

When I was 18, I was called up and sent to Aldershot for army training. Afterwards I was sent to Berkshire. I was happy there, working in an office. It was just right for me.

Soon however, all that changed and I was posted to an unknown destination overseas. Imagine my surprise when we disembarked in Alexandria. We were put on an overcrowded train in almost unbearable heat and travelled south to a place called Genefa near the Suez Canal. We were four to a tent and the view was terrific ...

Sand, sand and more sand!

The coolest place seemed to be the office where I worked. There was some shade also outside the canteen where we could sit and enjoy cold drinks when not on duty.

I was lonely and homesick for my family and the village life where I had friends in the church. I had been confirmed in the Anglican tradition and was a member of the choir. My life was centred on the quiet village. I had a girlfriend and we loved to go to all that was going on in church.

My idea – becoming a vicar

My idea was one day to study at a theological college and become a vicar with my own parish. Little did I know then that all that was going to be shattered by God bursting into my life. I was so self-righteous and proud. During all those years I had never ever heard the gospel preached. I was in for a rude awakening!

Here I was now in this fruitless wilderness. One evening I was sitting alone in the canteen. As I was drinking my tea a fellow soldier came up to me and sat down. He wanted a chat and I was quite happy to oblige. He asked me what I did when I wasn't on duty. Sometimes I'd go to the open-air cinema with a guy and get some cigarettes on the way. I had started smoking because it was so cheap in the Forces. Not that I had enjoyed it. I just needed to sort of fit in. However, one day I got fed up with it and flung the stuff as far as I could into the desert sands. – This fellow asked if I would like to come with him to a soldier's home to join with others in their meetings. I asked, "Is it a church where there's an altar with candles and a cross etc.?" – "Oh no, it's not like that. It's much simpler."



Genefa camp, Egypt
1949-1950

A homely place

I refused. It was not for me. I could see he was one of the so-called 'are-you-saved?' type of guys. He never gave up on me. He tried again and again until in the end I went with him. It was a nice homely place with a lounge where you could read, play games or write a letter home. There was a good canteen with good old fashioned English type meals. Those serving were elderly ladies for the most part, doing voluntary work looking after the needs of homesick and lonely soldiers. Sitting there, this fellow came up and sat with me. He was very friendly and we had a good old natter together. We played a game and then he asked me about myself and my future.

He listened well. "We are just going to have our meeting now; perhaps you would like to come in." I went with him into the little room. It was almost full of young soldiers and airmen and they were chatting away. I sat at the back and watched. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. These fellows were getting up and talking about Jesus as their Saviour and how He had come into their lives. I could see that they meant it. They were



Baptism in River Jordan
14 April 1950

happy! And they all sang cheery and lively, not the way I was used to in church. There was life. The leader, who turned out to be the man who had sat with me in the lounge, came to me and invited me to join them again.

Coming to be a Christian

"Next time", he said, "perhaps you would tell us how you came to be a Christian." That stumped me but I didn't let him see it. Back ▶

Voucher

If you would like to receive any further information, please fill in this form and post it to us, or contact us by email.

- "I don't have a Bible – please send me one."
- Preferred language (if other than English):
- Please send me the booklet "The Real Jesus" by R. Tice
- I would like to receive future editions of "A message for you" by post.

Name:

Address:

■ Please send voucher to the address on the back
or: church@HighburyFellowship.org

at camp I started going into the little camp church nearby. It was quiet there. Nobody ever seemed to go there. I wanted what those other soldiers had. I had become dissatisfied with my life as it was. I felt so empty. God seemed far away and certainly not real to me. I searched in the Prayer Book; then I took down the big Bible. I needed to be 'born again' – those were the words that rang in my ears – but how? I got down on my knees and groaned from deep down. I cried out loud and shouted, "God, where are

you? I need you! I am so empty! So full of religion and church talk but no life! I am confirmed into what? I am no different. Just proud and full of my own righteousness and self! I need you God! I want you as Lord in my life. I can't go on like this. I have nothing to offer but my life. Here I am, take me as I am and make me your own child. I want to follow you and be a true soldier of the Lord."

Peace came into my soul. A quietness I had never known before enveloped me. I knew that something had happened. The transaction was done. I was truly born again and washed clean. I felt really happy at last. I left that little church where I knew that I had met with God and there was no going back. I had decided to follow Jesus!

Part of God's family

When I went the next time to the soldier's home it was different. I felt as though I was bursting with life. I went to the front. I opened the Bible and read from Romans 12:1-2. I opened my mouth and it just seemed as though God took over. Words just poured out of my mouth. It had to be God because I had

not prepared anything beforehand. Suddenly I realized I was part of God's family. These were my brothers, and they had accepted me as one of them. I was no longer an outsider. I belonged! It was a wonderful feeling. I was HOME.

Now I understood a little better the verse from John's gospel chapter 14:6, "Jesus said, 'I am the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE.'"

Dear reader, do you know Him – this Jesus? He has made all the difference to my life. It is now well over 50 years ago that all the above took place. God has never forsaken me. He is true to His Word. God proved himself faithful and I know that when my life here on earth is over He will take me home to himself and that will be so beautiful. It will be for all eternity. All glory be to God.

Bernard Cookman

takeOne

A message for you

No. 04

I am a Christian ... or so I thought

... until I came face to face with God out there in the Egyptian Desert.



I was down by the Suez Canal doing my time in His Majesty's Forces. A whole, long year stretched before me in this barren and hot wasteland. How I longed to be back in the green pasture of the Midlands.

In Geneva –
winter uniform

A warm welcome to our meetings

- Sunday Services Morning 11.00am
Evening 6.30pm
- Prayer & Fellowship Wednesday 7.30pm
- Bible Study Friday 7.30pm
- Good News Club (for 4–12's) please contact us for further information

Highbury Evangelical Fellowship
16a Highbury Place, London N5 1QP
Pastor: Matthias Roggli
Phone: 020 7226 7341 or 020 7226 7288
Email: church@HighburyFellowship.org



Aboard HMS «Empress of
Australia» on way home from
Egypt, May 1950

takeOne

Highbury Evangelical Fellowship
16a Highbury Place, London N5 1QP
Phone 020 7226 7341 or 020 7226 7288
Email church@HighburyFellowship.org
www.HighburyFellowship.org
www.christian-literature.net