

The Diary of Captain L.B. Sherren

This Diary follows the voyage of the H.M.A.T. Ballarat A70. Sailed from Port Melbourne on February 19th, 1917. It was torpedoed in the English Channel on the 25th day of April, 1917

1917

Feb. 19th.

Monday and the big day has arrived. The day we have been waiting for a long time. The day we sail for overseas. We are camped at Royal Park. Reveille blows at 6.Am. Everyone is keyed up to a pitch of great excitement. Kits are packed before breakfast. Blankets handed in. And then breakfast. I am too excited to eat much. We fall in on parade at 9.am. Given lecture on entraining and at ten o'ĉlock we march to the station to catch a special train which takes us to the Port Melbourne Pier. We are then taken aboard the boat and allotted to our various troop decks. My home is going to be in the stern of the ship and hammocks are issued and blankets and we pick places to swing the hammocks. Dinner of bully beef and bread. Then we are allowed on the Pier to say our last farewells. My father and a few friends were there. My mother was too ill to travel to Melbourne. At 3.Pm. The Bugle blows and we are fallen in and again board the troopship. We take our places all around the ship and hang over the sides to get one last glance at our loved ones before we slowly move off from the Pier with our band playing Auld Lang Zyne as the boat steamed away. The cheering of the crowd could be heard until the pier was out of sight. The memory of the last farewells will ever linger in my memory. Streamers of every colour, being held until they break with one end to keep as memory. For some the only link to remember. The tear stained faces of the loved ones. For some never to return. Many of the older men could be seen with red eyes and tearstained faces. My own among them and heavy hearts but thrilled to know that it was the beginning of a great adventure and a great honour for one to be going away and to fight for his beloved country and his loved ones. After the boat left port Melbourne we steamed slowly down the bay heading for the Heads. At about six o'ĉlock we tried to have a meal but no one felt inclined to eat but stayed up on deck to get a glimpse of Queenscliff as we passed through the heads. I wrote a letter home and gave it to the Pilot to post when he left our ship outside the heads. It was about 9-30 .PM when we saw the last of the heads and the last of Victoria. For some it would mean the last time forever. About 10.PM we settled down to swing our hammocks and try to get some sleep. Something new for us to sleep in hammocks. I had a great difficulty in getting into mine. The first attempt I fell over the side on to the table underneath. Swore and had another go. More successful next time. Slept like a log until bugle woke me in the morning.

FEB.20th

Began to feel very sea sick and did not want breakfast. Dinner at 12 O'clock but did not feel like dinner. The smell of food made me sick. The band played during the afternoon. Saw a large shoal of porpoises following the boat. Had no tea, and went to bed feeling rotten. Slept with the hammock swaying from side to side.

FEB.21st.

Reveille at 6.AM. A bit early but felt a little better after I got up. Had a little breakfast. Had lifeboat parade at 10.AM. Saw our first ship at sea during the morning. Weather getting very rough. The old boat rolling like a good-un. Again getting very seasick. Went to bed early after tea. Sea getting rougher. Wishing the boat would sink as I felt so sick. Slept fairly under difficulties.

FEB.22nd.

Reveille at 6.AM. No breakfast. Sick again. Wondered why boats were ever invented. Would have given my right hand to put my feet on land for an hour or two. Had no dinner. Lay down on deck during the afternoon. Had a cup of tea only for tea and then went to bed.

FEB.23rd.

Reveille at 6.AM. Was made orderly Corporal for the day, for our company. Spent most of the morning parading seasick men to the Doctor. Was one of the worst myself. Endeavoured to make the best of it. The sea is a little calmer. Had a little more to eat. Feeling a little better towards tea time. Heard that we were making for Albany. With the thought that I would at last be able to walk on land again I began to feel better. Wrote letters home and to friends to post at Albany. Lights out at 9-45.PM.

FEB.24th.

Reveille blew at 6.am. Beautiful weather. Sea calm. We sighted land and enter channel for Albany Harbour. The harbour is very pretty. It is now Saturday Afternoon. Albany looked very pretty from the ship. Appears to be built at the foot of the Mountain. Had tea on ship and then we marched into Albany township and dismissed for two hours to have a look at the town and do some shopping. I had a good tea and enjoyed it thoroughly. Had some beautiful iced milk and lovely grapes. Arrived back at the boat at about 10.PM. Lights out at 10.30.PM. Got settled in bed about 2.AM. after a very nice evening.

FEB.25th.

SUNDAY.

Awoke at 6.AM. Had good breakfast and then we had church parade at 10-30.AM. Did not get shore leave. A beautiful Australian sunny day The scenery looking towards Albany from the ship was very nice. Wrote letters home and to friends.

FEB.26th

MONDAY.

Said goodbye to Albany and sailed for Freemantle on Monday morning. Arrived at Freemantle on Monday evening. Anchored for the night in Freemantle Harbour. Slept extra well with the anticipation of some more shore leave in the morning.

FEB.27th
WEDNESDAY.

Arrived at the Pier at Freemantle early this morning. We were given leave from 9.AM. until 8.PM. A special train took us to Perth. Had a wonderful time in Perth. Motored all over the place to items of interest around Perth. Had some extra good meals and a feed of beautiful fresh grapes. Met some lovely people. Arrived back at the ship at Freemantle at 8.PM. Very tired and went very early to bed. Slept the clock around until 6.AM.

FEB.28th
WEDNESDAY

Leave granted again from 9.AM. to 8.PM. Went by train again to Perth. Sent telegram home. Posted souvenirs and letters home. Had a good day in Perth. Returned to boat at 8.PM. Found that there was a telegram waiting for me from home. Was delighted to get it and know all at home were well and not worrying.

MARCH.1st
THURSDAY.

All the troops on board marched through Freemantle to the beach at Cottlescoe for a swim. Eleven hundred men in swimming at the one time took up quite a part of the Ocean. I had to fall out on the march back to the boat and go behind a bush. Must have been the large quantity of grapes that I had eaten. Got back to the boat in time for dinner. The reception that was given us by the west Australian people will always live in my memory. The reception they gave us when they knew we were Victorians was wonderful. We were given a rousing send off by the people of Freemantle. As we steamed out of the Harbour all boats in the harbour blew their sirens. We moved out of the harbour and anchored outside until 12.0½Clock Thursday night. We then sailed on our most important part of our trip to Africa. We saw the last of land and the last of Australia. To some it would mean the last time that they would ever see it again. My thoughts were very serious but I was full of confidence that I would be one of the lucky ones. I hoped so.

MARCH.2nd
FRIDAY

We are now sailing as far as we know to Durban, South Africa. The sea was very calm and I am quite over my seasickness and able to enjoy the meals and the trip which is now to become very interesting.

MARCH.3rd
SATURDAY.

Usual routine. Up at 6.AM. lounged about the decks all day. Nothing but sea and more sea. Sea beginning to get a little rough. Boat beginning to roll. But no sign of seasickness. May have beaten it.

MARCH.4th
SUNDAY.

Not feeling to good. Sea very rough and waves breaking over bows. Went to Church Parade at 10-30.AM. Very nice and impressive service. Went to Holy Communion at 2-15.PM. Conducted by Padre Goller. Went to Bible class at 3-15.PM. Had a very nice talk with Padre Goller. He knew my Uncle at Watchem. Think him a great scout. We passed two boats travelling towards Australia. A very heavy sea running.

MARCH.5th
MONDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Stew again for breakfast. Feeling a bit sick. One slice of bacon for dinner. Did not improve matters. Had game of cards in the afternoon. Had a little tea, bread and jam. Went to bed early.

MARCH.6th.
TUESDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Posted orderly Corporal for day. Boat drill and raft drill at 10.AM. Lifeboats used for practice. Rafts unslung and got ready to lower. Very good effort for first time. Dinner at 12.noon. Had very fair dinner. Bought some tinned fruit at the Canteen. Played Euchre after dinner until tea time. Had a good tea and then played Poker until 9.15.PM. Went to bed feeling O.K.

MARCH.7th.
WEDNESDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. My company doing boat duties and fatigues but I had day off being Orderly Corporal the day before. Had to attend a Kit Parade and full uniform inspection in the afternoon.

MARCH.8th.
THURSDAY.

Nothing of importance happened. Went to Concert on the boat deck in the evening. The Phosphorous glow on the water in the night was very pretty.

MARCH.9th.
FRIDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Usual routine all day. Beautiful day and new orders all lights out after sunset. No Cigarettes to be smoked on deck. No matches to be struck. A lecture on submarine guard.

MARCH.10th.
SATURDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Usual routine. Fine day. Lay out on boat deck all day and read and wrote letters.

MARCH.11th.
SUNDAY.

Church parade at 10.AM. Beautiful sunny weather. Went to Holy Communion at 2-15.PM. Also to bible class at 3.PM. Band concert in the afternoon finished up a very nice & enjoyable day.

MARCH.12th.
MONDAY.

Usual routine work. Nothing unusual happened. Played cards in the afternoon. Wrote more letters at night in the hold.

MARCH.13th.
TUESDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Full uniform and kit parade at 2-15.PM. Afterwards all the Geelong boys had their photographs taken. About sixty Geelong boys on board. Photo was to be sent to Geelong paper.

MARCH.14th.
WEDNESDAY.

Usual routine work. Had first pay on board ship. Drew 10/- Had buy up at Canteen. Lights out at sunset.

MARCH.15th.
THURSDAY.

Rumor is that we are now making for Durban. Submarine scare may go direct to Capetown. Strict watch kept and all lights out.

MARCH.16th.
FRIDAY.

Submarine guard formed. I am Corporal of guard. Men posted every ten yards along boat rail with rifles. Instructed to shoot at any periscope that appears. Saw shoal of flying fish. Was a very interesting sight. Now sea getting rough and wind raising. Many false alarms when white foam seen. Thought to be wake of a submarine periscope. Every one keen and on edge. However nothing exciting happened all day. Lights out and guard kept on all night.

MARCH.17th.
SATURDAY.

After the days routine work is done. The retreat is blown by the Company Bugler at Sunset. Everyone stands at attention and faces the setting sun and is supposed to offer a prayer for the ones that have fallen during the day in the war. We wonder whether troops coming over later will offer a prayer for some of the men on board who may be killed later on. We realize that out of the eleven hundred men on board some will never return. It is sad too think of it as the chaps are a hell of a fine lot. Some mother or Wife will mourn them perhaps. Who knows. It is in the hands of God. If he wills it I will return if not I will be one of the ones for the troops that follow to pray for. Funny thought to have but sailing through the ocean all lights out never quite sure whether you will be torpedoed or not before morning makes you think hard at times.

MARCH.18th.
SUNDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Breakfast. Very nice tripe. Church parade at 11.AM. Bible class in the afternoon. Spent most of the day sitting about in the sun. Had definite news that we would arrive in Capetown in the morning early. All on board quite excited as we heard that a boat had been sunk between Capetown and Durban.

MARCH.19
MONDAY.

Awoke with Table Mountain in sight covered with cloud. Looked just like a table with a white cloth on it. Hence its name Table Mountain. Entered Capetown Harbour at about 10-30.AM. Pulled up at Pier at 11.AM. Were granted leave into Capetown at 11.30.AM. until 11.PM. We were marched into Capetown and dismissed. I went to a restaurant and had a good feed before setting out to see the sights of the town. Had a good look at the shops. very nice ones. And then sent post cards and some souvenirs home. Sent cable home and registered packet to Mother. Went to the Capetown Tivoli Theatre in the evening. Had a good time and went back to the boat about 11.PM. And was quite ready for bed. Louie Cheale my pal was with me all the time.

MARCH 20.
TUESDAY.

Leave again granted from 9-30.AM. until 11.PM. Had another look around the town and enjoyed the sights. Lou Cheale and I and a couple of other cobbles took the tram to

Houts Bay and had our dinner there. A very nice trip indeed along the coast. It is a coastal resort. When we came back we visited Parliament House and were admitted to hear General Dotha speak. It was a very novel experience and thoroughly enjoyed. After tea we went to a Picture show. And then arrived back to the boat very tired and sleepy. Did not need any rocking in my hammock to get to sleep.

MARCH 21.
WEDNESDAY.

Leave again from 9-30.am. until 11.PM. We heard that it was reported that our boat had been sunk. I sent a cable home telling them that we were safe and not to worry. A New Zealand ship had just arrived from Australia and they told us that it was a rumour in Australia that we were sunk, after leaving Western Australia. I was not allowed to say where we were but put. (Arrived at port safely all well. Love.) After sending this I was more contented and send more letters and souvenirs home. In the evening I was placed in charge of the town picket to patrol the town and arrest all the strays and drunks after 11.PM. Had some excitement in stopping three street brawls between the natives and our boys. Of course took our lads part in all. Some Bottles and sticks were used but escaped with only a knock on the head but it made me very wild. Arrived back to the boat with six drunks about 1.AM. And slept well after a heavy day.

MARCH 22.
THURSDAY.

Had leave from 9-30.am. again to 11.PM. Several of us hired a motor car and drove thirty miles to Camp Bay. And had lunch at Camp Bay Hotel a very beautiful building. We then motored on to Table Mountain. I have never seen such beautiful scenery before. Had tea in Capetown. Then we accepted the invitation of an American resident of Capetown and went to the theatre with him. Witnessed a native funeral during the day. A most weird sight. They do not use a coffin but only wrap the body in a cloth and carry it on their shoulders through the streets. After the theatre part we had supper at the Americans expense and went back to the boat about 12-30.PM. one & half hours late.

MARCH 23.
FRIDAY.

All troops marched to Sea Point a seaside resort of Capetown. We were then dismissed at 1.PM. We then came back to the town and we had a great dinner. After dinner went to the Library and wrote letters and post cards. After tea we just pottered about and had some supper and returned to the boat. We had our last leave in Capetown as we were due to sail in the morning.

MARCH.24th.
SATURDAY.

The boat left the Pier at about 9.AM. We sailed with a fleet of eight other boats. The Auxiliary Cruiser our escort $1\frac{1}{2}$ Marmorai $1\frac{1}{2}$ Two New Zealand transports. Three

Australian troopships and two cargo vessels. And one boat load of chinese labourers. We sailed two abreast. A very pretty sight. And all boats sailing all lights out.

MARCH.25th.
SUNDAY.

The weather is getting hotter as we draw near to the Equator We have now got one destroyer as a rear escort. Attended Church Parade at 10-30.AM. and Bible class in the afternoon. Spent the day watching the other vessels tossing in the sea.

MARCH.26th.
MONDAY.

A fine tropical day. Getting hot. I am Orderly Corporal for the day. We try our submarine gun. Makes a terrific row and shakes the whole boat from bow to stern. Had good meals and extra good tea. Sailing all lights out after sunset. A very strict watch kept all day and night. Everyone is keyed up. Wild rumours of subs get around and you don't know what to think.

MARCH.27th.
TUESDAY.

We have physical training on boat deck. in the morning. Rifle exercises in the afternoon. Lights out at sunset. During the night the alarm goes. We all turn out wondering what is the matter. Find out our boats steering gear gone wrong and we nearly rammed the cruiser and very nearly got rammed by the troopship following us. We very nearly got all piled up. The Cruiser played her searchlights on us and saved the situation. We then took off our lifebelts again and went back to bed but did not get much sleep after that.

MARCH.28th.
WEDNESDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Physical training again at 10-30.AM. Am feeling pretty fit. Rifle exercised again in the afternoon. All lights out at sunset and we are not allowed to smoke either on deck or down below in the night now. All our smoking to be done in the day time. As I do not smoke it does not affect me.

MARCH.29th.
THURSDAY.

Physical training again. Trying to get us very fit. Rifle training again. We air out hammocks and blankets on deck in the afternoon. Have to sit and watch them or they walk. Went to bed after tea. The alarm went again at 3-30.AM. All grabbed life belts and rushed to our boat and raft stations, but it was only a test. Everything went well.

MARCH.30th.
FRIDAY.

Lecture on fire control at 10-30.AM. Physical training again at 2-15.PM. Medical parade at 3.PM. Beautiful moonlight night and I am orderly Cpl for the night. Submarine guard on the alert all night. Had usual salt bath during night. Nothing very unusual happened. During the night. Plenty of snoring etc.

MARCH. 31.
SATURDAY.

Usual quiet day. Had cold sea bath in the afternoon. The weather as hot as hell. Am orderly Cpl for the day. Nothing much to do. Lights out at sunset. Some caught for smoking on deck in the evening. Received a severe lecture on the danger etc.

SUNDAY.
APRIL.1.

Had another salt bath at 10.AM. Church parade at 10-30.AM. Went to Bible class in the afternoon. Today being April Fools day every bodys trying to catch each other. Had hot roast dinner with cabbage. But to hot to enjoy it. Yearned for ice cream. Attended C.Y.M.S. meeting in the afternoon. About 150.present. A talk by Rev Padre Buckley. Bible class afterwards by Padre Goller. About 100 present. Then wrote letters home.

APRIL.2nd.
MONDAY.

Nothing unusual happened all day. Lovely calm sea and hot weather. Lights out as usual at sunset. Guard still alert.

APRIL.3rd.
TUESDAY

A lecture by our O.C. Capt Harrison on Crimes and Punishments was interesting to us all. We now know what to expect of we break the rules of the boat or Army. Lovely moonlight night but nothing exciting happened.

APRIL.4th.
WEDNESDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Beautiful sunny day. Smoke sighted on the horizon all troops excited but when the ships drew near it was found that it was a convoy of eight ships heading for Capetown. They passed quite close within signaling distance. It made sixteen boats altogether with ours. A very nice sight. I wished for the moment that I was on one of them going home. But then I realized why I had enlisted and forgot the thought.

APRIL.5th.
THURSDAY.

Lovely day. Played euchre nearly all day. We passed the Equator during the morning and we had the usual ceremony. At 8.AM. we all assembled on deck and the Union Jack was hoisted on the yard arm. As the troops stood at attention the band played God Save the King. A very quaint old ceremony and very impressive.

APRIL.6th.
FRIDAY.

Being Good Friday we had religious services. We entered the port of Freetown the capital of Sierra Leone early in the morning. A very beautiful tropical harbour. There were fourteen other ships in the harbour when we entered. All waiting for a chance to get away safely. When our eight boats entered there were twenty two vessels in the harbour. A very unique sight for me. As soon as we dropped anchor we were surrounded by small native canoes selling fruit and beads or exchanging small articles food or clothes. Being Good Friday it was kept a solemn day for all on board. No shore leave was allowed as the natives are mostly unclad and a very dirty race.

APRIL.7th.
SATURDAY.

A beautiful tropical day. Very hot and the scenery from the ship beautiful. Another warship entered the harbour this morning accompanied by another troopship. Also a very large Belgian Steamer flying the Belgian flag. It was a ship of beauty. Tea at 5.PM. We then watched the most beautiful tropical sunset that cannot be described. Wild rumours going around about subs in the vicinity of Freetown and that accounts for the number of boats held up at this place.

APRIL.8th.
SUNDAY.

This is Easter Sunday. I went to Holy Communion at 6-30.AM. As I have never missed this particular Easter service since I was confirmed I was determined to attend this morning and enjoyed the service under novel conditions. We sang a special hymn for those dear ones that we had left behind. Hymn No. 595. Attended Church service at 10-30.AM. Watched the fine Belgian steamer go out at midday. Went to Bible class at 3-15.PM. Had tea at 5.PM. Sat on deck and watched the boats in the semi light. Lights out at 9-30.PM. Had a very nice sleep but very hot.

APRIL.9th.
MONDAY.

Reveille at 6.AM. Saw warship leaving harbour to patrol coast. Weather very hot. Lying about in shorts only. Watched the natives fishing from their canoes. Selling fish to the boys on the boat. Native canoes are made out of trunk of trees. Very clumsy looking. It is a wonder they stay afloat at all. Lights out at 9-30.PM. Too hot to go to bed. Lay on deck.

APRIL. 10th.
TUESDAY.

Extra hot today. Hope it gets no hotter as I will fade right away. Perspiration just pours off you here. We left Freetown at 5.PM. this afternoon accompanied by the Auxiliary Cruiser 'Marmora'. One New Zealand troopship and a chinese labour boat. With one Australian troopship. (Do not know her name) We sailed out all lights out and strict watch kept. Sub scare still on.

APRIL.11th.
WEDNESDAY.

On Refrigerator fatigue in charge of men cleaning out ice chamber. Orderly Cpl. From 6 p.m. till dawn.

APRIL.12th.
THURSDAY.

Saw wonderful sunrise. Am Orderly Corporal for the day. Took sick parade to Doctor at 8-45.AM. Pay day today am drawing another 10/- Another spend up at the canteen for me. We had our photos taken at 3-15.PM. My Company and Platoon. Lights out at sunset. Had sing song under decks in evening. Very good too. I am learning to sing a bit.

APRIL.13th.
FRIDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. a bit earlier than usual. Breakfast at 7.AM. Am in charge of our platoon's submarine guard. Watching out to sea for the wake of a periscope. Perhaps if we do see one we will miss it by yards in the excitement. Nothings happened. Lights out as usual at sunset.

APRIL 14th
SATURDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Submarine guard again from 7.AM. to 8.AM. Was relieved from guard at 8.AM. Had morning off. Played cards all the morning. Went to concert on starboard saloon deck in the afternoon. Some good performers from the lads too. Lights out at sunset. Very awkward trying to move about in the dark. Getting eyes like a cat to see in the dark.

APRIL 15th.
SUNDAY

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Church parade at 10-30.AM. very fine sermon. Wonderful day. Attended Initiation service of the Church of England Mens Society. Received badge and am now a full member. Received a card from Padre Buckley. Wrote letters home. Lights out at sunset.

APRIL 16th.
MONDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Played Muchre most of the day. Had an hours talk with Padre Buckley. He is a fine chap. Nothing eventful happened today. Lights out at sunset.

APRIL 17th.
TUESDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. during the morning we were startled by seeing a mirage of a sailing ship in the sky. A most unusual sight. A fully rigged sailing ship appeared to be in the clouds. It was over the horizon and the sun was behind it and threw the reflection on to the clouds. It was a wonderful sight. We watched it for a long time and then it disappeared. We then saw the ship itself appearing over the horizon. Was in charge of twenty men on linen fatigue.

APRIL 18th
WEDNESDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. weather beginning to get colder as we leave the hot climates. Nothing of importance happened today.

APRIL 19th.
THURSDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Reported on sick parade with boil on the back of my neck. Had it burned out by acid. Thought that my neck would go to. Felt a bit sick after it but soon recovered. Has the day off. Played cards most of the day.

APRIL 20th.
FRIDAY

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Weather getting very cold. Misty rain this morning. First we have had for a very long time. We had boat and raft drill. Have been placed in charge of a raft. As I cant swim do not know how I am going to get on it if it ever comes to throw the raft overboard and to have to swim to it. I will have to be the last to go overboard so God knows where the raft will be floating too by that time but hope for the best.

APRIL 21st
SATURDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. No parade this morning. Played Euchre all morning. Went to concert on the Saloon deck in the afternoon. An Alarm went during the concert. A rush for lifebelts and to our boat and raft stations. We stood too for an hour and then the all clear was given. I was much relieved as it was a very cold day and I did not fancy the

water at all. Had tea at 5.PM. Lights out at sunset. Turned in feeling a bit tired and wondering what will turn up during the night. Nothing did.

APRIL 22nd
SUNDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. My company on guard. Saw small boat approach. Our gun crew trained the gun on her but she was one of our so all felt much relieved when she came up close and flying the good old White Ensign of England. She was in the track of a submarine and our Captain was warned to be on his guard that subs were about. Went to Holy Communion today. Attended Bible class in the afternoon. Our band gave a concert late in the afternoon which was extra. Had blanket pinched from my hammock. Only had one blanket left and the weather very cold. Very sleepy night.

APRIL 23rd
MONDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Stew for breakfast. Kit bags brought up from hole. So we gather that we are not many days off old England. I will be relieved when we reach there as our nerves have been on edge during the last few days. Dinner at 12. Sea Pie. Don't know what was in it. A complete mystery dish. But not so bad when you are hungry. We are now out of fresh water to drink. Drinking water from the sea after purifying. But tastes rotten. Like Epsom salts to me.

APRIL.24th.
TUESDAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Orderly Corporal for the day. We sighted four destroyers which came up close to us from all directions. Quite thrilling to watch. But we were glad when we knew they were British and not German. It turned out to be a British Convoy to take a boat each and all go in different directions at full speed as submarines had been sighted and were in close proximity to our ships. A rumour went round that a tramp steamer had been sunk the day before not far from where we were. Naturally we are all excited and sleep with lifebelts on at night. Very hard to get any sleep at all. Most uncomfortable things to sleep in. Sailing now due East and at full speed with the destroyer about half a mile in front zig zagging all over the place on the alert for the supposed sub. Lights out at sunset and then to bed.

APRIL.25th
WEDNESDAY.

ANZAC DAY.

Reveille at 5-30.AM. Put all our hammocks and blankets in store as usual for the day. Dinner at 12.Noon. Roast Beef and Potatoes. We have to report on deck at 2-30.PM. for Anzac service. I was writing letters in aft well deck right under the stern of the boat when a terrific explosion occurred and shook the whole ship. Sent us all sprawling on the floor. We jumped up and then heard the bugle sounding the alarm. We knew then that

the worst had happened. They had got us at last. We grabbed our lifebelts and made for our boat and raft stations. We fell in at our usual stations and then it was given out over the megaphone that we had been torpedoed in the stern and that lifeboats were to be launched immediately as the boat was by then settling down by the stern. Those on rafts were to wait for further orders before throwing the rafts over. The submarine then appeared on our port side. We thought that they would shell us as well but our destroyer was making for her and she dived. The destroyer dropped depth charges but do not think they got it. The lifeboats were then lowered and the boys cheered as each boat full of troops left the ship. I was getting a bit windy, knowing that I could not swim and wondering how I was going to reach the raft. The sea was fairly calm. Our C.O. Capt Harrison handed cigars around to us and I took one for a souvenir but could not smoke it. It was a picture to watch the expressions on the mens faces. Some smoking, some playing euchre and some getting rid of all their clothes bar their singlets and underpants. One comical act I can remember was one of my raft men weighing about 18.stone putting two lifebelts on as he considered one not enough to hold him up. We told him to take one off or else he would drown but he refused so it took four of us to hold him down while we took one off him that was around his waist. My raft was No.4 and to be the fourth to be thrown over when the order was given. By the time all lifeboats were lowered we had five destroyers up with us and two french seaplanes circling the ship which was slowly sinking by the stern. I asked permission to go below to our sleeping quarters to get a few personal belongings, including my watch that I had left in my first hurry to get on deck. I went below and the water was up to my knees but I managed to secure a few personal belongings. On returning to deck I found that an order had been given that we were not to throw the rafts over. I was much relieved but that a destroyer was to try and get along side and we were to wait an opportunity and then slide down the ropes tied to the side of the ship on to the destroyer decks. We were then marched as our raft formations to the side of the boat and as the destroyer came alongside. Five or six men were to try and jump from the ropes on to the destroyers deck. Eventually it was my turn to jump and I can tell you I was glad when I felt my feet touch the deck of the destroyer. At last the destroyer had as many as she could safely carry on her decks and we moved away from the 'Ballarat'. On looking back we could still see the Captain and C.O. of the Ballarat waving to us. It was a wonderful sight.

The boys gave a cheer as we left the ship. We watched the other destroyers picking up the boys from the lifeboats and the empty lifeboats floating away was a pathetic sight. Our good old ship in which we had spent nearly ten weeks since leaving Australia was now doomed for a watery grave but fortunately she was not taking any of our boys with her. We were very thankful and offered thanks to God for his mercy in saving us all. The destroyer we were on was named the 'Lookout' and we circled around the old Ballarat for some time before we started on our journey for England. We traveled at a speed at about 30.miles per hour and with all lights out heading for Plymouth and safety. I take my hat off to the navy boys. They will always do me for brave men of the very highest order. We arrived at Plymouth at 10-30.PM. about 8 hours after we were torpedoed. We were taken off the destroyer to the Plymouth Naval Barracks. After we were counted and our names taken we were given a slice of bully beef and a biscuit. Also a cup of steaming hot chocolate and which I enjoyed after the strenuous day and the excitement of it all. It was 3.AM. before I got my cup and got to bed. We just laid down on the floor

on anything we could find. I found a bag and lay on that. We awoke at daylight and were given a breakfast of sausages by the sailor cooks. The sailors were wonderful and could not do enough for us.

APRIL.26th
Thursday

We fell in on parade at 9.AM. Had another roll call. Had dinner at 12.noon. Fell in a 2.PM and we were informed that our old boat had sunk after we left. We all stood at attention and gave three cheers for her.

At 2.PM. we entrained for Salisbury Plains. We stopped at a Station called Exeter and provided with all kinds of refreshments. A speech by the mayor on the behaviour of the troops of the 'Ballarat' made me feel proud that I was on her. We arrived at Salisbury Plains and detrained at Amesbury Station at 11.PM. We then marched about five miles to our camp on Salisbury Plains. We arrived at 12.30.am. Had a good meal of stew and a cup of tea. We were then issued with five blankets each. And marched to our respective huts. My pal Lou Cheale and Jim Mitchell were allotted to the same hut as I. At one o'clock in the morning we were ready for bed and the Officer came around with letters from home that had arrived before us and were waiting for us when we arrived. We read and reread them and then went to sleep. I received nine letters.

APRIL.27th
Friday

The next day we were given as a rest day Got up when we felt inclined. I was very tired and the cold was intense. In the afternoon were inspected by the Colonel of our Battalion who complimented the troops on their wonderful behaviour on the boat after the alarm was sounded by the bugler. We had only been dismissed about half an hour when we were called to parade again and this time telegrams were read to us from the King and the General commanding the Forces in England. They were full of praise and it made me feel proud that I was an Australian and that I had been on the 'Ballarat'. I soon found the post Office and sent a cable home telling them that I was safe and everything was O.K.. I don't know what is ahead of us but I do know that the first part of the adventure has turned out alright and that we all came through with flying colours. Thanks to the faith that my dear Mother has instilled into me I fully anticipate that when the job is done in France that I will return home and see all my loved ones again and look back on it all as a dream from which I have awoken after numerous nightmares.

I now close this little story which is a diary of my voyage on the ill fated troopship. A.70. H.M.A.T. "BALLARAT" Left Port Melbourne on FEBRUARY.19th.1917 and arriving at PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND on APRIL.25th.1917. Leslie.Bruce.Sherren.No.7311.23rd.BN.