

Dear Reg.

Herewith another instalment of Bill's letter dd. 23rd Nov. 1941.  
I hope they have proved interesting so far...

#### PART IV.

"The next day we were told that we were off up into the line and had to pull down our bivvies. We started after morning parade, and it was a sad moment. How unlike a little human habitation a bivvy is when his tent is off! What an indecent exposure of private belongings! It was almost as if an idle, wayward woman whipped off her dress in the street and shouted, "Let's swing it, boys!" What a loading, what a scrimmage - all day! Charlie and that huge American or pseudo-American did all my chores for me. I think that they felt they were losing me for good. What good fellows and what an example to Larry the Lark.

We slept "over the hill" and at dawn started off on our long trek. The whole Regiment. We were in the newly formed "D" Troop with 18 pdrs., Yes, my son, we are that - and 1913 models too! On and on and on. Slept at a place called Fooka (so many obvious jokes about its nomenclature!) Bok, Jigger, Charles, John Hickman and I went for a lovely swim. On, on, the next morning. Then Vermin and I were detailed to get petrol for the Batteray. We stopped at a kilo and then waited and waited - for petrol and grease and oil, and made a petrol fire on the side of the road to brew tea with. I drove and Ossie Thomas, old Beetle Brow, sat beside me. On and on. We turned south from your "reduplicated labial" (a Half-Blue if you decipher that!) and we had traffic blocks in the dark - but I gave it a tonk with our three-tonner and "the mail went through!" Russell was in front, Vermin second and I third, and when we had seen the last of the Englishmen turn off we had the road to ourselves, and did we give it a tonk? Flat out over the flattest country I've ever seen. Vermin drew off the road and signalled me over, for he said his car had petered out. So I tore after Russell and in the dark and clouds of dust arrived at the regimental outspan.

I crawled about and at last came to "D" Troop. We shared out our ration and all the gear and next morning, because Butcher had gone ahead with the recce party, I was Troop Leader and had to drive in an 8-cwt. Dodge. Jimmy Moodie drove and I got all the blokes out at 7 and drove up to the starting place long before the others were ready. I asked MacPherson (later in Addison's place, after Dick had gone away<sup>sick</sup>) whom I should follow. He said "Capt. MacNab, our new Battery Captain." Off we drove in great style but, after a mile up came Lance Knight, a Don R, with a big scowl. "Sgt. Payn? Who told you to go in front?" "Mr MacPherson," I replied sweetly. He rode on up to the front bus to check on me and, getting the reply that all was well, rode back to report to Mr. Perry!!! He reckoned he should have been in front! Aren't we a gay party.

McNab stopped at a point on the road and called for all troop leaders. We came up and he gave us... yes, you've guessed it... the Pitcher. Quite right! We were to "strike off into the desert, bearing 260degrees, and the troops were to travel in diamond formation. 200 yds. between weehickles!" Off we set, me and D Troop the front, right leg of the diamond. It was most impressive and I rode out on the running board every time we came to a slight elevation. The portés and our trailers moved like cruisers ploughing their way through a flat sea. A huge spume of dust rose from each, and feathered and opened and clouded out, making us look like so many meteors



meteors moving forward. Full marks to old McNab! He got us to Larry's rendezvous, 68 miles by speedometer, without a hitch. When he came to wadis the diamond broke up as the vehicles swung in to cross at the only place they could, and then opened out again.

We halted and then I had another change. Got into Stead's 3-tonner and off we moved in the dark to our positions. It was tricky going for we had to go through a minefield in the dark. We all got through OK except one of "D" Battery's buses that fouled a mine. Moore killed. Then our 3-tonner got a slow puncture. Stead asked if they'd wait 10 minutes to let us pump up. Larry said, "No. You'll have to pump when you get a chance." It went flat so we stopped, drew off and prepared to change the tyre. We did and just sat there. It would have been goofy to try to catch up with a convoy miles ahead, in the dark. Larry had to come back at 2 a.m. to lead us along. I drowsed in the back of the bus in exquisite torture, lying on a turntable and mats, and boxes and tins.

At 4 a.m. we stopped. When I heard Larry's querulous voice, "Where is the beacon? I travelled back 10.1 miles and it should be here. Where has it gone?" I couldn't refrain, and I know it was cruel, but I yawned, turned over on my Procrustean bed and shouted, "Fear is your beacon, Basie?". He never smiled again. At dawn next morning we woke up to find the beacon 200 yds. from us, standing out like canine testicles! Poor Larry! Anyway we drove on to our gun positions - pulled off, pulled back and then pulled in. Then we had to work to dig slit trenches, gun A and ammo pit camouflage. Then we had a place to sleep in. We had our 3-tonner sent back to the wagon lines and kept the hood. With a tarpaulin over it, it made a snug and happy home - but not for long...!



Dear Reg,

Herewith another instalment of Bill Payn's letter dated the 23rd November, 1941.....

"As we strode down a little alleyway, I came upon a tiny little Gypso girl, about three, indescribably dirty, with a face black as coal dust, and eating an overripe date. She was dressed in a pitiful little smock and her head, on top, was encrusted with a festering mass of ringworm! I bent over and said, "You poor little digger! She looked up at me and smiled and whick! in a trice, like a little anthropomorphic tree frog, had grabbed the forefinger of my right hand. Then, quite content, and munching her date, she held on. I was quite embarrassed, especially as a crowd collected. Old dames and crones and gossips! I couldn't 'puncuga' roughly, so I bent down and gently disengaged her fingers one by one. But, whick! Dammit! The tree frog had grabbed the forefinger of my other hand! Here was a thing! I waited for some time. Then an old harridan, sensing my predicament, opened her toothless mouth and, through her womanly, straggly beard, yelled "Fateema!" Up came a little girl and unceremoniously took away the little T.F!

Off we went, got a bus and set out for the Zoo. When we got to the big bridge over the Nile, with the bronze lions, it was closed to us, but not to the river traffic. I was glad to have this chance to watch the doings. A whole cluster of dhows and feluccas and barges were struggling to get through, and what a shouting and jostling and bumping and boring. The lofty sails of the dhows, only slightly pregnant to the soft waft of the idle wind, were insufficient to force the gravid craft through in time and the crew were straining every nerve and muscle, pulling at ropes and shouting to urge it forward. I was vouchsafed a glimpse of ancient Egypt, and I could see how the slaves strained at the galley oars or tugged at the pyramid stones. By the way the cynical and selfmocking Cairenes say that the huge bronze lions guarding the approaches to this bridge roar lustily when a virgin passes over it!

We got to the Zoo and Jimmy (Meyer) was in ecstasies, and soon in his exophthalmic coma! "O, my God! Die recigat apies!" - the buck, -the zebras, the giraffes, the hippos, the crocs". What a bloody party! I had to drag him away, giving us an hour and 5 mins. to get back to the Barracks! What a trip. With traffic jams and overloading, we were 15 mins. late! But it was O.K. We drew our brems from the Armoury, got on a vehicle and Boonter Deeder (sic!) drove off.

The cop cut us off the convoy and when we got to the gates the old ass turned to the right instead of left. I didn't care a damn, for I was able to see Heliopolis, and the Club, and the Racecourse. An Englishman put us right and we drove to Mena and slept there the night. John Thompson coming back from Tel el Kebir with the new buses drove his bus right into a big slit trench! Another bird knocked over a shithouse in which a Gypso was straining! We gave him a Full Blue! I was with Bokkie (Swart) in the front bus when we drew out next morning. It was gay! Our convoy was seven miles long and I loved to get out and stand on the step, looking back when we got to the top of a hill to see them toiling along behind.

Its tricky driving along this road for the sand, like a siren, is always trying to drag your outside wheels into the desert sands. It happened to Bok once, when he looked back at a convoy of armoured cars







Dear Reg.,

Continuing Bill Payn's letter dated 28rd November, 1941.:::.....  
After his trip on a Cairo train....

"We went to the Pole Nord and ordered a bull omelette, and while it was roasting, or stewing, or whatever they do to the damn things, I saw the off side horse of a gharry fall down in the street outside. It floundered and struggled on the hard slippery road with its steel-shod hooves bit in no wise could it get up. A lot of staring Cairenes gathered round-- but they were about as useful as a gunboil on a donkey's arse, so I told Jimmy to stand by our "claim" and nipped across the street to the rescue. This was an old ropetrick of mine and I can still remember, with pride, helping up a big dray horse that had fallen in a street in ~~Imy~~ Jemappes, near Mons.

I moved the crowd away, grabbed the bit on both sides of the horses mouth, spoke a couple of words clara voce, "Now, you old beggar let's both give it a good tonk!" and with all my might held up his head as high as I could get it. The old lad-- a beautiful horse, more beautiful than this <sup>cyueh</sup> callous race deserve-- flopped a bit and then, heaving on my arms, soon got to his feet.

I was hardly prepared for the oration I got from the crowd of loafers around us. "Gooood! Vair gooood, Afreeka!" But I beetled back to the joint for my cats. When we had finished I said, "Now, Jimmy (Meyer), what do you want to see or do?" "Sarge," said Jimmy, "I don't care, what would you like to do?" "Damn it!" says I, "I have seen all the sights, I'm asking you. Have you seen the Pyramids?" I was ever ready to do them again. "No, Sarge, I want to go to the Zoo. I've never seen a Zoo, not even in Pretoria, and I'd like to write to Ouma and Ma and Chrissie and tell them that I have been to one". "Righty Ho," said I, "Come on!"

We went to a bus stop but, while we were waiting, a dragoman came up and told us that the Zoo didn't open till 11. "Pyramids? Blue Mosque? I show you." "No, seen 'em all," I said. "Went with Sayed of the Hotel Regina". "Oh, Sayed. He is of my family!" and I'd struck a pal. I said I really wanted to buy an ancient copper lamp such as was used by Alladin. "Come!" he said "Three minutes walk." So off we went and, after thrice times three minutes, he says, "Here's a gharry." So we mounted the gharry, and drove on for miles. Eventually we stopped at a low hole in a wall and got out. We entered, passed down a narrow passage and came to the vestibule of what I thought was a museum. It proved to be an antique store, but what a place! I could have bought a mummy, a granite, Ramases-looking bugger, a complete set of Russian uniform and any damn thing. But no ancient lamps. Jimmy hit upon a case of ancient Egyptian armour, and blunderbusses, - and pistols and sabres, and he stood rooted to the spot. His eyes stuck out so queerly that I could have tied strings round 'em. "Oh, Sagge!" I dragged him away and off we strode through the slums of Cairo.

My God! What places we visited! I have never seen such filth and penury and degradation in my life. As we walked along, I felt like some Gulliver in a dirty Lilliput-- among stunted people. But they are a gay crowd, and smiled and joked and wore engaging



countenances, and I thought, "Well, bigger it all! What a brave face to show to so scurvy a world". And the Turks! I saw a bloke with a little handcart, with a charcoal fire at one end, which he quickened with a palm-leaf fan. He was roasting mulliest Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Oh, boy! How much? "Two for half alkor." ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "We dove in", as Clay Butler says, and had a good feed and chucked the cobs on the pavement, where everything falls here.

Then we saw two men in a booth a little bigger than a writing desk. They were making combs out of camel bones! The combs were as big and as broad as my open hand, and we were left mystified as to how they did it, as the Plattelander and the marble in the lemonade bottle. There was a basket weaver making baskets from osiers gathered from the banks of the Nile, his left foot playing an important part as his hands, and just as dexterous. All sorts of queer people and queer jobs! "....."

(to be continued...)



Dear Reg.

Herewith the last instalment of Bill's letter dated the 23rd November, 1941. I only hope everyone got as many smiles as I did from reading it again, after 19 years! Perhaps it may have evoked memories long dormant which may lead to someone wanting to write about them? If so, I'm sure we would all welcome them.

Part V. "The very next day the Lark came round and said, "We have to take the skin off your elephant, Sgt. Payn. It shows up too much." And this after Jack Hobbs had assured me, "It is quite alright. What luck, what? Yes." I nearly told Larry that his bit of taxidermy would shift our little home life, but refrained. It has to be off at sunrise and back at sunset! All the time I have been in the army I have eaten my food, but without any particular enthusiasm, and certainly without any avidity, as you may perhaps have noticed. I had begun to think my lack of keen appetite was merely a concomitant of senility, and that I had for ever lost its titillating encouragement. Never was there a more fallacious surmise! I am now as hungry as a schoolboy for my tucker, and look forward to every meal. We have Bunter with us! Stead, Don Irving and Cock, the platinum blonde. The last is at last happy and very well behaved. He works like hell and is particularly zealous about my own comfort, washing my little porringer and moog for every meal. I have no "Irons" at all now. It is most sad, and I have to eat everything with a biscuit. I sent Reg (Wright) my set of irons at Alamein and haven't had 'em back. Of such is trust in a prince! I did have a little NAAFI spoon - for two days - then, ostrich-like, it buried its head in the sand, but a fine-toothed comb search has failed to expose its locality.

We get  $\frac{1}{2}$  a gallon of water a day which is put into a common pool. I had no idea cooking used up so much water. It barely suffices for our needs. I am reduced to making my daily sluice out of 2 cupsful of water! Anywhere else this rather ludicrous sight would draw a "gate", but these buggers see neither pathos nor tragedy in the sight! You may have heard the query "Where do flies go in the winter time?" They are here, right round our lark! Although it is winter and bloody cold these pestiferous little bastards flock and swarm and herd and molest us all day long, buttoning up only at night. I have a fly swatter and slay thousands, but the assault hardly slackens. But its an ill wind.... and there is a single rejoicer. Little Willie, a wagtail, and his wife, who come and mop up the dead at sunrise. He drinks out of my sluice dish - I leave a few drops - but he does not seem to know of bathing. Perhaps he's never heard of it! Yesterday it rained and we put the tarp. out flat and caught two gallons of rain water. It was like striking a pothole at Elandsputte!

I can give you little news of the others. We are all so remote from one another we might be in the next world. Butcher walked over the other day, with Cherrington, a sort of old-fashioned farm visit! He brought a tin of biscuits. I shall have to repay his visit but the only present I can think of giving him to repay his bounteous gesture is a tin of Keatings Powder that Thompson left, which strikes me as being too ambiguous a gift to contemplate.

We have an old k joke here already. Now family jokes spring



spring up in the army! We eat Boomer's rice, or some unpelatable dish he has prepared, and I say," By Gad, sir! This is magnificent! The marines couldn't put up a dish like this!" And another says, "They wouldn't!" and I finish off with saying, gravely, "They daren't!"

I must close now. (This correspondence will now cease. Ed.) I am glad you went to see Winnie. She has told me of your visit. But I can in no wise understand George (Howson). He promised me solemnly that he would call and leave a little diary and the lily bulbs, even if he had to crawl on his hands and knees! Neither by upright ambulation nor by genuflection has he yet approached our threshold, so I must conclude he has lost a leg or had a bad accident. I hope this is not the case. He will make an excellent officer!

Lots of love, old man. Everyone sends their love.

All will be over here in about a month.

Your bloody uncle,

W.T.