

King's Own Kennet Hash Harriers
HQ Company Orderly Room
Benghazi Barracks
Egypt

23 April 1942

Dear Mum

Cor, it ain't 'alf hot Mum! 120° in the shade, and not much cooler out of it. We been here in the desert for the past two weeks – never so much as a drop of rain. A filthy, sweaty, stinking, disease-ridden abomination, crawling with flies – and that's just the C.O. – Lt-Cdr 'Mad Mike' Fisher. We been brought out here to search for the Great Bedouin, a cunning and deavious opponent, so the lads say.

We was a broken and wore-out bunch what slowly assembled in the wadi at Kharros Khais. 'Alf of us was missing after the Himalayas campaign – Richard and Val and Greg, we never seen them since they wandered off into the snow. Ian was last spotted with the company horn to his lips, playing 'the Last Post' for young Matt – I think they had to eat him. The few survivors straggled in – Steve had to join the walking wounded, the Sarge (Napoleon, we all calls him) with his arm in plaster, and the WACs so weak with dysentery that they was chained to the khazi for half an hour before we could start. Even Jason had to be pulled round by a dog.

When we finally started, we was immediately stumped by the cruel tricks of the Bedouin. Old Keith, our rear-gunner, runs off down a clear trail what he said was properly marked – even with an enigmatic 'HO' written in the sand. He'd gone about half a mile down the road before he were called back to the right trail, and he were so cross he tore Mad Mike off a strip – and were promptly put on a charge for 'insolence to the dumb' or somefing.

We struck off into the heart of the desert, the dry sand whipping up a dustcloud. The heat really starting getting to us, we was dehydrated and started hallucinating. We saw a mirage, a green oasis on the skyline. I knew fings was bad when the lads thought they'd found loads of little Easter eggs hidden in the grass – I don't like chocolate, so I just made do with the two half-pints of Mackeson what I thought I found.

After that, fings started getting worser. We crossed the great caravan road to M'ha-al-burra, and I saw dozens of camels grazing in the distance – though what with the Mackeson and me not having my specs, they could have been sheep. We thought we'd got rid of Mad Mike, but the bleeder (scuse my French, but he'd been wounded by a scimitar, so he says) was waiting for us by a palm tree. We regrouped, and headed down through the sand dunes towards the Bedouin camp. Discipline went right to pot. Napoleon and Marge was so exhausted they couldn't mark any of the trails properly, and the rear gunner was staggering around everywhere trying to find the right one. Martine and Sam, our pin-up girls, was so confused they was almost back to the water-hole in the wadi where we started, before they was put right. The last straw came when we regrouped on the banks of the Nile, only to find that the walking wounded, who had started out after us, had only been and bloody got there before us.


Just then, a barge come up the river. Ray, our cheery cockney corporal, said "Cor Lumme, cop a butchers at that!" he says "That's Cleopatra's barge that is - like a burnished throne. The poop is beaten gold, purple the sails, and the oars are silver, which to the tune of flutes keep stroke. Cleopatra herself does lie in her pavilion - cloth-of-gold tissue, o'er picturing that Venus where we see the fancy outwork nature" he says. "Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides, so many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes, and made their bends adornings; at the helm, a seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands". I think that was what he said, anyway. Myself, I thought they looked like the London Irish front row.

After that, it got easier. We run along the Nile till we come to a bridge, then it was through the bull-rushes until we was back where we started from. The CO had some foreign woman with him - no-one could understand a word she said - but she handed out rations - hard boiled eggs decorated in the local native manner - to Jeremy and Keith and the other girls, so that was very nice.

Got to go now Mum - we're off to fight the Duke of Collingbourne in a couple of weeks. I'll write from there.

Your loving son

Private XXXXXXXXXXXX Hash 057xxxxx (censored)



Forthcoming Hash Runs

059 - 21st May - Red Lion at Baydon - Val & Jane

060 - 4th June - White Hart at Compton Bassett - Ian

061 - 18th June - Land's End to John O'Groats - Jeremy

The runners are all sorted for this, but Jeremy may still need some support drivers etc.

If you feel moved to organise a Hash run, please ring GOM on 01672 871374 (h) or 01793 481220 (w) or astonish him by e-mail mjf@mfisher.co.uk