti's who gave the "pukka" or "Griff" (Why the news was called "Griff" I know not) Well on receipt of any near or probable definite news, or of any announcements that the Iti's would not like, these were passed on to him and he and his cobbers made a story and added the

necessary padding. So we heard, in a very short time of the events occurring of the victories in North Africa and other big occurrences, even to the many claims of having sunk the "Niagara" again and again during 1943. We heard of "Musso's" spot of bother (*When Mussolini and his mistress were hung maybe?*) in July but in the final collapse (of Italy) we did not hear anything until 8pm on the 8<sup>th</sup> September (1943). The news we got was sometimes wrong, but for all the mistakes it gave us an idea of what was going on. As far as I know there was never a wireless (*radio*) in 57 camp.

With Regards to our "brewing up" or cooking habits, we "brewed" tea, coffee and cocoa in big quantities when we were able or had the articles. When I first arrived everyone used a small fireplace, made of flattened tin cans (Red Cross) or some other type of improvised fireplace. Others, the more progressive had made or had had made, what we called a blower. It was simply a bag fitted with valves and blowing into a firebox full of embers, really based on the bellows, one used to see in the older kitchens etc at home sometimes. These worked well and boiled a billy much faster than the fires. The main trouble, with all fires was fuel and any bits of wood were valuable. Also used was cardboard from Red Cross parcels.

Later, at Christmas 1942, there arrived from Camp 52, near Genoa a big batch of Kiwis and they brought a new blower, based on a rotary propeller and this model was so improved on before long that an Italian aluminum Dixie, holding 1 ½ liters of water could be boiled in 1 ¼ minutes from a "no fire" start. Really I do believe that these blowers, made well were better and more reliable than a "Primus" stove. Some of these were made streamlined, with automatic feeding and refueling and really they did a lot to help idle hands and minds amongst the boys. I may add that until we went up to Germany, from Italy late in 1943, there were no "blowers" at all there so that this was a great help to the P.O.W. of all nationalities everywhere, and were the brainstorms of a number of men in Italy.

There is very little else to say about Camp 57, we had our weekly searches, but they were a good thing as by getting all our gear out of the huts, we also got the dirt out and washed the floors. As time went on things got easier in most cases. Towards the end, when we were first in Sicily, Rome sent out an order that parade times were to be varied and so we used to hear the loud speakers, about the camp say in broken English, "Hurry Hurry parade will be at once in ten minutes time!" and also they would

drag us out at midnight or any other hour at night, but we generally got a warning on our "underground" news system.

Well that about completes 57 Campo. I will just add that the weather, once the winter winds stopped was very warm. Also about electric storms, I have seen them come swiftly off the Dolomite Mountains and rain down like hail stones as big as pigeon eggs and would come and be gone inside half an hour. As to the locality of the camp, it was, as I said very close to the Yugoslav border and it was on the old battlefield of the last war where the Italians got such a "hiding," namely "Caparetta."

So much for Campo Concentramento No 57, in which I lived for 10 months and only went out the gates twice, dodging temporary and permanent work parties by being hut librarian!!!

### Chapter 3      Mit Deutches

September the 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, at 8pm we first heard the news. I was having a shower in No 1 compound when the Italian soldiers went mad, outside the wire and they soon told us. There was little sleep that night. On the 9<sup>th</sup> very little occurred except that the senior English Officer took over the camp and he was a Kiwi Padre and not suited. On the 10<sup>th</sup> word was given out that we were moving at 10am and later, owing to bad management on the part of the "Men of Confidence" a riot took place and the Red Cross magazine was raided and looted. Up to this time we were in charge, but the Italians took over again. They had been stopping any exits, from the camp and continued to do so. They also stopped our move. I do not know who started the riot at the Magazine, for I was not there but I have a fair idea who was responsible. On the 11<sup>th</sup> September nothing really happened and the "musicali" that had been our entertainment for several nights finished then with the news that the British had landed at Trieste, 30 kilos (20 miles) away.

We did not know then that it was a trap, for anyone who escaped to walk into. However the rest of the day was my birthday and I had already forecasted something would happen: It did!!! At 1am the Germans arrived and started to settle in. They took us over in the afternoon and then things happened, but we did not know they were SS troops, but they showed us enough the following day at 1pm.

Orders came in to "fall in" by nationalities, Kiwis, Aussies, etc etc in order. The Kiwis were first and we were told that we were to be put in groups of 50 and marched out and we were also told other things and were given a display of a "flame thrower"

which failed, but we understood and we marched out between a guard of honor, of very dejected and browbeaten Iti soldiers to the road where the "Jerries" met us. They had 88mm guns, flamethrowers and every manner of weapon there and a man every 5 yards on each side of the road. None of these men smiled, except one and his comrades could not see him and he said that magic word, "Deutschland," but we did not understand him.

We were put, 5000 odd, inside a small number of minutes, 50 men to a railway wagon on two trains and so we said "good bye" to Italy and Gruppinano.

That night we passed through Udine to Austria and arrived about 10am at a place called Markt Pongau and marched a kilo or so to the Kriegsgefangenlager No 317 or Stalag XVIIIC where we lived for about 10 days.

This trip was not the best, for we were 50 men in a truck renowned by the last war for "40 hommes or 8 chereaux" and believe me it was hot before the sun went down.

That night some chaps got away, but we were unable to get out in any way. However very few of these escapees got far, but some had some exciting moments and many died too.

The Markt Pongau camp was right in the mountains of Austria, with peaks towering above and the valley seeing the sun for only a few hours a day. For all it was really beautiful, with the houses perched on the hillside just like is seen in the pictures of that country. In this camp we were shifted around from hut to hut, the Germans realizing that we liked cleanliness, to a certain degree and so by putting us in new huts he got all his huts cleaned out.

Markt Pongau was, when we arrived mainly a Serbian camp, but the Russians had been there, as a big cross on the hillside denoted, for it covered what mortally remained of 4000 Russians. Also some English prisoners, from Greece or Crete had evidently been here, Aussie and Kiwi also, for references were found in pencil on beds and walls to their life and addresses etc.

Well, after about 10 days we left Pongau and went by 'box car truck' to Gorlitz, in Silicio via Saltzburg, Zof (?) Leipzig and Dresden and taking two days. The ride as far as Salzburg, was through mostly awe-inspiring passes, with mountains towering above us for sheer thousands of feet. At this time there were thousands of Italians being shipped into Germany, to work or die as they had refused to fight anymore for Italy. I must say that not a very great percentage of these Iti's ever saw Italy again in good health.

Gorlitz, or Stalag VIII A was, on our arrival mainly a French and Belgian camp, with the Russians there too. Later while I was out working, part was made Italian and then 'Yanks' arrived late in 1944.

I was only in Gorlitz, about another ten days before I went to work in a sugar factory. While I was there we were greatly overcrowded, having barely enough room to sleep let alone turn over in said sleep, however the bricks of the floor did not encourage any turning over.

The food consisted mainly of potatoes and cabbage and good we thought after 14 months of macaroni and rice. Red Cross parcels turn up for one issue, for me before I went out to work and it was greatly needed. As far as I can recollect, I went out on the 10<sup>th</sup> October and started work on the 11<sup>th</sup>, at a job that lasted just on two months. I remember it was a Sunday when we left, there were thirty of us and we had about 4 guards and our destination was for the town of Strehlen via Waldenburg, Glatz and Breslau. It was a very nice ride in Jerry 3<sup>rd</sup> class carriages, very nice after a boxcar wagon. In Breslau, we had to march across the city for about a mile from one station to another and it looked quite a nice place. It was full of Jerries on leave. At the second station, evidently the main station the Berlin Express was expected when we were forcing our way through the mob, which we did in single file, the guards being in a "flat spin" over it all. I have never seen such a crowd of worried looking people as I did on that station, you see it was on the main line for the Russian front.

From Breslau, Strehlen is only about 25 kilos and we arrived there to find we were at a sugar factory. We worked 12 hours a day, each second weekend an 18-hour changeover, very nice after 14 months of no work. The first week was the worst. About every three or four days, we had a strike over something or other and really it was a wonder no one was hurt. However, the second month was quieter and everyone much more settled.

We did not receive too many Red Cross parcels there, owing to the method Gorlitz used to send them, but towards the end all came right.

My job was outside unloading the sugar beet, which was done by a big water jet, like a 'sluice' in Central Otago (New Zealand). I may say we all came well versed in minor sabotage too.

The lager was a small hall and the 120 of us lived there in three decker beds, generally only 60 of us being there at a time as we were on shifts. The food was not bad considering, but it was mainly vegetables of some sort and very little meat, but that was the same all over Germany. The bread was the brown loaf of 1½ kilos to five men, not too good.

In my job, my job boss was not a bad old Jerry and had been a P.O.W. in France last war. He made a mistake on my date of arrival and I finished up the highest paid chap there, of which I am not really proud, but all by a 'bloomer' on his part. We got 120 pfennigs a day (1 Mark=20 pf) and I finished up with pay and bonuses at 112 Marks 60pf for 2 months. However it was of no use to us as we could not buy anything and it was in Stalag money, called "Leger Gelt".

From here we were sent to a place called Hirschburg, just near the Sudetenland (?) border and about 90 kilos from our Stalag in Gorlitz. Here we were to stay, with variation in jobs for the next fourteen months.

The trip was the coldest that I have ever done, with snow on the ground we traveled about 24 hours in wet box cars, fifty to a wagon and no straw on the floor.

This place was a "wood wool" factory. As Germany had no wool, she made wool from timber and this was called "Zellewolle" factory. Our job was to work with the Iti's, Jews and Russians in unloading the timber from the railway wagons. This job lasted a month after which they said that we were, 'NOT good workers' so we moved on. However whatever the work was like, we had a marvelous Lager, with hot and cold showers, central heating and quite close to work. Hours of work were 8 hours in two shifts Xmas came while we were here and we had quite a 'jollification' The food was passable here.

From here we went about 6 kilos, to a place called, Bad Warnbrun, a peacetime health resort. We went there to work in a factory. However, owing to a mistake, only after we arrived they found out that we were not all machinists, so they put most of us to school to learn the trade. However some were put to work on parts of a printing press, they were told, whilst the rest of us were put on two school shifts. This went alright for a few days until those supposed to be working on printing presses found and recognized parts of 125mm and 150mm artillery guns passing through their hands. We applied to Gorlitz to be taken off this job and got no satisfactory answer

from our own people, being told to stage our own "strike", but were given no help at all.

Officially the Geneva Convention forbids P.O.W.s to do war work, but in reality all work in a belligerent country is such that only the real classification is the actual work on guns etc, so here we had a good case. We had a very good Jerry Unter-Officer (Corporal) who spoke English, in charge of us and even he could not help us although he quite saw our complaint, so in the end we staged our "strike". It occurred early morning in the Lager and we refused to go to school till our comrades were taken off this work and we were guaranteed that we would not be put on it when we graduated from school. At this time our guards were not being fed too well and it was funny to watch them as they came into our room. Altogether we were very lucky that no one was hurt, but for all that we got off the job and out of the school, finished up for the remainder of the month in a sandpit.

As a sidelight, it was noticed that six men of the "specialists" for whom we were risking our necks, refused to leave the building and machines for the cold outside (It was January) on the grounds that it was too cold out there. Two were Aussies, two Tommie's and two Kiwis and one of those Kiwis had a Military Medal to pin on his chest, such is the fallacy of decorations, for that man did not know what he got his decoration for, as he was a "batman" to an Officer. Well, we all finished up in the cold and at the beginning of February were moved to our new and last job.

I have forgotten to say that as far as food went, the preparation of such was, unlike "57" in Italy where our own men prepared and cooked it, here at the sugar factory a German woman prepared it, at the "Zellewolle" factory some German controlled Ukrainian girls cooked it and when we went to Bad Warmbrun, with its gun factory, we were now able to use our own cooks and from now on till we marched out 12 months later we had cooks who got the best out of the food for us.

Actually actual cooking, there was very little to do except boil potatoes or swede turnips for the most part and if they had a "hot plate" they grill or braise meat and make gravy, otherwise it was not much to be a cook. At the same time two cooks, given the same amount of food like potatoes and meat and one made a meal whilst the other, having no interest in the meal made a mess. And so it was for the better that we put two Aussies on as cooks, a car salesman and an accountant and so our meals improved and from now on we had these two, who certainly did wonders with

very little. I will say that the difference from our old and new cooking was really marvelous.

Well, it snowed like the devil the day we shifted to our fourth and last job. We were moved by open trucks to our new Lager and it was for 3 kilos down a winding gorge beside a river called the Buber which later ran into the Odus to the ruins of an old factory. A more dismal place I can assure you you have never seen, with its snow covered trees all round it and over it too and the river and ruins about, it really did look gloomy. Inside it was no better, community beds and few fires. It looked terrible and was terrible, but before we had been there many months we had made it into the exact opposite.

From here we had to march 3 kilos, to and from work a day, so that really we kept fairly fit on 7 kilos daily.

The winter hours were not bad, being away between daylight and dark only, which cut our work down to 7 hours a day or less about the shortest day. The march was fairly easy with no long or steep hills, so that when we were away from our Lager for 13½ hours a day in the summer, you can imagine that we did not do too much work. The nearest town was 3½ to 4 kilos from the Lager and that was Hirschberg. Also the sports field, for our use if any was also the same distance. We were lucky here that we never worked from midday Saturday to Monday morning.

We were only about 80 men now, out of the original 120 and we worked one shift daily. The work was all outside, building a wireless factory and in the 12 months that we worked there, they really did not open many of the buildings that we started on. My job was in a gang, who were working with the sewer contractor, we dug the holes and he laid the sewer and rainwater pipes. It was not a bad job, except in the early stages when we were putting our drain under the river Buber, in mid winter and a "Siberian" winter is not too warm. We had a good job in summer, however I may also add that we kept our boss busy keeping an eye on us because as soon as he left we would stop work. There were, on the average about 10 men in the gang and we had a good time, what with arguments etc, for we were mixed, Aussie, Tommy and Kiwi and once we had a South African for a while.

In this job we had a fair amount of freedom, but it was never a worry that anyone would escape, in fact only one man tried it and he did so, so that he would be

returned to Stalag as he did not care for our 7½ kilo march. He did go back to Stalag for a week in the "Boob" before going out elsewhere. The reason why so few attempted to escape is that "D Day" was expected and when it came we did not think that it would be long afterwards that we would be on the way.

For sport we made a volleyball court, which was converted, into an ice rink in the winter. Football was played by those keen enough to walk 7½ kilos on a Sunday. We had wonderful swimming possibilities, but unfortunately the river was ruined and poisoned for swimming by the Zellewolle factory upstream, for it used different poisons in its process and then poured it all in the river. Inside the Lager, bridge tournaments etc were played on Sundays and holidays.

Well we stayed there for 12 months, except for about 6 days and on the 29<sup>th</sup> January, with Russian advance on Breslau there had been a constant stream of refugees, passing for several days so our job was closed down and we returned to our Lager at midday. We had received word from Stalag that Stalags 344 and 8A were on the march and to expect some at our place, however more came while we were there. We had been getting news, by our own radio (not official) and from newsletters, carried by hand from Stalag so we had been able to follow it all. The main line, from Breslau to Gorlitz, Dresden and Leipsig ran past our works and some of the sights on those trains would have amazed you, prams hung on the side, broken windows, panic everywhere in the civilians. Well on the 29<sup>th</sup> we finished work and on the 30<sup>th</sup> finished, luckily for us, the coldest spell of the winter and the thaw set in which lasted till the end of the winter. We stayed at our Lager, till the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, (1945) making sledges and then as the snow vanished, changing them into carts for we were expecting to march too, for the Russians were now only about 20 miles north of us at Leipsig. Ours was the first sledge and later we put one wheel barrow wheel under it and our gear on it and it was the best one of the lot that were made, for it carried the gear of 4 men and that saved our backs.

(I may add that my particular cobber for all these 14 months was Earnest Miles, of Kiapoi and who is a spinner in the hills there. He later got captured by the Russians and was with them for a while. Probably if I had not got the flu, later I might also have been in Russian hands)

Well on the 5<sup>th</sup> February we duly marched out and did our 90 kilos to the Gorlitz Stalag, arriving there in the afternoon of the following Wednesday. There was very little of note on the trip, for we slept at another Komando Lager at Griefenberg, the first night and in a barn at Lauban the second night.

Gorlitz was never a nice place, but now it had refugee P.O.W.s from Stalag 344 at Lamsdorf and there was mud a foot deep in places. Here I looked for (brother) Frank, but he never went to Gorlitz.

Well after about 6 days there I developed flu and was put into the Lager hospital and 2 days later all my friends marched out on the march that was to take them months and also to be the cause of much suffering. Well I was left on my own with Yanks and Tommie's mainly for comrades, but all were strangers. We sat there for two more days and expected the Russians to arrive and take us away, but at the last moment the Jerries put us on a train and off we went, via Dresden and Leipzig to Halberstadt, where we unfortunately had trouble with the Yank Air Force, which left 11 dead and 37 wounded, of which 5 more died later. The following day we passed through that mass of rubble called Hanover to a town called Fallingbostal, from whence we marched about a kilo to the Stalag XI B. It was raining that day on, should I say pouring. I finished up in quite a good billet, with R.A.F. Tommie's, 3 South Africans, an Aussie and 2 Tommie's and we were quite a league of nations, but I forgot to say that the 12<sup>th</sup> man was a Palestinian Jew.

We were a hard mob, adept at raiding German cool stores and other things, until the whole hut got moved and we were split up again a month later.

My second room was more crowded and not so comfortable and it lasted till the English finally arrived.

At this Stalag XI B, food was good at first, but slipped badly after a week or two. Parcels were very few, about 1 parcel between 4 men every 10 days (usually 1 per man a week). Actually it was a continental's camp, being French, Polish, Yugoslav, Italian Officers and Russians. However we had some English there before we arrived, Parachutists captured at the Arnhem attack, last September and they were the most racketeering mob I have ever run into. Unfortunately they ran the English section of the camp and knew nothing about how to handle the Germans first.

AS far as the Red Cross parcels went we were handy to Lubeck, the port near Hamburg and on the Baltic and we were able to get some parcels from there, but later some special Red Cross wagons came from Switzerland, painted white with red Crosses and Swiss flags all over them and they kept us going till the end.

Well there was little to do here, but the weather got better and our daily pastime became watching the Allied Air forces fly overhead to bomb Bremen, Hamburg, Hanover and Berlin, for we saw them either coming or going and it was a very

heartening sight. News still came in and at last the fronts began to come our way from the West. We held our breaths and wondered if Jerry would march us out and he did march some Officers and senior N.C.O.s, but I had a slight attack of Beri-Beri so did not go with them.

I had, some time before forecasted the 15<sup>th</sup> of April for our rebase. I was wrong as it occurred 8 hours and 50 minutes later, at 10 minutes to nine on the 16<sup>th</sup>, but I did not mind. It was a great day and I was in bed when the word passed round that tanks were approaching. It was the Desert Rats or 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division and were they welcome? We watched the battle from the roves of our huts and then they arrived and the first thing that we got were pairs of wire cutters and cut holes in our fences. You really cannot be told of the excitement, but it was colossal. They let loose the mangy horses that were to have been our meal for that day and we lived on raided German food. The next few days flowed by amidst speculation and rumours and at last the boys started to be moved out. 1940-1941 first, but the R.A.F with their typical selfishness gave in false dates of capture and got away early. These chaps were all Sergeants, by their trade and nothing else and got their seniority without having ever had charge of men and by that seniority, got put in charge of us and in most cases should never have been left in charge of a nursery. Some were good, but the majority I'm afraid were not

Well I left on the Saturday and arrived by bus at Sulingen and on to Borghurst, from whence we left Rheine airport for England where I landed at Dunfold airdrome in Suffolk, near Guilford and went to transit camp No 106 near Kirdford in Sussex on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1945.

The following day we journeyed from Horsham to London, changing at Victoria and arriving at the New Zealand base at Margate at 10pm on ANZAC Day. Here we were reequipped and so started a new life again.

And so it all ended. It had had its moments and it had been an experience in which we met human nature in all its good and bad moments. We had some fun and we had some grim moments too, but such is life.

The End....and a New Beginning....

Roger H. Morris, Lance corporal, 20<sup>th</sup> battalion.

*Note; I'm not sure of the exact date that Roger and Frank arrived home to Lyttelton. Roger and Dorothy were married on September the 26<sup>th</sup> 1945 and had 2 children, myself and my younger sister Annie. After a year or two they moved north to the*

*Wellington area to live. After the war, Roger wanted nothing more than to live a 'quiet life' and he succeeded in doing just that. I don't believe that I ever saw him leave a scrap of food on his plate, at dinnertime for some reason!*

*Geoff Morris.*

