



South Australians at war – transcript – PRG 1187

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Radiographer with the 'Free French' movement
1943-1945

Transcribed by S. van der Sluys in May 2002

1943

THURSDAY. May 27. Pleasant day – not too hot. We left at 12 noon & travelled about 20 miles to new place near Sousse & sea. I drove & road was bad in spots. New camp is attractive in an olive grove set on different levels with view of sea & a ravine. After much cogitation we pitched our tent somewhat apart on edge of ravine & under trees with view of the sea. In fact pleasant. Annoyed with Worden because I think he has repeated remarks have made to him re others to deLinum.

FRIDAY. May 28. Very nice day, sunny but with a coolish breeze. After some shilly-shally Vigne decided I could put up my X Ray tent so I did. Travers & (?) have gone to Algiers & she has asked us to mind Josephine so we are foster-mothers. Plenty of Jack-ack over Sousse last night at 4pm & again this eve. at 10 p.m.

SATURDAY. May 29. Lovely again. Had some work in morn. After lunch Worden & I & Josephine walked down ravine to beach. Pretty walk twisting & turning between olive trees, then native wells & high walls of cacti, beach of fine sand & very pale. We went in swimming & it was delightful.

MONDAY. May 31. Very hot & sunny again. Got paid. In afternoon Rollin, (?) & I & Josephine went down for a swim.

FRIDAY. June 4. Pleasant with coolish breeze. Capt. Burean told me that an accord has been made between de Gaulle & Giaud which is good news in a way for the French. But if it means we remain here in N.A I am not too thrilled. Plenty of rumpus. Other day there was a meeting at which Vigne said we were to be prepared to move in 24 hrs & all must learn to



swim as a journey might be made by boat!!! Have been very moody last few days & in the dumps.

Monday. June 7. Pleasant day with coolish breeze. Closed hospital in morn. In pm Kelsey, Ministreif & I went in Père's pick-up with usual ghastly French driving from M. Went to Hammam Sousse not too interesting native town which stank, then Sousse proper a dull place & fairly well damaged. Then to Monastin, a walled town by the sea where we bathed & so home. Travers back reclaimed Josephine.

WED. JUNE 9. Warm again. In afternoon Worden & I to Monastin in X Ray car & I drove there & back. I went for a bathe & we explored walled town quite interesting shops with curved barrel roof. Saw an all male wedding party & so home.

THURSDAY. June 10. Very hot. We left at 10.30 am with Tapping as my driver. Passed thro' Sousse, M. Saken, Kairouan & on to Loudon Rd which was dreadful & no surface at all. We crawled at 5 mph & arrived about 7 pm near Friaga where we camped. Storm & some rain in eve so slept in tent. I felt very ill & sick & have gippo tummy.

FRIDAY. June 11. Warm again. Left at 10.30 & arrived 8pm 162 miles & not interesting. Passed Mahares, Gabes & Medenine this last had some quaint domed native houses. Camped some miles from Medenine in wretched place & tent put-up. Feel so-so.

SAT. June 12. Sunny with a strong breeze. Left at 9.30 am & travelled 112 miles arriving 5 pm. Dust storms all the way & everything covered with sand. Went thro' Ben Ghardine (took 2 snap shots from the car) & then across from (?). Road pretty ghastly & sand, sand, sand. Then passed Pisida in Libra & Zuara & camped between there & Sabratha. I think we are not far from the sea, site not too charming flattish & strong wind. Worden & I in tent next to (?) & just outside Vigne's tent. But dont know how long we shall be here. Not sorry to leave Tunisia & as far as I can see neither are the F.F.C. It has been a great disappointment for them, in spite of the de G/Giraud accord. I am glad we are staying with the 8th Army but wonder where we shall go. Lots of rumours – Turkey & Balkans/or England.



MONDAY. June 14. Quite pleasant day. Set up X Ray tent & then Vigne told me that the dentist wanted to mount a tent & needed an extra element & would I demount & set up with one wall joining Salle de Peusement! Was I furious. Hell of a job getting it all down & reassembled & no one to help & no one to know how it was done. The lack of organisation here is unbelievable. When we arrive & get installed we are a "bordel". Yesterday Sassoon, Worden & I walked to sea only about 20 mins away. Coast rocky & a lot of sea weed but a small beach a little farther off but not as nice as Hammam Sousse.

TUES. Oct 12. Quite pleasant. Very busy in morn with X Rays, père has declared himself my unofficial helper & comes to assist. In eve. I was invited to dinner at Foyer in Nabeul by the Sous offs. Kelsey, Ministreif, Richard, LeMestie there & (?). Food very good but not exciting eve – home about 11.30 p.m. I am very bored by this place & do hope we move soon & into Europe. Garage has paint for all the cars so I can hope. Truth is 2 am lonely now W has gone, I dont wish to get too friendly with the French & Kelsey, Ministreif get on my nerves ++.

FRIDAY. Oct 15. Very nice sunny day. Went for walk after lunch this village & to hills, pretty scenery & of wadis & each hedges & olive trees etc with distant view of sea & white villages. To Benediction in eve at Nabeul with Père & others. Confirmed that Italy has declared war on Germany & strong rumours we go to Italy in a month at most. I hope so as I want to leave North Africa & get this war finished & so home.

SAT. Oct 16. Changeable day with storm & torrents of rain in p.m. Blood Transfusion Unit joined us from England, so far have met a female & a Med Student both talk excellent English & seem friendly. M'selle Piccard asked me if I would be interested in a radio job at Berck after the war. It is a big hosp. for T.B situated between Calais & Dunkirk, sounds interesting & I said "Yes"! Shall see.

SUNDAY. Oct 17 Pleasant & sunny. To Mass 8am & took communion – (?). After lunch walked to Nabeul & had a swim. Water coldish, rough & dirty.

MONDAY. Oct 18. Beautiful day & my birthday. To Mass 7am & took communion again. Here's hoping it may do me good. Zelonz got back at lunch time & we re-arranged tent as



we are sharing. In eve. we were all inoculated against typhus. Great scandal as Vigne is confined to his tent for 4 days by the General. I believe he was cheeky to a gendarme on the road. Quite believe it but think this is a bad way to handle it.

1944

SAT. May 6. Left at 12.30 am & arrived at 6 am near Conca I think. Drive OK & mountainous latter part, seemed nice views. Lovely camp, ringed by mountains & a little stream & rocks, fruit trees, flowers & all so green. In our individual pup tents gun fire & machine guns in the not far distance & smoke. Believe big attack takes place soon. I am in 2nd equip with Gabriel, Liochesson, Mourigaud, Picard etc. Had a Syrian as chauffeur & believe he (?) with me.

THURS. May 11. Lovely day & this place is really beautiful. Sad that I feel so blue & depressed. The old A.C.L I knew is no more – Capt Liochesson has now left us I believe. Thinking seriously of going myself after this attack & yet hate to leave before war ends. Have been to Spears several times to see Kelsey. Had tetanus infection & arm painful & bit of fever. Big attack began at 11 pm I think – much gunfire all night. Guns right near us & the noise & flashes & draughts & earth shakings – difficult to sleep.

FRIDAY. May 12. Dull morn. then nice. casualties arrived at 5 pm & 1st team got to work. Not sure whether we would or if we were to move, however at 7 pm we began to put up tents etc! What a mess & when it became dark – ghastly jumble. I finished at 11.30 pm & so to bed & up 1 am when we began to 9am Did 2 copies only, reporting on them myself! 12 cases in all.

SAT. May 13. Beautiful day. Finished nights work at 9am, had breakfast wash & doze for an hour. Then took a douche & sun bath & began again 5 pm Bloody set broke down after first case so I continued with small set in other operating (?) & did 6 cases. Hear Cassino is taken & also Le Harve. Great news.



1945

WED. Jan. 3. Dullish but less cold. Convoy left Conville 10 am but we got away at 12.30 pm as far as Baccarat when radiator leaked like mad. Repaired a bit in a civilian garage & en route encore 7 kms from L'Etape & broke down away. Finally away but had to stop every few kms for water. Road (?) & scenery very pretty, wooded, snowy & mountainous. Thro' villages Senoune, St. Blaise Mutzig & Obernai 6.30 pm & told ACL at St Picere 12 kms away. There in pitch blackness (no lights allowed) & searched everywhere but no ACL. Demanded at a French Mess (Vichy) who all thought I was a spy & finally car completely broke down so stopped for night. Le Morpe & Maginot found a room in a civilian house I slept in Major's house in dining room – above mentioned French Mess.

THURS. Jan 4 Up 6 am & car dead. Le M & Maginot hitchhiked to Obernai & at 1 p.m car from ACL & towed us back to Obernai. ACL fairly well installed in a chateau but may not be staying here long. I have a room with Dupont & Bereau. Very fed up & told Copigny I wanted to leave. Motor of car is quite done & I hate the atmosphere here now.

FRI. Jan 5. Dullish & some snow but not very cold. Hospital is very well installed in barracks in grounds of this chateau which was a school for S.S. women I hear. I have a nice room for the radio & have been promoted to Lieut by the French! So suppose I cant leave now. After lunch Dupont & I to Obernai & very charming & picturesque little town, complete with a stork's nest! The room we have in the chat. is comfortable & warm but I want to move next door into an empty room & be more tranquil. But must get a fire installed if possible.

SAT. Jan 6. Dullish again but not too cold. 5 cases for X Ray & fellow who works with me is very good & I have him as ordinance too. Found a nice room with fire in (?) with some Sous. offs just across from X Ray dept & installed there. Drinks in eve for my (?)

SUN. Jan 7 Very cold minus 12° I hear . Lots of wounded & yarns of German attacks all over the place – north of Strasbourg (25 kms away) & I hear a village 15 kms from here has been taken. Hope we shant all be prisoners soon. Rigged up a super dark room.



WED. Jan 10. Still good & cold & fair amount of dry, powdery snow. Le Mestie told me in eve. that nothing can be done for the car just now. And if we have to retreat in a hurry (!) it must be abandoned & burnt! If normal departure it can be towed.

FRIDAY. Jan 12. Plenty cold still. Wounded slackened off a bit & news better. Babst one of the wounded here, & pretty serious. A battalion has been cut off & all made prisoners or wounded or killed & I hear Worden is one of them! Too bad.

MON. May 21. Rather dull & heavy. Mouriquand leaves at 4.45 am tomorrow morn. for Paris & I (?) China. I shall miss him a lot as I like him immensely though somehow we never seemed to get very close friends. I have given in my resignation & hope to go soon. I am very blue & depressed.

WED. July 4. Nice day but at 5.30 pm a message for me to say I was to be at Paris 5 am tomorrow en route for England. Hectic rush to Med. Batt to get last minute papers & I (?). I leave tomorrow at 8 pm & (?) for the French. Sad farewells to all.

THURS. July 5. Left A.C.L for ever at 8.20 am in a jeep with Thérèse & her husband both leaving also. In Paris saw French & deposited my luggage (dreadfully heavy) (?) St. Lazare & lunch Cafe de l'Opera. Got tickets etc in after. & shopped a bit. Dinner in eve with Lady Enid Browne & friends at her hotel, the Lancaster. To station 11 pm & seat in 1st class & left 12 midnight, train full – English Lieut with me

FRIDAY. July 6 Dieppe at 5.30 am & on board “Isle of Thanet” about 6 am left 7.30 am. Beautiful crossing, perfect weather. I had breakfast & slept & Newhaven at 11.30 am. Bit of a bore here as I was classed as a civilian & had papers etc to fill in. Then customs nice & friendly & on train which left 1.5pm via Lewes & Vie. 2.30 got a room at the Regis praise be & wired family. Saw “Henry V” in eve. & good but disappointed a bit. Dinner and back to Regis where Mother 'phoned me & so ends an historic day.

SAT. July 7 Warm day. Tried to contact Red X but nothing doing until Monday. Early lunch & saw “Strip Tease Murder” very weak, poor Barbara Stanwyck. In eve to Haymarket & saw “The Circle” quite good, Yvonne Almand excellent, Leslie Banks & capable cast.