

Letters associated with Capt Gearld Evans MC, MiD, 8th Battalion regarding Thomas Usherwood

Redcamp
Nov 18th 1915

Dearist little Jumbuck(?)

There is'nt much news since I wrote last and I suppose this will arrive just in time for the New Year. I do trust it will be a happy one for you & that this horrid war will be over & you will just got to England & have a good time. It would be glorious then. I had a letter from Florence Polson last night, she say she is going to write to you & her brother is fighting in France in the 19th Artillery Division, but is now in England on furlough. Florrie seems to think her husband will go after Christmas. She says she would not stop him but she think the single me should go first, but I don't see why they should if the married can afford to leave their wives and children.

Katie drove Nona & Doris into Wangaratta. I had to writ to Mrs Campbell to ask if Nona could stay longer. I got a nice letter from her & she said Attie (Alec Campbell?) you were as lively as a cricket after you left Fremantle.

We are sending you a rabbis skin waterproof vest as they are better than sheep skin. I think it will go by this mail. We are also sending Bill Usherwood a sheep skin vest.

On Tuesday, Nona had to go home on Wednesday & hated going, she says she is coming back as soon as they come from King Island in the beginning of the year. Allent(?) was very sad when they left. We went for the picnic last Sunday to the Fifteen mile. There was only one accident, Doris bucked Harry off the three Handcocks(?) were chasing hime with water and her got on Doris to get away from them & was stooping down to dodge the water when Doris bucked but he was not hurt although he just missed a tred. Dot got Harry off Doris while she was in the wars. Kathie went into the Notcutts for working(?) for that day but didn't like Maude here manner is too abrupt, she & Tone(?) got a shock when they saw Dot's case(?) strapped(?). Tone just walked about and clapped his hands.

Evan came back with Katie on Tuesday, he looks well but has to use crutches & rest for a while – one leg isn't healed & I had a letter from Ken, he says he supposed we would want him home soon to keep the rabbits from the door. He says it is the limit selling in the black dust over there, it sounds as though he were getting tired of it.

Ian Whitty & Wilfred & Jack Evans are going this week I believe there lots(?) going. I hope the will, poor Mrs Mick is in a stat I think she has to go to town now to see Ken off.

We finished sheering last Monday without any hitches except Toni Whalley having to because he was careless. It didn't rain at all but looks like it now & it would do good. We haven't hear from Bill Usherwood since he was on Gallipoli. I habe he got over safely when the transport was torpedoed.

Mother sends all her love to her baby. She and Evan are just pouring(?) for a drive.

Goodluck

Your loving sister

Minnie (older sister of Gearld Evans)

Sgt T. (Tom) W. (Bill) Usherwood, 23rd Battalion, died 4/8/1916 – no known grave

New Gerald 29/11/1915

Zeitoun

Egypt

Nov 29 1915

My dear Mother

Since writing to Minnie I have received two letters from her, both of which were written before one I received previously, I suppose they all cam on the same boat.

The boat that Bill Usherwood went across in was torpedoed but only a few men were lost. There are three officers with us now, who were on the boat, the men behaved wonderfully and the ships stokers & engineers rushed the boats. The captain shot several of them. Lieut Pierce (?) who went through the same school of instruction as I did called for vulunteers & went down & kept the engines going & they managed to beach the boat & saved a lot of lives. Piece was mentioned in the report & promoted to 1st Lieutenant.

I enquired about Frank Ridgway & Bill Usherwood at the record office, they are alright so far.

Bill must have had a bit of scraping to buy those scarves as the privated don't get much pay over here.

I went out to the Races at the Greywich(?) Sporting Club yesterday, it is a beautiful place with Golf links, Polo ground, tennis courts & everything complete, an ideal place for picnic races. The horses are also Arabs & Barbs(?), they cannot go very fast, but the racing was interesting, they have the totlisator & it is quite strange not to hear the Bookmakers.

I saw young Carmichael from Greta at the races. He was in the 8th L.H. that were cut up so badly, only 58 left out of 400 odd (sic. This was the charge on the Nek on Gallipoli, 8th August 1915). Carmichael was in the first line but was not touched. He got enteric fever after and is now in the pay office in Cairo.

It is quite possible that I will be here some time as I believe they are going to send the men away without us, & Lord knows how long we will be here.

I think we are going up to the Barrage the dam across the Nile where they work all this irrigation scheme from. It should be interesting.

It is not much use asking question in the letters as one cannot get an answer for a couple of months, but I hope they will write plenty of letters & tell me all the news. I have been very lucky so far & have the record here easily.

Love to all

Your loving son

Gerald

"new gerald 23/5/1916"



Tuesday
23rd May 1916

Dear Father

As one of our fellows is going to England on leave tonight, I am going to write a note for him to post –

We have been in the trenches for a while & it is not bad fun, but we have been having a fairly quiet time, although the Bombs are a bit sudden, while writing the Hun is shelling a building just behind our lines & raising enough dust for a few thousand sheep on a road.

There has been a lot of mail lately but did not get any from home. Although I got some others. I am unlucky with home letters, the last was 10th Feb, so don't know much of what is going on.

The hours are pretty long here & one has to get his sleep in patches, the nights are very short which makes it better for this game.

We have had a lot of Australian papers lately up to the end of March. I see one of Mr Whitty's rejects was good enough to win the Australian cup, he must have a good team ---

Are they doing anything with the Redcamp thoroughbeds?

There is plenty of grass about these trenches but it would be risky for running cows in. You see very little signs of the enemy. I had a couple of shots at one yesterday morning but think I missed him. I was very proud of shooting down one of their wind guages. We have a great assortment of these as the gas question depends on the wind, of course. The weather is great now but it was wet over the first few days.

I have not seen Bill Usherwood since coming to France. It is had to get about here & when they are in the trenches we are out (of contact?).

I got a reader(?) from Minnie with views of Hunchback.

Will stop now with love to all
Your loving son
Gerald Evans

*Written from the trenches near Fromelles.
8th Battalions first stint in the trenches. Gen
Birdwood inspected the trenches on 19/4/1916*

new Letter from Bill Usherwood (Gerald Friend), 27/7/1916 – after Poziers

27/1/1916

To who? Probably to Gerald Evan's brother Evan? (Bill Usherwood lived in Myrree and was a good friend of both Gerald and Evan Evans).

..... Thomas (*Bill*) Usherwood talking about the battle of Pozieres and Gerald role in it.

As I said before he had just come out of the warmest corner in this part of the globe, and consequently was somewhat dirty & unshaven and a bit ragged and he hadn't had a sleep for several days. Do you realise what that means? In case you don't fully, I'll give you an idea in a few words. It means that he has been with his men playing a big part in the biggest game being played in the world today, with the result that his company took & held the most advanced position we hold in our line today and the fact that I saw him tired & dirt is clear proof that he wasn't only showing his men how to play the game but was helping them to play it and it takes a man to do that, a Gentleman and a sportsman, and when we get them for leaders, the rank and file won't fail and the result of the game is never in doubt. Unfortunately we get too few such.

You have reason to be very proud of your representative from Redcamp. I have told you this before but you have more reason than ever now. So put on a bit of swank (as the froggies say) every one of you and don't forget that when Ken gets over here he'll play his part as well.

Gerald is perfectly sane in mind and sound in body and limb, so there can not very well be much the matter with him, can there? So and there isn't either, he got a smack on the ribs which made them sore for a day or two, but he wasn't wounded, not even slightly. So don't go asking him a lot of questions about his rib because he may take it the wrong way and resent even you referring to him in such terms. Really though, I have told you the whole truth, and excepting the clout on the rib which was a bit sore, he came out without a scratch.

He isn't likely to be in again for a good while now. I think, as they'll have to have a spell and reorganise. Now I think I have given you all the information that I am possessed of concerning that notorious Big Brother of yours, so I conclude now by saying that if the opportunity offers, I'll cable your father to let you all know that Gerald is ok.

Bestwishes to all
Sincerely yours JWU
(Bill Usherwood).

Sgt T. (Tom) W. (Bill) Usherwood, 23rd Battalion, died 4/8/1916 – no known grave



Thomas USHERWOOD

Regimental number	263
Place of birth	Hay, New South Wales
School	Hay Public School, New South Wales
Religion	Church of England
Occupation	Labourer
Address	Red Camp, Moyhu, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Age at embarkation	29
Next of kin	Mrs Usherwood, Mossgiel, New South Wales
Enlistment date	13 February 1915
Rank on enlistment	Private
Unit name	23rd Battalion, A Company
AWM Embarkation Roll number	23/40/1
Embarkation details	Unit embarked from Melbourne, Victoria, on board HMAT A14 <i>Euripides</i> on 10 May 1915
Rank from Nominal Roll	Sergeant
Unit from Nominal Roll	33rd Battalion
Fate	Killed in Action 4 August 1916
Place of death or wounding	Poizieres, Somme Sector, France
Age at death	25
Place of burial	No known grave
Commemoration details	<p>Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, France Villers-Bretonneux is a village about 15 km east of Amiens. The Memorial stands on the high ground ('Hill 104') behind the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, Fouilloy, which is about 2 km north of Villers-Bretonneux on the east side of the road to Fouilloy.</p> <p>The Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux is approached through the Military Cemetery, at the end of which is an open grass lawn which leads into a three-sided court. The two pavilions on the left and right are linked by the north and south walls to the back (east) wall, from which rises the focal point of the Memorial, a 105 foot tall tower, of fine ashlar. A staircase leads to an observation platform, 64 feet above the ground, from which further staircases lead to an observation room. This room contains a circular stone tablet with bronze pointers indicating the Somme villages whose names have become synonymous with battles of the Great War; other battle fields in France and Belgium in which Australians fought; and far beyond, Gallipoli and Canberra.</p> <p>On the three walls, which are faced with Portland stone, are the names of 10,885 Australians who were killed in France and who have no known grave. The 'blocking course' above them bears the names of the Australian Battle Honours.</p> <p>After the war an appeal in Australia raised £22,700, of which £12,500 came from Victorian school children, with the request that the majority of the funds be used to build a new school in Villers-Bretonneux. The boys' school opened in May 1927, and contains an inscription stating that the school was the gift of Victorian schoolchildren, twelve hundred of whose fathers are buried in the Villers-Bretonneux cemetery, with the names of many more recorded on the Memorial. Villers-Bretonneux is now twinned with Robinvale, Victoria, which has in its main square a memorial to the links between the two towns.</p>
Panel number, Roll of Honour, Australian War Memorial	100
Miscellaneous information from cemetery records	Parents: Thomas and Annie Clifford USHERWOOD, Mossgill, New South Wales

"cgerald 31/7/1916"

France

July 31st 1916

My dear Mother -

I have not written for some time as we have been rather busy & have not had an opportunity - but I was lucky enough to get out of it with a slight crack on the ribs & did not leave the Company.

I have been well off for letters, have had several from home & plenty of papers so I have not done badly - I just heard there was a mail closing for Australia inside and hour so I have not much time . My last letter from Australia was dated June 18th.

Charlie M^cCardel came through the stunt alright but young Wilcox and Goodland did not - Alec Campbell got a nasty crack but is getting along well. I will cable you at the first. Have you come back from Killingworth?

I am trying hard to write something but it is hard with the censor to contend with, you will probably know all about our stunt before this as they are sure to write it up a lot in the Australian papers. Our Battalion has done remarkably & my Company was furthest ahead of the lot. I don't know what I will get out of it - but hope a promotion anyhow - I have been long enough getting my second stan.

How are you all getting along? I was inoculated for tetanus yesterday because of my wound, I got it on the first day but managed to stick it right out, it is pretty right now, but instead of having to march they give me a horse to ride. I will write and account of this scrap when I get a chance to get it through - I saw Bill Usherwood the other day, he is a sergeant and looks very well. I hope he got along alright, he was going in when I saw him.

The shell fire passes all imagination.

Will stop now, with love to all
your loving son
Gerald

Written after 1st Australian attack on Pozières, from Canaples (Nth of St Omer) where they were resting. The 8th Battalion was in Sausage Valley or Pozieres 23-27/7/1916.

Notes: This was written after the battle of Poziers. The "crack" on the ribs must have been when Gerald was wounded in the Chalk pit the Lt Andrewartha talks about in his sympathy letter. I think Gerald may have been mentioned in dispatches in this battle. Really nasty battle in which more Australians were killed for this ground than anywhere else.

On the 25/7/1916, D Coy was 50 yds beyond Cemetery and C Coy met with strong opposition that was overcome with great determination speedily to get to their objective NE of Village. D Coy sent forward a patrol (was Gerald part of this patrol?) which came within 100 yds of Mouquet Farm, later seeing strong German forces moving along the OG1/OG2 towards the Windmill. Reported this and called in artillery bombardment on the Germans. Very heavy shelling during day. Consolidation.

The details on this patrol are bit sketchy. Refer to Cobbers in Khaki pp 119-120 as best source. It seems R Sgt Major Frank Goodwin led this patrol. Certainly it gained much fame for "derring do" in the 8th Battalion but no ribbons for those involved?

"igerald 10/10/1916"

France

Oct 10th 1916

My dear Mother -

It is a good while since I have written to anyone at home but I missed the last mail - hope you will not be imagining all sorts of things about me.

There was a little matter of a raid that I happened to be in charge of, and I did not feel inclined to write till it was over; however it went off very successfully, and now can tell you all about it, it was very well done, & they have all said very nice things about me, and what you will probably like much better, I will not feel it is my turn to take part in a raid for a long time to come.

I have had lots of letters from everybody saying how pleased they were I was wounded because I would be away from the firing line for a while, the funny part is I have not been away from the Battalion for a day.

You cannot imagine what hard luck I had the day before yesterday, I had the warrant in my pocket to go on leave in England for ten days when I got sick, a bad bilious attack. I think, any how it stopped me, I am just about right again now, and as soon as I am well the pass will be forthcoming, it is the first time I have been ill like that since I can remember, I think it may have been a touch of ptomaine poisoning, however I am going to get properly well before I go as I want to do the leave full justice. What a bad fall father must have had, you must have got a fright. Alan and Pearlie are a strange pair as they must have taken all the dogs from Killingworth with them -

You will be sorry to hear that my batman Tullett has gone, he is 56 years & sleeping on the wet ground & so on was playing up with him so I got the Doc to send him back to Australia. He was a fine old chap as honest as the sun, & did not like leaving me, I have had him with me for 15 months and kept him out of all the rough business.

Captain Hurrey who was in the same Company as I for a long time has gone to England sick, he was always very decent to me - Dickson is now a Captain, all the fellows who went to new battalions got their promotion quickly, I was just due for mine but lately five original officers of this battalion have come back, so suppose I will be in the cold, these officers have been away 16 months, & most of them have seen practically no fighting, I will have to wait for another Pozieres, they are the stunts to make promotion. However I am quite content to bump? along as I am - Hope the next time I write will be from London.

I do not understand how you could have had a cable from Bill Usherwood, is he still alive? The paper says he cabled from England. He may have been picked up & got over there without his Battalion knowing of it -

Must stop now, with love to all

Your loving son
Gerald

Also included in envelope

92 London

10 words

Evans Redcamp Wangaratta

Leave England very well

Love Evans 6-30 PM 17th Oct

At this time the 8th Battalion was in the line in front of Ypres at the Glasgow post which is Sth of Zilebeke - D Coy at Battersea Farm in reserve. From Battalion diaries: Raiding party trained for this for around 10 days before 30/9/1916, Raid a complete success with one German prisoner

(later died) and two Germans killed. Lieut Joynt and one OR slightly wounded and Pt Smith (later DoW? Badly wounded. Identifications and information gained. Many congratulations from Army Corps, Division, Brigade command. Gerald led the raid.

Note: See "Cobbers in Khaki" page 132-133. It would appear that this raid occurred near Ypes in an area "north east of the bluff". On the 26th of September, the whole unit moved into billets at Scottish lines, and on the last night of the month (30th Sept) the raiding party, with faces blackened and wearing balaclavas, crawled into No Man's Land at 10pm and after covering the 50 yards at the agonizingly slow rate of only two yards a minute, attacked a sector of the enemy trenches north east of the Bluff, held by the 73rd Landwehr Regiment. The raiders scrambled across extensive entanglements using ladders and mats, and totally surprised the enemy. The raid resulted in several Germans being killed or wounded in their dugouts. A solitary wounded prisoner brought back by the raiders later died from his wounds at a casualty clearing station before he had divulged his unit identity. This was ascertained from his id discs.

The raid leaders, namely Lieutenants Evans, Goodwin, Joynt, Maguire and CSM Harris, were delighted to receive congratulatory messages on the success of the raid from their commanders at Corps, Division and Brigade level. Colonel Gordon Bennett (CO of 6th Battalion) was on "loan" to 8th Battalion for the training for the raid, "spoke highly of Evans' leadership during the raid "He trained his men so well they did the work with calm regularity and precision in very great danger. He controlled his party with great coolness" Assume this is one of Gerald's Mentioned in Dispatches.

Recommendation for a Military Cross, ended up being a Mentioned in Dispatches.

Lieutenant DG Evans, 8th Battalion, 2nd October, 1916

Running a raid on the German trenches near Hollebeke on the night of 30th Sept/1st Oct, Lt Evans was in command of the left raiding party. He trained his men so well that they do the work with calm regularity and precision in very great danger. He took his post on the enemy parapet and controlled his party with great coolness. The party killed one German and brought to our lines one wounded German from whom the necessary identification was established. His fine leadership was to a very great extent responsible for the success of his party.

Major General Gordon Bennett, Commanding Officer

New "???? to Bill Usherwood's father 27/5/1917"

Somewhere in France

27th May 1917

Dear Mr Usherwood,

Your letter inquiring for any news which I know concerning your brother and my mate (Sergt. Tom. Usherwood) reached me on my return to Batt. After having a few months in England in hospital. It was my intention to write to you right away but as we have to get up to the line sooner than we expected, I left you letter in my pack behind the lines and it was my misfortune to lose that pack. It was not until Pte. Cubbins received your letter about a fortnight later that I was able to again get your address. Your brother Tom and myself have been mates from when we went into Broadmeadows together and as I had the next section to him we were very seldom apart. About a fortnight before the great battle at the end of July and during August last year (Pozières, sic), Tom was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and before the battle began he had charge of the platoon. We were fairly lucky for some time and after the first attack we reached our objective with slight loss, the five N.C.O.s of the platoon still going strong. Then on the evening of 4th August it was surglet(?) to be in a party to hop over and dig a trench along the road connecting up with the advancing troops on the flank. The last words Tom said to me, expecting orders, said to me were "It's a stiff job and has to be done, and we'll do it." We did it but I'll never forget that night. There was an enemy strong post directly in front and we had not sooner hopped the bags when their machine guns started to spit death at point blank range. The last I saw of good old Tom, he was doing splendid work getting his mean forand and digging in. It was soon after this that one of the other N.C.O's saw him wounded. He started to go back to the trench but I am very very sorry to day he never reached there. I wish with all my hear that I could give you more cheerful news but I know that should I ever fall my last wish would be that my dear people should not be kept in suspense. I cannot in anyway see that anything else than that your brother died a good soldier's and man's death. Shells were falling thick and fast and we never had a chance of seeing the ground again that would account for so many being missing. I was....

Remainder lost. I think this is Gerald Evans who wrote this letter.