

These Gippos we learned later would do anything for money even selling his sister 'I take you my sister very good'. One day later I went into Alex from Alemain with one of our young officers. As usual we were approached by young Gippos offering to sell 'dirty pictures'. Well this young bachelor officer was shown a set of pictures which he bought. The Gippos next move was "Captain me give you bigger pictures exchange". Well he fell very quickly for that as he would not need a magnifying glass. Well I should hate to say what he called that Gippos when he got back to camp and secretly pulling out his set of Dirty Pictures found he had twelve post cards of the Pyramids. We had a darn good laugh.

Talking of Pyramids Geddes and I passed through Cairo - where there was a black-out and where the Gippo motorist drives on the hooter and brake, and on the way to Alex stopped beside the Pyramids, a very fine sight in the moonlight. Even as late as it was a Gippo suddenly rose from the ground and offered to guide us. He told us he had just received a telegram from Carter the man who did much excavation work in Egypt, as an introduction to himself as he said he had acted as guide to Carter. If I remember rightly, Carter later died in Egypt as the result of a spell said to have been cast on him for his excavation of Tut en Kamens Tomb.

We eventually arrived at Mariopilis where we were to be stationed for a while to be acclimatised to the desert dust and heat etc.

Quite close to us on the banks of a canal from the Nile were being grown some very fine grapes. We now had to get used to walking in heavy sand and forget tarred roads and lawns.

This desert, as all know, was at one time the granary of the world and even today is very fertile but lacks water. After a heavy rain which happens now and again it is surprising to see the wonderful flowers that grow. In Tobruk after one heavy rain there was a wharf full of beautiful flowers. I counted forty varieties including red and blue poppies. I mentioned earlier in my story how in the Namib Desert in 1914, after a heavy rain, barley grew in the old horse lines.

From the Nile a pipe line had been laid and also a railway so that we had water and rail following the army. The road from Cairo to Alex and on through Alemain to Benghazi and right on is tarred. It must have been a very well made road for all the heavy traffic throughout the campaign had no bad effect on it. Our roads are tarred one day and in a few months want redoing. I think most of that road was made by Italians and they seem to be first-class road makers.

As the troops moved West so the Railway was built by New Zealand Engineers. I remember near one camp we saw them working three miles away and by that evening had reached us. They were laying the line, graded on level ground, at the rate of three to four miles a day.

While at Mariopilis there were several enemy aerial attacks and gave me the feeling of being once again under fire. It also gave those who had no previous action the experience of enemy fire in a small way. At first as we all did they were inclined to duck as soon as they heard a shot but later realised that when you hear the shot it is too late to duck because the bullet had already either passed you or hit you.

We certainly had a lot to learn about this country. It is not all sand as one would imagine for much of the desert is a rocky formation with a covering of sand, in places fairly thin but in others deep. This hard formation we were to find in many places where we had to dig fortifications. There were times when, not having the proper tools, we had to improvise. Iron standards for drilling holes and powder of hand grenades for blasting. Later of course they had all sorts of earth-moving gear.