

A forecast of P.O.W. life.

We, eventually, embarked and sailed out of the harbour with Col. Page as O.C. Ship and I took over command of the Kaffrarian Rifles. There were several other small Units on board and 25 men who had been sentenced by the courts mentioned above to rejoin their Units in Egypt. We had a very fine trip travelling in convoys and escorted by H.M.S. Kent.

The officers all had accommodation in the cabins as did the senior N.C.O.s. The other ranks were quartered in the holds of the vessel. Here it was very hot and stuffy. The Captain was a very fine man and on the first night when he noticed a number of men wishing to sleep on deck he said: "The men must not sleep on deck for the first two nights as they are likely to catch colds; after two nights, Yes. Also I noticed one or two of the officers taking blankets onto the cargo deck. They are not to do that because that deck is for the men who have to sleep in a stuffy hold. The officers have cabins even if they have to share." Well that was what he thought of the men and also for those 25 who were jailed in the lower hold. These he said must come on deck for a short while even if the O.C. Ship said 'No'. "It is my ship and I am the one to give instructions." He even supplied the with Du Maurier Cigarettes every two days. I had a very nice big cabin, one of the suite cabins.

During the very hot weather the Captain invited Page and I to join him on the bridge where we had tea and sandwiches. There were a very fine lot of officers who were always out to help make the voyage pleasant.

We, eventually, arrived at Aden and the Captain said he was supposed to anchor outside the harbour. 'But' he said 'I have signalled that I am short of water and must enter the harbour' and so we entered. We were there only for the day during which time some of the men were allowed ashore. The Captain took Page and I ashore and there hired a taxi to take a run into the desert country.

Aden is a god forsaken place and I should have hated to live there. We were told that there were three separate villages of Arabs, the true Arab, the Jewish Arab and the Christian Arab. What a mixture.

As we sailed out of Aden and into the Red Sea the Captain, a Hollander, hoisted one of the biggest flags I have seen, the Dutch Flag.

We, eventually, arrived at Tewfick, entrance to the Suez Canal, where we were to land.

Our first sight of war damage was the large vessel Georgic which had been bombed and set on fire. She was a mere hulk lying a short distance from where we landed. The vessel was later repaired and made seaworthy and carried on for the rest of the war. It was at this time that the enemy were dropping mines into the Canal. Later this trouble was overcome by a plane to the nose of which a large magnet was attached and when the machine flew low over the canal, the magnet lifted the bomb to the surface where it could be attended to. A large Union-Castle Intermediate liner, the Dunbar Castle, was damaged and sunk in the mouth of the Thames by a magnetic mine.

We were met by Lieut. Sedgwick, our Signals Officer who had come up with the advance party. He had travelled down from Alex in the staff Sedan car in which Page and I were to travel to Mariopolis, just outside Alex, where we were to camp. The Regiment was to travel by special train as were the Umvoti Rifles and the Durban Light Infantry who had come up in the same convoy as we did. There were some amusing incidents, on the platform before leaving and on the train, which were to put our chaps wise as to the cunning ways of the Gippo. On the platform they sold whisky in sealed bottles but through a very small hole in the bottom they extracted the whisky and inserted cold tea. Lez Wyllie was one chap caught and probably others. On the train a Gippo went from one compartment to another taking orders for early morning coffee for which he was paid. Later he jumped off the train with about twenty or so pounds he had collected.

These Gippos we /