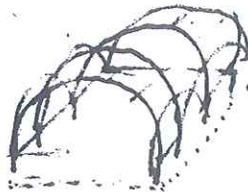


Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.,
M.E.F.
3/9/41

Dear Mother,


Two years today since War began; we are celebrating this by changing our camp site. In England, this would merely signify the loading of kit-bags onto a lorry (which would probably disappear for a couple of days), and a route march or a ride to another set of buildings as luxurious as the previous. Out here, there is great competition for picks, shovels, string, nails, rope, canvas, elephant tusks and any old iron that will make a bivouac for one or two men. My own consists of the hoops off a lorry-top, covered by half a tent and some corrugated iron sheets; the whole placed over a hole some 6 ft. by 8 ft. by 2 ft deep and elevated on petrol cans filled with sand. The shape of the skeleton of the bivouac is something like this:-

The shape of the skeleton of the bivouac is something like this:-



This desirable residence is about five feet high, and consequently my skeleton is shaped somewhat like this:-

This desirable residence is about five feet high, and consequently my skeleton is shaped somewhat like this:


This attitude may tend to signify dejection but is actually misleading.

This attitude may tend to signify dejection but is actually misleading as I am wholly filled with pride at the ingenuity of construction. Actually, most of the new homes are rather more ingenious than this, but it is a peculiar thing that while each man is enormously proud of the old junk he has collected for his own bivvy, he is very impatient of that collected by his mates, especially when it encumbers the transport to his own inconvenience. Looking through my letter I see that an enemy agent, into whose hands this letter will probably fall, will deduce that we are in sandy surroundings. For the benefit of the said enemy agent, I may as well confess that there is a certain amount of sand in our new site, and that more seems to blow in every day. For my opinion of sand, see letters written weekly since last October.

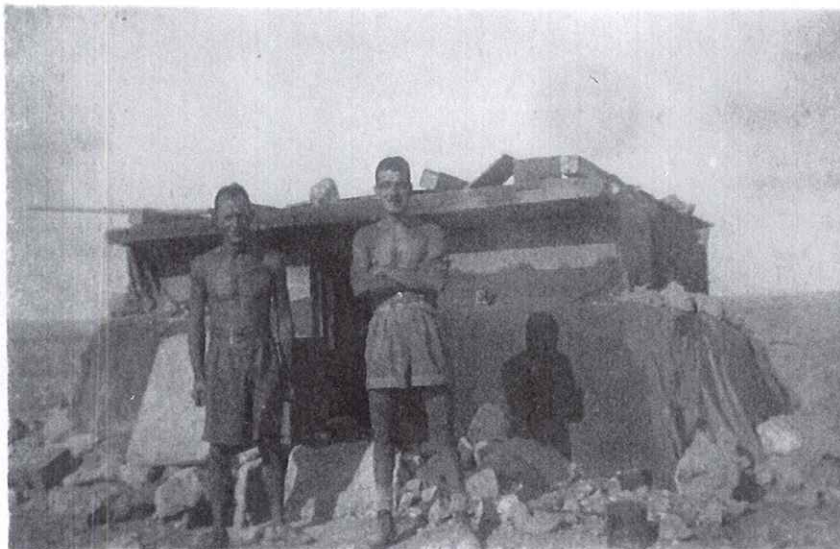
By the way, one of our fellows receives the Outspan, the S. African magazine. According to letters therein from "Our Lads Oop North," the S.A. troops in Abyssinia used to exchange biscuits and bully beef with the Abyssinians for chickens, potatoes, etc. They would be lucky to make the exchange for a couple of lizards up here.

I have met a number of men from Crete and Greece here, some even from both. One who used to be in the L. Welsh was in an open boat for about nine days, and landed five miles the right side of our line in Egypt. The only water that they had on board was gathered from a well on an island which they happened to find. All of them agree on the splendid time they had at both places when they first arrived but they certainly deserved it in view of what happened later.

Best wishes to Alfred.

Fondest Love Henry

Censor's signature
[illegible]

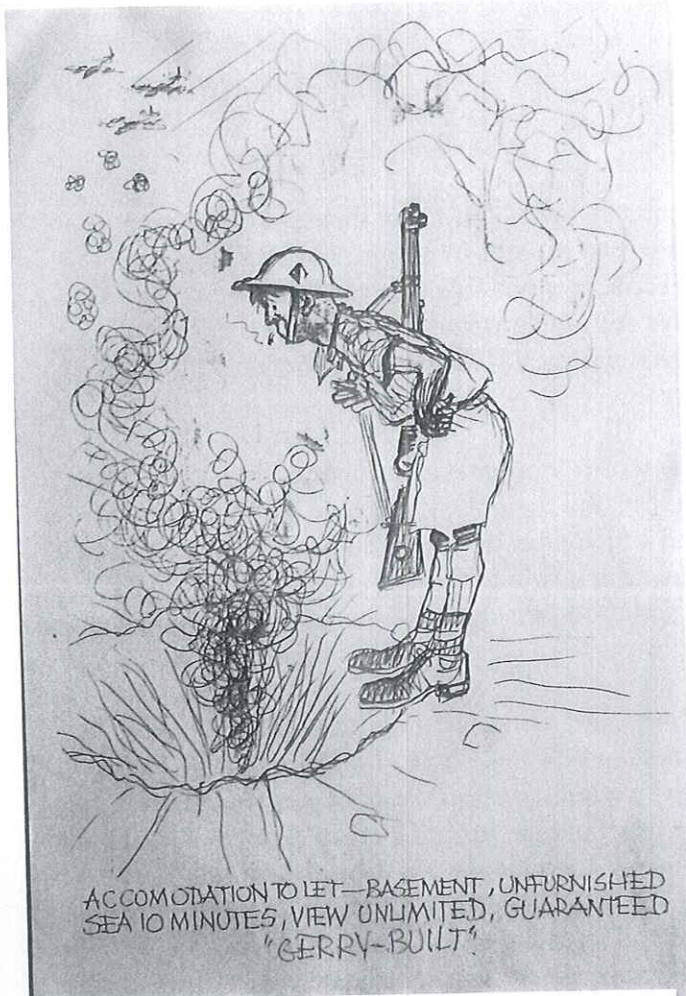


“Greenwood & Chapman Tobruk ‘41” *Champion bivvy builders*

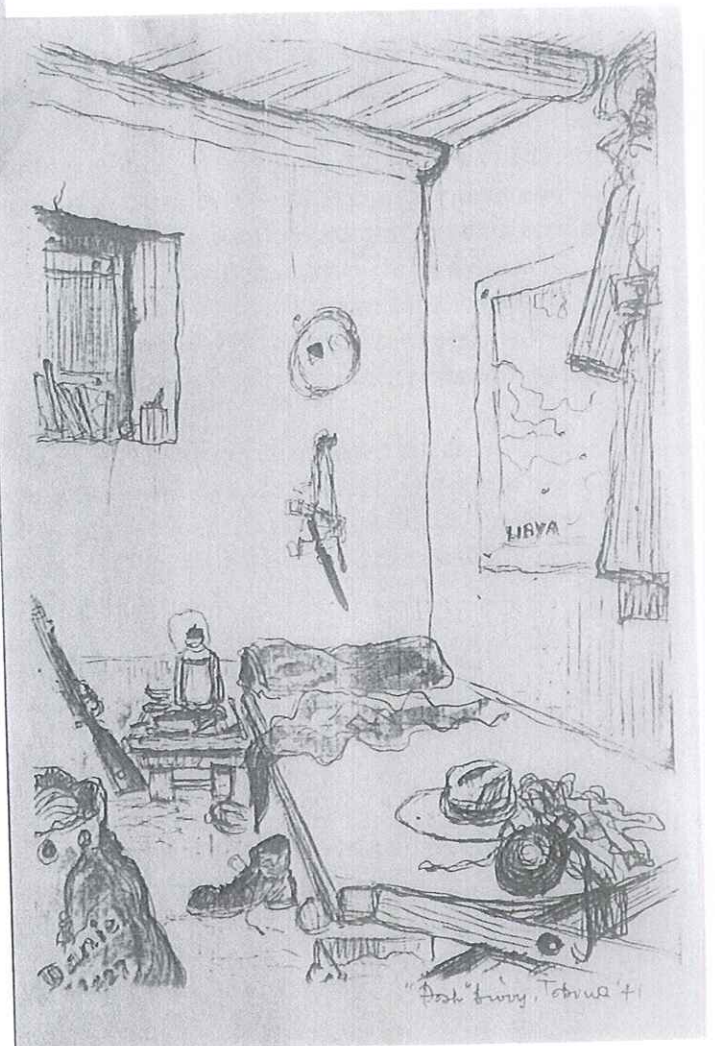


Drawing by Jack Daniel ('Dan')

Drawings by Jack Daniel ('Dan')



ACCOMODATION TO LET—BASEMENT, UNFURNISHED
SEA 10 MINUTES, VIEW UNLIMITED, GUARANTEED
"GERRY-BUILT"



"Posh Bivvy. Tobruk '41"

"Posh Bivvy. Tobruk '41"

Gnr H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
4/9/41

My dear Viviane,

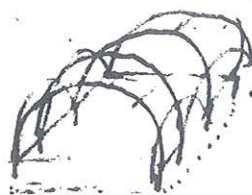
Rather a long time since I last wrote, I regret to say. (This is my standard opening to all my letters nowadays.) My last letter to you was written two months or so ago, but owing to a rumour of one of our mail boats having made a strategic descent, it is possible that you have not received this. Incoming mail is very bad indeed; we only receive Air Mail postcards, so the fact that I am not in receipt of your letters of the xth ult. pre-ult. or even pre-pre-ult. may (or may not) be due to slackness of the Army Post Office.

There is actually very little about which to write (another standard phrase in current letters). The green-fig harvest has followed the grape harvest, and the only things now left to us to reap are prickly pears which grow on cacti (cactuses?), and which after being picked gives you the impression of having stroked a bad-tempered porcupine. The taste however is delicious (like a mixture of strawberries and cream and chocolate ice cream soda), and makes the discomfort of picking well worth while.

The only two other items of news are firstly that I have found a sack of macaroni and secondly that we have moved our camp site. Moving a camp in England is quite a simple process; all one's personal kit is loaded onto an Army lorry (which thereafter disappears for anything from a week to ∞), and one's person is conducted to the new quarters by rail, lorry or Army boots, the new quarters being even more homely and luxurious than the previous. Out here the process is different, for the new home is one that has to be improvised by the occupant, mostly out of pieces of wood, petrol-tins, any old iron, canvas, string, wire, sand and anything else at which a superior rag and bone merchant would turn up his nose. Oddly enough, while everyone is inordinately vain of the material he has scooped out of the desert, he is very impatient of that belonging to his fellow gunners and affects great contempt for it.

My own bivouac is built in a hole about 10 ft. by 6 ft. by 2 ft. deep. Over this hole are some iron lorry hoops covered with half a tent and some corrugated iron ; (the latter as protection against falling aircraft which we bring down in profusion). The skeleton of my bivvy is something like this:-

(note the mastery of perspective)



(if you see what I mean)

The whole thing is about five feet high so my skeleton is shaped something like this:-



There is little more to say. I have ----- (words crossed out by censor) I have practised fluent French. ----- (words crossed out by censor) not speak French very well as ----- (words crossed out by censor) seem to understand me much. I am still very fit. I hope you have had a good summer and have stored up enough energy and pullovers for the winter.

All the very best,

Yours

Henry

LETTER TO HENRY FROM VIVIANE

The Paddocks,
Copperkins Lane,
Chesham Bois,
Bucks
5th Sept. 1941

Dear Henry,

Thank you so much for your letters. Please forgive me for not answering them sooner. I feel most guilty about it.

I was very interested to read of your life in the desert. It sounds pretty grim and hot, but I suppose one should thank God for small blessings, after all there are other places still more uncomfortable at the moment! I do pity you – life must be terribly monotonous and dull.

When I feel depressed I try and think of what you men in the forces have to go through, and it makes me feel even more depressed because I feel ashamed of myself at the same time – what a life!

Nothing happens in my life (now) except that I go to work every day (I earn £3) and I DRIVE quite a lot. I spend nearly all my money on driving. I have had lessons after work at a place ½ an hour's distance from here (can you guess where? I mustn't mention names of places) and in the weekends I go up to town and have lessons there. My one aim in life at the moment is to join the Mechanised Transport Corps. Unfortunately I am rather pessimistic about it as the test is very stiff and you have to drive a large ambulance, and it needs a lot of experience (which I haven't had) to become an efficient driver. Anyhow I am going to try for it.

We have got to leave the Paddocks as the people are coming back. We are all terrible sorry about it as we loved this house as our own. We have bought an awful little house (all we could get) called "The Meads". We propose calling it "The Weeds" but we are pleased to get anything, the demand for accommodation is so much greater than the supply.

I do hope Alec is better – please give him my kindest regards.

By the way, your mentioning GRAPES made my mouth water. I believe it is possible to get them at 10/- a lb. but I have not seen it. But I must say we eat very well considering everything.

I have registered but have not been called up because I am exempt – I work for shippers, but I do hope that I shall soon be "in Khaki" – there's a chance. I much prefer the blue uniform but it can't be helped. What a dreadful letter all about nothing.

Keep well Henry and all the best,

Viviane

Supplement to Parade, September 6, 1941

A MESSAGE

from

General Sir JOHN DILL,

Chief of the Imperial General Staff,

to

General Sir CLAUDE AUCHINLECK,

Commander-in-Chief, Middle East

"To all troops under your command : As we enter into the third year of the war, the Army can look with pride upon what has passed and with confidence into the future. We have passed through times of defeat and anxiety, through weary months of waiting and through days of triumphant success. No one can predict what the future holds for the Army, which, in these two years, and by its own endeavour, and with the help of its brothers in industry, has grown in strength and efficiency. There may still be months of waiting and preparation for some. There may be still heavy blows to be met by others. But whether patience or hardihood is demanded of the soldier, he will, I know, carry out his task with high-hearted confidence, in absolute assurance that whether it comes soon or late, victory will be ours."

Article from
The Daily
Telegraph
dated
9/9/41

TOBRUK PARTY FINDS AN ENEMY MINEFIELD HUNDREDS SAFELY TAKEN BACK

From GUY HARRIOTT,
Daily Telegraph Special Correspondent with the
Australian Forces in the Middle East

CAIRO, Monday.

Australian engineers in Tobruk sent out in a party to collect some mines from enemy sappers located an enemy minefield.

With characteristic unconcern at the deadly danger involved they collected between 300 and 400 mines and brought them back safely to our lines.

This incident was related to me by an Australian officer, who has just arrived in Cairo from Tobruk, as typical of the spirit of the Tobruk garrison.

He added that the pamphlets dropped by Axis airmen, telling the garrison: "You cannot escape," and urging them to surrender, provoked great amusement among the troops.

The paper run by one Australian unit suggested that a revised version was: "Aussies, we have been trying to get you from your ratholes for months and are getting fed up. Every one of you we get costs us 10. It is getting a bit thick. Come and give yourselves up. German beer is the best in the wide world. We have millions of gallons here."

Beer, it should be added, is just a happy memory to Tobruk's defenders.

THE TOUGHEST JOB

The men of Tobruk—Australians, Indians and British—are doing the toughest job. It is a job which has no equal for courage of the highest order, but an endurance which matches the famous sieges of history.

For more than four of the hottest months of the North African summer these gallant men, with their backs to the sea, have held at bay a greatly superior force, smashed heavy attacks launched against them, and compelled the enemy to detach forces he can ill spare, not so much to maintain a doubtful battle, but to hold the indomitable garrison in check.

When one tells of heavy attacks, of ceaseless shelling from guns of all calibres, of daily air attacks whose total has now soared beyond the thousand mark, one has only told half the story of what Tobruk's defenders are called on to endure. The living conditions have to be experienced to be appreciated.

Tobruk itself is a scarred and shattered shell of a town. The defended area, which is about the same size as the Isle of Wight, takes up more than the town and consists of a wadi-seamed patch of grid desert pitted and tortured by thousands of tons of high explosive.

"RATS OF TOBRUK"

Round this patch of desert run the perimeter defences. Behind these "the rats of Tobruk" live in holes in the ground. For four months these have been their quarters—caves scooped from the banks of wadis, holes in the sand roughly covered with corrugated iron.

All day and every day the Libyan sun beats down from a cloudless sky until weapons become too hot to handle. Any movement raises clouds of choking dust.

Frequently heavy sandstorms blow up from the desert, blotting out everything and reducing visibility to a few yards.

Heat, sandflies and death are the daily companions of Tobruk's garrison, with fleas, vipers and scorpions thrown in for good measure. Water

is strictly rationed and meals consist almost exclusively of bully beef with little tablets of vitamin C to supply the lack of greens and fruit. Recreational facilities are naturally nil.

A COAT-OF-ARMS

A young Australian infantryman told me he had devised a coat-of-arms for the Tobruk garrison. It was a dive-bomber rampant on a field of bully-beef tins, with the motto: "Not without heat and dust."

That is perhaps the most remarkable thing about the men of Tobruk—that after all they have been called on to endure and are still enduring they can still laugh. Their morale is excellent.

Ask anyone what he thinks of it, and he will reply, "It's hell," with a smile that shows he found that even hell has its humorous side.

COOKERY SCHOOLS

Training By Chefs

Two new Army schools of cookery have been opened in the Middle East—one in the desert, one in a garrison area. Sixty cooks monthly will be trained there by famous chefs, including several from the Savoy and May Fair Hotels. The three weeks' syllabus covers all branches of catering.

The Army authorities have formed a catering corps recruited as far as possible from civilian catering establishments. A cooks' pool is being established from qualified recruits and surplus regimental cooks. The catering corps cap badge is a Grecian urn surmounted by a crown. The buttons carry the Royal arms.

[COPYRIGHT.]

TOBRUK BOMBED

A communiqué from G.H.Q., Cairo, yesterday stated that in the Tobruk area on Sunday enemy shell-fire showed some increase. Six enemy bombing attacks during the day resulted in negligible damage. In the frontier area our patrols were active.

CAPITAL OF NEW GUINEA MOVED

VOLCANO MENACE From Our Own Correspondent SYDNEY, Monday.

After a series of eruptions following five years' quiescence the Matupi volcano, near Rabaul, New Guinea, has been almost continuously active since June 6, and the Australian Government has decided to move the New Guinea capital to Lae.

Sir Frederick Stewart, Minister for External Affairs, who recently visited Rabaul, saw that dust and fumes had seriously endangered the residents' health. Complete transfer will take some time.

POEM WRITTEN BY HENRY KASSMAN DURING BOMBING RAIDS AT TOBRUK.
THE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE BY DAN (JACK DANIELS). IT WAS READ OUT BY
DAN AT HENRY AND VIVIANE'S GOLDEN WEDDING PARTY ON 14 MAY 1995:

Jasper's Revenge

Summer sky : balmy breeze:
Screaching gulls : limpid seas.

Fertile farm : emerald green:
Lush green meadows : peaceful scene.

Hare-brained Humphrey : Mad Rebecca:
Married bliss : rich exchequer.

Aged father never stops
Sowing barley, growing hops

Spare time (never guess)

Engine driver, L.M.S.

Riches, Romance : Tranquil Calm:

All well on once-ruined farm.

One day, telegram:

Hare-brained Humphrey in a jam.

Price of mangel-wurzels falling:

Brussels sprouts receipts appalling:

Fat stock prices down the pan looking wren:
Half a million down the pan.

Jaw protrudes : stiff upper lip:

Hare-brained Humphrey packs a grip:

Off to see Lord of Goshawk Vulture,
Minister of Agriculture.

Rolls reading : haan a snigger:

Grossberry bushes : stealthy figure.

Jasper Gander, mad with dust:

Kidnap heroes on bust:

Jasper's Revenge

Summer sky : balmy breeze:
Screaching gulls : limpid seas.

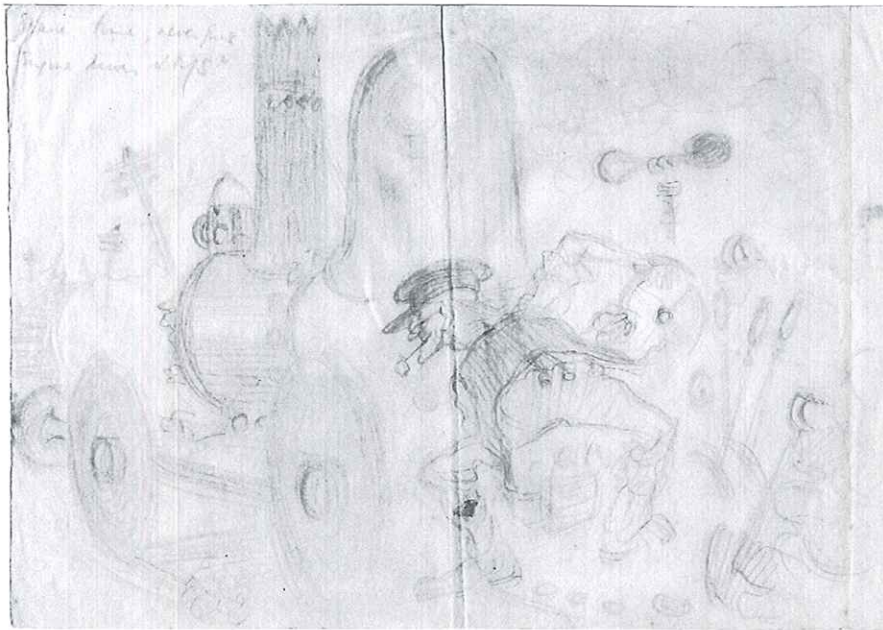
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Price of mangold-wurzels falling:
Brussels sprouts receipts appalling:

Fat stock prices looking wan:
Half a million down the pan.

Jaw protrudes : stiff upper lip:
Hare-brained Humphrey packs a grip:



Off to see Lord Grasper Vulture,
Minister of Agriculture.

Rolls receding : hear a snigger:
Gooseberry bushes : stealthy figure.

Jasper Gander, mad with lust:
Kidnap heroine or bust.

Out of window, plaintive wails:
Mad Rebecca playing scales.

C sharp minor in harmonic:
Villain's visage most sardonic.

Creeps through window, cloak and cane:
Jasper on the trail again.



Once inside, libertine,
Admiration luscious queen.

Former little village cutie:
Now a proud and haughty beauty.

Mad Rebecca : white as paint:
Fearsome shriek : deathlike faint.

Willy-nilly into sack:
Carried off on Jasper's back.

Three hours later : ghastly sight:
Land crossing : dead of night.

Poor Rebecca : frightful pain:
Lashed to railway line with chain

Seeks release, all her might:
Jasper crowing with delight.

“Silence, silly little thing:
“Else another song to sing.

“No escape : better mark it:
Renold’s chain best on market.”

Jasper chuckles : eyes afire:
“Humphrey chasing bogus wire.

“Seven minutes : eight at most:
“10.15 express to coast.

“Not too late : change your mind:
“Thoughts of Hare-brained left behind.

“Why not lavish love on me :
“Add to Gander family-tree.

“Mistress then – of Gander Grange:
“Richest man on Stock Exchange.”

Mad Rebecca shakes her head:
“No dishonour : better dead.”

Villain snarling : leave to fate:
10.15 is never late.

Pounding now through murky gloom:
Mad Rebecca faces doom.

Tearing headlong through the night:
Mad Rebecca pale with fright.

Flying Welshman : mighty roar:
Fifteen miles an hour, or more.



Engine driver aged pop:
Never found out how to stop.

Melodrama deepest water:
Aged pop runs over daughter.....

All of sudden, (where's he been?)
Hare-brained Humphrey comes on scene.

Leaps off horse to railway line:
Saves Rebecca : nick of time.

Jasper has to fight for life:
Feels in cloak for carving-knife.

Unavailing : frightful squeals:
Dreadful fate 'neath engine wheels.....

Nine months later, (can't be more):
Hare-brained Humphrey pacing floor.

Father drinking pints of mild:
Mad Rebecca having child.

Nurse emerges, soothing qualms:
Holding bundle in her arms.

Why does hero nearly choke?
Baby born with cane and cloak!!!



Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A
M.E.F.
17/9/41

Dear Mother,

Very many thanks for your Air Mail letter of the 4th August and Airgraph of 17th August which arrived yesterday with Punch & Manchester Guardian of the end of June. Thanks also for seeing about the subscriptions to "World Books"; now that the nights are lengthening, we are in more need than ever of reading material. We are better equipped than most for the long nights, having adequate lighting in the form of hurricane lamps and electric light in our dug outs. By the way, as you probably know by now, I have received Alfred's photograph and letter of June 4th which I have answered.

I am afraid that I am unable to give you any details about my leave, as you suggest, because I have as yet had none out here. In view of the Prime Minister's speech on the Cretan expedition and in view of our expanding territorial interests (Iran, Iraq & Syria), I have no doubt that we can use all the Ack Ack that we have out here, and leave must be infrequent.

We have in fact been in our present station for a good time now, and as the surroundings are dull in the extreme, most of us feel bored and irritable at times. Another fellow and myself had quite a pleasant break last Sunday. Having been on duty all the previous night, we had the day off. Accordingly we loaded ourselves with provisions (1 tin of bully, 4 raw onions, 2 packets of biscuits and 2 water bottles between us) and spent our time exploring two or three of the small bays along the coast. These little bays are very rocky and very deep, although the water is amazingly clear and one can see the bottom easily. The Australians, who are nearly all excellent swimmers, have fixed up some most hair-raising diving-boards, and we spent the greater part of the morning and afternoon in the water, which is still very warm. We arrived back in the evening with a ravenous appetite for our five o'clock meal which is the only substantial one we have during the day.

Do you hear from the Goodmans at all? We received a large amount of supplies from S. Africa, and I should imagine that business must be rocketing out there. The food stuff that they send us (tinned of course) is excellent, and we actually had some butter the other day, the first we have had this year. (No doubt, I.H.G. is adding to his fabulous wealth.) Nevertheless, in spite of excellence of the African produce, I should certainly like to join you at the Trocadero for supper one evening, although I am rather busy at the moment, and doubt whether I can get away.

I suppose you read about the business on the Dunera*. Since leaving the Welsh, my eyes have been opened wider and wider to the prevalence of the feelings which prompted the affair. These feelings are by no means absent in 153, and it is largely on this account that I personally have decided to discontinue Inaction and to have as little to do with Battery activities as possible. I have never been more thankful for having an independent mind.

Kindest regards to Alfred,
Fondest love

Henry

P.S. Just read Dostoevsky's Crime & Punishment to cheer myself up.

Censor's signature (illegible)

* *His Majesty's Transport, Dunera was a British passenger ship built as a troop transport in the late 1930s. She also operated as a passenger liner and as an educational cruise ship.*

War service: Dunera's first duty was to carry New Zealand troops to Egypt in January 1940. Her next duty, providing refugee transport, has become one of the most notorious events of British maritime history.

The Dunera left Liverpool on 10 July 1940 with 2,542 men, classed as enemy aliens, who were considered a risk to British security, after the fall of France. Many of the internees, including those who had fled continental Europe to escape Nazi persecution, were thought to have been German agents, potentially helping to plan the invasion of Britain. Included were 2,036 Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany, 451 German and Italian prisoners of war and others. The survivors of the Arandora Star disaster had been added to the transportees. They were being taken to Australia for internment in the rural towns of Hay, New South Wales and Tatura, Victoria, alongside those interned by Australia.

The ship had a maximum capacity of 1,500 - including crew - and the resultant conditions have been described as "inhumane". The transportees were also subjected to ill-treatment and theft by the 309 poorly trained British guards on board. The 57 day voyage was also made under the risk of enemy attack. On arrival in Sydney, the first Australian on board was medical army officer Alan Frost. He was appalled and his subsequent report led to the court martial of the army officer-in-charge, Lieutenant-Colonel William Scott.

AIRGRAPH

Dear Mother,

Gnr H.H. Kassman
1474509

Many thanks for Airgraphs of the 26th August. I can only hope that my writing comes out as clearly as yours in the final result. Mail has been slightly better during the past few weeks, but we only receive Air Mail letters and cards; ordinary mail, by which most of my friends write, does not seem to be arriving.

153/51 H.A.A.Reg. R.A.
M.E.F.
23/9/41

We celebrated Rosh Hashanah [*Jewish New Year*] here yesterday. There were 27 men at the service of one hour's duration, most of them Australians, one of whom led the service. There were a couple of Poles, one of them being an officer, rather to my surprise. I am afraid there was nothing very spectacular about the service, but at any rate the surroundings were quite memorable. One of the men, in our regiment, is a member of Brondesbury Synagogue and well remembers two red-faced boys being ushered in by an anxious father very late in the service, while everyone had to stand up to let them in. Need I say that I had to relate the many hours spent by the sons around the front door while Mother put the finishing touches on upstairs. I can only hope you have more mercy on Alfred. Alec sent greetings to Uncle Bert & Montie while I wrote to the Hirschsohns at Cape Town. Alec has incidentally returned to Base with sinusitis; not a very serious matter but enough to separate us. Wishing you well over the fast [*during Yom Kippur*]; don't forget to have a cup of tea! Regards to Alfred,

Love Henry

AIRGRAPH

Gnr H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A Regt. R.A.
24/9/41

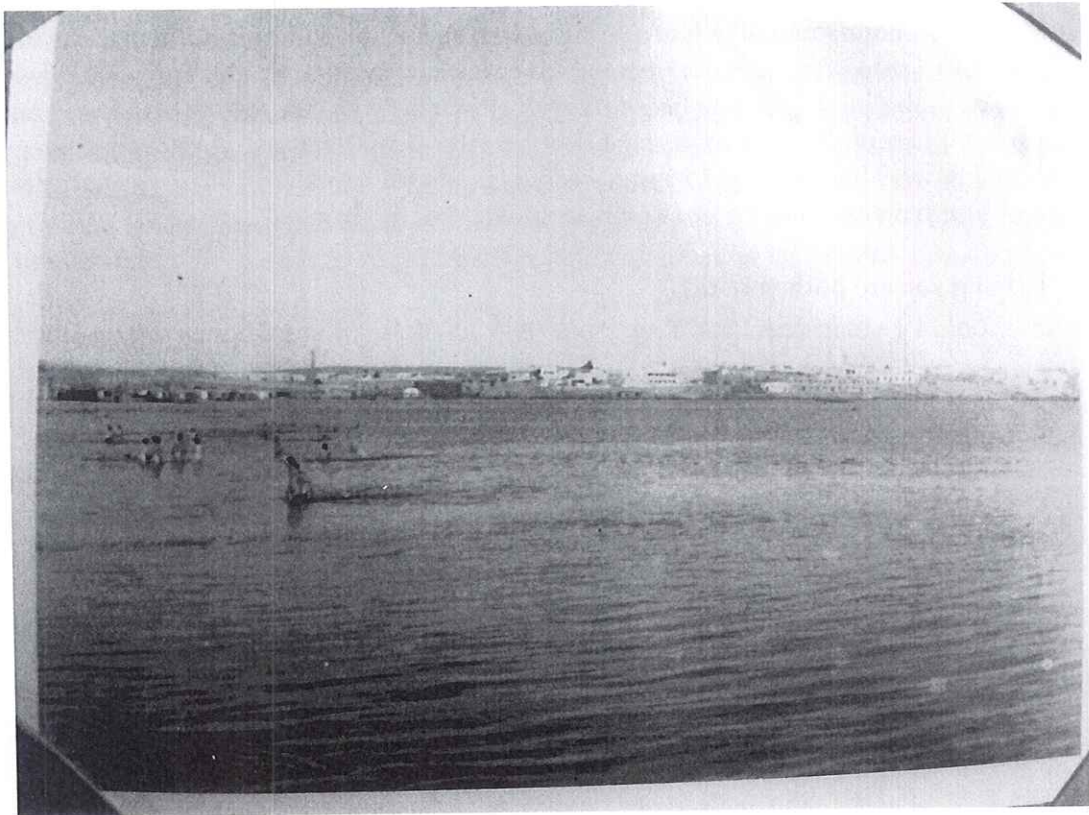
Dear Alfred,

Many thanks for your letter of the 28th August which arrived today. I hope that, by now, you have received my answer to your letter of June 3rd, which we both very sincerely appreciated. We are both very delighted that you and Mother are so happy, as we can gather from your letters.

As I told Mother in my last letter, Alec returned sick to Base very recently with sinusitis. He had contracted this form of catarrh in England, and I do not suppose the sand out here has done it much good. It is no very serious matter, and in fact he may be regarded as rather lucky to return to more luxurious surroundings on such comparatively easy grounds.

I myself am very fit, probably due to regular swimming which I have had all the summer. We have been quite surprised at the conditions here which have been far healthier during the summer than we had expected, probably due to our proximity to the coast.

Hoping you are very fit,
Yours sincerely, Henry



Swimming in Tobruk [The 'white swimming trunks' are just visible!]

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
29/9/41

Dear Mother,

Many thanks for your Airgraphs of September 4th, and for a few Punches, Law Reports and Manchester Guardians (of May and Early June!) which have arrived in the past few days. I have also received the May and June Readers Digests from Mr. Miller, although the only thing I really want to digest at the moment is a fat rump steak and chips. I am afraid that it is beyond Mr. Miller's powers to satisfy me in this respect, and I have written an Airgraph thanking him for the substitute. I must say that my reply was rather more formal than I could have wished (rather like a letter replying to a Bar-mitzvah present), but my mind is becoming blanker and blanker and I could not think of anything to write. These Airgraphs are certainly a boon to poor correspondents like myself.

I received Alfred's Airgraph last week and answered it. No doubt you have received the answer by now. As I told you last week, Alec is at Base now with a slight touch of sinusitis aggravated by the sand out here. It is very far from being a cause for worry, and he is greatly envied by those of us (about 99%) who have been in the desert since the end of last year. I have asked him to send you and Alfred a parcel each for Xmas containing tea and sugar which are no doubt difficult for you to obtain. I am afraid a couple of dozen new-laid eggs, which are very common in Egypt, would not reach you in very good condition.

By the way, who said it never rained in the desert? (No-one of whom I can think, but never mind.) We had an hour's rainfall a few mornings ago, and at the end of it our tents, dug into the ground, contained three feet of water; enough to swim in as proved by a daring young gunner. I was not affected, sharing a concrete barn arrangement with two other fellows and I may say living in a certain state of luxury. I regret to say that owing to the camp having been moved, I have had to abandon my bivvy which I described some weeks ago and on which I lavished great affection. I am still in great health and swimming once or twice pretty well every day.

Hoping you are both very fit,

Henry

P.S. From your letters to Alec, I rather gather that the intellectual Kassman is still represented in London.

It rather looks as though the lowbrow Kassmans are neglected. Who is supporting the Palladium & Holborn Empire? I rather like the critic's review of the show at the Comedy. I do not suppose you have seen it.

Censor's signature (illegible)

Gunner H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
6/10/41

Dear Mother,

Herewith the latest H.K. No-News Letter. We celebrated Yom Kippur on Wednesday; some thirty Australian, Polish and English men held a service in a concrete dugout led by an Australian (not a rev.) I cannot say the service was inspiring; it was very disjointed and obviously assembled by a layman, but the circumstances at least were memorable and the familiar parts of the service quite nostalgic. Like last year, I had visions of stewed salmon and fruit salad in the refrigerator, but had to be pleased with the usual M. & V and rice. Incidentally I met a man there called Michaelson who recognised my face (there must be something about my face and it's not whiskers). He is a cousin of Ronald Michaelson the actuary who still goes to his office every morning, but has changed his black coat for a khaki tunic. They also serve.....!!

I have written to Alec and asked him to send you and Alfred each a parcel of tea and sugar for Xmas (did I tell you this last week?) I note what you say about the Bovril and beer. Actually I wrote asking for these under the stress of the midsummer sun which possesses no mean heat out here. Now that the temperature is more humane, the need for these is not important, so unless you have sent a parcel perhaps you would forget the previous request. I should however appreciate a Xmas parcel if possible; last year I had to accept a certain amount of hospitality and I should like to return some in a small way. I feel a bit guilty about asking for this as you probably need the food more than I do.

I am still in first class condition. The water is tending to become colder and is now probably as cold as in England in midsummer. I still swim pretty well every day and sometimes twice a day. Being unable to vent my pugnacious spirit at close quarters with the foe, I indulge in fierce ducking matches with one of my companions. We have also obtained a cricket ball and spend a good deal of time improvising (and ultimately breaking) cricket bats out of odd bits of timber. The Lord only knows I used to find it hard enough to hit a cricket ball with a bat let alone with a rough stick.

By the way, I sent you photographs of Alec and myself last December. I cannot remember your acknowledging them. Have you received them?

Fondest love

Censor's signature (illegible)

Henry

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
14/10/41

Dear Mother,

Many thanks for your cables of last month which arrived at our camp yesterday – belated but appreciated. I also received a Manchester Guardian of 4th July; the newspapers are arriving very much behind schedule. Alec is still at Base; I heard from him too, and understand that he would be getting leave over the festivals so he cannot be very bad. I have had no leave yet but there is some talk of our returning for a short leave and period at a Base camp. We are due for this, but while I would be by no means sorry to have a few days sleeping between sheets and eating off a table-cloth, I would much rather be on active service at a gun site than messed about at a Base camp – kits stacked, Roll Call, on parade for meals, on parade for fun, on parade for pay (not so often!), on guard, on picket duty, polish buttons (I have not got many to polish now), lights out – lor' love a duck, what a bloody caper, as one of my companions puts it.

As it is, we are still leading much the same existence as for many months past. The moon is now waning, and we therefore are obtaining a certain amount of sleep at night. I am still swimming a good deal. I swam there and back across a bay half a mile wide a few days ago and am becoming quite efficient at long distances. A certain curb on our enthusiasm has arisen through the arrival of a sting ray and an octopus in our usual cove. These are far from being the most beautiful creatures in the cove, as apart from the elegant forms of the bathers; we saw a couple of king-fishers swooping over the water not long ago. They are most beautiful creatures and it is very rare to see them over salt water. There are also many swifts, swallows, curlews and a sort of yellow bunting. We also have the halftime bird (so called from its note) which is a gorgeous turquoise colour. In fact we have all kinds of birds except those of a non ornithological nature.

Regards to Alfred

Fondest love

Henry

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
14/10/41

Dear Viviane,

Many thanks for your Airgraph and (in anticipation) for your letter which, need I say, I am all agog to receive. We are still in the Western Desert but are still hopeful of leave which quite a few of us think is our due.

Is Eric still in England? I suppose he must be. I have not heard of his unit being sent out here although certain matters of military intelligence do occasionally escape my ears. I must say that I would not change places with him for anything. No words of mine can quite express the feeling, obtainable nowhere else on this earth, when you flop out of bed in the morning, poke your nose out of your hole (rather euphemistically called a bivouac), and see the full glory of the sandstorm whistling like a hurricane (meteorologically not aeronautically speaking) over the stark gaunt beauty of the desert. Suddenly you hear a little scramble at your feet, and the timid wild creatures of the

country can be seen (scorpions, snakes, lizards, beetles, rats and mice) or felt (fleas) nestling up to you for warmth.

Not that this scene entirely portrays and envelops all that is to be enjoyed here. Why, only yesterday we saw a sting ray and an octopus in the cove where we have been bathing all this year. So enraptured were we by these friendly creatures, that we tried to amuse them by throwing grenades at them in the water.

I am, as you say, probably as sunburnt as you are and, if it is not too indelicate to say so, more thoroughly done in view of the unisexual life we lead. I am in fact very fit indeed, nor as you suggest is there much chance of my getting fat on the rather exiguous rations granted to us. I am becoming quite good at long distance swimming and swam last week there and back across a bay about half a mile in width. I hope this accomplishment will never be of use to me in my military future.

This is quite a long letter for me but I do not seem to have said much. I cannot say how much I am looking forward to the Kassman-Maisel reunion dinner – at the Chez Filliez?

Best wishes to all,

Yours,

Henry

Censor's signature
(illegible)

AIRGRAPH

Dear Mother,

Very many thanks for your Airgraphs of the 29th September which reached here in record time, less than three weeks. I was very interested to hear about Miss Bunbury and glad that she had the foresight to leave Athens in time; she must have a very interesting story to tell. We had often wondered what had happened to her. It was certainly a coincidence for her to end up at Cape Town and meet the Hirschsohns. I should not worry about not receiving letters, if I were you. I do in fact write every week, but I believe there are good reasons why you are likely to receive these at irregular intervals. We receive your Air correspondence, but other letters and periodicals are very much delayed. I received another Reader's Digest the other day, and it is much appreciated here. I heard from Albert Levine recently; he is getting married very soon, and I wrote congratulations. He asked for your address, so that you may soon hear from him. Regards to Alfred.

Fondest love,

Henry

Gnr H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
20/10/41

Please note change of
address & notify
Punch, Guardian, etc.

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153 (Ldn.) H.A.A. Battery R.A.
M.E.F.
29/10/41

Dear Mother,

Many thanks for your letters (Airgraph) of the 7th October which arrived today. I have not yet received the letter from the N.P.I. which you mention, but presume it has something to do with the adjustment of salary that you mentioned. I should be very grateful if you could let me know approximately the amount that the N.P.I. have paid into your account since I left, less outlay such as Income Tax etc. I had roughly £130 in your account in August 1940. I have also been putting £4 per month into the N.P.I. Savings Scheme to purchase Savings Certificates and a fair number of Certificates must have accumulated by now. I should be very grateful if, next time you communicate with the N.P.I., you would ask them about these and if possible deposit them in your deed box at Barclays Bank.

I am afraid there is little else to write about, apart from these important matters of high finance. They are mentioning this place on the BBC news much more frequently nowadays, but less, I believe, because of the fierce battles raging than on account of lack of any other news with which to fill up the quarter hour bulletins. We have a wireless here but apart from the news, the programmes are not exactly exhilarating. We have German, Italian and British propaganda pumped into us unceasingly. The Germans are the only ones with enough sense to broadcast any musical programmes which are sufficiently attractive to compel one to listen to the news bulletins sandwiched between them. I do not know what the BBC home programmes are like, but their foreign broadcasts are deplorable. The BBC obviously have not the slightest idea of what the man in the street, or should I say the soldier in the dug-out, really wants.

Alec is still at Base and apparently having a fine time. He appears to have met some civilians in Alexandria who are extending their hospitality to him. I am still very fit, although the sea is much colder now and curtails our swimming. We have found a Wadi with a fair amount of grass in it, and two or three of us, having a cricket bat and ball from the Australians, play there nearly every day.

Regards to Alfred,

Censor's signature (illegible)

Love Henry