

## Chapter 8

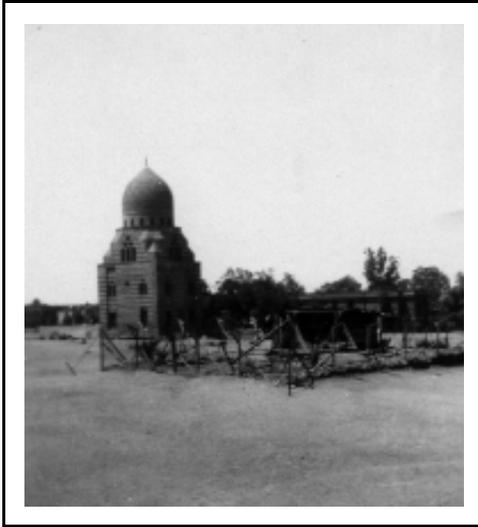
### Off to Egypt

*Most of our possessions went into a large packing case bought by Mum in the High Street, Canterbury. Clothes went as hand luggage; we didn't have much. Of course Mum had to get rid of all the furniture and household goods as best she could. I have no idea how she coped. One funny incident occurred when she sent me round to the Small family to give them a chamber pot. To disguise it, she carefully wrapped it up in brown paper but in its precise shape so I carried it looking like a chamber pot wrapped up in brown paper! Sadly, we had to part with our scooters. To do this, Betty put a "For Sale" notice in our shop window. They were Tan Sads and, surprise, surprise someone bought them. I think that Betty's went for seven and sixpence and mine for five shillings. I can't remember anything about the goodbyes. One lady knocked on the door at the last minute to say cheerio but I don't know who she was.*

*We went to Birkenhead by train, accompanied by Aunt Rose. We stayed the night in a hotel booked by the Army and went on board the following day. When the ship sailed, we made a bad mistake; instead of going to meals and onto the deck, we stayed in our cabin. Ships have a curious smell combining tar, oil and paint; this combination, together with the ship's motion causes sickness and going without food for three days was disastrous. We were all ill, me I think largely due to lack of food and fresh air.*

*After three days however, the weather improved and the ship steadied; we went to meals and up on deck. The food was plain but quite good. We got to know other families and began to make friends. The ship's Officers were very pleasant and, as I recall, all Scottish. I felt very sorry for twelve horses which were on board in stables built on the deck. We were able to play shuffleboard on the deck and generally began to enjoy ourselves. Betty and I had some fun drawing funny faces on cardboard and trailing them on string, hoping that people looking out of portholes would be frightened. What a hope! I think that we probably stopped at Gibraltar and Malta on the way but I cannot be sure; in any case we didn't go ashore. During the journey I managed to bang my head by falling off the hold hatch, a drop of two to three feet.*

*We arrived at Port Said about two weeks after leaving England. Dad came on board to collect us, carrying a box of Turkish Delight which I had not seen before. We were all thrilled to see him after the long separation. That night we stayed in Port Said in quite*



*Mosque at Abbassia*

*a pleasant hotel. The noise, smells and temperature seemed so different to England that I am sure that we felt lost and bewildered. The following day we were on our way, by train, to Cairo and Abbassia Depot. Little did we know that the next few weeks would be a most traumatic time for us as a family.*

*All new arrivals at that time were housed in a tented camp. Each family was allocated to a large marquee roughly divided into rooms by canvas curtains and sparsely furnished with Army furniture, including army type single beds. So much for sexual reunions. It must have been*

*awfully difficult. Some families elected to stay in the tented camps as they liked the free and easy approach to life. Cooking was done on oil stoves and water boiled on primus stoves. This was done in a small hut built outside each tent. These people rallied round the newcomers to show them the ropes and were very helpful. Betty and I thought it smashing, but Mum must have been bewildered by it all; she was, however, very practical and got on with the job of feeding us etc.*

*There was, however, an undercurrent. Dad only appeared to have one couple as close friends and the husband was not in his Corps. This seemed vaguely odd but I didn't think much about it at the time but, a little later, I visited them with Dad. She wanted to kiss me but I was not keen. In an unguarded moment however, I found them kissing. Another part of the jigsaw but I said nothing to anyone. Sometime later, Mum found a number of Love Letters from the woman to Dad. There was, of course, an awful row and, I think, talk of Mum returning home. Before anything could happen, however, Dad suffered a heart attack and Mum had to turn herself into a nurse. His bed was side by side with Mum's and in one spasm, I saw him grip the head of her bed and literally lift her bed a foot off the ground. Of course she wasn't in it at the time but it showed the strength of the emotional stress and physical pain he was suffering.*

*Oddly enough, Betty and I, both innocent sorts of children, thought that Mum was overreacting. We were, of course, sorry for her plight but we felt that he never ceased to love either her or us. I suppose it is easy for children to be objective in such circumstances but, as it turned out, our instincts proved correct. I believe that, on Dad's part, the whole episode was brought about by loneliness and sexual frustration; this, coupled with a willing woman, explains it all for me. There was a sequel to this story. The same woman got herself involved with a young soldier who subsequently committed suicide in a Cairo hotel. Apparently she was there at the time. The upshot of this was that she was sent home to England and was heard of no more.*

*In the event, my parents decided to carry on. I'm not really sure how, or to what extent she forgave him. She must have because there was no further undercurrent, although I think that there was probably only limited sexual relationship. I don't think that Mum was too keen anyway and regarded sex as a duty rather than a potential pleasure. The Victorians have a lot to answer for. Certainly she was shy and inhibited. Much later when Dad was in hospital dying, he wanted her to hold his hand but she always felt embarrassed. A shame.*