

Deposited by Mrs. N. Weidenhofer June 1982
Access: May be consulted.

JOHN LYNDON WEIDENHOFER

WAR TIME CORRESPONDENCE FROM NEW GUINEA 1944-1945

DX.9.
1-12

Letters from J.L. Weidenhofer to his wife 1941-1945

Sergeant John (Jack) Weidenhofer's letters to his wife Nancy, mainly while serving in New Guinea from March 1944 until December 1945. At first he served in the catering services but in March 1944 he was transferred to ANGAU, the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit formed in 1942 to take over the administration of districts as the enemy were repulsed. He then looked after stores and supplies in various parts of New Guinea.

Letters were written several times a week often several pages long, some on paper supplied by forces clubs or organisations such as the Salvation Army and were usually posted through ANGAU, Port Moresby, or Lae, or, in the Admiralty Islands, through the British Fleet Mail Office, Sydney (with Australian or British stamps) or through the U.S. Base (U.S. stamp). For security there is little reference to war activities or the names of the various villages or islands, but Sgt. Weidenhofer seems to have served first in the Port Moresby district, in villages near the Laloki River and Kokoda Trail and in coastal villages, then in the north, near Lae, and finally in the Admiralty Islands (Manus) where he joined his brother Reay.

Jack Weidenhofer's letters reflect some conditions of the life of the Pacific forces in the closing stages of the war. He describes the various forces clubs visited when travelling or waiting for transport, the food, bananas, fish etc., chocolate and other supplies available, the heat and humidity, leisure activities such as cricket matches with native teams, the regular cinema shows under the palm trees, his own hobby of photography and 9.5. mm movie film making, and educational courses (he was studying bookkeeping and sign writing to help his civilian career). The most important things of all, however, were the letters and newspapers from home and the parcels of cakes, sweets etc. sent by his wife. He compares the conditions of the U.S. forces, especially their better food and he praises their ice-cream and their superior medical services during a short period in the U.S. Navy Hospital at Seadler Harbour, Admiralty Islands, but he concludes that the men are much the same and just as homesick for their families.

As storekeeper Jack Weidenhofer made friends with many natives. A note dictated and signed by his boy, Kausis, was enclosed in a letter of 15 June 1944, and he asked his wife to buy a Bible for another boy, Kila. He describes native villages, especially the coastal ones but noted the number of bomb craters and the destruction of coconut palms by war in some places. He describes the canoes, fishing, craftwork, children's games, clothing (when worn) and the native drums, sometimes used when permitted to announce the approach of the lugger bringing stores. He purchased or was given many souvenirs to send home, such as string bags, mats, grass skirts, shells and skipping rope handles and a miniature outrigger canoe especially made for his little daughter. He mentions the mission churches of the Rev. Ure and Rev. D. Rankin and their families with whom he sometimes stayed for weekends. He liked the joyful singing of familiar hymns translated into Motu and missed it when he moved to another area where 'pidgin' was the only common language. Years later one of his friends, Rachel, sent him a copy of the Motu hymn book published by the London Missionary Society (1959 see no. 26). He made drawings of native villages, huts, the church, the store, canoes, vegetation, etc for his daughter (see also 13).

Above all these letters show the effect of war and separation on an average family. He mentions rationing censorship and advises his wife about insurance and where to go for advice when needed as there were reports of people trying to take advantage of soldiers' wives and widows receiving pensions. Mainly he writes about plans for the future and alterations to their house: a new bathroom, furniture for the child's room (the best possible, he did not want any second hand stuff). Little Heather's progress, her dancing lessons (but she was not to be forced), he was glad she had a playmate but recommended that children should not be forced to share toys, children should accompany their parents on holidays. He enclosed little letters and drawings for Heather (see also 13). He chose a tombstone for the grave of the baby Peter (died 1943). When a new baby was expected in 1945 he hoped it would be a girl, to be called Isobel (she was born in December 1945) and advised his wife to be careful and to walk the long way home rather than the steeper route. He sent flowers for his wife's birthday through his sister Lin, admitting that he would rather face the jungle himself than carry flowers through the streets or on a tram. His letter of 5 May 1944 refers to the controversy over the Theatre Royal. There are also references to other members of the family, relatives from South Australia met in the forces and to friends, including a fellow sergeant, Joe Zagami, from Brisbane.

The letters are arranged in bundles chronologically. Up to May 1945 the letters from New Guinea were numbered.

DX.9/1	1941	July 21	To his wife in hospital (1 letter)
2	1942	Brighton Camp	(6 letters)
3	1943	Dec - 1944	Jan. Launceston (4 letters)
4	1944	Jan-Feb.	In transit Melbourne, Brisbane, Townsville (12 letters).
5	1944	Feb-May	New Guinea, Port Moresby district letters 1-36.

(contd)

DX.9/6	1944	June-Aug.	Port Moresby district,	letters 38-62
7	1944	Sept-Nov.		letters 63-82
8	1944	Nov-Dec.	Salamania & Lae	letters 83-98
9	1945	Jan-Feb.	Lae	letters 99-114
10	1945	Mar, Apr, May	in transit to and from Brisbane (20 letters)	leave via
11	1945	May-July	Lae (in transit) and Admiralty Islands	(26 letters)
12	1945	Aug-Dec.	Admiralty Islands	(46 letters)

DX.9/

13 Letters to daughter Mar. 1944 - Dec. 1945

Letters to his little daughter Heather, describing birds, palms, native villages, native children's games, the camp cats, illustrated by drawings of cinema shows under the palm trees, native villages, native dress, children's games, canoes, the mission church, the lugger bringing stores and mails etc.
(42 papers)

DX.9/

14-16. J.L. Weidenhofer's letters to his sister Lyn and parents 1944, 1945

Family news and life in New Guinea.
(3 letters)

DX.9/

17 Sgt. J. Zagami to J. Weidenhofer 26 Feb. 1945

He was to marry Betty on 9 April and invited Jack to stay with them in Brisbane on his return from leave.
(1 paper)

DX.9/

18. Dorothy Williams to J.L. Weidenhofer 2 Nov. 1945.

Serving in W.A.A.A.F. Townsville and Bowen.
(1 paper)

DX.9/

19 Letter to Nancy W. from brother-in-law Reay 4 Mar. 1944

A good idea to let the house.
(1 paper).

DX.9/ Part of a letter to Nancy N.D.

20

Mother's day, crocheting edge of blanket end.
(1 paper).

DX.9/

21 Letter from Heather from Auntie Betty ND
Pictorial letter to child.

DX.9/

22 Japanese notes 1945

Paper ~~£~~ 1 and 1 shilling notes issued by the Japanese
Government
(3 papers)

DX.9/
23 Surrender information 1945

Notices in Japanese and 'pidgin' explaining that Allies held all sea lanes and asking natives to bring surrendered Japanese to the nearest Commanding Officer.
(3 papers)

DX.9/
24 Photographs - New Guinea 1944-1945

Photographs of army mobile canteens, native villages, fishing with bow and curved arrow, Rouna Falls, U.S. planes, etc. in album and loose (some duplicates) with negatives. Also ANZAC parade Hobart.
(bundle)

DX.9.
25 Motuan medical vocabulary, Lieut.J.N. Walshe c 1942-4

Booklet printed by N.G.F. Printing Unit. *+ lavender in paper bag*

DX.9/
26 'Ane', Motu Hymn Book, London Missionary Society 1959

Presented to J.L.W. by 'Rachel'.

+ 11 stamped envelopes addressed to his wife, Nancy

POST-WAR: J.L. WEIDENHOFER.

DX.9/
27 Letter of thanks for photographs 1947

From Medical Officer, Royal Hobart Hospital, addressed to Mercury Office.

DX.9/
28 Acknowledgment of resignation from Mercury Nov. 1951.

Note: J.L.W. had worked as photographer for the Mercury

DX.9/
29 Appointment to Education Dept. Visual Aids Centre 12 Dec. 1951.

30,31 Education Dept. Efficiency Awards 1952, 1953.

Visual Aids Centre.