

GENUINE

War Letters

By W. F. ADCOCK

*Written by an Australian to his people
from the Battlefields of France*

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Humorous
Pathetic

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34 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

GENUINE
WAR LETTERS

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Sunday, 2nd August, 1914

**Europe Threatens to Become a
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Ambassadors Leave Capitals

**KING GEORGE SEES MR. ASQUITH
AT 2 A.M.**

Great Britain Prepares for Struggle

AUSTRALIA STANDS ON GUARD

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 1.

15th March, 1915.

Dear _____

When the war-cloud burst over the world, Australia was enveloped in impenetrable distance. She was cut off from the Motherland by thousands of miles of troubled seas. Throughout her vast borders Australia was sending a clarion call "To Arms." Mobilisation from north to south and east to west was taking place. Men were wanted and men responded. Then came the sudden stroke; Samoa lowered her German flag to an Australian force; and twenty days later Simpson Haven fell to Rear-Admiral Patey's squadron. Here the Germans resisted, thinking, perhaps, that the Australians were unversed in war; the great and glorious conflict between the "Sydney" and the "Emden" then excited our young nation. The Emden, steaming out to sea, was the first to fire, at a range of 3700 yards, and at first her firing was excellent. Her captain thought Australia was unversed in war. But the mistake was realised. Shot after shot struck her rocking decks. First one funnel was carried away, then another. Slowly the dignity of the Emden was dissipated. Her decks were littered with dead, and she lay a battered wreck on North Keeling Island.

Following closely behind the wonderful achievement of the "Sydney" was the glorious landing at Gallipoli, and such names as Anzac, Lone Pine, Mudros Harbor, Lemnos, Rest Gully, and others will remain names of a most lasting character in the history of our young nation. These deeds made me enlist, and when I passed the doctor I felt a proud man. There were about 200 men being examined by the medical officers-stout, thin, tall and short. Stout men found it difficult to touch their toes without bending their knees, and tall men found it equally as hard, especially when their legs were long and their arms short. Thin men found it

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difficult to expand their chests to 32 inches, and stout men tried hard to conceal the fact that they ever accepted a glass of beer. There were lawyers, mechanics, clerks, bootmakers, laborers, and representatives from numerous other commercial occupations, but they all readily realized the fact that they were to be brothers in arms, and the lawyer did not mind in the least holding the fishmonger's false teeth, while the medical officer examined him. It was quite joyous to be amongst the mixed classes, and to see them acting in such a brotherly manner towards one another. That business competition had left their minds. There were no deceitful acts, and the flow of language was free and honest, open and pleasing to the ear. Comrades we were called: Comrades for war. When I told the boys at the factory they laughed: some said I was very foolish, others complimented me. The manager himself was very silent on the matter. I go into camp in a few days, then I shall be able to ascertain what the military life really is. Arrangements have been made for the collection of my letters from now on, until my return, or get killed, perhaps. A copy has been kept of my letters to you, but as some are of no consequence I am only keeping two or three.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 2.

15th February, 1916.

Dear _____

Well, I am in camp. On the 7th I reported at Sturt Street Barracks, and the ovation was rather pleasing. We received sandwiches, cigarettes, coffee, and kind words from the ladies, but suddenly a roar came forth: — “Fall in.” One sturdy looking soldier remarked, “I think we have fallen in already”

Our names were called out, then we were formed up into fours and marched through the streets to the city baths for a wash, which was very rapid. We then entrained for camp, where the officials gave us a welcome. The commanding officer of the camp addressed us in this fashion: — "Men, you are about to take up a new life-a soldier's life. It is not like a civilian life, where you can do this and that at your leisure. You are under military discipline, and without discipline an army is rotten." He brought out the word rotten in such a fashion that the men shuddered. One poor innocent chap laughed, and another roar came forth: — "What in the devil is that man laughing at?" There was a silence for a few moments; then the C.O. continued.

"We are going to give you afternoon tea; then you shall receive your equipment. The rules of the camp will be read to you. The medical officer will examine you. You will then have the rest of the afternoon to yourselves."

It was then 5.20 p.m. Our afternoon tea consisted of a hard biscuit about 4 inches square, and a mug of tea. We then received our equipment, which consisted of blue pants, white hat, boots etc. and we all sadly parted with our civilian clothes. At seven o'clock we were inoculated, and during the operation I lost my good razor. The next move was to be shown to our bedroom; but, oh the faces. Eighty men slept in one shed with their clothes all

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bundled up in a heap, just like a secondhand shop, and so long as I live I shall never forget the first night in camp, at 8.20 p.m. I made my bed and tried to sleep off the shock of such a sudden change from my civilian freedom, but every now and again someone would stand on my feet in an attempt to reach his place of rest. It was close on midnight before I felt drowsy, and just as I thought the camp was at last settled for the night, some deep baritone lifted his head from the sandpaper-like blankets and cried out — "Has Cohen got his pants off to-night?"

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 3.

22nd February, 1916.

Dear _____

All the week we have been learning how to do right turn and left turn and about turn without falling over. I rather enjoy the physical jerks every morning. The meals are nowhere near as good as mother cooks, and at 5 o'clock each night we are allowed to see our friends. They bring us tasty things to eat. It is one of the joys of the camp looking through the bars at the gate waiting for 5 o'clock, but the poor chaps on guard are deprived of the privilege. The band plays the same old tune every morning. The roosters never crow because there are none here, but the buglers take their places wet or fine — "Get out of bed."

Concerts are held at night, and we visit the various institutions where games are played. Pies, cakes, and coffee can be purchased. You can read and write and walk about. It's a lovely life for an outback farmer's son. One night I was on guard at the isolation camp with an entrenching tool handle as a weapon against offenders. The shift from 12 midnight until 4 a.m. in the morning is very trying. The only excitement was toast and pork dripping from the cook-house after the officer of the day had been round. Last Tuesday night we had a mock battle out near the river, and as we passed a couple spooning on a seat one chap forgot his military discipline and indulged in a few remarks.

"Get in your line," remarked the sergeant. "You may be like that yourself some day."

I do not know who won the mock battle, nor does anyone else. However, we had a great outing and it ended with songs all the way back to camp.

Next week we are to be moved from the ginger-beer shed to the cow's stables. I believe we are advancing in our training, but

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don't they try to catch you with and catch you with questions on the rifle? "What is the weight of a pull-through?" Some got caught and replied "About 2-ounces," but the sergeant told them it was the little weight at the end of the string. Another question, "What is meant by the butt?" One witty soldier said, "The end of a cigarette."

Our instructors are very nice, and as you get hardened to the various items and the routine of the camp it is marvellous how you become quite at home in the new life.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 4.

1st April, 1916.

Dear _____

We have been moved to Broadmeadows for finalisation of training etc. When we marched out of our home at the showgrounds the band played its old tune. There were women and children at gates with tears in their eyes. We now had our khaki clothes. Our blues were a thing of the past. We were more like soldiers. It was a very touching march, as most of the troops realised that each step and each change meant a degree closer to the real thing. We have had quite a number of roll-calls and examinations by medical officers and dental officers. We are to receive our final equipment, which includes oversea kit. Our training is more severe, and we are going through instructions in bomb-throwing, the laying-out of barb-wire entanglements, digging in, gas, and numerous other interesting items such as bayonet fighting. The troops are to have final leave, and arrangements are being made to have a final concert in the camp. Suggestions have been made that we all put so much in a bottle for the occasion. I do not know what sort of a bottle it is, but one chap asked if it was a pickle bottle, so that he could put a half-penny piece in. We are meeting with a lot of strange faces in this camp, but I expect we will have to get used to that, because there will be numerous strange faces when we reach the other side — square ones.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 5.

4th April, 1916.

Dear _____

There was quite an upheaval after all the troops returned from visiting their friends for the last time prior to embarkation. Some were sad, some were intoxicated, and it was 2 a.m. before any of the troops had a chance of going to sleep. It was only a two-hours' snooze, or forty winks, for at 4 a.m. the bugle call was heard, and we struggled out of our huts into the cold air half-asleep.

Sergeants and lieutenants were rushing wildly up and down the lines attempting to get the men together for a roll-call. At the same time the mess-orderlies were busy distributing the half-cooked potatoes and hot water, which they termed stew. After much bother the troops moved off to the station, greatly excited, and even at that early hour of the morning there were people to give us an ovation, and all sorts of cheerful words of farewell. Right along the line to our troopship we received: cheers. Some of the girls at various stations went as far as kissing the troops. As we landed at our destination I gazed across at the vessel that was to carry us to the cruellest war in history. I forgot for the moment that we had travelled some seventeen miles by train, amid shouts of praise and great excitement. I stood perplexed. Bound for where? I did not know, nor did anyone else around me. It was a huge ship of some 14,000 tons, altered for the purpose of conveying troops to war. My eyes left the boat and turned towards the pier, which was holding some hundreds of troops. Battalions, called in accordance with their positions on the boat, were slowly being moved from the pier, and at 1.30 p.m. we were all aboard ready to move. The gates of the pier were opened, and one throng of visitors rushed up alongside the vessel. Streamers were connected from friends to the various troops on the boat.

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Parcels and notes were thrown from the wharf. Tears were streaming down the faces of relatives and friends of those on board. It was a sad moment — a moment when the realization of certain facts of warfare hit the hearts of those present. They were losing their dear ones, perhaps for ever, perhaps for some considerable time. There appeared in the atmosphere that uncertainty about the reunion, both as to whether there shall be a reunion or how long. It was this uncertainty that caused the very soles of the men and women to rise, and glorify the acts of sacrifice off their dear ones. They had enlisted to help save the land and all it possessed that was dear to them. The boat moved out slowly but surely to an unknown destination.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 6.

6th May, 1916.

Dear _____

When we reached the heads we anchored for ten hours. Whether this was to await further orders or not, I cannot say. Some seem to think we were waiting for escorts. There were about 2500 men aboard the troopship, and when we moved from the bay to the ocean the decks became similar to a battlefield. Strong men were lying helpless on the deck, too sick to even answer questions, but after a day or two they slowly began to pick up. It was after three days at sea that we caught sight of land. Then we lost it again for two days before arriving at the first port, Albany. There is no doubt Albany is a very pretty place, and it impressed me very much. The town lends an appearance of a pretty nest of eggs in a very pretty nest. The battleship Encounter was there, and we coaled. There was another farewell when we left. The voyage through the Indian Ocean was rather pleasant, on account of the calm sea and the many attractions that took place on board. During the daytime we amused ourselves in various ways — carting potatoes to the cookhouse, guard duty, watching the gambling or flying fish. We even came across a whale. When I say came across one, I mean we saw the spray miles away. We passed three troopships in the Indian Ocean, and at 3 o'clock one morning we were stopped by a Japanese war boat. Concerts, boxing and wrestling tournaments were held each evening and they were very good indeed. There were quite a lot of talented men on board; some were from vaudeville circuits, others were from a circus. On account of the mysterious voyage of the ship and the lack of knowledge as to where we were bound for many rumours were circulating, until one day it was officially announced that we were bound for Colombo. At Albany we were

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not allowed to go ashore, so one of the star performers at the concerts introduced a song as an appeal to the captain of the A.14. The tune was similar to the song which runs "I Want to go Back on the Farm." These were the words: —

We want to go ashore,
We want to go ashore;
We want to go at Colombo.
Listen, Captain, dear,
We are feeling mighty queer:
We want a route march,
We want a route march,
Just to stretch our weary legs:
That's what we want to do,
That's all we ask of you•
Let's go ashore.

When we crossed the equator there were many threats and jokes concerning the incident. The weather was slowly becoming warmer, and the troops were throwing off their heavy clothes. We were all inoculated and had our hair cut short. My head looked just like a dirty bladder of lard. The meals on board became very poor as we neared Colombo, and. I lost my voice for a few days. I was glad when I walked on deck one night. There was a stillness in the air. The vessel's engines had stopped. I listened very attentively for a while, and could only hear gentle ripples below. I gazed to my right and saw many frail lights, which appeared some distance away. "We must be in Colombo." I thought.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 7.

8th May, 1916.

Dear _____

We rose very early in the morning to learn all about the strange land, Colombo. We could not see a great deal of the interior from the A.14, so our attention for the time being was devoted in learning just something about the little black fellows who surrounded the boat. It appeared to me that their one aim was money, and to gain this end they would do almost anything that was asked of them. They were even selling their own coins for English money. Coins valued at a farthing were sold for sixpence. A silver coin thrown in the water would soon be sought after. One or two of the little niggers were cutting corns from some of the troops' feet for 2/-. The method of coaling the vessel taught me that many hands make light work. They form a ladder from the coaling barge to the coaling hole of the vessel in pairs, one pair throwing to the other, and the final pair would tip the coal from the basket. It appears that they possessed a certain number of baskets, and did a certain number of rounds. When tallying, they would count thus: — 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9 tally, and so on. When we had grown tired of the habits of the coolies we turned our attention to the coast and the harbour. It appeared rather strange to us after being used to Australian scenery. Huge coconut palms surrounded part of the coast, and buried in the centre was a beautiful church. To the left, past the breakwater, we could see the remains of a wreck. I was unable to discover the name of the vessel. The war-boat Venus headed the ships in the harbour. We received our first war news since leaving Australia, and that was that 7000 Russians had landed in the south of France. We also learnt that it had been reported that our vessel had been torpedoed. There was a lot of food thrown through the port-holes

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to the coolies. They called rabbits "fish" One of our chaps took his false teeth out, and the coolies made off for their lives. Colombo harbour possesses a very fair landing jetty very powerfully constructed, and supported by solid round pillars: The breakwater is very helpful considering the harbour is exposed to the open ocean. I believe that during a south-west monsoon the spray from the waves rises to a height four or five times as high as the breakwater wall. Some of the public buildings of Colombo are quite modern in their construction, and gave us a setback. Part of York-street is really pretty, with lofty trees, which meet across the road, forming an ideal shelter. In the native quarters we find a totally different world. The buildings appear to be more like fowlpens. Some of them, however, are conspicuous by their pillars facing the street. Commercial vehicles, which draw up closely to, the front doors of the shops, are more like the old-fashioned bow-topped Chinese fruit waggons. By all accounts the road is for pedestrians and vehicles alike. The Hindoo temple in "Pettah" is noted for its wonderful architecture, being particularly noticeable is the mouldings of ancient figures. There is no doubt the palms in Ceylon are beautiful, and to take a drive in a rickshaw along the coast or any track where these palms are plentiful is indeed glorious. We moved again into a fairly rough sea.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 8.

18th May, 1916.

Dear _____

After we left Colombo many of the troops discovered that they were short of cash. This, however, was mainly caused through gambling and foolish spending at Colombo. At our table, in the mess-room, we lived like fighting-cocks. All the luxuries that could be purchased from the canteen were on our table, and as I knew most of the boys, or, rather, having lived in the same district in Australia, favoured me inasmuch as I shared with them. Some of the troops held over two hundred pounds, gained by running a crown-and-anchor board. You can, therefore, account for the shortage of other troops. This shortage of cash was made up by the sale of empty soft drink bottles thrown away by the more financial troops. The heat is much greater than at Colombo, and many of the troops are badly burnt. Just about the knees and around the arms appear to be the most affected parts, and some of them, who are only wearing a flannel and trousers are suffering much agony. Of late we have had quite a lot of boat drill with life-belts in position. The object is to be in readiness in case the vessel is torpedoed, and when the troops are dismissed from this uninteresting operation they imitate sheep being driven into cattle trucks. We have passed quite a number of ships in the Red Sea. This sea is indeed trying. The air is very sultry, and to me it appeared as if the place was haunted. The water is a dirty greyish color, and the birds look wild, hungry, and small. Some of them resemble very much a hawk. They have brown wings, black neck and beak, white breast, and are about the size of a pigeon. We steered very closely to dangerous looking rocks, which stood high above sea-level. I do not think this is the usual course. Rumours are current that we only have a few more days of this trying

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voyage. It is indeed trying on account of the conditions. Where we sleep is right at the bottom of the boat, where the pigs are dumped in peace time. The food is indeed hard to keep down, and the weather is far beyond what the Australians are used to.

We arrived at Port Suez on the 5th. As we steamed into port I quite forgot that we had left Australia to engage the Hun, and although the port is not equal to either Colombo or Albany it had fascinating surroundings. I can picture the massive rocks, with their veil-like covering, imitating, as it were, a theatrical scene of very high quality. I can picture the astounding gaze of all the troops as they gazed across at the rocks. The township did not offer such a spectacle, but afforded us a favourable opportunity of seeing what we had so often read about in books of ancient history. The houses and temples, with their ancient designs, created much comment, nevertheless sending forth a fine lesson of old in reality.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 9.

21st May, 1916

Dear _____

We left Port, Suez to its peaceful solemnity, and steamed in the direction of the canal. The journey through the canal, which was in-the daylight, was more in keeping with a river trip on a holiday, and we had plenty of incidents to occupy our minds, which did indeed relieve the dullness of the journey. Right through the canal we witnessed sights which indicated that a war was raging somewhere, and the first group of troops we came in contact with was a fine regiment from India. They greeted us with great meaning as they stood beside their faithful camels. Then we came in contact with a regiment of English troops, who seemed to wonder where all the Australian troops were coming from. They gave us little or no cheering. At the same time the expressions upon their faces accounted for all the silence. They were pleased to see us, and to realise that we had come to assist. The next lot of troops we came in contact with were Australians, and they greeted us in the manner I expected.

"Have you just found out about the war?" one shouted. "Are you downhearted?" cried another. "No," came the reply from our boat.

"You soon will be," shouted our comrades from the sandy shore.

Shouting and cheering continued right through the remainder of the canal, as we slowly steamed past the signal houses and other-important spots adjacent to the Canal. "Are there any from Fitzroy? Are there any from Lal Lal? Are there any from Sydney?" This went on for a long time, and our boys would reply in similar strains. They told us from the shore that General Townsend had surrendered with 11,000 men, and that the Australian and English troops had just had a scrap along the Canal with the Turks, but we did not swallow that news. The

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Canal, with its palms and miniature lakes, is a wonderful piece of work, and one cannot help but admire the architecture, even though we were slowly nearing the day we would meet the Germans.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 10.

24th May, 1916.

Dear _____

The journey through the Suez Canal was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, and it made a wonderful break of the journey. It was very early morning when the boat stopped, and I rose from my bed on the floor at the bottom of the boat and walked to the top deck, but I could only detect the lights which surrounded the outskirts of the coast and a few yards into the township. I could see we were very close to land because of the faint outline through the semi-darkness. Slowly the sun rose, opening up the view of one of the main streets. I could see that the streets were very narrow, and signs which indicated the various classes of businesses projected from the buildings instead of lying flat against them. The bulk of the buildings are two and three stories, some of which have long balconies. Like Colombo, there does not appear to be any consideration for pedestrians. They seem to roam about the road in a sort of jumble with the trams and other vehicles. Flag poles are very numerous, and flags of all nations were flying at full mast. Goats and cows roamed about the streets; in fact, we saw a goat milked in the street, while a lady waited for the milk direct from the producer to the consumer. Such sights as were seen would not be permitted in the streets of Australia. When the inhabitants made themselves conspicuous, and Port Said opened up its daily routine, I could see that the people were of a mixed class, and our boys freely displayed the field glasses to try and catch a glimpse of the styles. As the day went on ladies from the various windows of the buildings were waving handkerchiefs, and the troops were waving their singlets and socks in return, whilst round the boat, like flies buzzing round a

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jam jar, were dozens of blackfellows selling oranges, chocolate, and silk. Some of the features of Port Said include the statue of Queen Victoria, which faces the more select part along the shore; the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps is very prominent at the opening of the Canal. The native quarters are of a higher class than Colombo, and the native coffee-house projects out into the roadway with a sort of canvas covering overhead, supported by poles just as you would pitch a tent. Tables and chairs are arrayed in the street, or what appears to be part of the street. The railway station reminded me of the Central Station, Sydney. No insult to Sydney — it just reminded me of it. The harbour is a continuation of low-roofed sheds, and it appears a very busy spot, just in front of the Savoy Hotel. The Casino Palace Hotel is similar in structure to a market on account of its lofty verandahs, but when you get a closer view you realise its compact architecture. We coaled at Port Said, and moved off on Sunday evening, the 7th May, 1916, and were indeed pleased with the farewell of some of the inhabitants. They followed the boat right out to the end of the breakwater, which walk is indeed pleasant. At the end of the Canal, just near the large statue described as the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, there were hundreds of patriotic people, and we parted under a pleasant sunset and faced the danger zone.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 11.

26th May, 1916.

Dear _____

Although Port Said created great amusement in many ways, it was soon forgotten when we were out at sea in the Mediterranean. I was detailed for submarine guard duty. Twenty rounds of ammunition was issued to each of the guard, and as I received my small parcel it run through my mind that it would not do much damage to the German fleet. "Twenty rounds of bullets. Good heavens" We were sent right to the end of the boat, and I shall never forget that night as long as I live. It was cold and monotonous. Gazing across the sea of darkness, with its dashing waves, haunted me, and the rest of the guard as well. I had a blanket wrapped well around myself, and for all the world looked like an old witch I never shivered so much in all my life, and as the minutes, which seemed like hours, rolled by, the constant gazing into the water made me believe I could see submarines, even though none appeared. Several times I felt like giving the signal, but I was prompted not to make a fool of myself. Then a thought came to me that I would not know if there was a submarine or mine about, even if I looked point blank at it. I had never seen one. I did not know what one was like, nor did any of the guard, but they all watched with eager eyes for something they did not know of, only that there were mines and submarines. At about 3 a.m. I felt a touch on the back, and I jumped. I thought a torpedo had caught me right on the spine. It was only when I heard a gentle voice in my ear that I calmed down. "Look Mine" he cried. I gazed hard into the sea, following as best I could the direction of his finger. There was no doubt a black object floating carelessly on the sea.

"What are you going to do?" I whispered.

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"Will I fire at it?" he asked.

"No:" I replied, "rush and tell the officer."

In a few minutes the officer was straining his eyes, and for quite a long time it had the whole party in a fever of nervousness. Even the officer was bewildered, and as we were getting closer and closer to it I was getting ready to put my hands up to my eyes so that I would not feel the pain nor see the mess. It was not until we reached within a few yards of it that the officer attempted to make a move.

"A barrel," he said. "I wish it was on board and full of beer."

I was greatly relieved. How thankful I was when the sun rose, and we could see once more without straining our eyes, but, nevertheless, the day-time proved just as thrilling as the night-time. The Euripides took some very funny turns, which caused the rumours to circulate like wireless. "We're dodging submarines." one would say. "We're being chased by a German destroyer," another said.

The most cheerful news of the lot, and which was truthful, was that land was in sight, and we were heading straight for it. I felt like throwing my hat in the air. I was beginning to realise how comfortable it would be without the lifebelt stuck to my ribs morning and night. I did not care what land it was, as long as it was land, and you could not sink to the bottom.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No 12.

30th May, 1916

Dear _____

We landed at Alexandria on the 8th May, 1916, and there was not one who was sorry to get on land. Disembarkation was a proper mess up. Nobody seemed to know who was who, and everybody who had stripes or stars or crown were trying to have a roll-call. The troops were as restless and irritable as a young colt fed on oats, and some were as thirsty as if they had lived on bully beef right through the voyage. Most of them were very tired. The thirsty ones were looking for a drink, beer for preference. They could not get it, so they had spirits. Some of them declared it was firewater. The sound of the electric cars and other vehicles brightened the situation a little, but it was not until 9.30 p.m. before we entrained. Like sheep, we were bundled into our compartments. Not like tourists, as many would have us named because we received six shillings a day. No We were hounded into open trucks with sides about eighteen inches in height. I secured a corner position, and curled myself up like a dog lying out on the grass. It was necessary to do that, because 40 or more men were ordered into one truck, and it reminded me of a tin of sardines. Naturally, each one was complaining because he had no room, and accused his neighbor of occupying all the truck. Some went so far as to say the whole train. Troops are like that.

Alexandria, by what we could see of it in a short space of time, was the largest of towns we had come in contact with. The niggers appeared to be a much bigger race altogether. After the troops had settled down to the trip the train moved off, and in a few minutes the greater part of them had fallen to sleep, but the sleep did not last very long on account of the cold. Some wanted to put their top coats on, and during this operation the whole

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sardine tin, as I termed it, was upset. If one moved the whole had to move. So we all put our top coats on. We had not gone many miles before we realised that it was worth the disturbance, for it became bitterly cold, and you could hear teeth chattering as well as the wheels rolling over the rough track. It did not interfere with my sleep. I slept like a top in my cosy corner, and it was only when we came to a standstill and the troops all jumped out to stretch their limbs that I awakened. I took a dreamy sort of a look over the side of the truck and discovered that we were at a station, and this station was situated in some lonely spot on the earth, that I cannot tell you the name of it. However, there were cries of "Eggs a' cooked" and "Cakes" but I felt too sleepy to bother about them, although I was as hungry as a hawk. After a few minutes there was another jumble getting into position again, and off we went. Sleep again, then another stop, and the same performance again. "Eggs a' cooked" and "Cakes" I bought two eggs and some cakes on this occasion. The eggs were warm and the size of pigeons' eggs. The cakes were as hard as the boards we slept on, but the worst was welcome and I secured "two for 'alf" meaning two cakes for half a piastre. At this city, town, village, or whatever it might have been, I could see that we were not far from the desert. At night-time it looked more like the ocean. No lights anywhere. A penny trumpet sounded, and we were off again. I do not know whether the cakes or eggs had morphia in or not, but I did not wake again until a sergeant shook me, and told me to gather up my kit. It was still dark, but I knew that the daytime was not far distant. What a job it was collecting my kit out of that truck, and the disorganisation was at its highest. If the Germans had made a raid they would have discovered a nice dreamy lot of Australians. Some were too tired or lazy to put their packs on their backs, and the cry was, "I suppose we've got about

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fifteen miles to walk." Fortunately, we did not have a great distance to walk, and as we jogged along we became wide awake. It was till cold, and we had our top coats on. When we arrived at the camp it was daylight, and we were ordered to sit down and rest until the C.O. of the camp came. We were waiting for the C.O. about an hour, and the top coats were soon removed. The sun peeped up and sent forth a sting with it. Massive flies accompanied it, and instead of shivering and chattering teeth we were wiping the beads of perspiration from our faces. The C.O. eventually arrived, and gave us a welcome.

"Well men," he went on, "you are one of the finest body of troops that have come from overseas." I believe this was a general remark. "You are now out on the desert of Egypt — Tel-el-Kebir. The climate is very hot, and we cannot get too much water, so you must exercise great care. Furthermore, you are not to bathe in the Sweet Water Canal. I have arranged for a drink of tea and some bread and marmalade, but you should have with you sufficient food to last for the next twenty-four hours. You may now move out of the sun into the mess huts at the bottom of the camp. Your officer will read to you the rules which govern the camp, and you are to adhere strictly to these rules, for your own sakes. This is the third line of defence, defending the Canal, but it is very improbable that you will be called upon. I wish you all good luck."

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 13.

2nd June, 1916.

Dear _____

The desert and Tel-el-Kebir created a mystery before me. While one side of the Sweet Water Canal was sand and dry, the other side was nice and green, with beautiful palms, and appeared most suitable for cultivation. Of course, our camp was situated on the sandy side, with all the flies and heat. The camp was set out similar to a muster parade of a brigade — that is, each battalion being allotted a certain space, and each company occupied a row of bell tents. At the head of each row of tents was the company headquarters. In each tent some 14 to 16 men slept with their feet to the pole. At the foot of all these lines of companies were the cook-houses, mess-huts, incinerators, and store-rooms. Below these places again, nearer the Sweet Water Canal, were tents erected for the purpose of vendors selling eggs and bacon, etc. Along the road which faced the bank of the canal were shops built of some sort of cane. These shops were made up of various classes of businesses, such as syrup shops, photographers, chemists, hairdressers, watchmakers, stationers, silk goods, etc. Right at the top of the lines further into the desert, about 500 yards from the tents, was a small tent occupied by the Y.M.C.A., but you could only purchase cigarettes and writing paper, bachelor's buttons, and matches. The meals in this camp were not too bad considering we were miles away from anything. Stew, porridge, bread and marmalade, bacon, rice, and tea were among the chief articles, and considering the heat we enjoyed the meals very much. An issue of lime juice was an order which was appreciated very much by the troops, although beer could be purchased in bottles after six o'clock German lager, and to purchase this beer you had to go under an arch of fixed bayonets.

WAR LETTERS.

You were only allowed one bottle. Our uniform consisted of boots, socks, and putties, short pants, singlets, and, cork helmets. At night-time, however, we wore the usual military dress, apart from the soft felt hat, which was replaced by the cork helmet. In fact, some of the troops wore their top coats. This will illustrate the great difference between the heat of the day and the ' cold at night. The syrup sold by the natives to the troops for a piastre a glass was indeed refreshing. Such syrups could be purchased in almost any fruit flavour, even banana. Early in the morning small boys would head to the camp selling tomatoes, cucumbers, and doughnuts with a sprinkle of powdered sugar. Even at 4 a.m. you would see these small boys, and they travelled a great distance. We were not very far from the railway, which is run by the Egyptians, and they do not waste much time at the stations.. The stations are well built, but the spouting which carries away the water when there is any water is in the middle of the roof, not at the edge like our spouting. Some of the goods trains are very long. One in particular had 110 trucks, and they carry a red light both back and front. The wheels on the engine are exceedingly high. Other modes of travelling include the electric car, the camel, the mule, and the donkey. The most amusing incident regarding travel was an Egyptian wedding, which was headed by donkeys. Camels followed behind, laden with what I considered was the wedding breakfast. On one of the camels was a special carriage for the bride and bridegroom, while other black guests were clothed in white robes. On the other side of the Sweet Water Canal is a large tent occupied by foreign acrobats, jugglers, wire-walkers, etc., but the troops are not permitted to attend. A few miles from the camp, further into the desert, is an old battlefield where Earl Kitchener once fought, so we have been told.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 14.

6th June, 1916.

Dear _____

It would be a very long time before I became accustomed to the desert heat. They say the thermometer reaches 120 degrees in the shade, and I would not disbelieve it. We were told about battle-fields miles out into the desert, so a party of us ventured out in the sun. There were certainly impressions of a battlefield, but I was not interested in the matter on account of the trying circumstances. Although so tired walking through the sand, I possessed sufficient energy to stoop to gather a few pretty pebbles, and if it had not been for the long walk I would have never carried them. They are souvenirs of the ordeal and that is all. Quite a lot of remarks have been passed in connection with the heat. One is that it often rains, but the water turns into vapour before it reaches the ground. Another is that if you hold a cigarette in the sun and take a few puffs it will light. On one particular day I was detailed for fatigue work, and fatigue work in Egypt was much harder than the usual drill. With a water-bottle full of water, I made my way some four or five miles into the desert with the small party. We dug a hole about two feet six inches deep and about twelve feet square. It was 6 o'clock before we finished, and we were quite ready for home, but a load of rubbish appeared, and we had to burn it. This put the icing sugar on the cake. We just about got home, and that was all. The following day I was vaccinated, followed closely by inoculation, and had to be escorted to my tent by two A.M.C. orderlies. It was an agonising trip, too. I could not see my hand in front of me, and my head was rocking about on my neck as I thought the connections had been severed. I received forty-eight hours off duty. The ordinary training was not very severe, the hours of which were mixed on account of the heat. We rose at 4.30 a.m.,

WAR LETTERS.

which gave us time to roll our blankets, read part of the "Egyptian Mail," have a cucumber or tomato from the niggers, or else doughnuts with sugar, and have a wash in time for 5.45 a.m. physical training, which I thoroughly enjoyed. This exercise lasted until 8 a.m., and it did the troops the world of good. Breakfast was the next item in rest huts, or mess huts. The dust and flies used to keep us company. At 9.30 a.m. we paraded for drill until 11 a.m. Dinner at 12 noon. The next drill was 4 p.m. until 6 p.m. Tea was then served. After tea we used to relax for a while, dress ourselves in our walking-out attire, and spend our money down the street, as we termed it. Syrup, eggs and bacon, photos, shaves, silks, anything to spend money. I must not forget boot cleaning. The niggers used to clean the boots for a piastre, and they delighted in describing the way the Australian gives his order from the Tommy. It was the delight of some of our boys to upset the niggers' baskets, then watch them get on their knees in prayer, but they would assist them in gathering up the spoil, then give them a piastre. The niggers soon learnt the Australians' generosity, and stuck to them like glue. Earthenware vessels were sold in great numbers. Silk was another saleable line. Many had their photos taken. On one occasion a photographer's shop was burnt down because the Egyptian did not keep to his promise in delivering the photos. I ventured into the chemist's shop for a box of Beecham's pills, and he told me they only had cigarettes and chocolate. The Egyptian piastre seems to be the main coin, as everything is quoted by this coin. You ask the price of any article and you are merely told 20 or 40, meaning 20 piastres, or 40, whichever the case may be. We cannot see some stars that are visible in Australia, and there are stars here that are not visible in Australia. For instance, the Waggon and Horses. The Star of the East is very bright, but I do not care too much about studying the stars. There is a gloom when you look into the heavens. You feel

WAR LETTERS.

very lonely, and at times you wonder really if it is true that you are so many miles away from your dear ones, and so near the raging battlefield. I sometimes feel that it is impossible to get back from this desert of sand, and I know that some of the other troops become the same when they are writing home. The expressions upon their faces tell of their thoughts. Perhaps their wives, perhaps their mothers, and they wonder when they will be able to look into their eyes again.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 15.

9th June, 1916.

Dear _____

Since we arrived there has been a marked difference in the camp. The lines are exceedingly clean. The tents are rolled from the bottom every morning to allow fresh air to blow through. Each tent is thoroughly cleaned; all blankets are neatly rolled and placed in their proper positions. The occupiers of each tent strive to outdo their neighbours in decorations. A competition has been inaugurated, and the occupiers of the best decorated exterior of a tent are to receive some sort of reward. Whether it is a trip to Cairo, or a week without drill, or a drink of lime-juice I do not know. However, the struggle is becoming very keen, and several trips to the desert for coloured stones have been made by the competitors.

I do not know how often the Egyptian natives are paid, but in any case they go mad when they do receive their rupee, or whatever it is, round about the value of 1/4. I have had the opportunity not the pleasure of witnessing a pay day, and I thought they had declared war on the camp. Their hats were thrown in the air. Each nigger had a sack on his back, and they ran to the train, hundreds of them, shouting and crying out like a lot of frightened sheep. I was glad to see the last of them. Afterwards I learned that they were Government employees, and were going home to Cairo to spend their small earnings. When I realised the situation I felt ashamed to think that such animal-like lives were allowed to exist on the earth. All defaulters in this camp have to suffer the pains of doing pack drill in the sun. It is trying enough to drill in ordinary circumstances without full packs and in the sun. However, a firm hand is needed in Egypt, as the place has a tendency to draw out the evil that might exist in anyone. Burning of houses, huts, etc.,

WAR LETTERS.

rioting, and other uncalled-for deeds create unpleasantness for all concerned. Some of the troops, not from our section, were sent back. to Australia as undesirables — a shocking stain on anyone's character. The boy nigger vendors were more talkative than their older competitors, and for this reason the Australian soldier took to him very keenly. Apart from our boys learning words of the Egyptian language, so the niggers quickly learnt the Australian style of expressing himself. At early hours of the morning you would hear the youthful voices penetrating through the camp lines: —

"Come on, doughnuts. Very good — very sweet — very clean. Come on —."

On account of their popularity, they received a great deal of Australian money for no services at all; sometimes by merely answering questions. Although they are very active and wide awake, they are not too clean. I was told at one time that the niggers in Cairo are so smart that when you put your first foot on the ground when alighting from a tram-car they have commenced to clean your boots. The other one no sooner reaches the ground than they are before you for a piastre.

One day I was lying peacefully in my tent, and a sergeant peeped in and warned me to hold myself in readiness for guard duties. I had been told that guard duties in Egypt were very monotonous, so all sorts of thoughts ran through my mind. There are so many different kinds of guard duties in the army that one has to be prepared at any time to sacrifice a good night's sleep for distasteful duty. However, my duty on this occasion was rather a pleasant one. It was at the circus the other side of the canal, and as the duty commenced at 6 p.m. I was favoured with the opportunity of seeing the performance other troops were forbidden to see. The performance was very good. Acrobats,

WAR LETTERS.

jugglers, double-jointed girl, wire-walker, all helped to give us a real good night's performance. There was no trouble which necessitated the guard using force, so the night was very pleasant. After the show had ended and the patrons left for their homes supper was spread out on a long table, and the guard was looking forward to a spree. Wine was placed on the table, and everything looked so appetising, but instead of sharing in the joy we had to look on with hungry eyes. It was after 1 o'clock before they went to bed, then the mosquitoes had their turn, and we wished the circus to Hong-Kong.

The medical officer was exceedingly busy one morning, and it puzzled him a great deal as to why so many troops should approach him with the same complaint. It appears that on this special morning I did not feel too well myself. Pains in the stomach and a weakness across the small of the back was a general complaint. After careful investigations it was discovered that the troops had been eating something that was not good for them. Apparently investigations proved that in a tent close to the canal where eggs and bacon had been sold, three men were carrying on business under rather strange circumstances, and a test proved that the eggs and bacon were doped. A thorough search was made, but nothing could be discovered, as most of the stock and contents were thrown into the canal. The three men were arrested, and nigger boys who dived into the canal discovered rifles and many rounds of ammunition. It was afterwards discovered that the three men were Turkish spies. The hawks that fly about the desert were named Kitchen's fatigue party, on account of their duty in gathering scraps. We had church parade, and it was a very impressive sight. A brigade consisting of four strong battalions assembled in the open desert. The bands united and played all the hymns. It is a wonderful and

WAR LETTERS.

very sacred ceremony when hundreds of troops are gathered together in worship.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 16.

12th June, 1916.

Dear _____

Rumours, as a rule, in the army very seldom have any foundation, but the rumour which spread round the camp that we were leaving Tel-el-Kebir proved correct, for it was officially announced on the parade ground that the whole of the troops would be shortly moved to a cooler climate. Whether this cooler climate was France or England we did not know, but it was a great relief to even have the knowledge that we were to be freed from the trying heat of the desert, and, of course, the flies.

The following morning found many willing hearts for duty, the duty being to pull down the tents and clean the camp ready for immediate evacuation.. The work proceeded very satisfactorily, and at about 3 in the afternoon a dispatch rider was sighted delivering what appeared to be an urgent message to the C.O. of the camp. Then the rumours became more frequent.

"We are going to the Russian front," said one.

"We are bound for France," said another, "as there is going to be a big offensive on the Western front."

"We are going direct to England," said another; and so they poured in upon the troubled minds of the soldiers, but the most depressing rumour of the lot was that the order to move had been cancelled, and as this came from a person of a position where information was reliable it had a far-reaching effect. Later on, however, we discovered that the rumour had certainly been exaggerated. The cancelling of the move was untrue, but certain troops had to remain on the desert until further notice, and it caused much anxiety.

After waiting for an hour or more a sergeant came along with a list of names.

WAR LETTERS.

"Pay attention for a minute" he asked, and strict attention was paid.

Slowly and distinctly the names were read out of those who were to move and those who were to remain behind for a few days longer. On this occasion I was one of the fortunate ones. Very fortunate I considered, because there were only nineteen in our company to go.

The nineteen men were told to fall in near battalion headquarters with all their equipment, and we lost no time in carrying out the command. After two hours' waiting we were marched to the station. Our names were called out again, and we replied "Yes, sir" We were asked if we were sure that our equipment was complete, because they would be checked at the end of the journey, and anything that was missing would have to be paid for. We were quite prepared for this.

The nineteen men chosen out of our company were indeed a fine lot of fellows. They united at once for the purpose of attempting to stick to one another no matter what might be before us. The first movement by the sergeant was a suggestion to all put in a certain sum for provisions in case the food on the boat was poor. We all agreed, and it was decided by the majority that I should hold the money and purchase the necessary articles agreed upon. Such articles included:—48 lb. of jam, 28 tins of condensed milk, 1 case of eating apples, 1 case of Blood oranges, 1 box of cigarettes, 1 gross of safety matches, 3 packets of soap Lifebuoy. Lifebuoy soap was found to be the most valuable asset to the troops — especially at sea. We used it for toilet, we used it for our clothes, and we discovered that a good lather could be obtained even in hot salt water. We could not always pick and choose our cigarettes. We had to take just what we could get, and up to the present — since I left Australia I have smoked the

WAR LETTERS.

following brands:— Capstan, Three Castle, Flag, Park Drive, Woodbine, Gem of the Ocean, Clymas, Carlos, Trumpeter, Villa, Milkrona, Splendo, Glover. White-horse, Ferntree, Legation, Just So, Black Cat, Ruby Queen, Honeydew, Gold Flake, Russian Brown, Parkstan, Players, State Express, Peter Pan, Milo, Scissors, B.D.V., La Rose.

The articles mentioned could not be purchased from the shops along the Sweet Water Canal, so we had to let the matter stand over until we reached Alexandria. We left Tel-el-Kebir at 9 p.m. The troops who had to remain behind gave us a send-off. I did not take much notice of the proceedings. My thoughts were on the journey, and where we might be bound for. I felt that this was my last trip before the trenches in France, and as I gazed across the desert, which was just losing the light, I felt sorry. It seemed hard to part from the rest of the boys, and amid a mighty cheer our train moved out. The journey was much better than the last, for we were not so packed and tired. We discussed the future, and where we might be bound for. When we reached a town named Zagazig we had a good look round and stretched our legs. The streets in this town were very narrow, and although it was a late hour quite a number were enjoying the cool drinks served from the tables right on the roadway. This little break at Zagazig put new life in us, and the rest of the journey over the Nile and past several towns was pleasant, even though it was the night. We arrived at Alexandria very early in the morning, and walked a good distance into the township. The electric cars were running, and quite a number of people were up and about. Some of the quarters appeared to possess an air of mystery. Queer-looking men hanging about the corners and the numerous byways added to the mystery. After going in and out several lanes we opened into a big square like an idle space, and although trams ran

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through the square it seemed to us a waste of good room. After a careful search I could not procure the articles agreed upon. Even near the military quarters we could not find a place where provisions were sold, so we made our way back to the station. The troops were just forming up ready to move. We joined them, and were marched to our boat at the pier.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 17.

16th June, 1916.

Dear _____

It was 5 o'clock in the morning when we embarked on an old captured German vessel. It did not appear very comfortable, and was certainly in a filthy state. In fact, the boat had a peculiar smell about it, and we felt that the old "tub" was used to go through the Mediterranean Sea on account of its little value. The more we inspected the vessel the more disgusted we became, and very little hope was given for a safe voyage. The vessel had a tonnage of about 7000 tons. The old name, which was only visible on certain parts, such as lifebelts, etc., was "Derfflinger." We travelled under the sign "T.8260" as a troopship. The name the British gave the vessel was "Huntscreen." Although we were all settled, with a gun at each end of the boat, we did not move any further than the middle of the harbor, alongside the troopship "Nile," which was also loaded with troops, but it appeared a much brighter boat than the old German "Derfflinger." For three and a half hours we anchored in the harbour, either waiting for an escort or the signal to go. Breakfast on that day was hard to stomach. Dry bread and jam; meat and vegetables that were so greasy that I felt sick before we got anywhere near the open sea. The only feature of comfort about the vessel was a phonograph on our troopdeck No. 9, and it got absolutely murdered until such time as the troops were unfit for any comforts on the ship. I suppose the captain of the vessel thought it better to be sure than sorry, so he hugged the North African coast as much as he possibly could, but I did not mind at all, as it afforded us a very good opportunity of seeing the north coast of Africa. We passed such places as the Arabs' Gulf, Gulf of Sollum, Bumbus, Merjut. We passed underneath Greece, Sicily, but did not see land for quite a long

WAR LETTERS.

time after that, when I was told that we were very close to the Algerian coast. The day was glorious, and we all thoroughly enjoyed the sight of the high mountains, which appeared to be covered with snow. There were no sports of any description on this vessel, but a fear the whole time that we were going under, that our ship was doomed any day in that dangerous Mediterranean. It appeared more dangerous because each day brought us nearer thicker traffic. Patrol boats were to be seen in almost any direction you looked. We were so close, as it were, that you could almost feel the pangs of war, but the next day brought rough weather, and a rough sea. All the patrol boats seem to desert us. We were left to the mercy of the Hun and his submarines, and didn't we cling to our lifebelts. We ate with them on, shaved with them on, and slept with them on, and as horrible and as uncomfortable as they were they were our best friends. We steamed north-west against a wind that howled mercilessly through the riggings. The imagination of a shipwreck was an easy matter, but towards evening the sea calmed itself, and so did we. The thrills had been numerous, and very little food was eaten, not because of the roughness of the sea altogether, but because it was unpalatable. The food was becoming the main topic of the hour, and you would not believe me if I told you that we had to put mustard on the butter to deaden the taste. Bully beef was served up at every meal. The bread was sour. My principal nourishment was cold water. In all my life I had never been called upon to face such food: and it was becoming worse and worse each day. The troops were becoming weaker and weaker, and had it not been for the cooks supplying us with small buns or cakes at twopence each we would have no doubt had to starve. The troops without money used to sit on the well-deck and watch their mates coming from the alleyway with these tasty-looking cakes day after day.

WAR LETTERS.

Their eyes would pierce forth like those of a hungry tiger, and there is no doubt that if many more days had gone by something would have happened. Good food must have been on the boat, or these dozens and dozens of cakes would never have been made. In any case, there must have been a leakage somewhere, for if the ingredients were the property of the military why should they have been sold to the troops at twopence a cake? On one particular day, when about thirty of the hungry wolves were seated around on their usual haunts, a cook weighing about fifteen stone, and nicely dressed in a clean white hat, coat, and trousers, ventured to take a massive plum pudding about 10 inches by 12 inches from the cook-house to the officers' quarters. At the time I was standing on the port side of the boat, leaning against the rails. I saw the pudding, then I saw the fat cook, and I instantly gazed across at the hungry pack. Their eyes, my goodness, they stood out like the guns at each end of the boat, then, alas One gigantic rush. The cook fell over, and the wolves made the massive plum pudding look very foolish. In the struggle there was a fair amount of bloodshed, as some of them used their heavy boots in the attempt to gain a little luxury that was meant for the officers. The strangest part of the incident was that there was no more said about it, and I often wondered whether the authorities thought it wise to let the matter drop on account of, perhaps, some wrong against the troops.

A rumour went round the vessel that there had been a great naval battle in the North Sea. This would be about the 3rd June. Our report said 17 British ships sunk; serious German losses. We doubted all rumours, but this was supposed to be official. Many exciting incidences happened the day before we landed. There were torpedo boats steaming about all over the place. French seaplanes were hovering overhead, and coming quite low. There

WAR LETTERS.

were two burials on the journey. One was at 2 o'clock the morning and the other at 11. On both occasions the engines were stopped or slowed down to such an extent that you would think they had stopped. A French torpedo-boat escorted us into the harbour at Gibraltar.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 18.

20th June, 1916.

Dear _____

Gibraltar is a wonderful place. At the entrance can be seen a huge lighthouse, which showed us the way into the harbour under escort. It is from this lighthouse that the great fort rises, and as you follow the rise you seem to lose sight of the top. It appears buried in the clouds. Although we could not see many guns, they are there in great numbers, and what we did see seemed to be no bigger than revolvers. The lighthouse is situated on what is called Europa Point, a very low-lying solid rock, but very prominent for shipping purposes. From the eastern beach the rock rises to a great height, and appears to get very narrow as you reach the top. Other features of Gibraltar are the Market Square, which possesses two massive entrances. The Governor's Castle, the Moorish Castle, and the Signal Station — all these are connected or in the vicinity of the mighty rock, and the green appearance lends a charm as a background to many of the buildings. It was at this port where the troops made numerous purchases, for they feared a repetition of what had happened between Alexandria and Gibraltar. Beautiful oranges for one shilling per dozen were bought in large numbers. The vendors sold out very quickly, and had to row back to the town to replenish their stocks. Cigarettes were sold 150 for sixpence. Tobacco, 3/6 per pound; cigars, 2/6 for fifty. Other articles that were in great demand were chocolates, figs, cherries, and views of Gibraltar. One of the principal streets of the town is Waterport Street, which has some very fine buildings, but, like most foreign streets, it is built anywhere and anyhow, and very narrow. The hawkers use donkeys a great deal. Two large baskets hang over either side, while on the donkey's back is a longer basket, which rests on the

WAR LETTERS.

baskets hanging at the sides. However, it seems a large enough load for the poor donkey. The troops were a lot more contented when the time came to leave than when they arrived, for they had starved through the Mediterranean Sea, but on leaving Gibraltar they were not hungry. It was 7.30 p.m. when the "Huntscreen" left harbour under a glorious sunset of a purple-looking mountain. The red sky was mirrored in the water, and many of the troops remarked about the beautiful picture. For a couple of days the soldiers lived as lords. High-class cigars and other luxuries were being freely indulged in until a sudden stop came, and we were back in the old routine: Poor food and a dirty boat, cheap cigarettes, and the lonely sea. The food became so scarce that troops, whilst gambling, were betting their porridge and bread. This state of affairs did not last very long, for when we reached somewhere near the Bay of Biscay the food became plentiful and more appetising, and the troops forgot all about the hardships, although it appeared very strange that our food should improve in mid-sea, where no extra provisions could be purchased. When we were told that we were in the Bay of Biscay many of the men prepared for sickness, as we had been told that this bay was noted for its roughness, but we were all gloriously disappointed, as the water was exceedingly calm. In fact; it was much rougher when we reached the vicinity of the English Channel.

After being accustomed to the heat of Egypt we found, as we steamed north, that each day brought us nearer to the colder climate, and even during the day we were obliged to wear our overcoats and keep ourselves well wrapped up. One day in particular was bitterly cold, with a biting wind blowing from the north. It was about 10.3.0 a.m. when we entered the English Channel. This was the first time we had seen rain for .some considerable time, and the novelty created much comment. In the

WAR LETTERS.

afternoon the sun made a feeble effort to warm the atmosphere, but it did not succeed in forcing the troops to remove their heavy top coats nor their woollen jackets. After tea was over it was reported that in the morning we would land on English soil. This was indeed a joy, for the majority of the men on board had only heard of England in geography and history. They had heard, as youths, that England was part of our great Empire, and the main topic was London. Everybody became gay and happy. Some of the troops were polishing up their badges and buttons. The band, which was silent throughout the voyage, commenced to play. Dancing and singing followed, and the air was full of merriment. At 10.30 p.m. that night the engines stopped, and all eyes were turned towards the shore trying to get a glimpse of England, but it was useless, for the sun had gone before us. The following morning there was great excitement. Everybody was bustling here and there, and nobody seemed to be doing anything in the way of getting us off. The harbour was the main attraction, and indeed it was very pretty. It has two entrances each side of a breakwater. The town ship lies at the rear of the entrance. After the excitement had died down and the troops commenced to cry out, "What are we here for?" there was a move in the direction of disembarkation. Ferry boats, busy little fellows, steamed alongside our dirty ship and slowly but surely transported us to shore. The seagulls surrounded us in hundreds, and as we neared the shore we were very much impressed by the fresh, healthy appearance of England after the sandy desert of Egypt. The grass and trees were beautiful and green. The air had a fresh, clear sting with, it, and our lungs were full of it. The name of the little ferry that took me across was "Sir Francis Drake." I stepped from this boat and placed my foot on wonderful England for the first time in my life, and I felt very happy and pleased.

WAR LETTERS.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 19.

24th June, 1916.

Dear _____

It is Sunday afternoon, and the sun is just warm enough to make us all feel very happy. Most of the troops, full of joy, are dressing up as if they we're in Australia. They are going for a little outing around the green hills under the weeping trees that hang carelessly across the roads that lead to the various villages, but I must stay in camp until I finish this letter. We have forgotten all about the sour butter and distasteful food served out on the "Huntscreen". We have forgotten the sandy desert and its flies, but I will never forget the fate of the officers' pudding.

When we entrained on the Great Western Railway they seated six in a carriage labelled third class, but the quality of this carriage was almost as good as the Victorian Railways first-class. We had ample room to move about after all our kits were packed in the compartment with us. We left Plymouth at about 2 p.m., and travelled through the most glorious country. Green, grassy hills, and clumps of green-leafed trees, with paddocks ploughed and crops set, made the sight appear Just as a dream. These paddocks are divided by means of green hedges, not fences as we have in our country; and these hedges added to the beauty of the district. Occasionally we met an isolated mansion surrounded by green trees, at a distance, and at the rear of the mansion could be seen the faint outline of an English village. Of course, we passed dozens of villages, and had quite a good view in spite of the speed. The cattle are the picture of health, and the people of these villages, who gave us a hearty welcome by waving towels or anything handy, have beautiful rosy cheeks and eyes which told of their health. At Exeter, a fairly large town about midway from Plymouth to our camp, we were supplied by the mayoress with

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buns and tea, and a card wishing us the best of luck. This act was highly appreciated by the troops. As the train steamed out three cheers were given to Exeter. A peculiar thing about the English farmer and railway navvy — and it was particularly noticeable by our troops — is the dress. White shirts, watches and chains were worn by a great number. In fact, they all appeared to be neat and tidy for the class of work they were doing. At about 9.30 p.m. we landed at Tidworth, and we discovered that at Tidworth there were many camps. However, we were commanded to leave the train, and after the usual formula we were marched off to a camp about a mile from the station. The sun did not set until very late, and at night the air became very cold. The following day we were issued with three extra blankets in the morning, and drilled in the afternoon for about three and a half hours. After our first drill it rained heavily, but towards evening it fined up a little, which gave me an opportunity of visiting a village close to the camp named Ludgershall. This was the first English village which gave me a close view. Some of the most prominent features were the narrowness of the streets and the curves, also the secret that appeared to be wrapped up in the minds of the inhabitants. There were in abundance whitework shops, fancy goods shops, and photographers. These had grown considerably since the inauguration of the camps, and the lines that were sold were more in keeping with soldiers' wants. Needless to say, there were plenty of hotels inns for the size of the place. On my return from Ludgershall I visited the Y.M.C.A. in the camp grounds. This convenience is well arranged, and one of the most prominent articles for sale was Kiwi boot polish. The soldiers highly appreciated this polish for their tan boots. Girls are behind the counter, whereas in Australia they were all men. In fact, I noticed, when travelling, that girls had a roving commission on all

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stations, selling cakes, cigarettes, and sweets. Our stay was not very long at Tidworth, for in two days we were ordered to pack our belongings and march to a camp at Larkhill. This march was indeed severe, as we had full packs weighing roughly 50 lb., and the distance was approximately 12 miles. There was not a great deal of sight-seeing in the villages adjoining the camp that night. No the troops hugged the huts and made a new acquaintance in the "Canadian boys," who were very pleased to see us. They sang songs together and exchanged topics of interest to both countries. It appears that we are the first batch of Australian troops to receive training in Eng land, and on that account have received wonderful receptions from Tommies, New Zealanders, and Canadians. The officials were not too severe on us the following day. They evidently realised that the march was solid. Our drill was exceedingly easy, and towards evening I felt quite fresh, so took a short walk of a mile and a half to a place called Stonehenge. This historical place interested me to a great extent and I risked threepence admission to see and hear all about the ancient stones. I purchased seven postcards for sixpence and will forward them on with views of Cairo, Port Said, Gibraltar, Amesbury, and a few stones, etc., from the Egyptian desert. Now, this is what was told me by the official in charge at Stonehenge:— There are only a few stones left, as people used to come and chip pieces off and take them away. However, nobody has counted them correctly on account of the mixed state they are arranged in, but it is believed that some of these massive stones have been buried under the earth. On the 21st June, which is the longest day in England, some ancient race, known as the Druids, used to assemble for the purpose of carrying out a sacred ceremony. As the sun rose in the east it caught a stone lying in the outer portion of the arena, and threw a shadow on to another stone

WAR LETTERS.

inside the arena, which probably was the pulpit. On this pulpit; or stone; as it is, a pure virgin was placed, her heart taken out by means of a piece of sharp flint, and placed on the stone for the first appearance of the sun to shine upon. Afterwards her head was cut off, and the body buried. It was considered an honour for a girl to be slaughtered in this manner, and many volunteers were to be seen, prior to the performance.

The structure itself is no doubt a wonderful piece of work, as huge stones, some thirty or more yards long, are built up to such a height that you can as much as believe the story when you realise the size of each stone, and the enormous weight contained in each one. How they got there, apart from being placed in such order, astounded me, and the attendant told me that in some quarters it is believed that earth was placed in position and the stones rolled up to their respective places, but I contend that a sufficient number of men could not gather round the stones to enable sufficient force to be implied. I did not believe the possibility of such theory. I do not think many people really know the true facts of the wonderful engineering, but the stones are there. It is 3700 years ago, when men did not smoke and stay out until all hours of the night. They must have been strong men, or there is a secret in haulage that has been lost to the knowledge of men. After returning from this historical place I was informed that there had been riots in the camp, and at a place called Andover. This, indeed, is a sad and awful thing to have to state about our troops. The report states that at Andover a policeman was killed by an Australian gang who were intoxicated, and that in the camp the adjutant and a sergeant had been very roughly handled. There is no doubt that we had been bundled from pillar to post since our arrival on English soil under very trying conditions, such as a march of thirteen miles or more with heavy

WAR LETTERS.

packs, with only bread and butter to eat and water to drink. It is true that 90 per cent of the troops had shocking feet after the march, but it is doubted as to whether the fault should be placed upon the shoulders of our own officials. Even so, it did not warrant such behaviour. This sort of thing made for Australia a bad name. Every time we marched through strange villages the people would rush inside and close their doors and it got that way that our troops used to cry out on entering a strange village, "Lock your doors, take your daughters and cockatoos in. Here comes the Aussies" However, it is pleasing to relate that this sort of thing did not reign long as the terrors of the gang were soon placed under observation, and the people began to learn that the Australian soldier was a man besides a soldier, and after a few days we were much sought after as guests in the English homes. I have not had any leave since I left Australia, but I am living in hopes of getting a few days. We are 70 miles from London, on the Salisbury Plains.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 20.

10th July, 1916.

Dear _____

As soon as we landed on English soil it became one of the troops' greatest desires to see London, and my turn came. There was great excitement in the camp. Five hundred Australians were to pay a visit to London. Boots were polished, faces were nicely shaven, and everybody about to proceed on the long-looked-for journey was looking just lovely. But there was one unpleasant incident, and that was the heavy rain. Mud was just like dough before it is cooked, and after preparing so carefully it made us feel that our labour was lost. However, we had to look just lovely, or the officials would have denounced us as unfit to visit London. We marched from Rollestone camp to Amesbury to catch our train. The distance would be about five miles. On this voyage we passed a home sitting well back from the road, and hidden amongst massive trees after the pine nature. We were told that Oliver Cromwell used to live there, and that an underground tunnel extending some great distance was built to enable this great statesman to leave his home and return without being observed by persons deemed to be his enemies. When you view these ancient places and are told of the ways of the people your mind travels back years and years, and you can almost picture the habits of such people and see them in actual life.

After a great deal of patience our train moved off at about 10 a.m. The scenery, as usual, was exceedingly pretty, and all along the line we received cheers from the patriotic English people. We were not, however, so interested about the cheers and scenery, on this occasion, as we were to arrive in London, and the time seemed ever so long, yet we were only four hours and a half

WAR LETTERS.

travelling. It was 2.30 p.m. when we landed at Waterloo Station. I certainly steered my eyes quickly about, but I did not open my mouth and stand there like a stupid in the streets of London. After I had satisfied myself that there was nothing so extra marvellous about the place I enquired where to get the train for Putney, and bought my ticket, and entered the electric train as if I had lived there all my life. They do not waste much time on the railways, and we were soon at Putney. After a few enquiries I discovered where Mrs.—— lived, and didn't she make a fuss

"Now, what do you fancy for tea?" she asked as soon as I had removed my hat from my head. This placed me in an awkward position, for I did not know whether my fancy dish was too expensive. However, I told her that whatever she had in the house would be very nice indeed. I thoroughly enjoyed my tea, and after I had told her as much as I knew about Australia and she had told me as much as she knew about London and a few other items I left her, to seek further knowledge of London. A huge motor factory took my eye, and I walked to the office door and told them I would very much like to have a look through. The manager detailed one of the men to show me through and explain all the details. I thoroughly enjoyed the inspection, and I discovered quite a lot of valuable information that might be of service to me when I return to Australia. When I left the motor factory I had a look at the Thames River, and I could see no difference between the water in this river from any other. Only it was the Thames and near London. Putney reminded me very much of Prahran. I boarded the train and in a few minutes I was back at Waterloo. It was at this stage that I met two of my friends from the camp, and we walked about viewing the various sights of London. Every now and again we would be stopped by the female sex, who seemed rather anxious to learn just a little about Australia and try hard to press us to have tea with them but we

WAR LETTERS.

went back to camp. On one occasion a mother and her daughter occupied our time for close on an hour, and one of my pals told the mother that he was a professor of grubs and used to go round the various orchards in Australia examining these grubs and ascertaining to what extent they did damage to the fruit. They became very interested, and when we told them that we had better move on a bit further they asked us to have a drink with them. This gave us the surprise of our lives. For supper we had crab and Portugese oysters, and I enjoyed them very much. The grass did not grow under our feet. We walked and walked until midnight, but unfortunately we got lost, and had to ask a policeman the best way to get back to Waterloo. He put us on a bus, and off we went. After travelling for some distance we realised that, we would not get a bed that night, so decided to alight and have a hot pie with coffee. This .was purchased from a coffee stall in the street, .and we paid sixpence for it. An elderly man told us we were not far from Waterloo, so we ventured the journey on foot, but it was not long before we found ourselves in just as big a muddle. We heard the trains running, so made enquiries as to how to get there. We discovered that these trains were underground. To get to this train we had to go down stairs, but instead of walking down they took us down, and seemed to throw us off when we reached the bottom. We did not fancy this journey at night, as we could not see London under the ground. However, we went a few stations up the line, and made our way to the open street. There were not many people about, so we kept on walking and planning the next day's programme. The next day was not far off for in a few minutes the sun brought with it a faint light. It was daybreak. "Where are we?" This was the question we asked a policeman. "You are in Brixton, mate," he said. We thanked him, and walked on, but hunger soon brought us to our bearing, and when we asked another policeman where we were he said Norbury. We

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were directed to Waterloo, where we had sausages and bacon, and cleaned ourselves up for the second day.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 21.

11th July, 1916

Dear _____

The second day in London was spent sight-seeing, and as far as I can remember to describe with accuracy, we visited such places as:—— Charing Cross. This is a noted station in London, and the hotel facing the street is a massive structure of some five to six stories high. Right in front of this hotel is a masterpiece of architecture in the form of a cone, which rises to a height almost as high as the building itself. There is no doubt Charing Cross Hotel is a fashionable residential building for persons desirous of travelling on that particular line. The Houses of Parliament, which are situated on or near the banks of the Thames, are a very picturesque group. At one extreme end is a huge square tower, while at the other end is a four-faced clock. The Australian soldiers found much interest in these buildings, and frequent visits were made by them. At almost any time you would see quite a number of Australians admiring the architecture.

Nelson's Monument, which is situated in Trafalgar Square, is more after the pedestal design and very high. At the bottom is a solid square base composed of three steps, which hold a four-faced square of frames, with designs of various battles as in the form of four picture frames. Then there is a long pillar, which holds the statue of Lord Nelson. Piccadilly Circus was rather to my fancy, for at one intersection there is a statue of a person standing on one leg over what appeared to be a sort of fountain arrangement. This was surrounded by shops and theatres, and there was plenty of incidents to occupy a visitor's time.

Old Bailey is another fine building, which attracted a great deal of attention. The feature of this building of note is the beautiful dome, something similar to the Exhibition dome in

WAR LETTERS.

Melbourne, at the top, but the architecture just above the main structure is worthy of keen admiration. Hyde Park is a very popular place, especially of a Sunday afternoon. A sort of track for vehicles is on the outskirts, while in the centre great gatherings take place of various beliefs, such as Socialists, Christians, etc. What they term Hyde Park Corner is a massive structure in the form of an entrance to the park. They are the most elaborate I have seen in my life.

The New Archway, if it is claimed to be in the same category as Hyde Park Corner, it is far superior in design, but it is more in the form of a bridge to go under. However, it is a building in itself, and has written upon it, "Anno Decimo. Edward Septimi Regis, Victoria Regina. Cives Cralissimi, MDCCCCXI."

Mansion House is another noted building, and at a glance it resembles Parliament House, Melbourne, but I would not say the building has a better appearance. The steps are not there, although there appears a fine piece of work above six massive pillars.

Admiralty Buildings are something similar to our buildings on St. Kilda Road, but, oh, so much bigger and better. The grounds surrounding it are wonderful, and we were told that many real parades have been conducted in such grounds.

The Embankment. — Looking along this noted place is indeed a wonderful sight. From the Hotel Cecil onwards is one mass of wonderful architecture, including an arch-designed bridge. The trees which shade the road add to the picture a beauty that is all too good to realise, when you learn in far-off lands that London consists of slums. Big Ben is an isolated-looking creature near Westminster Bridge, and he was very silent during the war. The people told us that this wonderful clock was worth listening to before the war, but they had their doubts as to whether they

WAR LETTERS.

would ever hear it again. The Zeppelins were after it, and as many bridges as they could get.

Westminster Abbey had more attraction for the Australian soldier than any other place; that is to say, when a soldier went on leave he always had in his mind Westminster Abbey the first time of the visit. Theatres, the Waxworks, the Zoo, and other noted places of amusements were only visited when the question. "Where will we go to-day?" was asked. In comparing St. Paul's Cathedral with Westminster Abbey is like comparing our Exhibition with St. Patrick's Cathedral in design only. St. Paul's Cathedral did not impress me as being a cathedral, but rather an exhibition. That is what I mean when I say comparing it with Westminster Abbey is like comparing our Exhibition with St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Round about the Strand reminded me very much like parts of Sydney, but whereas the buildings of Sydney lack domes, one side of the Strand, which I was told was the Law Courts, it is all domes. The Tower Bridge is another objective for the German airmen, and it stands out on its own as a wonderful bridge. If you remember the visit to Australia of the Duke of York, now King George, you will have a recollection of the wonderful and pretty archways that were constructed in prominent thoroughfares.

The Tower Bridge is something after the same style, but in reality much larger, stronger-looking, with mechanical wonders attached. The Tower of London is an old-fashioned-looking place. I was not too keen on going inside. Queen Victoria Memorial, situated in the front of Buckingham Palace, is glorious. Not being an artist, I cannot do justice to an illustration. I was very tired after the sight-seeing, and you must understand that I did not see all the places mentioned in this letter in one day, but I am writing from the camp hut, not London, and it is my desire to arrange the

WAR LETTERS.

London visit in such a way that it will be in order of interest. In my next letter I will tell of some of the experiences of the boys while on leave.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 22.

12 July, 1916.

Dear _____

I promised to relate some of the experiences of the boys who had been on London leave. Whether or not these stories are correct, I take it that there is a good deal of truth in some of them, for I will commence by giving you a little experience that actually happened in my own sphere. On the morning of the third day of my leave I entered a hairdresser's shop for a shave and hair-cut. He commenced by saying, "Good-day, Dig. Shave?"

"Yes," I replied, "and a hair-cut as well."

"Do you want a military crop?" he asked.

"No, thank you," I said, "I want a London-leave hair-cut."

He recognised my colours, and asked several questions regarding the battalion. He seemed to know a great deal more about the Australian army than I did myself. In fact, he knew a great deal concerning the movements of various bodies connected with the A.I.F. He also advised me of places not to go, if I intended staying over my time. He was very keenly interested in the welfare of the 11th Battalion, and I formed an opinion that he was an Australian. He spoke in similar terms to that of an Australian. He used Australian slang. In fact, it was impossible under the circumstances for him to be any other than an Australian, and for the knowledge he possessed of the A.I.F. I could believe nothing else than his being an ex-A.I.F. man, and out of the 11th Battalion. He as much as told me so, and, furthermore, advised me not to speak of his business. His identity was so clear that I asked him if he were not an ex-A.I.F. man, and he then told me the whole history of his cunningness to escape the horrors of war that he had experienced in Egypt and France.

WAR LETTERS.

Another story of daring on the part of an A.I.F. man was related in camp. It appears that for a number of weeks this particular soldier roamed the streets of London without any leave pass. Eventually a field of adventure opened its way, and he at once took advantage of the opportunity. At some society social gathering held on behalf of wounded soldiers in one of the leading halls of London this soldier posed as a captain with V.C. honours. He became acquainted with the Lord Mayor of London's daughter. His physique and open manner attracted her attention and he received a special invitation to her home. The romance continued for several days, and grew stronger and stronger. Tactful as he was, he intimated that he would soon have to return to duty, and special haste therefore brought about a hurried marriage, but the unforeseen eventually happened. The Lord Mayor made enquiries as to further leave for the newlywed V.C. captain, which resulted in his arrest for being absent without leave, and his rank was that of a private. As to the result of his punishment, it was not related.

A story of an A.I.F. man who was arrested in America was related in camp and the method by which he gained passage to that country is as follows:— Being small, active and talkative, he succeeded in gaining the friendship of several very wealthy Americans, and during the course of conversation he discovered that they were exceedingly interested in racehorses. This small soldier, having a fair knowledge of horses, impressed his friends in such a way that they offered to take him back to the States, and the incident was not discovered until after the boat had left England. This would-be Australian jockey was arrested and brought back to England, where he was charged with being a deserter.

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One of the strangest stories related was about the parson who toured England and Scotland, preaching in various churches, and was arrested for being absent without leave. It appears that he was not a parson at all, but a mere private who possessed a very fair knowledge of the Bible and the methods of conducting the services of the different denominations.

Quite a number of stories came to hand of soldier who were married during the four days leave, and some of them are very amusing. One soldier married a widow who had four children, and persuaded the soldier to allot her certain sums of money. He was 24 years of age, and the widow 43 years of age. Other stories of marriages were that some of our married men were married. Some told of their wealth in Australia as goanna farm owners, dealers in .kangaroo feathers, farms in George Street, Sydney, and Collins Street, Melbourne. One soldier told his bride that his father owned Tasmania. Another after marriage told his bride he would meet her near Parliament House after the war.

The last day of my leave in London was composed of hurried visits to various places of note. We visited the Waxworks, Dirty Dicks, which is an old inn in the East End of London, where Dickens secured most of his characters we were told this. We visited the much-talked-of Petticoat Lane, where Jews sell their goods at ridiculously low prices. Elephant and Castle, and several other places, just saw the morning out. In the afternoon we went to the Palladium and from there we caught our train back to the Salisbury Plains.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 23.

12th November, 1916

Dear _____

I am thankful for the big bunch of letters that I have received from my various friends in Australia, also the parcel, which was indeed very welcome. This will be positively the last letter that I will be able to write you from England. In seven days they have prepared me to meet the Hun. I feel fit and well. You will no doubt feel a certain strain with this news, but I want you all to bear it well, especially my dear mother. There is a war raging across the Channel, but I have no fear of any fatal happenings. There is a smile upon my face. There is a spark of joy in my mind, just like a schoolboy before he goes on his Christmas holidays. It is the thought of seeing France that makes me joyful, not the thoughts of war, and it is the thought that when the war is over I will be coming home. It sounds ever so much better than going to France. I look about me and see others, the same build, the same feeling, the same powers. They have been there, and they are smiling now. If they have endured the hardships of war I can do the same. If they have escaped death, I can do the same. It is a matter of living a day at a time. It would not do for me to look too far into the future, although sometimes I am apt to think of what is going to happen after the war is over. I sometimes think that I made a big sacrifice in giving up the job I had to allow another who had enlisted, but would not swear in on account of the possibilities of getting my job. I do not think I will ever get a position like that one again, because I remember the stories told of how the South African troops were treated. Even if the Government do bring in certain laws, there will always be a certain class who will down the soldier. In my own case, for instance, I do not like to dwell on that subject at all, for it only tends to make me very melancholy. I have

WAR LETTERS.

been warned for draft and told that I am not to leave camp under any consideration. Doctors and dentists have examined me. I have been issued with full equipment: Ready for France.

Yours, _____

Please note that all signs given in original letters from France have been altered, giving proper names and numbers, etc., for print.

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 24.

22nd November, 1916

Dear _____

It was quite different getting ready for France than what it was getting ready for London leave. Our heavy black boots and gas helmets, our rifles and dixies and clothing, all helped to make a very heavy pack, and the morning we left Rolleston Camp was wet and miserable. Our train took us to a place called Folkestone, on the south coast of England, where some hundreds of troops were bundled into a small vessel not much larger than a Sydney ferry. I shall never forget that trip across the English Channel. Everybody was for himself. There were so many troops on such a small boat that you could hardly walk about. The kit did not improve matters, and as I was fortunate in securing a seat on the stairway with some hundred or more troops I decided to remain there until such time as I was hunted off. No smoking was allowed, and the vessel travelled with all lights out. Whether it was especially a rough night or not for the English Channel waters I do not know, but there were very, very few on the boat who were not sick — all down the stairway, on one another's clothes and equipment. They did not care. They could not help it. It was war conditions, and the sea had conquered them and made them helpless. Although I was not actually sick, I felt horrible. I did not seem to care whether we were torpedoed or not. You could hardly move a limb. It was just like a country excursion train. We called at Boulogne, and my eyes went all over the place, although it was night. I could hear the French women talking one with the other, and I thought that I could never learn to understand it. I noticed with interest that the dress was totally different from that worn by English people. I could see that the towns were differently laid out, and buildings were strange. It was a foreign

WAR LETTERS.

land, and it was on this land that the Great War was raging — the main theatre of the greatest war in history. I listened, but I could hear no guns. I could see no signs of war whatever. We had a very long journey up hills and through by-ways to a camp named Etaples pronounced Etaps, but the troops named it "Eat Apples" The camp at this place consisted of bell-tents, and there were sixteen soldiers in our tent, about 12 ft. in circumference. The crowding, however, caused little trouble on account of everyone wanting to please himself and select the most comfortable position. As we were only to be there for three days, it was really useless creating trouble over such a trifle. At this camp we underwent several final tests for war, and received final instructions regarding the gas helmet. It appears that this was an all-important factor, and we were warned to treat this as one of our dearest friends. The first night in Etaples was very strange to me. I could not sleep at all, thinking the whole time that we were on the very soil where the war was. The time had arrived for me to face the Hun. The time had arrived for me to bring to bear all that I had been told in connection with a fighting soldier, and while these thoughts were passing through my mind I took a pause to listen into the stillness of the night. I heard the faint sound of a thousand or more men beating at their drums, as it were, but this continuous roll, which secured ever so far away was the noise from the mighty guns. I woke my companion up for I thought he might like to hear it.

"It's guns alright," he said, and he too, became very interested at such a late hour. It was quite a long time before I could get to sleep, and it was very early in the morning when I woke. Not knowing the routine of the new camp, I was up early, and had had a wash and a shave before the bugle sounded. This gave me a few minutes to myself, and I was very pleased to have them. At such

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an early hour two or three small French children entered the camp selling chocolates and little booklets demonstrating how everyday French words are pronounced, and what they mean. I thought this little booklet might be of some value, so I bought one. The little girl who was selling the booklets was very poorly dressed, but I particularly noticed that her face and hair were exceptionally clean and tidy. She spoke English in a very broken fashion, but could make me understand what she meant sufficiently to direct and inform me of various places and topics of interest.

"You see plenty soldiers?" I asked.

"Australie soldah plenty," she replied.

"You sell hundreds books?"

"Me no compree hundreds," she said, and I could not tell her in French what hundreds was, but I knew when she said "no compree" that it meant she did not understand.

"Vous compree plenty batteel last night," she enquired of me, and the recollection of the sound like many rolling drums came to me.

"Yes," I said. "Big Battle."

"Big, plenty" When she said this her hands flew to the air. Some of the words I learned from that little book were indeed valuable. Such as: — La rue, The street; Il y a un magasin dans la rue à côte. There is a shop in the next street; Combein. How much? Un, deux, trois, quartre, cinq, six, meaning one, two, three, four, five, and six. And there were quite a lot of little things I got from the little book.

The following day we had a rapid look round one of the villages, and what attracted me most was the cleanliness of the French women regarding their heads. There appeared to be quite a number of women in deep mourning, and these women were doing very heavy work, such as farm work and carrying great

WAR LETTERS.

heavy bags of coal. There were younger French girls, evidently taking a man's place also, but most of these were dressed in men's attire. Their faces seemed to be set. All signs of merriment had left them and to attempt to make them happy was like showing a red rag to a bull. However, many of our troops, in spite of the war conditions, sought after much merriment, and sometimes the French people were made the victims of such merriment. The language was the main field for laughter, and it did not take the boys very long to make up their own French understandable by both Australian troops and French people. There is a tinned meat bully beef bearing the name of "Fray Bentos." Now, the words in French meaning "very good" are *Tres bien*, pronounced something like Tray-be-ang, but instead of using the tray-be-ang as it would sound, our boys introduced the bully-beef label "Fray Bentos" for "very good."

"Bon-swar, monsieur," which is a greeting in French similar to our "Good day, sir," was substituted for "Bonza war, manure," and so the Australians struggled on with the French language until they could make themselves understood and understand what was being said. On one occasion I desired to purchase some views. I saw these views in the window, so after carefully scanning my little booklet for a suitable sentence, I ventured inside. A handsome-looking, dark-eyed French girl stepped forward. I at once took a deep breath. Her fascinating appearance took up all the room in my brain; Beautiful eyes and such a well-moulded face, with a soft, pleasing expression.

"Bon-jour, monsieur," she said, quickly, and I smiled. It must have been a stupid smile, for I felt stupid after. Then I struggled to collect my French together.

"Un postal carte de Albert," I ventured to say.

WAR LETTERS.

"Qu'est-ce que monsieur desire?" she asked me, and I thought I must have made a horrible mistake, for she was not merely smiling, but laughing right out, and, although it was very pleasant to see her laugh, I felt very uncomfortable.

"Vous ne comprenez carte postale?" "Yes" she said, "of course I do. You want a view of Albert." It was such good English, and I looked such a goat, that I felt like leaving the shop at once.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 25.

1st December, 1916.

Dear _____

Before we left Etaples to join the battalion we were issued with final equipment and thoroughly inspected. The steel hats were very awkward looking things. The one I had sat on my head like a wash basin and when I ran I had to keep my head very stiff for fear it would drop off. The incident reminded me of an egg and spoon race. It was rumored that our train voyage would take some considerable time, on account of the tin of salmon issued to every three men, and I anticipated a nice voyage in the up-to-date French carriages, but when we reached the train I was sadly disappointed to find that our journey was to be made in cattle trucks, so many "Hommes" men, I suppose to a truck. The number was forty. Wasn't it a squeeze; and didn't it cause some fluent language from the troops. Just as you felt you were nicely settled someone would dump their full kit in front of you and the edge of the tin of salmon to three men, or the edge of a steel hat, would tenderly strike a timid part of your sickly toe. I was very glad when we moved off, although half of them wanted to look out of the doorways at one time to see the French country. I was fortunate; I could see a good deal of it from where I was jammed in. It was some considerable time before the troops settled down, and were satisfied that grass is green in France the same as it is in Australia, and that when they threw kisses to the French girls on the way they were ignored. Yes, they all sat down to be peaceful for two or three minutes, and the confounded cattle train stopped again and created a tremendous amount of inquisitiveness.

"What's this?"

"Where are we now, Dig?" "Anywhere near the Hun yet?"

"Can yer see the reflections from the guns?"

WAR LETTERS.

These were some of the questions, but the worst nuisance was half of them wanted their issues of salmon. This meant that everybody must have dinner, because salmon will not keep. Then there was a scatter and upheaval looking for a crust of bread that they had secretly hidden at the bottom of their haversacks.

"Who pinched my haversack?" This was an accusation towards the soldier next to him. Then he drew his bayonet and commenced to open the tin of salmon. He chose to do it that way instead of with his jack-knife because he had heard that soldiers in the trenches find great use for the bayonet. In a few minutes empty salmon tins were flying in all directions, and the troops were advised that if they wanted to make tea they could get hot water from the engine-driver. After a few minutes the train moved off again, and we travelled through many villages and towns to a place called Abbeyville. We had tea at Abbeville; then moved on again. This journey took us well into the night of the next day. Then we had a good long walk to where our battalion was billeted. The name of this village was Flesselles. When we came to a halt I listened; guns could be heard from this village and there was a stillness surrounding the places nearby. All our troops had gone to bed, and we were told quietly what was to be done. This quietness made me believe that the Hun was not too far away, but the sergeant told us we were some thirty or forty miles away. I was shown to my bedroom. Oh dear me, when I say bedroom. It looked for all the world like a giant's den and all the men lying about on the straw were his prisoners.

"Snooze off wherever you can find room," was the order given by the sergeant. I was very tired indeed, but it was most difficult to find a few square inches whereby I could rest my body. "Hop in here, Dig," a rough voice came from the ground, and I strained my eyes to find that there was plenty of room for

WAR LETTERS.

me if I doubled my knees up near my chin, but I knew that I would not be able to turn when one side started to ache through the hardness of the floor, but it relieved me when I thought that I could stand as much as the troops on the floor. I never took my clothes off, because I did not have a wardrobe to hang my clothes in, and I did not feel inclined to undo my pack to get my waterproof sheet at such a late hour. I lowered myself as carefully as possible so that I would not disturb the half-dozen or more troops in close vicinity. As tired as I was I could not sleep. I could not relax myself in such a position, but I tried hard by closing my eyes and allowing my mind to imagine I was asleep. Suddenly I felt a strange thing about the bottom of my tunic, and the first thought was that they were trying to pick my pockets. I put my hand down to let them know that I was awake, but I touched fur and then felt a scatter down my leg. In a few moments a massive rat played toboggan over my shoulder, down my arm, and over the next chap's shoulder. This sort of thing went on all night, and I then remembered that I was told France was full of huge rats. I was very happy when the morning came, and it was then that I found out that we were in the wrong billet. We were shown to our correct billet, where we settled ourselves a little better, then we had a look round Fesselles. It appeared to me that all the streets run into a business square, and that the most beautiful part of the village was the church, or cathedral. The houses were back to front, as I could see pigs, horses, fowls, and pigeons on the front, and the gardens at the rear. Most of the troops used to visit the Estaminets hotels, where they could purchase hot wine. The drill at Fesselles was very light, and we were told that the battalion was to rest for about ten days before proceeding to the front-line trenches. In realising the closeness of my initiation to the trenches I began to think very seriously, but I overcame the enemy of fear

WAR LETTERS.

by looking about at the happy faces of my fellow soldiers. They did not seem to be afraid of the thought of going back, so why should I. and I made myself believe that it could not be one-half so bad as what one would imagine, then again a counter thought would come to my mind that there is such a thing as becoming used to a thing, and when I considered this aspect it made me believe that really the men are not so tame looking as they are in the camps, and by no means as select as they are in their homes in Australia. Environment does play a very active part on one's life, and it leads me to believe that if it were not for outstanding reformers the people of the world would soon drift to savagery. However, I became acquainted with a very well-balanced, select lot of young men, apart from renewing the friendship of most of the boys who left Australian shores with me, but it grieved me very much to learn that a number of them had been killed and wounded. In a few days' time I became quite used to the battalion routine and had made quite a number of new friends. The time has come for me to move, and I feel up to it. My health is indeed good.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 26.

15th December, 1916.

Dear _____

I am still feeling very fit and well, but it is exceedingly cold and wet under foot. I suppose you are all preparing for a good Xmas dinner. Before we left Plesselles a friend of mine asked me to go with him to a French home for tea, and I gladly accepted the invitation. We had omelet and stew and a beautiful little basin of coffee. After tea we made the acquaintance of three French soldiers who were rather interested in shooting, by what we could gather. To indicate the shooting of rabbits, I made a shadow on the wall, and this amused them very much. When we entrained for a camp nearer the trenches I felt very excited. There was so much singing and merriment that we all forgot that we were getting closer to the massive guns. The train stopped, and we all got out. I looked around to see what was doing. I felt at that time very queer, but all that was happening was transport activity. However, the guns were more distinct, but no shells troubled us. We formed up into fours and marched along the narrow road. After the first few miles my pack began to get heavy, and for the first time I thought I was not as strong and healthy as might be, and when I noticed that the older ones were gliding along quite merrily and with ease I felt amiss. Every few hundreds of yards brought us to worse roads, and by the time we were called to a halt for a rest the travelling conditions were indeed dreadful. So bad was the state of the roads and the embankments that I was mud from head to foot. My boots must have weighed six to eight pounds, and all the embankments either side of the road were supported by a kind of heavy wire netting. If it were not for the netting the mud would, no doubt, slowly roll on to the road and dislocate the traffic. When we rested we simply fell back on our

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packs in the slush. It mattered not what state we were in as long as we rested. One of the older soldiers told me my pack was far too heavy, but I had nothing more than what was issued to me. However, I made a few adjustments, and off we went again for a few miles in the mud. Although the air was bitterly cold the perspiration streamed down my face as if it were a hot summer's day. That journey was the toughest up to date. The fourteen to sixteen mile route marches that we used to have in England were fools to this, and I at once realised that a soldier wants to be like leather. I was indeed happy when I learnt that we had reached our camp. The name of the camp was "Carlton Camp," and the huts were much rougher than in England, and of a different design. The roofs were round and made of sheet iron. The conditions were slowly becoming severe. I felt much better after a spell and tea, and began to walk about as if I owned the show. As it became dusk I settled down in the hut to think matters over, and converse with my friend on the trying conditions. Other soldiers also joined in the conversation, and I discovered through the various remarks that pretty well everybody was knocked up after the strenuous march through the mud. At that time I did not feel at all too bad, and it gave me ever so much courage. In scrutinising the hut I found a massive hole that measured some four to five feet across and the depth into the ground from the hut was about six feet. I could only arrive at the one conclusion, and that was that a huge shell had landed right in that spot. This was not my first view of destruction by shells, for we had passed the village of Fremicourt, which was practically levelled to the ground. The cathedral tower seemed to be the most prominent structure, and this only possessed a few feet above the foundation of anything that might be termed firm. However, this was transformed into a canteen of a very rough nature, but it served the purpose admirably for tired

WAR LETTERS.

and worn-out troops on the march. There were quite a number of various units of the Australian Imperial forces in the locality of Carlton Camp, and I thought that it would be almost certain to run into someone I had known in civil life, but when I was told that the 14th Field Ambulance and 4th Divisional Engineers were not there I gave up hopes of seeing _____ or _____ but we must come across them sooner or later, although a letter to me from _____ indicated that _____ was in England having a spell. Later in the evening I should say about 8.30 p.m. a terrific bombardment took place. It seemed a terrific bombardment to me, but I afterwards learnt that it was only the usual stunt to catch fatigue parties and units changing over positions. However, it convinced me that there was a war on, and the continual humdrum led me to believe that a considerable number of soldiers must be killed or wounded nightly, if this should be the usual occurrence, and it was while this ratta tatta of guns was going off, and the thoughts of casualties were passing through my mind, that the sergeant of our section told me that I was to go on fatigue work. It was then about 9.20 p.m., and when I discovered that my friend was coming too I felt much easier about the position. We crawled cautiously from the hut, every now and again to stop and listen to the ever endless roars from the massive guns. It did not seem like war to me when the sergeant commanded us to fall in. I thought all the business of right turn had ended in the showgrounds in Australia and that all the musketry and practice in warfare had ended in England and that all the lifebelts and fall-in commands had ended at Etaples, but, no We had to fall in with fifty rounds of ammunition, our rifles and gas helmets. A list of names was read out and we had to answer such roll-call. Then we moved off to what was called a dump. The guns still roared and the wind rose wildly, whilst I waited for the next move.

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Eventually I was given a duck-board to carry. This duck-board measured about six feet in length and appeared to be made out of unseasoned hardwood, for it was very heavy. The width of the board was about eighteen inches, and for all the world looked like a ladder with the steps only two inches apart. We moved off along the slippery, muddy track, and when we had gone a few hundreds of yards I heard complaints that the boards were weighty. The longer we went, like ducks to a pond, one after the other, with about three yards separating each one, the language became putrid. I never heard such blasphemy in all my life, and as one would slip and fall into what appeared to be a shell-hole, you would hear another string of words which positively displayed the true mind of the person an uncontrolled temper. Then a command came to be careful near Factory Corner. I wondered what danger was attached to Factory Corner, but I afterwards discovered that Factory Corner was a death trap, as machine-gun bullets and high explosive shells were poured into this place by the enemy, and I asked myself the question, Why do they go that way? We passed the dreaded Factory Corner, and I could neither hear shell nor bullet. A few more hundred yards and we were told to drop our duckboards. The journey home was made in much quicker time than the trip in, and when we reached a snug little dug-out made up of sandbags filled with dirt, with the dim light of a candle piercing through the small holes in an empty preserved fruit tin, I was told that it was the "Australian Comforts Fund." and that I could get a hot drink of cocoa. I gladly partook of the drink of cocoa, and I felt as happy drinking that cocoa as any society Jody would having supper after hearing one of Madame Melba's concerts. I arrived home safely to my shell-shattered hut, feeling as warm as toast, while those who remained behind were shivering with the cold. I smiled with joy, made up my bed and

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laid myself down to sleep. The war was not too bad at all, I thought.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 27.

25th December, 1916.

Dear _____

Our stay at Carlton Camp terminated very abruptly, and we moved further in towards the firing line. The march, although very heavy and trying, was well overcome by me. I finished up with the best of them, and throughout the journey there was not one shell that came anywhere near us. As a matter of fact, I have not received any rude awakenings from shells up to date, and I have been within range for some considerable time. My health is exceedingly good just now, but the weather is very cold and miserable. As it is summer in Australia at the present time it would be a very difficult matter for you to realise that, at times, we have no control over the use of the limbs connected with our fingers, and if we stand in one position for any length of time we become quite faint. The cold air and sloppy condition of the ground renders it extremely trying, and whenever possible we make up a fire to warm ourselves. Before I commenced writing this letter I washed the greater part of the mud from my mouth, eyebrows, and ears as best I could in an adjacent shell-hole that was half-full of greenish coloured water. The water would be similar to that, which you would find in a stagnant creek, or unfrequented country dam, and the greatest care had to be exercised or a slide through the slush into the water would result. I had no soap, nor did I possess any towel at the time. We received a reminder that it was Xmas day by the issue of small parcels through the Australian Comforts Fund. These parcels contained such articles as:—Jews' harps, crackers, cigarettes, sweets, biscuits, and other little ditties that were thought to be needed by the troops. Of course, Jews' harps and paper crackers, I presume, were sent to make us laugh rather than for their

WAR LETTERS.

usefulness. You will probably be very sadly disappointed by the refusal of the peace offer, but I would not build any hopes whatever on any peace offers or baits thrown out. The determination with which Great Britain is fighting this war leads me to believe that the only hope for peace is a complete surrender by the enemy. There will be many more peace offers, and I view them in this light: — Germany must be getting weaker or such offers would not be created. I received a big mail before we left Carlton Camp, but I regret that I will not be able to reply to all of them. It would very nice if my letters could be handed round to my relatives. This would save me a considerable amount of trouble in various ways. The name of the trench we are in at present is Cow Trench, and, to use a vulgar term, it is a real "cow." Broken rifles, bayonets of many types are to be found lying carelessly about the parapets and in the trench, old steel hats and damaged gas helmets, rusty dixies, and equipment saturated with blood and mud, boots and old telephone wire reels all helped to form the picture of Cow Trench. The dug-outs were the most discouraging sight to gaze upon. As a matter of fact, Cow Trench was a sort of shell-shattered sunken road, with holes dug in the side facing the enemy, in which were the homes of the soldiers, and these were termed dug-outs. Each dug-out was about the size of an ordinary fowl pen, and as many as ten troops had to make this their comfortable place of abode. I know in our dug-out there were ten men, and besides the ten men a brazier was burning, while at the mouth or entrance to the bungalow was a stinking old German topcoat. There was hardly room for our knees, and as far as sleep was concerned, I thought it was an absolute impossibility, and as the night wore on the heat from the brazier was just about peeling the skin off my knees. Cow Trench was a reserve or support for the front-line trench, and, it was our duty to be on the alert and, at

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the same time, keep them well supplied with food and ammunition. On this special night the men in our dug-out were warned off to carry sheet iron, and I gladly welcomed the news, because I was in agony crouched up in the dug-out. It was a very windy night, and I was told that the trip would not be too bad, because it was a duckboard track all the way. However, we commenced our journey directly towards the German lines and this was the first time I had been so close to the enemy as to almost be able to pick out the position from whence the flares were fired. These flares, which form a light all night throughout the entire line, are fired down from what is termed a flare pistol. The light, which is about the size of an ordinary household electric light, reach a height of some fifty to a hundred feet in the air, and are inclined to hang in the air for several seconds. Some of them merely reach the desired height and turn towards the ground. When they reach the ground they keep alight for a time, then gradually fade away. The space of time between each firing is but a few seconds, and the distance between each flare pistol is only a few yards. So you can see by these spaces of time and distance that the continuous flow of lights right along the fighting line forms a glorious picture. Then again in the distance we can see the constant sudden flashes of the mighty guns which form a kind of background for the nearer flares. I took notice of these things as I toddled along the duckboards with my sheet of iron. But when my strength began to fail me, and the wind, which was very strong, became even stronger. I considered it time to pay a little more interest to my duty. It was a battle with that sheet of iron. You just imagine walking on a board about eighteen inches wide with sloppy shell-holes either side, with a sheet of iron six feet by three feet, and a wind blowing fiercely against the iron the whole time. You have no time to be thinking of scenery; and it

WAR LETTERS.

was just at this moment when I felt that I would require all my mental, as well as muscular, strength, that I heard a whistling tune through the air, then a crash about forty yards in front of me. A pitiful groan then pierced through the dark air, and the guns seemed to hush for the moment. I stopped to listen and to rest:

“Jock’s gone” I heard the remark from one of my comrades, but they moved on slowly with the iron.

Jock had passed away. He had paid the price for his King and Country.

This incident created a very deep impression upon my mind. It was only a single incident. It was my first news of "killed in action" whilst actually in the field. There are thousands of incidents just the same. They are paying the price for what? Germans, Australians, Turks; all nations the same: Their sons are paying the price. What reward is there? Or, I sometimes think, what punishment? This is what they call war, where heroes stand for ever in the memories of the generations. It is by this means that men have won laurels in the minds of the people. War There is nothing glorious in it.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 28.

1st January, 1917.

Dear _____

I did not finish your last letter, because when I was out getting a drop of the cleanest water I could gather from the neighbouring shell-holes a shell burst right on our home, wounding two or three. I was very sorry for those who were wounded, but I was indeed glad that the home was destroyed. My companion and myself decided to build a new one suitable for two respectable tenants. We secured two picks and commenced to dig, but before we had penetrated far into the embankment a most terrific odour came forth, and on investigation we found that we had pierced a dead German's leg, evidently the victim of a huge shell, and got buried under shell-fire. Shells were bursting all around us, and overhead as well, and I was very glad when we arrived at what was called "The Chalk Pits," for we had a short rest while a guide took possession of the track. At the time I was carrying rifle, two blankets, water-proof sheet, twenty- four hours' rations, change of socks, singlet and shirt, soap, dixie, two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition, two Mills bombs, gas helmet, bayonet, entrenching tool and handle. I was wearing big heavy black boots that were covered with mud and must have weighed three to four pounds each, two sand-bags around my legs in lieu of putties, tied with telephone wire; a pair of thick woollen socks. underpants and military trousers, a singlet, shirt, military cardigan jacket and tunic, a sheep-skin jacket and an overcoat, a woollen pair of gloves, with another pair of gloves composed of some animal's skin over the woollen gloves, a woollen Balaclava cap over my head, and the steel hat on top of that again. It was a difficult

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matter to tell whether I was an animal or a human being; an Eskimo or an Antarctic explorer. However, the whole of my equipment was covered with mud. At the Chalk Pits we were handed gun-boots. These boots were very high. The pair I put on were far too large, and I had to hold them on. Continuing the journey I found the boots to be more trouble than what they were worth. For every step I would take the boots would stick in the mud, and my legs would come out on their own. As I was paying too much attention to this item, I got slowly left behind, and as the others had as much to do in looking after themselves I began to realise that it was a case of fight your own way. It reminded me of a syringe when I walked. Every time you went to withdraw your foot the sound of this suction would penetrate your ears. Eventually I discarded the old boots, but I found to my horror that not one of our men could be found. I was left alone in the battlefield. The thought of the incident did more towards wrecking my determination to gain ground than the actual possibility of reaching the company, and whether I was on the right track or not I did not know. I looked towards the twinkling stars, with both my legs stuck about fifteen inches into the ground. I tried to ascertain from those peaceful little creatures what would be the wisest step, when a hiss and a bang soon made me decide That shell was followed by several more, and they landed very close to my heels, I can assure you. In the struggle to free myself from the mud I lost all power, and slowly gave way. Lower and lower I sank, until I found in my stupid struggle that my back was in the mud and my feet in the air. A stick-fast flypaper was not to be compared with the Somme mud. The situation began to get rather serious, as I could not move one way or the other, so I thought I had better call out for help.

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"Help" I cried, very nervously though, but the only reply I got was a sharp burst of shrapnel right over my head. At length a group of men passed, and one of them struggled across to me and asked me who I belonged to. I told him the —— Battalion, and he then made a strenuous effort to relieve me from my tangle. When I was on my feet again he displayed a light upon me from his electric torch, and told me to throw off all the unnecessary weight. I quickly obeyed that order. Bombs, ammunition, rifle, twenty-four hours' rations, overcoat, everything went in the air, with the exception of my gas helmet. I found the travelling much better, and was soon in the front line with the rest of the company.

"You got here" remarked my companion, with a smile upon his face.

"Yes I'm here all right, but we've got to go back in four days over the same track."

"That's if we're not killed," he drily remarked, and he pointed to the bottom of the hill where the flares were coming from. "See," he said, "that is the German front line trench. If you listen very attentively you can hear a mumbling sound. I believe there are Germans a few yards away."

I gazed into the space before me. My head was just a shade higher than the parapet. It was "No Man's Land," and it told of many secrets. It appeared as secret as the roaring ocean at night. It had a haunted air about it, and if you gazed long enough at the blank you could imagine all sorts of things.

"I will now show you your bedroom, your dining room, sitting-room, etc.," he said, and I followed him around the miniature creek that was called our trench, every now and again slipping, but the muddy sides acted as a support. At length we arrived at our dwelling, and I was surprised to see him crawl into a hole just like a snake. This hole was about eighteen inches

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square and about two feet above the slush at the bottom of the avenue or trench. I was informed from a hole in the earth to turn my back to the homestead and face Fritz; then to bend backwards as if giving the Hun a physical culture display, until my head was level with the doors of the chateau. As soon as I succeeded in this wonderful acrobatic feat, a powerful hand gripped me by the collar of the tunic.

What game is this?" I asked.

"This is how the second tenant gets to his flat." he replied.

"And how do you get out?" I asked.

"I never thought of that," he replied.

"It strikes me our home is a one-at-a-time cottage."

I will continue this letter next week, as the green envelope issued by the authorities will not hold too much, and, furthermore, if I made it too fat they might suspect I belong to the German Secret Service. But for a cold in the head. I feel just lovely. I hope you are all well at home. I try to add a little humour in letters to act as a seasoning to anything that might be too dreadful for you. Now, I want you all to keep up a good heart, especially my dear mother. I would so like you to believe that I am only away shooting. Forget the word "War." The whole civilised world should forget it, and teach the savages to forget it also.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 29.

5th January, 1917.

Dear _____

Many thanks for all the Christmas gifts. They were just lovely, and I shall lay the Insectibane on about a quarter of an inch thick and try and kill some of these chats, but how did you know I had chats. I suppose everybody is sending Insectibane, but they do not know what these little companions or ours are like. I will tell you. I have looked very closely into them, and they appear to me to be very much like the ancient ant-eater, but, of course, they are not quite so large in stature. If they were fish I would consider myself a good fisherman, for I catch about thirty to fifty a day by just undoing the front of my tunic, and exercising the muscles of my neck. I now find that my news will probably be a little behind time according to the dates at the headings. For instance, I have to continue the last news of the trench in the front line, and we are back in reserves. The name of the front line trench was "Ginchy." After deciding that our dug-out would not hold two at a time, and as we were discussing the best move, the officer called us, and told us that he wanted a message taken to "A" Company and one to "D" Company. The messages were of great importance, we were told, so each one had to go a different direction, and as quickly as possible. It fell to my lot to deliver "D" Company's message, and after being directed by means of pointing by the finger and a prominent star. I made off with my best companion, "the gas helmet." It was soon discovered by me that my job was very distasteful, and I shall never forget the battle against the mud at the dead of night across the haunted battlefield. It was about twenty minutes past 12 at night when I left our trench, and after I had gone a few yards, which occupied a quarter of an hour or so, I knew that I was in for a long outing. Every step was very

WAR LETTERS.

cautiously taken, but in spite of all this I was up and down in the mud and shell-holes until I became afraid to move. It would be extremely difficult for me to describe the true sensation of that journey. I remember when I was a very small boy how I used to fear the bogey man, especially when I had to go a message on a very dark night. Well, that feeling was nothing to be compared with the severe strain upon both nerve and muscle. After a fall into a shell-hole I would take about five minutes to clear the mud from my face and hands, just as you would wipe the perspiration from your forehead if you did not happen to have a handkerchief, or just as mother cleans her fingers after mixing the ingredients for a cake. However, after a fierce struggle and great determination, I reached "D" Company, and handed in the note. This was a great load off my mind, and after we had a thorough examination of the compass I was directed which way to return to the trench at "Ginchy." I made a very rough and tumble exhibition of getting back, but I got back, after narrowly missing two or three "whiz-bangs." The time was then ten minutes past five, so you see the job lasted close on five hours, and the distance was not a mile, so you can form a pretty fair idea of the conditions of travelling. I had something to eat a cold piece of bacon and some dry bread; I had a drink tea in a petrol tin, without sugar or milk, but plenty of petrol. Up to that time my companion had not returned, and I was beginning to fear the worst. The officer gave me a small portion of rum and told me to have a snooze for a few minutes, because he then wanted me to relieve the man who had been on gas guard. I crawled into our coffin-like dug-out, and was soon asleep. It only seemed a few seconds, when someone was pulling at my muddy boots.

"What is it?" I asked.

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"Your turn for gas guard," was the answer, and I crawled out again into the muddy trench. It was now light, and I felt much better after my twenty minutes' rest.

Gas I thought I wouldn't know it if it did come. However, I looked for it, and as I was straining my eyes over the parapet I saw a muddy-looking object, half-swimming and half-crawling. It was my companion, and didn't he look a picture when he reached the trench. His boots were easily five inches wide, including the mud as boots. His sandbags, which were rolled around his legs, had connected themselves automatically with his boots and trousers. His cardigan jacket had been lowered to below his knees through the weight of mud upon it. His top coat was thick with mud, and it was as much as one could do to hold it up with one hand. His face and hands were thickly covered with the slush from the battlefield, and he intimated that he would sooner be shot right now than have to go through that ordeal many more times. I advised him to see the officer and get a drink of rum, then go to sleep. He did so, but when he crawled into the dug-out he got a surprise. "Where did the pillow come from?" he asked. "There was no pillow there when I went to sleep," I replied.

He struck a match, and quickly sought the muddy trench.

"What's wrong now?" I asked.

"A damn dog he exclaimed, and no sooner had he said it than this massive dog, about eighteen inches high, rushed out and leaped on top of the parapet, but, worse than all, he started to bark, which aggravated the officer. After careful consideration we were compelled to shoot the animal on account of the danger in his giving our position to the enemy.

New Year's Eve was another eventful night at Ginchy, for the enemy shelled us unmercifully for some considerable time in response to the intense bombardment opened by our artillery.

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There was no infantry action on this particular night, but the officer called out to me while the bombardment was on.

"Is there anyone hurt?"

"Not yet," I replied.

"Not yet" he said, "a cheer-up sort you are."

My clothes have been on me for some considerable time, and there does not seem to be any prospects of taking them off for some weeks to come. It appears that we are in the vicinity of operations for some time, and I am wet through. If this was in civil life I would no doubt be in a very critical condition in some hospital, whereas I feel very well under the circumstances. This will bear out the fact that the training must have hardened the troops to some order. Although the casualties are exceedingly light, there are quite a number of troops being evacuated with what they call trench feet. I am told that this complaint is extremely trying, inasmuch that it torments the nerves of the men, and cases have been reported where the feet have gone quite black, and toes have dropped off through the extreme cold.

When we left Ginchy, I was detailed as guide to show the relieving party the way to the trench which was known by the authorities as "Gusty." This was another battle through the mud, but I seemed to master the situation much better than when I delivered the message to "D" Company. My course was from the "Chalk Pits" to "Gusty," and I did not give the relieving party much trouble at all. In fact, I seemed to realise that the genuine track showed up much lighter mud than the dangerous ground. How I can account for this is that so many walking over the same ground made it much thinner and. as the mud became thinner it was not so sticky. Furthermore, the light track was solid about nine inches below the actual surface, which afforded greater ease in walking. The relieving battalion or part of battalion under my

WAR LETTERS.

guidance, had had a much better time than did our company. After I had finished my job I made for a trench named "Rose," where I was to have rejoined the company, but I was unfortunate in coming across the track of a soldier who had been hit with a piece of shrapnel. I took him to Chalk Pits, where he received medical attention, but it was an exceedingly difficult job to get him there, as he was very nervous, and would lend no help himself whatever. I had to practically carry him, and the perspiration simply poured from the pores of my skin, and the air was cold and nippy.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 30.

9th January, 1917

Dear _____

I was not too pleased when I learnt who won the football premiership, but I -know someone who was, and who would have loved to have had me at the table the Saturday night after the match. In the last mail I received from home I was asked if time drags? No; time does not drag in any way, because we are constantly moving from one place to another, but I can truthfully say that there are days that I do not know the name of, and, as far as Sunday is concerned, we never know when it arrives — when in the trenches. But, of course, when we are out in billets we have the usual church parade and the band gives us some music. My friend and I have been interested of late in souvenirs, and up to date we have collected a number of articles which would be worth having years to come. My collection includes: — A German steel helmet; a German cap, which is similar in design to a sailor's cap, but it is a dirty grey shade, with a red band around it, and a small button arrangement in front; a clip of German bullets. These are similar in design to our own bullets, but the clip has two springs at each end, and the grooves of the casing run in suitable grooves just below the two springs it is believed that the Germans can use our bullets in their rifles, but we cannot use their bullets in our rifles; the bolt from a German rifle, I am looking out for a clean German rifle, but I think it will be very difficult to find one this weather. Our own rifles are nothing startling; A German gas helmet. This is rather cumbersome, after our own, as it is more after the billy style, whereas ours is nicely arranged in a bag about nine inches square and about two inches deep, and rests comfortably on our chests. I will have a much better chance of securing souvenirs when attacks are on, and the fine weather

WAR LETTERS.

comes. There is no doubt that there will be something doing in the shape of hard fighting next spring. I can tell by various movements, and unless Fritz is very strong he will be pushed back a good number of miles. I will not go as far as to say we will be on German soil, but I feel confident that Fritz will get a setback this coming spring. It is amusing to hear the various troops complaining to each other of their defects. This is very noticeable when an officer is about. They believe that he will take pity on them and permit them to remain in their dug-outs while the others do the work. On very rare occasions does this prove successful, and I have noticed repeatedly that it is the fearless that come out on top every time. Generating the habit of imposition in the army is not profitable, for the simple reason that it forms a nervousness that is apt to call for unnecessary danger. I have heard of cases where men have dodged going into the trenches for months at a stretch, and when the officer in charge has become familiar with the artfulness and ordered the person to proceed to the trenches he has met with either death or wounds. It pays, both in civil and military lives, to be brave within yourself and do willingly what has to be done. There is more pleasure in it. The trench we are in at present is "Rose Trench," and is in a very dilapidated state. The dug-outs are very frail and small I fancy, but I would not be sure on this point, that "Rose Trench" was one time or other a country road of a very small type.—what they would call a sunken road, although its unshapely character leads me to believe that it is a group of shell-holes connected together. "Rose Trench" was about four to five miles from the front line, but I would have far sooner been right in the front line, on account of the strenuous fatigue duties that we had to do nightly. These duties consisted of carrying rations to the men in the front line, and ammunition and duckboards to

WAR LETTERS.

various other lines working in conjunction with the front line. Some of the trips were very eventful in different ways, such as shell fire, accidents, etc. We used to thoroughly enjoy the tin of cocoa at the Comforts Fund on the return from these trips. It warmed the blood and put new vigour into us. We needed warming with all our cold, wet clothes on. Although it was more convenient to get food to us, we did not fare so well as what we did in the front line. Most of the food we had I prepared myself from various articles left in the dug-outs. Cheese seemed to be most plentiful, but we had to be very sparing with the bread. On some occasions we used to melt the cheese and spread it on the bread. By this means we saved a good deal of our margarine and jam.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 31.

29th January, 1917.

Dear _____

It is evident from the last group of letters that I received from Australia that quite a number are becoming anxious about me and going as far as to permit thoughts to interfere with their general health. While I have to thank the different ones for their kindness and prayers offered on my behalf, I have to advise that to worry over something that has not happened is indeed unwise. I have every confidence that nothing very serious will happen to me. Of course, I do not anticipate for one minute that I will go through without some affliction, but you are just as apt to receive affliction at home as what I am in the trenches. I am always thinking of home and of those with whom I am closely connected. When I say always I mean when my mind is not forced to be concentrated on other matters. Some of the last correspondence contained many questions, such as:— Have you plenty of cigarettes? We receive an issue of cigarettes and, apart from that, the Y.M.C.A. is not too far away, and when there is a shortage of the issue we arrange to get them. Furthermore, we have our own canteens, and the Australian Comforts Fund. Would you like the paper sent every week? No, thank you. The news just at present is mainly war news, and we get all we want of that in the French edition of "The Daily Mail." Any other news of importance that would interest at present concerning Australia is sent over as correspondence.

We are back In "Cow Trench" again, but it seems to be a different trench altogether. Now there is something very strange happening. "Cow Trench" was a support trench, but to see it now, you would say it was fit for brigade headquarters, and this is just what it is being built for. The divisional engineers have been at work and all the sloppy, stinking holes that we used to live in are a thing of the past. Our home now is ever so deep under the ground, and we are

WAR LETTERS.

beginning to think that it is all a dream. Furthermore, it strengthens my belief that during the coming spring Fritz is going to be peppered up. This work is not going on for a joke and by the time this letter reaches Australia you may also receive reports in the daily papers that a new offensive has been launched against the enemy strongposts at such and such a place. In the same vicinity as last offensive, you remember Pozieres, but a little further along the line, thus:— Code transposed:— Warlencourt Butte, Le Sars, Martinpuish. etc., etc.. During our short stay at "Cow Trench" we performed various duties in connection with the men in the front line, and in preparation for a coming offensive. I found the stay at "Cow Trench": very light compared with other trenches. The conditions, however, were much better, but my clothes have not been removed from me yet, and I feel wet. I have not had what you might call a wash yet, but I have removed a good deal of dirt from my face and hands. My moustache and beard are coming on nicely, but I am longing for the time to come when I can prune them. In some of my earlier letters it was stated that the men eat like pigs. I fancy this was relating to one of the camps in England. However, the conditions of eating in the trenches really brings the men on a level with the animals. It is nothing to see a soldier drop his slice of crisp, cold bacon in the mud, and pick it up and eat it without attempting to remove any of the dirt. It is nothing at all to hear the men growling at one another like two dogs over a bone, all because one considers the other is getting a fraction more than he is. This state of affairs makes you stop to think, who they are, and where did they come from, who are their parents, whether or not the leakage exists in the training by the parents, or whether the environment of warfare, or whether the lack of cultivation in personal control I do not know. Nevertheless, you have to look on in amazement, sometimes disgust, yet the self-same men are highly polished, and upright in stature when parading the streets of

WAR LETTERS.

London. You have heard the old saying, "Don't judge a man by the clothes he wears," and it is indeed very conspicuous in the A.I.F. I sometimes look on at the commissioned officers, not with any air of jealousy, but more in the nature of a search. I try to picture what they were and who they were in civil life. Now and again you can catch a rebound from their civil habits and you at once denounce them and claim that all the airs and graces are artificial. But does it not bear out the undeniable fact, that environment plays a very active part of our lives? It therefore means that to succeed or to push ahead in whatever capacity we may so desire is to mix with the best of it — the highest quality of it that is obtainable. It has been said of cricketers that they improved greatly through being associated with Test-games. The same thing applies in every walk of life — in business, society, sport.

It is a difficult matter for me to sleep at night. My health seems good enough, but until the officer brings round the nightcap I cannot go to sleep. Our nightcap consists of a shell nose-cap full of overproof rum. I have known the time when I could not close my hands, they were so cold, but as soon .as I have had my rum issue I could feel the blood moving. This rum issue is the most distasteful thing I know of, yet the majority of the troops love it. It is a very heavy drug, and while it is sending some to sleep it is creating visions of V.C.'s for others: I have heard them remark often, after the rum issue, that Fritz would get a very rough time, if he came over at that particular moment. The rum issue is often the cause of unnecessary quarrels amongst pals, but I will not say that these quarrels develop into permanent hatred. On some occasions much merriment is caused the following morning, as well as big heads. We still receive tea tasting of petrol, but I am beginning to appreciate this drink, as it comes at such times as when you are really thirsty. We can drink out of the shell-holes, but it is not wise, and it is not very tempting after what you see of the shell-holes

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during the daytime. It Is not uncommon to see a greenish scum on the surface of the water, and usually this is caused by either a dead body or a mule, or some other impure matter. We are only issued rations once a day, and the issue is none too large. A loaf to three men is the usual issue of bread — a small quantity of margarine and jam; Sometimes a ridiculous issue of cheese. Meat or bacon is also issued. The tea, in petrol tins, comes up hot every night, and that has to last the following day. It means that every time we want a drink of hot tea we have to warm it up again.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 32.

7th February, 1917.

Dear _____

From "Cow Trench" we moved back to Carlton Camp and had to undergo a series of very queer fatigue duties, both heavy and tiresome. I discovered at Carlton Camp a number of Tommies and just over the hill from our group of huts I ran into _____. He was making himself a nice cup of hot coffee cup, mind you. I did not think such things existed in France.

"My word, you're living high," I remarked. "Yes;" he replied, "we are right on a hill."

Although I saw the joke I did not display my knowledge of it by laughing, because I knew _____ was not in the habit of being witty. I therefore formed an opinion that he had been used to cups of coffee, and I wondered if he knew that we had been drinking absolutely raw tea flavoured with petrol.

"The A.M.C. is not a bad life?" I remarked further.

"I'm fed up with-it," he said. "Last week a shell burst about 200 yards away, and it shook us up."

"It would," I replied, with a tone of sarcasm.

"I suppose you're fed up, too?" he asked, and he was looking for someone. to sympathise with him.

"We're not fed up like you, Bill," I replied. "Coffee, and cups to drink out of."

Do you .know, Bill saw the joke, and he only smiled and said, "Cut the rough out."

However, I was indeed pleased to see him. He told me the whereabouts of a good number of my friends, and it cheered me to a great extent to learn that I was not .far from an old friend. I joined him with a cup of coffee, He could spare it. He had plenty, and his clothes were exceedingly clean compared with the

WAR LETTERS.

covering over my body; and his face was nice and clean, as if he had just come out of a barber's. We talked together for quite a long time, and I left him and felt down in the dumps. The presence of _____ had brought me nearer home. The talk on matters so closely connected with my past civilian life had so drawn me from the horrors of war that I felt it a great strain when the hill divided poor Bill and me. He did not look too happy, but his life was much easier than mine. The conditions of living were far superior in every way, and. I realised that the infantry was one of the units where the work is hard and cruel and the consideration is just as hard. While I was thinking this matter over it dawned on me that in civil life it is just the same. There is a class who have to work hard and it is cruel. The thanks they receive are cruel, but they are all fighting for the one cause. In the army it is speedy victory for the nation, our Empire, but in civil life it is for each home or each individual, and, indirectly, for the land in which we live. This war should indeed enlighten the minds of the people now living, and especially those directly connected with the army and in this enlightenment there should be sown a seed for the generations to follow; for them to cultivate and bring the new plant to full bloom. There should be more consideration one towards the other. Each should look into the lives of those around him, and be thankful for his lot. Teach and do not growl. A few hundred yards from our camp is a railway and large dump. A dump is a sort of store place. I was told that it was the intention of the authorities to run a light railway from this dump to a place near the front-line trenches. This would indeed lessen the work of the infantry to a great extent. For power, motor engines were to be used instead of the light steam engine. On this particular day a trainload of these engines arrived, and all hands had to set to work to have them removed from the trucks. These

WAR LETTERS.

engines were very heavy and the work had to be executed in quick time so that the trucks could get away: You might not believe, but the perspiration simply poured out of me, and when I went to get a drink out of my water-bottle I discovered that the water had turned into ice. It may be hard to believe, but, nevertheless, it was true. Tommies were helping us, and they remarked how strenuous the work was, when time was against you. However, it did not take very long to get cool again, and I sometimes wonder how the troops manage to go on day after day under such conditions without getting severe colds, for it is a common occurrence for the troops to sweat and then sit about on the cold, frozen ground with their clothes wet. After being asked by one of the Tommies for a drink out of my water-bottle, I took him to the Australian Comforts' Fund for a hot drink of cocoa, and he highly appreciated the kindness and gave me the address of a relative of his, where, he said, I would be able to get cigarettes and anything that I badly needed as a comfort. This offer touched me a great deal, and he could see the gratefulness that I felt in the expression on my face.

Yours, _____

Letter No. 33.

11th February, 1917.

Dear _____

I have not received much mail from Australia of late, but I am living in hopes of getting a big bunch within the course of a few days. I do a lot of correspondence, far more than what I receive, but I do not mind, because there are times when it soothes me greatly to write and lose my feelings. I have good friends here, but they come and go like the seasons. They are only temporary acquaintances.

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My health is still very good, and I am by no means inclined to give in or to become so despondent as to injure my health. I am keeping up remarkably well, and I attribute this to my humorous disposition. The boys of my special section consider I am very witty, and they highly appreciate it, because there is always a certain amount of anxiety when we go into the trenches. They all want to be in the same dug-out, and this is not always possible. For instance we moved from Carlton Camp to a trench called "Thistle," and the dug-outs would only hold two, similar to "Gusty Trench" at Ginchy. The night we arrived at "Thistle Trench" was very cold and windy. I shall never forget the adventurous trip through the mud. It was by no means easy going. However, we did not have any work to do that night and it gave us a very good opportunity of making ourselves comfortable. After carefully examining the trench, which was most scattered, we discovered that it was quite possible to make ourselves very cosy, and we stored up the various articles, namely:— Half a tin of petrol, 1 tin of cocoa and milk, half a tin Cafe-du-Lait, which we took to be coffee and milk, nearly a quarter of a small cheese like soap, three full packets of Gem of the Ocean cigarettes but they were wet, three tins of bully beef, an old waterproof sheet and a German overcoat. During the night it was bitterly cold, and it rained heavily, and as my friend and I looked at each other, about ten feet under the ground, you could have seen the words "Thank God we're not out to-night" written across our faces. Now we knew that if bag or any other material of a similar nature was saturated in petrol it would burn. It was not difficult to secure a sandbag. However, our little fire, which consisted of a ration tin with bag saturated with petrol, was a great success, and after we had secured water from a nearby shell-hole and had a drink of "Cafe-du-lait" each, it was decided to take it in turns to have a

WAR LETTERS.

sleep. This was indeed lovely. Everything was going smoothly until the second change-over came. My friend woke me up and I had a bath a soldier's bath by rubbing my eyes and yawning. I looked at the dull fire, but it was nice and warm, and the earth about us seemed to be hard like a brick. This fire was between us and the floor space was about four feet by three feet, so you see we could not lie down to sleep. My companion said he would make the fire up, so poured the petrol on the ration tin. What a blaze My overcoat caught fire, my eyebrows and hair were singed, even my thumb was alight, but, luckily for us, we had the presence of mind to smother the lot with an old blanket, or I would not be writing this letter to-night, especially after what we discovered at the bottom of the dug-out. There were fourteen boxes of bombs, and each bomb was detonated. That means ready for use. We were thankful that night, if ever we were. The next night we did not light the fire, not because we were afraid exactly. Oh, no We had to go on duty, carrying rations to the front line. It was a sort of cross-country journey. I mean that there was no track made by soldiers. We had to make our own track, and, as a matter of fact, we had to find our own way. I did hear some foul talk that night, and some disgraceful conduct, which only brought about a very heavy artillery bombardment from the enemy. It appeared that part of our ration cargo consisted of jars of rum, and one of the men kept nibbling or sucking at it like a baby's bottle. Of course, he was soon drunk, because the army rum, as I have mentioned before, is very strong, and in his drunkenness he started to sing and scream out. Can you wonder at the bombardment? Fritz must have thought the Western Front had gone mad. Strange as it may appear, that fellow was killed that night, and we suffered no other casualties. I did hear some days after that one of our own officers shot him, but I am not going to

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comment on this either way. Our dug-out in "Thistle Trench" was rather queer. At the entrance was a big pool, while inside was exceedingly dry. The fire dried the inside to a certain extent. Surrounding the entrance and in the vicinity of the trench were dead Germans, old bayonets, gas helmets, etc., etc. One of our boys, rather anxious for souvenirs, ventured out in the daytime for the purpose of searching the dead Germans. It goes to prove what some will do, for we could smell the bodies from the trench. However, he secured a gold ring from one of the bodies lying on the battlefield. His story of the souvenir hunt was very interesting. He told us that he kept very low, crawling on some of the higher ground. There are numerous dead, he said, including Tommies and Scots. Their faces are black and some of their teeth are showing just like wild beasts. It is hard to make yourself believe that they ever did walk about the earth. But when you look from the battlefield in the attempt to gaze at their homes and picture them by the fireside with their wives, or their mothers, their sisters, their brothers, or their children, it is most difficult to believe, and most appalling to realise. Although he told of so many disgraceful sights about us, we could hardly believe when he told us that, in the attempt to remove the gold ring from a German's finger, he pulled the arm right out from the shoulder.

News has reached us that the men in the front line raided Fritz last night, killing three and capturing seventy-five. Our casualties were two killed and eleven wounded. So you see it is difficult to say whether our rowdy man caused the bombardment or whether it was the raiders. I am inclined to think it was the latter.

The papers say that this is the coldest winter in France for twenty-five years. Snow has fallen and become frozen, which makes the travelling much easier than in the mud, although the

WAR LETTERS.

ground is very slippery. The Somme River is frozen in parts. With regard to articles most needed. I should say:— Two pairs socks. I pair underpants, 1 shirt with sleeves, 1 tin of cigarettes, 1 bottle of eucalyptus. It is not wise to send cigarettes in packets, and I prefer Boststo's 'Parrot' brand eucalyptus. Do not send sweets, as they are badly affected coming through the tropics. I should like a couple of black pencils and a writing tablet. If you think I will be passing them on my way home do not send them, but I do not think such will be the case. A Scotch battalion has captured quite a number of prisoners, who look total wrecks. One Scotty told me that some of the Germans were in a cold sweat when they were captured.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 34.

16th February, 1917.

Dear _____

We are a fair distance back now in a place called Scots' Redoubt, We are not in the billets of French people, but in huts similar to those at Carlton Camp. The area is more like the camps of England, only that there is a good deal more of genuine warfare transportation. Every morning we have a parade, and our rifles are inspected. We have been able to have a shave and a wash, but our clothes are still very rough. I do not think they would allow me to do the streets of London in such attire, but round about the fighting zones we are not too particular with the glaze upon our boots. Many football matches have taken place, and the band gives us an overture now and again. Before Scots' Redoubt we were billeted in a village named Ribemont, not a great distance from Flesselles. There were a few French people there, but the village was not so nice as Flesselles. We played football there also, and had the usual drill.

This letter has been postponed time after time, and we are now in a sunken road, which ran through the village of Martinpuish that was. Just after we left Scots' Redoubt Fritz dropped bombs in the vicinity, and made a direct hit on one of the huts. I believe twelve casualties occurred. Another incident was a group of Scotties passed with bombs in bags. One bomb exploded and set others off. Many horses and Scotch suffered. It has been worrying me a little, delaying this letter because you might think something has happened to me, but this is not the case, for I am feeling very well just now, and as happy as can be expected under war conditions. Mail has come from Australia and I have received a fair share of it. Many are asking me to write to them, but just at present I feel that it is too much to undertake. One party has told me in her

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letter that she is keeping a copy of all my letters to you. She tells me you forward them to her. Now, that is a good idea, and I would be glad if you could manage to circulate them around. It would save me a good deal of worry and time. The journey to the trenches in Martinpuish was absolutely the easiest journey I have had. Although the distance was great, we had a spell on a hill overlooking the German lines in the vicinity of Mametz, Bazentine, Contalmaison. From this hill we walked along a specially prepared communication trench right up to the front line. I thought this was a masterpiece in warfare. The camouflage was wonderful, and I felt almost as safe walking along there as I did in the streets of London. When we arrived at the trench I got a surprise. It was wide and private, and the dug-outs were very deep indeed. In looking through them one would wonder how the Germans got pushed out. They were very cosy, with beds, tables, and even pictures, but when you look around the surface you wonder how Fritz stood it so long. The ground was just like a honey-comb.

In this trench I discovered a tin of marmalade, a tin of apricot jam, two tins of ideal milk, and half a tin of sugar. We had a little salt and curry powder. This was indeed a happy find.

It was suggested that we have a feed, so I ventured to the top of the dug-out for the purpose of trying to arrange a fire of some description, even if it be fat on a bit of cloth, but there was a fierce bombardment taking place. I listened to this for some considerable time, and made quite a study of the various sounds and bursts of the shells. I could, after a time, almost distinguish a whiz-bang from a six-inch shell. I could tell whether the shell was going far back or whether it was going to burst close by, and with this knowledge I thought I would be able to avoid much danger. The shells, however, were not bursting very close to where we

WAR LETTERS.

were, so I took a walk along the trench. My first find was a coke fire already alight, so I managed to get it to the mouth of our dug-out without burning myself. I then continued the investigations, and ventured out into the open field right up near the barb-wire entanglements In "No Man's Land." It was 'here that I 'found a very suitable shell-hole, where Ice could be obtained. As I gazed across "No Man's Land" I could see the sudden flashes from the enemy guns, but every time a flare went into the air nearby I kept very still and low, but the flares gave me a wonderful opportunity of closely observing the much-talked-of "No Man's Land". Dead bodies could be seen, but they did not appear to be recent fatalities. I returned to my dug-out and reported my find, so it was decided that I should be cook. For breakfast we had hot stew, and if you would care about sending this recipe around I'm sure it will be highly appreciated. You secure a quantity of army biscuits, crush them up into very small particles, and allow to soak until the bombardment has lifted. The bombardment is not an ingredient of the army biscuit. In the meantime, you walk to a selected shell-hole with a bag and a pick, for the purpose of obtaining water, which might be frozen. Melt the ice in a dixie, then boil the water. Add salt to taste. Mix both water and army biscuits together, and stir well with a salvaged bayonet. You will then have enough porridge for twelve in civil life, or four soldiers in the field. The porridge was highly appreciated, and we decided to have porridge every morning. The boys at dinner-time asked me to make a stew. Here is my recipe:— Bully-beef, pork, and beans: 1 tin of army rations, which consists of meat, potatoes, carrots, and some liquid; about a quart of ice water, and half a tin of curry. There was none of this stew left. For tea I made toast, and the boys had it with jam on, and named it jam tart. For supper we had a chat, but this is different from the civilian chat. We say

WAR LETTERS.

nothing when we chat, but think a lot. Some troops think chatting is great fun, and when they reach a hundred they become greatly excited. Another pastime is rat-hunting; we sometimes see them as big as half-grown cats. You can see by the foregoing that a soldier's life is not like a civilian life. It would seem dreadful for a soldier to sit in a drawing room by the fire on a winter's night. So you see there are habits with every living thing. Fish love the water, birds love the trees, men and women love the fire on a cold winter's night, and a soldier loves his dirt, chats, and rats.

While I was in the trench at Martinpuish I had to take a message to headquarters through this wonderful communication trench, which was called "William's Alley." I did not hesitate at all when asked to do this message, but after I had got about two hundred yards I began to think that "Williams Alley" was a death-trap. Right before my eyes a huge shell burst, and some of the mud slapped me in the face with much force. Not only did it cause me much pain, but smashed that portion of the trench to pieces, making it impossible to pass. I had to crawl over the top, and just as I was getting in again another huge shell burst just at the rear of me, and it was what I termed a "kind" of shell, for it assisted me back into the trench without bringing blood. All I received was a push from a huge piece of mud or something at the lower portion of the spine. Whether it killed any chats or not I do not know. However, I was very glad when the journey was over, for Fritz did not give me a fair go at all.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 35.

21st February, 1917.

Dear _____

After a comfortable four days in the trenches at Martinpuish we moved back to a highly situated position overlooking the Somme. It reminded me very much of a dried-up river with high banks, Our position was midway in a miniature mountain, Although we were very comfortable as regards home, the position was by no means as safe as that of Martinpuish. The artillery was very active in these quarters, and in one particular place it was given the name of "Gun-pit Alley." Our men were not at all in favour of being residents in the suburb of "Gun-pit Alley," for they believed that while the artillery were nicely camouflaged and had good homes the infantry were exposed to the enemy shell-finders. That is to say, the shells that were sent in search of the guns in the alley would find a lodging-place near our homes. This state of affairs was termed "drawing crabs." However, in spite of the bad reports that we heard about the place, such as "we would not last one night," and so forth, "Gun-pit Alley" proved a real home, and it was on very rare occasions that the enemy shelled us. On one particular night I was detailed for gas guard, and the position where I stood was above the roof of company headquarters. It was exceedingly cold, and was well prepared for us. During the dead or night the battle area became quite calm, and with the air so cold and still it offered a very favourable opportunity for me to hear the secrets of the world. I could imagine all sorts of things with the greatest of ease. I could picture the Kaiser in his elaborate bedroom; I could picture the busy people of London, now at rest. The whole world seemed to be at rest, but in my search for things that are much brighter than warfare I readily realised that in Australia the sun was shining. I could see the

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young men nicely dressed, with every comfort that they required, hurrying to and fro. I could hear the busy housewife singing a song of contentment while her fortunate husband was sitting in his office with all his pals. I could feel the pains and sorrows of those widows, mothers, sisters who had lost their dear ones on the very battlefield where I stood, I could see my own dear mother trying to picture what her son was like, and then my mind turned to the battlefield, to realise that there were men lying breathless face downwards towards the sod, where they fell. These visions brought a lump in my throat, and the tears slowly blinded my eyes, and I could see no gas, but the ghastly horrors of war that were created by men supposed to be of the highest of civilisation; Rulers of nations, murderers of men. What was all the trouble about? Some say the Kaiser wanted greater power on earth. Others say the working classes were getting too strong a hold; that the greed for commercial trade was the cause; that one man was murdered by Serbians; that the population of the world was getting too great. Whatever the cause, it is uncivilised, and in my visions I saw room for greater deeds to be performed after all this murder is over. Who are the fighters? Why, my own workmates; workers from all quarters of the supposed civilised world. It appeared to me that the drones were reading about it and talking about it. What you might call society, or the people who live in luxury on the sweat of the brows of others. The nations might well get together and so form one big nation, and if the leaders of the nations will not agree to put a stop to this class of wholesale murder; well then, it is high time that the people of the world formed for themselves an anti-war league.

Whilst up in the lonely position, looking for clouds of gas, and ready at any moment to give an alarm that the lives of my fellow companions might be saved, a humble rat crawled close to my

WAR LETTERS.

feet. He was not frightened. He played about nearby, and I worried him not, for he was company for me. He seemed to know that I would not hurt him, and at times he ventured right up close to where I was standing. He must have been looking for food, and I watched gun bullets were now coming at us at frequent intervals. Their hissing sound about our earholes made us keep walking, and at the same time made my comrade forget about his wound. He told me that "The Seven Elms" was the nearest place for him to get attention. I told him that I had no idea where "The Seven Elms" were, but fortunately he knew, and with his arm around my shoulders, we struggled on and on under the music of the whistling bullets. We reached The Seven Elms safely. I handed in my message, and then made for "Gun-pit Alley" across the snow-clad field. The journey home was worse than the journey there, but on a return journey there is always the feeling of going home and home seems to be the place where you stay longest. I did not find so much trouble in getting back, and when I reported to the officer he told me I had had a very cold and miserable trip. He gave me a good issue of rum and I went to sleep until after 2 o'clock the next afternoon.

It was a pleasant surprise for me when I woke to learn that all the troops were busy preparing to move back to Scots' Redoubt again. Their rifles were being cleaned, and they were all happy. My friend and I were detailed to go on ahead just after sunset, and the journey was very rough indeed. However, we were fortunate in coming across the track of a Comforts Fund hut, where we had a cup of hot soup, which gave us much energy for the rest of the journey.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 36.

1st March, 1917.

Dear _____

We did not stay very long at Scots' Redoubt this time — just long enough to receive a big bunch of mail and have a few games of football in the snow and a few rifle inspections. In my mail this time I received the £5 and a photo which I highly appreciate. I am: pleased to learn that everybody is in good health and happy. It makes me feel happy to read about it. The sun made a feeble attempt to-day to tell us that warmer weather will be coming along shortly. Why I like to hear from everybody is on account of the different styles of writing. — tells me all about the doings of the city, the concerts, and other girls. — tells me all about the way the mice are eating the wheat in the country and how they captured five dray-loads in one night, and about the harvester and rabbits, — tells me all about the place where I worked, and the changes that have taken place, — tells me all about the cricket and the football He tells me how the premiership was won last year, and the letters are long, but they would not have been so long if the other team had won. — tells me a sad story always about the poor soldiers — what they are putting up with. Mother tells me of home, of her prayers for me, and in each line there is an undoubted conspicuous flow of motherly love. But Australia is not the only place I receive letters from nor parcels either, for I have received a parcel from a lady in England, and a very nice letter. In the parcel I found cigarettes, chocolates, cakes, soap, and several other articles very precious to a soldier. Her letter ran like this: "Dear Soldier, — My nephew told me of your kindness to him when he was thirsty. That letter came to me the same mail as I received a letter from you, but poor Bert has been killed in

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action since that time, and I feel that as he was our only relative at the war we shall miss his letters very much. Your letter to me was most interesting, and I would be very grateful if you could manage to keep up the writing. Bert described you as a real white man, a real brother-in-arms, and he asked me to send you a few things. I only wish I could do better, but the restrictions are very great, and we are only allowed to purchase certain articles. If ever you come to London you must come to Battersea and stay with us for a few days. What we have we will share with you. I wish you the very best of luck. Yours sincerely, _____”

You can see by this letter how quickly friends are made and lost in the army. I remember Bert on the light railway job. Now he is dead, and it was only a few days ago, you might say. I have written again to Bert's auntie, but I do not wish to trespass on her kindness. We had a good march from "Scot's Redoubt" to a camp called "Pioneer Camp." all amongst the ruins. Bazentine, Mametz, Contalmaison are all within walking distance, but they have suffered during the offensive of 1916. "Pioneer Camp" has its true name, for in the army the word pioneer means work, and we had plenty to do. On one job we had to carry duck-boards and place them in position. The placing of them in position was an easy matter, for we only had to rub them in the muddy ground and put them in place. I might mention that the frozen snow has started to thaw, making the conditions as bad as what they were at Ginchy and Thistle trenches. The journeys we had with these duck-boards were very trying indeed, and two or three of our men came down in the mud several times. On one occasion we came in contact with a duck-board that had been blown to pieces, and where the shell hit was a big hole. One of the men hurt himself very much. The usual cry was "Hole in the duck-board" or "Mind the wire" Some of the track was so bad that we had to just do the best we

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could as regards keeping our feet. It was after we had done about three trips over the same track that it was discovered that in one particular spot a dead German had been replaced for a shattered duck-board, and that we had walked over him time after time. In realising this I felt a tinge of horror ran through my veins. Whether he was a German or not, it was an inhuman thing to do. He may have been a respectable, honest citizen of the German Empire. He may have left a heart-broken mother or wife and children. It would have killed his next of kin to learn that his body was being used as part of a track for soldiers, over a bloodstained battlefield. There is no doubt a soldier does not possess the same sense of feeling that he does in civil life. Such an act as the above would, in civil life, only be performed by the worst type criminal. After every trip we had a condensed milk tin full of cocoa from the Comforts Fund, but the duck-board trips were not the worst by far. Before we left "Pioneer Camp", we had several trips along the Bapaume Road clearing the mud that had accumulated, and so long as I live I should never forget that job. As soon, as we put foot on the Bapaume Road we sunk very nearly up to our knees in slush, and, when we started the work of cleaning it away it was as much as I could stand. Underneath this slush were buried the bodies of dozens of Tommies and Germans. They had evidently been there since the 1916 offensive, so it is useless for me to state the condition the bodies were in. The job was not only heart-breaking, but nerve-wracking, for we were under continuous shell-fire from the enemy. This road was being cleared right up as far as we could go. That is to say, as near to the enemy lines as we ventured, and as it was the main road such preparation gave me first-hand knowledge that a big offensive was pending. Underneath this slush was firm road, but occasionally massive trees, which helped to make the Bapaume Road a beautiful

WAR LETTERS.

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WAR LETTERS.

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Yours, _____

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Letter No. 37.

6th March, 1917.

Dear _____

Now I want you to remember all these war names — “William’s Alley” “Sugar Factory”, or “Factory Corner,” Gun-pit Alley,” “The Seven Elms,” “Chalk Pits,” “Gusty,” and so forth. They are worth remembering. We are now in a place called Le Sars. It was at one time a village, but is now one heap of ruins. On our right is the "Butte" — “The Famous Butte” some call it-but it is Warlencourt Butte, a high piece of ground in the vicinity of Bapaume. Although we were so near the village of Le Sars we did not use the place as our home; we preferred to live more in the open in a trench called "Malt Trench." During the day-time we visited the ruins and the rats. Oh, my goodness They were having great fun. I thought the war was doing some good by getting rid of the rats, or rather, disturbing them so that other means of destruction might befall them. I do not know what sort of a place Le Sars was in peace time, but all the troops seemed to be very happy there. Of course, we were away from the strenuous work on the Bapaume Road, but we were not very far from the road itself, and we knew too well by the shells that visited us. There is no doubt the Germans knew of the activity along the Bapaume Road; they knew as well as I did that it was necessary to clear the road for traffic. They knew that a "push" was coming off in the spring as well as the authorities. What Fritz did not know about the war was not worth knowing. It was their objective to catch as many as possible of our men and to delay the work on the road as much as possible. This was part of the move, as in a game of draughts. And another move was to poison the water in the shell-holes. This was done by means of gas shells. One of our sergeants sent out for water to make some coffee or cocoa. This was done,

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but a couple of days later he suffered great agony. Orders then came out that any soldier who drinks the water from shell-holes will be punished. Whether this punishment meant the suffering of agony or not, I do not know. Our sergeant had to be evacuated, and we had heard later that a crime had been brought against him, and his agony was classed as self-inflicted. No sane man would drink poisoned water just to escape the trenches. The result is so dangerous, and while there are other methods, I do not think the classification in order. In any case, he is the last sergeant in our battalion who would do such a thing. Our trench being so near the main road brought a good deal of stray shells about, and the company suffered quite a lot of casualties that it would have otherwise escaped had we been a little further in towards the open fields. We did not class the village as a crab-drawer so much as the road, because it was one mass of rubbish heaped high on top of half blown-down walls. It may have been that the Germans thought that we might possibly be stupid enough to live in the cellars, but I do not think so. The main object was the Bapaume Road, for they shelled it with all classes of shells almost from Albert to where we were living, "Malt Trench." I did not have much work to do here, so had a very favourable opportunity of looking round. My friend and I took a journey to the Butte. I considered this was rather risky, but we took great pains, and used a lot of judgment in selecting the time and trade to take. When we arrived there we discovered a number of dead Tommies and Scotties. These units evidently made several attempts to drive the Hun from the Butte without success. Some of the attitudes of the men were impressive, and although the sight was very heart-rending it hardened us a little more in warfare. Does it not seem strange to talk like this, being hardened to the sight of dead men?

WAR LETTERS.

Passing them, as it were, just like you would pass a stone on the road, shooting at them just as you would a rabbit in the bush. We did not stay at the Butte very long. Souvenirs at that time did not offer much attraction. At the same time, the Butte was an ideal place for souvenirs, and if you were on the opposite side against the enemy position you were as safe as in the streets of London.

The village of Le Sars gave plenty of scope for amusement, inasmuch as we found great pleasure in hunting through the ruins just to see what we could find and what we could catch. Quite a number hurled half-bricks at rats, and found plenty of amusement in it. Others were busy trying to pick the different French words from the books. Some were looking for money, while others were trying to compare the furniture with that made in Australia. The outstanding feature was those in search of clothes. Some of the troops threw away their shattered clothes and put civilian clothes on. One chap in particular had a top hat on, but he did not prefer this to his steel hat. Another had a pair of lady's corsets on. Women's hats were numerous, and were tried on frequently, to the amusement of the boys, but all this merriment was put to a sudden end when the news came through that we were to raid the enemy to find out his strength. There was stillness in the minds of many; there was an anxiety in others; and on the night of the raid, when all seemed quiet, a burst came forth from many guns. Our artillery spoke, and we dashed at the enemy like the flicker of a stockman's whip. All was over; we were back again relating the experiences. It was the first step into "No Man's Land" that was the worst. After that the hard feeling, the numb feeling of the nerves crept into the very tissues of our veins. Bombs were hurled at the enemy from every angle. Isolated groans came from the haunted-like machine-gun posts. The Germans offered little or no resistance, and we considered that we were superior. That night

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we suffered the bombardment as part payment of our act, and whilst we were sitting in our dug-out with a candle dimly burning you could feel the earth shake, and as one can readily understand that the bursts of these shells, besides shaking the earth, shattered the nerve of the men in the dug-out. One shell in particular seemed to burst right at my back. I could at once feel the disturbance within my system. Every nerve in my body seemed to be disconnected, and when I looked down towards my legs I could see my knees rocking like the chimney of a donkey engine. I put my hand firmly on it to try and steady it, but for once the mind had no power over its nervous system.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 38.

14th March, 1917

Dear _____

There were two or three raids made from "Malt Trench," and it developed into an attack just at the outskirts of the village of Bapaume. We consolidated in this position, which seemed to be very secret. I should say we were about two hundred and fifty yards from the village. Our view directly in front was rather gloomy. As we faced what appeared to be a broken-down guards-van, but you cannot always rely on these queer obstacles being really what they are or what they are meant to represent, for Fritz has an artful way with him, and one needs to be awake at all times, or he would fall to the many traps that are set. Beyond this guards-van was the Bapaume cemetery, and at dusk the picture offered an exceedingly sad one. The air at this particular period is always still, and silence on the battlefield has an emotional tendency. It is during these moments of solitude that one thinks most. One would be safe in stating that on this night all minds were turned towards an attack that is sure to come, and that is the attack on the village of Bapaume.

Bapaume is a fairly large village situated on the main Amiens Road, and all troops believed that the Germans would undoubtedly offer a very stubborn resistance before allowing the valuable position to fall through their fingers. My friend and I lifted our heads above the parapet to learn just a little about the direction most likely to be taken should an attack eventuate, but we were obliged to keep very low before we could as much as catch a rough view of the outline of the village through the semi-darkness. A most terrific bombardment was hurled in the direction of our trench. Two casualties resulted, apart from the

WAR LETTERS.

severe shaking many of the boys received. We all sat very low for some two or three hours conversing on topics that we thought would relieve the strain of the nerve-racking shells. When this strain had eased down a little the talk drifted to hospital and wounds. I never did like talking hospitals, nor wounds either, and some of the incidents mentioned were doing more damage to my nerves than the whole of the bombardment. I was obliged to leave the dug-out in search of a little fresh air. When I reached the open a new terror came before my eyes. I thought the world was on its last. I thought the whole earth had been crumbled to small particles. The trench, which was rather neat before the bombardment commenced, was blown almost to powder, and huge holes formed part of our treasured track. Then the sky was angry and red-looking, quite an un-common sight for a spring evening. I first of all thought that a munition dump had been bit by a shell, but on looking further I wondered if God had sent forth fire from Heaven. As far as my eyes could see to the east and as far as my eyes could see to the north and to the south. I could see mountains of angry flames. It frightened me so much that I could not venture to the dug-out to break the news. My eyes were fixed, as it were, like the gaze of a semi-conscious epileptic person, on the miles and miles of fierce flames that roared before me. What was it all about? It perplexed me very much, and it was not until the early hours of the morning that I discovered that the Germans had set many villages on fire and were evacuating. This news brought about a hurried attack on Bapaume by our men, and the cemetery I spoke of became the scene of a very fierce struggle, while the village itself was roaring with the flames between its streets and walls. Men were hiding behind tombstones hurling bombs at one another; others were trying hard to bring a machine-gun into operation, and for some hours the struggle continued.

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Gradually we forced our way through the cemetery, and could only catch a glimpse of an isolated German here and there. The smoke and heat and flames from the houses and stores in the village of Bapaume stemmed any further advance on our part at the moment, so we received instructions to strengthen our position and prepare for a further attack in the morning. Excitement was intense. Our men considered they had performed a wonderful feat and gained an honour worthy of being noted, and that was to capture the village of Bapaume. There was great joy in the home, but it was soon forgotten when hurried orders came through to continue the chase. They were all eager, but still there was a feeling of doubt intermingling; a sort of artificial smile upon some of their faces. We went right through the burning village, and the perspiration teemed from my face, just as it would on a summer's day in Australia, and when we reached the other side it was like an ice-chest. From the Equator to the North Pole all In a minute is the best way to describe it. On reaching the open again we exercised great care in our movements. We did not know any minute what we might encounter. This anxiety was really worse than an actual battle, and far worse than looking for an intruder at the dead of night in civilian life. We did not even notice how far we had walked. There was none of the usual "Only one kilo. to go," but on we went, yard after yard and kilometre after kilometre, until we had come to a village almost intact. This was quite a new experience, but It was with very great care that we ventured anywhere near the middle of It. What made us more careful was on account of the place not being set on fire, yet flames were visible all around us. It was only after a thorough search that we were convinced the Germans had completely left the village. It was decided to stay the night, but before finalising the order instructions were given to all men to scout out and see if

WAR LETTERS.

anything could be discovered in the surrounding area. A map of the district was brought out, and my friend and I were given instructions to reconnoitre a village a little to the right. Our first step was to fully arm ourselves, and we took quite a lot of bombs with us. The first difficulty we encountered was a long stretch of barb-wire entanglement which formed part of the enemy defence. Then we came in contact with a road composed of huge logs similar to a railway sleeper. If these logs were all in order, we would have had a real good road before us, but they were shattered by shell-fire, and we found great difficulty in avoiding accidents in the darkness. It was by no means a calm night, which added to the unpleasantness of the voyage over unknown ground, with ever so much risk attached to it. We whispered one to the other on the danger we might have to face, and the great risk of being captured by the enemy. The idea of sending two on such an errand seemed ridiculous, but I consoled myself by believing that our commander would not dare send two men on such a mission if he had the slightest doubt that the enemy was there. However, we reached the village and discovered that it had suffered heavy shell-fire, for there was not a complete house standing. We also discovered that it possessed a cemetery similarly situated to that of Bapaume, but the cemetery in this particular village had suffered much more than the Bapaume Cemetery. As we ventured further into the middle we became very nervous. Every little sound caused a shudder within us, but we ventured further and further until we reached the open again. We then decided to return. The journey back was even a greater strain than coming, for every movement seemed to be the movement of an army of Germans. The greatest of all shocks was the wind through the destroyed houses, which very often resembled the sound of

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human groans or angry voices. It was a very happy moment when we were able to report that no Germans occupied the village.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 39.

17th March, 1917.

Dear _____

My friend has just suggested that I do my correspondence in the chateau, but after careful consideration I decided to remain in our own humble dwelling. The chateau is a massive house, with very large rooms and acres and acres of ground surrounding it. My reason for not using this building is on account of the danger from shell-fire and bombs, although it was in my power to enter the building and use whatever room I desired, and there would be a certain amount of joy in the home and sights worth seeing, but my life seemed safer in the old house by the road. It is a long, long time since I have heard the voice of a child, and it seems ever so long since I have heard the voice of a woman; Men, men, men, from daylight to sunset, from Sunday morning until Saturday night, and it has made me halt a while to send my mind drifting over the miles of huge breakers that separate us. Some of the children you speak of in your letters have not as much as looked into my eyes: my eyes have not as much as seen a hair upon their heads; nor have my ears heard their youthful cries. I am forced to imagine them, to try to hear and see them: and sometimes when the deluge of warfare has become tired, and is resting, I feel sure that I can hear them, even the children who have not seen me. It is beautiful to forget war and permit your mind to wander to a place of rest and peace, but visions bring to me a sadness that is hard to break off. It is only an order from the military authorities that places you once more on the battlefield. If I remember rightly, I finished Letter No. 38 by telling you my experiences at the adjoining village. I was glad to get home that night. After we reported to the officer we undertook a little duty on our own, and that was to make ourselves comfortable for the night, for we were told that we would not be moving forward for about 36 hours. The house we were in was very cosy looking, and possessed many articles,

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of furniture, including beds, mirrors, tables, chairs, and other things. We were fortunate in securing sufficient bedding to enable us to have a very comfortable night's rest. In the-morning we utilised the kitchen fireplace to cook our breakfast, and many remarks were passed about home, and when the war would end. The incident was really lovely, and was just like a picnic. After breakfast we took a walk around the newly-occupied village, and discovered many things to interest us. The name of the village was Flavriel, The sun made a very bold effort to warm the air, and the green grass was making itself conspicuous after the long spell of snow. In one building we discovered cases upon cases of German helmets, and I collected over thirty-two different badges. There were also cases of small soft bats all brand new, and our boys threw off their steel hats, replacing them with either a soft hat or a helmet. The most disgraceful scene was in a snug corner of the cathedral, where we discovered some hundreds of empty beer bottles. I consider that the Germans could have found a more suitable place for beer bottles than the beautiful cathedral. In the afternoon we went out shooting, and one of the boys got a hare. Although we did this, we had no idea where the enemy was. He may have been secretly hiding some three or four hundred yards away, but everything seemed so very quiet. In the evening we rested in the house. In one room there were quite a lot of soldiers, and I stopped to take notice. This is what I saw: — Two of the troops were taking the shells off eggs that they had boiled. The next person was day-dreaming. His thoughts were ever so far away, and I came to the conclusion that he was thinking of his wife and children, or his mother, brothers, and sisters. The next man was cleaning out his ration bag. Haversacks are not always used for carrying rations. In many cases the troops prefer an old sandbag, as they can carry it over their shoulders, and if needs be they can have a chew on the road. However, this man was cleaning out the old sandbag. The next man was enjoying a dixie-lid full of dry-looking rice that he had

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dug up from somewhere — perhaps the incinerator. In the far corner a group of troops were playing poker on the floor by the light of half an inch of candle. In another corner there were two idiots (we have quite a lot in the army) wrestling and swearing at one another the whole time. A patient young chap was making a souvenir out of a German bullet. Another chap was exceedingly busy catching chats. I do not mean listening to other's conversations, but catching insects from his shirt. These tiny companions are termed chats. Next to him was a young man reading the Bible. Another was cleaning his boots, not with a brush or a pad, but with the end of his bayonet. You will see by this that we have quite a variety of different natures in the army. A person you would think was a managing director of some large industrial enterprise usually turns out to be a marine dealer, and a person you would take to be a marine dealer turns out to be the owner of some large estate. The biggest set-back I got was a man they used to call "Pull-through," because he was so thin and frail-looking. However, it turned out that he was a physical culture expert. It is very amusing when a new arrival enters the home of a night and happens to one of the old birds. A conversation such as this follows:—

"Do you remember old Joe at the pie-shop? Is Jimmy still in the old joint?"

This lasts for some considerable time, and slowly time creeps on, and some of the boys, tired and worn out by the strenuous day's work, begin to feel that it is time to put a stop to it. You then hear:— Don't you think there is anyone else in the place?"

"I say, give us an imitation of an oyster."

There is generally a comedian in every place you go, and our comedian is a really smart young chap. He is serious at all times with his humour, which adds to its quality. They call me a dry old stick, but our friend is really good company. Although he is always last to join

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his meals, he claims to have a very small appetite, and the reason he takes such a time to eat his meals is on account of the size of his mouth.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 40.

25th March, 1917.

Dear _____

Before we left Flavriel my friend and I decided to take another walk to the village on our right, but we had not got very far along the road when a terrific noise came from an aeroplane. We looked up. and to our surprise th.is huge red-looking object, with a huge cross below it, was but a few hundred feet above our heads. The pilot was gazing down at us, and my friend shook his fist. This minor threat was not heeded. so we both took a very careful aim with our rifles, and I can assure you that I am far better at ducks than I am at hares, and my friend is no harm with the gun either. I consider we both made marks in the body of his plane. What damage did we do? .Only that he turned on us and showered machine-gun bullets about us. For ten minutes or so he had us clinging to the trunk of a massive tree. While he was one side we were the other, and as he came around so we moved. Eventually he gave up the task, and glided off. On our return to home we discovered that our fight was with "The Terror of the Somme." From Flavriel we moved forward again, and took up the chase. We had gone many kilometres before we came to a halt, and on the march we passed quite a lot of barb-wire entanglements. The village we rested near was Fremicourt. It was close on lunch time, so we had a small portion of bread. The time would be about 1.30 p.m. It was rumoured about that the enemy was not far away, so our commanding officer decided to move forward in the hopes of catching him early the next morning. The anxiety was becoming greater and greater each kilometre we passed, and at sunset it was agreed upon to prepare for an early attack. In the morning however, we were notified that the enemy

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had further evacuated his position. We at once took up the chase, and continued the march on fairly good ground all day without a bite to eat. It was not noticed so much on account of the eagerness to snatch a victory from the retreating Hun, and the different sights occupied a good deal of our attention. Carefully observing the acts of the enemy convinced me that he was retiring comfortably, for fruit trees and huge trees along the route were all cut down and placed in such a manner as to interfere with our progress. The massive trees along the main road that formed a beautiful avenue were carefully placed along the roadside, and if the enemy was pushed for time he would not be able to go to the bother of obstructing our path in such a complete way. Furthermore, there were no signs of any material anywhere. In fact, a stranger from a land where no war news had reached would not think a war was on but for the barb-wire entanglements. On one portion of the road we came in contact with a beautiful wild flower. It was the only flower we had seen on the whole of the battle area, and it aroused so much suspicion that nobody would venture to even smell it, let alone attempt to pluck it. The observing and tactful officer of our company sent word right along the line: to beware of the wild flower. In all probability it was the starting point of a massive explosion. Further along the road we came in contact with an image from one of the cathedrals. It was placed right in the middle of the road, and once more an officer warned his men and the rest of the army that it was wise to walk round the image. A sign was placed on the image, "Danger." So you see the Germans, apart from being good fighting soldiers, were full of tricks. In one deep dug-out I discovered quite a lot of tempting articles such as telephones, candles, instruments for beating water or tea, and so forth, but after seeing such traps set along the roadway I

WAR LETTERS.

considered it wise to leave the articles alone, and I left a little note warning others not to be tempted with the bait. Those who had matches, tobacco, or cigarettes enjoyed a smoke a little further along the roadway, for we had a rest of about ten minutes. This rest was evidently given on account of a severe hill directly in front of us — I should say about six kilometres. It would be dark by the time we reached the place, so many of the men were looking forward to a good night's rest in the village. The extra six kilometres made a big difference to a great majority of the men, for we had not had a bite to eat for over twenty-four hours. The hill we could see was a back-breaker at such a time under such conditions, and to add to the trying circumstances it became bitterly cold, and snow started to fall upon the weary men. When we arrived at the village it was about 9 p.m., and I discovered that the name of the place was Vaulx. It was smouldering when we reached it, and by all accounts it was one of the unfortunate places that had suffered severe shellfire. Great holes in the roofs of the houses and massive craters on the roadside indicated this, and one can easily understand how Vaulx became the victim of such a cannonade on account of its lofty position. Some of the troops settled down to a rest, others were hungry and too tired to make up a bed. They were lying about just like a lot of sheep in a paddock or like weary dogs of the hunt in fields. Quite a number of them, with hair half an inch long on their faces, and mud quite thick on their weary brows, were just strong enough to crunch at a hard biscuit. The whole business was a severe test on the men, and they offered thanks for the rest. It was a common saying, "Thank God for the rest; never mind the tucker." In spite of all the hardships, I stood the strain as well as the best, but I did not bargain to be set on duty. Yes! two hours' duty I was ordered on the telephone. There were no telephone wires laid, so I had to

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set to and arrange communication with battalion headquarters. This operation lasted until 12.30, just after midnight, and it was from that time that my two hours' duty commenced. I have never experienced in all my life such a struggle against sleep, and as I would find my eyelids slowly closing so I would quickly twist myself about to try and keep awake. Apart from this ordeal, my fingers were positively numb, and my feet were throbbing with the cold. In one great struggle against sleep, I faintly heard the tingle of the phone, and in a half-conscious state of mind I was able to catch the message. It was urgent, so I stood to my feet, shook myself, and took it to the officer. He rubbed his eyes and looked at me as much as to say, "To hell with you." He read the note, then made another angry look. He read the note again. This time he seemed to understand the text of the message a little clearer.

"Good God" he exclaimed, and jumped to his feet.

You do not know what passed through my mind all in two or three seconds. First of all, I thought we were in some awful trap. Then I thought that the Allies had surrendered.

"Where's the sergeant?" he asked.

I told him he was asleep in a deep cellar across the road.

"Tell him to get all the men together as quickly as possible."

I walked across the road, battling through the heavy snow.

"Are you there, Sergeant?" I called. No answer!

"Are you there, sergeant?" I called, a little louder. No answer!

I ventured through the dark, cold air to the bottom of the cellar. "Sergeant!" I called at the top of my voice.

"Hullo! What's wrong!" a tired, sleepy sort of voice rang through the cellar.

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"The O.C. says to get the men together as quickly as possible," I said. The ray of a strong electric torch was searchingly sent forth to my face.

"Oh! It's you —," said the sergeant. "What's the trouble?"

"The O.C. wants the men together as quickly as possible." I repeated, and he jumped out of bed like a rabbit from behind a bush.

"Wake some of them up, will you?" he asked, and I made off as quickly as my legs would permit. It was not a very nice job waking troops up from a welcomed sleep after what they had gone through, but nevertheless it had to be done, and by all accounts the sooner the better. The time was now 2.30 a.m. and, to my surprise most of the men were quite agreeable to get up. Whether they thought a hot meal had arrived or not I do not know. After I had secured my own equipment I went back to the 'phone. There I saw a massive map laid out upon a roughly constructed instrument that acted as a table. I also saw a bottle of whisky, and I would have given anything for a sip or a lick of the cork. It might warm me, I thought, but my share was to see it there, and smell the breaths of those who had had a fair share. This is what I heard: —

"This is the village we are to take. It must be taken at all costs before daybreak."

An urgent message then came that we were only to occupy the village, as the Germans had just evacuated it.

The men were all lined up ready to move. The snow was beating mercilessly against our hungry frames.

"Come on!" cried some of them, "What are we here for — our photos or what?"

We moved off in fours just like the first contingent marched through the streets in Australia and we had only got about three

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kilometres when salvo after salvo of whiz-bangs came at us. We scattered out on our own accord, and many of them fixed bayonets. I found it took me some two minutes to put my bayonet on, my fingers were so cold. Some of them did not put theirs on at all, and quite a number of them were too cold and weak to work their rifles. I managed to jam a few cartridges into the magazine. At about 5.45 a.m., it was noticed that many Germans were coming at us, and I heard a voice cry out,

"We're being surrounded,"

Another voice from far behind called. "What — fool is that? We opened fire with our rifles and machine-guns, but the longer we stopped the plainer we could see the enemy creeping around our flanks. He was forming a sort of horse-shoe around us, but we did not flinch. One of our sergeants was putting in excellent work with a machine-gun on his hip. Suddenly an official order came through to return to the outskirts of the village. We did so, while our machine gunners held the enemy at bay. It was remarkable how we only suffered one casualty. The enemy, however, did not continue to attack us, and after we had settled down a little, many questions were asked regarding artillery support. It appears that we did not have the support of one big gun. At half-past eight it suddenly dawned on the commanding officer that he had attacked at the wrong village. According to the map and instructions he should have occupied the village of Noreuil, instead of which he was marching the troops towards a village named Langnicourt. In his excitement he gave the order to attack at Noreuil. It was now well on to 9 a.m. and the snow was the only thing that relieved the conspicuous view of our men. In any case we were seen long before we attacked and it appeared to me that the enemy was playing a waiting game. In the broad

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daylight. It seemed that he knew as much of the blunder as we did ourselves. It seemed that he knew our head was flurried and they waited to snatch an easy victory. No sooner had we moved from our position to attack Noreuil than the machine-gun bullets and shrapnel was poured upon us. We fought on for about one hundred yards, then the company officers told us to dig in. Many oaths were uttered by even company officers at the shocking order in the daylight. "Sending men to death" one said, but we dug and dug amidst the snow and shells. "Hound them on," came the roar as from a mighty bull away back in safety.

On we went a little further. I should say we were about 600 yards off the village and we could plainly see reinforcements coming up in trains to help the Germans. We could see the movements in the village, which was on a bit of a hill, very plainly, and our guns were silent. Our heavy guns were back near Bapaume. All the defence we possessed was a rifle covered with mud and one machine-gun. Three of our machine-guns were put out of action. I fired as best I could sixteen shots on to the top road of the village where I saw two or three Germans smoking cigars. That is what they thought of our effort to capture the village, or that is what they thought of our stupid attempt to capture the village. More of the "Hound them on," came from the rear, and we moved up to about two hundred yards off the foot of Noreuil. I could now hear groans of pain from the wounded. I could see no stretcher bearers anywhere. They were not wanted. It was a march to death, and every company officer realised it, too. The scalp of one chap's head was lifted completely off by machine-gun bullets. Others were lying about me groaning with pain. I could do nothing. The officer near me told me not to attempt to do anything as it was certain death. We simply had to stand as target for the enemy. Shells were bursting very close to my heels, and my nerves were

WAR LETTERS.

one mass of irregularity. I did not know where to turn, where to go, what to say, or what to do. There was an officer near me clinging to the side of the road as if he was glued there. Suddenly he threw his arms in the air and fell. I looked about but could see no one who appeared to be sound in body. They were either wounded or dead. "Fools we are," I heard a groaning cry as if it were his final message to the world. I placed my hand to my face to relieve the strain of it all, but to my horror, I struck blood upon myself. How it came there I did not know, but it made me feel so disgusted that I decided to do something. I was alone to the mercy of the Hun. Nobody could help me round about me. Nobody could advise me what to do. I walked towards the officer who was lying face downwards towards the snow, and he looked up into my face with his eyes half-closed.

"Can we get out?" he pleaded.

"We can attempt it, anyhow," I said, and I lifted him to his feet. His chest was torn shockingly, and he was very weak, but with his arm around my neck we ventured towards the village of Vaux. The bullets hissed past us and shrapnel pellets thumped the ground about us, but on we went, and, with great determination, we reached the village. The officer was evacuated, and I discovered that I had a small piece of shrapnel piercing the fleshy part of my ear. It was bathed, and I then went in search of the members of my company.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 41.

30th March, 1917.

Dear _____

I am so happy about the large mail I received today. It included a lovely parcel from _____, and a photo of _____ which I am very thankful to have. It pleased me to learn that your Xmas was spent happily. You say you missed me. You are not the only ones who have missed me. Fritz missed me badly at Noreuil with his hissing machine-gun bullets. As regards sending the paper over every week, I will leave the matter entirely with yourselves. We very rarely receive papers. I believe they go to hospital patients, and, no doubt, they appreciate them. I have not been in a military hospital, but I should imagine that an Australian newspaper would be very interesting. As a matter of fact, anything Australian just at present is very welcome. Day after day we see the same faces, and hear the same voices. We are surrounded by the destructed war area from morn till night. Our clothes and faces are filthy, and, although the finer weather is slowly creeping upon us, the life is indeed very hard to endure, and should teach many of the troops a lesson in friendship or appreciation of what home life really is. I know for a fact some of the most notorious of troops sometimes feel that there is something sweeter in life than perpetual quarrelling. I have heard them say that they would sooner be down and out in Australia than be continually facing death and the misery attached to military active service under the conditions of the present war. These temporary sentiments are numerous after a severe battle or a severe trial of discomfort, but nature seems to possess an art in which it can quickly change the views of the soldiers. It is only a matter of a few words of cheer and the Australian soldier is himself again. The knowledge of leave coming, or even the

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thoughts of a few weeks in a hospital has a wonderful effect upon the troubled war veteran, and sometimes, when the hardships have almost converted a wild man to a bright honest citizen, the news of joy upsets the whole of his resolutions. He forgets he ever suffered. It is very nice to forget all the sufferings, but it is not wise to forget that they have taught a lesson, and if the advice contained in the lesson is to be passed off unheeded, then we have lost certain knowledge that God has taught us. The parcel of mail that I have received brought with it different messages from various homes, and, as I read them through and through that I might bring myself in closer touch with those who are thinking and praying on my behalf, the tears slowly find their way to my weary eyes. My throat seems to become blocked, and I feel that I have not done enough, but in one letter I learn with very disheartening strains that when the war is over I will find that a severe worry will be upon my mind over the good job that I left behind. It is no more than I expected, for the world is made up of so many different types of men that one can hardly trust his existence outside his own sphere. Unlawfully taking a man's position is equivalent to taking the bread and butter from him that nourishes his body. I feel sure that I will possess sufficient grit in me when I return to save myself from hunger.

In my last letter I told you of Noreuil and how I fared. After this awful ordeal had calmed down I began to feel very hungry, and, not knowing where to go to find any of our men, I decided to have a last look at the disgraceful scene of battle. At this time two of our anti-aircraft guns had arrived to try and quieten the enemy guns. Fancy, two anti-aircraft guns! I wonder they didn't issue peashooters or shang-hais, Daisy air guns, or such like. It was just like adding insult to injury. However, as I gazed down towards Noreuil, over the snow-clad battlefield, I could plainly see that

WAR LETTERS.

Friz had had a complete victory. He was carrying bags upon bags of rations, water-proof sheets, rifles, and bombs. He was carrying our wounded away as well, and it made me feel very thankful that I was not one of the party. After this disheartening sight I was invited by a member of the 27th battalion to have some bread and tea with him. This was very highly appreciated by me, and I found in the village of Vaulx that they had come to relieve us. I sat by a huge fire and had a bite to eat and drink. At dusk I discovered what was left of our company and joined them in a long march back to Le Sars. We passed through Bapaume, which was still burning, and when we arrived at Le Sars we all received a hot Dixie of soup. It was a very late hour, but the few who were left seemed to have strength enough to relate their experiences of the recent encounter. Each one in his turn had thrilling incidents to relate, and some startling revelations were brought to the fore regarding the conduct of some of the officers in charge of the companies and the commanding officer of the battalion. It was intimated that a captain abused the chief to some order and exposed the horrible blunder. The topic created much hostile thought and threats of violence against the C.O., but these threats generally blow over when the C.O. invites the boys to a game of football or offers some other source of joy. During our stay at Le Sars we: had a general clean up, and viewed the scenes of recent battles, but these sights are by no means thrilling. I would far sooner witness a good football match. From Le Sars we moved still further back to Becourt, and we were told that we were going to have a few days' spell.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 42.

4th April, 1917.

Dear _____,

I have received another beautiful batch of mail from Australia. Now, when I speak of receiving mail from Australia It might sound nothing of much importance, but it covers quite a lot of things that we should be indeed thankful for. There is that happiness attached to letters to a soldier from his people that makes up for quite a lot of hardships. The soldier is very, very keen on receiving his mail, more so in the field than anywhere else, because it is so effective, and brings him face to face with himself. He looks over his past life, and feels a tinge of sympathy making itself very prominent within his mind. He would love to forgive all those he had wronged in civil life; and, feels that there is in life a sweetness that is not sufficiently appreciated by those wearing civilian clothes. He looks matters squarely in the face, and by so doing broadens his mind as to what life really should be when raging warfare ceases. Then, again, we must all realise that the safe delivery of mail tells us in plain facts that the .British Navy and other navies helping to guard our interests are doing their work satisfactorily. Some of our men have been known to say that the navy is having a grand time during this war, but it must be remembered that the anxiety upon the waters is just as great a strain upon our sailors as the actual daily warfare of the soldiers. We should feel proud of the sailors, and give them thanks for our mail.

Since I wrote to you last our battalion has had a very easy time of it back near the civilians, but not exactly in the vicinity. To meet with civilians we had to walk quite a number of kilometres, but walking is no trouble when there are no trams or trains. One night my friend and I took a long walk and found

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ourselves in a nice little village. We came in contact with a number of French soldiers, and we found much interest in trying to make one another understand what we meant. In trying to demonstrate that there were many rabbits in Australia, and that most of the young men found pleasure in shooting them, created much food for laughter amongst the Frenchmen; not that they knew what I was aiming at, but the method I adopted in demonstrating. My success in this method of conversation was only attained when I made a shadow of a rabbit on the wall with my hands, and then imitated a person shooting. When we understood one another the Frenchmen laughed heartily and cried "Tres bien." We were treated very well by the French people, who treated us to hot coffee and cakes. We were introduced to their wives, and the evening was spent very happily.

For the first time for many weeks I removed clothes that had been wet for weeks, and we had a military bath and changed our clothes. Many football matches were played, and a general clean-up of equipment etc., took place. Our battalion was reinforced after the severe loss at Noreuil. About midway through our spell I was compelled to parade to the doctor. After a close examination he ordered me to a hospital at Bicourt. This hospital was composed of huge tents, in which stretchers were placed either side in lines. The stretchers were resting on trestles about six inches. The bed clothing consisted of blankets only. There were quite a number of these tents, called wards, and attached to a certain number was a cook-house. Each tent would hold about twenty-five to thirty soldiers, and an orderly was put in charge. It was the orderly's duty to get the meals from the cook-house and keep the place clean. He also issued the No. 9's and aspirins. "Soda Sal" and "Mist Expect." These were very familiar to the soldier. When it was my turn to be examined I sat up on the

WAR LETTERS.

stretcher with a thermometer to my mouth.

"Have you any pains?" asked the doctor, and I replied "No!"
Do you feel sore?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

He then told the orderly to give me three aspirins.

I had the "Flu," and was ordered to remain quiet for a few days. The next patient was the image of Charlie Chaplin, and told the doctor that the thermometer he had was not the one which registered 100 degrees. If he had the 98.4 degree thermometer he would soon be back with his battalion. He requested the doctor to order light diet for him, as bully beef gave him a pain on the right side. However, he succeeded in getting light diet, and as soon as the doctor left the tent he was out of bed giving us an entertainment.

The following day the doctor came, and when he examined Charlie Chaplin, as we called him, Charlie said that the pain had gone to the left side.

"Oh!" said the doctor, "you can go out tomorrow, for that is a sure sign that you are getting better."

Charlie's bottom lip dropped. He thought it was very cruel of the doctor to order him back to the battlefield after having custard and such like. At this stage I was becoming very familiar with the hospital routine, and found that by being very friendly you could get custard and toast. Etc., even if the doctor did not order it. I took advantage of this; because I discovered that on many occasions there was ample custard left over after all the light diet patients had had their issue.

Day by day I began to feel better, and I appreciated the spell in hospital very much. It became so comfortable after trench warfare that I felt very despondent when the doctor told me that I

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could re-join the battalion. When I left my temperature was 98.1 degrees, and I felt very well.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 43.

15th April, 1917.

Dear _____,

When I left the hospital at Bicourt and once more faced the open area of the battlefields of France I became very melancholy, for I was by myself, and the weather was the most boisterous since I arrived in France. Where the battalion was I did not know, and I was advised to go to Albert and seek information. On my way I found it very difficult to fight against the fierce wind that battered itself against me. The snow beat into my face cruelly, making the situation worse than it really was. Never before had I wished for home. I really felt downhearted, and the further I went the weaker I became, and it was only the sight of Albert, with its newness, that made me feel at all bright. People had moved back to their homes. Shops were open, such as eggs and chips, confectionery, and such like. Albert still looked a wreck, however, and the beautiful cathedral still held its appearance of Hun destruction. The massive model of a woman nursing a child hung carelessly across the road, and as I gazed directly overhead from the road I was told that French engineers had so arranged this statue to prevent observation. It was a wonderful piece of work, and the woman hung fully three-quarters the distance across the road. This will give you a rough idea of the size of the statue.

After I had been informed that my battalion was in the trenches I was advised to go to a camp just outside the village for the night, and make the journey the next day. This suited me very well, for I did not feel like taking a 20-kilometre march through the snow and hail. During the evening I had a good feed of eggs and chips, and then watched with keen interest the solemn movements of the night in that historic village that suffered through the Hun onslaught. The place was dark, and seemed to hold a mystery. I did not stay too long, for there was nothing cheerful in the place. I was sound asleep by 9.30

WAR LETTERS.

p.m. The following morning was a little calmer, and after having a drink of tea and some dry bread I moved along the main Bapaume Road. The traffic was the greatest I have seen in my life. For miles and mile, it was one continuous flow of mule teams and horses. They suddenly stopped, and motors took up the work. Great massive limbers carrying war stores told me that preparation for a big push was still the object of the authorities. The traffic was so great through the mud and slush that traffic controllers were stationed every few hundred yards, so that no congestion took place. You have noticed the continuous flow of the busy ants; well, Bapaume Road was just the same, only now and again high explosive shrapnel made itself conspicuous. When I had gone about three kilometres I boarded a transport, and was carried as far as Bapaume. Bapaume was similar to Albert as regards damage only that 'the damage at Albert was caused through shell-fire, while the damage to Bapaume was caused through ordinary fire. Albert and Bapaume are much the same size, and a little larger than the other villages, but Bapaume seemed to possess houses of a much higher quality than any of them. During my short stay at Bapaume I came in contact with a poor old man, who was trying to ascertain some information regarding his home. The pitiful look in his eyes told me of the sufferings of the whole of the French people who once lived happily in the Somme area. I really felt sorry for him, and I watched him until he got out of sight. I discovered our battalion in trenches between Bapaume and Vaulx, and they gave me a good welcome back, asking me to join them removing barb-wire from the rear of the trench to the front. You know what barb-wire is to handle: well, we had miles of it to drag through the mud. I received quite a number of scratches, besides getting covered with mud. The boys told me that the work in the trench was very severe, and that they realised what the spell was for. This information told me that before very long a big battle would rage, and that our battalion would be involved.

WAR LETTERS.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 44.

22nd April, 1917.

Dear _____,

The trench we are in is not at all comfortable and we are by no means having a picnic. Night and day some of our boys are working, and if we are not working we are standing to, ready for the enemy to attack. A very queer incident happened on the 16th April. Just as we were dismissed, and ready to snatch a spell in the dug-out, if such were possible, a group of prisoners were sighted coming along the road. At first one would think of some historical march, but no, it was inquisitiveness that made us run to see them. The Germans must have got a terrible fright when they saw us all running towards them. I consider a lot of them said their prayers. But it was quite alright; our boys simply stood aside and passed one or two remarks. Of course, souvenirs were frequently asked for, but the escorts simply replied, "You want to wake up, Dig." I suppose there were some two or three hundreds, and they appeared to be fairly well built.

The weather on that day was excellent, so was mostly used for observing by aeroplanes and balloons.

The following morning was bitterly cold, and I shivered a great deal. The wind had blown the waterproof sheet from the mouth of my dug-out, only leaving an old German overcoat that I had as an emergency. The ground was very muddy underfoot, and as one would attempt to walk along a false step would throw him off his balance. All night long the enemy guns pounded away at our position. Some of the shells came exceedingly close, and caused a silence for several seconds. This silence would always be broken by what I used to term a nervous remark, such as something that had nothing to do with anyone or anything connected with our homestead. On one particular occasion a huge

WAR LETTERS.

shell burst right near us. When I say right near us I mean within twenty yards. The dirt was hurled into the air, and came down with a terrific force. We were all shaken very much, and the dirt went down my neck, in my hair, and biscuits. We get the biscuits in small packets, but they do not seem to be as nice as the biscuits we buy at home; whether they are stale or not I do not know.

Although we were five miles .from the front line, our boys played a football match, and the band played. During the game the enemy guns roared wildly, but the shells, came nowhere near us.

On the morning of the 21st, at 3.30, I felt something at my feet, and knowing how numerous rats were I took no notice, but the shaking seemed to become more severe, so I thought it time I rubbed my eyes.

"Who's there?" I cried:

"Stand to," came a rough voice, and I heard the heavy steps move away to the next dug-out. I equipped myself quickly, and rushed to the open field. The air was cold, and I was half asleep. Red flashes were frequent in the distance, and after a few minutes of shivering we were dismissed.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 45.

29th April, 1917.

Dear _____,

Our trench, which is known as "Birdwood Trench," has been greatly improved during our stay, and it is very comfortable. We even have small fires in rough-looking braziers, which add to the comfort of the home. As I have stated in previous letters, a big battle is pending. More indications were conspicuous when we were detailed to go out in search of old telephone wire. Three or four of us ventured on this trip, and we carried with us a number of cartridges and our rifles, because we did not know what we might come in contact with either on land or in the air. The air seemed to be the most dangerous. The morning was beautiful, so we left our top coats in our dug-outs. After we had gone about three kilometres and collected about fifty yards of wire, we came in contact with two hares. War was forgotten, and we organised a plan so that our capture would be certain. The hares evidently knew we were after them, and set off at a terrific pace, but one of our boys took a careful aim and rolled one over. This was a marvellous shot, or else a little bit of luck. I am inclined to favour the latter, for I do not think he could do it again in a month of Sundays. However, we collected the hare, and made for two villages close by. The names of these villages are Mory and St. Leger. We came in contact with quite a number of Tommies in these villages, and they told us we were only about three kilometres from the front line trench. This caused us to turn on our heels and make for home, but we were very hungry, and the chase after the hare had made us a little foot-sore. We did not forget our mission for telephone wire, and by the time we had gathered what we thought was a fair thing we were just about done up. On arriving home we discovered that the men had half-finished their teas, and when we called on the sergeant for

WAR LETTERS.

something to eat he told us we had come a "skinner." That means there, was no tea left, but instead of being able to have a rest on an empty stomach we were warned to fall in at 6 o'clock for fatigue work up the line. This was very disheartening, and had a tendency to make me feel weaker than what I really was. One of my companions gave me a packet of biscuits and a drink of water, which seemed to refresh me very much, and by 6 o'clock I was feeling myself again. Each member of the fatigue party was handed a pick and shovel. We had to carry fifty rounds of ammunition, our rifles and gas helmets. We went right through Vaulx and Noreuil, and at one of the corners in the village of Noreuil the smell of dead mules or dead horses was .as much as my half-full stomach could stand. I afterwards discovered that the corner mentioned was named the "Devil's Corner" on account of so many casualties. Every step brought us nearer and nearer the hissing bullets and whiz-bangs, and now and again we would stumble over some object .that might have been anything from a bag of dirt to a mule or a bundle of sandbags to some unfortunate soldier. We could not see what we were walking over, nor could we see where we were going. The: absence of flares on this night was particularly noticeable, for we were positively lost, whereas our men used the enemy's flares for direction on other occasions, although when a flare is in action perfect stillness is maintained. It must have been near 8.30 p.m. before we arrived at our destination, and about 8.45 p.m. before we commenced to dig a trench two feet wide by six feet deep for a cable. At about 10 p.m., when I had reached about 18 inches after struggling in the dark, a very powerful searchlight was focused right on our positions by the enemy. I had not known this sort of thing before on the land, and I can assure you it frightened more than me. The officer in charge got very low, and I finished my digging on my stomach and knees. Five or ten minutes after the searchlight had

WAR LETTERS.

discovered us we were pounded with shrapnel coal-boxes and whiz-bangs. Coal-boxes are fairly large shells, which send forth abundance of black smoke. Whiz-bangs are a small species of shell similar to our 18 lb. shell, or the French .75. Our casualties were very light considering the fierce bombardment, and I was exceedingly happy when I had dug six feet and made for home.

Some of the troops just about got home, and that was all. They were dog tired. It was 4.30 a.m. when I reached home, and I lost no time in throwing myself on the ground of our dug-out for a sleep. At 6 a.m. we were roused out for breakfast, and warned to fall in at 6.45 a.m., "fighting order." We marched off to our trenches and post fully armed, and ready for an attack by the enemy, but it did not come off, so we had a snooze in the sun for a while, and at 7 p.m. we got a shock. Another brigade came to relieve us from the trenches we had just occupied, and we returned to our old trench. At 9.30 p.m. that night we had to carry sheet iron to the front line trench, and on the return journey quite a number of our boys fell down exhausted. They were lying on the muddy road just like a dog would lie out in the sun. It was 2 a.m. when we arrived home, and we received a piece of cold fat with a little meat on it, which, when put together, would weigh about 1½ oz., also a drink of cold tea that tasted of petrol. At 10 a.m. we were ordered on parade for a rifle inspection. On Anzac Day we stood to ready for an enemy attack, after which we had to clean up the trench. Right through the week we have had a very severe test, and although at times I felt done I was determined to hold out, for I feared that to give in on the main roads is only asking for death or a wound from a huge shell.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 46.

8th May, 1917.

Dear _____,

Bullecourt — the name that will live in many a soldier's memory, was one of the severest tests of individual stamina. For weeks past preparations have been made for this attack, but it was not anticipated that Bullecourt was going to be a battle of battles — a battle where each individual had to fight his own way. According to plans, we were to have captured villages further ahead, but we came to a sudden halt at Bullecourt. The opening day brought with it a fierce bombardment from the artillery, and as the men advanced so the fighting became more stubborn. The Germans were not going to be made look like schoolboys. They held their ground with great determination. The casualties on both sides were very heavy, and by the second and third days the battle had turned into a real bomb-fight from shell-hole to shell-hole. The battle was so severe on the nerves that it seemed to alter the expressions upon some of the men's faces. It was undoubtedly a real wrecker. I had thrown bombs until I could throw them no longer. My strength failed me, and just as I was giving up the situation as a hopeless task, and feeling that my turn had come, even tears came to my eyes, and the whole world seemed to bid me farewell. A voice, quite feeble, said. "You'd better get back and see the doctor; you look done." I turned my head carelessly, and discovered my officer holding my head from the shell-torn battleground. Yes, I was weak and tired, but his advice was like a bowl of beef tea. It put fresh blood in me, and I struggled to my feet and made way back towards headquarters. There is not much of the journey I remember, only that a sergeant-major stopped me and asked me where I was going. "I'm going to see the doctor," I said.

"Are you wounded?" he asked.

"No." I replied, "but the officer told me to see him."

"If you are not evacuated I'll put in a crime sheet," he growled. I continued my journey until I came to the doctor.

WAR LETTERS.

He looked at me, and never even asked my name or my religion. He never even asked me to take castor oil or No. 9 pills. He simply told me to wait for the next ambulance. It was a very long wait, but I preferred to be waiting out in the cold in that particular place than in the shell-holes near Bullecourt. The old Ford ambulance driven by a Tommy seemed very comfortable when I stepped inside, and as it glided away I said to myself, "Thank God for that much."

It was fairly late in the afternoon before we got clear of the danger-zone, and I was beginning to feel that it was time we made a halt for light refreshments, but my eagerness for this small pleasure only grew to a great discomfort. Time was speeding on, and there were no signs whatever of a stop.

"Surely," I thought, "we're not going on to Paris!"

The light was becoming weaker and weaker, the air was becoming colder and colder, and the road was becoming rougher and rougher. With the tips of my cold fingers I pushed the side curtains of the ambulance just a little to one side, and as I peeped through I saw a feeble-looking sun saying farewell to the battlefield, and at that moment it seemed as though every eye was turned towards that feeble sun in pity. The whole world seemed sorrowful, and it was more pronounced on account of the silence everywhere. Not a gun could be heard, not a footstep, not a voice. If it were not for the rattle of the old Ford I should have said "The whole world sleeps!" The lights of Paris were not in view after three hours' riding, but it was dark. Every now and again I would peep through the curtain to try and catch a glimpse of civilisation, but to my horror we were quite close to those ghastly German flares. Far too close to be comfortable, so I questioned the driver.

"Where are we, chum?"

"Damned if I know, mate."

"I think we're driving straight for Fritz if you ask me."

"Just a minute; I'll ask this crowd of somebody over here a bit. I can hear voices,"

WAR LETTERS.

"Make sure they're not Huns."

Our driver was away about a half-hour, during which time those who were not wounded too severely in the ambulance discussed the situation.

"I think the guy's lost," said one.

"You only think he's lost?" said another.

"We ought to drive it off and go for a joy ride," joined in another, but before many more remarks were passed Tommy had returned "What's the verdict?" asked a man with his arm in a sling.

"They're Frenchmen; and they don't understand what I'm talking about."

"Frenchmen!" cried the men in the ambulance, and they looked at one another through the darkness.

"It's alright, boys," I said, "we're down near Verdun."

This caused a little laughter, and off Tommy went again for about an hour or so, then stopped. He put his head into the interior of the ambulance and said, — "Just a tick. I'll see what's doing here?"

We were all expecting him to come back and say he was near the great ammunition works at Essen, but, instead, he told us that we were still in the French lines, but they could understand him.

"What place are you after?" I asked.

"Pozières," he said.

Good heavens," cried another. "Pozières is up near Manchester somewhere, not in Spain."

We did not seem to worry any more, because we felt sure that before peace was declared we would be back amongst our own boys. At about midnight it became very cold, and I rejoiced with all my heart and soul when I heard the voices of our own A.M.C. boys.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 47.

18th May, 1917.

Dear _____,

You will all be wondering why I am not stating that I received letters, etc., but it must be remembered that during this period of the year, when the ground is firm, and the weather conditions good, strenuous fighting takes place. Then again you will wonder how it is that I can find time to write at such regular intervals. I do not write at regular intervals. Sometimes I write a whole month's letters in one day, but date them as if they had been written weekly. Of late we have not had time to attend to our toilets, but now I am in the hospital I shall have to clean myself thoroughly. The safety razor I have been using is for all the world like a rake, with a piece of hoop-iron fitted closely to the teeth. The mirror I use is the bottom of my Dixie, and my razor strop is the sling on my rifle. When we arrived at Pozières one of the troops asked the orderly if he had a lawn-mower, because he wanted to get the hair off his face. Pozières was the centre of business, even at midnight. Wounded men kept flocking in by dozens — Germans and Australians alike. It was evident that Bullecourt had not eased down at all since we left, and, according to reports, the fighting was becoming more stubborn as time went on. The Germans must be putting a very powerful resistance, for our boys were fully prepared for a heavy battle. At about 1 a.m. we received a bowl of cocoa and a sandwich of bully beef. Then we were shown to our beds — a stretcher on the floor. At 5 a.m. we were roused out for more bully-beef and cocoa, and then we were bundled off to another hospital at Avoluy. This hospital was known as No. 9 Casualty Clearing Station, and was controlled by the English R.A.M.C. My temperature was 103 degrees. Although No. 9 C.C.S. is a very clean hospital, it does not possess that freedom which is so conspicuous in our own hospitals.

WAR LETTERS.

The orderlies possess that domineering spirit and roar at the patients as if they were Germans. They roam about the wards as if they were Sir Douglas Haig. Their heads shake about with a sharp, snappy touch, and their voices seem as if they want filing down a little. I fancy some of them must be striving hard for a lance-corporal's stripe, and the whole time they appear afraid in case a corporal should be watching them. The air is full of that dog-and-master spirit instead of brotherly spirit. When any of the medical officers come in, oh! you can't see their heels for dust, and their voices become even rougher, and it is the poor infantry men, with their arms or legs half-off, who have to lie in pain and suffer this abuse, or this bold attempt to secure a lance-corporal's stripe or military medal for bravery against half-dead soldiers. The sisters appear to be totally different, and it goes to prove that if one section of the hospital can be kind and human the rest can. I was not long at No. 9 C.C.S. and a good thing, too, although the surroundings were very nice. At the foot of a small hill, which sloped from the main section of the hospital, was a lake. I ventured down to have a look at this lake, but I did not feel too good when I came back. Up to date they did not tell me what my complaint was. I was taking soda sal at No. 9 C.C.S. I had a very enjoyable train ride from Avoluy to Reuen. We passed through Abbeville, Ameins, and many other noted French towns. At Ameins we received a bowl of cocoa, and I offered some of mine to a small French boy who was with his mother. He took one or two sips, then handed it back to me. His mother, who was draped in deep mourning, gave me two very pretty flowers, and I thanked her in French. As the train steamed out I could see tears slowly coming to her eyes, and I at once formed the opinion that she was a war widow; Quite a young woman, with her infant boy as the only comforter left.

It was 11 p.m, when we arrived at Rouen, and by what we

WAR LETTERS.

could see it appeared to be a very busy town. The streets were fairly wide, and the trams hurrying here and there made it feel quite businesslike. In the morning I investigated the surroundings and found that we were in the racecourse just outside the city. The scenery was beautiful, and I felt just like a lord standing out on the grounds. It is the custom to have a real good bath, and I can tell you I appreciated the custom. All my old clothes were taken away and new ones issued. I had to go straight to bed, and what do you think the bed was? — sheets; just fancy! Sheets; No chats; a clean face and body; no clothes; no shells; but sheets! This was No. 10 General Hospital. At 7 a.m. I had breakfast — a bowl of tea, a slice of bread and butter, and a dish of porridge. Later on I was examined by the doctor, and was ordered to remain in bed. At 10 a.m. a bowl of milk was brought to me. At 12 noon I had a bowl of tea and some bread and butter. After each meal a nurse used to bring round the medicine. In my ward they were all English born, hut one soldier right opposite me was in the A.I.F., the rest were in different English regiments. I felt too weak to bother talking, so I made myself a good listener, and this is what I heard from the other A.I.F. man opposite:— "Oh, yes. .I spent many a good day. in Manchester, but .you fellers don't 'know yer alive until you get out to Australia. A few miles out of Brisbane — a country town in Queensland — you can shoot just what you fancy — kangaroos, wallabies, foxes, hares, rabbits, birds, anything. The only danger is a huge fourteen feet snake about four inches across the body, known as the tiger. They say he will run from you if you fix your eyes on him, but I never used to take any risks."

I could not stand it any longer, so I stretched myself and sat up.

"Did you come in this morning, chum?" asked the chap next to me.

"Yes," I replied.

WAR LETTERS.

"What unit do you belong to?"

"The A.I.F.," I said. As soon as the A.I.F. was mentioned the man opposite sat back and pretended to snooze off. At 4 p.m. I had an egg and a bowl of tea, and a slice of bread and butter. At 7 p.m. I had a bowl of cocoa, then my temperature was taken, which showed 101 degrees. Right throughout the night a dim light burned, and every few minutes the night nurse would visit us to see if all was O.K. If we could not sleep we would receive a sleeping tablet. For a number of days my complaint varied. Sometimes I would feel quite strong, while at other times I felt very weak. My temperature ranged from 98 degrees to 102 degrees, and the doctor finally decided that I should go to England. He marked my medical history card L.T.B. L.T.B. meant that I was to be a stretcher case on train and boat, and, although I did not know how serious my case was, I was highly delighted to learn that I was going to England.

At 3 a.m. the following morning I was awakened by the sister, who told me to dress as quickly as possible. Well, to dress as quickly as possible was a severe order, because I was exceedingly weak, and it was as much as I could do to stand for more than twenty seconds without becoming giddy. However, I managed to be ready just in time for the two strong, active-looking stretcher-bearers who conveyed me carefully to the ambulance. I was driven right through the main streets of Rauen to the hospital train No. 29. At 7.30 a.m. the train moved off. I had bread and jam and tea on the way, and at 11.30 a.m. we arrived at Le Havre. From the train I was carried to a hospital ship named "Grantully Castle." We did not sail until 10 p.m. The food and attention on the "Grantully Castle" were excellent, — nice white bread and fresh butter, beautiful tea, and soup of the highest quality. During the voyage the captain came round and asked us if we were all comfortable? At 4 a.m. the following morning I discovered that we were anchored at

WAR LETTERS.

Plymouth, but at 5 a.m. we moved off to Southampton, arriving at 7 a.m. I was carefully carried from the boat and placed on the wharf, and even at that early hour the people were about in great numbers. Some of the young ladies gave me chocolates and cigarettes, some were very anxious to know what the trouble was, and they must have thought me very stupid when I told them that I did not know. At certain periods the incidences created in me a very gloomy aspect. The kindness of the ladies, the tenderness of the attendants, all helped to bring before my mind the thoughts of love. How, from the depth of hell, as it were, I was safely conveyed to what appeared a heaven on earth. The difference between hatred and friendship was so pronounced that it was as much as I could do to refrain from crying. We boarded the train for Waterloo station, and right along the line we received cheers, which indicated the feelings of appreciation of the English people for the services we had rendered during the dark hours of battle. There were ambulances awaiting us at Waterloo, and the crowd was more than I expected to see. Flowers, cigarettes, chocolate, and even a handkerchief, were given to me as they gently lifted me into the ambulance. One young lady told me it was Whitsun bank holiday. Right through the heart of London we went, and both sides of the streets were lined with holiday makers, I thought I was king. Cheer after cheer came forth from the merry-makers, and at the intersections quite a crowd would gather round to catch a glimpse of the men in the carriage de la ambulance. I was sorry when we stopped in front of a huge building, which looked for all the world like some art gallery or museum. .Instead it was Bethnal Green Military Hospital,

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 48.

2nd June, 1917.

Dear _____,

The name of my ward is "Faith." Other wards have names such as "Honour," "Justice," "Truth," "Love," "Charity," etc. It is a three-storied building, with spacious grounds surrounding it, in which are tennis courts for the nurses and doctors. My ward is on the third story and for the first two days the doctor did not seem to bother much about me. The third day he came up to the foot of the bed and looked at me over his glasses.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Three days," I replied.

He had another queer look over his glasses, never felt my pulse, or took my temperature. He never asked me any questions regarding my illness, but merely replied:— "You can get up tomorrow." The next day I got up, and was instructed to clean all the brasswork about the ward. That night I was very restless, and the night nurse must have told the matron, for the doctor asked me if I slept well.

"I did not sleep too well last night," I said.

He turned to the matron and gave instructions that I should have a sleeping tablet. At about 8.30 p.m. that night I went to bed and fell into a deep sleep, but it only lasted until 11 p.m., when the night nurse woke me up, and said, "Come on, you've got to take this sleeping tablet." I thought that was the latest, being wakened from sleep to take a sleeping tablet.

At Bethnal Green Hospital we were allowed to go out for two hours every day, between the hours of 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. This gave me an opportunity of having a look round the East End of London, for the hospital was situated in that locality — what they call the slums.

At 10 o'clock one morning, as we were all looking out of the top window right down into one of the slum streets, we saw some of the

WAR LETTERS.

most comical sights you could ever wish to see. In one house there must have been over 50 children darting in and out the narrow doorway at the bottom of the building. Children were playing ball by throwing it at the wall and trying to catch it on the rebound. During the process various heads would appear from the tiny windows. On one occasion a lady pushed her head out of the window, and vainly made a search for her daughter. When she found out her daughter was not in sight, she called out. "Katie."

Just as she said Katie the ball missed her head by inches and fell flat against the wall. She looked angrily upon the urchins in the street. "I'll screw your — neck," she cried, then slammed the window. Little donkeys and barrows were as numerous as buses in Piccadilly. A very amusing incident happened when one of our chaps sighted a young girl carrying a child. He was under the impression that she was a nurse was a nurse-girl, so he thought he would make an appointment with her for 2 o'clock. He put up two fingers then pointed to the street; but her answer was not what he expected.

No," she replied. "This is only my first."

The way people used to dart in and out of those narrow lanes and doorways reminded me for all the world of a rabbit's burrow. Sometimes at night we were visited by concert parties, and I used to thoroughly enjoy these entertainments. Very often we would receive oranges and cigarettes. One day during the outing we ventured as far as a place called Hackney, which is also situated in the East End of London, and in one of the streets, we received a shock on seeing a line of women huddled closely into the shop windows. A policeman was keeping them in order. Some had prams; some had small trucks, while others had large bags.

"Hullo! There must be a picture show on," remarked one of my companions.

"Lucky devils," an old lady with a pram that had every appearance

WAR LETTERS.

of being one used in William the Conqueror's time.

"Why are we lucky?" I asked.

"I've been waiting here two and a half hours for half a pound of sugar," she said; A voice lower down cried out: "Mary, isn't that dark boy like the one I fell in love with once?"

You will remember a few months back. I wrote you about a Tommy I met in France when we were unloading trucks. He gave me the address of his aunt, and I wrote to her and she sent me chocolates and cigarettes. Well, that correspondence stopped when Fritz started to evacuate, because I did not have the time. However, I have written to them since I have been here and asked them if they would like to see me personally. This is the reply I got:— Dear Soldier, — Sorry to learn you are in hospital, but as we did not hear from you for such a long time we thought you had been killed. Since then, Eva has become engaged, so we cannot entertain you." (I might mention here that during the whole of the correspondence between us there was never any mention of Eva.) Now they say Eva has become engaged so they cannot entertain me. Perhaps Eva is too busy with her young man and she is the only one in the family with a power to entertain, but it sounds very much like Eva being the one held in reserve for me as a bride. It may be true that everything happened for the best. I do not feel too keen on making up too friendly with these young ladies, or they might be taking matters too seriously. The Sunday afternoon before I left Bethnal Green I had afternoon tea at one of the slum houses opposite. They were not too poor, because they gave me a very nice afternoon tea. They possessed a piano, and gave me a few tunes. I sang two or three old-time songs, and at 4 o'clock they tried hard for me to break the rules of the hospital and stay to tea, but I did not think a blot on my crime-sheet was of less importance than their tea.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 49.

15th June, 1917.

Dear _____,

From Bethnal Green Military Hospital we motored to London Bridge, where we caught a train for Dartford. We found our new home right out in the open fields, and it is known as No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital. The position of Dartford is a few miles out of London, in Kent. There are two long rows of wards labelled "A" and "B," and the beds are all numbered. I have been allotted "B31." We have plenty of time to go out walking, and the food is very good. Every day we take a walk into the township and sit in the gardens. I should say the township is about the size of one of our largest suburbs, and is about 16 miles from London, along the Thames River. Trams run out that way to such places as Woolwich, Lee, Greenwich, and other surrounding places. The streets are narrow, similar to Sydney streets. There are two picture theatres, and the park, which contains no cricket-ground, but tennis-courts and croquet-lawns. The entrance to the park is made by means of a long lane off the main street. There are tearooms in the ground, and right in the centre is a nice bandstand. The hospital is about one mile from the township. The beds in the wards are very nice and clean. We sleep between sheets, and have a locker to keep our things in. We make our own bed, and that is all the work we do. For breakfast we have either bacon or fish, also porridge and a cup of tea. For dinner we have meat, gravy, one potato, and some rice, then a helping of rice pudding. There is no tea served at dinner time. For tea we have a cup of tea, a slice of bread, margarine and jam. For supper we have a cup of cocoa, and a slice of bread and margarine. We receive a packet of cigarettes from the Red Cross every other day. The Red Cross and Australian Comforts Fund are blessings to the troops, but when

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we are in the trenches we have no blessings, as these institutions cannot get close enough. The Australian Comforts Fund, however, makes a very good effort. I have known the times when the troops could just about put one foot before the other with fatigue, when suddenly the dim lights from the Comforts Fund would appear, putting fresh energy into the men. Sometimes we would get a tin of soup, and sometimes a tin of cocoa, which gave us strength to complete our journey over the snow-clad duckboards.

I have just learnt that when you go from this place you are marked in various ways, thus:—

P.1 means furlough & duty,

F.2 means furlough & spell.

F.3 means furlough & long spell. F.4 means furlough & light duty.

Sometimes F.4 cases are sent home to Australia. So you see they give the troops something to study out, and in many cases the lead begins to swing. One chap said "He always thought F. stood for France. "France!" another interjected. "The word is like needles in my eardrums, pineapple skin on my lips, and alum on my teeth." These illustrations amused us.

During our visits to the park we came in contact with quite a mixed crowd. One time I was talking to an old lady, and she asked me what was my worst battle.

"My worst battle seems to go on day after day." I said. "It is hard for me to realise that I have a home. For the last month or so I have been bundled from pillar to post. No mail ever comes to me now, but it will come, and I know that it will make me very sad when I read it. The battle is to content myself; to make myself believe that some day I will see my own people who are 13.000 miles away. There are so many things between me and my home

WAR LETTERS.

that I feel too weak a person to cast them aside. It is certain that I have yet to risk my life again on the battlefields of France. Shells make you shudder, and the hissing bullets seem to sharpen your wits, but they will never make me become careless with my life, for others are waiting, watching, and praying." Another time I visited the park, and was sitting all by myself, meditating I suppose, when a young woman of about thirty summers walked towards me in a fashion similar to a snake. She sat beside me and put her arm around my neck. I looked at her square in the face, and she gave me a rocky sort of a smile. I knew what was the matter, because I could smell Three-Star brandy. "You insignificant little chap. How did you get into the army? I wonder your mummy allowed you join up. What do you weigh? Seven stone?"

This sort of thing went on for five or ten minutes. until I thought it time I had a say in the matter.

"How old do you think I am?" I asked.

"About nineteen!"

"Nineteen!" I cried. "I was nineteen ten years before the war started."

"Then you're old enough to be my husband."

"Now, how would you like me to be your husband?"

She seized hold of my chin and had a good look into my face.

"I should say you'd make an ideal husband."

"But don't you think people would say, 'There goes Trilby with her son?' "

She stood to her feet in great dignity.

"How dare you call me 'Trilby.' I ain't .no 'Trilby,' and I won't be .called 'Trilby' by you or anyone else in the 'Ha! Hi! Hef.' 'Trilby' never was my name, and never will be."

By this time quite a crowd had gathered round to learn just a

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little about the excitement.

"What's up, Dig?" they asked. "Ask 'Trilby'," I replied.

"I ain't 'Trilby'," came forth another volume, while some of the troops told her to move along before the police got hold of her.

She moved off, mumbling to herself some oath, and I was glad to inhale the fresh air from the beautiful flowers.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 50.

29th June, 1917.

Dear

I had rather many exciting incidences before being discharged from No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital. In the first place, we had fifteen enemy planes over, and I watched our men combat them at a very lofty position: Although one of the German planes was brought down. I believe two of our airmen received nasty bullet wounds.

Another incident was the doctor asking to see me at the last moment for a thorough examination. He marked me down for Weymouth. Then I went on my way to have fourteen days' furlough. At Horseferry Road, that is, where the A.I.F. Headquarters are in London, we had a very long wait for our passes, warrants, etc. The pass is a leaflet which indicates the time allotted for leave, your name, and battalion. The warrant is a railway pass. We also received a book of coupons, which entitled one to so much meat, tea, sugar, margarine, cheese, jam, etc. On one occasion one of our boys went into a cafe for sausages, and he asked the attendant if he wanted a bread coupon or a meat coupon. That's a war-time sausage for you. However, we lost no time when once we received these many things. West Barnes was our objective, and we soon reached it. We had tea at my friend's sister's home, after which we took a quiet walk through the green fields of Rayne's Park to Wimbledon. Our lady escort asked me if I would care to have a look through the church. And so we decided to go through the church. As we reached the door we heard the sound of a mighty organ, playing a mighty tune, and before we had time to seat ourselves in the massive building the choir pealed forth volumes of beautifully blended notes. I thoroughly enjoyed the music, and I feel sure that as soon as the

WAR LETTERS.

organist and choir realised that two Australian soldiers were listening they put their whole hearts and souls into it. We left the church and made for home. Two strangers were in the house, and I was introduced to them. After a long conversation on war and other matters we had a supper of lettuce and a potato cooked in the ashes of the fire.

I slept really well that night, and was sorry when I had to leave in the morning. I was now all by myself, so I enquired at Horseferry Road as to the best place to stop. They recommended me to the War Chest Club. On leaving the office of headquarters a young lady stopped me.

"Excuse me," she said. "I noticed your colors, so I thought I would ask you if you knew —— in your battalion."

"Oh, yes," I said. "He was evacuated just in front of Bapaume."

"Well," she pleaded, "would you spare a few minutes of your leave and go out to see him. He is at No. 3 London General Hospital."

I did not go out that day, as I wanted to make sure of my bed, and when I did reach the "War Chest Club" I was told not to be out any later than 8 o'clock.

"Nice thing!" I muttered, and off I went.

At 8 o'clock I went to bed, and vowed I would never seek lodgings again at the "War Chest Club," and on enquiring what the early order was for I discovered that somebody else would have the bed if I did not claim it then. I slept fairly well until 1 o'clock, when I received a sharp pull on the arm. "Sling us a bob," came a rough voice.

At first I thought I was having a dream, but the second tug, which very near pulled me out of my bunk, made me realise that a person had visited me with the intention of securing a loan of one

WAR LETTERS.

shilling sterling less any security or interest.

"To hell with you," I said, and the man below rose from his bunk and pushed him fully five yards. "Can't a feller have a decent sleep without being pestered with you loungers," he growled.

I can assure you I was glad when the morning came, and while I was washing I read notices on the walls:—

"Do not leave your clothes about."

"Beware of pickpockets."

"Wash yourself near your valuables."

That is the A.I.F. boarding house.

After the disturbed rest at the "War Chest Club," and a wash under trying circumstances, I made enquiries as to the best way to get to No. 3 London General Hospital.

"No. 2a bus, mate, will take you right opposite the gates," replied a constable on duty. I caught

No. 2a bus for a place called Golder's Green. When I thought we had gone a fairly long distance for the amount of fare asked for I notified the conductress — young girls used to take the fares during the war — that I wished to be put down at No. 3 London General. She at once rang the bell, and called out "St.Dunstan's." I still kept my seat.

"Come on!" she said. "I can't wait all day."

"St. Dunstan's and No. 3 London General is all one, then," I remarked, and jumped from my seat and made for the footpath.

I could see two massive gates that opened into a beautiful drive to a real mansion. At first I felt a little nervous on account of the stylish motor cars that were going and coming. However, I ventured to the front door, and was faced by a handsome looking young nurse, who asked me if I would like to see anyone.

'Is Private _____ here?" I asked.

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"Yes." she replied. "Will you wait in the hall, and I will go and tell him? Does he know you?"

"Know me! We used to play cherry-bobs together at school."

She left me to myself, and during her absence I was trying to fathom the depth of the mystery which seemed to surround the whole atmosphere. The hall itself was a massive piece of architectural talent. The huge pillars that held the concrete mouldings were in themselves masterpieces. The carpets and linoleums on the floor were of the most glorious design and quality. The nurses seemed to be in keeping with all this, and I wondered why it was I was sent to the East End of London while my friend was being cared for in a home fit for any king. I heard a voice, then a laugh, and I recognised it as that of my friend.

"There can't be much wrong with him," I thought, "but why should I be asked to visit him?"

He appeared before me, and a lump came to my throat. Tears slowly came to my eyes. He was smiling, but his face was torn about unmercifully. His eyesight had been taken from him. Both eyes had been blown out. As soon as I spoke he recognised me, and then he told me all about it. He told me that he was unconscious for quite a long time. He told me that during his absence his family had increased. He possessed a daughter. From his pocket he withdrew a postcard and asked me what I thought of it. It was his only child, and he never would see her. He told me of the kindness of the nurses, and how they teach the blind soldiers wicker-work, typewriting, and how to play instruments. He told me of the boat races they have on the lake in the grounds, and how they are cared for in a number of other ways. I went for a long walk with him, and our parting was very sad.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 51.

13th July, 1917.

Dear _____,

When I arrived at Weymouth I felt very down-hearted. The military routine had started again after a long spell away from it, and it took me quite a long time to get used to it. I knew nobody and everybody seemed as if they didn't want to know me. It was a case of look after yourself. Everybody in that camp appeared to me to be a past master at making the doctor believe they were next door to death, and I believe it is in this camp where most of the funny stories originated regarding lead swinging. It was in this camp where a doctor gave a group of men waiting for a boat bound for Australia a football to play with, then pounced on them and marked them all fit for France. It is in this camp where the man deceived the doctor about his hearing for about an hour. And just as he was leaving the room the doctor dropped a two-shilling piece and the soldier rushed to pick it up. "France!" cried the doctor.

Before I went in to be examined one of the old soldiers said to me, "You tell him you are feeling grand, and he'll give you a thorough examination."

I faced the doctor.

"Well! Have you had your furlough yet?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And how do you feel now?" "I don't feel too bad, sir."

"Right! You can do some duty."

You might as well have hit me on the head. Two days later I was moved from Monte Video camp to Westham. On the Sunday I

WAR LETTERS.

visited the villages of Chickerell and Whyke Regis. From the outskirts of Whyke Regis I had a good view of the old forts of Portland. Portland. I believe, is a great naval base, and is strongly fortified. It is almost surrounded by water. The regulations in the Westham Camp are very severe, and one is very fortunate if he reigns long without being brought over the carpet. One soldier was crimed for not having his hair a quarter of an inch long at the back and an inch long in the front. Another soldier was punished for having civilian tan boots on. It appears that he had a toe blown off. Another private was fined for not saluting an officer. Since I have been here I have attended two military funerals. We had to practice the goose-step for two or three days before. I often wonder if they were kept while we learnt it. One chap remarked that the business was so slow that when he got his leg in the air he forgot to bring it down again."

Another chap remarked, after learning that there were two funerals, "Are we to be permanent mourners?"

I have been inoculated again and marked B.I.A.I.

This is one of the gloomiest camps I have ever been in. The whole time they are talking about going back to Australia, and they must know that they have not got the slightest chance. Why, I have met worse cases than some of them in our own battalion. In a few days' time I am to be examined again, and if I don't tell the doctor straight that I feel fit to be moved from this camp my name's not what it is.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 52.

1st October, 1917.

Dear _____,

Reports have come to us that Russia has given in, and this will make a big difference in the war. I do not say that Germany will win, but I do say that the war will last longer, because the enemy can now withdraw the troops from the Eastern front, and strengthen their forces on the Western and Italian fronts. The fighting is very heavy just now round about Belgium. If we can keep the enemy well on defence work on this sector the army occupying the Somme area will have a very favourable opportunity to make a real good drive. The Canadians, of course, are holding the enemy well. It appears that I am not to go to France yet awhile, for I have been withdrawn from another draft and sent to a signal school at Rollestone. This is the third time that I have been warned for France, and taken off at the last moment. There were several others detailed for the signal school, and we had a very long walk from Perham Downs to Rollestone Camp. I should say the distance is fully twelve miles. We passed the New Zealanders' camp about midway, and had a long talk to them about various matters. They told us that on account of the Maoris being weakened in strength that unit was not to go in the danger zone any more, but was to do general fatigue work behind the lines. When we arrived at camp I felt fairly tired, but it did not prevent me from taking a walk to the villages we used to visit twelve months back. We had made a lot of friends in these villages, so I was very anxious to see them. Winterbourne Stoke was the first village I called at, but the friends we had made twelve months ago had altered. They did not seem to want my company, whereas twelve months ago they were always delighted to see me. I could not make the change out, and instead of being a welcome visitor I felt that I was an intruder. I felt that my presence bored

WAR LETTERS.

them, so I moved off to the next village to see if the same sort of thing had taken place there. Berwick St. James was the name of the village, but it was positively deserted. You could have fired a machine-gun down the street without fear of any danger. From this village I walked on to Stapleford, and being very disappointed I commenced to pluck blackberries on the roadside and eat them. I did feel so lonely and despondent walking along that lonely country lane, but I pegged away until I came to the home of an old friend. A dim light was burning through the creepers that hung carelessly over the window frame. There was not a sound to be heard, and I did not know whether to knock at the door or turn for home. I listened for some time, then decided to walk back home. I had not felt so low spirited for many a long day, and I blamed this cruel war for it all.

I was cheered a little the next day when they told me there was a big fat parcel for me. It was just on tea-time when I called for it, so most of the eatables were devoured at tea-time. The jar of honey, the tin of cheese, the packet of Swallow & Ariell's biscuits, the chocolate, and other delicacies were distributed amongst my friends, and they thoroughly enjoyed the feast, but the poor troops on the other tables, who were having bread and dirty-looking fat, looked on with sorrowful eyes. They all must have thought of their homes, because their faces told me so. I was very, very thankful for the parcel. The last lot of reinforcements that have just arrived from Australia are a very poor-looking lot. I doubt, whether any of them would be able to stand the severe strain of a winter like the 1916. Some of them look real old men, while the others are mere schoolboys. They are on final leave now, which means that they will be going to France very shortly. If I remain in this school for any length of time I know I will not see many of them when I reach France. We are having quite a lot of concerts in the Y.M.C.A. lately, and I do not miss any of them, because it breaks the monotony of

WAR LETTERS.

the dry camp life. We had a Madame Torgray last week, and she was very entertaining. One of the songs ended with the words "Every Tommy has a sweetheart somewhere in the British Isles." Our boys would not have it that way, for every time the last line came you · would hear the audience join in. "Every Aussie has a sweetheart somewhere in the British Isles." There are very few who realise the value of the brain whilst, in France. I know for a fact that on many occasions I saved myself from severe wounds, or may have been death, by careful observation. I made quite a study of the various classes of shells, and I could tell on many occasions the exact class of shell by the whistling sound through the air. At night I used to watch the flashes of the enemy guns, and I could tell what shells were coming in our vicinity, and I have taken the necessary precautions as soon as I have seen the flash. Many a time I have been missed by a few feet. Then, again, I discovered that it was wise to avoid main roads and villages. The open fields seem much safer, even from machine-gun bullets. The enemy trained his guns on roads, villages, or places where he thought our batteries were.

The food in this camp is something shocking. I have seen the troops rush at an old dry crust of bread and eat it while waiting for dinner or tea to be served. Somebody came forward with a piece of poetry, and it goes something like this:-

"You may keep .on till you're ninety-four,
And go right through till the end of the war
You won't get any leave before,
In these hard times.
You may get more, you may get less.
But apple and plum's your best, I guess.
The strawberry jam's for the sergeant's mess.
In these hard times."

WAR LETTERS.

It is my wish to tell you just a little about wounded soldiers and the hospitals. I have seen a continuous flow of wounded men coming in, and being sent away to other hospitals. Some of these men have been in a disgraceful state, and the groaning has been as much as a normal civilised person could stand, but the most wonderful part of it all is the high spirits of the majority of the wounded men. I can only arrive at a conclusion in this way. The torment upon the nervous system created by wounds cannot compare with the torment upon the brain that exists whilst in the trenches or under shell-fire. It therefore means that the great relief of the brain is soothing to the whole nervous system, and gives new life to the person free from the torment of warfare. The majority of wounded soldiers are very high spirited. In comparing the two agonies you may be able to arrive at the real life on the battlefield. I have seen men with wounds which look like raw steak. I saw a man in London red raw all over. He was in a tank, and the inside caught fire somehow or other, and he was severely burnt. He had been in hospital twelve months, and he looked like a mass of bones painted red. Yet when the nurses dressed his wounds he would smile and talk to them. At dinner to-day, one of the troops, who had just come from London leave, said, "I wish I had the dinner I saw a dog have in London!"

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 53.

1st November, 1917.

Dear _____,

We have moved to a camp at a place called Fovant. The march was a good distance, but the troops stood it far better than what I expected. The first Saturday we visited the villages of Fovant, Sutton, Teffont, and Dinton. On the march we passed through the villages of Wilton, Barford, and Hurdcott. On the Sunday we dug six bags of potatoes for the cooks and wheeled them to the cook-house. The orders in this camp are amusing, and in some cases ridiculous. One order reads: "Troops wishing to grow hair on the top lip must grow it right across."

The food is still very poor, and the troops are just like a lot of hungry wolves at the tables.

One of the late reinforcements was told to keep the line tidy, as the G.O.C. was coming round to inspect.

"I don't care if the Y.M.C.A. comes round," he said.

One of the troops came home from one of the villages drunk, and was threatening everyone in the hut. The time was about 11 p.m., and everybody was trying to go to sleep. "Go to sleep, Scottie," cried one, "or I'll pull my shirt off to you."

"It would be a change anyhow," replied Scottie.

At the dinner-table the other day one of the troops held a lump of fat up on a fork: "Well, if this ain't a waste of good food. The pigs could eat this." It was part of his issue, so he evidently did not think much of himself.

We have a route march every Saturday, and it is the custom to get up a sing-song, as the officers claim that it assists greatly in relieving the strain. On the last route march, after we had sung several songs, one of the troops cried out: "What's that about the jam?"

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"Flies!" cried someone from the rear.

A soldier going on sick parade the other day said,

"You want confidence to go and see this doctor."

"You want to have something wrong with you," joined in another.

You will notice by the above that there is a section of the army always ready for a joke or always ready to utter something that they think will amuse the rest of the troops. If it were not for these occasional humorous remarks the army would be a very dull concern — so dull that many of the troops would not be able to hold out. Take, for instance, the time when a soldier is taken away from his fellow companions and placed amongst a lot of strangers. Why, he frets just the same as a baby would if taken away from its mother, although some have the nature to quickly make new friends, while there are others who never make many friends. There are some, especially married men, who have been fretting ever since they left Australian shores. It is difficult for them to indulge in any merriment whatever, and I feel exceedingly low-spirited myself when I come in contact with anyone of this class. We all sometime or other feel that we would love to be home. There is, at times, a little longing for those we left behind, and it is most difficult to pacify oneself; it needs the high spirits of others, and the Australian army is blessed with a lot of high spirited men. One tries to outdo the other in humour, and each tries to conceal the fact that he ever becomes down-hearted. Of course, there is a class of men who are never contented. They were never contented in civil life. It is grand to realise that few of this class belong to the A.I.F. If a man shows signs of despondency he is classed as one being dopey, and he is continually being told to wake up. There are other means by which the troops are helped in forgetting the attractions of civil life, or the joys they left behind, but these come under different categories,

WAR LETTERS.

according to the home training and class of life they have been accustomed to. Many troops drown their sorrows at the canteen bars; another group enjoy a few hours at "Housey-Housey." There are some who love "Two-up"; there are some who read a lot; there are others who take long walks into the country; but I think the majority of troops favour the concerts at the Y.M.C.A, or if there is not a concert, well, the billiard tables attract, and other games. I have visited the Y.M.C.A. a lot during, this stay in England, and I find that it passes the evening away very nicely. The person in charge of the Y.M.C.A. in this camp is a foreigner of some description, and the boys are ever ready to criticise his manner of speaking. One night he gave a bit of a speech for the benefit of the troops. Whether the troops accepted the advice or not I do not know. This is what he said:—

"Don't go away, men. I want to tell you about de magazines. Remember, men, dese magazines are for you, and if you see anyone taking dem away you are only robbing yourselves by not stopping dem. It's got nudding to do wid me, dat is why I talk about it: and remember dis, men, don't put de stamps in de pillar-box widout de envelopes, because your people have to pay de twopence de udder end. Now it was rumoured dat I sent a concert party away. Well, I didn't. I merely told dem to go, because I feared dat der would be too much smut on de stage. I want you to come along next Sunday to de weekly tea. You should see de boys enjoying dare tea wid plenty sugar and plenty buns to eat. We give you dis, men, and only charge sixpence. After de tea we will have a few words wid de Holy Go'."

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 54.

15th November, 1917.

Dear _____,

One of the troops has established himself in a snug corner of the Y.M.C.A., and is carrying on the business of watch repairer. He is a Jew. I was watching one night when a customer came up for his watch.

"Have you got that gun-metal wristlet watch finished?"

"Yes, I have a gun-metal watch here, and it is finished."

"Well, I'll take it. How much is it?"

"Ah!" cried Reuben. "This is the watch, but how do I know you are the feller?"

A few days later Reuben disappeared, and the rest of the troops are beginning to think he is a prisoner of war in Germany. They say he was "trying to steal the 'watch on the Rhine' and got caught."

We were having a lesson on how to read messages. The teacher said: "If you read a message 'Attack at to-night' you would know that something was wrong, so you would reply 'W.A. at', which means 'Word after at.' They would then send, 'Attack at noon to-night.' "

"It might be noon in Australia when it's to-night here." joined in one of the troops.

A few days ago I was chosen a goal umpire for the training battalion. (Sounds like war, doesn't it?) Well, the first Saturday brought a sudden surprise. A mobilisation was called. What does it mean? When anything unusual happens like this a lot of rumours are quickly circulated. Let me give you a few:—

"Got the dinkum oil, chaps. We're off to Italy to-morrow."

"Just got the oil from headquarters. We're going to Malta and a lot of Tommies are going to Italy."

WAR LETTERS.

"Now this is dinkum-the real good oil. There's a revolution in Ireland. All the troops are wanted at once."

"Well, do you know what I heard confidentially?" cried the hero of the crowd. "Peace is declared!"

The crowd hurled all sorts of military property at him. "Go home!" they cried.

I fancy these mobilisations are to arrive at the actual strengths of available units. Some of the articles in a weekly English journal are very red raw. A few weeks ago it stated that the 29th Division and the Australians were the white slaves of France. Another time we read: "Fooled for three years!"

The other night we went to the Y.M.C.A. for a cup of cocoa. There were no vacant seats. so we drank it at the counter, but when we were receiving our penny back, which is charged on every cup. one of the party told the attendant that you could taste the water in it. The cocoa is certainly very weak, and has no sugar. I have been told that when the present King and Queen visited Australia the Queen opened a women's hospital, and said, during the course of her address, that she would like to see the first child born there. It appears that the First child born there came over with the 19th Reinforcements, and while he was on embarkation leave he visited Buckingham Palace and related his mission. The story goes on that Princess Mary interviewed him, as the Queen was away at the time. However, arrangements were made at Buckingham Palace for him to visit the Queen, and when the time arrived the military authorities went to no end of trouble in dressing him in the best they could find.

The spirits of the troops are very low just now on account of the bad news from Russia and the retreat of the Italians, and that some of the English politicians voted for peace negotiations with Germany.

WAR LETTERS.

I think there will be another year, or perhaps more, yet before Germany will begin to bend to the knees. Anyhow, I am preparing for it by taking great care of myself. All this grave news does not stir me, but you would think that they would cut the strikes out in Australia at such a critical moment. What is cheering me more than anything is the single front scheme. I like it. I fancy it will make a big difference. Our men are doing very well on the Western front, but I fancy the Germans will make a final attempt for Paris, now they are relieved from the Russian front.

The other day, when we were on a long route march, we came across a little girl about three years old. She was leading a massive dog about six inches higher than herself. One of the troops called out to her, "Drop that dog!"

Reports have been circulated that a few notorious Australians have been sand-bagging and robbing women, children, and other troops. The reports go as far as to say that two have been killed.

France is staring me in the face again, and I think that it will be certain that I am to go. I do not see that there is anything to hold me back this time. I know it is not bright news for you at home, but I want you all to believe that I fear nothing. The enemy shells might shake the best of us at times, but I do not possess the fear of being fatally wounded. It may be that I receive a wound, but we are never sadly disappointed by receiving slight wounds. They come as a blessing sometimes. When I go to France next time I would like as many as can to write, whether they belong to the family circle or not, because letters play a very active part in keeping our spirits up. Sometimes the troops become reckless, and tired, and it is at these moments when a lot of damage is done. After a lecture in the signal school the other days the instructor asked if anyone would like to ask any question.

WAR LETTERS.

Can tortoiseshell cats have black kittens?" asked one.

The signal instructor said at a class meeting: "If you were sending a message in the open and a shell burst a few feet away, what would you do?"

"You mean, what would the shell do?" was the reply.

We have just this minute been told that an Australian soldier had been found in the scrub dead. The military doctor says he has been dead six days, and in all probabilities he has been sand-bagged and robbed.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 55.

9th December, 1917.

Dear _____,

The last days in England were spent very quietly. We did not seem to bother much about any of the attractions at the Y.M.C.A. I had my photo taken, and have posted them on. I hope you like it. I could not do any better under the circumstances.

At 10.45 a.m. we caught the boat from Southampton to Le Havre. As usual, the boat was crowded, and the conditions quite up to war-time standard. There were a number of troops sick and sorry, but this is generally expected on the trip across. When we arrived at the base there was a disorderly disembarkation and a long march, but the march was brightened a little when we came to a French village named Harfleurs. The troops forgot all the worries and troubles of moving from place to place, especially moving from England to France, although it was the first time for quite a number, and I felt really sorry for them, but they were bright and cheerful. It was a novelty for them to be in a place like France — a strange country, with strange methods of living. I often wondered if they ever realised that it was in this strange country, where they would find so much to amuse them, that they would find so much to make them sad, and perhaps so much to make their friends sad, who were miles and miles away. It is grand sometimes to have something that will deaden the pangs of misery. If it were not so in the army there would be pitiful, drawn-in faces wherever you turned.

We have received news, whilst at the base, that the British have been forced back on the Western front. This is very discouraging, especially so when the bad news arrived just as we had been told of the awful gases now being used by the Germans. These gases are sent over by means of shells, and are of numerous species, viz.: Tear gas: Tear gas has the same effect upon the eyes as onions when

WAR LETTERS.

being peeled. It appears that tears flow frequently from the eyes, causing a slight pain -on the lids, and the more you blink the more painful it becomes, and the more the tears flow. With tear gas it is very difficult to avoid blinking. There is no danger from poison as regards the tear gas. I mean that tear gas alone would not cause death. It is merely the inconvenience to the troops, and should the enemy be attacking it would be a great advantage to them. There is another horrid gas we term sneeze gas. .This gas has the same effect upon the nose as pepper, and it is exceedingly difficult to retain the gas helmet in its proper position when once you have taken in a good deal of this class of gas. The danger attached to it is, when poisonous gases have been sent over as well there is always the risk of catching the poisonous gases if the helmet is continually being put out of position. This gas, like the tear gas, is also very uncomfortable, and one has to be ever on the alert, and very speedy in putting the helmet into position to prevent any trouble. The gas known as mustard gas is the most destructive of all gases. This gas has the effect of blistering any moist parts of the body, and I have known cases where blindness has been the result of this gas. Many bad cases have been reported of men drinking water which contained mustard gas. Last time I was in France I used to rely on shell-hole water a lot for washing purposes, and drinking, but it is not safe now on account of this deadly gas .

At the base we receive what might be termed a brush-up in our training and a check on our equipment before we join the battalion. We have gone through gas, bayonet fighting, bombing, etc., and have had some very long route marches. One march in particular was very nice, as we passed through the French villages of Montivellers and Eclair. After this route march I thought it would be very nice to learn French, so I went with another pal of mine to the Y.M.C.A. hut to have a lesson from a young French girl, who was

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charging one franc a lesson. I got on very well until she asked me to pronounce the French "o." I said "oh," but, she informed me that it was incorrect, the correct method being similar to a cow bellowing. However, I imitated a cow bellowing, but she became annoyed and said I was only making fun of the class.

"It is not 'moo'," she said, "but a sort of 'ow-oo'."

In any case I could not learn much French, as the Germans were waiting to teach us the way their mighty guns spoke. Our final kit inspection was an all-important matter, but I did not take too much notice of it on account of what I had discovered from past experiences. The following day about 5 p.m. we were all bundled into trucks, and it had written on these trucks 20 Hommes, 10 Cheveaux. I was told that it meant either 20 men or 10 horses were allowed in each truck, but I consider there were close on 75 men in our truck, and whilst we were travelling at night, it was a very difficult matter to know which were your own legs. On several occasions I scratched the next door chap's legs and thought they were mine, and he did not object in the least. I dare say he was just as itchy as I was myself. This voyage was almost as bad as the trip in trucks out to the desert in Egypt. I was as cold as ice all night, and as hungry as a hawk. In the morning when it became daylight we had a very hard struggle to secure a hot drink; However, I, was very fortunate in this respect, and very pleased when one of the troops came forward with a rough looking sort of a brazier. The train moved off again, and the main topic in the saloon carriage was firewood. We had the brazier but no firewood, and the brazier without the firewood was worse than no brazier at all, because it occupied good space, and some of the troops were beginning to make a few complaints.

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"Toss it out," cried one. The person who discovered the brazier would not part with it. He had great confidence that firewood would be procurable next time the train stopped.

The train did stop, and quite a number of volunteers came forward to gather firewood. Armful after armful helped fill the truck, and there was much joy when the train moved off again. There were quite a number anxious to light the fire, but the wood seemed damp and it would not burn. It was only after arduous attempts that they managed to get a tiny flicker. It was growing, but very, very slowly. One of the troops suggested that there was not enough draught getting to the fire, so it was decided to hold the brazier out in the open, and as the train cut through the air, so the flames grew and grew, to the delight of all the occupants of the truck. All of a sudden brazier and fire and all our hopes went. A train of Tommies passed us going in the opposite direction. They must have noticed the brazier, and, as they came close up, they hooked it into their own carriage. A very neat operation, but we were cold for the rest of the journey, but the language was very hot. We arrived at a place called Hazebrouck about 3 p.m., but did not stay there any length of time; not sufficient even to have a look round. We moved off on what appeared to be a different line, and just on nightfall we arrived at a place called Bailleul. It is always noticeable after a very long journey by train that troops who are financial seek after a good feed. One reason is that we get very little to eat whilst travelling. However, Bailleul offered many temptations in this direction, but quite a number of troops, after hunting for some considerable time, were turned away with hungry - looking faces. It was not so in my case, and I have to thank one of our boys for his kindness in taking me to a secret place where we secured eggs and chips. It was only a favour, but I was exceedingly grateful to both the lady and my friend. The French lady, who so kindly prepared

WAR LETTERS.

our teas, appeared to be rather select. I mean that her manners were more in keeping with her own middle-class. She spoke very good English, and was most interesting to listen to. In relating earlier history of the war, she said: — "When the Germans broke through in 1914 they took possession of everything. They simply came in and demanded this and that." "Did they handle you roughly?" asked my friend. "No. they did not," she replied. "But I will not say that they would not have done so had I shown signs of stubbornness. The position was, the Germans had possession, and all the protesting in the world would not have made them sympathetic. Warfare is warfare, and I realised this from the outset." We were told that Bailleul in peace time was a prosperous manufacturing town with a population of some 13,000 people. It was difficult to have a real good look through the town at such an hour, but we were able to gain such information that gave us a first class idea of what the town looked like even in peace time.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 56.

20th December, 1917.

Dear _____,

You will no doubt be greatly surprised to learn that I am in Belgium. I joined the battalion at a place called Locre, after a walk from Bailleul. My night's rest was very bad. I had to sleep just where my frame would fit, and that was a very small space. The following day I witnessed a very exciting football match between our battalion and our next-door battalion. A three-point victory was the best our battalion could do. After that pleasant afternoon I was detailed to visit the neighbouring village to keep order and see that the estaminet (that is hotel) closed at 8 o'clock, and that none of our boys were sleeping in the gutters. You might laugh at that, but one time, when we were on the Somme, one of our boys was found dead in a gutter in Albert. His face was blue. He had been drinking some rubbish called "pinkie." We had no trouble in this Belgian village, and the young lady serving out the drinks in the estaminet was quite willing to close her doors at 8 o'clock.

The following day I was detailed with several others to do duty at a place called Steenwerck. We marched through Neuve Eglise on blue metal roads, but I did not mind, because the job was supposed to be a very good one. When we reached the hut I was highly delighted. It looked ever so cosy, with a big fireplace in the middle. Right in front of us was a huge factory where many hundreds of duck boards had been made. Running alongside the factory was the Anzac light railway, while to our left, about three or four hundreds of yards away, was the town of Steenwerck itself, the whole surroundings offered a brightness that I had not experienced before so close to the enemy lines, and, whilst these many joys were rolling through my mind, someone entered the hut and remarked that real good coffee could be had across the road for a penny-ha'penny a basin, with plenty of sugar

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and milk. That night I slept very happily, and in the morning I was ready for duty. "From half-past seven in the morning until five at night are your hours, and your duty is to load the trucks with duck-boards. Sometimes you might have to help unload the trucks at the dump up near the trenches. When this happens you have a holiday the next day." So spoke the sergeant in charge.

"Before you commence to-day," continued the sergeant, "I want three francs from every man for Xmas dinner. We are going to have a good Xmas dinner this year, because I feel sure that it will be the last in the fighting zone." "Hear, hear!" cried the boys, "You'll do me, 'Sarge'." All this made me as happy as I could ever wish to be, and I began to feel and make myself believe that it was far better to be in the fighting area than in the camps of England. I set about my work with a willing heart, and, although the duck-boards were covered with snow, I did not mind, I soon found out that my hot breath relieved the sting from Jack Frost, and I soon found out that exercise in the freshness was making me feel well. It was just like a job in civil life, more so when hundreds of Belgian girls started to flock to the factory from all directions. At half-past nine we tested the lady's coffee over the road, and it was simply glorious, bubbling with rich milk, and as sweet as honey. It set the blood flowing through my veins at three times the rate it was going before, and I had a second basin full, and felt just like a pig. I could have easily gone to sleep. However, I felt warm, and that was a very valuable asset during the cold weather,

"Get some more duck-boards from the factory, 'Dig'," requested the sergeant, and I went into the factory. The person in charge told me to take the boards outside the window, so while I was struggling to get them down I felt a sharp pain behind. At first I thought I was sitting on a nail, but when I turned round I found two or three Belgian girls enjoying a joke with a long stick which had a nail at the end. They said something in their own language, but I do not know what it

WAR LETTERS.

was. If they had not been laughing so heartily I would have taken it that they were offering an apology. The day passed on and 5 o' clock came, but instead of enjoying the free evening, I was one of the unfortunate ones who had to go on the light railway to the dump. This lowered my spirits one hundred percent, and I had a very sorrowful face when the rough-looking sort of toy-train moved off. There I was, perched high in the air; sitting on these cold duck-boards. I can tell you it was no trip to Blackboy Hill, and when the sun had gone the huge shells found room to annoy me more. I could hear them whistling their pitiful tune through the air. Now and again one would lodge himself very, very close to the toy-train, and I would look into the air to try and catch a glimpse of the engine; but on we went, and the shells became more numerous. Several times I was showered with dirt from the bursts, but the engine-driver was not sitting on top of the cold duck-boards. We stopped, and I soon started. Those duck-boards soon came off, and it was not until I got home by the fire that I felt safe. I slept well that night, but when I wakened the next morning I felt a tingle in the air. and on looking out into the open I saw a beautiful sight. Everything was snow-white.' and the snow was still falling. It dawned on me at the moment that I have the day off on account of the trip to the dump. I looked at the load of wood at the door, then at the fire. There was no need for me to say anything; my head fell back on a hard sort of a pillow. The rest was very welcome, and by the evening it had cleared up a good deal, which tempted me to take a walk to Steenwerck. The township was quite busy. Picture theatre, canteens, trains busy shunting at the station and people were hustling about as if it were the heart of London. I went into a place and ordered six fried eggs with chips, and a cup of coffee. I did feel hungry, and the girl who served them out brought her mother into the dining-room, and they both sat down knitting, while I slowly made the six eggs disappear.

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"You from trenches?" asked the girl. "No; I work railway."

"You no trenches?"

"Oh, yes," I replied, "two or three days I go trenches."

"Trenches no bon!" she said; then she turned to her mother and sent forth a long string of French.

I did not understand one word of what she said. "You like more coffee, monsieur?"

"Thank you very much." I handed her my basin, and she left the room. During her absence her mother watched me with searching eyes, and I did not know what to do. It was useless attempting to speak English to her, and my French was so thick that she would not be able to thin it down. However, I attempted a little.

"Le guerre no bon," I said. All I received was a vacant look. She did not even tell me that she did not understand, and I was glad when her daughter returned. "Here, monsieur! plenty hot." The coffee was lovely, and I handed mademoiselle one franc, but the mother burst forth with quite a mouthful of French.

"My mother say you no pay for coffee. Keep the franc yourself."

I first looked at the mother, then the daughter, then the franc, then my pocket. The franc disappeared, but the old lady, who seemed to be full of mystery, was very calm. After I had finished my coffee I thought it time to go, but mademoiselle considered differently. "You stay by fire, monsieur," she said.

"Thank you so much," I replied, and I spent quite a pleasant hour with them. When it was time for me to go the old lady took my hand. The tears slowly came to her eyes, then the daughter commenced to sob, and I wondered what it was all about. It was only at the door that mademoiselle told me that she had lost her two brothers in the trenches.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter 57.

25th December, 1917.

Dear _____,

It is Xmas day, and, if I remember rightly, I wrote to you on last Xmas day, but the letter of last Xmas will be totally different from that of to-day. Last Xmas I was on the Somme amongst all the mud and snow. The conditions were indeed trying, whereas this Xmas is much milder. For dinner we had toast and sardines, soup, roast beef, cabbage and pota toes, pork, carrots, apple sauce, baked potatoes, jellies, custard and plum pudding. The band played during the meal, and a few songs, and recitations were rendered by members of the division. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole performance, and it took my mind right away from all things that are horrid. It created in many of the troops' minds an impression that will not be forgotten. Apart from the joy that was derived from the great gathering, there was, hidden beneath the idea, that possibility of brotherly unity — a unity that was hitherto unbelievable in civil life. All classes and creeds assembled for a right royal good spree, and I believe they all had a real good time, without that feeling of associating with a class that was just not what should be. Every man was a soldier, and just the same a human being, and in civil life every man is a citizen and, just the same, a human being; but in civil life there is that difference that makes all the difference. There is a continuous fight for gold, or that which represents gold, and in this fight many of us become forgetful of the object of our very existence. There are some people, with abundance of wealth, even more than they really require, yet they would not lift the slightest atom of misery from a down-and-out, if be made the most pitiful appeal. The army, therefore, has shown us the way. It has shown many of us a road by which we may be happy without a huge accumulation of money. After our glorious

WAR LETTERS.

dinner a huge mail was read out, and I received a real good issue. Apart from parcels and letters from home I received quite a number of letters from outsiders. I went to my home to read these letters, but Fritz would not let me concentrate. He kept sending over huge shells which shook the whole place and everything within it. The home I speak of is an oval-shaped roof hut, with bag windows. At the door is a stack of rough looking timber that has been carefully collected and very much treasured, because we rely on this to keep ourselves warm on the cold nights. At one of the bag windows there is a chap shaving. He is using Lifebuoy soap as shaving soap, and the mug is composed of a bully beef tin. The mirror is a broken one about two inches across. In the centre of the room there are nine of the troops sitting round a blazing fire arguing about conscription. Rifles and equipment hang carelessly all round the hut, and the bedding is all bundled up like straw in a horse stable. One chap is bathing his foot. Four others are playing cards for money. The room is full of smoke, and now and again an oath comes out against the fire-lighter. There are some socks and shirts hanging up to dry. The usual meals are the same every day:— Breakfast, one slice of bacon and half a dixie of tea; dinner, stew and half a dixie of tea; tea, rice and half a dixie of tea. We get an issue daily composed of one-third of a loaf of bread, sometimes cheese, about three desert spoonful's of jam, an ounce of margarine.

My bed consists of the soft part of my equipment with two sand bags over it, then my socks, then my cap comforter, and then my towel comprises the pillow. On the floor I put my waterproof sheet, then a layer of sand bags, then half of one of my blankets. With the other half hanging over the bottom ready to fold back. Another blanket is then placed in reverse manner, so 'that the one will hold the other, and so keep my feet warm. My top-coat, trousers, and tunic all help to keep me warm and form part of the bed.

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We were promised a bath to-day, and after walking about four kilometres we found out that the baths were booked, so we marched back with the same dirt as we took.

It is marvellous who one comes in contact with in this army. I had a man pointed out to me who was a lecturer at the University. He looked for all the world like a marine dealer. I came in contact with a man who has a large business in Post Office Place. He looked like a man who would be accustomed to selling frankfurts on the racecourse. I came in contact with a man who used to sell studs and razor paste up the byways of the Melbourne streets. He is a captain and to look at him you would think he was Sir Douglas Haig. In our own hut we have farmers, clerks, laborers, carpenters; etc., and it is very amusing to hear the carpenter telling the farmer how to grow wheat, and the laborer telling the clerk how to prepare a balance-sheet.

Just before dark I met a very old friend of mine, and he asked me if I would care to go with him to a place called Fletre. He tempted me by telling me that at this place he knew a family who would give us a real good feed and a nice drink of coffee. Although I had half a real good Xmas dinner, I decided to go, and we both moved off along the Belgian road. After walking about a kilometre and a half, we came across a transport making directly for Fletre. We boarded this transport and, and after a very rough, cold ride we arrived at my friend's secret home just in time for tea. I had four eggs and chips and some lovely pancakes, in addition to two bowls of beautiful hot coffee. We remained there for about two hours, and it was very interesting trying to make them understand what we were talking about. On leaving it commenced to snow, so we sought shelter with the hopes that we would be fortunate enough to strike a transport going home, but our luck was not in; we had to walk. It was the dreariest walk I have had for many a long day. The snow

WAR LETTERS.

beat against our faces. It covered our hats and coats, and I must have looked just like Amundsen. or some other Antarctic explorer. About half-way home we came in contact with a café which had written over the door in rough letters:— "Allies' Repose." This struck me at once as being a place that had originated since the commencement of the war. We thought that a hot bowl of coffee would warm us sufficiently to make the remainder of the walk more pleasant, but, to our surprise, we were told that the lady did not sell coffee. However, we thought it wise to make further investigations, so we entered the building. There were no privates in the place – they were all officers – and the woman behind the counter was highly polished. I mean, she was painted up to artists' pitch. There was not a hair of her head out of place. Her features were very finely shaped, and her manner was so attractive that one could not help staring at her in a rude manner. Her voice was sweet, and her English was perfect. Her eyes were always laughing at you, and appeared to be full of life. My friend asked her if she had coffee

"No, monsieur, only hot wines." Then she smiled and waited for our answer.

"We will have hot wine then." replied my friend, and when the woman handed us the two glasses, she said. "I thought you: crowd were on the Somme?"

"So they are," replied my friend. "I am only here on a special job."

This woman knew more about the A.I F. and the Canadians than a good many of the officials.

When I arrived home that night I told the boys in our hut that I knew where a spy was.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 58.

1st January, 1918.

Dear _____,

The main topic just now is on the latest peace offer hit at the Allies through Russia. I hope you did not build up hopes on such ridiculous bases. At the same time, it is good to read, for I really think it is admitting loss on the part of the enemy. Victory for the Hun is an impossibility in my mind — as far as the battlefield is concerned — but whether the political part will rob from our side a complete victory I do not know. The Kaiser is in a most awful fix just now, I guess, and on the 1st January, 1919, our men should be marching through the streets of Berlin to make us victors. I cannot see for the life of me, how the Hun is going to stand the strain. It is not only Germany we look at, but these hangers-on, such as Turkey, Bulgaria, and others. It reminds me of a football team carrying a lot of passengers, as they term them.

The ground has been covered with snow for the past few days, and, although it is cold, I quite enjoy being out in it, enjoying the fun with many others. Snowball fights are common, and we all accept the nasty knocks as unintentional. Even the officers enjoy the fun, and it is lovely to see them smile when a snowball three inches in diameter strikes them on the ear, where a massive chilblain exists.

I think it is glorious to have a field covered with snow. It brightens the whole surroundings. It seems as though God has cleansed the face of the earth. Even the battlefield, with its horrid sights, such as broken gun carriages, remnants from a dead soldier, broken guns, barb wire, shell-holes, torn-up railways, duck-boards rudely placed, and many other sights are temporarily covered by this beautiful white snow, and it appears that the rougher the surroundings are the more beautiful is the picture. It

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is a lesson that we should not lose sight of, as in some of our lives — lives that have been sorely tried by misfortunes — a sort of snowstorm falls upon us. We shall say a spark of fortune, and it makes life appear all the better because it was once so very rough. Sometimes the snow becomes frozen and loses a great deal of its beauty, but we still find fun in the hard parts, by sliding like a child going to school would on a footpath which has been rubbed with several banana skins. The nails in our boots make this play ever so much nicer, as we fall more, and go quicker.

One of my friends called for me on Sunday and asked me if I would like to take a walk with him into the township. Although it was a very long distance I agreed, and I do not regret it, for I saw quite a new sight, and that was the French people going to church, or rather Belgians. Some of them were very well dressed. Big, wide hats, short skirts, high boots, and blouses that I cannot clearly define. Tucks, overlaps, waistbands, etc., are quite out of my line, but I have formed an opinion that when the people over here take off their every-day clothes and don their Sunday best there is a marked difference, and they look very nice and clean, especially about the head.

Something from the direction of the sky fell very heavily on the back of my foot and gave me a nasty graze. What it came from is still a puzzle, but it weighed about 12 pounds, and resembled a piece of shell that might be anything round about a fourteen or fifteen inch. German planes were up at the time, but no bombs were dropped. Whether or not it was a piece from our own anti-aircraft is hard to say. However, it is very painful, and is in a very nasty place.

I received a nice bunch of letters again, but in one letter it stated that blouses were 45/-. It reads so funny while the roaring guns are drumming into my ears that sandbags are only fourpence

WAR LETTERS.

each and German overcoats may be found lying about the old battlefields. It would have been better to have informed me that suits of clothes are cheaper, or that men salute women now instead of dirtying the rims of their hats.

New Year's Eve was very quiet, up till about 9 p.m. The guns that usually hush us to our final sleep when we are a little back from the trenches were silent. The whole battle-front, as far as we could see, was dead, as it were, so most of the boys went to sleep. At about half-past eleven I became very thirsty, and had to leave my cosy dug-out in search of water. When I reached the open field I came in contact with a dark object that resembled a human figure. I switched on my torch, and discovered that it was one of our own boys.

"Have you any idea of the correct time?" I asked.

"Nearly 1918," he replied, then walked away into a darker region, out of my sight. The quietness made me curious, as I thought there might be something extraordinary happen after midnight. I must have been out in the cold air for some considerable time. To me it seemed about two hours, and as I tried to make my eyes pierce through the darkness I realised the quietness. I allowed myself to become lonely, and when I am lonely on this battlefield my mind thinks of many things, and wanders everywhere. I listened, but could not hear a sound of any description — not even the humming noise of an isolated aeroplane nor the rattle of a distant limber. I looked into the sky, but not a star could be seen. My mind was then turned to my home, and I forgot that I was in the field of battle. I could see the hustle and bustle of those going to the seaside on New Year's Day, or to the country. I could see the jolly faces and the hampers full of delicacies. I could see the trains and trams dashing here and there. It was a holiday, New Year's Day in Australia. At these

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times I feel that home is sweet. I often wonder how you think I live. Then my mind turned once more to the battlefield. I could see the red reflections like sparks from the smithy's fire. I could hear the roll of the roaring cannon, like the roll of many drums. Hell once more was let loose upon my mind, to torment it after its soothing spell. The evil of it seemed, at the moment, to be worse than ever: The groans of the suffering, and the sadness in the homes of those who have paid the price. It cannot last much longer. There seems to be a constant message telling me all this. I feel confident in saying that the war is near the end. I feel that I am only repeating what is being sent to me, and that is "Peace in 1918!"

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 59.

12th January, 1918.

Dear _____,

Many thanks for your letter of 28/10/17. It contained very interesting news, and you say it was Hospital Sunday in Australia. Just at this moment a massive Australian soldier has placed his huge foot on a poor insignificant little chap's toe.

"My corn when you're finished!" he cried.

A voice further along was heard, "You're not on the farm now, old chap."

Early this morning I went out to view the ground, and, as usual, it was covered with snow, but I noticed that the birds were enjoying a play in it all. They were twittering and flapping their tiny wings, and the snow was being lifted into the air, only to drop again on their feathered backs, I wondered if they were having a bath, or only playing. Somehow I think it was both, for they enjoyed it immensely, and they must know that it is all-important to be clean. But after they had finished their play and their toilet they seemed to scratch the snow away in search of food, only to be sadly disappointed. I felt sorry for the birds, but they must live somehow when the ground is covered with snow. Nature must provide a way for the poor little creatures. Besides my army rations I have had eleven eggs to-day. Goodness me, you will be sorry when I come home. It is the fresh, open-air life, and I believe the snow has a good deal to do with it. You might think that is a heartless thing to write about, after mentioning about the trials of the birds, but you will understand that we have our little trials just the same as the birds. One time our bread issue was a quarter loaf between seven. I do not mean a quarter of a loaf, but what is known in Australia as a quarter loaf. Now here is a sum for the children:— If half a loaf is better than no bread,

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what is the value of a seventh of a quarter loaf to a hungry soldier? It was rumoured last week that spies were: about, and that a black dog was taking messages to the German lines. This has created much amusement, and amusement is not too plentiful in these quarters, so you can well imagine that everyone is after his share. A Belgian passed us the other day, and I remarked to several of the boys that his nose appeared artificial, and that his whiskers seemed as though they were glued on. It was during the laughter that a black dog ran up to him, and commenced to recognise him by licking his hand. "Look!" cried one of the boys. "He's waiting for a message."

There was more laughter.

Some of the habits of the troops are indeed messages to me of their civil lives, such as spitting on a round stove in a hut, then placing a slice of bread on it for the purpose of making toast. It is alright, I suppose, to eat with your fingers when nothing else is available, but when a knife and fork is alongside one and he prefers scooping out greasy stew with hands as dirty as a coal-lumper's I consider it is time the brake was put on to prevent him drifting back to a monkey, as Darwin tells us that's where we came from. There are other disgraceful, dirty habits conducted that I would be ashamed to put in a letter that bears my signature.

The army carries many thoughtless individuals, as well as ignorant. It was only a few weeks ago when I was sitting in a hut writing that I observed an act of thoughtlessness. After lighting a fire in the hut, and discovering that the smoke was a greater nuisance than the cold, a soldier went out in the open, leaving the rest of the troops to endure the inconvenience. I have heard that _____ has been wounded slightly, but it is not wise to worry. _____ will be pleased, for he will probably go to

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England, and after the wound has healed he will get fourteen days' furlough.

Our home just now is one of the animal type. A rabbit's burrow, I shall term it, but on a huge scale. Why, it will hold half a brigade, and perhaps more. This will make you indeed curious, for when one speaks of housing a half-brigade or more it is saying a mighty lot. I would like you to imagine in the first place a huge hill, or, shall we say, a miniature mountain. At the foot of this mountain is a huge entrance of some fourteen to twenty feet across, and about twelve feet high. While we were stationed in this wonderful home there was a constant drip of dirty water, which created a smell similar to a drain. After entering, you come in contact with a space large enough for two small shops and a band. Occasionally the band played, and we were very happy to have a canteen so conveniently situated. We pass on through this space, then meet with various streets. These streets, as they were termed, were not like the ordinary town or village street, but were ever so many feet below the top of the hill, and air tubes had to be installed so that the many troops who lived in the hill would have a certain amount of fresh air. Electric light was also installed, adding still further to our comfort. The width of these streets was about sixteen feet, but three feet each side was occupied by bed space three feet high, similar to the cabins on a ship. Each street was named so we had no trouble in finding out which street we lived in. Apart from the streets being named, each bed had a means of recognition. If we wished to reach the top of the hill it was not compulsory to go right to the main entrance. I discovered this when ascertaining information regarding rubbish, etc. Half way up the hill there are many conveniences, and a huge incinerator, secretly concealed, disposes of all the rubbish that accumulates within this wonderful home. It is called the

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Catacombs, and I was told that the whole construction was the brains and workmanship of the Australian Engineers. Shells burst upon it without damaging it in any way, and the troops feel as safe in the wonderful Catacombs as what they do in the streets of London.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 60.

31st January, 1918.

Dear _____,

I am not living in the wonderful home now, but I have a little more to relate about it before I begin my experiences in the front line. I discovered that this underground township possessed a barber, a tailor and a boot maker. The name of my street was Hinder Street, and from this home quite a lot of work was executed. We have had quite a lot of rain, and it has turned the trenches into small rivers. Whilst looking across the battle area from this hill it looked just like a huge lake, and I was detailed to help clear one of the trenches that lead to the main trench, or front line. We left what is termed reserves at about 5 o'clock in the morning, and faced a most disagreeable track of mud and water. This lasted for fully three-quarters of a mile and then we reached a rugged track of duck boards. No sooner had we placed our feet upon them than a barrage of twenty or more shells burst closely to us. The barrage consisted mainly of 5.9 shells, minenwerfers, and gas-shells. As it was early in the morning, my nerves stood it well, and I finished the journey without a hitch. But, oh, the job! Mud, water, and other refuse had to be cleared out of the trench. It appeared a very nasty job. However, we set to work, but the progress was exceedingly slow. We struggled on until 9 o'clock, until the enemy forced us to go home by showering us with small gas-shells. The smell from these shells made me feel quite sick, and I was very pleased when we moved for home. When we are hovering round the front-line trenches doing fatigue work it generally ends up with a severe turn our selves, and this turn came. Our battalion marched from the Catacombs through all this mud and water that I have previously described, and you will readily realise that the further you go towards the enemy the worse the

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ground is for travelling, and the further one goes so he becomes weaker. This applied to our journey to the front-line trenches. Every few yards we walked, or rather struggled along brought us closer and closer to a track almost unbearable. To add to the agony the shells and bullets fought and struggled through mud, rain, bullets and shells.

We were told that we would have about a week of the life, and I looked at our trench, and tried to picture myself after a week. We slept in mud; we ate in mud, with hands covered with mud. We could not wash, we could not shave, and we could not remove our clothes. The enemy was almost within listening distance. One night I sat up to rest my tired shoulder-blades, and I could hear the awful deluge outside, the shells passing overhead, and the machine-guns going mad like a motor cycle engine.

The next morning I ventured out into the open to get some fresh air, and to my surprise I saw Germans walking about a few yards ahead of me, as cheeky as you like, and, furthermore, some of our chaps were waving shovels to them and holding up their dixies and their bread issue. Goodness me, peace is declared, I thought. The Germans seemed to be astonished, because our bread was close to being white, and some of them actually sent word over that London was almost brought to the ground by bombs from German planes. The first three days were real days of agony, and we all seemed to harden a little. One cheerful incident on the fourth day was the arrival of a mail from Australia. There was only one letter for me, and it contained such a flow of joyous news from home that it brought the tears to my eyes, and a nasty lump kept coming to my throat. Although I state here that the news was joyous it made me very sad. I felt that I had made a horrible mistake by coming to this hell on earth. I felt that all my prospects in life had been thrown in the gutter. All my studying and planning

WAR LETTERS.

for a successful business life had gone for ever. I looked at the mud that clung to me like glue. I looked at the haggard faces of my comrades, and I thought of some of the items so nicely written with pen and ink which were messages to me from my own real home. Strawberries and cream — and so-and-so has been promoted to such-and-such a position: The very position that I forfeited to come to this which faces me at present. It is impossible for me to ever be the same, physically, after all this gas, and the very bones of my body have been saturated by waters of the fields of battle, and it is not over yet! There must be some very strenuous fighting close at hand. The Germans will not go down until they are flogged. My hopes are built up for this year to end it all. I sometimes see things very clearly, but my pals say this is another hundred years' war. You all keep me well posted with news, and I am thankful to you all.

After the fourth day we moved back about one hundred yards to a support trench called "Wally." We did not evacuate the front line, leaving it unprotected. We were relieved by another battalion. Wally support was much drier than the front line, which enabled us to remove our heavy gun-boots. We were about three hundred and fifty yards from the enemy, so great care had to be exercised in concealing ourselves. I did not mind this trench so much. It was more in the shape of a rest, but unfortunately, we were relieved after the second night and had to go back about two hundred odd yards to reserves. We waited in the cold for about half an hour. When we did get into the trenches we discovered that there were no dug-outs, so we all set to, and quickly made a little shelter for the night, but this was not a matter of dig for a while. We first of all had to remove a lot of slush from the bottom of the trench before we could dig, and during the course of digging we came in contact with all sorts of smells and obstacles before our home was

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finally dug, and had it not been for about a teaspoonful of rum, I would never have slept. Early the following morning I woke, and found two or three huge rats playing basketball around my two huge military boots, that were sticking up in the air. When my pals woke up I suggested that we make a new home, but the suggestion dropped flat. That day was the best day we had had for a long time, and the aeroplanes were very active on both sides. For hours I watched them fly like massive birds through the air, and I noticed an enemy plane coming over us at frequent intervals. It would disappear; then several shells would come over. Back it would come again, and disappear. Another lot of shells came over and so this continued for quite a long time. Three of our own planes flew right overhead without attempting to show fight, and they flew right over the enemy lines, but within one hour they came down from the clouds like a hawk after its prey. They surrounded the enemy plane that had been troubling us. It was a smart piece of work. Several shots from the machinegun and the plane came to the ground in flames. We were all very glad, and the sight was one I shall never forget. What if such a thing happened in peace time? Why, the people would have considered the incident as one of the cruellest crimes in the history of the world, yet it was looked upon as a mere everyday occurrence. This bears out the fact that warfare is really a class of quarrel that is far behind the times: As ancient as the walls that stand in Babylon. Warfare in these days of civilisation under such shocking conditions amounts to wholesale murder of the people, and the people should see that those who are responsible should be punished under existing modern laws. In my estimation there should be laws made by the nations for the whole world, just the same as there are laws for any country.

When the evening came, I was one of the party warned to carry tea and stew to the men in the frontline, and the utensils used

WAR LETTERS.

for this purpose fitted loosely into the back, with two shoulder straps. You would hardly believe how the heat from these canisters brought the perspiration out of our bodies. The journey to the front line was not a happy one, for we were shelled from the time we got within distance of the enemy's whiz-bangs until we delivered the stew and tea. The shells were not the only trouble, for every few yards someone would fall the victim of a shell-hole disaster. The journey back to our trench was made in much quicker time, and, as usual, I was very thankful that I was not injured in any way.

The sixth day was cold, and opened with a heavy frost. I asked permission of the officer if I could go back from the line to have a bath. It was granted.

I felt this a great relief, for I had, or thought I had, pounds and pounds of dirt all over my body. It did not take me very long to get on the move along the rugged track towards the Catacombs, but after I had gone a few hundred yards it brought home a lesson to me that such risks were indeed tempting providence. The bullets hissed past me like insects on a summer's night. The small shells followed me until I reached a slight dip in the ground. This relieved the situation a good deal, and I was able to make progress with a contented mind. On reaching the Catacombs I had a hot drink of cocoa out of a Nestle's milk tin, supplied by the Australian Comforts' Fund. The track was much better after leaving the Catacombs, not only on account of its firmness and evenness, but its beauty added to the pleasure. Each side of the road stood high trees in a uniform manner. Occasionally you would come in contact with a shell-torn tree, but the realisation of what the avenue was like in peace time repaired all the damage and filled me with joy. A little further along the road were massive iron gates, one side of which was torn to pieces by shell fire. I stood, as it were, in

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disgust: Gates that must have cost hundreds of pounds. They were really beautiful gates, and so big. My eyes went out in search of any-thing that might be behind these attractive gates, and, to my horror, I could see, buried behind a dense forest of beautiful trees, a real castle blown to uselessness. Further down the road were more large and ornamental gates lying flat upon the ground. Behind these gates was a lodge. In Australia many houses of wealthy people are not as large as this lodge. It was ruined also. The whole home of magnificence was ruined. I stood gazing into the forest of large trees that stood amongst it all. I walked some hundred or more yards along the wide drive from the lodge, until I came to what appeared to be a garden of Eden for the occupiers of brighter days, and whilst I was trying to picture the real home with all its glory our guns were pounding the enemy. The shells were whistling over the tree tops, harmonizing with the sweet notes from the happy birds that were enjoying a rest on the twigs that the enemy had failed to destroy. I felt quite safe in those grounds, and, although the guns were wild in their roars and the birds were straining their little throats to show their happiness, there was a stillness about the air, and this stillness made me feel that I was in wonderland. It was during this dream of wonderland that a powerful military band sent forth the music of "The Count of Luxembourg." It came from one of the rooms in the ruined castle, and pierced through the dense forest of high trees. It reached my ears, and soothed my mind. I was for once carried away to a land of dreams, and it was not until the band stopped that I moved on. I had my bath and returned to my dug-out, where I laid myself down on a bed of mud and military clothes, and there I slept.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 61.

10th February, 1918.

Dear _____,

On the seventh day, after the sun had set, there was a severe artillery duel. It was so severe that I thought either our men or the enemy forces were going to make an attack. This duel lasted for some two to three hours at high pitch, then slowly died down to isolated firing. At 9.30 p.m. a battalion from the 3rd Division arrived to relieve us, and I was exceedingly pleased, for our position was by no means cosy and the sector was of a wild nature. After a three or four miles' walk we camped for a while, then continued and entrained for Neuve Eglise, a small village a few miles behind the line. I did not feel too comfortable in Neuve Eglise on account of the heavy shells that landed there during the night. Each shell that burst shook every building in the village, and as we were sleeping on a second story of a very frail, half-broken-down shanty, we simply rocked as if we were on a boat, and pieces of glass would fall, making the situation appear ten times worse. For two days we stayed at Neuve Eglise under a strain. There was great joy amongst the troops when they discovered that they were bound for a pretty village some seventy or more miles behind the fighting zone, and before we entrained we received an Australian mail. Most of my letters were dated 21st November, or thereabouts, and I was highly delighted, like the rest of the troops, most of whom were singing patriotic songs. I could not put my mind on the letters, so I put them away until a more favourable opportunity arose. I gazed musingly at the younger men in the truck, and their antics told me a story.

I pictured a boy walking the streets of our beautiful Australia. I could see him talking at the corners to soldiers in khaki. I could see the longing eyes which told of his secrets — secrets that were

WAR LETTERS.

dreams before him. Khaki clothes, shining military boots and a peaky cap; quite fascinating, lends its charm to youth. His parents, full of patriotism, give their consent for him to become a soldier. To fight for the country is indeed an honor. To march through the streets of a capital midst shouts of "Bravo!" is a thrill. The youth still looks further. He sees a glorious trip on an ocean liner. He sees the lights of London, Glasgow, and other huge towns of fame. The word France, with Paris, brightens the aspect still more, and sets his blood tingling to a heat of pride never before known in his life, but underneath this glorious picture is hell itself. The sea trip is not what was pictured. It was more like shipping sheep or pigs across the water. He sees very little of London or Glasgow, but is placed on the plains of England for strict military training. He reaches France. All these visions vanish; hell appears. The cream of his life turns sour. The sweet life of youth becomes bitter. He mixes with men much older than himself, and feels that he is just as old and can indulge in the same vice; but the strain is too great, and in many cases a seed of destruction is sown even too powerful for a mother's advice to kill.

The journey in the train was very nice, on account of the holiday at the end. We arrived full of brightness, and we were marched to our billets. Our company was billeted at the extreme end of the village, and our home was situated in the back yard of some up-country farmer, amongst his pigs and fowls; but we seemed to enjoy their company, because they were not hostile: However, after a few days some of the pigs and fowls thought our men were hostile towards them, because the hens were hunted off their nests and eggs were stolen, and attempts were made to turn the pigs over. A few complaints by the French put a stop to a good deal of it. We had plenty of straw in our barn, so our hips

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had quite a spell from the mud so common in the trenches. Indeed. The straw was very soft and exceedingly warm. We were not permitted to light fires in the barns or, billets, so it is just as well that plenty of straw was available. After settling down to our new home, I made a careful survey of the village, and I found many things that appealed to me. On all sides this pretty village, which is named "Ques Ques" (pronounced as "Keck") is surrounded by beautiful hills. At the end of the road in which our billet was situated is a blacksmith's shop, and around a crescent are a number of stores. Most of the houses are right on to the road, while running alongside a group of farmer's residences is a gently rippling brook. The sound of the water against the small pebbles, which peacefully buried themselves in portion of the mud at the bottom of the brook, sent forth a little tune of its own, and at night time, when quietness spread itself over the village, the gentle ripple was very soothing. That night I felt very happy, and the notes from the water over the stones made me think of something lovely. Nature has a tendency of speaking to us of lovely things, and if we drink in the wisdom from the lessons of Nature we feel that there is great joy to be found in life, if we only think of things that are lovely always. Misery, I thought, was seventy miles away, where the roaring cannon sent forth its rage. Having had so much of warfare I could not help thinking of it, and it seemed as though a child who wished to slumber was tormented. In one road I could see a lonely country home, and as I neared it a picture of contentment appeared before me. There was an old couple sitting by the fireside enjoying the solitude sent forth from the soothing flames of the fire. After two or three days, at "Ques Ques" the troops began to feel fit and well, and many rumors were circulating as to what was before us after the spell was over.

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"We do not get spells for nothing." one remarked, and it is very true I anticipate a heavy offensive after our holiday. This did not trouble me much, for the army had taught me to just live a day at a time. Another soldier and myself became acquainted with an old French lady about five hundred yards from where we live. We used to write our letters there, and as time went on, and our friendship grew closer, the old lady made us understand that she would sooner talk to us than have us write letters. It was very clever of us to understand her, and it was by means of actions, and a little boy named Gustave, that we learnt quite a lot of the French language. Mrs. Payen was the lady's name, and she used to give us coffee and scones for supper. Gustave used to bring forth articles and ask us what the English word was for each one. After we told him he would laugh, then tell us what it was in French. There was another place a few yards away from Mrs. Payen's where we were able to secure milk. We also discovered a place where we could purchase flour and eggs. This enabled us to make some sort of cakes and pancakes. Of course a soldier's cooking is no class with mother's, but we managed to make our dishes taste very nice.

One of our boys wished to repair his boots, and he came to me enquiring what "last" was in French. I could not tell him, but offered to go with him and help to demonstrate. We approached the lady with a "Bon-jour, madame."

"Bon-jour, monsieur," she replied. Then he lifted his boot and showed the lady his worn-out sole. In French, she told us that she had no old boots. My friend then ascertained from a learned Australian soldier what the word "last" was in French, but he forgot to state that it was boot last, and he went to the French lady again trying to make her understand, but all the lady said was, "Tres bein," which means "very good." I think she thought he was

WAR LETTERS.

trying to tell her that the boots last a long time. Before we could make her understand we had to get a hatchet and a nail, and my friend had to take his boot off.

We are having plenty of sport here. Several football matches have been played, also hockey; but I have found plenty of amusement at golf just over the hills. We get the branches from the trees and an empty bully-beef tin, which acts as a ball. If golf is anything like we are playing it over here, I do not think I will take it on when I come home, spite the fun we have.

We had a bath parade the other day, and I saw a sight that I will not probably see again in my life. Some of the men's backs were covered with sores — sores that look angry and seem to say the food has been too poor or the bodies are not kept clean, or the vermin is the cause. It made me feel sick. I now hear that the men are isolated.

Our drill has been easy, with the exception of a day we ran up and down the hills with fixed bayonets. I asked a friend, "What we got by doing this sort of thing?" He replied, "Tired."

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 62.

1st March, 1918.

Dear _____,

It was a very sad day, the day we packed our equipment ready for the front line. Ques Ques had spoiled us. It was just like a boy starting school after spending a lovely Xmas holiday. However, the train journey to a place called "Canteen Corner," near the village of Le Suille, was thoroughly enjoyed. The season of Autumn made the conditions much brighter, and we found plenty to occupy our minds. We passed quite a number of German prisoners on the way, working on the railways, and they did look a poor lot. I thought to myself, "The French soldiers have not got much to contend with if this is the type of men they are against." The following day we moved up forward to the Catacombs. All the old memories came back to me. The many fights in the mud with rations, and the digging of a new dug-out in reserves all came back, but the snow and rain seemed to have finally disappeared. In fact, round about the Catacombs was nice and dry, and I felt that we would have a much brighter time of it than before. These were my views, but the rest of the troops seemed to think that we were in for a pretty hot time, on account of being fresh from a holiday. Fortune seemed to favour me at the outset, for I was detailed for brigade head-quarters telephone. After two days I became quite comfortable. It was delightful to think that I could sit out in the sun and have a comfortable shave. I prepared my razor and secured hot water. I had a fairly clean towel and a box to sit on. After my face was well lathered with common scrubbing soap I seized hold of my razor to commence, when I heard the whistle of a mighty shell-overhead. I did not go on until that shell burst, then I was satisfied, but in quick succession two more came whistling over my head, and a third landed near

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the Catacombs. Before I had time to wait for any bursting my shaving water was sent flying into the air, never to be seen again. I shaved inside that day!

My signalling was so satisfactory that I was ordered to go back to divisional head-quarters for a test. This was a very long walk, and when I did reach there I had to wait for hours. I became very hungry, and asked if I could get anything to eat, but they simply told me that they were not expecting me, but they would give me a cup of tea. Eventually the right man appeared, and I told him I had come for a test. "We got our man yesterday," he replied. "You had better report to your company." It was a miserable walk back on my own. I could not get a lift as no transports were on the road at that time. Every step I took brought me nearer and nearer the flares and heavy guns, and as I neared the Catacombs I could hear a heavy cannonade, which seemed to be right in front of me. I enquired of a captain where our company was, and he willingly told me. I have never known a man so anxious to direct me to a place, and I was hoping all the time that he did not know. He pointed with his finger, and as I followed the line of the finger my eyes caught the red reflections of heavy guns. My ears caught the sounds as though they were right near my drums. Even my mouth opened, and my nose sent forth deeper breathing. I had to go right up near that, I thought.

It was fortunate I remembered the track or the trip would have been most awful, whereas I did the whole journey without being troubled with the hissing bullets from the enemy machine-guns. When I reached the company, the first words I heard were:- "Look what's arrived." Naturally, I looked around to see if there were any rations. No, it was to me they were referring! But when I told them I had had nothing to eat all day they quickly directed me, to the canister which contained some lovely hot stew. What a

WAR LETTERS.

beast I made of myself; but I felt ever so much better after it. A little later in the evening a company arrived to relieve us, so I had to pack up for another move. It seemed as though I would never settle, but it pleased me when I discovered that we were bound for reserves. I had a good sleep in reserves that night, and woke up feeling fairly fresh considering what I had gone through the day previous, and to add to the pleasure the sun was making a bold effort to warm the trench. During the daytime the enemy was very considerate — he permitted us to sit out in the sun. We never worried at all about him, but in the evenings he became angry and peppered us to some order. We suffered quite a number of casualties at night. It was for this reason that we were glad to move back to the front line, but some of the duties in the front line are not too choice, even when he is shelling reserves. For instance, my job was very distasteful after we had been in two days. The first two days were very quiet, so quiet that a friend and I visited two or three out-posts just to see how they were getting on. The enemy at this period appeared to be concentrating on reserves. Whether his object was to hamper any preparations that we might be making for an offensive or not, I cannot tell, but reserves suffered very much, while the front line seemed to be as safe as any streets in Australia. After the second night my turn came to repair the wires that the enemy had broken, and it was not by any means as comfortable a job as some of the Australians had at head-quarters in London. My life was in the balance the whole time. Shells were very numerous, and it was round about reserves where most of the breaks were. I was not the only uncomfortable one, for when I arrived home early in the morning there were some pitiful tales to tell. Some of my dearest friends had been dangerously wounded. One was killed outright whilst leaving the trench on duty. The whole company seemed to be unnerved.

WAR LETTERS.

When I got into my bed I noticed that my pal was shaking all over. I felt him to see if he was wounded or in pain at all. "What's the matter?" I asked. "It's cold," he replied. Now I knew what the trouble was. He was not cold at all. In fact, when I felt him, he was very warm. It was his nerves, and I have been the same way myself. The enemy barrage was very severe, and when I began to realise the position and feel the vibration from every burst I began to feel very uneasy.

A group of men came along the sap or trench. Every now and again they would look, then listen, and duck their heads below the parapet. One remarked, "Fritz will hop over to-night, there's nothing surer."

My pal lifted his head from below the dirty blankets. "What did that chap say?" he asked.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 63.

16th March, 1918.

Dear _____,

There has not been any mail come to hand of late, and I am not expecting any until we get over this lot. Goodness knows what it is going to end up with. Some think the Germans are going to attack us, but I have my doubts about a big offensive by the enemy against the Australians. He made a raid on us one night and got such a shock that he has kept quiet ever since. I fancy he thought we were the boy scouts. My health, generally, has been very good, so there is no need to worry over anything. Some of the boys tell me their people are very upset on account of the war lasting so long, but so long as the war lasts I have a job, and that is what I might not have when I am discharged. A soldier receives his pay, certainly, for his job, but what has to be taken into account is what he sacrificed or what he would have held had he said, "The country can go to pot."

My experiences since I wrote you last have been rather interesting as regards reading matter, but I would not care to go through the business again. The enemy has been very vexed over something, and he seems to have picked on to me more than once. I have never done the Kaiser any harm, but he has directed his men to have several shots at me with ugly pieces of iron, and things they call bullets. I have never got the bullet in my life, and the only bullet I wish to get is the "bullet" from the "Australian Military Forces." The dug-out we occupied in the front line was no better than a frail fowl-house, the only difference being that instead of wire in the front and a nest of straw in a candle box in the corner we had a waterproof sheet and a muddy floor. It became so bad all over the sector that only a few were game to get their stew. On one occasion the stew came up, and the guns

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were quiet for a time. There was quite a rush. It was so bad that the corporal had to tell them to form a queue.

"Every man must get his issue," he said, and he stood there like a king, but the men still pushed and scrambled.

"No one will get an ounce until there is order;" he still showed the highness of his rank. Suddenly five shells burst on the parapet one after the other, and the men all bowed their heads. A few minutes later the crowd had become considerably less, and one of the boys looked up and inquired: — "Where's the corporal?" We all helped ourselves to the stew and there was a lot left.

It appears that fine weather cannot last very long this side of the globe, and it was during a very heavy storm that I had to go out to repair the telephone wire. Fifty yards from home the enemy opened up a very severe barrage, and the thickest of it was right on my track. One shell was so close that I had to make a leap into the trench. The timing was excellent, for I had not reached the bottom of the muddy trench before an awful crash occurred on the parapet where I had made the leap. When out on duty at night I locate the positions of the various flashes from the enemy guns, and this gives me good time to get under cover. A little further along, I noticed the flash from the same gun, and I quickly threw myself into the nearest deep shell-hole. This shell was no more than ten yards away when it burst, and I got covered with the pieces of dirt that were hurled into the air. The barrage became more intense, and up to date I had not found where the break was. The further I went the more open it became, and deep shell-holes were the only means of safety that I could find. Umbrellas are no good in this war, nor overcoats either. The iron Fritz sends over is worse than the biggest drops of rain I have ever seen. A soldier told me one time that if cream puffs were fired instead of shells

WAR LETTERS.

there would be far more enlisting. However, to continue with my story; I reached the place where the break was, and, would you believe me, it was no more than twenty yards from headquarters, and they would not venture out. The return journey was very hasty. Not many blades of grass grew under my feet, in spite of the state of the ground. My clothes were as heavy as lead, and as wet as a bag that has been out in the rain for a week. It was eleven o'clock in the evening when I arrived home, and as tired as a hungry dog. At twelve o' clock, just as I felt that the cares of life had left my troubled brain, I felt a quick shaking at my feet. I jumped quickly, half-frightened, as it were, through the heavy strain of what I had previously gone through.

"I want you to lay a fresh line to No. 4 outpost, and from No. 4 outpost to a listening post in "No Man's Land," he said. Then he walked away. At first I thought it was all a haunted dream, so dosed off in a semi-conscious sleep, but, to my horror, it was true!

"What about that new line?" a gruff voice seemed to pierce my ears. I quickly rose and sort of staggered to the officer's dug-out, wiping my eyes.

"You want a new line, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, old man. I'm sorry. I know you have had a rough spin, but the sector is very lively, and we want to be fully prepared. I do not say that the enemy will raid us any more, but we may be able to secure a good deal of information from the outpost, and as the listening post is right on Fritz's line our men must have a signal." "All right, sir, I will fix it up.

"No. 4 outpost was right close to the barb wire entanglements. I reached there safely and soon had the men in communication with the company officer. The men in No. 4 outpost directed me to the listening post. It was a job that needed patience, and when I commenced, my sleep left me, and I became

WAR LETTERS.

very much awake, with my wits about me. The first step was to get the wire underneath the barb wire entanglements, and this was very distasteful. It took me quite a long time on account of having to release the wire from my clothes every now and again, and I had to keep very low and quiet on account of the activity the enemy was displaying with his flares. When once past the wire I crawled through the mud, over all sorts of things. Now and again the smell from dead soldiers became very pronounced, but, fortunately, I did not run into any. When I reached the listening post I discovered the two men crouched up, and they were all nerves. However, they were very pleased to see me and to learn that they were to have some sort of an alarm. After the work was completed I made a zig-zag rush for the barb wire, then crept underneath as quietly as possible. I reported to the officer, and he told me to go and have a sleep. It was half-past one.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 64.

4th April, 1918.

Dear _____,

My health has been very good, considering, and I am happy. That is what you wish to know. When we are kept busy we have no time to ponder over what might have been. We have no time to look back at civil life. We even cannot think of home. One has to be on a constant watch all the time, and hissing bullets and howling shells keep us out of mischief.

Since I wrote to you last there have been great changes, so I will relate them as each day went. After having a short sleep I was aroused by my pals for breakfast, and told that there might be a chance of relief after tea. All that day I had a very easy time, sitting in the dug-out drawing, talking, and playing cards. After tea, the enemy shelled us heavily and inflicted casualties. Some of the shells came so close to our dug-out that we were obliged to move along further. We had just made ourselves comfortable when the officer came along to me and reported all lines broken by shell-fire. He advised that I align a lamp to headquarters and save any further humbug. Aligning a lamp to headquarters was a very thankless job, as we were not permitted to receive any reply from headquarters, so it was really a gamble. We could not prove that our lamp was correctly aligned, and should we be in distress our signals may be useless. However, I took great pains in this duty, and shells were bursting around the vicinity the whole time. It was very encouraging to learn from a runner from headquarters that our lamp was very distinct. A runner is another means of communication. He takes messages from various stations on the field to other stations, and the job is by no means a pleasant one, as this duty means walking in the open under shell-fire, and in all sorts of conditions. He not only brought word that our lamp was

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good, but that we had to go half way to headquarters to repair the wires, as tele phonic communication must be kept up. There were two of us ventured out on this duty under a heavy barrage. We had only got a few yards and had to return on account of the danger involved. Later we made another attempt, and succeeded in repairing all wires up till the time we met headquarters men. We then tapped in, and were pleased to learn that all lines were right. At ten o'clock we arrived home, just in time to be relieved. It was a hurry-up job packing up, but we were in time, and I was thankful to move back a bit.

Our new trench, which was a support for the front line, was not too bad, but I thought it could be made a little dryer, and having gained knowledge of where sheet iron was, I ventured out, but had no luck. After I reached a sort of dip between a road and a communication trench I was caught between the fingers with a bullet, and had to have it dressed. It is a wonder I made such an error as to go openly to such a spot. Most of the men kept very low. However, I was fortunate that it was not a bullet in the head. It taught me that bullets are more treacherous than shells and should not be treated as whistling Rufus.

When I returned to my dug-out my pals asked me where the tin was, and I told them it was the other side of the road past "Wally" support if they would like to get it, but none of them seemed to be anxious about it. The following morning the enemy gave us a good deal of gas in the form of shells, and we were obliged to wear our gas helmets at various intervals. Some of the shells landed very close to our home, and the gas was very pronounced. Gas has the same effect upon the troops, morally, as what the ordinary shells have, on account of the thrilling stories we hear heavily again, and casualties were inflicted. We had to remove further along the trench. Towards the end of the day I was

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one of the party to carry rations to the men who relieved us. The next morning was fairly quiet, but the shaking we have had has scared a number of the men. One of our dug-out companions has taken a few drops of iodine on a bread crumb. He says this will affect his heart in such a way that the medical officer will evacuate him. I did not approve of the idea at all, for some times these stupid acts of cowardice lead to permanent trouble. In the afternoon the enemy sent us some afternoon tea made of 5.9 shells and 9.2 high explosives. They were very hard to digest, and many of the boys felt the strain of the big stuff.

In the evening I carried rations again to No. 7 and No. 9 outposts, but No. 7 had been blown up. Seven men were killed and four men wounded. The following morning a party of our section had to carry coal from the light railway to the advanced cooker. The third day in supports opened with a glorious sun bath. The enemy must be enjoying the sun also, for he has not sent any shells over. It is quite a treat to be able to sit for a while and enjoy the sun without being tormented by gas and iron, and it is just now that I have a longing to get back to Australia, so that I can really have a peace that is a peace. Even when we are in England there is always the horror of going to France again. It is always before one. It is therefore no peace, but merely a short relief. The sun still shone in the afternoon, but I had to go across to an old German pill-box on duty. These pill-boxes were made of concrete, and were named pill-boxes on account of the smallness and shape. I was glad to get home.

When I awoke on the fourth morning I found that my voice had gone. Some of the gas had evidently been the cause, for others were the same; in the evening I had to carry rations to the front line, and from various training camps. In the evening I had to carry rations to the front line, and just escaped a heavy barrage

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of 5.9 shells and whiz-bangs. When our party returned from duty the officer called us together.

"Well men," he said, "I have bad news. The ground that our men fought so gallantly for on the Somme has been lost. The enemy has pushed from the Cambrai sector, right through Bullecourt, Langnicourt, Bapaume, past Le Sars, and is heading on for Amiens. We want you all to keep calm, and be prepared. He may push on this sector any morning. His drumfire at our trench with all sorts of shells indicates that he is busy. We are strong enough to hold him, men. He will get the biggest shock he ever got if he attempts to break through. We are going to raid him for the purpose of testing his strength, and when once we raid him you need have no fear of an attack. Now, do not be downhearted over the Somme incident. The English regiments have been forced to fall back a little, but the enemy has suffered heavily, and should he wish to go mad very often he will become too weak to stand. Our turn will come, and before long you will find the Aussie alongside his mates in the final onslaught." These words were very deeply impressed upon my mind, for I thought in similar strains. I knew the enemy would not venture against us. I had a feeling there was mischief along the front, but I thought it was the Canadians at Vimy Ridge. Sometimes when our guns were quiet you could hear the rumble on the Somme. We did not know it was on the Somme, but we could hear the rumble, that humdrum that tells the troops that there is something doing on another sector. That humdrum makes you feel thankful that you are not there; that humdrum that tells you that many are lying on the field of battle groaning with pain, praying for peace, home and comfort. It is at these times that one sits and thinks of the horrors, of the peace that could be, if it were not for an isolated few on the earth who crave for War! War! War! They do not

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fight. It is the hand of supremacy — a hand that the people of the world should condemn. This supreme hand that even mentions war should be humbled and brought to nothing. They should be cast into one grave to save millions of other graves.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 65.

21st April, 1918.

Dear _____,

So many things have pleased me in the last group of letters from Australia, that I am rather keen on making an attempt to answer them all, but it is very hard for me just at present, on account of the unsettled nature of things. There is one thing that gives me much joy, and that is to learn of the pleasure my photo gave everyone. It seems to be hard work for me to have my photo taken. I would sooner have a tooth extracted, and I dare say it is for this reason that so many have appreciated it. Before I go on with the news in this letter, I am forced to thank all those who have kept me going with such interesting mail, especially those who have written to me under difficult circumstances. I mean people who have never seen me, and do not know what class of news I like. We have been relieved by an English regiment, and we moved to Neuve Eglise. It was a long, tiresome walk after having had a good innings. The following morning we moved from Neuve Eglise, after having spent a miserable night in a dirty old half-broken-down dwelling of some description. We all motored to a place called Stanzelle. Now, I do not want you to believe for one minute that we had covered-in cars, nicely upholstered, for we did not. Our motor tours are made in transport wagons, and as many as can be jammed in one. We passed through the villages of Loche, Dranoutre, Mont Rouge, Mont Nair, Meteron, Fletre, and Castre. Although the journey was not up-to-date, I enjoyed it. Passing through all these strange villages was a delight. Not that they are all so very much different, but because they are plain villages, and are a change from the open fields, which are torn about by shells. At Stanzelle we slept, and I never enjoyed such a sleep in all my life before. In fact, when I

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woke the next morning it took me some little time to realise where I was. However, I felt ever so much better for it, and when they told us we were going for a train ride I thought it was just lovely. I thought of the time when we all used to go to the Zoo on a holiday. The train ride was one of the features of the holiday, and so it was when we entrained in cattle trucks after a four-mile walk and a drink of tea. We had no breakfast that morning. The cook must have slept in.

We passed through quite a number of towns and villages, including Abbeville and Boulogne. The journey occupied fifteen hours, and all the nourishment we received was a cup of tea here and there, when the train stopped. You can see by this that our journey was not quite so nice as the times when we went to the Zoo, and when we were told to get out we began to wonder where we were. However, I managed to discover the name of the place "Hangest." Weren't we disappointed when we discovered that we had to walk eleven miles! This seemed to top everything, and I for one was beginning to feel hunger creeping on me. This march would have been very nice if we had no packs to carry, but that was not so; we had heavy packs upon our backs for the full eleven miles. Like all travellers or tourists, we had a spell that night. Our beds consisted of ashes. Mark you, ashes, not feathers or flock-ashes! We did not have a room to ourselves, either. It was a matter of fight for your bed. Do your best. There's nothing in your stomach to hurt. Thank God we were roused out from our bedroom at 4.15 a.m. for a tin of cold salmon between nine men, and a slice of bread with tea. After this heavy meal, and it was not very long, either, we were on the track again, only, instead of full packs, we had our Sunday clothes on. (Fighting order.) Our march was fully seven miles, and, let me be serious, the men were done. It was another cruel act of the war. An act that probably could not

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be helped as regards our officers, but an act brought about by the war mongers; whether it be the Kaiser or not, such warmongers should be punished. Now we were all very tired and weak, and we sat on the road like a dog who has followed a country waggon for miles: Suddenly a few old London buses came on the scene, which created just a fraction of life. "Hullo! We off to Blighty," cried one.

"Off to the Somme." cried another very despondent fellow, who thought jokes were out of place on such an occasion. We were all packed nicely in the buses, and off we went again. At this juncture the boys began to sing. "Now, wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king"? Yes; sing, mind you, and the songs were nothing like the songs we hear in church or Sunday school. They were songs the boys had made up themselves, and some of the words are not in the English dictionary, but the tunes were very familiar to me. In fact, some of the tunes have really been heard in churches. The old London buses took us to a place near Amiens. Now we knew that Fritz or the Germans were not so very far from Amiens. We had read about it in the French edition of the "Daily Mail," so the men realised it was time to put their fighting faces on and stop the singing. They realised, too, that the enemy .was very active around these quarters, so they did put their fighting faces on, and I can tell you the Australian is a different person when business is on the menu. We walked five miles after the bus trip, and rested in a wood. Our five miles' walk was not so bad because we walked through Amiens. Soldiers on the way told us the position, and that was that we would be hard-pressed. We did not fear because our boys have been holding out well, and gaining for Australia a world-wide reputation, which must at some future date benefit the Commonwealth to a great

WAR LETTERS.

extent. An English chaplain remarked: "Ah! These are the boys I love to see going to meet the Hun."

It was very encouraging, and a little encouragement works wonders with our men. They will not be driven, but are masters when enticed. Some of the expressions upon the faces of the French people who have had to evacuate their homes are indeed sad to look upon. I shall never forget our march through Amiens. Old women, young women, old men and children had been hunted from their homes. They were placing full confidence in the boys from Sunny Australia. Others who saw us were overwhelmed with joy. You could almost see that strange lump which rises to the throat when the soul is touched. There were others, who gave us cheerful smiles, but their eyes told of their meaning, and one could almost read the words, "God bless you." If we lose one article of value we make a fuss, but these unfortunate French people have lost everything. I have gone through villages that have been evacuated and seen furniture, photos, keepsakes, beds, and clothes; everything that makes up a home, strewn about as if a multitude of outlaws had visited the place, but, in addition, huge holes are to be seen in the walls. Chimneys have been blown over through the roofs, and one mass of ruin meets the eye.

We remained in the wood until it became fairly dark and then plodded along another six miles to the front line.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 66.

28th April, 1918.

Dear _____,

The front line trench we took over did not have any dug-outs, but the Hun soon made us dig a little shelter place. The first two days were fairly quiet. The enemy, utilising his snipers, was very active, but the shells were going over our heads. On the third day I had some very unpleasant experiences, one early in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Under a heavy barrage my friend and I ventured out to locate breakages in the telephone wire. It occupied a great deal of time, but we were determined to have the communication. The rations have been something disgraceful, but hunger has a tendency of making one eat anything but pork and beans, which I simply detest. When I mention pork and beans I want you to picture a cubic inch of half-cooked bacon fat mixed in with poor quality, half-cooked haricot beans in a sickly sort of gravy. To write about it makes me feel pale and sickly. Some of the troops like them. Oh! The taste! Well, the first day we were in the trenches we received absolutely nothing. We were told to eat some of our iron rations. Iron rations are not shells, as some of the troops will have it, but bully beef. "Fray Bentos" is a good brand, and if we had nice tomato sauce and nice fresh bread it would not have been at all bad, but we broke the beef off in lumps with our fingers, and ate it with our fingers, like you would a saveloy from a vendor's cart. Our tea was brought up in petrol cans, and tasted more like petrol than tea. Milk was not added, neither was sugar. We had no cups, but the old rusty dixie lid served as a suitable vessel. This was the second day, and with the tea came some very poor pieces of dried-up bacon. My piece was about five inches long by about one inch wide. It was crisp and cold, but you could detect it easily from the mud that covered it. We had a small

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portion of bread given to us, also a small portion of margarine to eat for our meals on that second day. Hunger seemed to cling to us closer than a brother, and it was on the third day that we were forced out on the hunt for food. This is the battlefield, and you will remember a few letters back, where I told of the poor little birds hunting for food on the snow-clad ground of Belgium. We were successful in finding a tin of army rations. That is, meat with vegetables. We also discovered cocoa, jam, and a half-tin of unsweetened milk. We managed to make a fire by the aid of candle grease and bag. It was sufficient to warm the army rations and enabled us to make cocoa. We thoroughly appreciated the spread, but there were no toasts or long speeches. On the fourth and fifth days things improved a little, the only distasteful incident being a call at 1.30 a.m. for duty. The fifth night brought relief, and we marched back to a village, or near a village, named Millencourt.

I have not been writing home too frequently lately, but you will understand that it is not always convenient to write, and sometimes I write of incidents that happened days before the actual date of the letters. Paper is very scarce just now, and so are matches. I am therefore going to trespass on your kindness by asking you to forward this on to my friends, but make sure you get it back, for these letters might be very useful when I return. You will understand by the already addressed envelope that I am permitted to drop you a few lines, and by so doing you will keep the mail link together, which I consider is such a relief at home as well as here. Not being able to write home regularly has indeed been a great weight upon my mind, for I have imagined all sorts of things, especially now, as I know the Australian papers will be full of disappointing news of the recent retreat of the English divisions. I do so hope that my people are not looking at these

WAR LETTERS.

recent reverses in the same light as some of the troops, for it only makes one lose confidence and the spirit of patience that is so much needed at the darkest period of the British Empire. It is almost natural for me to imagine that many minds have been directed towards me in pity, as other minds towards other young men under similar circumstances. It is therefore a necessity for me to let you and mother know as quickly as possible that my views of the present situation are very hopeful. I have not feared for one minute that the Germans are striking a victorious blow. I consider that this final episode, so to speak, on the part of the enemy is all he can do. (Death or Glory.) For the life of me I cannot see where the glory lies. I am rather inclined to consider it as death. There is no need for the Germans to sip at their wine and drink their beer, for the hour of sorrow is not far off, and the merriment will only double their misery. In accordance the German Empire should be preparing for deep mourning. The hour for the Allies to strike the final blow cannot be far off. The enemy is done!

In the Millencourt area we made our homes along a sunken road, not far from the dwelling places which had been recently evacuated. On visiting the houses we discovered carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables, also clothing and articles of furniture, etc. Some of the troops were greatly taken up with the quaint articles of furniture, such as clocks and chairs. Others dressed up in the French clothes. Even the women's clothes were worn by our troops, and if the enemy made a further advance he would consider the Australian maid as fairly handsome, but inclined to grow very heavy whiskers. Some of the corsets fitted our men well, and the top hats made it appear like some night club array in gay Paris. Our objective was different. We gathered all the carrots, etc., and cooked as many as we could possibly eat.

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Millencourt shall always be remembered by me on account of the acceptable feeds, as we termed them. Whilst around these quarters we visited the destroyed village of Hindencourt, which was evacuated in haste. Prayer books and photos were strewn about carelessly, which formed a pitiful sight. Both villages have been shelled heavily.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 67.

5th May, 1918.

Dear _____,

We have moved into the front line trenches again, just in front of Albert. Our position is rather better than the enemy's, as we can look right into Albert. Last time I walked through this town there were a few isolated families living there. Bit by bit the place was beginning to be rebuilt, but the enemy's onslaught from the Cambrai sector had hunted them once more from their homes. I cannot say we feel too comfortable where we are on account of the enemy's activity, but I can assure you that we will not give one inch in the event of an attack. My opinion is that he has made a halt. A compulsory halt, I shall venture to say, and without fear of boasting I shall further say that it is on account of the Australian Forces being up against him, for he was very keen on capturing Amiens. We are keeping a very careful watch upon him. The eyes of our gallant little army are as keen as a cat's. We have no fear of his attacking, because we possess that all-conquering spirit. As a matter of fact, our raiders are going to let him know who we are, and what we are made of. During our stay in this zone I witnessed a wonderful sight, and this wonderful sight was brought about by wonderful shooting. The Tower of Albert, after several very close shots, was hurled into the air almost intact, and came crashing to the ground. If there were any Germans in the vicinity they must have got a horrible shock. The place looked bare when the tower fell, and I believe it was an opening for our men to get to work. Several raids have taken place, and we now feel sure that the enemy will not attack. We just about had him scared when we were relieved. We marched right back to dug-outs at Millencourt again, but we were not at all happy there, for he shelled the place unmercifully, and our

WAR LETTERS.

battalion suffered many casualties. I made several visits to the shattered villages of Millencourt and Hindencourt, and discovered cotton and needles and trousers that were far better than mine, but they were civilian. However, I transformed them into riding breeches, and I looked quite a swell. We had more carrots and potatoes, but very often we were driven from our homes by huge shells. On one special day, a very nice sunny day, too, I was one of a party detailed for water fatigue. This water was only procurable from a certain pump in the village of Millencourt. When we arrived at the well I caught hold of the handle, whilst my mate held the bucket. A huge shell burst in the yard, and we both turned deadly white. Neither of us seemed to have the power to speak. Such a wonderful escape from death I have never experienced before. We must have been missed by inches. After a spell I told my mate that that was a warning, and no sooner had I got the words out of my mouth than another massive shell came crash into the house. Bricks and dirt flew in all directions, and it was then that we decided to get out of it. We were too late. The shells were coming frequently, and it is here that I wish to explain the danger of being in a village. There was not a soul to be seen in the vicinity where we were, and these gigantic pieces of iron that were being hurled at us created within that village a sort of ghost-like atmosphere. My eyes must have been ever so wide open with fear. My nerves must have been all untied, as it were, but we managed to confer one with the other. My friend suggested down the cellar, but I could not imagine myself being buried alive.

"Let us make for it," I cried, and every word I meant. One dash for the street and off we went. Particles of bricks and mud followed us, missing only by inches. We ran as fast as our legs were able to take us amidst a deluge of roaring shells and the falling of walls. After a strenuous four or five hundred yards we

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reached a cemetery that had been unmercifully ploughed up by shells that would be anything up to 14-inch. In our frantic flight from death we jumped into a grave, and remained there for close on two hours. Quietness then reigned throughout the village, and we returned by the road we had come. On reaching another road we discovered, to our great sorrow, several men lying dead on the road. We went to headquarters to report our experiences, where we learnt that the Major had been gassed and many casualties had occurred. This was indeed a black day, for when we reached the spot where we lived, we could not identify one part of our home nor our equipment. Trees were lying carelessly across the place. Not even the carrots were left, and we smiled at the incident, but beneath my smile was a mind full of thankfulness. That night we built a new home, in a new place, but at 4.30 a.m. we were forced to leave it and find shelter in a huge hole. I was very glad when we moved back into the front-line trenches again. Our journey was very calm, as the enemy ceased his drumfire. Although we took over in front of Albert we only remained one day, then moved to a sector a little to the left, where we relieved a Welsh regiment. It appears that this regiment was strange in its habits, for they built their dug-out facing the enemy. Of course, this applied only to the privates; the officers' homes were in the correct positions. By three o'clock the following morning all our men had built their homes on the correct side of the trench, and I for one felt very tired. Three hours' sleep was all I could get when I was called for three hours' duty. This took me up to 9 a.m. The fast meal I had had was 4 p.m. the day previous, and that consisted of two slices of bread and marmalade. The following meal consisted of a small slice of cold bacon and a slice of dry bread. After a few days in this trench we moved back to reserves, but our rations did not improve. It became so bad that some of the

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men used to toss up to see who would take the two issues, which were barely enough for one man. Matches were as scarce as nuggets, and it was nothing to see a dozen or so men run with their cigarettes as soon as a man struck a match, for the purpose of getting a light, and if you were smoking every passer-by would ask for a light. One poor fellow remarked, "You chaps have worn down more of my smokes than I have myself."

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 68.

10th May, 1918

Dear _____,

. The home we are in reminds me very much of Dickens' "Old Curiosity Shop." Equipment hangs carelessly about the rugged room. There are heaps of old curiosities that the French people have left behind. Some of the boys have been fortunate enough to secure a proper civilian bed. They are now hunting for toilet-sets and mirrors. One chap has even suggested curtains to the broken-down window frames. Yes! We were relieved from the trenches by a London regiment, and marched about fourteen kilometres to a place called Warloy. Although we are back a little, we are not free from the shells. Oh, no! Mighty "Jack Johnsons" land here. and the buildings shake beneath the awful bursts. I have had some very gruesome times lately, and one has to exercise his mind to a great degree. Judgment plays a very active part when one's life is in the balance. Calmness is a gift under such circumstances. The power to immediately realise that one is being cared for is a predominant feature with many of our Australian soldiers. They give courage to their comrades, and on they go, fearing nothing. It is due to this feature, that the Australian soldier is so confident of success on the battlefield, and, coupled with the competitive atmosphere that is created between the various units, have made our army one of the finest in the fields of France. The Germans themselves speak of the high quality of our men as fighters. No wonder he will not venture an attack of any importance against us.

From Warloy we marched some twelve kilometres to a place called Pont Noyelles. In surveying the village I discovered that American troops were in the vicinity, and that Pont Noyelles was a very nice place. In the evening another young chap and myself

WAR LETTERS.

took a walk to a village close by called Querieu. At Querieu we found that eatables could be procured, so we spent nearly all our spare cash that night. It is wonderful the effect a spell has on the troops. They recuperate in very quick time from the nerve-breaking shells and hard living in the trenches. In an attempt to fathom the means of such recovery I am inclined to think that many incidents in the life of a soldier play an active part. The physical exercise, which develops his muscles and adds to his good breathing. The open air and plain food. All these things seem to tell me that in civil life city folk nurse themselves too much. They hug the fires too much and permit themselves to become languid and lazy. Just like the sum on the top of liquids, so they allow the worries of life to set on their brows. Instead, they should be up and doing. They should be seeking as much of life's pleasures as they can possibly get. They should inhale the freshness of the winter's morn and look bright under the heat of a summer's day. Unfortunately there are some people who cannot find pleasure in anything. They are always dissatisfied, and so make others feel miserable. It would do those people good to see some of our boys smiling under severe circumstances.

Close to the village of Querieu is a very prettily situated lake, and the men of our brigade had a swimming carnival, but during the events a huge shell burst in the water, which spoilt the whole proceedings. Up till that time we had quite forgotten that there was a war on. The embankment was crowded, just like you would see at a regatta, and the band, which was situated amongst beautiful trees that grew along the water's edge, played popular selections.

The following day most of the troops set to and got busy. Writing letters to their dear ones in Australia was one of the most important features, but many of the men utilised their spare

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moments in mending clothes, playing cards, making souvenirs, and some reading. It is good to see them occupying their minds usefully instead of brooding over the war. On the Sunday we had a church parade — the first since February — and it was an extra big one.

The whole brigade assembled in the chateau grounds, and General Birdwood distributed medals after which we had a march past. The mass bands of the brigade played, and the troops marched very well indeed. Quite a number of the American boys watched us, and were pleased to have us near them.

There is one thing in the military life that is hard to bear apart from the actual warfare, and that is the making and breaking of so many friendships. We meet with very nice people. We become to like them, then we have to part for ever, in most cases. Even our short stay at Querieu and Pont Noyelles brought us new friends, but we had to part. We became attached to the little villages in quick time, but we had to part, and the parting is all the harder because we generally make for the trenches. I was rather down in the dumps for a while when we left Pont Noyelles for the trenches, and during the eight kilometres' march I kept thinking of the happy hours in our shackle.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 69

19th May, 1918.

Dear _____,

Two or three letters have come to hand, for which I am exceedingly thankful. You ask in one of the letters whether the parcels I referred to were from home? Yes, they were. I have only received one parcel from a person outside the family circle. You have also asked me if I mind people outside the family circle reading my letters? I do not mind in the least, providing they are people who would readily realise the conditions in which they were, written and the state of the mind. In fact, I feel honored to have you ask such a question, for I feel that you are appreciating the news to a much greater extent than what I anticipate. You have now sent me quite a number of snapshots, which I value very much. There are a number of troops with collections of miniature photographs, and I often see them going over them. These snapshots bring us closer to our homes, but on such occasions as might be termed "hard" it is not wise to look over the snapshots, for at such times they make one feel very low spirited. I picked up an Australian paper the other day, and was greatly amused at some of the ideas they have formed of the lives in the trenches. Whichever paper it is says: "The troops in the trenches have three hot meals a day, a clean shirt every evening, and they are more at home there than anywhere." What a thing to say, "More at home there than anywhere!"

I will give you a few facts: — "At 10.30 p.m. we took over our positions. At 2 a.m. the following morning we received three slices of bread about the size of a tin loaf in width and length and about five eighths of an inch in thickness; one piece of cold, brittle bacon that would barely cover three pennies. We had about one pint of tea without sugar or milk, and plenty of petrol flavor.

WAR LETTERS.

We were issued with two tablespoonful's of marmalade. This issue had to last until 2 a.m. the following morning, when we would receive a small quantity of bully-beef and potatoes made into a hash. Oh, yes, a proper hash! We were fortunate in receiving a box of matches to four men, and three packets of "Flag" brand cigarettes. As regards clean clothes, we have never received clean shirts or underpants in the front line yet. Our feet are well cared for. but our stomachs—!

As regards being at home in the trenches, the man is mad who wrote it, and the people who believe it, too. Some of the war news I read was fairly correct, but that portion relating to a soldier's life is right out. Although I speak of short rations, it is wonderful how we manage to have five meals a day. This is how we do it:— Early breakfast: Hash or stew. Breakfast: Slice of bacon and piece of bread cut thinly. This makes us thirsty, so at 11 a.m. — Morning tea: Petrol, tea and hot water. Dinner: Slice of bread and marmalade; sip of petrol, tea and water. Tea : We finish what remains, if any.

When rifle rag is issued to the troops we never seem to get jam. I have noticed this on several occasions. I have been trying to think out the problem. Perhaps too much jam in the rifle would necessitate a clean out. Although I have only had one jam in my rifle, and that was when we attacked at Noreiul. On the other hand, the rag might be intended as part of the eatables, seeing that it replaces jam, probably to fill portion of the vacant spaces that might exist during the shortages of other provisions. Some of the articles we purchase are very dear. For instance, 2-lb. tin of ox tongue, 6/8; small tin of sardines, 1/1; biscuits like gingernuts and sultana, 1d. each; plain biscuits like toast, in packets, eight for 8d.; preserved fruit, when it is to be had, is 2/11 per tin. Some of the writing pads are 2/11; eggs are 5d. each. Bread we are not

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allowed to buy, or at least I take it that way, for orders have been issued to the effect that no troops are to purchase bread within a certain radius, whereas outside that radius no troops are permitted to go.

The march we had to the trenches this time was eight kilometres, but it was very easy travelling. The grass is beginning to show up now, and the ground is fairly hard. The hard ground, although pleasant as regards going to and from various trenches, is dangerous in other ways, as we learnt to our sorrow when we arrived in our trench. We could not get into communication with anyone, so it was decided that my mate and myself attend the defects. The first hundred yards were easily traversed, but as we neared a thick clump of half-torn down trees, which we afterwards discovered to be Merricourt Woods, we were showered with shells of a 9.2 calibre. So frequent were the bursts, and so close were they to us, that we were compelled to rest in a deep shell-hole for some thirty or forty minutes. This incident thoroughly unstrung my nerves. I cannot account for my mate's feelings, but according to some of the remarks he passed and the manner in which he passed them gave me the impression that his nerves were none too plum either. However, troops have a way of letting you I believe that they are exceedingly brave, and it was whilst the enemy was giving us a breather that he suggested we move on through the woods, as this direction appeared to be the line in which our wires ran. We were not many yards into the woods when another outburst from the enemy made us quicken our steps, but we were brought to a halt by an English soldier, who displayed about eighteen inches of cold steel towards our stomachs. "Who goes there?" he cried, and wasn't it a nervous sort of "Who goes there!" We told him we were Aussies, and he was greatly relieved. On reaching the other side of the woods we

WAR LETTERS.

looked at one another through the semi-darkness. We did not speak, but we understood what one another meant. Our next move was through the village of Merricourt, and I can assure you I did not care for the proposition at all, seeing that he was shelling the place heavily, but it had to be done, and we still had the wire in our hands. At about the third house we discovered that the wire ran over a half-blown-down brick wall. This took some time to overcome. However, the breakage was not there. Further down the street we came in contact with a group of English signallers trying to locate breakages, and a little further still we almost ran into three most awful explosions. They sounded worse than what they really were, on account of the walls, etc., but when the noise from the shells had died away we distinctly heard the cries and groans. Oh! so pitifully through the still air did those cries seem. We made straight for the place where the massive, cruel shells had burst, and to our horror we found three of our own pals dead and two very badly wounded. It was only a sort of artificial nerve that gave us the power and courage to see the two men to safety. We repaired our lines and made for home. The journey was just as pleasant to us as what it might be to civilians walking through the streets of London. We expected a nerve-breaking journey. Instead, it was calm, and the air was fresh. It was 2 a.m. when we reached home.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 70.

30th May, 1918.

Dear _____,

After being six days in the support trenches, we moved forward again into the front line. The trench was full of gas, and it was difficult for us to decide on what course to take. Some had taken the sure road by putting on their gas helmets, but we did not seem to fear that the gas was so dangerous. The position we are in at present faces the Ancre River, just behind a railway line, which shelters us from the enemy observation. The railway line being built so high enabled us to become very comfortable. We built ourselves very cosy homes, and were looking forward to a happy turn-in. At 11.30 p.m. one night I was informed that an attack was almost sure to be launched from our position, and I was warned to keep in close touch with a certain officer. At midnight the official news came through that our battalion was to engage the enemy at 2 a.m. Preparations, which had no doubt been going on for some days before, were all complete. The men seemed to fear nothing. The recent advances of the enemy forces from Cambrai were to be avenged, and that was just how our men viewed the situation. With such confidence as our men displayed at such an early hour defeat was almost impossible. Success was already our lot, for the smiling faces told of it. At 1.30 a.m. our sergeant passed and told us that there was only half an hour to go. A few minutes later we were told to be ready to move. Fifteen minutes to go. At exactly 2 o'clock in the morning our mighty guns illuminated the heavens. The reflections of the guns were so pronounced, and in such quick succession, that one hardly had time to realise whether we were at some notable regatta or a tattoo. The guns roared wildly, and the trench mortars played havoc on the enemy trenches. Yes! We had moved forward in the face of a very weak reply to our

WAR LETTERS.

challenge. The wonderful victors of the Cambrai sector of March and April sent their signals of distress high into the air. There were green, red, white, and various other shades of flares rising to the sky and falling upon the battlefield. Some would go out of sight altogether; some would throw out what appeared to be hundreds of smaller flares of the same color. It was a glorious sight, and took our minds well away from any danger. We advanced further, and the enemy's flares ceased. We took his front line trench, and established machine gun posts, which played along his masses, cutting him to pieces. We threw Mill's bombs at those who offered any stubborn resistance, and captured those who came across our paths. One officer, rushing towards us, put his hands up and cried for mercy. He was captured, and whilst one of our N.C.O.'s was making inquiries as to who should take the first group back this German officer drew a revolver and shot him dead. It so touched our officer that he threw off his coat, and dealt him some of the deadliest blows I have seen for some time. He cried pitifully for mercy. He told us that he had three children in Germany. Our officer said angrily, "That man you shot had four in Australia." This aroused the men to anger. They kicked at him and punched him until he was senseless. Some of the troops went as far as splitting his head with their steel hats. Several other Germans who had been taken prisoners, and who had witnessed the whole incident, were as white as snow. They had fear written right across their faces, but our men treated them well, and they were removed. We advanced further into the village, but were forced to remain there for some considerable period under close cover. The enemy had awakened his artillery and machine-gunners, and the village was being shelled heavily, and bullets were flying down every street. At first we thought we were trapped, and many suggestions were made. Some supported a

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bayonet charge. Some supported a fierce fight, should the enemy enter the village. The village had not been searched. We had no idea who was in the place, but we realised that something had to be done, and it was becoming very light. In batches we searched the village, and came in contact with quite a number of the enemy forces hiding in cellars. They were threatened with bombs, but, none of them offered any resistance. On entering one of the houses our party met face to face with a group of Germans. This was quite a shock to us, and I believe the Germans saw us before we saw them. A very severe miniature battle took place. Three of our party were killed and five were wounded. We killed eight Germans and wounded two. After a lengthy struggle with bombs and rifles the remainder of the Germans gave themselves up. The enemy artillery had now eased down, but our guns were hammering at him with terrific vigour. We advanced to the extreme end of the village, where we met quite a number of our own men. On looking further, we saw the enemy running for all he knew. This told me that we were victors. At this stage I was ordered to send a message through on the lamp. This appeared to terminate the attack.

Outstanding features of the attack are worthy of every consideration, and I feel that during this war one only has to carefully observe the acts and the speech of various individuals to find out what the world is composed of regarding human beings. During the operation of escorting a German officer to our nearest dressing station we were surprised to learn that this man had very high esteem for Australians. We were also surprised to learn that he spoke good English, and knew as much about Australia as we knew ourselves. It was indeed interesting for us to be told by this person, our enemy one time, that he possessed a bakery business in Melbourne. The exposure of the German plans were very

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pronounced when he informed us that he was summoned to Germany in 1913, for the purpose of acting as a German soldier for the German Empire. He gave us several relics, and wished us good luck when we left him. We came in contact with a mere lad with his forearm torn just like a lion would tear at a shin of beef. It was ripped up by a piece of shell, and looked like a piece of raw meat. His eyes were half-closed. His face was white, his ears were white. He knew little or nothing of what was going on about him. The sight of this lad moved me to pity. I lifted his head from a blood-stained pillow of mud. I spoke to him, and his pale lips moved, as if he were attempting to say something. His hand, blood-stained and cold with loss of blood, appeared thin and weak. I diluted a few drops of rum and placed them to his lips. He realised what I was doing, and attempted to thank me. I diluted more, and gave him a small drink, which seemed to make a difference. I gave him a cigarette, and covered his wound. His eyes opened and looked into mine. He believed that I was no longer his enemy. He smiled, and I knew that his smile was meant for thankfulness. Neither this German nor myself had been given instructions to act in this manner. It is part of us that is outstanding in cases of this description, and hidden when the world is offering us its many joys.

After holding our position at Ville-sur-Ancre we were relieved by another Australian battalion, and we spent a few days at a very pretty spot between the villages of Heilly and Bonnay. During our stay at this spot a German aeroplane ran one of our scout planes to earth. The German plane was showered with machine-gun bullets, but he managed to get back safely to his own lines. The same afternoon a German plane landed right amongst us, and the airman jumped out just like you would from a train. He was quite calm about the business, and whilst he was

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exercising his legs and removing some of his headgear he told us he was fed up with the war, His plane was in good order

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Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 71.

15th June. 1918.

Dear _____,

Now, let me see! Where's my confidential clerk? I've got quite a number of letters before me, and they are all from Australia, the land of my birth: my home. I have read all my letters on a beautiful hill which faces the scene from the Ancre River. I am enjoying the odour from Nature's own scent bottle, and it gives me joy. I do not think the beastly "Hun" will disturb me.

In the first place, I received a very nice letter from _____ which I intend to answer to-morrow. I received a letter from _____, two from _____, and one from _____ which contained all the press news. I am so thankful for them all, and the news right through is very good, but the tone is apt to be a little down at times, as though you were worrying. Let it stop. Many letters finish up by stating that the letter is a poor one. Now, I can honestly say that the letters I receive are indeed of a high quality, possessing a ring that has more effect on me than some gifted authors might. You are all doing remarkably well in the letter-writing. Some of the letters absolutely draw me away from the war to a place of peace. "Our Boys' Day" was a great success according to the paper. Sister _____'s letter this time has no news of corsets or nighties. I generally find a column of women's clothing intermingling the news of motor trips or parties.

The week is going on, and we have moved. It is fairly quiet for us just now, as regards shells, etc., so we are doing a fair share of wiring, which I consider is not the duty of the infantry. In the English regiments there are labor units. We have been digging deep trenches for cables, and we are the infantry. Right from

WAR LETTERS.

February we have had a good run in the trenches, and our meals have been extraordinary. The cooks prepared for us two half-dixies of tea and a slice of bacon. Our day rations consisted of bread, jam and cheese. It is very hard on us: harder when we learn that men attached to division have a loaf of bread per man, roast beef, and vegetables, in addition to other minor rations.

In the letters I read of the awful and cruel offensive. Well, cruel and awful! Yes, I suppose that is right, and I predicted it in one of my letters written in 1916. Have you ever heard it remarked that if a kangaroo sees he is getting cornered by dogs he will fight with a half-stupid rage for his life. That's just what the "Hun" did in the Cambrai offensive. He had to do this on a chance that he might save his life, but do not be alarmed. General Foch is in command, and they say the cunning fox is at work. I have great faith in our new general. One of our boys said, after he learnt of the retreat of the English army, "A new song will have to be written. 'Boys of the Bull-dog Breed' is right out. It should be 'Boys of the Half-starved, Crying Puppies.' " I was told that in an English paper a writer was blaming the prolongation of the war to women smoking cigarettes. Out of all the letters I have written to you or any one else I do not think I have attempted to illustrate the war as it appears to me. I mean the actual trench warfare, not clerical work in London. By doing this it might aid you in many respects to overcome what I probably surmise is a great strain of anxiety. We have had a good run in the trenches under shell-fire, gas, and bombs, raids and attacks. These have enabled me to observe a great number of minor incidents that occur. There have been times when I have been active from midnight to midnight, and this affords me sufficient knowledge to undertake this subject: —

WAR LETTERS.

Flares. —. These are used by the enemy to a great extent, and of a clear night, when aeroplanes are active on both sides, one has before his eyes a display of fireworks far superior to any I have witnessed in civil life. The ordinary white flare, used by the enemy to detect our forward movements, is very powerful and exceedingly active throughout the whole line. For miles and miles this white flare flickers in the air and slowly descends. One has to be very careful of the white flare when he is nearing the front line. Then there are green flares of various designs, which are known best by the enemy. I believe at one time two green flares meant "lengthen range." But there is the single green, the double green, and the green that bursts into hundreds of small green lights in mid-air. There is a white flare similar. There is a red flare which acts as the green and white, but meant something different from the enemy standpoint. I do not like the red flare, as in most cases it is an artillery signal. Since our planes have become so active there are a number of additional flares in the air. One in particular works by means of a parachute and lights up the area very plainly. We can expect bombs when they go up. A very wonderful flare is one for aeroplanes. It ascends, forming a sort of Jacob's ladder. During its course one light follows another. I have heard it said that this signal shows the German airman his infantry's front line. The finest flare of the lot is the enemy's pink flare, which bursts into thousands of small pink lights: This is indeed pretty and very powerful, and lights up the area very clearly. I was out on a wire message one night and two went up together, which necessitated my keeping very quiet and low. It is very nice to see all these flares in action together, and when we are attacking, or when the enemy surmises we are about to attack, quite a beautiful array of lights is visible in the heavens, and they all speak. It is a

WAR LETTERS.

wonderful way of communication, and the enemy has it off to perfection.

During the Day. — Sometimes during the day one feels as safe 200 yards from the enemy as he would front line trench is during an enemy attack or raid, and the activity of the minenwerfers or other mortars. Night work consists of patrol, scout work, ration parties, fatigue parties, repairing of wires, raids, and other minor incidents necessary for a strong defence or attack. Very often at night heavy artillery _duels take place, but one becomes so used to these that he takes little or no notice unless it is a misdirected firing. Sometimes shells fall short, and are very dangerous to the infantry. You will sometimes hear a casual remark from a new arrival that a stunt is on. I have seen our troops only half-dressed a distance of one hundred and fifty yards away from the enemy. Some have been mending clothes, some have been playing cards, while few have been making souvenirs. You will see by this that great confidence prevails amongst the men in the front. Such things as raids affect a few; that is to say, the artillery and those who are actually taking part in the raid. Then there are fighting patrols, scouts, etc., who go as close as ten yards from the enemy strong post. Sometimes patrols clash and a fight takes place in what is known as "No Man's Land." I have never heard yet of our boys being defeated in these encounters. According to these few remarks the war seems quite enjoyable, but in my next letter I will endeavour to illustrate the darker side of the war.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 72.

30th June, 1918.

Dear _____,

We have been relieved again from the front line, and have gone back to a place called Bussy. The enemy has dropped several bombs about our camp without effect. One of the enemy planes has been brought down; another enemy plane set fire to one of our observation balloons. The two men occupying the basket below the balloon at once left the baskets, but, unfortunately, one of the parachutes would not open. The poor fellow kicked and struggled until he reached a very soft part, but the other observer had been shot through the stomach. I believe he died. The plane was brought down. My last letter was devoted to the bright side of the war, but the hardships are so great that these pictures and interesting incidents are silver linings of a very faint nature to the gigantic dark cloud. In the very first instance there is a sacrifice, and as this war continues so this sacrifice becomes deeper and deeper on the minds of those who visit the front line trenches. In leaving Australia we sacrificed our homes with all the comforts. We have sacrificed our bread-winning commercial positions in civil life for the purpose of aiding in the defeat of our enemies, thus protecting the rights of those belonging to Australia. Some wives have sacrificed their husbands, and some mothers their sons, some sisters their brothers, and there are numerous sacrifices that will make themselves felt in the hearts of the men of France. There are times when the mind seeks a little solitude, and it is during such times that the soldier out on the fields of battle becomes very melancholy. Married men seem to suffer more in this direction than single men, but it depends mainly on the hard-heartedness of the person. Some of the troops have no hearts at all; or shall I define the situation as being more

WAR LETTERS.

animal-like? It has been known that some troops cut the fingers from dead Germans so that they might be the proud possessors of a German gold ring. For a person to have a heart of steel to do such a thing, I say this war is not a bother to him. He is of a fighting, wild nature. Battles are very strenuous in many ways. Prior to an attack, I should say that it is one of the greatest strains upon the nervous system. This nerve strain is generated from the thoughts that enter the mind. I should imagine it to be similar to drowning. With only seconds between life and death the troops stand in their trenches strained to the utmost capacity. Which one of them knows that death is waiting to snatch him the moment he rises to the parapet? The rapidity with which he thinks of home, his loved ones, his own life, what pain he might suffer, what limbs he might lose, is beyond comprehension, but the moment he rises from his trench and faces the open battlefield he is able to concentrate easier on a definite object. The thoughts of horror become lessened in the actual battle on account of this concentration. So I shall say that the waiting is far worse than the battle. During the course of a battle one is apt to disregard all habits, manners, etc., that have been cultivated during a lifetime. I mean by this, that the eagerness to save one's life is so great, and the mind is so disorganised, that culture leaves the brain altogether. Of course, some battles are milder than others, and are of a different species. For instance, a bomb fight like Bullecourt permitted of certain spaces of time to use a little common sense, but a battle like that fought at Noreuil, where the mind was completely overbalanced by machine-gun fire and shells, and where so many were falling, killed and wounded, and the groans from the agony was indeed a great strain. The concussion brought about by the bursting of a shell must play havoc on the nervous system. Another hardship that the troops are called upon to bear is

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the food question. Of course the troops realise that it is warfare, and that salads cannot be prepared, but whether warfare or some party, it is a hardship, for the irregularity of meals and quality is hard to bear. Some of the food we have eaten would not be offered to pigs. The clothes we have to wear would not be given to a beggar at the door, for he would not accept them. The length of time we wear our clothes is unbelievable. The class of work I perform is a hardship to me. I mean by this that it is expected of me in heavy digging, just as much as it is of a man who is accustomed to digging. It is expected of me in carrying heavy weights just the same as a person accustomed to carrying heavy weights. Therefore, this is a handicap, especially under shell fire, and is a hardship. We come to a critical subject when we speak of the Australian Imperial Forces having the bulk of the attacks. Many of the boys consider that we are not getting a fair crack of the whip. By this they mean a fair deal. I will not say the A.I.F. men are having a picnic by any means. When you come to take into account the push of 1916 on the Somme at Pozières and the advances early in 1917 from Butte de Warlencourt; then look to the north at the battles in Belgium; It appears that we are doing very well in attacking. When you look to Verdun and Vimy Ridge, one is apt to think the French and Canadians are having a good share of it. Unfortunately, the Australians cannot see, or do not hear much about what the English divisions are doing, apart from the early stages of French's little army and Byng's push. The Americans, of course, are coming in just as the enemy is giving his last kick, and there is no honour attached to any victory that they might gain. In fact, a lot of our men consider it a financial matter. In an English journal we were termed the "White slaves of France." Another hardship in the army is the vast distinction between commissioned officers and the other rank. The men in

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the common uniforms are like dogs, whilst the commissioned officers, in neatly pressed garments, are the masters. I will give you one illustration of the power of a commissioned officer. During a turn in a trench I was told to wake an officer at 4.30 a.m. and did so. I woke him and gave him his watch, but he snoozed off again. At 5.15 a.m. the sergeant major came in and woke him up again. When he realised what time it was he pounced on me like a hawk on to a sparrow. "Why the devil didn't you wake me?" he roared.

"I did, sir," I replied.

"No you didn't, you merely gave me my watch."

"You must have been awake, sir," I said, "or you would not have been able to accept the watch."

"Cut that sort of talk out," he yelled, "or you will go up before the carpet." I had to sneak back to my kennel and fret because my master was angry. This is the power of an officer, but I am not going to denounce all officers, for some of them are thorough gentlemen; in fact, most of them, but it does not alter the fact that there is too much distinction. It has been said that the Australians enjoy attacking. A statement of this description is untrue, and further tends to insinuate that the Australians are of a wild-beast nature, or uncivilised, or cannibals. The officers at head-quarters might feel proud of what the Australian soldier can do as a fighter, but I do not think the majority of those who take part in battles enjoy it to such an extent that they crave for them. After a recent battle one of our officers was commended on the fine victory by one of the higher authorities. "The boys did it. They're wonderful," he said. The hardships of the army are very numerous, and I claim it to be on account of the forcing powers, conditions of warfare, and other minor details that would occupy too much space. I have received more letters from home for

WAR LETTERS.

which I am indeed thankful. You will be surprised to learn that the famous cricketer, Dr. Barbour, is attached to our unit. We have had several games of cricket, and the doctor considers I field very well at point. I did not tell him I usually keep wickets. The ground is too rough. I have also met Percy Parratt, the Fitzroy footballer; he asked after _____ but he was surprised to learn that I am a very one-eyed Collingwood supporter. It will give you great joy to learn that I have been given a spell, and I am now at a place near the villages of Glisy, Lamotte, and Brebières. I have met a number of American soldiers, and they tell me such a lot about the States, and what they are going to do to poor old half-killed Germany. I hope they do all they say, anyhow. I might be home sooner than I expect. Five weeks time. I have been reading the "Daily Mail" and I find that the Italians have given the Austrians a nasty setback. I also read that Kühlmann says he can't win the war by arms. It sounds to me like a mild form of surrender. The year is quickly passing, and the Hun cannot achieve his goal. He might make a bold effort for the coast in the north, and the English divisions might fall back a little, but I do not think he can break through to the coast. It is the end of the half-year, and the enemy has certainly gained much ground, but I do not think he can hold it. That is my firm belief, and I would not be at all surprised, if, by the time this letter reaches you, that we have him on the run, back to the home that he loves best. When once he starts, or when once he turns his back, he is gone. We could go to Berlin. I believe this year will see the finish. It might be just before Xmas.

Yours, _____.

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 73.

14th July, 1918.

Dear _____,

In my last letter to you I told you that I was near the villages of Glisy, Brebeire, and Lamotte, and having a spell. The spell still lasts, but I do not think for very long, as the mighty guns ahead of me tell me that there is something coming off within the next few days or weeks. They do not bark at nothing or for nothing. Just like a good watch dog, they speak. Although we are in a position where real good meals could be served to us, we are fed very poorly, and each day we hunt about the various canteens, etc., for food. On one occasion I bought six fried eggs, and then I was not satisfied, but it acted as an introduction to a poor dixie full of stew. I would be very thankful if you could send me over a tin of Nestle's milk in the next parcel. We can do such a lot with it as it is so nourishing. Why, we make porridge out of the dog biscuits we get from time to time. A tin of mustard would also be acceptable, as this takes the taste out of the bully beef; not that the bully beef is so bad, after all, but because we eat it in such quantities and in such a fashion that the very label "Fray Bentos" makes us feel sick. We were given some gravy the other day with our meat, and it absolutely stank. I ate the meat and threw the gravy away. I held my nose whilst I did it. The tea tastes of chemicals that are put in the water. When we are not very thirsty it is hard to get it down, but we never throw it away on account of its usefulness. We wash our cutlery with it. We have had Sir Joseph Cook and the Hon. William Hughes to see us and to speak to us. I shall never forget the visit so long as I live. We were formed up into fours and had to march six or seven kilometres. During the march there were all sorts of threats flying about. The troops were going to count them out, and goodness knows what

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else, and I awaited the moment with great excitement. Mr. Hughes stepped forward, there was a mumble around the lines. Nobody had so far made any attempt to interject.

Mr. Hughes commenced by saying that he was here to thank us on behalf of the people of Australia for our gallantry, etc. It sounded so funny to me that he should say the people of Australia, when we are people of Australia ourselves, and we know too well the feelings of our own at home, in the land we left. However, it touched a very tender spot in the hearts of a good number of our boys. The very word "Australian" tingled in their veins. It set the toughest of minds thinking of home, and this, no doubt, was Mr. Hughes's object in opening his address. He went on to say that when the Anzacs landed on the shores of Gallipoli they made Australia. It was the greatest advertisement Australia had known. He also stated that it was up to the politicians to do their bit for the men who were enduring the hardships of this world war, and making the name "Australia" prominent before the whole world. During his address he mentioned about schemes that were before them for the men after the war.

Sir Joseph Cook stated, during his address, that no soldier would be worse off for having served his King and Empire. I cannot remark on this; we must wait and see. At the same time, I am inclined to think that a good number of the troops will be far worse off. I can picture married men pleading for help. I can plainly see them without employment. The picture is indeed very sad, as the guns mumble in my ear drums. Mr. Hughes said we have many battles to face yet. I believe him, too! Many battles after this war is over, which makes me believe that the politicians' interests are not so keen for the soldier as he would have us believe. It is wonderful how a body of men can be stirred from the very basis of revolution, as it seemed to me, to a strong

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feeling of patriotism. Sometimes the conditions under which the troops live make them notorious in the true sense of the word. They forget everything that might be lovely. They forget everything that makes joy, but a few words in the shape of home, mother, sisters, or brothers, changes that cloud of horrid thoughts to visions of hope and happiness. The visit of the politicians had this effect, and on the way back to our homes patriotic songs were freely sung. One would have thought the boys were back in Australia. The various patriotic songs were discussed in our home when we arrived. It was arrived at in this way:— In Australia, prior to leaving for overseas, the most popular song was "Some hearts will be joyful, some hearts will be sad," "And we'll all sing a grand ovation." "When the train comes steaming into the railway station," etc., etc. When the troops are arriving at their overseas camp they sing "Australia will be there," etc. When in the camp overseas the most popular song is, "Pack all your troubles in your old kitbag, and smile, boys, smile," etc., etc. But after they have been in France a few weeks the song is "Take me back to dear old Aussie, Take me back home again; I don't want your France or Blighty, It's nothing else but snow and rain," etc., etc. There has been good news coming to hand lately, and I am delighted. Do not criticise too much if I give you my opinion of the situation. As far as the smaller Powers are concerned, I believe they are now exhausted. Bulgaria, for instance, realises that she has made a huge blunder; Turkey is like a sinking ship; Austria is depending on the hopeless efforts recently made by the Germans; while the Germans themselves have tired to such an extent that a severe blow would finish the whole business. It is a matter of giving the Germans a real good setback and Bulgaria and Turkey would automatically surrender, for they are looking to the greater Power. The end is not far off.

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Another young chap and myself were ordered to leave Glisy for the trenches. The march was indeed good until we reached the outskirts of Villers Bretonneux. We kept to the Péronne road, and as we neared the village, we noticed very heavy shells bursting in the main street. Had we known where the battalion was situated from another point other than the village, we would have certainly avoided the village. In spite of the danger we ventured through what appeared to be the greatest risk I had taken during my career in France, but, fortunately, the shells eased off as we neared the heart of the village. Never before have I witnessed such shocking sights as I saw in some of the streets of Villers-Bretonneux. The dead were lying carelessly in the middle of the roads, mules were here and there, and streams of blood had made the sight ten times as bad. The smell was awful, and the buildings were in a shocking state. The whole picture was like a ghost scene, and as we reached the end of the village we gazed into the war zone. Then there was a silence, but a haze seemed to dull the atmosphere. One could imagine mischief bubbling from under the sod, as it were. We came in contact with another of our boys, and after he had discovered that we came through the village, he said, "You're lucky to be alive." He told us that the enemy was about eighteen hundred yards away. He also told us that the place was pretty active. I knew all this. I could see it in the air. It seemed to me like two mad beasts waiting to spring at one another.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 74

14th August, 1918.

Dear _____,

It seems a long, long time since I have written to you, but I have not had an opportunity. It has worried me to a certain extent, for I know that during these series of awful battles you will want to know just how I am. While I write this letter I feel disturbed. I am shaking and listening for bursting shells. We have no doubt been tested to the fullest possible degree. and as much as I would like to put the best effort in the writing of this letter I feel that my brain is all of a whirl. On the afternoon of the seventh day of August I slept with several of my companions in a dug-out just in front of Villers Bretonneux. I was quite stiff in the limbs when I woke, and before me stood our officer. He held in his hand a large sheet of paper, and he gazed into my eyes, without making any effort to speak. There was a sadness about his expression and a lump seemed to come to his throat. At last he spoke. "Wake the men up," he said. I shook them, and they lifted their weary eyelids. "I have something to read to you," continued the officer. "Hullo! Peace is declared." cried one of the troops, as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "I have a message for you from our general," the officer continued. "We are to attack to-morrow in company with the whole of the Australian and Canadian divisions. Two English regiments will be taking part on our extreme left. The battle will be the greatest the Australians have been called upon to face and every officer and man will be at his best. For Australia's future and the liberty of the peoples of the nations now fighting by our sides we are about to make an attack upon our enemy. For the sake of our dear homeland and those who are so dear to us we are asked to put the full strength of our wills into the battle."

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There was a silence after the officer had left us. The message had penetrated deeply into the minds of those belonging to our forces. It was believed that this effort would have a far-reaching effect upon demoralising the forces of the enemy. His mind is fresh from the fruits of victory from Cambrai and on the Belgian sector. He no doubt possessed an all-conquering air that had to be crushed by a tired, despondent army of colonial troops. That determination to be victors slowly crept into the minds of the Australians. The very thought of gaining a decisive victory in such an important encounter made Australian shores appear closer than ever, and the activity was wonderful from a tired group of men. We prepared our equipment and ammunition right away, and by eleven o'clock that night the battle area was one mass of eager troops from the shores of Australia. We moved to the right of Villers Bretonneux, just in front of a battery of 18-pounder guns. The walk was not noticed on account of other activities about us. Everybody appeared to be busy. It must have been two o'clock in the morning when we settled down in our trench. At two-thirty stew was served up, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was hot, and there was plenty of it. We also had a good, hot cup of tea. This nourishment had a wonderful effect upon the troops, for it seemed to regenerate their strength and warm their bodies. The hurry and bustle were now becoming very irregular, which caused quite a lot of unnecessary noise. Thousands of troops were on the move, and huge tanks were coming forward ; some of them were going right over our trench, as if there were no trench there at all. The parapets were all broken down, leaving a kind of gutter or drain-like cutting in the earth. Each minute increased the activity, and so the excitement grew greater and greater, creating a sort of excitement that is only paralleled by the event of some noted sporting event. It was through this great excitement that the

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words, "For those we love," came before my mind, and the emotion it brought about created tears in my eyes. They were not tears of sadness; nor were they tears of pain, but tears of joy for what our boys from Australia were about to undertake — and they were all so happy. Even in the smaller battles our men did not show the happiness that was so prominent on every face. All the troops were carrying explosives, and as many as their strength would permit. Tanks were the most conspicuous at about three o'clock, and the noise was almost deafening. The enemy was only eighteen hundred yards away, so it was easy to realise that he quickly surmised an attack. It was only a few minutes past three when he sent over a terrific barrage, which disorganised some of the movements. Men were losing their units, and the longer we waited the more, intense was the enemy's barrage, and, worst of all, he had directed the fire right on our unit. Every member turned ghastly pale, and was lying flat down on his stomach at the bottom of the rugged trench. The flashes from the enemy guns came across our trench like flashes of lightning. Shells were bursting right on the parapet, slowly breaking up the only bit of protection we possessed. The dirt was being hurled high in the air, and was coming down upon our backs like massive hailstones. The strain was hard to bear, for, with our faces turned to the sod, and not knowing what was happening about us, we felt that any second would end our lives, but God watched over us. Not one of our men suffered the smallest scratch. This lasted for one hour and about eight minutes; then our mighty instruments of war opened their challenge for the liberty of the nations. The roll of the cannon for twenty miles was like a continuous roll of many powerful drums. It gave us fresh hopes and brave hearts. The greatest battle had started, and it was twenty minutes past four. The enemy guns were silenced like the mouths of the lions in the

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den, and our boys went forward full of confidence, with the tanks assisting them to combat the enemy in the great battle of blood and iron. After a few yards of advance we came in contact with the enemy. Many of our men fell before our eyes, and many of the enemy were shot down. Bombs were hurled at us, and we retaliated. Our determination was growing, whilst the enemy was weakening in his resistance. The sights of the wounded and killed were awful. Men with long gashes in their heads, parts of their bodies torn off them, legs blown off, and arms with cuts. Their clothes were torn and hanging carelessly from their blood-stained bodies. The whole sight so disturbed the mind that the thought of being hit by shellfire was a foregone conclusion. The attention was devoted more to the field fighting. At this stage many Germans surrendered, and the prisoners captured had numbered some thousand or more. The advance extended, and more prisoners were captured on account of the weak resistance. Some of the enemy wounded were in a shocking condition, one in particular having his breast torn right off. He was suffering great pain, and we gave him water and a cigarette. The air had become so smoky that you could hardly detect your own men from the enemy, and our boys were now moving forward very cautiously, with bayonets flashing forward, and bodies in a forward attitude, just like you would see men out hunting for game. The enemy soon became disorganised, and commenced wandering about midst the smoky air. Hundreds gave themselves up rather than risk death, whilst their comrades were on the run back towards the Rhine. Our casualties up to date were very slight considering the class of battle, but the enemy suffered heavily in killed, wounded, and prisoners of war.

The second day of the big push was continued, as the enemy was now on the run. In the early part of the day we did not attack,

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so I had an opportunity to look around the captured area and recollect my thoughts a little. The German support and reserve lines were shattered to pieces. Dead Germans were everywhere lying about in very queer positions; some were half-buried with dirt. The ground had been ploughed up by the thousands of shells that must have fallen like rain. Old relics of war were lying everywhere, and the railway line was torn up and bent like fencing wire. Some of the rails were standing up ten to twelve feet in the air. At about eleven o'clock we took over the attack and pushed forward some five to six kilometres. The aeroplanes were very active, and the cavalry was coming into action. The whole of the army system was moving forward in conjunction with the advance, which gave credit to the general who organised the campaign. Some of our aeroplanes were brought down, and some of the enemy planes came down in flames. During the day field guns were captured, troop trains were captured, and hundreds of prisoners. We even captured German nurses. I believe the nurses said they wished to be taken prisoners so that they could care for the German wounded. Many souvenirs were collected, such as exchange switchboards, anti-tank guns, whiz-bangs, minenwerfer guns, watches, pipes, hats, field glasses, machine-guns, postcards, rings, wallets, and a number of minor items. We did not advance on the third day, and I was glad, because I had had a most awful night in the open; I could not sleep at all. The horrid visions of the past two days were haunting me, and I was glad when the sun rose. Whilst I was inspecting the captured villages of Weincourt and Goullancourt the battalion which had taken over the attack sent down a huge gun which they had captured. It was an 11.9 naval gun, and I was photographed with it. I spent the rest of the day watching air battles.

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On the fourth day we took over the attack again and pushed the enemy beyond a ridge on the other side of Harbonnières. A number of prisoners were captured, but the fighting was by no means severe, nor were the conditions so trying. The enemy gave us a nasty issue of gas, and I consider this saved a big advance on our part. When we stopped I viewed the battle area and saw many German troops mangled by our gigantic tanks. The fifth day we consolidated, but on the sixth day we attacked again, taking many prisoners and ground. I will continue the great battle in my next letter.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 75.

19th August, 1918.

Dear _____,

Our attacking still continues, but during the seventh, eighth and ninth days our captures were of a much higher class. A corps general has been captured, and many officers of high rank in the German army. We have come in contact with a field hospital of the German army. At the front is a huge red cross marked out on the ground. It must measure some forty or fifty feet square. This was done so that our airmen would not bomb it. Inside the hospital we found beds and numerous valuable surgical instruments, which went to prove that the enemy did not have time to evacuate in an orderly manner. Several other valuable war trophies have been collected. I discovered a complete wireless set in a deep dug-out, and after carrying it some two or three miles it was taken from me, and I was threatened by the officer for attempting to steal Government property. On the evening of the tenth day we were bombed by the enemy planes, but no casualties were inflicted. Night bombing seems to be very common just now. It appears that the enemy is only game to come out after the sun has set. The next day, early in the morning, we caught sight of a very queer-looking heap a little to our left. It aroused the curiosity of a number of boys, so several of the troops, including myself, ventured across the fields. We had only got within a hundred yards when we could smell the dead bodies, and the nearer we got to this heap of ruins the fouler the air became. Several of the boys turned for home as the odour was becoming too strong, but I suggested that we don our gas masks and go right up to it. The sight was as much as I could bear to look upon. First of all there was a train that had been conveying horses, troops and nurses belonging to the enemy. We surmised that this

WAR LETTERS.

train was bombed by our aircraft and caught fire. The horses, troops and nurses were roasted, or they had met some awful fate. Their bodies were black and in a shocking condition. I was very pleased to get back to my unit, but for days and days that picture kept coming before my eyes, and the smell would not leave my nostrils. A few yards from the scene was one of our aeroplanes, which had evidently crashed to the ground. Several dead Australians were lying about, and quite a number of Germans in a nearby trench. On the eleventh morning we consolidated near the ridge. We did not know where the enemy was nor did he know where we were. His planes were hovering round very early, but we concealed our position very well. We have not had a good night's sleep for quite a long time, and where we are is very open and cold at night. The little gully in which we call our home is full of crawling insects, and most numerous of all is a horrid looking bloodsucker, as we used to name them. These various insects crawl down your neck and up your arms, making it so uncomfortable that we cannot sleep. We seem to be advancing faster than the rear portion of the army: That is to say, the transports, etc. I know this by the falling off of our rations. We are getting a poor lot just now. It was noticed last night that enemy flares were dropping a good distance away, so a patrol party was sent out. After a very exciting tour around No Man's Land they discovered the enemy in hiding. This was reported on their arrival back to our trench. The morning brought us another attack, and we advanced our position five hundred yards and captured prisoners. Our front line was then very much improved, as we held a commanding position on the ridge overlooking the enemy trenches. A new type of attack has been introduced, and it is called a peaceful penetration. There is no artillery support. We simply march up in the broad daylight and capture the enemy

WAR LETTERS.

trenches. During one of these attacks we came in contact with four Germans who were sound asleep in their dug-outs. When we captured them we found no boots on their feet, and we were told that they had not had anything to eat for four days. They were glad to be prisoners. The position we now held overlooked all the ground that we had captured during the last few days, and for miles we could see what yet had to be captured. There were villages, woods, and much rough country before us. After we had taken possession of the ridge and firmly established ourselves, the battalion on our right attacked and we suffered a heavy barrage from the enemy. So persistent were they with their shooting that we were obliged to seek very close shelter. His planes assisted him greatly in direction until one was brought down in flames. This catastrophe seemed to put an end to a good deal of the trouble. During the day we strengthened our position and prepared for a further attack, but this was not proceeded with as satisfactorily as we expected on account of the numerous gas shells that were hurled at us; in fact, some of these shells came very close to us, causing us to wear our gas helmets. It was considered that the enemy was massing troops and that he might attack us on a very large scale. Before our eyes were many strongholds. Barbed wire entanglements and numerous strong-posts had been reported, and this made some of our boys believe that the eventful big push had come to a close. However, that night saw the transport very busy bringing up new supplies of ammunition. Ammunition was first, our rations were second. Right up till a late hour men were feeding us with bombs, cartridges, etc., and it gave a very grave appearance to all the good work we had done. Just as we entered the next day a terrific bombardment was sent over by the enemy. His shooting on this occasion was deadly accurate. Many of our troops were wounded;

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some were killed, while those who were fortunate enough to escape injury were deathlike in appearance. Their faces had become as white as death itself, and to speak seemed a very hard task. It was no later than two o'clock in the morning when the enemy sent over a very powerful raiding party. They reached our barbed wire and hurled bombs at us. I am led to believe that we gave no distress signal at all; in any case, our artillery made no attempt to silence the savage guns of the enemy. We just stood in our trenches like fools for several minutes, but like a flash of lightning the order came through to attack. Simultaneously our guns opened wildly at the roaring Huns, and we were after him like a hungry wolf after its prey. Several of the enemy were shot down before they could get away. Over two hundred were captured. The excitement had grown again, for the enemy now stood up to it. Our determination was too much for him — he gave way before our powerful onslaught. The enemy suffered very heavily in killed, for when we captured their strongposts there were dead seen lying about everywhere. Some of the men were of enormous size. His raid being such a failure has brought peace ever so much nearer.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 76.

5th September, 1918.

Dear _____,

I rose from my bed of mud this morning just like cows do. They lay out on the grassy fields in all kinds of weather, but we lay out on the shell-torn battlefields of France-blood ...stained for miles and miles and overrun with vermin that might be carrying all sorts of contamination. We eat, not ns human beings. but more like the giants one reads about in fairy tales. While all these thoughts were passing through my mind I gazed across the fields of battle. There was a silence that spoke in secrets as does the mighty ocean. Whilst at my side was my pal snoring as if enjoying the comforts of a newly made feather bed. I was wondering when our next attack would be and how long this sort Of thing was going to last. It appeared impossible for the men to go on much longer for they had had fourteen of the roughest days that one could possibly imagine, with life hanging, as it were, by the frailest thread. The strain upon every vital organ of the body was the greatest that I have ever been called upon to bear. The nerves, the muscles, the heart, everything appertaining to our human frames have been strained to their utmost. The question of vital importance is: can we go on? It is while I am trying to fathom the final episode of our great work that the massive instruments of war some twenty miles further along the sector are opening in one accord against the enemy. I should say they are the French guns. They must be the French guns, for the enemy does not possess the strength to open up such a powerful attack. My pal has lifted himself to listen to the roaring of the guns, and he speaks in a similar strain. "The froggies are peppering him up."

It appears that our authorities considered it an opportune time to snatch more ground. We attacked again and inflicted many

WAR LETTERS.

casualties on the enemy. We also took the guns from his outpost men, and took them prisoners; four hundred yards we captured and strengthened the position. At this period we were running short of telephone wire, so my pal and I were detailed to salvage as much as we could possibly get. We came in contact with several well directed bombardments, but managed to get a full reel of fairly good wire without being hurt. The following day a very strange thing happened. My pal and I were informed that the enemy had evacuated a very valuable position known as "Madame's Wood." This particular strong point was in the centre of a miniature forest: An ideal position, no doubt. Our duty was to run a wire to a certain point, which was to be known as company headquarters. Further, we were to open up communication with battalion headquarters. After receiving instructions we merrily went our way. In fact, we considered the journey so pleasant through the woods that we commenced to sing, "Australia Will Be There." Half-way along the track we rested, and had a smoke. Then we continued until we came to a deep communication trench. We had been told about this deep trench so we were perfectly satisfied that so far we were on the right road. Our next objective was to look out for three very prominent trees with limbs something like that of the crucifix. We saw these trees about three hundred yards ahead, so were positive that we were on the right road. It was near these trees that we were to establish company head-quarters. We had another rest. and a smoke, and a little round of "three blind mice," after which we laughed so heartily that we thought we might be heard in Berlin. It was this thought that moved us on a little. Then we commenced whistling a tune we used to hear in the camp, but we came to a sudden stop. My face went deadly cold, my heart seemed to stop beating, my throat seemed to have a great lump stuck in it. I could feel the

WAR LETTERS.

cold beads of perspiration all over my face. We were face to face with four huge Huns. They were just as nonplussed as I was. The reel of wire dropped to the ground of its own accord. My pal and I seized our rifles simultaneously. Like a flash from a cannon the Huns were off. We ceased our songs and merriment, and slowly crept back to a position where we could gain a little shelter. We agreed to send forth two bombs. They went! We listened! Three came back to us, and we sent over two more. Bombs came back freely, and we retaliated as fast as we could send them until our pockets were empty. For ten or twelve minutes we were crouched up in misery. Six of our own boys who were on a party fatigue bringing bombs joined us in the battle. More followed on with bombs, then our own officer came up with the whole company carrying bombs. We turned the bombing into an attack, and drove the enemy completely out of the woods. That night a very fierce artillery duel took place on our sector. In spite of this artillery duel I had to complete my duty by getting into touch with battalion headquarters. At a very early hour in the morning, after the battle had eased down, we were relieved by a Manchester battalion, and we walked several kilometres, then caught buses for a village called Daours.

The first day at Daours was spent in filling our stomachs and talking about the great battle. The spell, however, was indeed welcome, and one could notice a difference in the troops at once. Some of the delicacies we indulged in were fruit, cake, custard, porridge, biscuits from Australia and chocolate. On the second day we all had a bath, and got clean clothes. Oh! What a difference! All the whiskers were gone, all the dirt washed away. The criminal-looking men of two days ago looked just like office clerks. On the third day we had a good game of cricket and tennis. We wore our soft hats and they felt like feathers on our heads

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after the steel hats. During the day hundreds of poor French troops have come into Daours temporarily blind through mustard gas. The sight was very pitiful and created much comment amongst the boys. That night we moved suddenly from Daours for the trenches.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 76

12th September. 1918.

Dear _____,

It only seems a few years ago when we used to look forward, with great eagerness, to have a ride in the drags with four beautiful horses in front. Our sudden departure from Daours reminded one of this, but on this occasion it was an unexpected, disappointing journey in motor buses back to the trenches. We only had three days' spell, and the troops could come to no other conclusion than more attacks. It was evident that the higher authorities were determined to continue the successes that had been our lot ever since the great eighth of August and this was freely discussed throughout our journey that night. We arrived at our destination at about one o'clock in the morning, and every soldier I conversed with complained of being stiff in the limbs after the twenty-three kilometre ride over very rough roads. There was a drizzly rain falling which added to our misery, but when we were ordered to have a few hours' sleep out in the open, it made us feel that all our rest had gone for nothing. It would have probably been better to have kept us in the trenches, than send us to Daours to be tormented by the longing for a decent rest. The troops were done up, and in spite of the rain, they rested on the soaked battle ground.

At five o'clock in the morning we were on the march to the trenches, but after a three-kilometre walk we halted at a position near an old German dump. It was exceedingly strange that the Germans should leave behind such a store of ammunition as was stored up at this dump, and it aroused the curiosity of our officers, who moved a little away from it. Nearby the dump were many German dead bodies, and these bodies appeared in such queer order, that one could not think otherwise than it being a trap set

WAR LETTERS.

for our men. It is certain that the bodies had been placed there by German soldiers. The whole scene was set out to make us believe that during an attack the enemy was forced to leave the dump. It was not a surprise when orders came out warning the troops to keep clear of all dumps and objects likely to be traps set for us. After a walk of some four or five kilometres we took over the front line trenches. The occupation of these trenches by us must have been but an hour or so, for we left them and made off for the enemy. He stood to us and inflicted several casualties in our ranks, but after a determined struggle with bombs and machine guns we were able to snatch another five hundred yards of battle ground. He seemed to be annoyed at losing this ground, and during that evening he raided us, but I do not think any of them got back alive. It only doubled his trouble, for we decided to take another two hundred yards just to teach him not to play with cubs of the British lion. We succeeded in our endeavours. The men in front of us attempted to play a trick, by means of various signals, which brought about a severe bombardment on our trench. He gained nothing whatever by this, because we attacked again in a most determined manner, taking prisoners and capturing over two thousand yards of his trenches. He did not have time to sit down when we launched another attack and sent him further back to the Rhine. Another brigade passed us and took up the chase. We followed on, acting as a support for them in case of failure. The enemy at this stage was showing little points, such as setting traps for us and trying to make us believe things that were not. In every case his brainy efforts proved fruitless. He was showing signs of defeat.

Quite unexpectedly our guns opened up a most terrific bombardment on the enemy. Oh dear! I thought this would completely break his heart. Others thought there was to be a

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repetition of the eighth of August, but there was no attack whatever. The bombardment was a well-planned scheme that enabled us to cross very difficult positions without losing our men. It was to quieten the enemy guns while we crossed marshy ground. When I say marshy ground I mean a young sea. The water was in places up to our chests. Up to my chest, anyhow, but only up to the taller soldiers' hips. Right through this water there was high grass growing, and the travelling was most trying. It frightened me far more than the shells, and I thought I would never get through it. What with fear, coupled with exertion, I was knocked up before we got half the distance. It seemed to me as though we had gone miles and miles, instead of a few hundred yards. It sounds stupid to say I was perspiring, but I believe I was, in spite of being soaked to the skin. My face was all of a glow, and I could feel the perspiration on my lips and under my steel hat. Oh! Wasn't I glad when we reached the pier? There was no pier, but it seemed to me like reaching a pier after a very rough trip on the ocean. We came in contact with another miniature forest and I shook myself like a dog. The enemy was nowhere to be seen. I believe our guns frightened him. The officer said we had better have something to eat, and have a smoke. There were very few who had anything to eat. Those who had bread in their packs found it like sop, and nobody seemed to have matches, so we neither had breakfast nor a smoke. We moved forward again into the open, and before our eyes stood Mont St. Quentin. We rested that day in a trench, a few hundred yards before the village. During the spell we were told that Mont St. Quentin was our next task, and full details were given as to what line of attack we were to take. We all looked upon this battle as being something harder than the past. The high position the enemy held was a great advantage. Our handicap was the tiring effort of climbing the

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hills. We attacked early in the morning with the support of the artillery. The rain fell upon us, making the conditions very difficult. By four o'clock one of the bloodiest battles of the war was in progress. The fighting was most stubborn. Neither our men nor the enemy would give an inch, and in and out of the shallow trenches men were dropping, killed and wounded, almost as fast as you could count them. The battle raged all morning, and I could see some of our men with blood-stained faces, looking towards the enemy strongholds with their teeth clenched. Others were curled up in the various saps groaning with pain. It was close on midday before the fierce struggle eased off. We had failed miserably to gain the heights, but we did not lose one inch of ground. It was the loss of our brave men that stirred your Australian sons to anger. It was the flow of precious Australian blood down those muddy saps that caused your Australian sons to rally again. On this occasion Australia was there. Every particle of strength was mustered. We had sixteen men left at midday. They talk of the charge of the Light Brigade. Our attack in the morning was real war, with such determination that Australia should never be forgotten as heroes of a very high order. At half-past one, we were gathered together; sixteen of us, including an officer. He spoke to us about the importance of capturing Mont St. Quentin. He told us that our brothers from Australia were waiting the news of the capture. They were held at Péronne. They could not advance until we had captured the Mount, on top of which was the village, and it was while he was telling us this that I noticed a gutter of blood below our feet; blood of Australian soldiers. I cast my eyes carelessly along the sap to see the dead lying on top of one another. Germans and Australians were all bundled up in heaps, as it were, and as I looked further I saw the Mount that was to be captured. Later we were attached to another

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battalion, and our officer told us to stick. No sooner had he mentioned the word "stick" than he dropped at our feet, dead — a pellet from a shell had caught him in the throat. At two o'clock our guns pealed forth again. There was no "I beg your pardon" with their wild roar, and we moved towards the Mount. The battle regenerated and, bit by bit we forced the enemy from his strongholds. There was a great relief when we reached the village high on top of the Mount. The battle was very severe in the village. More of Australia's sons fell before our eyes, but with that determination to punish we stuck our ground, and cleaned up the village. Groans from all directions were now piercing my ears, and I was beginning to feel that I could not go on much further. I was staggering like a drunken man along the roadside. I was done! Just before the shattered gates of a huge chateau stooped over a wounded German as if to console myself. He showed me the whites of his eyes, but it was not real anger. He was dying. He was in great pain. I took from his pack a water bottle which contained hot coffee. I put it to his lips, but he feebly pushed it away, and moved his lips. He pointed to my mouth, so I drank some of the coffee. I was done! I took his hand and he screamed at me. He died, and as I went to raise myself a huge shell burst behind me which seemed to push me over him. I rose again, with four panniers of machine-gun bullets. I joined the sergeant the other side of the village. From this road we could see for miles, and little black specs were dodging here and there like black sheep in the meadows. They were German reinforcements coming at us in hundreds.

"Where are those bullets?" asked the sergeant.

"Here you are," I replied, and flung the first one to the ground.

"They're no good," he said, "They have a hole in them."

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I flung the next one from my shoulder.

"They're just as bad," he said.

At this moment I did not know what to do. The enemy was slowly creeping on, and I knew he wanted to mow them down.

"Turn round," he demanded, and he then commenced to tear my coat.

"Where is your field dressing?" he asked; but before I had time to recollect what had happened he was tying a bandage around my back.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 77.

15th September. 1918.

Dear _____,

You should be delighted to learn that I am in hospital. I will tell you the final stages of my experience at Mont St. Quentin. The sergeant who dressed my wound merely told me that I had a nasty knock in the back, and to get out as quickly as possible. I did so, and when I reached the spot where we commenced the battle I came across a German with his arm and chest torn. He was in great pain. I dressed his wounds as best I could and lifted him to his feet. Both of us then made for the dressing station. When we arrived there he asked me for a cigarette. I gave him one, and in return he gave me his photo and a German mark. The doctor looked at our wounds and told us to wait for the ambulance. During our wait this German told me that the men at Mont St. Quentin were all volunteers from the pick of the German armies, whose orders were to stem the advance of the Australians at all costs. There were men from the Prussian Guards, Wurtembergers, Westphalians, the Kaisers Pearl Troops, and Bavarians. He admitted that the Australians were far too good, and he made special mention of the determination displayed by our men. He thanked me for the kindness I had shown towards him and the care with which I handled his wounds. He further stated that he was sorry he ever volunteered to fight against such a group of men as the Australians, for up to date they had treated him as a gentleman.

The ambulance arrived and conveyed us to a clearing station, where our wounds were re-dressed. We then caught the ambulance train for Rauen. At Rouen we were parted, and the tears came to his eyes. I was sent to No. 5 General Hospital. During my short stay at No. 5, I received injections of some 250

WAR LETTERS.

to 500 units for anti-septic. The nurse who dressed my wound was not Australian. I fancy she was an American nurse. Whoever she was, she was exceedingly rough, and caused me much pain. I was glad when the medical officer marked me for England. Since Mont St. Quentin I have not slept too well. I am frightened to move about much in case I hurt myself, and each day the wound seems to be getting worse. The pain is increasing, and my arm is all swollen and inflamed. We journeyed from Rouen to Havre in a hospital train, then caught a boat for England. The treatment the wounded received on that boat was shocking. I saw men with their arms in splints and men on crutches fighting desperately for a drink of tea and a hard biscuit. They were falling over with exhaustion. In fact, blood was brought on some of the troops in their struggle for a drink. After a cruel journey on the boat we landed at Southampton, where we caught the train for Birmingham, passing through Basingstoke, Reading, etc. I was admitted into Monyhull Military Hospital, E Block, Ward I. suffering from a gun-shot wound in the shoulder. The routine of this hospital was totally different from that of Bethnel Green. Probably the wound had a good deal to do with it. At Bethnel Green the doctor made no attempt to examine me for two or three days, whereas at Birmingham I was ordered to have a hot bath and go straight to bed, where I was thoroughly examined and my wound re-dressed. After this operation my temperature was taken, and I received another injection of 250 units. I slept fairly well the first night, and it was extremely difficult to realise that I was in England when awakened very early for a wash, and a cup of tea. Later, one of the sisters extracted two pieces of shrapnel from my back and re-dressed the wound. Her gentle touch and soothing words took my mind right off what was happening, and it was not until she told me of what had happened that I started to imagine

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of German iron under my skin. This gave room for further imagination as to what the wound really looked like, and, being very weak in this direction, I began to feel a little dizzy for the first time. A few hours later the medical officer informed the sister that I would have to undergo an X-ray photograph for the purpose of trying to locate where the piece of 5.9 shell had buried itself. According to my card the X-ray photographer was given instructions to photograph the upper portion of my right side. This led me to believe that the piece of shell had entered my back near the right shoulder-blade and drifted to a position underneath the right arm. Until I heard the result of this photograph I was very uneasy. The report read:— Can not locate any fracture or piece of shell in right shoulder. When the doctor saw this, he exclaimed: "The ass has photographed the wrong place." After several questions, it was definitely announced by the medical officer that no piece of shell is in the body, and that I could be removed to a V.A.D. hospital. That means Voluntary Aid Department. For two or three days I remained at Birmingham, and had a real good look around the city. On all the trams I travelled free; in fact, I was admitted to a picture show free of charge, but after the show I became very hungry, and bought a hot pie for sixpence. I did not care about carrying this pie back to the hospital, so ate it right there and then. People in the trams and in motors were laughing at me; passers-by were laughing and commenting on my act, and it suddenly dawned on me that I was eating a hot pie in one of the busiest thoroughfares of a city with a larger population than either Sydney or Melbourne. Can you imagine yourself eating a hot pie on the block of a Saturday morning? Well then, it was something as disastrous as that, in my estimation, and I could feel the color come to my face. It is wonderful how soldiers pal up with one another during the various stages of a military career during

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wartime. For instance. I have come in contact with a person who has automatically become my pal-my hospital pal-and we are to be removed to a place called Rugby together, but his parting from Birmingham will be much harder than mine on account of a little love affair 'twixt him and a nurse. I really believe the nurse has fallen in love with him, too, for he receives warmer water to wash with early in the morning than I do, but he helps her make the beds, and maybe she is giving him a bit of "soft soap." We met her in one of the streets of Birmingham, but she would not say any more than, "Good afternoon," then walk away from us. At first I thought I was standing in the way of a probable match, but we discovered that the nurses are not permitted to talk or walk with privates in the streets, As we left Birmingham for Rugby I heard my pal say, "I'll write to you, Maud." It so startled me that I turned quickly and, behold! I saw my pal with a tear in his eye and, furthermore, the little nurse was not far short of a cry. Oh, yes! Another bride for Australia; nothing could convince me otherwise. We were walking cases, and as we neared the gates of Monyhull Hospital my pal threw a kiss, but I fancy it went high, and caught a Medical Officer on the lips instead of Maud. He did not appear very pleased.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 78.

30th. September, 1918.

Dear _____,

When we arrived at Rugby I got a big shock. An elderly lady greeted us in such a manner that made me feel I was a gentleman instead of a soldier. How wonderful it is to have a few kind words spoken to you after months of hell in France. Those few words touched the tenderest spots of all the Australians aboard the train. We were the first Australian soldiers to be under this lady's care, and she felt proud to have us. It was this genuine feeling so displayed in the very eyes of our matron that calmed the roughest character amongst us. We were not driven in ambulances, but privately owned touring cars, to our home in Rugby, and on arrival we received the heartiest of welcomes from all the nurses, then a real good tea. The first impression was a real good one, and created much comment by the boys as they undressed for bed that night.

The following morning there was another great surprise for us. White table cloths were before our eyes. A tempting plate of ham, and mustard already mixed! The whole table was set out just like it is at home, which made it all the more enjoyable. At the end of the meal the matron made her appearance, and it reminded me very much of an angel appearing before a mass of pirates or some other unlawful gang of roughs. She tapped gently on the table, and then asked the men to stand whilst she said grace. This incident appeared all the more touching on account of the vast contrast between soldiers from a battlefield and a woman full of gentleness. At the termination of the offering the troops simultaneously joined in the "Amen!"

During the course of the morning our wounds were dressed, after which we were allowed to visit the township of Rugby. For

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dinner we had roast beef, potatoes, and cabbage. Treacle pudding followed, and most of the troops thought it so nice that they called for a repeater; and, furthermore, they sang grace as an appreciation of the good things that had fallen their way.

In the afternoon I visited the township again, and enjoyed a good lie out on the grass in the park. For tea we had rice pudding in milk, and as much bread and butter as we desired, and so the first day's routine had passed away.

As the days wore on; so the troops became more acquainted with the hospital routine and the township. In fact, many of the troops had made friends, some sweethearts. And that was not very hard to do, for the flappers, as they are called, simply love the Diggers. He possesses that jolly manner that is so attractive. He can tell such a story of thrills about sunny Australia, without exhibiting the slightest suspicion of an untruth. Such stories as, "Uncle owning Tasmania," and "wild alligators running about in the streets of the big towns"; "hunting rabbits away whilst the traps are set," and "goanna farms." etc., etc., formed some of the thrilling stories. On the other hand, Australia was made so attractive that the flappers were grasping at every opportunity which might enable them to see the wonderful country south of the Equator. It was therefore a simple matter to gain the friendship of a Rugby girl. Oh, yes; I was invited to tea, and introduced to Pa as the intended husband: Nothing backward about the Rugby girl who wished to see Australia. On Sunday I went to church, but I was not introduced to the reverend gentleman. My friendship became so close that I thought it time to relax a little, and for this purpose I joined the bachelor section of the inflicted gang. My first outing with the boys was made to the "Empire Picture Palace," where we were able to secure admittance free. The pictures were indeed good, and the boys

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were in the highest spirits; but one picture seemed to come to an abrupt finish — rather too abrupt — for it created much Australian comment, such as:

"Put another penny in."

"What are we here for?"

"Will they ever come?"

There was a light on the screen. Then the words appeared roughly on the white calico:

"BULGARIA HAS SURRENDERED
UNCONDITIONALLY"

The roars were deafening. Cheering lasted for some considerable time, and it only died down to allow a certain section of the audience to join in "Australia Will Be There" — not in Bulgaria, I thought to myself, but in our own dear land.

I am expecting to hear similar news from Turkey at any time. Peace seems certain this year. I feel confident in stating that I will never see France again, and that this terrible war will end within the next two months.

My next outing was made with a group of wounded Australians to the firm of The British Houston, Thompson Co., electrical engineers. We received a very hearty welcome by the various superintendents, and were introduced to tour guides, who were detailed to show us through the works. The first thing that impressed me was the tidiness of the place. Although some six or seven thousands are employed there, there seems to be a smartness about the place that would lead one to believe that it was a private dwelling place, rather than a huge industrial piece of man's brains. Lawns surrounded the outer portions of the huge structure that comprised the factory. Plants were growing here and there, and a beautiful bandstand, situated, as it were, in the midst of a garden of freshness, told the on looker that the man

WAR LETTERS.

behind the whole affair was giving his best for those who toiled between the walls of the building. The inside of the building reminded me more of a retail store, such as universal providers. Everything was in order, and the tracks which led to the various departments of manufacture were marked out by means of a thick white line. My attention was greatly taken up by the employees — the happy faces and the joy they found

in their work. There did not seem to be one who was unhappy, and this led me to make a few inquiries into the conditions under which they work. One of the guides told me that various sports are provided for the employees. They have special dining rooms, and waitresses are employed to give the best that can be had. The works possess their own fire brigade, and we had the pleasure of watching them at practice. After closely inspecting every department, I had a short talk with the manager, and he gave me to understand that it was all-important to study the employees in every possible way. Just as a housewife keeps her crockery clean and in order, so the manager of this massive industry keeps his employees in the pink of condition and happy. He considers his employees as an asset in the industry — not mere slaves that have to be driven. He considers that the road must be clear for easy running, rather than have his material all over the place. We were invited to have afternoon tea, and so we were all pleased with our outing.

Yours, _____

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 79.

10th October, 1918.

Dear _____,

There is no doubt about it — the English people have been very good to the Australian troops. Quite a number of them have been frequently dining out, and spending week-ends with friends, and on every occasion the English people are spoken of very highly. We all understand just at the moment that it is most difficult to procure food, and this makes it most difficult to entertain. I mean, that if you are invited to a home, one of the first things is the stomach; singing, reciting and dancing are mere side-shows compared with a good feed, especially for a soldier. But, as I have stated in other letters, the Australian can always tell an amusing story of his home life.

Last Saturday afternoon a number of the boys were invited to a small village just outside Rugby, named Clifton. The walk was very nice, but nothing to be compared with the actual entertaining of the squire, who took extra special care not to miss anything of importance connected with, the ancient village. In the first place, he took us all round the grounds. What I mean by the grounds are the church graveyard, and a small drain, which was a battlefield. Oh, yes; the squire thought it was just lovely telling the troops all about the battle of Naseby, which was supposed to have been fought in this drain. He told us that one of the soldiers, after being killed, sent his heart home to his people as a proof that he was dead: Quite a wonderful thing to do — even more wonderful than wireless. He also told us of two holes — one in the body of the church, and another in the side of a dead horse, in the hole in the body of the church. The particular horse was ridden by Cromwell during the fierce battle. The hole, which was in a very conspicuous place in the horse, we were told, was caused by a

WAR LETTERS.

bullet from the enemy of the wonderful Cromwell. In spite of some of the impossibilities told to the troops by the squire, we all found him very interesting. One story, in particular, connected with the habits of the people during the early years of the British race interested us to a very great degree. It was referring to the Sabbath day, in which many of the male folk, and perhaps women of a more masculine nature, finished the service held in the ancient chapel by indulging in several or more glasses of intoxicating liquor, sold by the proprietor of the "Cock and Bear" inn, which is situated directly opposite the House of the Lord. After the sporting class of the congregation had drowned the effects of a solemn sermon with old-time beer, a very exciting fight would take place, either between two cocks or two bears — more often two bears. The squire pointed to a certain spot on the roadside, which was the actual place where these fights took place. I gazed musingly at that spot for several moments, half in disgust, and half in imagination.

I tried to picture the masses with prayer books under their arms, and eyes that you could knock out with the frailest twig from the nearby shrubs. I could picture the stupid grin upon each face as these poor creatures tore at one another, with blood oozing from their wounds. I could see the vitality slowly leaving each competitor as the fight progressed, and at last, before the drunken eyes of supposed Christians, one poor animal or bird was killed. And to their homes these old-time English people would go, chattering by the wayside as to which bird or animal was the better breed — while the clergyman went his way meaning well.

The old squire believed that the Australian soldiers were very fond of sport, so he permitted them to hold a few races in his own grounds, but I fancy he was sorry afterwards on account of the way the grass was cut up. He showed us a statue of a famous dog

WAR LETTERS.

owned by one of his ancestors. At tea time we were taken to a hall at the extreme end of the village, and it amazed us all, when we saw the wonderful spread on snow-white tablecloths. Who would have thought that Britain was short of food? Who would have thought that ration books were being issued to the people?

We had a most wonderful tea. Not one soldier could truthfully say he was sorry he came. After tea we were entertained in the most classical manner. First-class artists were engaged from one of the adjoining towns, in addition to a captain and his wife from one of the leading English regiments. One of the artists sang the "Rosary" in French; another artist sang "Roses of Picardy," which brought the two walls of the building together almost. The English captain was a very fine singer, and a very fitting artist at this special function: It was late when we arrived back to the hospital, but the matron excused us for being late, although we never had notes from our mothers; nor did we have a bunch of flowers to offer as a soother, like we used to do at school. The hospital life reminds me very much of school days. We have to be in by seven. We have to be in bed by 9 p.m. They even make sure we have washed our ears and cleaned our boots before we leave for the township. The only difference from school days is our whiskers. When one begins to realise that the nurses have done all in their power to make one feel fit and well again, there is always that longing to have fourteen days' furlough, which the military authorities grant after a stay in any hospital. It is at this period that the strictness of hospital life begins to bore you, but we do not give thoughts to those who are suffering the pains of the battlefields. It appears to be the soldier's lot to be always complaining. From the time they leave Australian shores they are constantly finding out something that is not quite pleasing. It would be well for those who are in camps to

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permit their thoughts to fly, just for a few seconds, to France. They should see the dying on the battlefields and listen to the groans of the suffering. They should see the gutters of blood and hear the roaring guns and whistling bullets. Then they might cry out: "Make us truly thankful . . ." It is like these things in civil life. Many complain of their lots, but they do not look to others who are suffering ten times the hardships, and they do not cry out: "Make us truly thankful...."

Yours _____,

WAR LETTERS.

Letter No. 80.

29th October. 1918.

Dear _____,

Furlough is one of the joys that a soldier is always prepared to partake of. He will go to no end of bother to gain it, and when he has it he does not know what to do to make the best of it. I am now on my furlough, with such a big programme to go through that I think it will go too quickly. After being discharged from the Rugby V.A.D. hospital. I had to report at our headquarters in Horseferry Road, for the purpose of obtaining my pay, clothes and pass. This ordeal took some three or four hours, and many of the troops were complaining about the loss of time, as their furlough leave was slowly being eaten away by the cold-footers, as they termed them at Horseferry Road. At any rate, I had to sacrifice the first night by seeking a bed at the War Chest Club instead of going to a friend's place at Wimbledon. I could not sleep that night on account of the continuous flow of men down the alley ways which led to the various lines of beds. Some of the all-night roamers went as far as to ask for money. "On the rocks," they used to say, but the old soldiers soon woke up to the fact that these men were only loafers of the A.I.F., living on the good-hearted chaps who were doing the rough in France while these men did the grand in the Strand and Oxford Street. Some nice tales have been told about these men. I believe some of them have bought V.C. medals in Petticoat Lane and dressed as majors and colonels, and have the nerve to walk the busiest thoroughfares of London, demanding salutes from probably the ones they borrowed a "bob" from a few nights before. Some of them have told us that they have never seen France, and never will. Their minds were made up not to see France long before they left Australian shores. One of the A.I.F. men told me that he

WAR LETTERS.

possessed a complaint that he could handle at will, which he knew of in Australia. It was his desire to make money at "two-up" or some other form of gambling. Up to date he has not seen France, and at this stage of the war he is not likely to see France, for I am expecting to hear news from the fighting zone that the Germans have surrendered at any time. It is almost certain that I will not see France again: for the end is not far off.

The first few days of my leave were spent at Clapham Junction. I used to love the parks and see the swans with their graceful necks. I remember one day, I was sitting on a seat with another Australian soldier, admiring the swans, when two bright looking young damsels sat beside us. Being Colonial soldiers, we naturally thought they were flappers out for a mash, so we introduced ourselves by means of a topic on the beautiful gardens and the lovely swans.

"Yes, they are," said one, and she unconsciously moved nearer to us, while the other one appeared to rather ignore our friendship. But you might notice this in many cases of mashing. There seems to be a stiff sort of companion. However, this did not interfere by any means with our progress; nevertheless it seemed as though I were going to be the one who had to entertain the stiffy.

"Where do you live?" asked my friend, and I noticed that her companion flashed her eyes about with great meaning.

"Oh, we live at Battersea."

Another sudden flash came from the eyes of the solemn creature at the end of the seat.

"Would you like to come to the pictures with me to-night?" asked my friend.

WAR LETTERS.

I won't allow you to talk to my daughter of going to pictures," chimed in the quiet one, and you can hardly believe the difference there seemed to be in that glorious park.

"Good-bye! I'm sorry!"

I got tired of Clapham. It seemed to alter suddenly, so I made for West Barnes. At West Barnes station there was something in the atmosphere that reminded me of home. Whether the old railway gates had something to do with it, or whether it was the open appearance of the district, I cannot say. However, it was indeed pleasant and surprising to see stretches of ground not built on and yet so near big London. West Barnes is not very far from the famous Wimbledon, where our great tennis players contest noted players from all parts of the world.

Without any difficulty whatever I found the avenue that I was looking for, and then the house. There was a silence about the place, just like some outer suburban home during a mid-week day. I knocked, and the door was opened by a young woman who wore a smiling face.

"Come inside," she said, and, believe me, she nearly kissed me. Some people in England have been deeply touched by this war, and any soldier is highly appreciated, especially after being wounded, and back once more to health and strength. I did not know what to say at first. I know it was useless talking war, because it was a subject that most people would sooner not indulge in.

"Are you quite well again?" asked my friend, and with that smile still upon her face. I could say nothing else but "Yes!"

"My husband is not home from work yet, and I am peeling the potatoes. You know, we practically live on lettuce and potatoes. It seems to be the national food. Oh! I will be glad when this horrid war is over." There seemed to be a doubt about my

WAR LETTERS.

movements. I felt that what my friend had said had rooted itself right at the very vital strings of my nervous system. "Are you cold?" she asked. "No, I am not cold," I replied.

"You must be cold," she continued. "You are shivering."

"It is not that I am shivering, Mrs._____, it is my nerves."

In spite of my remark there was soon a beautiful fire cracking away its good old homely melody. Mrs._____ left me to my solitude. The fire grew stronger and stronger, and the room became warmer and warmer. The red reflection from those soothing flames added a double warmth to the red table-cloth on the table. There was a silence, which permitted the clock to send forth its tick-tock, tick-tock. The pictures on the walls seemed to come forward and speak to me. I was in a real home, and it did seem like heaven. There was not even a gust of wind blowing down the chimney to remind me of the blasting guns of France. There was not the rolling of motor wheels to remind me of the busy transport. There were no horrid blow-flies to remind me of enemy planes. No! I was home in England by the fireside.

I enjoyed Mr._____'s company. He came in and took my hand as if it was half-a-pound of meat — part of the week's rations — but he shook it so wildly that I thought he had had a few on the way home. But, no! He is a teetotaller, and was jolly glad to meet me — more so than his wife.

"Come on now, have some of our home-grown spuds and lettuce!" Mrs._____ prepared these spuds and lettuce very nicely, and I enjoyed them just as well as I would have done turkey. After tea Mr._____ took me to a lecture on "Kitchener and His Army." It was very good indeed. Afterwards we both called in to see a newly married couple. The husband is 78 years old and the wife 22. They have a daughter 46 years of age, and she calls her mother Josie. Josie has got to do what her daughter

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tells her, and it was lucky for me that the daughter fancied a nice cup of cocoa. The husband gave me a cigar. We had several songs, etc., and I went home to sleep on a feather bed, between two white sheets.

Yours, _____

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Letter No. 81.

11th November, 1918.

Dear _____,

At eleven o'clock this morning "THE ARMISTICE WAS SIGNED." That means — The war is over. By the time you receive this letter all the excitement will have died down. But we must all remember that there will be more excitement yet. When the boys come home some hearts will be joyful; then again, there are some sixty thousand who will not return, and there will be sad hearts. We must never forget them — those who fell on the fields of battle! It is all the more emotional to me and others who were actually in the fighting, for we heard their pitiful groans, and realised their sufferings, but there were times when it was not wise to permit aid for them. This indeed makes the suffering ever so much greater.

I do not know what my movements are going to be just now, but I am boarding at a first-class country residence known as No. 4 Command Depot, Hurdcott, Salisbury Plains, and am having a very easy time.

We received the news of the Armistice through the early edition of one of the evening papers named "The Evening News." Some of the headings read as follows:— "Kaiser and Crown Prince Flee to Holland." "Foch May Give Huns a Time Extension." The last of the war news which appeared in the stop-press read:— "G.H.Q., Monday, 10.19 a.m. Shortly before dawn this morning Canadian troops of the First Army (General Horne) captured Mons." The message of the Armistice came through thus:—"Radio 3084 and E.Q.E.2. No. 11386, received Armistice was signed at 5 o'clock in the morning (French time). It comes into force at 11 o'clock in the morning (French time)." When the news first came through the troops in this camp went mad. They

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broke into the canteens and helped themselves to the beer, then rolled the empty barrels down the road. They raided the detention rooms, and set the prisoners free. Cars were commandeered and driven to Salisbury, and even London. I will have to finish this letter later; as orders have come through that we are to move to O.T.B. (Overseas Training Battalion) at Warminster.

It is now the 1st December. 1918. We left Hurdcott and walked to Wilton, where we caught the train which passed through Wishford, Wylie, and Codford. It was the Great Western Railway, and before I entered the train I bought a cake for 1/2. It was about seven inches long, three and a half inches wide, and about three inches thick. It was not properly cooked, but I was glad in one way. It enabled me to eat it from my pocket without making a lot of crumbs. By squeezing the cake you could make it like putty, which was very convenient. On Sunday morning I was looking forward to a real good rest, but I had to go and help unload a truck of coke. Some of the troops cannot believe the war is over, while quite a number dream at night that they are at the front. You see, the business is so much on their minds that it is hard to realise it is all over.

I have had a waiter's job in one of the mess huts, and it is surprising the food that is left over after each meal, yet the troops are always complaining that they do not get enough to eat. I asked where all the waste food goes to, and I was told that it is washed and given to the pigs. Washed, mind you; so what must it be like for us — or are we the pigs?

Some of the Y.M.C.A. concerts are very amusing; I went to one the other night and thoroughly enjoyed it. Not that the remarks from the audience were tactful, but because they were taken in good part by the artists. The first item was a dance, and the boys at the rear could only see the girls' head.

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"Jump higher! Can't see yer Dutch pegs." shouted one.

Another artist gave us an entertaining five minutes on Dickens' characters. He was illustrating a father nursing a sick child. One of the troops from the rear called out. "Give it a No. 9." No. 9 is a pill given to the troops as a medicine, and is as popular as castor oil or iodine.

I have made several visits to a nearby village named Langridge Deverill. It is a very small place with scattered houses. The weather is so cold now, and sometimes we have some fairly heavy snow-storms that I do not go out. I have been waiting for a mail from Australia, so have delayed this letter for some days — .it is now 5th January, 1919. For Xmas dinner we had turkey and ham, and I have since had four days' leave. I went to Rugby. My name is on the roll for home, and that is positively the sweetest news that I can tell you.

Yours, _____

THE END

