

William Kenneth Lang – VX14941

Known as Ken, William was the son of Walter Waldemare Zachary Lang & he was born in Adelaide, South Australia, on 12th July 1918. Single & working as a Clerk & Motor Engineer, he was living in Punt Road, Richmond, Victoria at the time of his enlistment at Caulfield on 13th May 1940. He gave no next-of-kin at the time of his enlistment.

Taken on strength R.R.D. Ken was transferred to Puckapunyal on 14th May & posted to 2nd 8th Field Regiment the following day.

On 25th June 1940 he married Beryl Edith Lang of Elizabeth Street, Melbourne (fate unknown).

At Puckapunyal, Ken was promoted to Acting Lance Bombardier on 8th August 1940, but this rank was later reverted to Gunner on 17th September 1940.

On 16th November 1940, he joined the embarkation of the Regiment aboard HMT “Strathmore ” at Princes Pier, Port Melbourne, bound for the Middle East. They disembarked near El Kantara, on the Suez Canal, on 17th December 1940.

New Year’s Day 1941, at Kilo 89 in South Palestine, Ken failed to appear on Parade & was duly admonished.

Later, at Qastina Camp on 25th January 1941, he was charged with the offence: “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline” & he was awarded 3 days C.B. (Confined to Barracks).

>>> It is unknown what Battery or Troop Ken was assigned to, however between January and April of 1941 the 2nd 8th were involved in training at Gaza in Palestine with conditions known to be tough. Howling cold winds & rain, with plenty of hard work on pick & shovel to build mud walls & trenches to protect the tents. Ken possibly took leave to Tel Aviv & Jerusalem. The 2nd 8th packed up ready to move from Palestine to Alexandria & then on to Mersa Matruh, in the Western Desert, in early April 1941. (They eventually moved on 19th April).

In Gaza, Ken was transferred to Base Area Signals & struck off strength from 2nd 8th on 14th April 1941 –in the week prior to the move to Alexandria. Ken was evacuated to 1 Australian General Hospital with Gastric Influenza on 26th April 1941 & transferred to X List. This was later diagnosed as “Sandfly Fever” & he was discharged to rejoin his Unit on 7th May.

10th July 1941, Ken was transferred to H.Q. AIF, Base Area Units, H.Q. Sec. where he was taken on strength & later transferred to 1 L of C Provost Company on 23rd July 1941 & appointed Lance Corporal & Graded Group 2 Provost Duties.. From 29th July to 1st August 1941, he was once again evacuated to hospital at Kilo 89 Camp with “Sandfly Fever”.

15th August 1941, Ken relinquished Group 2 Provost Duties & was promoted to Acting Corporal the next day. This rank was to be confirmed on 17th January 1942.

Ken embarked on the British India B1 Steam Navigator RMS “Mauretania” of the Cunard Line bound for (unknown). On 13th February, he was transhipped to the American SS “Egra”, disembarking at (unknown) in Australia on 24th March 1942.

On 11th May 1942, Ken married Harriet Marjorie Berenise Osborn at St. Bartholomew's Church in Norwood, South Australia. Probable brother to Marjorie, Thomas William Osborn (Soldier AIF) – WX1501 (6th Div. Provost Company) was a witness to the marriage.

13th May 1942, Ken was taken in strength from HQ AIF (ME) L of C Provost Company to First Army Provost Company. He was granted home leave from 17th to 26th May 1942.

From 13th to 26th October 1942, Ken was hospitalised with 117 A.G.H. due to (N.Y.D.) – Not yet determined diagnosis). He was later transferred from 1 Aust Army Provost Coy to S.A. L of C on 25th November 1942

Ken was transferred again to G.D.D. for movement to 11 L of C Ind. Provost Platoon on 26th June 1943 & he entrained for the Northern Territory on 28th July 1943.

31st July 1943, he detrained in Number 11 (Central Australia) L of C Sub-Area where he was taken on strength. By now, Marjorie Lang had moved to St. Kilda Road in Melbourne.

On 31st August 1941, Ken was again evacuated to 74 Camp Hospital with acute Gastro Enteritis. He remained there until being discharged back to his Unit on 16th September 1943.

Six months later, on 16th March 1944, Ken was once more hospitalised at 74 Camp Hospital (N.Y.D.G.) – Not yet determined diagnosis Gastro Enteritis. This condition persisted on & off throughout April & May of that year & on 10th May 1944, Ken was assessed Medical Classification B – Debility & Nervasthernia (?)

Ken was transferred to S.I.B. (Australia Special Investigations Branch) Land HQ Vic L of C in Melbourne on 19th May 1944 & his medical category was changed from B to B1 (Debility) on 28th June.

On 24th November 1944, Ken was appointed Lance Sergeant only to be evacuated to 115 Heidelberg Military Hospital – Debility for Investigation. Diagnosed with an Anxiety State, Ken was evacuated to Rockingham Convalescent Home in Kew. He was later assessed as Medical Class D (Anxiety State) on 19th March 1945 & marched out of Royal Park for discharge on 28th March 1945

Marjorie Lang – Her Story

In December 1943, Marjorie left Melbourne on a trip to visit Ken at Mount Isa in North Queensland:

“Left 362 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne at 3pm on Sunday, 26th December 1943. Said au revoir to Mother and Pam, and arrived at Port Melbourne at about 3.15pm. Took luggage by taxi onto wharf and had to pay 2 shillings for my luggage to be taken aboard. We came back out of the wharf gates and waited till boarding time at 4pm with Em. and her people and Ken’s Mother and Dad.

Went on board at 4pm and walked around the decks. Reaching the bow we found our people still waiting at the wharf gates to say goodbye. We waved to them until they left, then went down to our cabin where we hung up a few clothes, possibly needed during the voyage. We were to sail at 5pm.

Most of the crew were Chinese and when our Steward came in with boxes of strawberries, we asked him when we would be sailing ? He looked rather dumbly at us and said something about “the Heads at Midnight” so we thought that he meant that we would reach the Victorian Heads at that time. Arriving up on deck at about 6pm we found that we were well on our way. No wonder our Steward looked confused, he must have thought we were cuckoo !

After being on deck for awhile, we needed to see our Steward about Table Seating arrangements, only to find that we would not be able to sit together or even at the same table. Dinner was at 7pm and the elderly couple at my table were very nice. Our Chinese waiter was middle-aged and also very nice. He agreed, with a bow, at the end of the meal that I could keep the menu.

After dinner, we got our knitting and proceeded to the lounge to write a few lines to our sweetheart husbands and our parents. We then went up on deck to watch our approach to Queenscliffe and The Heads. We proceeded to knit and somehow I felt quite dizzy – a feeling that I had not experienced before on previous sea trips. I gave up knitting and then felt quite okay. Darkness descended on us soon after we passed through The Heads and as it was getting cold, we went below to get our overcoats. We walked around the decks several times, then stopping on the starboard side, we leaned on the rail and talked and sang until we were the only ones left on deck. It was 11pm so we decided to turn in.

We had a three-berth cabin and our cabin mate was Miss Mackay, who we decided was a schoolteacher. She was very nice but we didn’t see much of her, so we propped open the cabin door, turned out the lights and proceeded to the land of sleep.

Monday 27th

Breakfast was not being served until 8.30am so we took our time rising at about 7.45am. I was feeling quite hungry and ready for breakfast. The lady at my left at table was late down to breakfast and I wondered whether she might have been seasick, but no, she was quite well.

At the table, there were all sorts of tales about when we should arrive at our destination. It seems that everybody had heard a different story but we decided that it would probably be Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning. The other four people excused themselves, but I felt that I could do nothing else but remain until the other lady had finished.

Em had finished breakfast some time before me and was knitting in the lounge, so I went to get mine too. We did very little knitting, for we wandered around up to the boat deck where we found some soldiers sorting out nuts and bolts, so we stayed talking to them for awhile until luncheon at 1pm.

At luncheon, there were still many theories as to when we might reach Sydney and someone kindly said that it would not be until noon on Wednesday. I had told my Mother I expected to arrive on the Tuesday so I was concerned that they would worry for our safety when we were late. I had told our waiter that I was keeping the menus and about half way through the meal, he proudly presented me with a copy of the Christmas Day Menu which was quite colourful. I later discovered that he had autographed it and his name was Tom Ah Sing.

After lunch, we walked around the decks and then went back to our cabin to rest. At 4pm we had to don our lifebelts for a drill and to proceed to our position at No. 1 Lifeboat Station. We were inspected by the Captain and Chief Officer, then returned to our cabin to cress for dinner at 6.30pm.

During dinner, our waiter explained that we should be docking in Sydney on Tuesday evening sometime, which was somewhat a relief. I quite enjoyed this meal for Pickled Pork was on the menu and chatting to Mrs. Fielding on my left, I learned that she was also going to Cronulla.

We went back to the lounge afterwards to continue our writing and after some time the coast was visible. Someone said that it was Tasmania (???) and our informer was quite positive and could not be dissuaded. We again donned our overcoats and stayed up on deck until most people had retired. It was nearly 11.15pm when we turned in and although it was easy to get to sleep, I did not sleep well.

Tuesday 28th

At breakfast we were told that we expected to dock in Sydney at 5pm. We wondered whether we would still have dinner on board but could not determine this ?

The sun was out so we took our knitting up on deck. After a short time I developed a pain which later took me below to my cabin for an hour. During the morning a plane flew out from land and circled around us several times, signalling to us as he went back inland. The plane returned later in the morning and this time it flew just above sea level and the pilot waved to us. All the morning we were quite close to the coast.

I didn't feel like going up to lunch, but as we suspected that it might be our last meal on board, I put in an appearance about half way through the meal. I felt a little better after that. It was still indefinite about dinner, so I gave my tip to Tom Ah Sing. He refused at first, but Mrs. Fielding and I insisted so he took the money.

I considered lying on my bunk once more, but we decided to do our packing. As we were so close to the coast, we got all dressed up and went on deck to watch the coast, with its small coves and beaches, and in some cases, houses were built very close to the edge of the steep cliffs.

When at last the Sydney Heads were in sight, we went down to the bottom deck to get a closer view of our arrival. We could see quite a few steamers approaching and leaving the harbour, it was a sight to see ! We hadn't gone far between the Heads when a pilot came out to guide us through a narrow channel, then leaving us to carry on by ourselves. It was very picturesque with the small island in the Harbour and the Hawkesbury River.

The famous Bridge came into view and the harbour was busy with ferries to and fro. Just approaching the Bridge we saw Taronga Zoo in the distance and on the port side was a small island where the first convicts and prisoners were kept. There were a couple of large camouflaged steamers lying at anchor and also a Hospital Ship.

All the passengers wondered whether we would ever make it under the Bridge, for we could not possibly make it, but we did and quite easily.

All the wharves were busy with ships alongside them, and we passed another Hospital Ship. We finally pulled in to what seemed to be the only available wharf – Dalgetty's No. 1 Wharf – at the expected time of 5pm.

We waited awhile for other passengers to disembark before making our way to our cabin to pick up our luggage. We had to pay a Chinese Steward 2 shillings to take it from our cabin to the wharf deck. There was no transport at all in sight so we struggled on to the wharf with our luggage and went in search of a taxi. We learnt from fellow passengers that there were no taxis, so Em. tried to ring her brother-in-law, but he had already left the University. What to do ?

Back on the wharf we found a delivery van, so after begging and struggling with our luggage, it was to be taken to the cloakroom of the Central Station at a cost of 9 shillings. That fixed, we had to find our way to a bus or tram at Miller's Point. Our wait there was a long one, but finally a tram came along and we were on our way to the Central Station. It was difficult to recall the surroundings momentarily, but we sent telegrams from a dirty old post office attached to the station. I went to get a piece of blotter that I saw a woman using, to be told that it was hers, but she loaned it to us. That done, we proceeded to the station and being well after 6pm we decided to have some tea at the Railway Cafeteria. The meal was dreadful and cost us 2 shillings and sixpence.

We tried to find the platform that would take us to Cronulla and after consulting a porter, we had to go some distance down a ramp and steps, but we finally found platform No. 23. We then purchased our tickets for 2 shillings and ten pence each and made our way to the cloakroom to find our luggage. After approaching several counters, we were told that our luggage was on its way up. This was another long wait and it cost us another 1 shilling and eight pence for cloakroom fees. A porter needed to be summoned for the long distance to our platform so that cost us another 2 shillings. He did put the luggage on the train for us though and within a few seconds we were on our way. What a close call !

All the while I had said that we should leave our luggage in Sydney but we hadn't prepared for this and had nothing to put on.

It was quite a long train ride to Cronulla – about 50 minutes. A gentleman helped us from the train to a taxi, which we shared with another couple. Our ride to Em's sister's place cost us 2 shillings and sixpence and by this time we were firmly convinced that we owned quite a large portion of Sydney! We were also five hours – from 5pm till 10pm – arriving at our destination.

We left our luggage out on the road where the taxi driver had put it and went inside to see if Em's sister was at home. The landlady was finally aroused and Em. was told to ring the bell. We couldn't find a bell in the darkness, so we finally made our way around to a narrow laneway, where we saw a light and Em. called out.

I met Em's sister, mother-in-law & baby niece, Kae (just six weeks old). She was a dear little baby and very good, but she had wind in her tummy and of course made rude noises. It was baby's feeding time so we were able to spend about half an hour or more with her which was lucky as we wouldn't get to see her next morning.

After a nice cup of cocoa and a wash, we finally put our weary bodies to bed. There were also two letters from my husband there waiting for me.

Wednesday 29th

Next morning, we got up and had breakfast, then had to decide what we would wear for the day. Em chose a darkish green creaseless frock and I chose my navy uncrushable jacket suit.

We left home about 10am saying that we didn't expect to be home for dinner, but would be home for tea. No hats were worn and we took our knitting in our handbags. I wore no stockings, which was a thing I never practised. It was the first time I had gone without them.

The train took us to St. James Underground Station and from there we found our way to the airways office. We asked how soon we could get a plane to Brisbane and were promptly told that we could go straight away and the bus would leave there in one hour to take us to Mascot Airport.

We only had what we stood up in but we didn't want to miss the opportunity, so we agreed and they said our luggage could follow in a later plane. That hour was all we had to find the Post Office to send telegrams and to find a Bank for Em. to get some money

In our excitement, we dashed right past the Post Office and a policeman could not be found to ask where to go, so we asked a taxi driver if he could take us to Cronulla. He couldn't so we made our way back to the Post Office. After sending telegrams and posting a Registered letter, with the key to Em's sister's flat in it, we asked a Post Office Official the way to the Bank. He showed us to Barrack Street Bank, but we were then sent to the Martin Place Office. We arrived there to learn that we had to go on to the Castlereagh Street Branch. Finally we were in the right place, but it seemed to take an eternity before Em. was attended to.

We finally emerged from the Bank with only 7 minutes to spare and I simply HAD to find a Ladies' Toilet Room. We knew there was one on the way, and despite finding it occupied, we somehow made it back to the Airways Office on time. We reported and were told that they had omitted to weigh us, so we were then weighed – Em. going 9stone 10 ounces and me 9 stone.

Out we went and climbed into the bus. There were only four passengers and the hostess.

Em. and I were positively amused at our plight, but we consoled ourselves with the fact that we were two, and it being fine in Sydney, then it was bound to be so in Brisbane. We were also consoled by the fact that no one else knew we were travelling to an almost unknown place, without luggage or the slightest knowledge where we could stay.

The plane was due to leave at 1pm but that was delayed until 1.45pm so we decided to go upstairs for some dinner. A plane came in whilst we were having dinner, but we were told that it was not our plane, so we finished our dinner.

Dinner over, we tidied ourselves and sat down to wait. Departure was again delayed until 2.10pm.

About 2pm, my name was called over the microphone for me to report to the office. I was told that I was not going on the first flight but would have to wait for a second an hour later.

Ten minutes later, Em. was off on the "Bungana" Royal Mail plane and I was left to wait for the later plane. My thoughts wandered in the direction that it was an omen, and that one plane or another might crash, or maybe I might not even travel that day.

Finally, at 3.15pm we were told to board the plane and I was given No. 1 seat. I was quite pleased that our plane was the much smaller "ANA" plane for I had a better ride in the smaller planes. No time was wasted and we were soon passing over the Hawkesbury River. The scenery was excellent.

Gradually we were flying into the clouds and about half way we were surrounded by dark, heavy clouds and we were unable to see land. Soon it began to rain and we flew right into the storm. The rain was very heavy and the clouds so dense that we flew blind practically, for the last half of the journey. With the roar of the engines and the heavy rain it was almost impossible to talk or hear.

The soldier sitting opposite me was on his way back to his Unit to get his discharge. He had been AWL for 3 weeks and so would have to give himself up upon arriving in Brisbane. It was his first ride in a plane and he was more than a little nervous.

There was no door to the pilot's cabin and I could see everything that they did – all the gadgets they turned, etc. and also the wireless operator. He belonged to the RAAF and was a Sgt. Wireless Operator.

We finally landed on the Brisbane Aerodrome at 6.30pm. It was pouring rain and the pilot had to except me, of course – and as the plane stopped some distance from the waiting room, I had to make a dash for it.

Em. was waiting there to meet me, and greeted me with the news that The Peoples' Palace could not find accommodation for us, so we were in quite a fix. We had no luggage, nowhere to go and it was pouring with rain. By the time we reached Brisbane it was dark.

Em. thought she knew a couple of Provosts in Brisbane, so when we got out of the airways bus, we walked down the street hoping to meet some of them. We hadn't gone far when we came across two, but they weren't a bit helpful. They didn't know the Provosts that Em. mentioned, but they told us how to get to the Roma Street Station, where we had intended to catch the "Midnight Horror" to Toowoomba. At least we could spend the night on the train as we were told that there was no accommodation to be had ANYWHERE !

We duly arrived at the station and learnt that the train was not due to leave until 9pm so we decided to make our way to the Post Office and try to contact Captain Mackay. We asked some people if we could share their taxi to the Post Office, but the Post Office was never reached that night, for we got into conversation with the two girls and the driver, and he took us to the YWCA. He said he would wait while Em. went inside to see whether or not they could put us up for the night. Fortune smiled on us, for we were able to stay the night – bed and breakfast, 3 shillings and nine pence each. Our taxi driver only charged us 2 shillings and gave us directions to the Post Office, the airways & QANTAS.

Fortune again went our way, and when we had a look at our sleeping quarters, we asked where we might find something to eat. We had not eaten since early in the afternoon and it was now after 9pm. Our hostess said that she could give us a cold salad if that would do. We were very thrilled to get it and jumped at her offer. It was beautiful and we ate it all, and the cost was only 1 shilling and sixpence.

The bathroom was our next port of call and then to bed. Whilst in the bathroom, the hostess came in and found me with one foot in hot water in the basin, for it had rained continuously all through our travels and I thought that I might catch a cold.

Now to bed – well it was easy to undress, for all we had to take off was our dress and shoes, and we were ready for bed !

Our hostess had told us all sorts of tales about our room mate, and when we went into the room we found her, with clothes strewn all around the place. One bed was very close to her's, with the head right alongside, so we decided to doss into the other bed together. It was lights out at 11pm and everyone was supposed to be in by then.

Our flight was a source of amusement to us and we giggled away at ourselves in bed until we heard the hostess and another lady doing the rounds to see who was in and who wasn't. All at once, our light went on, but she didn't look to see if we were in, she knew we were, but our room mate was still not in and we wondered all the more about her. About ten minutes later, she did come in but we still didn't get a look at her as she almost immediately went out to join her friends next door !

When she finally came in to bed all she did was pull her dress over her head and step into bed. Her shoes had been removed earlier. I gave Em. a knock and said "gosh, that was quick" and we both began to wonder and to chuckle away to ourselves. The room was very stuffy and we could not open a window as it was pouring with rain and beating our way.

Thursday 30th

In the morning we woke to the clanging of a bell which meant that breakfast was on, so it was out of bed and to the bathroom to wash. On our return our room mate said "Have you been to breakfast ?" We said we had not, so she just jumped out of bed, put on her overcoat and said "I think I will come too". We had quite expected her to be some time, but she was right there on our heels. Still in her overcoat, all she had done was put a scarf over her hair, she could not possibly have washed.

Breakfast was tea and toast which was most enjoyable. On returning to our room, we both had a finger in the making of the bed, and then set out to buy ourselves an umbrella or small coat each. Our hostess told us where to find several large stores, but gave us no hope of buying an umbrella.

A few things like toothpaste and brush and powder were bought in our search for coats or umbrella. A navy blue three quarter coat was all we could get for I only had 14 coupons and Em. only had 15 coupons. Ten coupons and 47 shillings and nine pence was the cost of our coats, and both were identical.

The next port of call was the airways office to see about our luggage, and also to enquire about a plane to Cloncurry or Townsville. They had nothing and told us to ask QANTAS.

We were some time getting to QANTAS owing to the heavy rain, and when our destination was reached, we were told that they had two seats available, but could not let us know until 2.30pm whether or not the plane would be going on the morrow.

Our hopes were high, and our next port of call was the Post Office so that I could book a call to Captain Mackay at Toowoomba. I was advised that there was a delay of two hours on the line, so we decided that we would go back to the YWCA to make sure of a bed for the night, in case we had to stay, and also to get some lunch.

On our way back from lunch, I thought it could be worth our while to try the Tourist Bureau, and here our success was even better. The train was due to leave this same night for Mount Isa and the booking clerk promised to hold two seats for us until 2.30pm. The official told us that even if we flew to Cloncurry, we would still have to wait until Sunday for the train to Mount Isa, so if we flew, it would mean spending two days there with no luggage. We later learned, that had we flown to Cloncurry, we could have joined the train the same day !

To the GPO we went to take the booked call, but the call had come in during our absence, but they would put the call through again as quickly as possible. When I got through again, Captain Mackay was at lunch, so the call had to be postponed until 2pm. There was a waiting room there and having our knitting with us, we decided to sit and knit until the call came through.

During our wait, we talked over the situation and came to the conclusion that we were better off if we took the train, for at least we would be on our way, and if we were to be put off the plane, as might happen, there would not be another train for a week. Whilst I waited for the phone call, Em. went to the Government Tourist Bureau and purchased our tickets.

When she came back, I had just finished talking to "Pop" Mackay, who was very pleased to hear from me and was disappointed that I could not make time to go up to see him.

Our next move was to inform the airways (QANTAS) that we had made other arrangements. They said that they could not confirm anything for another hour anyway and were pleased we had told them. We in turn were pleased about our decision. Back to the YWCA to tell them that we would not in fact need our beds for the night as we were going on, and to complete our letters.

At 4pm we had to call at the airways office to see if our luggage had arrived, but we were out of luck, so we asked if they would put it on the train for us. They promised to do this – if the Railways would accept it – so it was down to Roma Street where we struck a very abrupt old gentleman who said that it could NOT go “passenger freight” but could be sent “freight on” ? The airways agreed to put on the train for us - “freight on” as we had been advised.

Now, to buy a shopping or string bag, and a few odds and ends that we would need for the trip. To our amazement, we found all the shops were closed, even the chemists. That just about capped it all, but as chemists are usually open again for an hour our hopes were raised, until we learned that they would only be open between 6 & 7pm.

We had tea again at the YWCA, and from there we made our few scanty purchases, filling our handbags to the utmost, then it was back to the YW to clean ourselves up and to press our frocks.

When we left the YWCA, we had half an hour to catch the train. We duly arrived at the station, found our seats and then purchased some fruit for the trip, then it was back to our seats to await our departure.

At 8pm sharp we steamed out of Roma Street Station and were on our way. There were only two others in our compartment – two men – one Merchant Navy man, the other a cattleman. It was not long before conversation was struck up between us and we learned that our Merchant Navy companion was going to Mackay and hadn’t been home for 4 years. The cattleman was on his way back to Julia Creek after a 3 week holiday in Brisbane.

I started to keep account of the names of the places where the train stopped that night, but of course lost count.

Friday 31st December 1943

By this time the rain had ceased and it was quite cool but it looked like

>>>> No more of Marjorie’s notes could be found. What an enormous journey for a girl who was only about 28yo at the time, though it seems that she was an experienced traveller.

What chances to be taken, in those early days, in a totally unknown and unanticipated environment !

Marjorie did add:

“ I omitted to say that I had sent a telegram from Brisbane to Ken, telling him to expect “two parcels” on the 4pm train at Mount Isa on Sunday

“We arrived at 12.05am on Monday 3rd January 1944”

>>> What an amazing and beautiful story, especially when it must now be realized that Ken Lang was struggling with the effects of Anxiety Disorder and in need of pending and urgent hospitalisation.

Editor: “For what is love ?”

