

WAR DIARY OF JAMES C LUTENER

Lieutenant 4th Light Field Ambulance RASC

The dates between 1st January and 1st June 1941 are only approximate with a few exceptions.

1941 - EGYPT

JANUARY

1, Wednesday Making the camp look more ship-shape
2 -31 Nothing much doing that I can remember

FEBRUARY

1, Saturday Training and camp life in general
2 -9 Nothing much doing except training
10, Monday Our first lot of mail arrives
11 -21 Nothing much doing
22, Saturday Received second lot of mail
23, Sunday Received our morning orders for the day after tomorrow.
 Lawson and Duncan on leave so off to Cairo with the Colonel
 to notify them and also see HQ about our extra vehicles.
 Bought new wireless for the mess, £29.
24 Monday Working like blazes to get everything in order. Drew rest of
 vehicles.
25, Tuesday On road at reveille and up to Amirya taking all day to get there,
 arriving at dusk
26, Wednesday Getting camp in order
27, Thursday Dust and then rain and Gosh didn't it rain. The whole camp was
 flooded out
28, Friday The camp was in a hell of a mess after yesterday's rain. Spent morning
 getting vehicles out of the mud and then suddenly received orders to
 leave for the docks at 3pm. Managed to get vehicles together and get to
 docks before dark. Slept in ambulance.

MARCH

1, Saturday Spent day on the docks. Managed to borrow a vehicle and, getting to
 Mustapha, scrounged Bread, Potatoes and Vegetables for the lads.

TO GREECE

- 2, Sunday Set sail at 3pm with all the vehicles per S.S. Lurmahal. Destination officially unknown but Greece is hinted at. Saw account of death of Archdeacon Johnston's son-in-law in Sat's paper.
- 3, Monday Steaming out to sea made the acquaintance of Col.Clifton CRE NZ Div, the Captain and ship's officers.
- 4, Tuesday The convoy was bombed by two Italian planes flying at quite 15,000 ft. No damage. Did a tour of engine room.
- 5, Wednesday Fine weather. Did a tour of the ship and got sparks to give me a lesson in morse code.
- 6, Thursday Last day at sea arrived in Piraeus harbour just at dusk. Made a mess of docking, fouling a buoy, ramming first the jetty and then the dry-dock gates.
- 7, Friday Offloading the vehicles. The cars had been in 2ft of water and were in bad condition. The Col. and Ferris came to the ship (they'd raced over in 20 hrs in a cruiser) and the Colonel suggested a party in Athens. Took the two Humbers & Sparks and had a beano first at the Maxims and then at the Argentina. Slept aboard.
- 8, Saturday Convoyed the vehicles up to Volous Camp where rest of unit were under canvas. Changed my money into Drachmas. Started on servicing the vehicles ready for the road.
- 9, Sunday Plenty of work with vehicles getting them tuned up. Started on getting them painted at the aerodrome.
- 10, Monday Still working on vehicles, finished off the painting. Handed in drill clothing. Drew sufficient petrol. Trouble with petrol pumps clogging up with red lead sediment.
- 11, Tuesday Left the camp at 7am on way North. Got left behind with a bad starter. Should have reached Lamia by first light but an ACV going over in a field caused us to spend the night on the Athens side of the Lamia Pass.
- 12, Wednesday On next day through Lamia and Larrissa. Got left behind with a bad starter. Marvellous country. Spent night in a field just before Ellasson.
- 13, Thursday On again through Lamia (?). Left Wittshire and section by a little river to form staging section. Started climbing Veria pass. Struck a blizzard. Hoped to get over before dark but couldn't manage it and had to spend the night up in the snow right on the top of the pass at 8,000 ft. Everything freezing up. Drank bottles of whiskey and wine with Greek officers. Very cold
- 14, Friday A hell of a job with the vehicles. All thermostats stuck and caused vehicles to boil over. After a while got all vehicles on road except one ambulance with pot plugs cracked. After a lot of running down hill we arrived at Vereia. The units was allocated in the little village of Mikrogouze. Eating a dickens of a lot of figs.
- 15, Saturday Started on servicing the vehicles and getting them camouflaged. Took stock of surrounding country.
- 16, Sunday -
29, Saturday General servicing of vehicles. A very pleasant existence.

- 30, Sunday Moved from Veria to Eddissa about 35 miles NW. A very nice little town. We were billeted in northern end of town in a school. Lawson went to Yanmitsa.
- 31, Monday General training.

APRIL

- 1, Tuesday -
-5, Saturday Life in general very pleasant. Servicing vehicles etc. Wiltshire rejoined us.
- 6, Sunday Moved out of Eddessato a mulberry orchard 2 miles NW.
- 7, Monday Perfecting camouflage.
- 8, Tuesday Germany declared war on Greece and Yugoslavia. Filthy weather. 2nd Ech. moved to near Perdika. Did a reconnaissance to Perdika and came back the back way. Got badly bogged. Arrived at site late afternoon to find unot moving. Left at dark for new site near Perdika. Lost water trailer.
- 9, Wednesday Arrived Perdika just before dawn. Left Wiltshire and Wood with A.D.S. near front line. Looked for site and found one between Perdika and Ptolemais. Took over mess set. Difficult to buy anything in Ptolemais for refugees. improving camp roads.
- 10, Thursday A wet day. ruined road in and out of M.D.S. Bought 250 eggs. 2nd Ech. moved out at night. Started getting casualties in, mostly Australians.
- 11, Friday More casualties. Moved from site and set up M.D.S. in church at Koila leaving Houghton at old site. Calderwood reported captured.
- 12, Saturday Moved out from Koila at dawn, through Kozzani and through a deep ravine to Grevena. Caught up with 2nd Ech. and found Calderwood to be safe.
- 13, Sunday Easter Sunday I think. Enemy aircraft in action. One twin engine plane dropped four bombs over our site but they missed us. Digging slit trenches.
- 14, Monday Enemy aircraft again. 26 planes dive bombed Grevena and then machine gunned our site. Cpl. Kennedy fatally injured. Gilks and Alsford slightly injured. Left site at dusk and on through Grevena. Fires in all directions. Matthews car went over the side and Major Thorne was injured. Ferris and Duncan shaken up. Vehicles jamming road. A nightmare.
- 15, Tuesday Still on road at dawn. Lost Dixon's Ford. Average speed about 2 mph. More raids. Smiths lorry burnt out with my kit aboard. Pulled in under some trees and have something to eat. Badly strafed by Jerry. Given five minutes to get out. A shambles. Dive bombing all day along the road. Greek w/shop lorry turned over and caused bad hold-up. On through water and bad country to Kalambaka where we arrived about 5pm. Planes dive bombing ahead. Moved on towards Trikala. Found a site in the dark just off road. Two lorries turned over. Thank goodness for a sleep.
- 16, Wednesday Up early to recover overturned lorries. Pouring with rain. Major Thorne went to CCS. Rest of unit moved whilst we were getting Eldin's lorry out. Caught them up in the afternoon at temporary site by

- CCS near Larrissa. On again to a site near Phansallos. Half vehicles went astray in Larrissa. Sleep for a couple of hours.
- 17, Thursday Up early again and off in the pouring rain with Lassetter to look for the missing vehicles. No sign of them. Back to the site to find the rest had moved. Caught them up in Lamia. On to the Attantis road. Joined by some of 168 LFA. Pulled in for night under olive trees on the sea shore.
- 18, Friday On road again through Attantis. Pulled into a side lane to spend the night.
- 19, Saturday Went to Levadia and drew petrol. On move again in the afternoon back through Attantis and over a back route onto Thebes road. Arrived at new site 3 miles along Chalkis road at about midnight.
- 20, Saturday Bombed a lot. The men took to hills.
- 21, Monday More bombing and machine gunning. Recovered two broken down vehicles. Left for Athens in the evening. Had a hell of a job towing a vehicle with broken half shaft and no lights. Arrived Athens well after midnight. Lawson stayed with Bde (Brigade ?)
- 22, Tuesday Up early and tried to get all the men bathing in the sea. Received orders to move again. Moved to Daphne camp. On move again after dark along Corinth road. Average speed 2 mph. Woods section off ahead.
- 23, Wednesday Found new site 2 miles W. of Megora and got vehicles parked before dawn. By 6am all vehicles were marvellously camouflaged and slit trenches nearly finished. Good show. Within 200 yards of the sea.
- 24, Thursday Spent an idle day under the olive trees. Plenty of tinned food. Bombing and machine gunning all around us.
- 25, Friday More enemy air action. Found to our delight that our site was near the evacuation beach. Broke up the vehicles. Started evacuating 11pm on board SS "Thurland Castle" by midnight. Left Wiltshire with walking wounded.

CRETE

- 26, Saturday Steaming out to sea with quite a strong escort. Dive bombed three or four times. Two very near misses. Arrived Suda Bay, Crete late morning. Messed around and didn't get ashore till midnight. Then had a couple of miles to march for a cup of tea and a sleep under olive trees without blankets.
- 27, Sunday Had a nice breaker of bacon and sausage that we'd brought with us. Then got a lift to our new camp, "C" Camp. Rest of unit route marched. Sleeping under olive trees with one blanket.
- 28, Monday Moved again to "B" Camp and took over an MT tent. Nearer Canea. Still sleeping in the open. Lawson, Boyle and Cresswell lined up. No news of Wiltshire and Wood.
- 29, Tuesday Doing our best to get used to sleeping on ground with one blanket.
- 30, Wednesday Living quite well really. The food isn't too bad.

MAY 1941

- 1, Thursday to
16, Friday
- Life in general not too bad. Plenty of tinned food. Managed to scrounge a car battery from 189 Fld. Amb. and got the wireless going. Crowds of Australian, NZ and British troops crowd to hear news night and morning. Surprised to see Jimmy Welch as CSM 189 Fld Amb. Managed to get a few cases of beer from the NAAFI. Into Canea nearly every day to do shopping for mess. Plenty of green vegetables. Eggs getting dear. Busied myself with training and making an oven from two creosote drums. Periodical dips in the river very pleasant. Air raid increasing daily. At least one every day.
- 17, Saturday
- My birthday. Celebrated by using my new oven for first time. Roasted a joint of beef. Beautiful. Washed it down with a bottle of Port, so altogether quite a pleasant day.
- 18, Sunday
- More bombing. A nice day. Church service under the trees at night.
- 19, Monday
- More bombing. Not at all pleasant.
- 20, Tuesday
- What a day. The Blitz started at 7.55am with terrific bombing. Then noticed gliders coming down between the hills. Then paratroops started dropping by 7th General Hosp. Formed a rifle party with the RASC boys whilst the Col. took the rest of the unit to the King's house to form an MDS. Under Capt. Page we formed a Batt. calling ourselves the Royal Perivoleans. EFI boys did good work and roped in over a dozen prisoners.
- 21, Wednesday
- Blitz continuing in full force. All day long planes machine gun over our heads. Dug a slit trench. Wangled myself a German automatic.
- 22, Thursday
- Blitz still in full force. Having my meals with MDS in the King's house. Met the owners. Very nice. Still occupying same position. More paratroops dropped. Collected another prisoner, a pilot.
- 23, Friday
- Digging dug outs then got moved to a new position nearer Canea after dark. Dug all through the night with knives and bayonets. Only about 4 shovels and two picks available for the whole battalion.
- 24, Saturday
- Spent day in dug outs. Excavating all the time and finally made a really decent dug out. Canea bombed all day long, what a hell. Pyatt (brave laddie) did good work taking hot tea round to the lads, Rations were pretty good.
- 25, Sunday
- Resting in dug out. Ordered to stand to for the front and then altered to a move back. Two tins of bully and one packet of biscuits per man issued. Marched out at 11.45pm. Marched throughout the night to about 15 miles the other side of Suda. Sprained my ankle after first hour.
- 26, Monday
- Ceased marching at dawn and rested under some rocks. After a couple of hours noticed everybody moving out so set off ourselves. Found three loaves near an ammunition dump. Walked on until ordered off

- road by control. Waited in an orchard till dusk then set off again. Through Vriecis then took the left fork. Marched through the night.
- 27, Tuesday Stopped marching at dawn and rested for a couple of hours. Then decided to carry on and march right on into the night until ordered off the road by Farley. Not far to go now. Moved into a ravine.
- 28, Wednesday Resting until nearly dusk. Ate last of food. On again walking into the night. No one to tell us what to do or anything. Had a short rest after midnight.
- 29, Thursday After an hour's rest decided that as we could see the beach we might as well make a break for it. Picked up with more of the unit. Gascoyne and others. Got down to short distance of beach without accident. Our straffing eased up slightly. Rested in some caves. Messed about during the day. A mixed bag left for the beach at night mostly Moores (?).
- 30, Friday Took the lads over to the village with the church. Formed into a party of 50 to try and get food but nothing doing. Messed about all day. Only 600 going off today according to orders and none of the 4th were lucky.
- 31, Saturday Another conference in the church. Only a limited number going tonight but hopes of more tomorrow. Same old tale every time. Yet another day without food and no sign of any coming. Decided it better to split RASC and RAMC. None selected for tonight's boat.

JUNE 1941

- 1, Sunday **Sfakia, Crete**
 Acting under the orders of Captain Henderson, RASC. Awake with the dawn after a night under the olive trees. Ugly rumours that we have capitulated and a lot of talk about white flags. A Colonel of the Australian Army came past our tree and told us to put out white towels. Caused rather a fuss and a lot of chaps suggested that he was a fifth columnist and were all for shooting him.
 A few white towels were laid out but some of the infantry boys (The Welsh Regiment) starting firing over the heads of the fellows putting out the towels and rather put a stop to such action. At approximately 10.30am the enemy started using a heavy mortar and quickly found the gully in which we were hiding. Two bombs fell very close and a boy next to me received a deep thigh wound. Orders received that all officers were to report to the church.. Started making my way up there but it took some time. Found the capitulation rumour to be correct as the church was in possession of the enemy and all officers were being disarmed. By 11am all officers has surrendered and were assembled at the church. At approx noon we left the village and began the return journey to Canea. Just after leaving the village came across a bunch of Greek civilians digging a gigantic pit and for a moment I wondered if it was for us. We marched non-stop till dusk and without ever getting away from the stench of dead bodies. God it was awful. Broken off into a field where I quickly fell asleep. Awoke about midnight to find that there had been an issue of a few pineapple cubes but I'd missed mine. Managed to get a small amount of sugar in lieu. Its now about four days since I last had anything to eat and I'm beginning to feel a bit

- weak. My left ankle, sprained on the retreat, is beginning to worry me again.
- 2, Monday
Marched on in the morning. 3 officers with parties of 500 men. One of our guards was very decent. Stopped at Vrieces and issued with a tin of bully between four, and biscuits. Gosh ! It tasted grand. An Italian gave me a drink of wine. Marched on till late afternoon with only one short rest. I was just about done.
 - 3, Tuesday
Just about to leave with a party when I saw the opportunity of a lift so, my ankle still paining me I hopped about. Taken to Canea and firstly to the old 7th General Hospital, now a prison camp, then to the King's house, now the Luftwafer HQ. Received marvellous treatment. Had my ankle seen to and given tons of food, oranges and soda water. Supposed to have been questioned. Then sent back to the old 7th General where rest of prisoners were encamped.
 - 4, Wednesday
Joined in with rest of RASC under Major Lambert. About 700 of us altogether. A devil of a job with the feeding.
 - 5, Thursday
Food pretty poor. Nothing much doing.
 - 6, Friday
Went on a scrounging trip into Canea for Sawger stoves etc. Given bread, butter and potatoes by inhabitants. Took over job of O/C Messing. Living a little better.
 - 7, Saturday
Organising feeding arrangements, or trying to.
 - 8, Sunday
All the officers except about 20 left by plane for Greece. I stayed on with Major Lambert as O/C Messing Getting enough to eat.
 - 9, Monday
Went out on a wood scrounging trip and got back to "B" Camp site. Absolutely nothing left. Was given a shirt and a pair of shorts from my laundry by the local family. After getting wood they decided to alter our camp. Lost my job but better without it.
 - 10, Tuesday
Living on quite good food with Major Lambert. Had touch of dysentery for last few days and am not feeling so well.
 - 11, Wednesday
At about noon received notice to be ready to leave camp at 1pm. Half filled my pack with sugar knobs and two tins bully. At 1pm went by lorry to Mallami Aerodrome thence by JU 52 to Glyphada Aerodrome near Athens. Mallami was strewn with wreckage of JUs. Went by lorry from Glyphada to barracks on outskirts of Athens. Slept on floor on palliasses. Food very poor.
 - 12, Thursday
Spent day in this temporary camp./ Bad food.
 - 13, Friday
One more day in this temporary camp. Rumours of a move in the morning.
 - 14, Saturday
Left Athens by 3rd class coach in early morning. Arrived at Gravia and after a meal left in lorries for Lamia. Couldn't go by train owing to bridge being down. Arrived Lamia well after dark. Slept 32 to cattle truck with door locked. Dysentery still worrying me.
 - 15, Sunday
Spent day at the small station just outside Lamia. Food consisted of 3/4 tin German fleisch and a biscuit, with local tea.
 - 16, Monday
Left station after noon and travelled through night still 32 to cattle truck with doors shut. My dysentery was much worse and I had to get out at every stop.
 - 17, Tuesday
Arrived Salonika about noon. Marched through the town to the prison camp. Registered and searched. Found Wiltshire, Cpl. Tattersal, two RAMC Brooks, Mulhern, Calderwood, Rowe, Evans, Pearl,

	Waddingham and Hewson. Calderwood reported the death of MSM Moss and Cpl. Jacobs. Sent prison post card. Apparent Wood was here but has now left for Germany.
18, Wednesday	Had a long chat with Wiltshire. Moved to new quarters.
19, Thursday	Getting settled in but don't think much to the food.
20, Friday	Received two lts of pay. 27 Marks in all.
22, Sunday	Germany declared war on Russia. Greeks light fires on hills.
26, Thursday	Rioting in Salonika.

JULY 1941

1, Tuesday to 5 Saturday	The days go by slowly. Dysentery still troubling me. Started a German class. Pay 13 ½ marks.
6, Sunday	Admitted hospital with dysentery.
7, Monday	In hospital with dysentery to 27 th , Sunday. The dysentery ward was a hell of a hole. I was eaten alive by bugs, fleas and lice. Pay on 10 th and 20 th .
28, Monday	Discharged hospital.
29, Tuesday	Feeling rotten.
30, Wednesday	Admitted hospital with sandfly fever.
31, Thursday	Received 13 ½ marks pay.

AUGUST 1941

1, Friday	Found out that one of the F.A.U. orderlies is Richard Early of Witney (50 Newland Road)
2, Saturday	Discharged hospital.
3, Sunday	Trying to get my strength back. Heard a rumour that we may leave for Germany on 5 th .
5, Tuesday	At noon received orders to leave. On parade at 3pm. Left camp about 5pm by lorry to station. Left Salonika by train with about 1,000 men. 22 officers (incl. 1 Serb) in a cattle truck. Rations 6 biscuits, ¾ loaf bread and 2 tins of fleisch for 6 days. Pased through Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (Belgrade & Zagreb) Austria (Vienna, Salzburg), Germany (Landshut, Hof, Leipzig) and arrived prison camp at Luckenwalde (Stalag 3A) 230 kms south of Berlin pm on the 11 th
12, Tuesday	Coffee served at 6.30am by Serb. Quite a nice camp. Lunch consisted of a big basin of soup. Tea (4 to a loaf), margarine and sugar with brawn. Quite a spread. Camp mostly consists of French and Serbs. Raids on Berlin at night.
13, Wednesday	Feeling much stronger in this climate. The stew today was a thick cabbage one and tasted grand. Rumours that we move on to an officers camp tomorrow.
14, Thursday	On the move again. Marched to Luckenwalde station. 3 rd train coach to outskirts off Berlin. Then by tube to centre of city. Then march of 15

- minutes across Berlin to main Western station. Express to Hamburg. Sat in corridor all the way and saw quite a lot of life. Civilians seemed quite friendly. A long wait at Hamburg. Obtained hot coffee from two German Red Cross girls, one of whom spoke perfect English. The by 3rd coach to Lubec and a march from station to prison camp. Spent night in a garage.
- 15, Friday Up at 8am and over to be deloused. Spent from 9am to 1pm naked in the bath house. Had what we thought a grand lunch of soup, fish and potatoes (tons of 'em). Got our clothes back and posted to No.2 Company. All the Salonika crowd were there.
- 16, Saturday A wet day. Getting settled down to new routine.
- 17, Sunday Showery. Church in the morning. Saw notices of German and other classes starting not yet though. PC (in German) sent home.
- 18, Monday Unsettled weather. The canteen seems to be a great asset. Today we got two sorts of fish and I also obtained a cup and saucer.
- 19, Tuesday Fair day. Received postcards. Our first communication with home. Canteen produced Russian salad. Had haircut.
- 20, Wednesday A fine day. Played bridge all day. Canteen produced tinned tomatoes, tomato essence, tobacco and vegetable salad.
- 21, Thursday Showery day. Bridge all day. Canteen produced lemonade. Kept on parade at night.
- 22, Friday Fair with showers. Posted my first postcard home. Canteen produced vegetable roll, tomato mark (?) and chestnuts.
- 23, Saturday Showery. Started the German course. Fish, pickles and fishcakes from canteen.
- 24, Sunday A wet day. Church in the morning. Wrote my first letter and posted it.
- 25, Monday A fine day. Lecture on wines in the morning. Agricultural lecture in afternoon. Tomato supper and saurkraut from canteen.
- 26, Tuesday A wet day. Posted card to Hanboro. Fish, fishcakes and rhubarb juice from canteen.
- 27, Wednesday A cold windy day. Solo all day. Wrote 2nd letter to Hazel. Canteen produced beetroot and chestnuts. Evening parade 6pm.
- 28, Thursday A fair day. Drew 50 marks back pay.
- 29, Friday A cold wet day. Gardening lecture. Canteen produced fish paste.
- 30, Saturday A very chilly day. Lecture in the morning. Canteen produced beetroot, saurkraut, beefsteak sauce.
- 31, Sunday Church in the morning. A very chilly day.