

## Appendix 16

### Letters from John Sloan

#### John G Sloan    Known as Johnnie Sloan

Gallantry Awards:            Territorial Efficiency Medal

Most of what we know of John Sloan is through a number of letters to Joan Guise during the War.

He wrote to Joan after Tony's died expressing his deepest sympathy and explaining how he had met Tony when he was about 16½ and was greatly impressed by him. He obviously had become a firm member of the Pinfold Road clan from a few years before the war.

In June 1944, he volunteered to go overseas to join the Civil Affairs and as he was about to embark for the continent in August he heard from Pinfold Road that Tony had died. His sympathy letter indicates that he had met up with Joan earlier and then explains how he met Tony some seven years before presumably when Tony was about 20 years old, in 1937.

The reference to his mother, the London bombing and Pinfold Road in the same sentence suggests that he lived locally in the Streatham area and from the army records below he must have joined the gunners earlier in the war and then acquired the rank of Bombadier (BDR) which is the rank of corporal in the Royal Artillery.

<b>Name:</b>	J G Sloan
<b>Rank:</b>	Gunner
<b>Service Number:</b>	902780
<b>Authority:</b>	A.O. 134/46
<b>List Number:</b>	4
<b>Authority Date:</b>	1946
<b>Service:</b>	British Army
<b>Primary Unit:</b>	Royal Artillery
<b>Secondary Unit:</b>	Heavy Anti-Aircraft
<b>Archive Reference:</b>	WO102_36

In this first letter, a condolence one, written on 28<sup>th</sup> Sept 1944, he expresses beautifully how he felt about Tony as a person and subsequently his new family.

“I think I was sixteen and a half when I first met Tony – I had paid a visit to the Adam's and was on the point of leaving when Tony walked it. We chatted about one thing and another until midnight and then he took me back to his den in Kirkstall Road where he made some of his famous coffee and continued our conversation. From this night I became a staunch admirer of Tony and was proud to think that he honoured me with his friendship. From then on I met several interesting people but none that would stick in my memory for evermore than Tony, except, of course, your dear brother and yourself.”

Having joined the Civil Affairs Group, he thought he was going to France following the June D Day landings however, much to his surprise, his boat went to Egypt where he settled for a while. It was from here that he wrote and, like Tony, he wrote back about all the details of what he could buy in the NAAFI and how much items were.

He must have been about 23 years old at the time.

His next letter written two months later indicate that he is working again with the Civil Affairs group but in Greece just after the German force withdrew from the country in October 1944. He explains that his job was involved with transport of food etc to the island in the Province of Preveza.

Sadly by the time that the Allies moved into Greece the Civil War had started making life exciting and a little difficult for our troops who were there to help with relief work.

### **Greek Civil War**

First phase: 1943–1944

(1 year)

Second Phase: 3 December 1944 – 11 January 1945

(1 month, 1 week and 1 day)

Third Phase: 30 March 1946 – 16 October 1949

(3 years, 6 months, 2 weeks and 2 days) The Greek Civil War was a civil war in Greece fought between the Greek government army (supported by the United Kingdom and the United States) and the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) — the military branch of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE)(supported by Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria) from 1946 to 1949. The Soviet Union avoided sending aid. The fighting resulted in the defeat of the DSE by the Hellenic Army.

Before Christmas 1944, he and others were evacuated from Greece to Taranto, Southern Italy because of the Civil War, but he returned within six weeks. He was not very happy with Taranto although he did enjoy a visit to Bari on the coast about 60 miles north.

His letters are fascinating because of the precise details he gave of his work and experiences and the descriptions of the countryside.

After six weeks he returned to Greece settling in Corfu continuing the type of work he was doing before, but also he was elected as entertainments NCO. His approach to his work, fundamentally of the social welfare of the men around, seems in so many ways a reflection of the way that Tony approached life as an officer in England and in India.

Johnnie set up a Mess for the men from a bare room which seems to have been finished to a fairly high quality in much the same way as Tony set up a Mess in the Jungle in India even going to bother of painting dancing girls on the walls. It is not surprising that the two hit it off so well at their first encounter seven years before.

Towards the end of May, he was posted to Athens and it was while there, that he met up with Paulos, one of Tony's cousins on the Fleuss side of the family, who was working on relief work as well, in his work with the RASC. Paulos or rather Paul Frankland was a son of Mater's sister Audrey and was obviously a significant member of the Pinfold Road clan as was his brother known as Jiminy Cricket who was also out in Greece at the time.

We read in the last letter that we have from him to Joan that unfortunately Johnnie did not have the drunken orgy in true Guise/Fleuss style that he hoped for with the two Franklands on VJ day because of getting Sandfly Fever and ending up in Hospital for some time on a couple of occasions. After this and on his way back to his Unit, he did get time to his delight in Athens photographing antiquities.

Where ever John was all his letters were address from:

902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.  
4 Supply and Provisions Depot "D" region  
(Balkans ) MEF  
Military Liaison Greece C.M.F.

**Map of Italy and Greece showing the 5 places in **RED** referred to by John Sloan**



**The first letter was of condolence  
for the death of Tony Guise**

**28/09/1944** From 902780 SLOAN J.G.

**Comment** from Egypt.

28<sup>th</sup> Sept 1944

Jo', my dear.

You will be more than surprised, I think, to receive a letter from one whom you no doubt thought had forgotten about you and all those dear to you.

After January, when I was last on leave, I was unfortunate enough to receive no more leave and in June I volunteered to go overseas in Civil Affairs, preferably in 21 AG (which is France).

On the first of August I received embarkation leave and it was not until my last night that I went over to 4 Pinfold Road – the Doodlebugs so scared mother that I did not wish to leave her.

On the last night- practically my last in England - I learnt of your grievous loss.

Believe me, Jo', when I say I cannot put into words on paper what I actually feel and that my most heartfelt sympathies go out to you in your bereavement.

I have thought these last few weeks - when I was cut off from all communication with the outside world – so much of you and it hurt more than I can explain that God had dealt you two such severe blows within twelve months.

I was more than proud to call Tony a friend, as indeed a great friend he had proved to me during the seven years that he harboured me with his friendship. It would be impossible for me to forget Tony for his qualities were such that they will be indelibly imprinted upon my memory.

I think I was sixteen and a half when I first met Tony – I had paid a visit to the Adam's and was on the point of leaving when Tony walked in. We chatted about one thing and another until midnight and then he took me back to his den in Kirkstall Road where he made some of his famous coffee and continued our conversation. From this night I became a staunch admirer of Tony and was proud to think that he honoured me with his friendship. From then on I met several interesting people but none that would stick in my memory for evermore than Tony, except, of course, your dear brother and yourself.

If only I had known earlier of Tony I would have paid a visit to you on my leave for I cannot possibly make this pen put on paper what I really wish to say. All I can really say is that I am more than sorry and that I am only waiting for the day that I land in England in order that I may express myself properly.

When I saw Yvonne and Marie I was convinced I was going to France because I had been told so when my posting came through. You can imagine my surprise, therefore, when I saw the size of the boat on which I was to embark. I then thought that perhaps I should be going to the South of France but after a few days at sea I realised that I should not see France on the trip.

I was not really surprised therefore when I found myself in Egypt. It would have been an experience to go through France from one end to the other – not that I wish it for I have already seen enough, although I have not walked through a town or village but have merely passed through them on a train. Even so, Cairo, was a great shock to me. Perhaps one day I shall be able to spend more time in that town and it would be interesting to see then how one part of the world lives. I will tell you a lot more about Egypt in my future letters but suffice it to say that during my short stay in this country I have formed the opinion that our slums, compared with an Egyptian village, would be regarded as palaces.



Not having been outside the two camps that I have been stationed in, I can give you very little idea of the price of goods etc. although have been given to understand that genuine champagne can be bought in a first class restaurant for approximately £3-16-0. South African Brands which are fairly dear in England being priced at 3/6 a measure sell for between 2½ d and 1/0½ according to the type of restaurant or bar visited. The NAAFI's are very good and cater for all ranks. American cigarettes such as Chesterfield and Lucky Strike sell for seven pence halfpenny and Senior Service Greys 333' are priced at ten pence. All prices are for 20 cigarettes. The Players and Gold flake sold are made in Egypt and they are only 10d for 20. Toilet articles in the NAAFI besides being more or less unlimited – as are the cigarettes ( if you want 200 you can have them ) are on the whole cheaper than in England. 5 Gillette razor blades cost 1/0½ as compared with 1/3 in England; Dettol 11¼ d Lux, Palmolive, Lifebuoy and other popular brands of soap 3¾ d Colgate and Macclean's toothpastes 11¼ d and so on. Beer is a bit of a snag – the only kind being sold in the NAAFI or anywhere else for that matter being a Lager brewed in Egypt which in that excellent institution the NAAFI costs the enormous sum of 10d for a bottle containing a pint and an third. I will certainly write to you again before many days pass, All my Love to Rhoal {Raoul} and yourself

Johnnie.

21/11/1944  
From Sloan To Joan



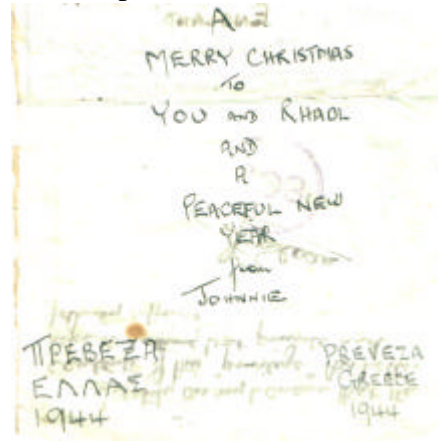
**Christmas card sent for the Mediterranean  
Johnnie Sloan was in Greece at the time.**

25/11/1944

To Pinfold Rd  
Forwarded to Meols.

My Dear Jo'

Whether or not I have explained before these, Air letters were issued in lieu of Christmas cards, I can not remember but it will not hurt to repeat the information. I am no artist so you will have to excuse my feeble attempt at a Christmas Card:-



My Greek is becoming so good that I can now show it off - hence the peculiar marks in the bottom left hand corner of the previous page.

I assure you Jo' that I will not forget anyone this Christmas and at exactly noon I shall drink a private toast to those dear to you and I who through God's Graces will not be with us this year and then I shall drink a toast to each of my friends who still remain upon Earth.

The events of the last year seem hardly creditable and I still cannot believe some of the terrible happenings of this year but

believe me my dear when I say with all my heart that I sympathise with you most sincerely. The two hard blows that Good God has dealt you, react upon my humble self in a manner you would hardly imagine.

I realise it seems like hypocrisy to wish you a "Merry Christmas" by I do wish you a "Merry Christmas" and hope and trust that the coming year will be as pleasant as God can possibly make it. Since I have been serving overseas I have learnt much, but the greatest thing I have learnt is to appreciate the people that I look upon as the grandest friends it would be possible to have - whether they still regard me as a friend after my disgusting behaviour of the first eight months of this year I do not know. I have promised and so far kept that promise that I will write religiously (at least once each month) to them and I can assure you that I have no intention of that pledge being broken. For some reason best know to myself perhaps, I have become very morbid but that is not my intention for I really mean to be sincere.

Another letter is due to you before the end of the month and that will occupy my time on Sunday evening. I do not know in what state the mail will be in which case my November and December letters may not reach you until after Christmas but they will be on the way.

I myself have had no mail for 6½ weeks and therefore have had very little idea of what is happening in England. To say I am eagerly wait a letter is putting it mildly for really mail has now become an obsession with me and the sooner all the mail written to me in the last seven weeks arrives the happier and more contented I shall be.

I shall be hard at work on Christmas morning for I have offered to cook the breakfast so that the cooks may remain in bed and thereby enjoy Christmas to the full - you can imagine that my head is full of menus for I intend to "shake" the whole unit by the meals I shall place before them. All my craft and cunning will be

employed in the preparation of that meal. ( provided of course that my brain will function after the effects of Christmas Eve)  
Once again A Very Merry Christmas to you both  
God bless you All my Love Johnnie.

**27/11/1944** 902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.

My Dear Jo,

The mail situation has greatly improved for on the 25th I received eight letters - seven from home and one from Yvonne. I almost felt human again after such contact with the outside world.!! Somehow though I seem to suspect that there are still some more on the way for the gaps between my letters from home were greater than was normal. I only hope my suspicions were well founded. I can now reveal exactly where I am situated and what my work really is ! I am stationed in the small port of PREVEZA on the west coast of Greece. On a map you will notice an inlet Gulf, about half way down the coastline of the mainland between the islands of CORFU and LEVKAS. On the north bank of that inlet near the coast is the town of PREVAZA and incidentally myself! Our work is to feed and cloth the population of a province of Greece - and the title actually is almost self explanatory. A task which has proved both interesting and instructive.

I believe that the English press is singing the praises of the military personal effecting the relief work in Greece and the lads undoubtedly merit their "write up". It has been and still is a difficult job for the Boche is no respecter of property or roads and he actually did not leave this country in the condition that he found it, which as you will realise does not facilitate our task. My occupations since I joined the unit have been most varied but my present one the most interesting. I am responsible, through my officer, for the loading of cargus (small sailing vessels) that take the supplies to other port and islands of the province. My

time is spent dashing round the docks, dashing in and out of the Port Commandants office, dashing after Greek Government representatives, liasing with the RE's that operate the docks and lots of other tasks, all requiring a certain amount of dash! I work out the cargo that each vessel is to take, make out a loading programme and do some more dashing. It gets without saying that on a busy day I obtain plenty of fresh air and an equal amount of exercise - not forgetting of course a few swigs of brandy from the cargus skippers.!! For some unknown reason I always find interesting jobs in the service - how or why I do not know !! I certainly aspire to the title of "dasher" -- now I knew long ago what my work was to be and where it was to take place and yet, in the interests of security, I did not breathe a word about it. I found that when writing to people who knew I had volunteered for Civil Affairs it was difficult indeed not to mention that I was in the Civil Affairs Unit just waiting for the word "Go". I am rather of the opinion that many people, from my first letters, gathered that I was unhappy because I had not been posted to such a unit, yet I was unable to convey any other impression.

Off duty hours are well occupied – at least as far as I am concerned for there is plenty to do. At least two nights, more often than not three nights a week are spent in the canteen running whist drives or “Housey Housey” meetings for the benefit of the lads. No need to state that I consume two bottles of wine on each occasion.!! One night a week I am on duty and on that night and one other I write my weeks mail which even now is quite large yet continues to grow steadily. I am left therefore with at most three free nights and these I spend drifting round the town enjoying a drink and a chat here and there and finish the evening with an excellent fish supper.

A word here about the wines and spirits of this province perhaps would not go amiss. Like France, Greece is a great producer of wines and in normal times wine is a table beverage – it still is for

those that can afford it.! The wines vary from a light brown, extremely bitter liquid (comparable with a very cheap and nasty sherry) to an excellent, sweet richly bodied, ruby wine which reminds me of claret. Prices range from 6d to two shillings a pint. The chief spirit is "0020" not unlike gin in appearance but there all resemblance ends for its taste is different and it is the possessor of a kick which has been likened to that of a mule !! It is priced at 2½ d a glass (almost a double). The next spirit is "KONIAK" varying in quality from "might be something" to a reasonably good Cognac but once again it has a punch. For a shilling one can buy four glasses !!! Banana Brandy is one of my favourite drinks and as its name suggests in the counterpart of Cherry Brandy. The Greek Cherry Brandy is not to my liking, it is too thin and watery – and fiery. Both Banana and Cherry Brandy retail at four glasses for one shilling and sixpence. When I say that a party of people could get very nearly pickled on the amount of money it would cost them for one round of the equivalent intoxicants in England, I am not exaggerating – can you not wonder that I find Greece a second paradise.!! Last Sunday I went to Mass in the Roman Catholic Church of Preveza. It was a quaint little place, the seating accommodation being no bigger than your bedroom at Streatham and consisting of four small pews on each side. The singular beauty of the interior was spoilt, I will admit, by the bullet holes in the ceiling, but nevertheless it was a very pleasant little place. The Priest was a member of the Franciscan Brothers and paid great attention to me. He showed me round his little garden – beautifully tended by ex Italian prisoners of war – and generally made me feel really welcome – it was a great pity that my work prevented me from attending mass yesterday. I hope you will excuse the various shades of ink only it happens that these letter cards are very treacherous and I have to rewrite your letter and blot every third line or so for the other went straight through both pages – a fact which annoyed me because I

have spent a great deal of writing time, this evening, helping an officer to install a telephone exchange – the jobs I am called upon to do are never ending in their variedness !!

I shall go to press again before Christmas, so for the present I must bid you

Goodnight and God Bless

All my Love Johnnie.

**04/01/1945** 902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.

Dear Jo'

This is my first letter of 1945, I must first do two things. One is to thank you for your letter of the 12<sup>th</sup> December which I received on Boxing Day and the other is to wish you a somewhat belated Happy New Year.

It was very kind of you to mention that you had been thinking of me with regard to the trouble in my part of the world. You can however put your mind at rest, for the present, because I am now in Southern Italy having been evacuated from my Province just before Christmas. I never thought for one moment when I left the old country last year that I would play my part in an evacuation but how little I knew. !

Actually I should have written to you a fortnight again but owing to the situation I was unable to write for nearly a fortnight – my mother had to wait 13 days for a letter. Those last few days in Greece were hectic in more ways than one, I was dead tired when we pulled out of the harbour. We had no time to choose ship or weather and both were bad. I have always been a good sailor and I thank my lucky stars that my previous seafaring experience held me in good stead when we got to sea for, after only a few hours out we ran into a gale ! I do not think I have ever been quite so scared in the whole of my life for how near our vessel came to capsizing only God knows – I have never seen a boat roll or pitch so much and although I had no need to pray against sickness, I



prayed vehemently that my nerve would hold out. What made matters worse was seeing so many fellows go “under” as a result of the vessels gymnastics ( never before has there been such a shortage of “PUKE” dishes.) until in the end there were only about 5% of the lads still on their feet and we were all scared out of our lives.

It goes without saying, therefore, that our preparations for Christmas and the New Year went completely haywire and that the festivities spent in Italy did not come within one tenth as good as those we should have spent in Greece. The British Soldier has, however, always been renowned for his ability to make the best of any situation and I managed to get pleasantly pickled on both occasions. Actually it was one of the most amusing Christmas Holidays I have every enjoyed, and when I return to England I shall be able to relate the most amusing stories of Christmas 1944.

It was a great wrench leaving Greece (although we all hope to go back) for although our work was hard we had noticed the movement in the people during our short stay. One does not mind hard work when one can reap the profits and the improvement in the health and self respect of the people was evident to all of us. Since I last wrote to you, I had been invited into two homes and I was making great headway in understanding the attitude of the man-in-the-street.. I was privileged to enjoy my last meal since I arrived in the Middle east /Central Mediterranean Forces and my best wine.!! Always conversation was difficult, but it was usual that the person that had invited me was capable of speaking English (by virtue of the fact that he had spent some years in the States ) and he usually had a busy time interpreting my remarks. I shall never forget either the marvellous scenery of NW Greece – no words can describe that beautiful rugged country with its snow capped peaks rising out of the mist and poking their glorious crests through the lower strata of clouds. On a moonlight night it was truly the perfect setting for a painting of landscape.

For the average British soldier our province was a paradise for the cost of living. Every one was hard pressed to spend their pay, and many as I did myself saved twenty pounds and upwards in their short stay. I have grave doubts whether the same can be said of Italy – in the shops even the simplest things in life seem to be priced highly, xxx? at 5/- each for instance.

Italy has, however, two compensations, mail and the cinema. In my brief stay in “Muddy Italy” I have had four batches of mail to my great pleasure, at least one from everyone I was longing to hear from which includes you ( yours was in fact the highlight of my Boxing Day consignment). The cinema, too, holds forth its attractions for it is possible to see films in Italy that were showing in town when I left English shores.

I know exactly how you feel about the old days and the old surroundings. I can understand your finding it difficult to return at the moment but perhaps later when time has had a little chance to take the edge off the bitter blow you have been dealt, you may find it possible, for even though the place may seem ghastly, it will also bring back those pleasant and sweet tender memories that no amount of time can erase. I am gratified indeed that you found my last letter interesting – this one definitely not so because my mind is still confused – because I hoped it would be so and hoped also that it would distract your attention from other things for a brief moment. If I have succeeded then I am perfectly satisfied and although overseas every letter from the old country is worth its weigh in gold, I would be perfectly content to do without from you realising only too well how difficult you must find it to write.

Every time I say that I shall write again before on certain date, something prevents me so this time I shall not promise to write again before the beginning of next month but will merely promise that I will merely promise that I will do my best to write as soon as humanly possible. My mail list is so large that when I loose a fortnight as I have done more than once, I am hard pressed to

make up the time and I am six weeks behind now with letters to some of my relatives – the dutiful nephew and all that sort of thing !

God bless you both My love to Rhoal and you Johnnie.

**06/02/1945** 902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.

Dear Jo

Please pardon my error with the date – I mean the 6<sup>th</sup> February. For some unknown reason I will insist on writing January for February which makes it look as though I am still living in January.

I did promise to write again before the end of last month but as usual my good intentions were upset by the sea voyage for just as I had worked through my mail and was ready to start again, we set sail for Greece. This then is being written from the land of trials and tribulations although from a somewhat different part from that in which I was stationed before. When the ban on revealing location is , I shall have quite a deal to say about the interesting part of Greece in which I now find myself.

The five weeks I spent in Italy were really far from interesting for apart from one day that I went to Bari the rest of the period was spent in Taranto – a very famous place in the war, but not a very interesting one. I did manage to take in a couple of films and the same number of variety shows and three parties. ( in the CMP's Mess of all places) and that describes my life in Taranto. What little I did see of Bari during the few hours that I was there greatly impressed me – opera house most of all. Five weeks in Bari would have been heavenly because apart from the fact that there was an additional cinema, an opera house (where most of my off duty hours would have been spent) the welfare amenities were much better and there were a greater number of cafes "inbounds". It goes without saying therefore, that I was by no means sorry to leave Taranto! Strange to relate I saw nothing

beautiful in the part of Italy in which I spent my enforced sojourn. In point of fact I found it particularly ugly and muddy. There was literally mud everywhere and a week's scrapings from my clothes would have been enough to fill an average sized flowerpot. Truly it would be far better to refer to that delightful country as "Muddy Italy" instead of "Sunny Italy".

My seafaring knowledge is improving too, for in the short time I have been overseas, I have travelled on a variety of vessels 24,000 ton ex liners, 2000 ton cargo vessels, little landing craft, infantry and huge landing ships, Tanks. In fact I am beginning to think that I would make a far better sailor than a soldier – I am more used to living on sea than on land! All those journeys have been experiences I shall never forget – the trip on the 2000 ton cargo vessel is indelibly implanted in my memory.

The weather in Greece is a vast improvement on that of Italy for the raining season is just ending and the spring commencing. I will admit that it is still a little chilly but the sun is out shedding its golden rays over the whole countryside. In a few months I shall be cursing the sun and praying for rain but that is only human nature – for what human is ever satisfied ?

It is now evening and having spent the last three hours finishing off the bar in our Mess, I decided that it was time I picked up my pen again. A few days ago I was elected to exalted position of Entertainments NCO and in company with the canteen NCO I vigorously attacked the bare room which will become our Mess. So far we have built the bar and are halfway through the cupboard which will house the stock. Tomorrow the walls are being trimmed up by having all the holes and cracks re-plastered. When that is complete and the cupboard finished, we shall have the job of painting the walls, the cupboard and the decorative designs on the facings of the bar. So far I have been too busy to go out for the work accomplished has taken the whole of my available off duty hours. But go out I must, for local contacts must be established and a barrel of wine purchased for the Mess at a fair

and reasonable price.

In Italy I was part of the Quartermasters stores (or I should say "Q Clerk" ) because the unit was re-equipping but as we a back in harness I have left the "Q stores" for my old job of loading Cargus and Voways. As my work in that direction has not really started yet however, I have been given the interim task of sorting out the pay accounts of the unit – not a very enviable task when I have to take out a statement of account for each individual in the unit and the minimum period I have to go back is six months. I did well today for I managed to wade through for all of the laddies accounts.!! This is the second time I have been called upon to straighten out the accounts. Last time I was two thirds of the way through after three weeks hard work when I was forced to hand over pay to a fellow that knew not one iota about the subject – usual army style (It was laid down in the War Establishment that so and so should do pay – I was not so and so !!) and the present work is my reward. I have an undertaking, however, that for the future the only person concerned with pay in the unit will be me !

I have just seen the first piece of news about Gratuities on Demobilisation. For other ranks 10/- to 20/- a month according to rank and for officers 25/- to 75/- a month. Not so much as everyone had hoped for but perhaps in the circumstances not too bad. The only snag is that there is no rate quoted for overseas service and most of the laddies overseas think that the rates for service overseas should be higher than those for service in England. I feel inclined to agree with them for separation from ones loved ones for four years or more is a bitter blow and should be repayable with a little more hard cash than that metered out to a soldier whose service is confined to the old country. Perhaps however, what we have seen is just an extract from the "white paper" – I for one sincerely hope that there is an increased rate for overseas for I am not adverse to taking any money from the Government when they seem so keen to take it from me in the

form of income tax.

In actual fact the services have been in the news of late for since Sept. 44 we have received a substantial increase in pay: The Demobilisation plan has been announced and we have been granted permission to wear ties – quite an interesting five months. On top of this the Red Army had been doing exceedingly well this year with the result that the end of the war with Germany looks as though it will not have to see the end of 1945- no one hope more than I that these words are true. NO rash promises this time for one has no idea what might happen between now and the end of the month but will write again as soon as possible.

God Bless you both , All my Love Johnnie.

**14/03/1945** 902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.

Dear Jo

I am a week late in commencing my epistle this month and I tender my apologies accordingly although I have a sneaking suspicion that the fact that February only has 28 days has a great deal to do with my lapse.

There is little to write of this month except social activities. Most of February and all that has gone of this month has been taken up with social events of all kinds from dances to darts matches, all from the saloon to the "spit and sawdust".

One should I suppose take the events in chronological order and to commence at the beginning – most essential to start at the beginning for how would one ever reach the end. The canteen NCO and my humble self eventually succeeded in completing the bar and stock cupboard. The following Sunday I ran amok with some curtain material, some black and green paint and a small quantity of plywood. Even though I say it myself the result was truly amazing – the Mess is now a real Mess- the last word is a noun and NOT an adjective. !!

Sundays, thank goodness are holidays and picnic outings are all the vogue. A fortnight ago or so I was one of a party that visited a village high up in the mountains. The day broke dismally, but just after noon, when we set forth, it had cleared well up and the sun was shedding its health giving rays. As we drove through the beautiful countryside of this part of Greece I was struck by its great resemblance to England except that here one has the tranquil beauty of Warwickshire coupled with the rugged majesty of Cumberland and Westmoreland. The higher we climbed the more beautiful and picturesque became the scenery on which we had the good fortune to gaze. The wonderful green valleys the beautiful terraced green slopes of the mountains, the cultivated slopes of the mountainside forming a patchwork quilt; the tall pines and firs holding their heads proudly and erect as their topmost branches brushed the cloud; wonderfully colourful orange groves nestling in the bottom of the valleys; all these are just a few of the wonderful sights I shall never forget. The road was fairly decent until we began to climb but then it became a nightmare for the driver. The track – one could hardly call it a road for there was no room for two vehicles to pass, unless they were both motorcycles – spiralled up the mountainside in a series of the most hair raising and seat-gripping hair-pin bends that I have ever seen. Our vehicle was a 15cwt and I really think that a jeep would have thought twice before attempting the climb – more than once we had to reverse to get round a bend and there was a drop of anything from 50 to 200 feet either side with nothing but a small stone wall, less than a foot in height to stop us had the brakes gone.!

Eventually we crossed the mountains and began our descent on the other side

- this part of the journey was the most hair raising yet enchanted but every thing held and at last we reached our destination. It was a tiny picturesque village nestling very near to the summit of one of the smaller mountains. We were greeted as usual by a very

enthusiastic crowd of villagers. Here arose a situation, which I have not yet succeeded in living down. One untidy and rather dirty old man came up to me, pointed to my upper lip and then to his own (where there nestled an exact replica of my own sandy colonial “walrus” ) and said “adelphos” –which in English means “brother”. The shriek of laughter that went up from our party nearly lifted the roofs of the neighbouring buildings ! Before much more could happen however we were whisked away to partake of wine and nuts in one of the headman’s houses. It was here that the largest bottle I have ever seen in my life was placed before us filled with the most exquisite wine I have ever tasted in Greece. The bottles capacity must have been in the region of two gallons and it stood two and a half feet high with the width of roughly ten inches – truly an excellent bottle to hold such a magnificent wine. Olives and walnuts were produced and despatched and half an hour later saw still half the contents of the bottle to be consumed. The drivers by this time had fallen out of the running and the remainder of the bottle had to be “seen off” by only six of us. Unfortunately there was no way of repaying such gracious hospitality apart from giving our hosts a few packets of cigarettes and that was all one could do.

Our journey back was accomplished without mishap but about ten miles out of town we picked up a Police Inspector, an officer of the new National Guard and a young married couple. The ride would have been given as a normal one had not one of our party discovered that we still had some tea left in one of our gallon containers. It was madness to attempt to pour tea out of an unwieldy one gallon container whilst you are seated in the back of the vehicle being driven along road whose surface could be more likened to a German airfield just after the RAF had dealt it a 1000 bomber raid ! Before a few second had gone there was tea all over the place and every time the vehicle bumped another shower of England’s national beverage shot over our Greek friends and the party dissolved into a side splitting laughter

competition.

The next event of note was the party we had for ten of our English-speaking civilian employees. They were all either clerks at HQ or checkers in our warehouses and their command of the English or American tongue pretty good. We could hardly challenge them to a game of darts because very few played but some of the lads did take on a few that did play England's National drinking sport. The rest of us either individually or in pairs challenged then to either chess, cards, draughts or dominoes. I only had time to play seven games of dominoes with a Welsh partner but we managed to keep the old country's flag flying by trouncing our opponents 5 games to 2. The rest of the evening, I spent refilling bottles of wine and glasses and generally acting as host. For this occasion I managed to secure some excellent wine with a very high alcoholic percentage which very soon put everyone in a happy state of mind. After the pleasant little supper we had prepared for them I proposed a toast in true deference to our visitors, to our gallant allies and friends the Greeks. This however proved to be fatal as one after the other our guests jumped to their feet and toasted us in the most glowing and magnificent terms. I think that even the most hard bitten of our lads was touched by the deep admiration and respect for Britain shown and voiced by those Greeks that evening. When the party eventually broke up most of our visitors went home far happier than they had been for years and far more pickled too! One of them had a horrible shock when he arrived home and discovered that he had acquired two front doors and an equal number of wives!!

Binges really have been the order of the day and a grand time was had by all when the entire Sgts Mess paid us a visit – the wine flowed fast and furious all the evening and I was hard pressed to keep up with the orders in my position behind the bar. The high spot of the evening was an 8 a side dance match which our Mess won and duly celebrated their victory by imbibing in the excellent

wine of Greece. After some slight refreshments the evening developed into a smoking concert and I was called upon to MC the events. I had difficulty at first in persuading most of our artistes to perform but I soon found an antidote by thrusting half pint glass of wine into their hands and standing over them until they drank it. ! Duly lubricated they performed and many and varied were their acts allocated to the Mess that evening although the laddie that led the community singing at the end must take the prize for originality in improvisation – he is a drummer and his side turn consisted of an upturned fire bucket; his bass drum was the bottom of our bar and his drumsticks two forks. His act would have brought the house down on any London stage and he was extremely well received by the laddies present.

If I go on at this rate I shall never finish so I must try and generalise on one or two points. I find the wine in this part of Greece far more powerful than any I had drunk before in Greece and whereas I could demolish four or five bottles and upwards in Preveza I find that two or three are quite sufficient here. The prices vary quite a deal but so far as I have purchased wines at prices ranging from 1/4 to 2/11 a pint and the best have been, so far, those purchased at 1/8 and 2/5. In Greece, as in France one drinks wine by the bottle and not the glass although some wines are sold in cafes by the glass – a bottle can only be consumed by the very hardy! Wine really is very deadly and I discovered that the other evening when one of the lads returning to England on repatriation insisted upon “pushing the boat out” several times during one of our social evenings. By the end of the evening there were quite a number of half pint glasses on the counter that I had been unable to dispose of so I attempted to dispose of them by challenging one of our guests to a competition. I was to drink two glasses to his one and the first to finish was naturally the winner. I went along the counter –and the glasses – in a perfect imitation of my exploits at “Winny's”. I finished six glasses before my opponent had finished his third and was awarded the verdict. I



deserved it because I was very pickled by the time I had finished !!

To conclude my letter I must comment upon the war situation. The news for the Western and Eastern fronts in Europe is more than good and if the present progress of the Allied forces and the Russian Army is sustained then the defeat of Germany may come in time for Christmas 1945. The finest present that could be given to England is a peaceful 1945 Christmas and I only hope that my prophesy comes true. The efforts of the 14<sup>th</sup> army in Burma should not be passed over, nor the efforts of the Americans in the Pacific. – their bombing of Tokyo was a masterly effort and one that has brought the war right home to the Jap. 1945 so far, has certainly seen the turning point of the war with all the Allies fighting on German soil and the British and American forces in the East beginning the final assault on Japan.

I have attempted to make the letter interesting although the subject has been rather monotonous. My next epistle may be far more interesting but that actually remains to be seen.

God bless Rhoal and yourself All my love Johnnie.

Winnie was probably a host of a party in Streatham and maybe to do with the disgrace referred to in an earlier letter when John disgrace himself.

**25/07/1945** 902780 Bdr SLOAN J.G.

Dear Jo

It is over four months since I wrote to you and I feel very guilty for such neglect. Much has happened in these four months however and the retelling of my adventures over that period may do little to take your mind of things.

The end of the war with Germany has come and gone and with it has come, so I have heard your return to London. I was more than thankful that the end had come for it meant to the laddies over

here that they need no longer worry about their loved ones back home.

Now that the war in Europe is over, censorship regulations have been relaxed and much that could not be discussed can now be revealed. After leaving Italy in January we came back to Greece, not to the mainland but to the beautiful island of CORFU. My whole ideas of Greece were reversed for this island must be considered as one of the prettiest in the world.

As you may, or may not know, a certain group of islands of the West coast of Greece ( including CORFU) were British possessions from 1812 to 1864 and are known as the IOANIAN ISLANDS. Under British rule they flourished and on these islands are finds making things reminiscent of England. For instance, one finds in Corfu the only place on the continent where the noble art of cricket is exploited – in fact it is the National summer sport of this island. One also finds that cakes are more like English country buns and names such as “The Bat and Ball” carry the visitor back to his home country.

The Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements flourish on Corfu as do they, for that matter, throughout the length and breadth of Greece! One also finds Sea Scouts and Sea Cadets on Corfu which heightens the illusion that one is living in England. When one passes a building bearing the legend “English Elementary School” one almost come to the conclusion that they are wandering around one of the lesser parts of England.!

Work slackened tremendously towards the end of our stay on the island and we were therefore afforded many opportunities to explore. Kaiser Willhelm II had a summer residence on the island and on two occasions I toured the edifice and its surrounding gardens. Although rapidly falling into a state of disrepair, it is still a thing of beauty albeit, a blatant and garish one, but nevertheless well worth one’s time.

Our social life, owing to our lack of work, underwent a great change and there were times when I began to wonder if I was a

tourist or a soldier. Dances, dinners, bathing parties, binges and cricket matches made life more than pleasant and when we embarked for Athens towards the end of May we were all more than sorry to leave.

I was very busy during my first week in Athens racing against time in disbanding the old Depot and before I had time and before I had finished I was posted to my present unit. Since I came abroad I have been constantly liaising first with civilians and now with the military. Officially we are attached to the Greek army for liaison and, believe me, there is some work. I spend most of my time punching a typewriter and it is clattering away all day like a "Chicago piano."

It was on the day that I was posted to my regiment that the good God smiled on me and brought about one of those meetings that everyone hopes will occur, yet rarely are these ambitions realised. I met a laddie in my new billet who had served with me in the old Depot, and together we went to the NAAFI for a cup of tea. On the way out of the NAAFI after partaking of the usual standard of NAAFI tea, I was descending the stairs wrapped in thought when I found someone eyes bore through my back – it is really queer how one, at times, does experience that sensation. I turned round to behold someone whose face was vaguely familiar and after some seconds we through ourselves into each other's arms with excited cries of "Paulos" and "John".

Paulos was on the last two days of a seven day leave so we made the best of those 48 hours. Although I knew that Jiminy was in Greece, I had no idea that Paulos was. My informants had told me that Paulos was in Italy and I had believed them. You can well imagine my surprise then at meeting dear old Paulos.

After a delightful stay of just on a month in Athens during which period, of course, I did no work, I was posted to a Greek HQ in North West Greece only some seventy miles from the town in which I was first stationed when I came to Greece –PREVEZA.

On the way up from Athens we stopped for the night only twenty

or so miles from where Paulos was stationed so once again we met. The binge that followed I leave to your imagination. When I arrived here I hoped that there would be many more meetings for my staff officers to give me the alternative of a day and a half a week or four days a month. I agreed to the latter, of course, but now with the other clerk asking, it looks as though the four days I was to have at the end of this month has fallen through. I shall know in a few days, however, of my fate and then of course, I shall be extremely happy or unhappy.

Armed with a camera I really enjoyed my stay in Athens. I think I got photographs of nearly half of the ancient sights of that city and, had I been privileged to stay longer, I feel sure that I could have completed my collection. There is a great possibility of my going to Athens if I ever get leave but as I have always been unlucky with leave, I doubt whether I shall get any – so if I do, I shall be able to capture the shots I so desire. Greece lends itself well to photography for it is, I believe, one of the most mountainous countries in Europe. The scenery, if one is privileged to travel through the country, from end to end (as I have done on two occasions ) is more than magnificent.

The town in which I am stationed is completely surrounded by mountains and the climate, therefore, is absolutely wicked. It is sweltering hot without any breeze and poor little me from morning until night is bathed in perspiration. At the moment I have signs of fever coming on and life is not pleasant but somehow I suppose I shall pull through. I usually do not let maladies get me down but these tropical illnesses completely sap ones strength.

A very cheerful letter I do not think, but perhaps my next will be rather after my old style. I rather think I am in need of a complete rest and somehow think that before long I shall get it.

I sincerely hope that you are feeling a little better now in you new surroundings. Love Johnnie.

**A small contextual note:**

Prince Philip, of Greek origins but whose family was thrown out of Greece before the war, became engaged to Princess Elizabeth in 1947.

**01/09/1945**

**Comment** Typed

To Jo' Guise

c/o Mrs Smeddle West Nook Croyde Bay Nr Braunton

From 90278 BDR (UC) JG SLOAN

"D" B.I.U. C.M.F.

1 Sept 1945

I think that in my letter of the 25th July, I mentioned that I was not feeling too well and that I thought that I should very shortly be confined to my bed. Such was, indeed, the case for on the 27th I went into the local unit's Regimental Medical Post with my first tropical ailment - Sandfly Fever. I came out on the 1st August, spent another couple of days in bed and then started work again although feeling a trifle weak. For some time past, I have been endeavouring to secure leave in order to go over and visit Paulos and on the 24th I duly set out with the intention of spending two or three days with that worthy individual painting the town red. Such was not the case, however, for when I reached a town 80 miles from where Paulos should have been, I went into the local British General Hospital with another attack of the confounded Sandfly Fever.

Before I went in, however, I saw Paulos because he had lost his Job with the Church Army Welfare and was on his way back to his original unit. We did get in a chat or two, however, whilst I was lying on my back and then I had a couple of visits from Jiminy Cricket who was stationed in the town.

The greatest day in the last six years of my life - "VJ" Day - I was

compelled to spend lying on my back exuding pints of perspiration as the Fever mounted to a climax. Due to my foresight, however, in carrying two bottles of Scotch in my Pack the day was not without it's liquid refreshment and a high old time was had by all the patients with enough strength to lift a cup to their mouths. Apart from that slight celebration, however, that is the only way in which the event altered my life.

In this backwater of Europe we have so much of our own troubles and in consequence so much work that we have very little time for the outside world. Of course, we were all more than glad and relieved that the War in the Far East had been brought to an end for the saving of life on the Allied side by this early surrender must indeed be great. The "VJ" Days in hospital were just like any other days except that all the permanent staff got pickled on the 15th and as far as the boys back with the unit were concerned it was simply a case of "carry on with the work for we have no time to celebrate".

To continue with the account, however, of my travels of the last few weeks. Jiminy Cricket came to meet me on my discharge from hospital and did everything he could to find transport to take me back to my unit but there was nothing doing and the solution seemed to be to lay in going with his unit on a troop carrying detail to Athens and then up the West coast to within a few miles of my town. So, in the days that followed, he and I saw much of each other as Jiminy was in the vehicle in front of the one in which I was travelling. I was also enabled to see a good deal of my beautiful Greece - although at this time of the year it is terrifically hot down in the plains and makes travelling extremely uncomfortable.

During the journey to Athens I managed to secure a few photographs of interesting objects and scenes, and when I arrived in the capital I was enabled to do some thing that I have wanted to do for a considerable time - get a few shots of the more modern building. So In fact I thoroughly enjoyed my trip and it did

compensate in a way for the untimely cancellation of my leave due to my admission to hospital.

Athens affects me in a peculiar way - the more I see of it the more I want to see of it because for the historical student there is a wealth of material in this ancient city and for an ardent photographer, such as myself, it is just perfect heaven. I am anxiously looking forward, therefore, to my next visit when I shall pay an unaccompanied visit to the ancient parts of the city and just wander round with my camera taking shot after shot of the remains of an architecture that I consider to be more beautiful than anything I have ever seen before. I almost go into a state of ecstasy when I am writing or talking about ancient Athens and yet there are so many English soldiers over here who consider my beautiful ruins as being nothing less than a mouldy old heap of stones and rock!!! When you see my photographs however, you will be in a position to judge for yourself. Marie informed me that a couple of dirty binges recently took place at your flat in company with a crowd of the intelligencia of the I Corps - still it [must be good] to be able to see laddies like Sidney again. It appears that a high old time was had by all including the upholders the law and order although it was a pretty bad show that he could not have put the ungrateful so and so that owned the flat in his hotel for the night while you proceeded to celebrate in time-honoured style. I am rather of the opinion that, several other such similar binges must have taken place to celebrate, the end of the Japanese War. My own celebration will take place when I return home and I have an awful feeling that I am going to repeat a performance of mine that occurred at the tender age of 16 and a half - go right out.

Politics in Greece never seem to vary and the positions of the rival Wings seems to be very different today to what they were immediately after the Civil War of last year. They are in no way nearer a settlement than they were then and with the elections due to come off this month, no one knows what might happen.

Outwardly life seems pretty normal but one can detect an under current of unrest and suspense until, the elections are over. I hope to God for their sake, and ours, that they will be sensible enough to fight with merely words. I think the quickest way of being an anti-Communist today is to come, out to the Balkans for a short while. When one has seen the evidence of what really happens in a truly Communistic state then they have no wish to have anything at all to do with that party.

By the time that I next write I sincerely hope that the Armistice with Japan has been signed and put into effect. Also I may have several interesting topics to discuss, for I hope to be able to get out of town and explore a few ancient ruins. I seem to have very few interests these days for I have no bingeing partners and in fact cannot remember when I last drank. It must have been whilst I was with James.

I will bid you "au revoir" .. Until next I write

Love to both you and Rhoal

Love Johnnie