

Albert Ronald Bond

By Tom Bond

Please find attached my only surviving letter from my father, who served in the British 8th Army throughout World War 2, to my mother who was living in London.

He was a signaller in the 519/104 RHA regiment and his job was to radio directions to the field guns. It tells of his part in the battle of El Alamein in 1942, him being wounded and the kindness of a wounded Australian soldier who helped him on the train journey back to the hospital east of Cairo.

My father died in 1990.

911139
Bond A.R.Sig.
519/104 R.H.A.Regt.
M.E.F.

2nd October, 1942.

Dear Zena,

Its a long time since I wrote you a long letter but please forgive me many things have happened to prevent it. I am still at the Convalescent Camp at El Arish but I have high hopes of re-joining my Regiment this week, I'm particularly looking forward to it as I hope there's a pile of post waiting for me. I want to try and tell you all that's happened these last few weeks. Back in the end of August we were stationed south of the New Zealand Box, and we were warned that Jerry was expected to "Push" during the full moon. We were having a quiet steady time there, my only worry was desert sores on my hands and arms. On the night of the 30-31st August we received the warning that Jerry was advancing through the "Gap" we took up our position at 2.30 in the morning. Frankly I wasn't feeling too good about it, I knew we had more than enough to stop him with but my worry was personal, not general, as we had the "Place of Honour" in the Gap. Jerry came in range, and we engaged him at 4 o'clock in the morning, he pushed south of us, and proceeded in an easterly direction. By 8 o'clock we were firing East South East, and I began to fear that we were cut off. That first day was very messy, we had five Stuka raids and we came in for a hell of a lot of shelling both from his field guns and his tanks, still we chucked plenty back and we had some satisfactory reports on our shooting. We didn't get much sleep that night as we had to lay a barrage on some of his transport that was moving up. The following day our armour engaged him and a lively sort of tank scrap took place. Our Air Force broke up two bunches of Stukas that attempted to bomb us. I managed to get some sleep that night, although I had to be on my wireless at 3 o'clock in the morning. We heard that Jerry was being forced back and there was plenty of air activity, we also came in for quite a bit of his shelling, in fact we had several casualties. In the evening the ambulance took down some of our chaps, and they ran into a Jerry tank who promptly machined gunned them, the ambulance caught fire but fortunately the chaps managed to get away all right.

The third day was September 3rd and it opened with plenty of action, we were engaging enemy batteries and also tanks I was pretty busy on the wireless set taking fire orders. It wasn't very pleasant sitting on the wireless truck while all the muck was flying around, nor did I like his aircraft that was messing about, still while the messages and fire orders were coming through I had to stay there, so I kept my fingers crossed and kidded myself that I was a blooming hero. We had one or two near misses when suddenly there was a "Whang" that nearly upset the truck and I was bleeding down my arm. I felt pretty sick I can tell you. I called out to the Officer and he sent down another Signaller and I got down the slit trench and let him dress my arm. I had four holes in my arm and it was all numb, but thankfully nothing was broken. I was bleeding like a stuck pig and was badly scared, I had visions of my arm off or at least my hand, and as it was my right arm I was feeling pretty sick. Directly things quietened down a bit I was sent to the M.O. By now my arm was hurting and I was in rotten shape, the M.O. gave me some tea with whisky or brandy, I don't know which in it, and bandaged me up properly. I was then shoved in an ambulance and sent down to the Field Ambulance Station. There was quite a crowd here some of them in a very bad way. We were given some damn fine soup and bread, also tinned fruit and tinned milk, it went down well. Now the ambulances arrived to take us to the Casualty Clearing Station, this was a long bumpy ride and we were all in pretty bad shape when we arrived there. My arm had started to bleed again and I was weak as a kitten. There was an Aussie in my ambulance with a finger shot off, he carried me into the tent. They gave me an injection here which I believe was morphia, cos I went off to sleep almost straight away. I woke up when they started to redress my arm. They also had cut my shorts off, and I learned that I had a wound in my buttock, it was queer but I hadn't noticed this before. I had seen the blood on my socks but I thought it was from my arm. However, it wasn't much. They gave me a local anesthetic and took a piece of shrapnel out of my arm, the only piece as it happened, and then I was tucked up on my stretcher and went to sleep. The following morning we were taken to the railway and put on an ambulance train for hospital. I had now started to run a temperature 102.8 and my leg had gone stiff I also had fits of sickness. The Aussie was in the next cot to mine and he sat on my cot and talked to me. He was very good, he rolled

me cigarettes, got me water, wiped the sweat off my face and fanned me with a paper. He also told me what stations we were going through. We stopped at a station the other side of Alex called Bug Bug, here some French, Greek and better classed Egyptian girls came on the train and gave us cigarettes, flowers, tea and cakes. A French girl gave me some tea roses, she said they were English roses to remind me of the girl who waits for me in England. I felt a damn fool lying there with these roses, but I also felt a bit weepy 'cos they made me think of the roses you carried at our wedding. Anyway we arrived at El Quassain, which was our destination, at 9 o'clock that evening, and were carried in Ambulances to No.2. General Hospital. Here we were greeted by South African nurses who gave us tea, cigs and biscuits and then put us to bed. It was quite decent in the hospital I couldn't write so Pete (the Assule) wrote it at my dictation that Air Mail Letter Card. We got down to the canteen one night and had some beer, perhaps more than was good for us but we felt in urgent need for it. I was glad to go from the hospital because hospitals are very depressing places I think. I lost Pete as he went off to the Australian Convalescent Camp, I went to No.2. Convalescent Camp. Here I had a dental inspection and it was decided to take out the best part of my teeth, I also went to the opticians for specs as my own got broken four ~~xxxx~~ months back. I was only here a few days when I got shifted to No.5. Convalescent Camp El Arish up on the Palestinian Border. That was where I started this letter. It was quite nice here right on the beach with as much bathing as we wished, I tried very hard to learn to swim but I'm still a flop. I tried to get a cable off to you but the nearest Cable Office was at Raffia some miles away, I was disappointed as I wanted to get a cable to you for our wedding anniversary. I started having my teeth out here five at one go, and it could have been fifty for all I knew or cared, he was a wonderful dentist.

I've got a real hankering to get back to the Regt., they are still up the desert and I ought to have more sense than to wish I was with them, but I can't help it, I feel a bit of a shirker sitting back here.

Your loving hubby,

Bert.