

The Travels of Laurie Lane

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When war was declared, Laurie was serving with a Militia Unit known as the Universal Trainees (U.T) in the 14 Field Ambulance, with Captains Morrow, Barling and Humphries. Humphries was later killed at Balikpapan.

In January 1940, Capt. Morrow called for volunteers to form a Field Ambulance Unit, but instead finished up at Greta for five months training with the 2/5 Australian General Hospital, a newly appointed unit of 1200 bed capacity. Laurie was one of these volunteers

Laurie enlisted in the A.I.F. on 23 May 1940 .

From Greta they travelled down to Leichardt, then with Steve Lane, Tich Foster and others and spent time at Forrest Lodge packing stores for the eventual move -- overseas duty.

In October 1940 aboard the Queen Mary, part of the Unit, Laurie included, sailed out of Sydney Harbour and arrived in Bombay two days later.

At Bombay they boarded the Troopship President Doumier for Palestine. They later arrived at a camp called Kilo 89, where the 2/6 AGH had established a 600 bed hospital.

It was here that football games were conducted between the 2/5AGH, 2/6AGH, the Palestine Police, who were mostly British, and the RAF at Ramley Field.

From here they went on to Rehovot, where they celebrated Christmas, they were then moved to Ekali, in Greece, where the 2/5 Australian General Hospital was finally established (April 1941)

On 27 April 1941, the German Army marched through Greece, and the 2/5 Australian General Hospital came under German control. Prior to this, Laurie had been assisting Father Gallagher with his evacuation, and subsequently found himself with an Ambulance convoy bound for Athens. This was part of the First Flight, the nurses and wounded being evacuated from the hospital prior to the German advance.

From Athens the able bodied were put aboard a train for Corinth, and on arrival were unloaded and all the personnel took refuge on a wooded hill, they then marched for two days before being trucked to Argos, to board ships. Laurie remembers seeing Major McCallum, Jim Black, Steve McCoy and Jack Alleyne.

There were several ships waiting in the harbour to take the evacuees aboard. Among these were the Voyager - Perth - Ajax and the British ship the Glenearn. As escorts were the ack ack ships Dydo and Phoebe. Laurie was put aboard the Glenearn, and sailed to Crete, landing at Suda Bay, and remained here for about a month, and was then returned to Palestine, where the Unit was reformed and reinforced with class B troops. This was about late May / early June 1941. Laurie was promoted to Lance Corporal and went to Eritrea, here the 2/5AGH combined with the 3 rd AGH and a hospital was set up at Gura, the site of an Italian Aerodrome.

Under the command of Angus Murray, Laurie was attached to an advanced party and sent back to Port Tewfick, they left here by train for Aswan Dam, and then boarded a three deck paddle steamer bound for Waddiealfa, sailing down the Nile. Then another two day train trip to Port Sudan, boarded a 500 ton freighter to Massewa, and finally established a hospital at Decamerie. This was about July 1941.

Moving on from here back to Massewa - Cairo and finally arriving in Palestine in December 1941. Whilst at Port Tewfick, Laurie noticed the British ship Glenearn sunk in the harbour. On being posted back to Australia, Laurie was sent to Armidale, where the 2/5 AGH was reforming into two 600 bed hospitals, and it was here Laurie was promoted to Sergeant. Laurie was sent to the Battalion Training Hospital at Bacchus Marsh, and attached to the 2/6 Field Ambulance. At one stage, training was done in the Atherton Tablelands with tropical work being carried out at Trinity Bay and Port Douglas. And it was here in October 1944, that Laurie noticed a ship anchored in the Bay, it was the British ship, Glenearn. It appears that the once wreck, was restored and put back in service. Laurie reported to the Captain, only to discover that it was the same Captain who picked them up in Argos.

The 2/6 Field Ambulance was then posted overseas and saw service in Balikpapan, Macassa, and the Celebes.

Laurie returned home in January 1946, and spent the next four months in hospital. He was finally discharged on 21 May 1946.

This story was told to Ray Butterfield, by Laurie Lane in November 2007