

PRE-GREECE

Driver Harry Fridkin, RASC, 211 Coy

Harry was living with his wife Lyn in Eastcote, Middlesex when war was declared on September 3rd 1939. He immediately enlisted in the Royal Army Service Corps as a Driver and trained on the Spencer estate at Althorp in Northamptonshire.

Probably in November-December 1940 Harry was taken out to the Middle East on a troopship convoy with warship escorts via Sierra Leone and South Africa to Port Tewfiq and Port Suez, then up the Suez Canal and eventually to Heliopolis near Cairo and thence into the Western Desert.



Harry highlighted (centre) – this must be in Training (maybe at the Althorp estate?)



This could be Durban (Cyril Crawford took a rickshaw ride here between 12-16 Dec 1940)
(don't know which passenger is Harry)



Standard pose at the Pyramids (Harry left of centre)

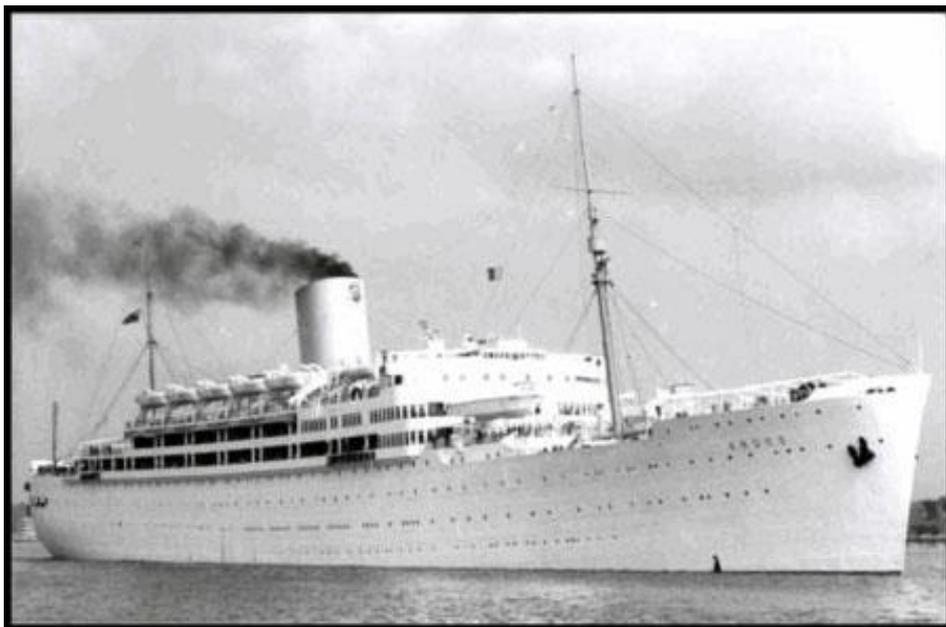
Fellow 211 Coy member Driver Cyril Crawford records the voyage and Egypt as follows:

15/11/1940

Embarked on ship from U.K. (Taken from military records)

17/11/40

"Andes" sailed out of Liverpool as part of a convoy.



RMS Andes before troopship conversion

29/11/40

Convoy arrived in Freetown, Sierre Leone, not allowed ashore.

1/12/40

Convoy sailed from Freetown.

3/12/40

Convoy crossed the Equator.

12/12/40

Convoy arrived Durban, South Africa.

A postcard of Durban has the following notes on the back.

“Andes, Electric Power – 7am passed salt baths – Christmas – Letters home – The fine bakery and kitchen – Radio + Records. Submarines, changed course depth charges and guns.”

Durban

Jelly Fish. Rail Tractor. Ice Cream. Teas. Crickets. Rickshaws. Beer. Preparing for Christmas. War effort. Trolleys, no buses. Palm Trees Modern Buildings. South Beach. Ovington Court. Surf American style. All lights on, no blackout now. Ships lights on. On guard. The route march. lager and salmon refreshment (Ice cold). Heat intense. Double decker trolley fine cars. Had tropical gear on. South African flag. C to C cigarette + Cards, cheapness of tobacco.

16/12/40

Convoy sailed from Durban.

28/12/40

Convoy arrived at Port Suez and anchored for a few hours.

29/12/40

Convoy entered the Suez Canal in the early hours

Suez + Desert (taken from back of Durban Postcard)

Terrific Canal. Irrigated Land. Convoy RASC Bags. Post-card View. Railroad + canal. Turning cold as we proceed (Winter) Flying sand. Port-Said. Freighter unloading coal. Dirty looking docks. Took on Oil. Egyptians selling wares, silks, moccasins, fruit, handbags (Choc 4 pieces in box). Disembarkation Egyptians carrying kit to station. Snack rolls Bis (sic) and boiled eggs. Waiting. Train whistles, large carriages, wood seats. Journey Tahag - Ismalia. March in dusk to camp. On guard first night. Earnie brought us cup of tea twice. Comes in and out all night (see 2)”

(Note: Maybe there is a second card but it has not been found yet.)

1/1/1941

Disembarked in Egypt. (Taken from military records)

A postcard of Port-Said – The Harbour: has the following written on the back by Cyril, “Disembarked from the *Andes* at 10am. Did not have chance to see the town. Went straight to the railway station at the dockside, Wednesday Jan 1st 1941”

17/1/1941

“Embarked here for Sollum.” (on back of Alexandria postcard)

5/2/1941

From Postcard of The Pyramid of Cheops – Cairo. “Visited 5/2/41, 451ft High, 3733BC Completed, 30 Years to build, covers 13 acres ground,”

From postcard Cairo – the Sphinx and Pyramids. “Visited 5/2/41 Nose of Sphinx shot off by Napoleon with cannonball”

Also taken from a postcard of Cairo – Soloman Pacha Street (date unknown) ” Passed here many times. Y.M.C.A. have luxurious tea gardens and lounge in this street. Had very enjoyable times here.”

6/2/1941

“Arrived back here from Bardia (Lybia, Battle of, 3-5 Jan 1941)” (taken from back of Alexandria postcard).

19/2/1941

Taken from a postcard Cairo Mamelouk Tombs and Citadel. “Dead City, the greater part of the population was wiped out by the great plague a few years ago. All the buildings were shut up and the remainder of the inhabitants left. Gravestones are to be seen everywhere. In the background the Citadel can be seen on the right. Passed through on a lorry 19/2/41”

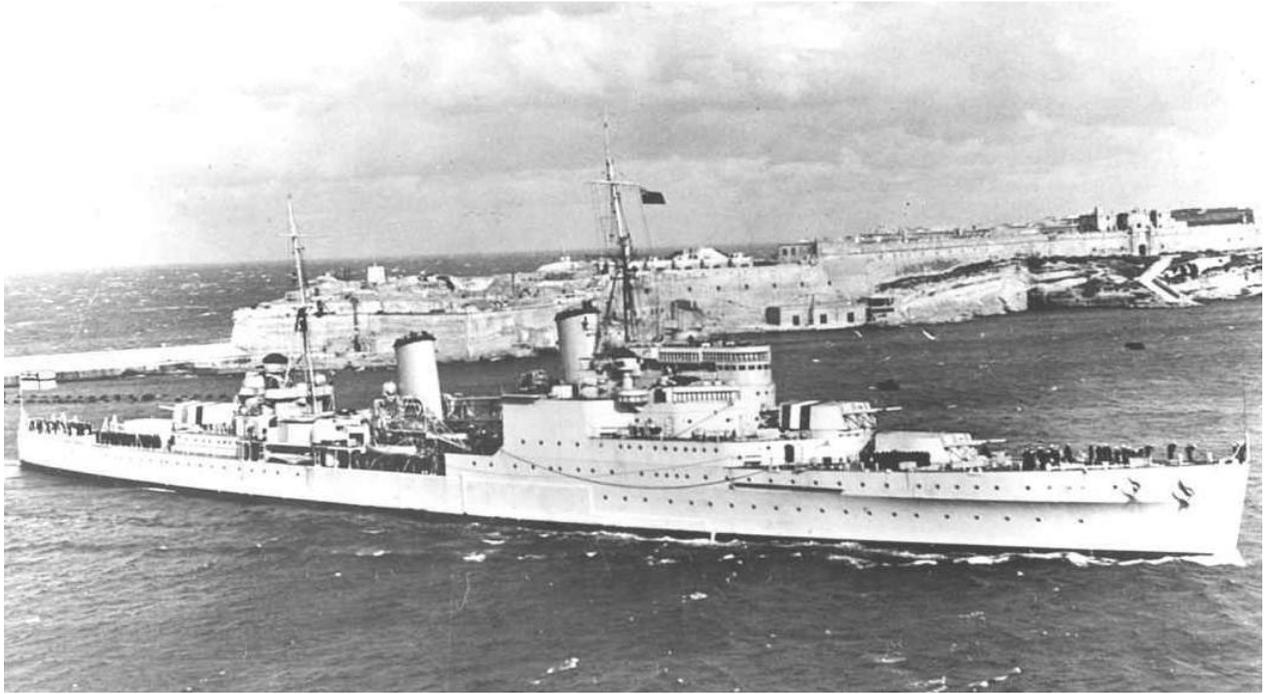
Taken from a postcard Cairo – The Citadel. “Passed here in a lorry Wed February 19th 1941. The Citadel can be seen for miles, it is on the edge of Dead City. The Citadel is now a military hospital (British).”

5/3/1941

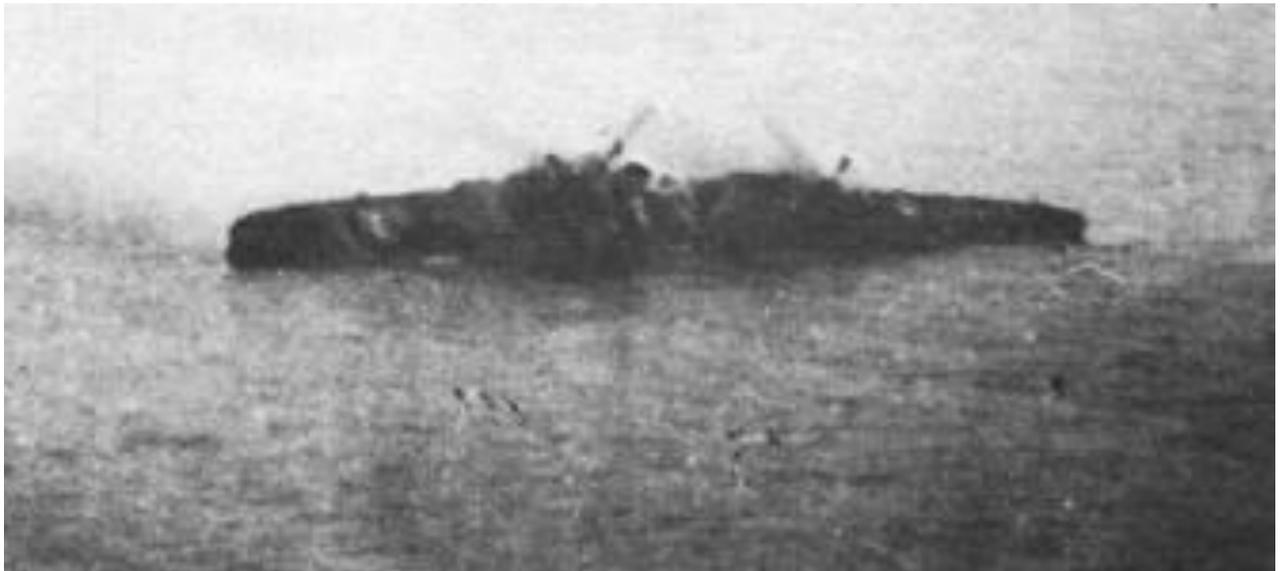
Embarked on HMS Gloucester from Egypt. (taken from military records)

The following information taken from writing on the back of a postcard bought on board by Cyril.

“Went on board at 9am Thursday March 6th. She is a very fast ship. Disembarked on the 7th 22 hours later. She covered the 700 miles from Alexandria to Piraeus (Port of Athens) in 22 hours at an average speed of 32knots. Carried one seaplane. This cruiser sunk when wave after wave of enemy bombers exhausted her ammunition supply. Defenceless she was an easy pray. Went down May 22nd 1941 with the loss of 720 lives. HMS York and HMS Bonaventure of the same class also have gone down.”



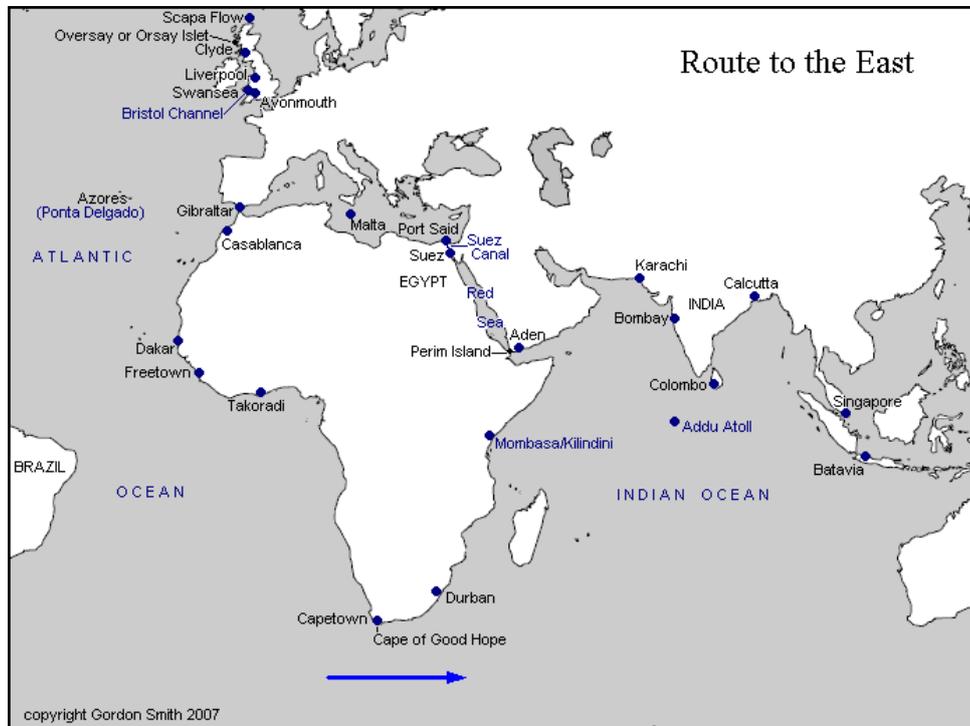
HMS Gloucester entering Valetta, pre-war



HMS Gloucester sinking, 22 May 1941 off Crete

From “ROUTE TO THE EAST - the WS (Winston’s Special) CONVOYS”
 by the late Arnold Hague, Lieutenant Commander, RNR (Rtd) (c) 2007

1940 Sailings (round the Cape of Good Hope)



WS 4B

The ships of this convoy sailed from Liverpool 17.11.40 and the Clyde 18.11 to combine on that day in the following order:

PRIVATE 11 STRATHNAVER	21 STRATHAIRD	31 DUCHESS OF ATHOLL (Commodore)	41 ORCADES	51 REINA DEL PACIFICO
12 STRATHALLAN	22 VICEROY OF INDIA	32 EMPRESS OF CANADA (Vice Commodore)	42 ANDES	52 OTRANTO

A/S escort was provided by the destroyers BATH, ST ALBANS, and ST MARY'S from 18 to 19.11 and by HIGHLANDER, OTTAWA, SAGUENAY, SKEENA and ST LAURENT from 18 to 20.11; the escort from Liverpool is not known. The AA cruiser CAIRO provided cover from 18 to 19.11, while the ocean escort consisted of the cruiser EDINBURGH from Liverpool to Freetown, and NORFOLK from the Clyde until 23.11 when she was relieved by DEVONSHIRE for the passage to Freetown where the convoy arrived on 29.11.

The convoy sailed from Freetown on 1.12 in the same formation, escorted by the cruisers CUMBERLAND for 4 days and DEVONSHIRE from Freetown to Durban where the convoy arrived on 12.12. CUMBERLAND's relief was the old cruiser HAWKINS which joined 4.12 although she was absent 8 to 10.12 fuelling.

When the convoy sailed from Durban on 16.12, the cruising order was altered as shown below:

PRIVATE 11 ANDES	21 VICEROY OF INDIA	31 DUCHESS OF ATHOLL (Commodore)	41 ORCADES	51 OTRANTO
12 STRATHALLAN	22 STRATHAIRD	32 EMPRESS OF CANADA (Vice Commodore)	42 REINA DEL PACIFICO	52 STRATHNAVER

The convoy was escorted from Durban by the cruisers DEVONSHIRE until 18.12, SHROPSHIRE until 25.12 and SOUTHAMPTON until 28.12 on which date the ships arrived at Suez. SOUTHAMPTON was on passage to join the Mediterranean Fleet at Alexandria.

[From Liverpool to Egypt on the SS "Andes" 1940 - 1941

An account by Jeffrey Jackson, edited slightly by L Jackson.]

"After survivor's leave [following the bombing of the SS 'Oronsay'], I went to Oswestry and thence to Liverpool, where we embarked on the Andes, a magnificent new ship that had been intended for the South American route. What a contrast with the horrible Oronsay! (I heard later that it had been sunk somewhere [see previous story for details].) This was by now sometime in November. We sailed west for the first week, so the weather was fairly unpleasant, but it improved steadily after we turned south, and eventually became warm enough for me to escape from the cramped conditions below and to sleep on deck under the stars. A couple of Cypriots had been tacked on to us, and one of them was convinced that he wasn't getting his fair share when the potatoes were being dished out, hence his anguished cry of 'Everybody two bananas, me one banana!' [now an old family saying] We saw flying fishes and a whale spouting (the only time I've ever seen either).

We put in at Freetown, Sierra Leone, but were not allowed ashore (my first sight of Africa - I did not set foot in Freetown until 1981). Africans came out to us in small boats and would dive for shillings. One joker wrapped a halfpenny in silver paper, on discovering which the disappointed African called out "By Jesus, you pulla my bloody leg!" After Freetown, we went on southwards, crossing the Equator and round the Cape, and calling in, unfortunately, at Durban, (Cape Town would have been far more interesting - I still haven't got there). It was amazing to see a city that wasn't blacked out. I don't remember much, except enormous jellyfish in the harbour, a tropical storm, and being baffled by finding that there were seats on buses that I couldn't sit in because they were for blacks only. I had never heard of apartheid.

After Durban, we sailed northwards, celebrating Christmas and New Year at sea. We passed just as night was falling through the straits at the entrance to the Red Sea, with sinister and completely barren mountains on the African side. There was no sign of life, and no attempt by the Italians to stop us. Finally we reached Suez and sailed on to Port Said through the Canal. Here we entrained for Cairo, and were seen off by a crowd of Egyptians shouting obscenities and smiling broadly - they'd obviously been taught them by soldiers as English greetings.

I didn't see anything of Cairo on this occasion, but what was peculiar was that, although Egypt was being used as a base by British forces, it wasn't actually at war with Germany."

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