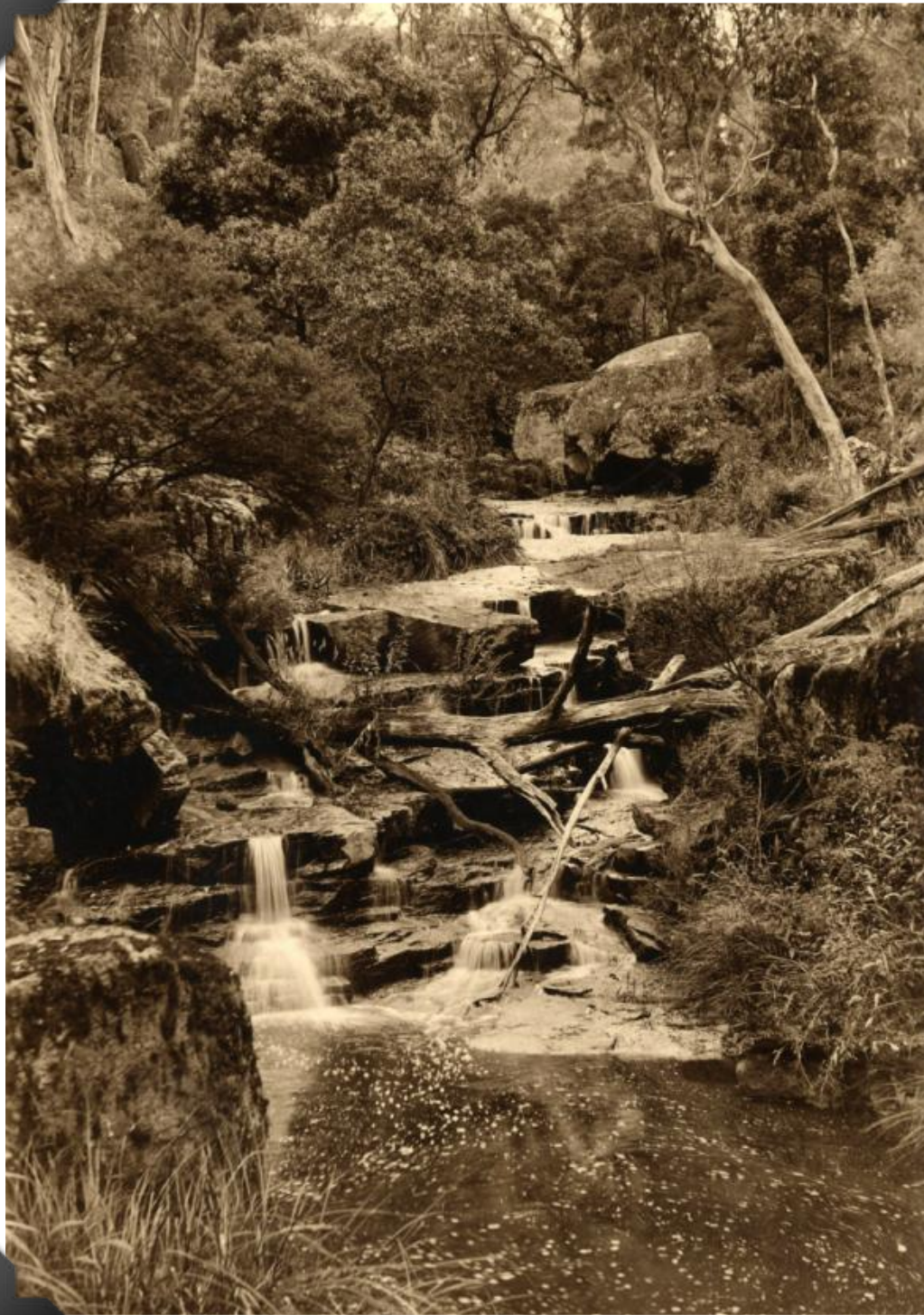


REMEMBERING AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER



MAURICE
THOMPSON



Photographer

- Maurice Thompson -

By Maurie & Marida Pawsey

Maurice Charles Thompson was a young Australian man who was passionate about nature, photography and loved the Australian bush and bird watching.

He also served as a Gunner in the 2nd Brigade,
Australian Field Artillery.

This album serves as a tribute to Maurice who was cut down in his prime. As can be seen in this album, his photographic skill reached a professional level.

*Information and imagery supplied by his
Nephew Maurice (Maurie) Pawsey.*

EARLY LIFE

THE EARLY LIFE OF MAURICE THOMPSON

TRIBUTE

MAURICE CHARLES THOMPSON

BORN 11TH APRIL 1892 AT ASCOT VALE, VICTORIA

SON OF WILLIAM AND LILLIE THOMPSON

NATURALIST, BIRDWATCHER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

GUNNER NO 5798, 2ND BRIGADE, AUSTRALIAN FIELD ARTILLERY

DIED OF WOUNDS ON 29TH APRIL 1918, AGED 25

BURIED AT EBBLINGHEM MILITARY CEMETERY, NORTHERN FRANCE

Lillie May



Maurice was the eldest of six children born to William George and Lillie May Thompson, in Ascot Vale. They moved to 77 Cassells Rd, Brunswick in 1911. Maurice's schooling was at Moreland Primary School, Victoria and he was employed in the Audit Office, Victorian Railways.

Lillie May was of the Butler family, being born at Tarilta near Castlemaine in Victoria, where her family owned a store on the goldfields and an uncle the Maldon Hotel, in that town.

Maurice was a keen naturalist and bird observer, and also an excellent photographer. He spent a lot of time camping and there is an excellent photo outside a tent at Gisborne in Victoria, with four friends later in this publication. Obviously they had been shooting, with several rabbits hanging on the tent pole.

Lillie May's sister, Mabel [Butler] had married into the Collier Family at Eildon. The Collers had initially settled on the Devils River, near the junction of the Delatite and Goulburn Rivers. The construction of Eildon Dam meant that their property would be under water, so they had to move.

There were several branches of the family. One moved to farms on what is now U.T. Creek Road. The others moved to an area below the dam as construction commenced in 1911. Their homestead *Woodlands* was located on the Goulburn River, roughly where the Golden Trout Hotel is now located.

Maurice and his sister Madge (mother of Maurice's namesake Maurie Pawsey), used to spend a lot of time with the Collers. Madge, before her death in 1991, used to often talk about her times at Eildon in pre-First World War days. One of her interests was horse riding and she used to at times, ride from Eildon to visit the other branch of the Collier family at Devils River. She describes the ride as through 'White Gum Gully', which from her description, we

have identified as possibly the valley in which the Eildon Boat Club is now situated.

The house she rode to is the house in Collier Bay in what used to be Fraser National Park, which has emerged from the water on several occasions over the years and have been privileged to see it twice.

After the move and as members of the family married and established themselves, the Collers owned a substantial area from Sugarloaf Mountain, at the western end of the dam wall, on the northern side of the Goulburn River, between the river and the lake, down to Taylor's Lane. By the 1930s this was split into three farms, later owned by Brent Collier, Charlie Collier and Yutha Broderick. Mavis, who later married William (Bill) Austin, took over the old Dam Construction Offices from 1912–24 and created a fisherman's guesthouse.

It is not necessarily related to the story of Maurice Thompson, but in the late 1930s, Madge, husband Ray Pawsey [trout fishing tragics] and their three sons, Maurie, Max and Ian used to spend many of their January's at the guesthouse. The joys of

country life for young lads were introduced to the Pawsey boys by Charlie's two sons Ross and Barry. Their farm house was just across the road from the guesthouse. Also Maurie and Max Pawsey spent significant time with the Brodericks and their son Terry and later with the Austins in Grannies Lane. This is relevant only, in that many years later Maurie Pawsey and wife Marida came to live in the area.

Maurice Thompson was also known as Morry and sometimes named himself Maurie and Thompson. As well as his occupation in the Victorian Railways, Audit Office, Maurice joined the Bird Observers Club and the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union and wrote articles about his interests for their magazine called *The Emu*, which is still published today. This magazine carried an obituary to Maurice Thompson on 18th July 1918. See [here](#).

To follow his bird watching and photographic interests, he had a very close friend Les Chandler, who also served in France and loved camping with a group of friends. He also joined the Victorian Volunteer Artillery Brigade, Albert Park Battery,

presumably similar to the Militia groups between the wars. It seems strange that a naturalist and bird watcher should spend time in an Artillery group, but this is idle speculation.

Maurice Thompson received some 14 international photographic awards mainly from America, obviously a photographer of note, processing his own plates and prints. Unfortunately we cannot find any records of these awards.

Family notes tell us that as a first generation Australian and the eldest son, he considered it his duty to enlist, but as a field naturalist, he could not kill anything. Also as a Militia man, he refused the offer of a commission and volunteered for the Ammunition Brigade.

From our information Maurice enlisted on 12th July 1915 when aged 23 and was sent off to Egypt with his unit on the HMAT A71 *Nestor* on 11th October 1915, leaving from Melbourne.



A small fob watch gifted to Maurice from his friends at his work before he left for the war.

The watch was designed to be secured in a leather wrist strap.

To
M. Thompson
as a token of esteem
from his fellow officers
in the
Audit Branch Vic. Railways
11 September 1915





CAMPING AT TRAWOOL



CAMPING AT GISBORNE - MAURICE (SEATED)



MAURICE TENDING THE BILLY



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



SUNSET AT BLACK ROCK



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

Built from 1902



The Vest Pocket camera was a big selling folding camera, made by Eastman Kodak from 1902. They were the first camera to use the smaller 127 film reels and had a f/6.8 72 mm achromatic meniscus lens, with a maximum aperture of f/11. Over 1.75 million were sold between 1912 and 1926, based around the advertising slogan 'The Soldiers Camera'. The camera enabled the user to inscribe each individual photograph with a name or short comment using the metal pen and small door.

The pictured camera is from the Kath Chanter Collection and has reportedly been a part of the Chanter family for a considerable period of time.

YARRA RIVER AT STUDLEY PARK



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

YARRA RIVER AT STUDLEY PARK

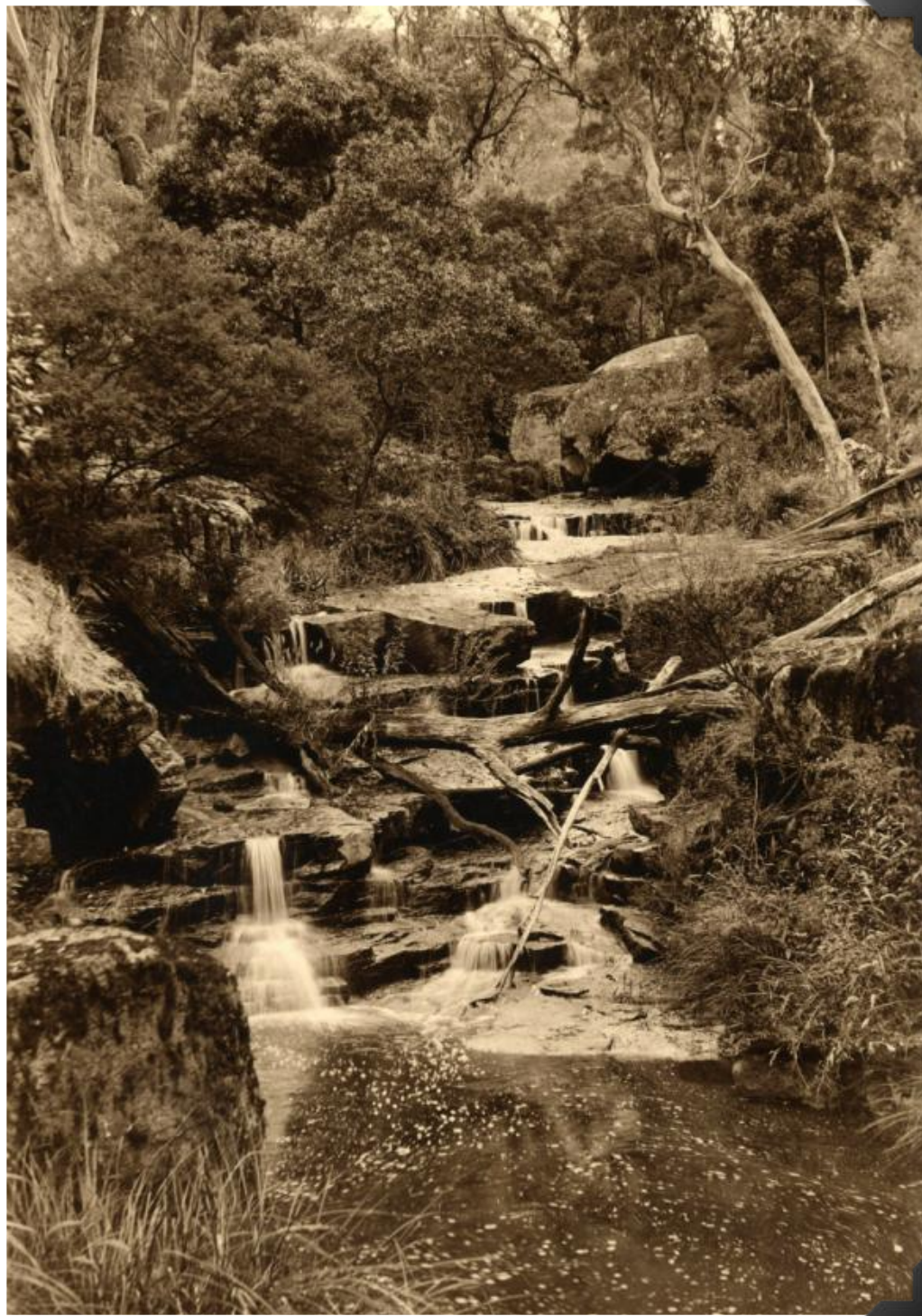


Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

SNOBS CREEK



CREEK AT TRAWOOL



PATH IN TI-TREE AT BLACK ROCK



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW, MT TARRANGOWER, MALDON



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

GOULBURN RIVER AT THORNTON



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

NORMAN WATCHING THE GOLD FISH IN THE FERNERY



FRIEND REG STEPHENS



MAVIS





The Rose Archway
"Pambula"
47 Cassells Road,
MORELAND





Access to Snobs Falls at the time when this photograph was captured was via a long winding track that followed Snobs Creek from near where it met the Goulburn River.

The uphill hike brought you to the bottom of the Falls which was often referred to as Niagara Falls.

The section photographed here is the top section as seen from the pathway to the top of the Falls. A good flow of water is present, suggesting it may have been taken in the wetter cooler months.

PARENTS LILLIAN AND WILLIAM



GRANDMOTHER AGNES BUTLER





Female Pink Robin

Yellow Robin



Orkney, Fort William

POST



Dear Maurice



Our Sincere congratulations
to you upon your photographic
successes, they are certainly
very fine and should still
further encourage you. Pleased
to hear you are getting on in
the State railway. This is a town
of a town in Scotland near
to where we are staying for our
holidays this year. Tell father
Grandma is very well and hopes
to go to Brighton in a few weeks time
Love from Auntie Nellie & Uncle Edwin

Mr Maurice Thompson

D
Lambula
Cassels Rd
Brunswick
Melbourne
Australia

PUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPHS

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS PUBLISHED IN
THE AMERICAN ANNUAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY
BETWEEN 1915 AND 1917



HIS FIRST TOP.

MAURICE THOMPSON.



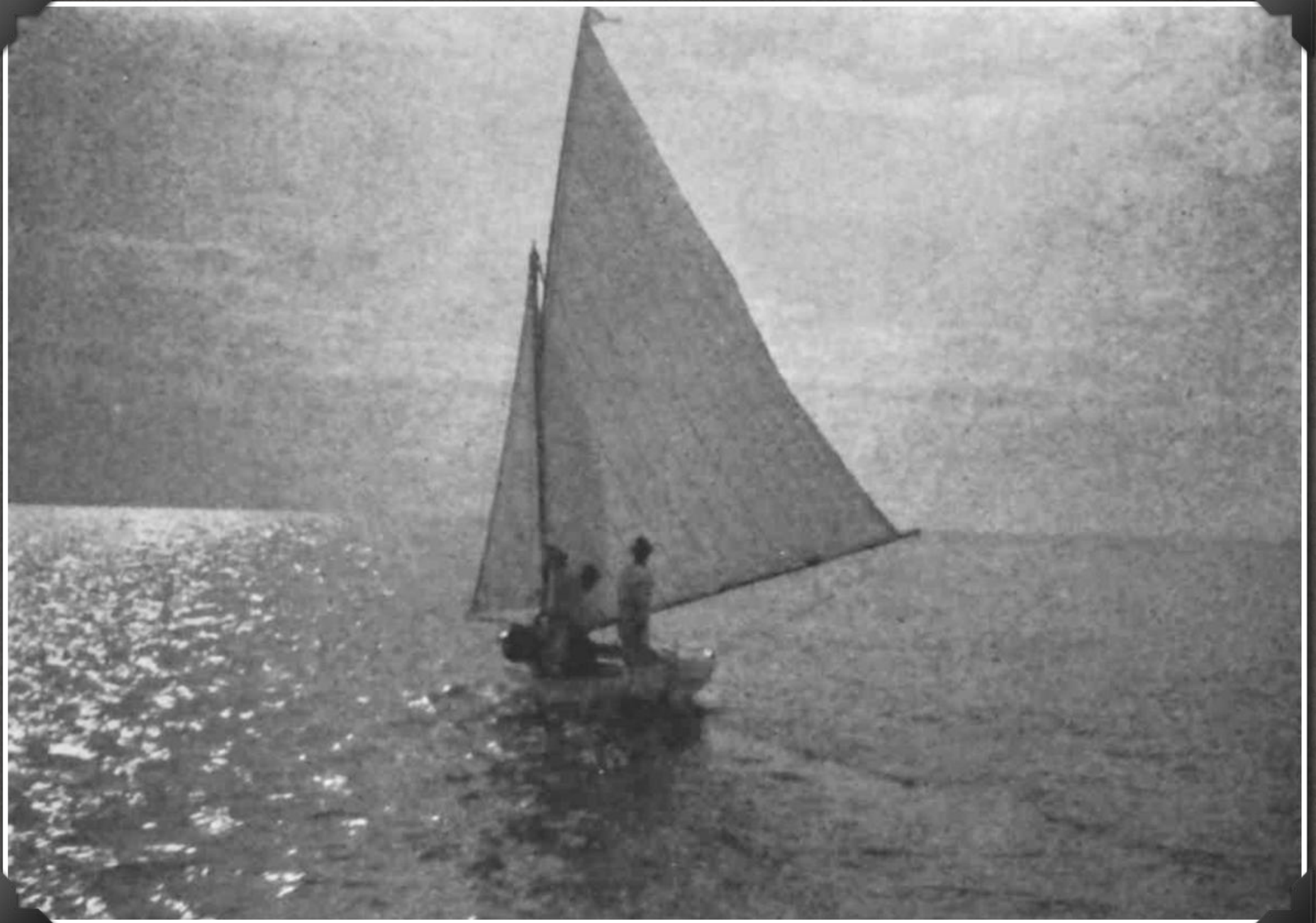
WATER WEEDS.

MAURICE THOMPSON.



NEAR BLACK ROCK

MAURICE THOMPSON



WAR SERVICE

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY MAURICE DURING HIS WARTIME SERVICE

KILLED IN ACTION ON 29 APRIL 1918

EGYPT

Maurice arrived in Egypt for training on 12th November 1915. From his letters, an impression is gained that he enjoyed Egypt and there are a number of photographs taken in Egypt showing his army mates outside their tent, their Christmas dinner, and a good supply of beer in evidence. They are also interesting shots of their tents and gear. Photographs of the Great Pyramids, Cairo streets, mosques, churches and the zoo, suggest they had good leisure time. There are photographs of the camp, horse lines and wagons, the post office, hospital tent, 'fertilizer' carriers, carts carrying feed for the horses and a camel train. There are several horse back photos, one of Maurice and another of an Egyptian soldier on horseback. Some of their training, from the photographs, appears to have been at the 'Lost Oasis'. There are Christmas cards that still exist, several of which are embroidered, including one of the Sphinx.

His Army Records show that he left for France in early 1916.

FRANCE

Maurice arrived in France on 28th March 1916 and according to records was transferred to the 21st Field Artillery Brigade on 15th May 1916.

From general information and his letters, which of course were censored, his unit seems to have been in action up and down the front for the next two years. He was transferred to the 2nd Field Brigade on 24th June 1917.

In August 1917 he had leave in England and had time to see London in some detail, including Brighton and Folkestone. He did not have time to visit Holbeton in Devon from where his maternal Grandmother came.

We have in our possession a number of postcards from London and Brighton. One letter from France dated October 1917 to his sister 'Madgie', included a short piece of verse:

Christmas 1917

**Did you hear a whisper`d "Coo-ee"
Did you feel a clasping hand,
When the Christmas bells were ringing
In Australia`s Golden land?**

**For in my thoughts I send them to you
From the shattere`d fields of war
That we might meet, that we might greet,
As in dear days of yore:**

**And O, how distant seem those times
When you and I were near,
Ah, I wish the Southern Cross and you
Were shining on me here.**

*From
Gunner M. C. Thompson*

There is also an interesting article in *The Emu* magazine of the Ornithologists Union, quoting extracts from a letter of Maurice's to another member of the Union (Mr A. C. Stone) dated

24th April 1917. The first describing early awakening near Bapaume in France, a cry that 'Fritz' was advancing in force, just over the rise. They were told to retire to the next village, as our infantry was falling back. 'The breech-blocks were removed from the guns, machine gun and rifle bullets were pretty thick and the shells were falling in the fields. At first I thought I would soon be mending Fritz's roads. Finally Fritz got a terrible mauling.'

The second piece described the birds he had seen: 'The larks are singing beautifully and today I saw the first swallow of the season.' He goes on to list, magpies, partridges, linnets, tiny hawks resembling our kestrels. 'The only other "birds" that are at all common hereabouts are aeroplanes, of many different species. It must be mating season for them, too, as I often see them fighting fiercely.'

Another letter to Madge he states 'this little dugout is the most comfortable I've ever occupied in France or Belgium. It is fairly strong, would stop anything but a very large shell, contains two bunks, a table, a very nice little stove and [this will surprise

you] a 15 c.p. electric light. We fixed the stove, table and light in ourselves and I can tell you she is some home now. But I suppose now we have fixed ourselves up so nicely, we are bound to have to move. It is often this way. The office and some of the officer`s dugouts have electric light on so we managed to get hold of a globe and some wire and thus fixed one in our joint. Our headquarters have gone back a few miles, but the four ‘runners’ [us] are left here to carry on, attached to another H.Q. The tucker supplied by the latter is rather decent. At dinner today we had minced meat mixed up with spuds and onions and then some rice and custard. For tea we had some raspberry jam tart covered with custard and the pastry was really good stuff under the circs. I hope they keep up the standard, if so it will do me.’

Letter to Madgie dated April 1916

‘...we have had a fine trip through France from the extreme south to the extreme north in Flanders and we saw some lovely country on the way. It`s marvellous to see the way the farmers have settled down to the war. You would never think there was a

war on to see them ploughing and working right near the firing line. The people here work their churns with the aid of a dog. There is a big wide wheel outside and the dog runs inside this and keeps it going.’

Letter dated August 1916

‘I was carrying some ammunition one night and had taken off my coat and gas helmet. The Huns sent over some gas shells and the alarm went. I didn`t drop my two shells, but I set the pace until I got back and got my helmet. On the way I got a whiff which made my throat sting and I felt a bit faint for a while. I always had my helmet handy after that!’

By June 1917, he is again talking about birds his sisters have seen and correcting their opinions. By now, he has switched to being a dispatch rider, one of three riders, two days on and one off.

His letters talk about having six months off, when he gets home, about his too short leaves in England, always about the birds he sees and about family matters.

But in April 1918, during one of the German's last offences, a shell was directed at the headquarters of his Brigade in a farmhouse, Maurice was hit and later died of his wounds. See the photograph of farmhouse shown later in this publication along with a map describing the attacks directed by General Ludendorf.

The second attack (labelled 2 in the arrow near the top of the map) is that in which Maurice was killed. It also shows the approximate location of the Ebblinghem Military Cemetery where he was buried. This has been visited by a number of members of my family.

In a letter to Lillie May, Maurice's mother, Lieut. Colonel David Moore describes how the Huns had apparently determined the location of Brigade HQ and hit the farmhouse at 6.30 am with two 8 inch shells. Maurice was hit in the explosion and died later from his wounds. He went on to say that it was a sad blow to the brigade. 'He was exceedingly popular with his comrades and as a brigade runner showed exceeding keenness and pluck, which was a credit to himself and to you as his dear mother.'

Photographs of his grave and memorial also appear in the gallery and some of his effects were returned home, but a second consignment was lost when a ship was sunk. His wrist watch and compass are held by me and pictures are included in the gallery.

Of great interest is that in 2008, a photo album and a tobacco tin containing his photographic negatives, a photo album with the photographs from the tin and copies of his letters to my mother 'Madgie', were offered to and accepted by the Australian War Memorial, and are now on exhibit there. It is also of interest that the experts of the memorial seem to be more excited by the tobacco tin, than the negatives. See the gallery and the War Memorials entry documents.

So, another promising, active and intelligent young Australian was taken from us, before he could show his full potential.

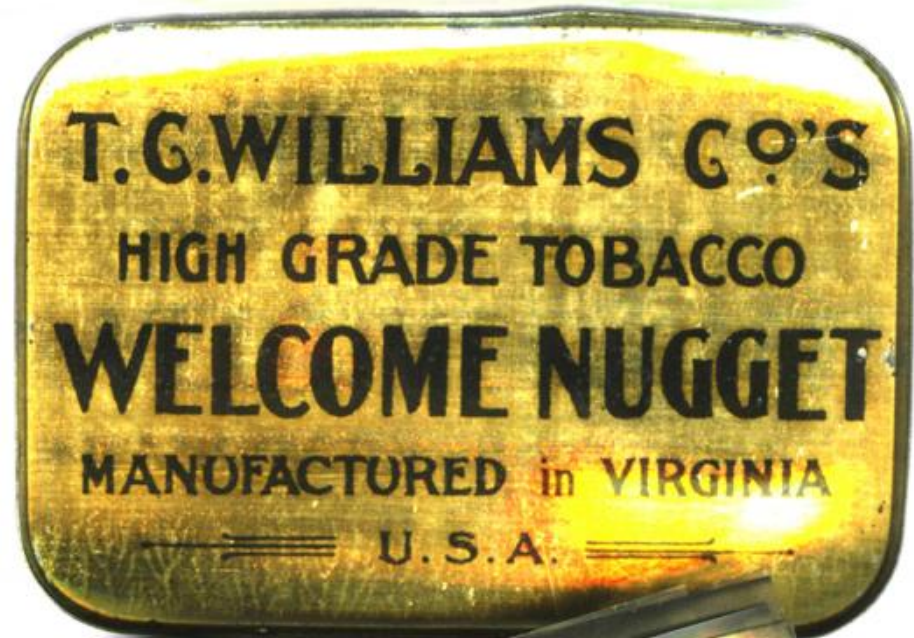
*Maurie Pawsey
Nephew
February 2019*



DINNER IS SERVED IN CAIRO DURING THE 1915 CHRISTMAS



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



In 2008, a tobacco tin containing his negatives, as well as a photo album was donated to the Australian War Memorial. Interestingly, the War Memorial seemed more excited about the tobacco tin, than the negatives!

THE HORSE FEED CARTERS AT LOST OASIS EGYPT IN 1915



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

THE HORSE 'FERTILISER' CARTERS AT LOST OASIS IN 1915







MOUNTED EGYPTIAN SOLDIER (FEZ) AT EGYPT



Although serving soldiers were not supposed to have cameras, Maurice took his Kodak Vest Pocket Autographic Camera with him overseas. At that time Kodak was actually promoting the Vest as a camera for serving men and women. The photographs in this gallery are all believed to have been taken with his Vest.



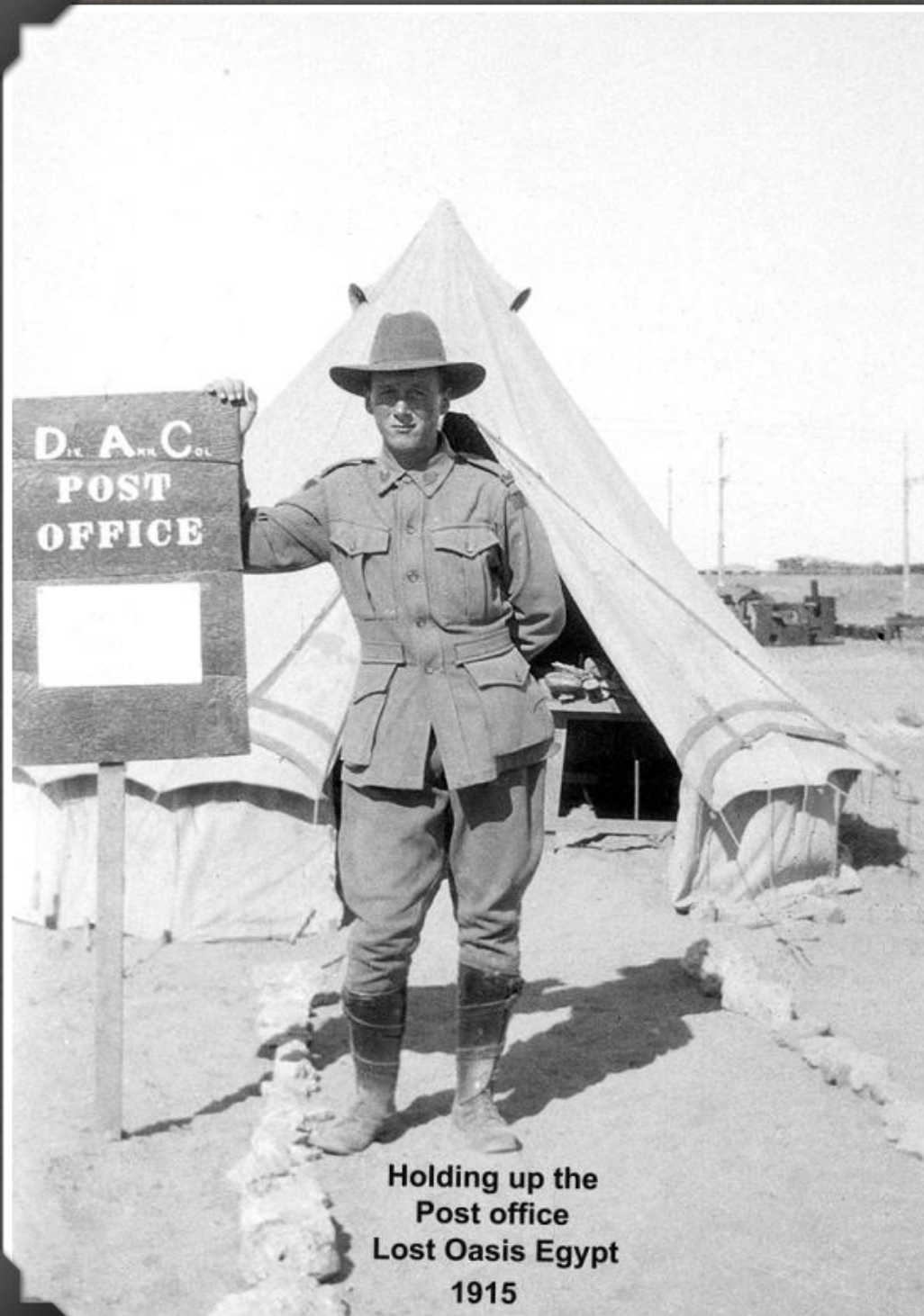




DAMAGED BOAT FROM GALLIPOLI



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



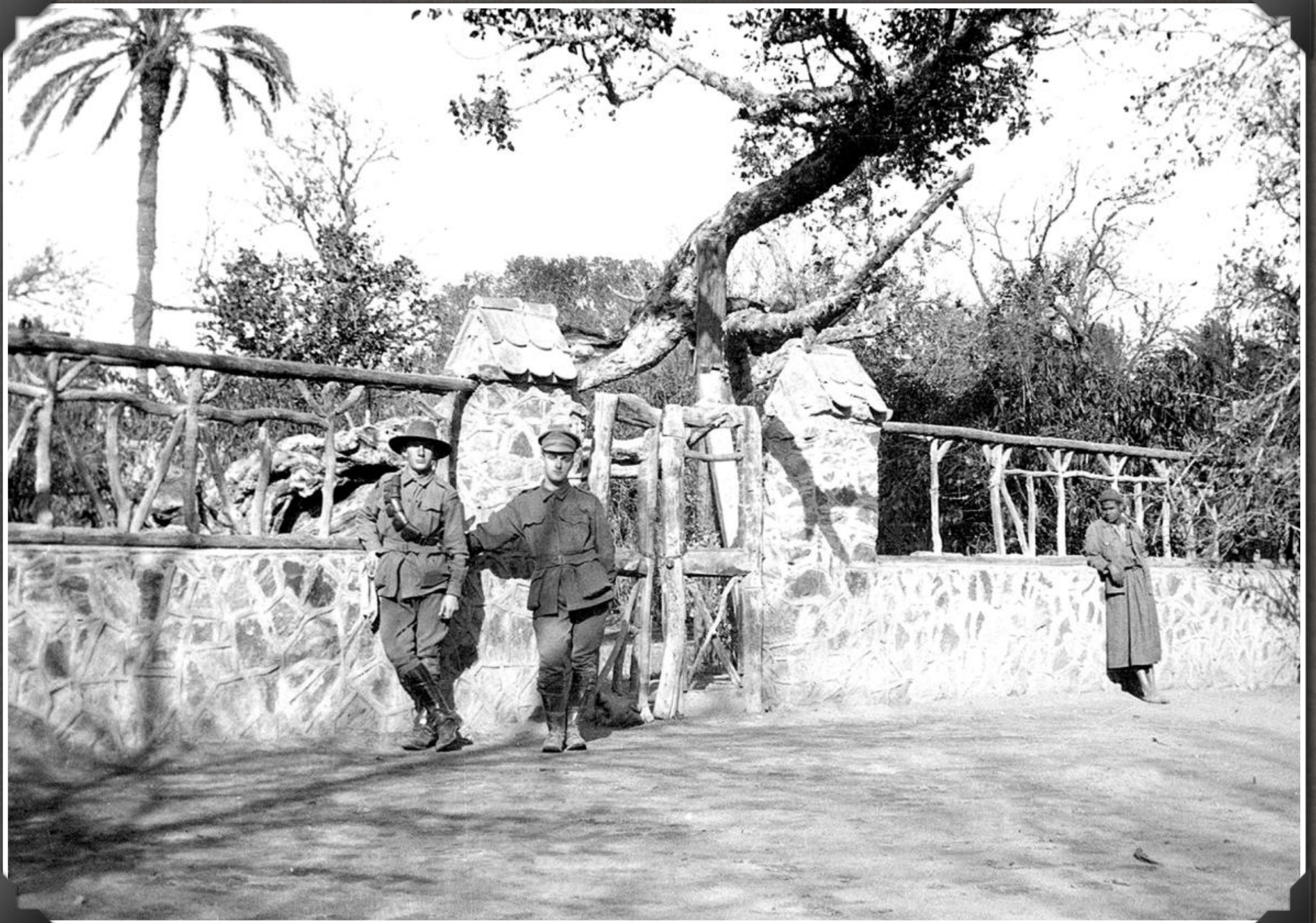
Holding up the
Post office
Lost Oasis Egypt
1915



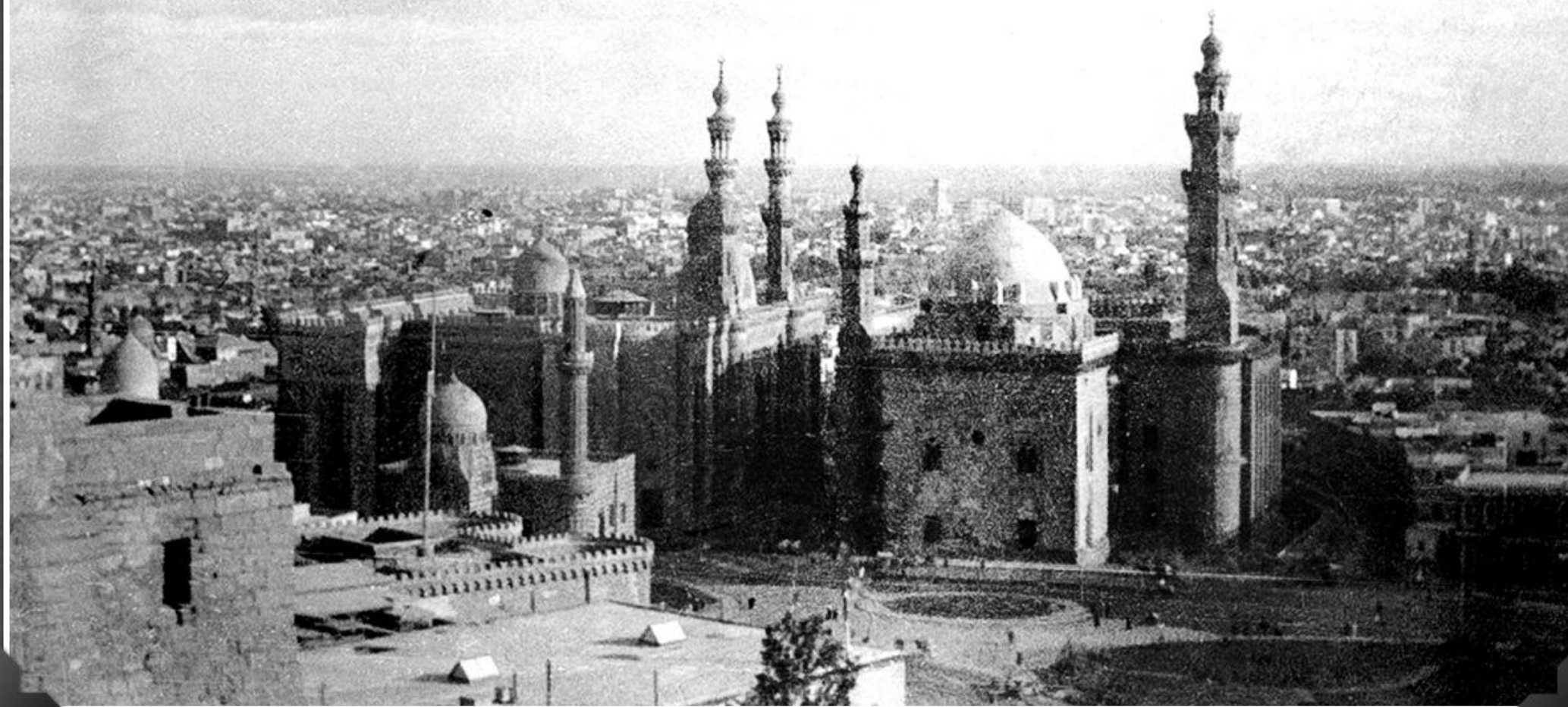
Gunner Maurice Thompson
Cairo 1915

Soldiers received regular periods of leave and it was during these times that they often visited local sites and photographed local features. Maurice used his Vest Pocket Camera to capture the following images of life and the city of Egypt.





A CAIRO MOSQUE IN 1915



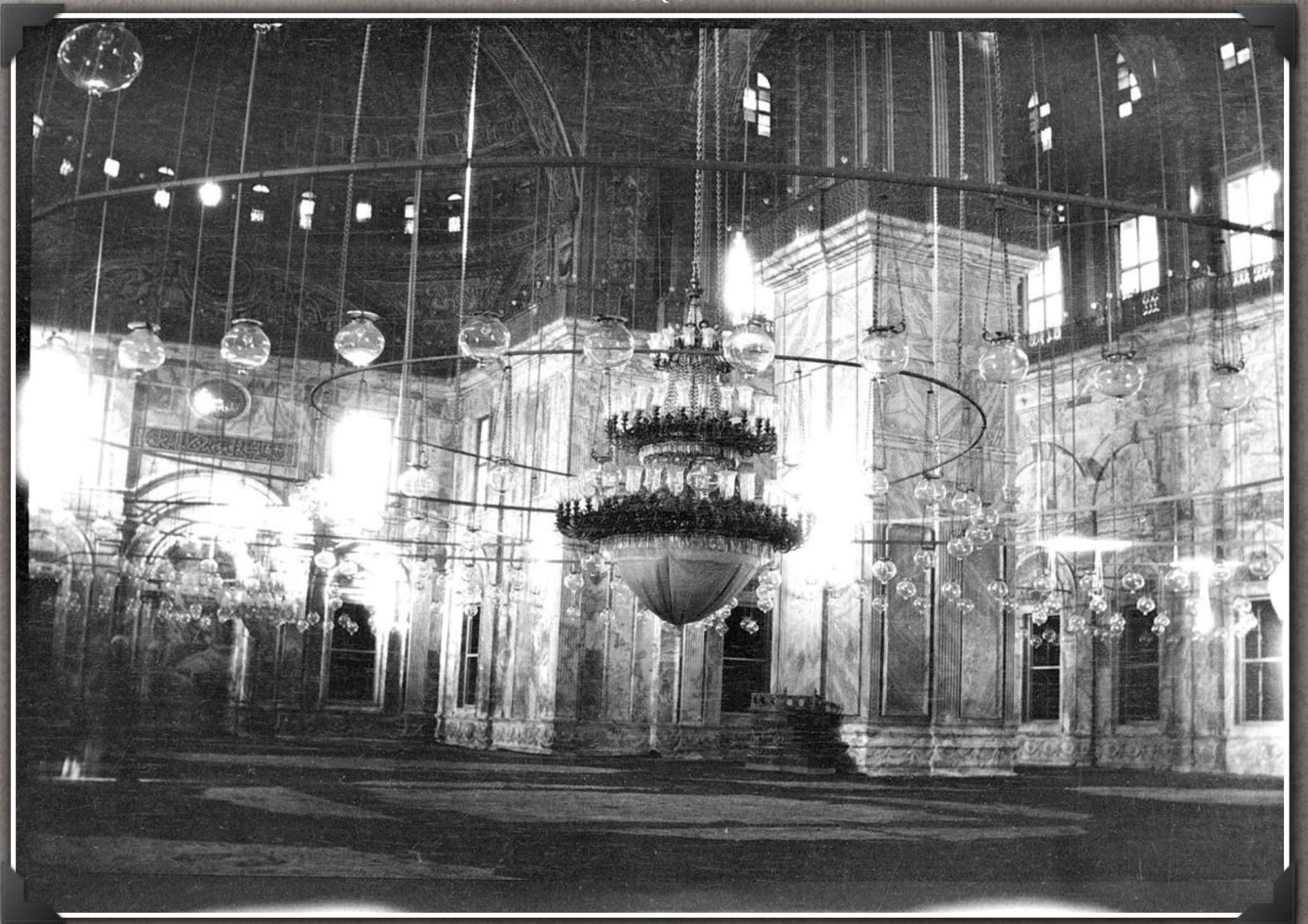
Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

A CAIRO MOSQUE IN 1915



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

INSIDE A MOSQUE IN 1915



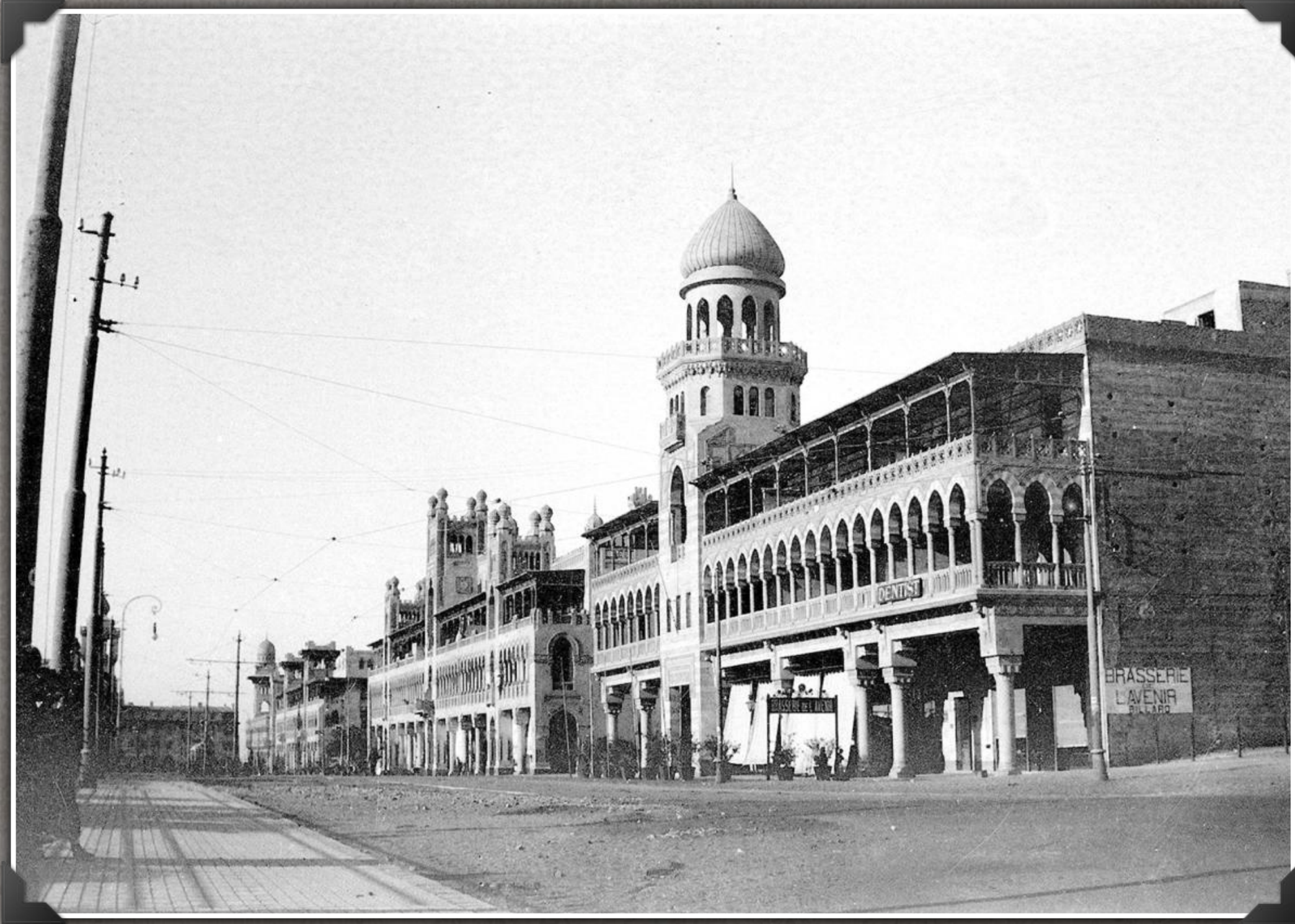
Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



HELMIEH RAILWAY STATION, CAIRO EGYPT IN 1915



A STREET IN HELIOPOLIS, CAIRO, EGYPT IN 1915



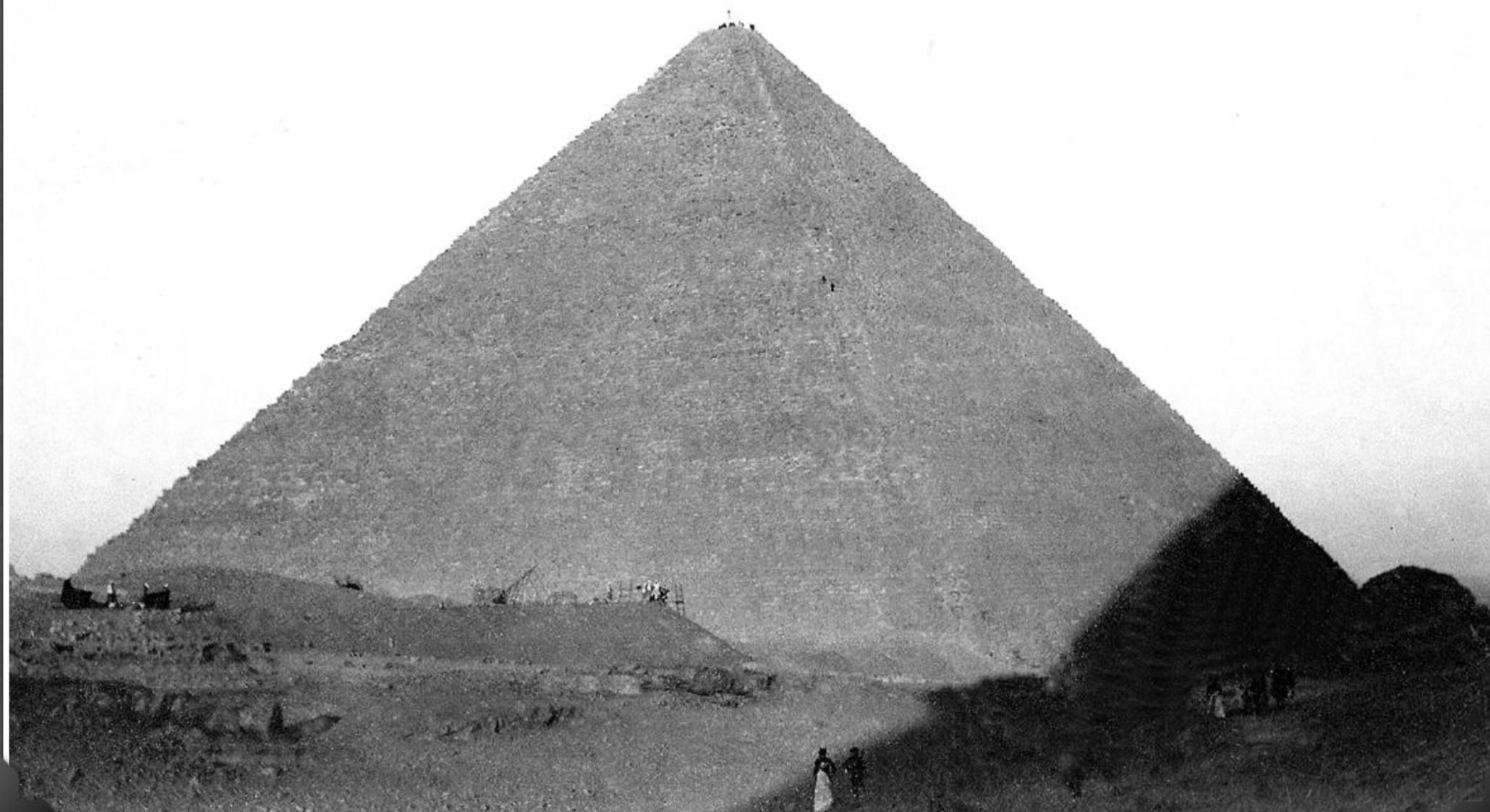
THE HELIOPOLIS, CAIRO, EGYPT IN 1915



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



THE GREAT PYRAMID CHEOPS (KHUFU) 2000+ BC, EGYPT, PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1916



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

VIEW FROM THE GREAT PYRAMID, EGYPT IN 1916

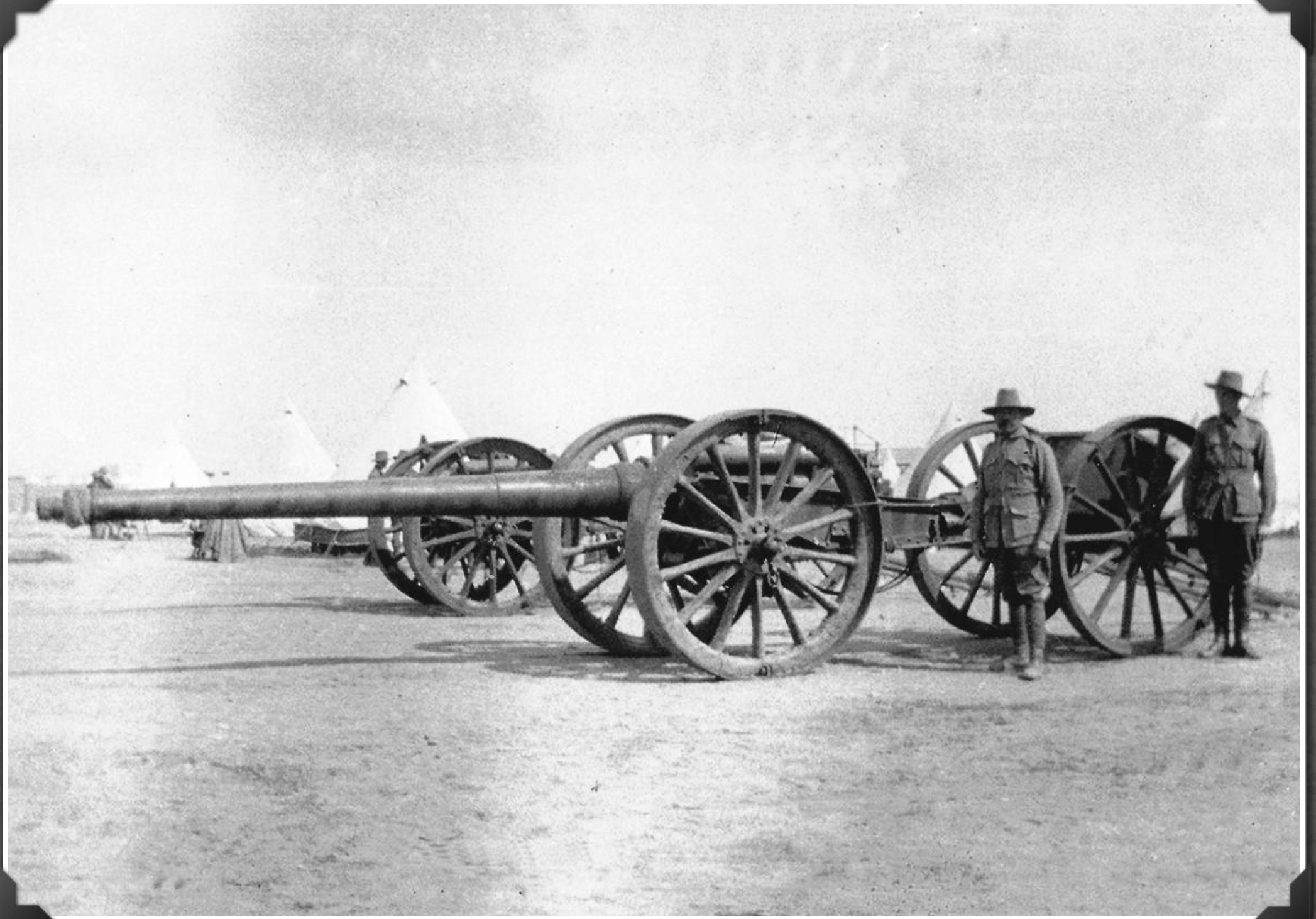




It was not uncommon for soldiers to have portraits taken of themselves, and in many cases the photographs were the final photographs ever taken of them.

It is possible that this was the photograph taken by the ‘lady photographer’ mentioned in one of his letters home and reproduced **here**.





'SPOILS' OF WAR - FLANDERS FIELDS, FRANCE IN 1917



Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019

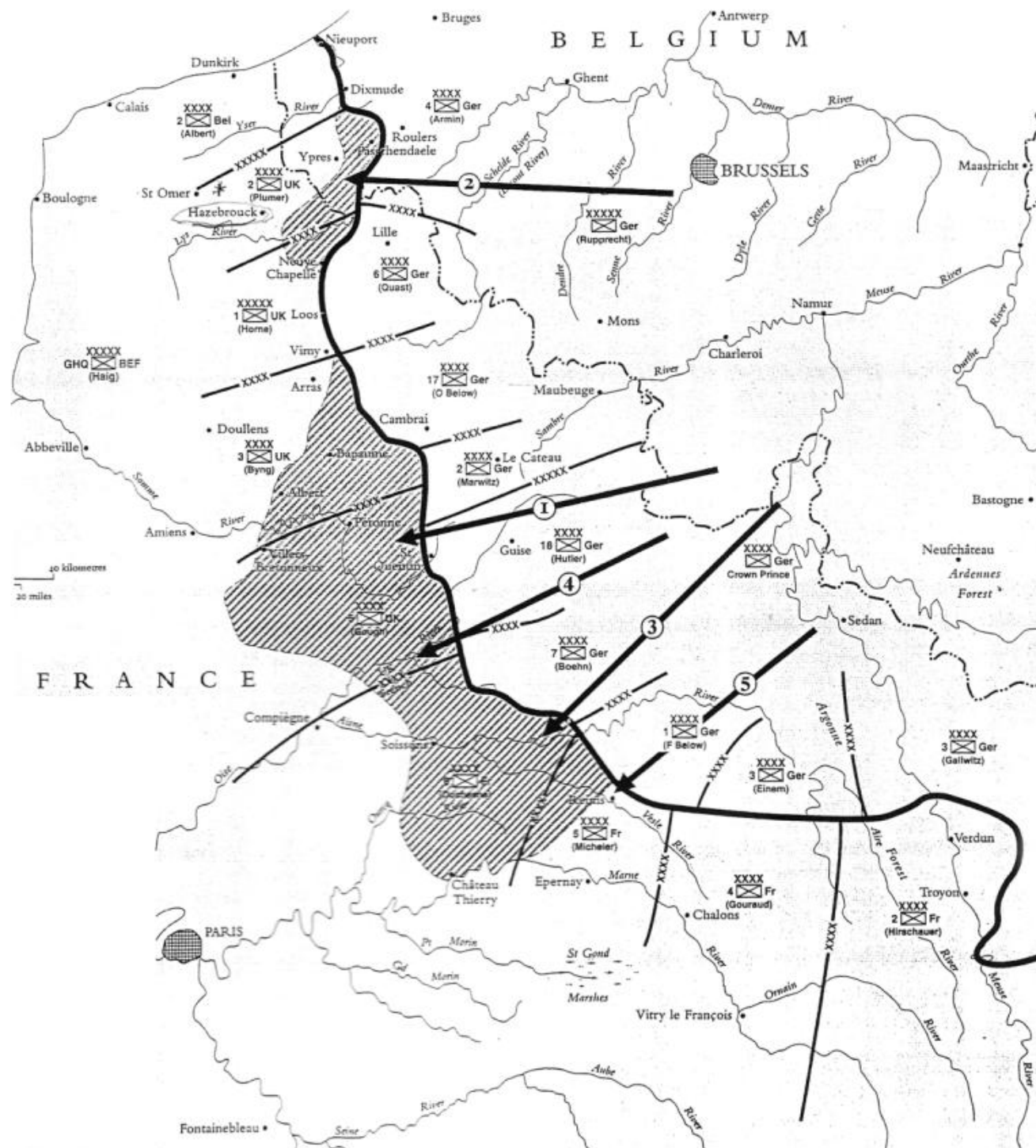


Place where Gunner Maurice Thompson was killed.
Note the damage to farmhouse done by the shell which killed him.
Died 29th April 1918 near Lille France



Click here for the
Ebbingham Military
Cemetery where
Maurice is buried.

Courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019



Gunner Maurice Charles Thompson

Born January 1893

Killed in Action 28th April 1918

Gunner 4th Battery 1st Division

2nd Field Artillery Brigade



DEBT OF HONOUR REGISTER

In Memory of

MAURICE CHARLES THOMPSON

Gunner
5798

2nd Bde., Australian Field Artillery

who died on
Monday 29 April 1918 . Age 25 .

Additional Information: Son of William George and Lillie May Thompson, of
77, Cassell's Rd., Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Cemetery: EBBLINGHEM MILITARY CEMETERYNord,
France

Grave or Reference
Panel Number: I. D. 37.

Location: Ebblinghem is a village halfway between St. Omer
and Hazebrouck. Ebblinghem Military Cemetery is
600 metres from the centre of the village heading
east on the D55. Turn right on to the 'Chemin des
Loups' and the Cemetery is a further 500 metres on
the left hand side opposite the wood.

Historical Information: In April, 1918, at the beginning of the German
offensive known as the Battles of the Lys, the 2nd
and 15th Casualty Clearing Stations came to
Ebblinghem and began the cemetery. It was used
until July by them and by the Royal Air Force. There
are now nearly 450, 1914-18 and a small number of
1939-45 war casualties commemorated in this site.
The cemetery covers an area of 1,266 square
metres.

92431.—W6490/1535.—2,000,000.—J. J. K. & Co., Ltd.—Forms B. 103/1.

~~21st F. Art. Bde.~~

Army Form B. 103. 5798

Casualty Form Active Service

Regiment or Corps

Regimental No.

Rank

Name

Enlisted (a)

Terms of Service (a)

Service reckons from (a)

Date of promotion
to present rankDate of appointment
to lance rankNumerical position on
roll of N.C.Os.

Extended

Re-engaged

Qualification (b)

Report		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received				
1 15/11/15	Ab. D.O.B.	Taken on strength of D.O.B. from Rf and posted to No 3 Section	Cairo	15/11/15	7447 B213 AP3889
2	Ed. 10.4	Youshangh 83 Bathy	Leuketiv	9.3.16	AP5673. Do 11/1848.
3 18.3.16	oc 83 Bk	Mustered Driver	"	14.3.16	AP 6404 Do 2/2093
4 15/3/16	"	Mustered Gunner	"	16.3.16	AP 6404 Do 2/2094
5 27/3/16	Nav. roll	Proceeds to join B. E. & Alexander	Alexandria	27/3/16	
6 28/3/16	oc 83 Bk	Drummers	Mayville	28/3/16	2K5128.31
7 26-1-17	2nd. Ede.	Transf. to 1st. Bde	France	24-1-17	..A27 47113 115'556
8 10	do	Taken on strength posted 4th Bty.	France.	do	do D-9/462
9	4.8.17 do	On leave Eng	"	30.7.17	A27/31
10	18.8.17	Rejoined at	"	14.8.17	A27/33.

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.
(b) e.g., Signaller, Shoeing Smith, etc., etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties.

[P.T.O.]

CASUALTY FORM

Report		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.	
Date	From whom received					
WITH UNIT 25-1-18						
14	3.5.18	O/C. 15th B.C.D.	Sm. Died of Wounds received in Action	Lield	29.4.18	A.I. 21515 V.L. 700 A.I. 21572 DO. 23/1908.
12	29.4.18	3rd Aust. Fld. Amb.	Adm + Tpt to C. B.D. "S.W" Inac Skull, L/leg + Back"	Lield	29.4.18	A.K. 2564/44
13	29.4.18	15th B.C.D.	admitted "J.D.W. Muesph"	Lield	29.4.18	A.K. 2564/78
11	3.5.18	O.P. 2nd A. B. B. 213.	Sm. Wounded in Action	Lield	29.4.18	A. 21/70.
15	Undated	Rev. J.L. Kember att. 15th B.C.D.	Buried at Ebbington 20000 27.T. d. b. 2.	---	30.4.18	A.I. 21810 S. 488/3.
ORIGINAL + Copies forwarded to Defence Melbourne, Chief Paymaster & Administrative Headquarters A.I.F., with Army Form B.2090A on 24/5/18. 2/6/18 <div style="text-align: right;"> (Sgd) D. CROOKS Captain. for Officer i/c Records. </div>						

THE LATE GUNNER M. C. THOMPSON, R.A.O.U.

General and sincere regret will be felt by all members of the R.A.O.U. at the loss of a young and promising naturalist, Maurice Charles Thompson, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Thompson, of "Pambula," Moreland. Gunner Thompson fell in France on 29th April last, and, as heroes do, facing the foe on the Lys River, where the British, fighting hard, thrust the horrible Huns back apace.

The late gallant gunner, who was formerly in the Auditor of Receipts Office, Victorian Railways, was only 25 years of age, was born at Ascot Vale (Vic.), and was educated at the Moreland State school. He enlisted July, 1915, and was in the thick of the fighting for over two years in France. He will be remembered amongst members for his well-nigh faultless and lovable disposition. As a bird-lover and in the field he lived near to Nature's own great heart, and consequently was a keen observer. On service he was very fond of reading *The Emu*, and, when digested, he always returned his copy home for safe keeping. The following extract of stern duty and bird-observing is taken from a letter of Gunner Thompson's written to a fellow-member, Mr. A. C. Stone, under date France, 24.4.17:—

"We had some interesting though strenuous times lately following Fritz through and far beyond Bapaume. The most exciting time (which has since been well described in the papers) was one morning when I had an unpleasant awakening. Just before dawn a chap came running past our dug-outs with the pleasant news that Fritz was advancing in force just over the rise. We were soon told to retire to the next village, as our infantry were falling back. The breech-blocks, &c., were removed from the guns, as the latter could not be used under the circumstances. Machine gun and rifle bullets were pretty thick, and the shells were falling in the fields, but not so thickly. At first I thought I would soon be mending Fritz's roads. It was something new for us. Finally, as you know, Fritz got a terrible mauling.

"The weather to-day is glorious. What a wonderful difference it makes to us. It is good to be alive. The Larks are singing beautifully, and to-day I saw the first Swallow this season. The Magpies (*Pica pica*) are building in a small wood not many miles from here. I saw about one hundred of these birds one evening. The Partridges are going about in pairs now. There are a fair number of what I take to be Linnets, and a few tiny Hawks which somewhat resemble our Kestrel in habits. The only other 'birds' that are at all common hereabouts are aeroplanes, of many different species. It must be the 'mating season' for them, too, as I often see them fighting fiercely."

1914-15 STAR (LEFT), BRITISH WAR MEDAL AND THE VICTORY MEDAL (RIGHT)



ITEMS FROM THE FRONT

SOME OF THE ITEMS MAURICE COLLECTED OR SENT HOME

The following items were also found in Maurice's Album, which included cuttings and postcards.

*It was common for soldiers to collect such items when overseas, and often the postcards
were sent back home to family and friends.*

Le Caire - Le Sphynx



POSTCARD

41141. FOLKESTONE: BATHING PLACE, MARINE WALK





TON - THE PAVILION.





Le Caire - Bord du Nil



KARNAK

Les Ramesseumes





LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

THREE OF THE MANY LETTERS SENT HOME BY MAURICE THOMPSON

Letters such as these sent home by Maurice Thompson, illustrate how servicemen were able to write letters to family members and keep the horrors of war from their writings. In one letter for instance, Maurice draws the reader's attention to the lovely landscape and farming scenes, found near the front.

23 Battery,
2nd F. it. B,
1st. Aust. Div.
France
23rd April 1917

Dear Madgie,

I received your letter dated the 18th Feb. [that is over two months ago]. Within the last few days I got eleven letters, ten papers, my birthday hamper, and four novels, so I am quite pleased with myself. The letters are first one from Maudie, one from Mavis, one from you, three from Les, and a few days later two from Mum, two from Father, and one from Auntie Maud.

One of Mum's letters says there is a parcel containing soap, boot polish etc. on its way. I am expecting it in a few days. I hope I get it in alright, as lifebuoy soap is exactly what I want. Tell Mum not to send a sheep skin vest, as the cold weather is over now. In one of Mum's letters dated the 20th of

Feb. she says that £1 was to be enclosed, but I think she must have forgot to put it in, and the letter was not registered. A letter of Maudie's dated 3rd Feb. was registered and contained £1 note.

It's just as well two did not arrive together. One a month is enough. I'm putting three letters in the one green envelope, as these envelopes are so scarce. I've got plenty of ordinary envelopes but letters in those must be censored at our own office, so I can't put much in those. I don't mind if they are censored elsewhere, but I don't like them being read by officers in our own battery. Maudie's letter will have most of the news as I wrote that first. I will write to Mum and Father next week, as it's no use putting the same news in every letter.

I am glad to hear that Ormy's eyesight is a bit better. Les Chandler was still at Seymour at the end of February but I think he must have left Australia by now. He had measles and spent a few days recuperating at Frankston.

He also went to Ararat near the Grampians for a day trip, I've had some very nice letters from him. The

people here work their churns with the aid of a dog. There is a big wide wheel outside, and the dog runs inside this and thus keeps it going. This turns the churn inside the room. The dogs are fine big animals. The houses in France are all roofed with either thatch or tiles, you never see iron.

We have had a fine trip through France, from the extreme South up to the extreme North in Flanders, and we saw some lovely country on the journey and had a real good time. It's marvellous how the farmers here have settled down to the war. You would never think there was a war on to see them ploughing and working right near the firing line. You see shell holes in the ploughed fields. If part of their house is blown away they live in the rest.

Our aeroplanes are wonderfully daring. Shells seem to burst right near them from the anti-aircraft guns, but they never seem to be hit. They are clever at turning and dodging.

I hope all are well at home. I am glad you were all so pleased with the things I sent.

If I had stayed in Egypt I was going to send home some blouse fronts. They were very pretty, but I had no dough at the time.

Well, goodbye till next time.

Love to all

From Maurice.

France.

7th June 1917

Dear Madge,

I was glad to receive your letter of the 1st. April. You had just received a letter from me telling you of my transference to a new battery, but I'm not separated from my coppers, as you surmised. The old battery was divided, one half went to one other battery, and the other half to another. All our equipment and guns went with us. I'm glad to hear Maudie and Doris had such a good time at Geelong, and I am expecting a letter and photos from Percy telling me of the time he had at Alexandra.

The bird you saw near the aviary, which you think by the description in the book to be an ash coloured cuckoo, probably was a pallid cuckoo or a fantail cuckoo, both of which are fair sized birds and fairly common in the bush, and outlying suburbs. The ash coloured species is rather rare, even in the bush, though it's possible the one you saw belonged to

this species. It was probably a cuckoo alright as you say it was eating caterpillars; and caterpillars form the main article of diet of our cuckoos. I quite agree with you, that it is very interesting watching wild birds. It is fascinating studying them in their native bush, in the nesting season, especially when using a camera.

I am pleased to hear that Amy is teaching at the Weir school, and hope she gets the position of a permanent teacher. We are still out resting, having a very quiet time. On the dispatch carrying job, there are three of us, and we have one day on duty, and two off, while we are here. Not bad hours is it? But I consider we are entitled to an easy time now and again.

We are having some decent sports now, running, jumping, boxing, football etc., and there are a few with sore knees, ankles etc. Our battery has come out on top so far in the Brigade, and I think they will win the brigade football competition. There are four teams, and our team has won the first match. I was unable to take part in anything as I sprained my left ankle badly, while playing football one evening.

That was twelve days ago, and it's still a bit tender, though I can walk without limping, and resumed duty four days ago. All our work is done on bikes now the weather is so fine.

If I had been in action when I sprained my ankle I probably would have had to go to hospital. I know one chap who was away for three months with the same thing, but I'm glad I didn't have to leave. A few days after I knocked my ankle, I was inoculated, so I then had a very sore ankle, and a very sore arm.

We had rather a good dinner today. Roast fowl, and onions. The weather is very warm at present, and those tussore silk shirts are proving very comfortable. The first is very dirty at present, and I've put it by for a wash, but one chap wants me to give it to him. I'm going to see how it stands a boil; that's the only way to get the dirt out of it. My braces were issued to me at Broadmeadows, so you can imagine they are pretty dirty and they make all my shirts black in no time. I'm tired of asking the Q.M. for a new pair, so I've just bought a pair in a Froggie shop, that I managed to discover. I also got

a decent pair of brown underpants at the same place, for 4 1/2 francs [3/4].

Tell Mum that Uncle Edwin received the other £4 alright. I got a letter from Auntie Maud recently, and it contained a £1 postal note, which will be useful. That is the second postal note she has sent me, as well as the "quid" for Christmas. Uncle Herb was not too well, when she wrote. She is looking forward to the time when they can both go back to Australia, where she is thinking of buying a small farm in a beauty spot, and Uncle Herb could interest himself in horse and cattle breeding. Auntie Maud will always do me; she is a real good sort.

In a recent letter I had from Les he was telling me about some nightingales he saw and heard, in a creek valley near a little village where he was then stationed. He was lucky enough to find them nesting too. As you may know, the nightingale is a very famous songster, immortalised in many poems by great poets; but Les says that, though it is certainly a very good singer, it can't compare with several of our birds, which far surpass it.

There are many fine song birds around this little village, and they greatly add to the pleasure of a walk along the pretty little creek, that runs through the valley. There are some swamps, near one stretch of the creek, and thousands of magnificently coloured dragon flies inhabit them. They are very interesting to study closely.

Les takes a great interest in them, and we intend to do some photographic work on them, on our return.

They look dangerous insects to anyone unacquainted with them, but they are absolutely harmless, except to smaller flying insects, such as mosquitoes and gnats, and these they devour greedily.

Just outside the door of our billet there is a pretty little nest in a walnut tree. I often watch the two birds feeding the three young, and feel sorry for the female on very hot days, as she stands gasping with the heat, with her wings spread to keep the sun off the chicks. She ought to have had sense enough to build in a more sheltered position. I think they are chaff finches, though I'm not sure. The birds are

common enough, and the male is very pretty in his spring uniform.

I am sending the book of Aust. poems this mail. The pressed pansies in this letter, are from some I found growing wild, not very far from a place named Hermies, near the Cambrai section of the line. I don't think the censor could raise any objections to my mentioning this place, as I've not mentioned what unit I belong to, or when we were there. I had a couple of exciting experiences there, due to some of Fritz's work, but, of course, you must expect a few little incidents like that on this game, and providing they end all right there's no harm done.

I will probably have my dial taken tomorrow, at a lady photographers near here. If they are any good I'll send a few home, and one to Mrs. Diddams, as she asked me for one. She had not had a letter from her son, and it was four months since he sailed; so she tells me in her last letter.

My leave is gradually getting closer, and I will probably be away within six weeks. Our battery is the furthest behind of the lot for leave, or I would

be away sooner. I've got two little souvenirs to send home, but I haven't been able to buy any more lately, and I can't send only two. First time I'm near a decent shop I'll try and get some more, but it is difficult to get anything suitable to send to gents. I'm not sure that we are allowed to send them now, but I'll give it a try.

Well I've nothing more to say at present, so I will bring this epistle to a close, hoping it finds you all in the best of health, and that we are all home before many months are past.

Your affectionate brother,

Morry.

“Playground of Mars”

11th Nov. 1917

Dear Madgie,

I was very pleased to get your letter of 20th. Sept., last night. It is quite unusually up to date. The last letters I had from home were written on about 13th. Aug., five weeks before this one, and I hope the subs. haven't got any intervening mail. You say that this mail was advertised as the Christmas mail. They evidently intend you to get in early, as it has arrived six weeks before Christmas; but better early than late.

The X'mas parcel hasn't lobbed yet, but parcels always take about a fortnight longer than letters to do the journey, so I'm expecting it to put in an appearance within a fortnight. A bit early for Christmas, but none the less useful for that.

Last year you may remember it arrived between Christmas and New Year, when we were out

enjoying a spell in a picturesque little French village called Havernas. This Christmas, if rumour speaks truth, we will also be enjoying a good spell, but I can assure you it's been earned. How and why, I can't tell you here; but I hope to be able to sometime during next year.

I am writing this with a new fountain pen, I got Uncle Edwin to send me. It is an Onoto safety, self filler, and seems a very decent one. Price 12/6. You remember I had the last one pinched recently. I also got an electric torch, a pair of gloves, and several other small items from the same source.

I've just asked him to send me a pair of rubber boots, as they are absolutely necessary, and I haven't been able to get a pair issued to me, or pinch a pair like I did last year. I got a fine pair last winter from a store of them we found in a dugout. Sometime ago I asked Mum to send Uncle Edwin another £5, and I suppose he will receive it shortly. Well, tell her to send another £5 when this letter arrives. It's just as well to have a bit in hand, in case my next leave comes sooner than I expect.

I had a nice letter from Mrs. Chitty [Auntie Nell's sister-in-law at Brighton]. She certainly hasn't had the best of educations, but she is extremely kind hearted and very cheery. When I was over there, her husband was very interested in Australia, and asked me many questions about our climate, agriculture, cities etc. Her daughter, who has just recently celebrated her 21st. birthday, is a very nice girl and very lively. At present she is not so lively I'm told, as her young man, who is in the R.A.M.C., has been sent to Salonika. I won't easily forget their kindness to me when I was down at Brighton.

Uncle Albert sent me a beautifully made brass case to hold my new fountain pen. He made it himself Uncle Ed. tells me.

I would like to have seen Percy dressed as a "gollywog", and hope he got one of you to snap him in his warpaint. I am very anxious to see that photo Percy took of you all on the lawn, and also the one of Mrs. Rutledge's house.

The Aust. Photo Reviews are arriving alright. June and July numbers are to hand. I have received

several "winners", Penny Mags, "Argus", "Herald", W'kly. Tels. etc. lately. Mum's letter containing the £1, has not arrived yet, but it probably will do so within a few days, unless it is registered, which will delay it still longer. Did I tell you I received a small parcel from Mr. & Mrs. Geo. Dyer of Barkly St. Nth. Fitzroy. Mr. Dyer is one of the heads of D. & W. Chandlers the big ironmongers of Fitzroy, is a very decent chap, and was treasurer of the Bird Obs. Club. It was at his place that I delivered that little lecture, that all the papers raved about.

It wasn't exactly a lecture, but a paper on "A Season with the Birds", which secured for me a full membership of the Club. I think you had the unpleasant task of copying most of it, from my hastily scrawled notes.

Recently, while on duty at a certain place, I met a chap named Ogier, who hails from Clunes near Ballarat, but spent three years in Queensland before the War. He is in the wireless section of the Aust. Flying Corps, and seems a very decent sort of chap. We were discussing Australia, and the parts we lived in, when he asked me if I knew Les Dyson or

Violet Swinburne. The latter he says is a good singer.

I remember Les Dyson, and have heard of the lady in question. They were both in the choir weren't they? My friend also tells me that the two persons under discussion were married some time back. I've often heard Maudie and you speak of Violet Swinburne, if I'm not mistaken, but I don't remember seeing her myself.

I'm going to number my letters from now on, and it would be advisable for each of you to follow suit. We can then easily discover if any are missed. But be very careful to number them correctly, and keep an account of the number, date, and a note on any important news the letter contains. Each one keeps a separate account. I will number your letters 1,2,3, and so on, Maudies a separate set of numbers, and, in fact, a separate set for each. The trouble with this system is that after a time you will forget the correct number, unless you keep a careful account.

I have an accurate account of all letters and parcels received and posted by me since a short time after

my arrival in Egypt.

The weather is fairly cold now, but not as bad as the same period during last year. The first fall of snow last year was on the 18th Nov. and on the 16th. & 17th. the weather was bitterly cold, with 3/4 inch of ice covering the mud and water. This is the 14th. and though we've had a few light frosts there's not much sign of ice and snow yet. I'd sooner have the cold and hard frozen ground than this mud, but unless the mud is frozen for at least several inches down, it is worse than before as the horses break through the thin crust and the jagged lumps of ice cut their legs. About 3/4 inch of ice on mud will bear the weight of a man.

I'd like to be back in Victoria now. The weather must be beautiful now, and the bush looking its best. I can imagine the larks singing over Coonan's hill, and the fields along the creek. Every time I hear a blackbird singing it reminds me of the one that used to entertain us from the top of Sutton's chimney. When I get back I intend to have about six months holiday before I settle down to office slavery again. I wish I could get hold of some job

that would keep me travelling in the open air, and wild parts of the Bush.

18th. This afternoon I was extremely pleased to receive a fine large cake from home. I was surprised to find it so fresh looking, and absolutely unbroken. It is quite moist and has kept splendidly except for some mildew on the sides and bottom. If it had been cracked the mildew would have extended along the cracks, but as it wasn't cracked it's all right. It was just cooked nicely, and is just the sort I like. I hadn't had any word that the cake was sent, so it came as a surprise.

I am posting two Aust. Photo—Reviews and an “Anzac Bulletin”, this mail. I'm still keeping well, except for a bit of a toothache which I am going to get fixed up shortly.

Remember me to all our mutual friends and relations, and may this find you all in the best of health. Love to all.

Your affectionate brother, Morry.

Remembering Amateur Photographer and Serviceman Maurice Thompson

By Maurie and Marida Pawsey



Photographer: Late Maurice Thompson
Photographs, postcards and clippings courtesy Maurie & Marida Pawsey 2019
Vest camera photographs courtesy Kath Chanter
Special thanks to Kathie Maynes, David & Debbie Hibbert and Artworkz

First published Wednesday, 24 April 2019

Last updated Wednesday, 24 April 2019