

Chapter 6.

Weymouth.

6-7-14.

Dear Grace,

In my last letter I finished up where we had arrived at Albert & settled down for the night. The hungry ones who had missed tea the night before rose early & seemed to be taking a great interest in watching the Company cooks ~~make the tea~~.

The aeroplanes were a great sight, there must have been an aerodrome not far away as swarms of them were manœuvring in the air - looping the loops, diving, making spiral descents & numerous other antics.

After breakfast - Bully beef, Bismits & tea - I went to see if I could find some water. After about a quarter of an hour's search I found a tankful on a high

truth & after climbing the trestle
& nearly falling in the tank
I got a water-bottle full.

The hut was a great sight after
we had packed our kits ready
to move off - most of the fellows
had dumped all their clothes
except what they were wearing.
& to make their packs lighter
had thrown away such treasures
as the water-proof capes cardigan
jackets & singlets & those delightful
little books such as - "Pleasant
thoughts for Sunday afternoons,"
"Hints for young soldiers" etc.

We all loaded our selves with ^{as much}
bully beef & biscuits as we could
carry & then set off for the
Reinforcement Camp about a $\frac{1}{2}$
mile away where we were
to be issued with our dease
respirators.

We were given instructions in the
way to use the respirator &
then we sat on our packs

and had some nourishment.

It was was here where the officers had arranged a pleasant little surprise for us.

We were told that we were to go through the poison gas chamber in order to test the efficiency of the ^{gas} respirators ~~helmets~~.

The troops smiled when they saw the dreaded poison gas chamber. ~~It was~~ The chamber was a room in a deserted farm house only half the roof was missing and the glass window were slightly bent.

To show what he thought of the poison gas chamber one chap went in without his ~~respirator~~ and after being locked in the chamber for three minutes came out as large as life & quite pleased with the world at large.

It Before we moved off the

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inevitable shower of rain came
on during which we all sat
on our packs with our water-
proof coats over our heads
looking like a lot of tree stumps.
Once more we took up the trail
after Fritz. I think Fritz must
have known we were after him
as he seemed to be further
back every day.

We marched about 3 miles
before we had a shell & then
when we got a shell we
sat down alongside a newly
made cemetery ^{at Belcordel} with rows upon
rows of graves & admired
the canvas hospital opposite.
Another ~~three~~ two miles &
we were in Tricourt where
some very fierce fighting took
place. There were trenches, shell-
holes, smashed houses, &
torn up trees everywhere.
Protuding from a smashed in
dug-out on the side of the road

was the remains of an iron bedstead & we vaguely wondered where the owner was.

Alongside the road we saw numbers of unexploded shells (duds) & parts ^{of} ~~was~~ equipment & houses were ~~every~~ where.

The road was full of transport traffic all the time, mostly lean mules in transport wagons driven by lean A. S. C. & Artillery men. The drivers were very

different from the pretty soldiers with flash spurs & leggings that used to promenade round Sydney. They wore greasy clothes covered with mud and about half an inch of beard showing out through the dirt.

Old Fritz must have made a great stand at that place.

He had machine gun positions all over the place - even up trees.

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After the ~~next~~ next lap it took nearly a quarter of an hour before the last of the lame ducks appeared on the horizon.

With the old swag up and whiskers drooping underneath the old tin hat he only wanted the faithful hound to complete the picture of a typical dead beat.

We passed numerous gangs of Fritz^x's working on the road & we cheered them up by telling them they would soon have their mates with them. ~~For~~ ^{At} a mile further & the graves began to get more numerous. The crosses were just dotted here & there ~~among~~ sticking up out of the mud. In the ~~distant~~ distance was the remains of a fine wood but only blackened stumps remained — the work of the Artillery.

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Some of the down-at-heel began to wonder how much further there was to go & when they asked Matt - "Fire Jack he" cheerfully told them - about another 6 — mile yet.

The little B — was very different from what he used to be back in camp. On the march he was doing great work helping the lame ducks along & carrying their rifles.

The first ^{old French} cemetery we passed after leaving Fricourt was a ~~sight~~ terrible sight. The whole graveyard had been heavily shelled by Fritz some time before we passed & the tombstones were smashed ~~up~~ about, some were blown up into the ~~some~~ branches of the few trees remaining others broken & bent the iron railings smashed & bent. The whole graveyard

was practically turned inside out & most of the graves were turned into great shell holes.

About 100 yards further along the road we came upon a "Tommy" steering an erratic course along the road. He was full of jay also of rum and informed the lads that they were a bit late as the Germans had been chased back three weeks ago. Some of the lads didn't seem too pleased & told him it was a — pity that they had been wheeled so far as we ^{had to} ~~were~~ go for our lives to catch the ~~the~~ — up. It was here where Old George got a lift.

I first saw Private George in camp at Goulburn ~~camp~~, he had been there practically since the camp started.

He protested that his age was

38 but I bet he was a good deal over fifty. He was a little ginger haired ~~covert~~ & simple as a child. ~~He~~ ^{He} could never ~~teach~~ ^{earn} ~~him~~ his drill properly though he used to put his whole heart into it. He was left behind by every draft that left Gouldburn Camp but as ours was the 2nd last draft to leave Gouldburn he was put in our Company. I don't know why the authorities ever let him leave Australia but as the poor beggar wanted to go to the war so badly they must have taken pity on him. All through the hard training in England the lads helped him on-carrying his pack when he was knocked up & helping him as best they could. They could never teach Old George to march he always had a

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half Chinese sort of that.
When we went to France he
came with us. he was nearly
in tears when they wouldn't
let him go with the first
draft but he cheered up when
they put him with the 2nd
draft. How the doctors passed
him I don't know as he was
only a nuisance to himself
& to us.

Poor Old George was just about
finished on this march till
the lads pulled up an A.S.C
wagon & showed him aboard
& told the driver to drive him
to camp. Even then the poor
coat didn't have the sense to
take off his pack but rode
the whole journey sitting on
~~the~~ beside the driver with
his pack up.

At Weymouth now getting
on tip-top. Love to all
of rank.