### From the book: [Nature, Nurture and Chance: The Lives of Frank and Charles Fenner](https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj4_83Z4dfRAhVIUZQKHfisARoQFggeMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpress-files.anu.edu.au%2Fdownloads%2Fpress%2Fp34751%2Fpdf%2Fbook.pdf%3Freferer%3D318&usg=AFQjCNENTbe-E9gO-K3eNUXpHR5_wMU0kg)

Bonnin appears on pages 31, 32, 44, 50 and 327

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|  | **Chapter 3. The War Years, May 1940 to February 1946** |

**2/1 Casualty Clearing Station**

Shortly after I had returned to Corps Headquarters, I was transferred as a physician to the 2/1 Casualty Clearing Station (2/1 CCS), which was located in Nazareth as a field hospital for Australian soldiers involved in the Syrian campaign, which was developed to oust the Vichy French, who then occupied Syria and Lebanon. Since many of the patients suffered from malaria or dysentery, I set up a small laboratory and carried out malaria diagnosis by examination of thick films. While there, my colleagues called me ‘Noffie’ (an abbreviation of *Anopheles*, the malaria mosquito), a nickname that stuck until I moved to New Guinea as a malariologist. At the conclusion of the Syrian campaign, the Unit moved to Beirut, where it set up in what was said to have been the only mental hospital in the Middle East, at Asfurieh, about 20 km to the east of Beirut. We were there for six months. I made friends with an American microbiologist who worked in the American University in Beirut, and also with a well-to-do Lebanese family named Hitti, with whom I spent several very pleasant weekends at their country home in the mountains.

During this period Professor Sydney Sunderland, who had succeeded Wood Jones as Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne, entered into negotiations with me and the Army authorities in Australia to secure my release, so that I could return to Australia and take up the position of Senior Lecturer in his department. I replied saying that my current commitments were such that I could not accept his offer, but that I looked forward to joining him after the War. However, after my experience with malaria in New Guinea (see below), I had decided that research in infectious diseases, not anatomy or physical anthropology, was to be my post-war activity. I therefore did not respond to a later invitation from the University of Adelaide to apply for the vacant chair of anatomy.

My friend, **Noel Bonnin**, who was by then a surgeon in 2/1 CCS, and I also arranged two very interesting trips from Beirut during two separate periods of leave. For the first, we hired a taxi with a driver who spoke French but no English, and our French was very primitive. **Noel** acquired two four-gallon tins of petrol from friends in a nearby British Field Ambulance, and we travelled south through Haifa, Jerusalem and Jericho, bathed in the Dead Sea and went on into Jordan. We stopped at Jerash, a wonderfully well-preserved Roman city, then proceeded through Amman, the capital of Jordan, and south through the desert until we came to a narrow gorge to Petra, the ‘rose-red city half as old as time’, and spent a day exploring the wonderful buildings carved out of the red sandstone. Unaccustomed to travelling over corrugated desert roads, which we had to use on our trip down, our driver drove slowly, while with our experience of travelling on corrugated roads in outback Australia we tried to encourage him to drive faster. We came back along the mountains that form the western shore of the Dead Sea. Here our driver felt at home (from his experience in the mountains of Lebanon) and drove so fast around the winding roads that we shouted *‘Lentement! Lentement!’*, to no avail. We visited some impressive castles on the mountains, and eventually stopped off in Damascus, then visited Homs, and back to Asfurieh.

My next adventure, with two medical orderlies and in a field ambulance, was to accompany a regiment of the 9th Division from Palestine through Egypt to Mersa Matruh, in Libya. This passed without incident, and I then came back at my own pace, and stopped off near the pyramids in Cairo for a couple of days to explore that part of the world. This proved a useful preparation for my second week's holiday with **Noel Bonnin**. We had purchased and read a Penguin book on the wonders of ancient Egypt and, a few months later, spent a week's leave travelling by train from Beirut through Cairo and along the Nile Valley to Aswan, where a major dam was under construction, then back to Luxor, where there were an amazing number of famous ruins. Usually a very popular tourist destination, it was deserted because of the War. ‘Knowledgeable’, as we thought we were, having read the Penguin book, we interviewed several guides at Luxor before selecting the one we judged to be the best. He turned out to be a splendid guide. We stayed in a luxurious but almost empty hotel and we went to all the local sites.

Apart from the marvels of the ancient Egyptian ruins, there were a couple of incidents on this trip that I vividly remember, 65 years later. The first occurred on the way to Cairo. There had been a severe sandstorm in the Sinai Desert and the train ran off the line just before it reached Kantara, on the Suez Canal. The 2/2 Australian General Hospital (AGH) was located at Kantara and **Noel**'s brother was a physician there, so we spent the night with him before proceeding to Cairo the next day. We had planned to spend a day in Cairo and, importantly, to visit the British Pay Office to get some Egyptian currency. However, we arrived a day late, in the early evening, in a blacked-out city, and the train to Aswan on which we were booked was due to leave in an hour. I thought that I could remember where the Pay Office was from my earlier trip (to Mersa Matruh), so we ran through the blacked-out city streets, arriving just as the paymaster was packing up, and got our money. Then a run back to the station and we threw ourselves into the train just before it left. The other memorable incident was our departure from Luxor. The train to Cairo was filled with British troops coming down from Khartoum. Our excellent guide ran back and forth, speaking with the railway officials, and an extra carriage was hooked onto the train for our convenience.