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THE

DIARY

OF

Corpl. William Alfred SPURLING

50th BATTALION, 1st A.I.F.

WORLD WAR ONE

COMMENCED:- 13th August, 1915.  
Upon joining the Army.

COMPLETED:- 16th August, 1917.  
When he died of wounds in England.

These typewritten notes were made from  
the original Diaries by M.A. SLÉE in  
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THE DIARY OF  
WILLIAM ALFRED SPURLING

Corporal No.4275, 50th Battalion A.I.F.

"This is a few notes on my life from the time I enlisted in the Army on the 13th August, 1915. I went through the general preliminary of Military Training commencing at the Exhibition Camp, then Morphettville, and finally at Mitcham Camp. At Mitcham I was annexed to the Unit of the 13th Rein, 10th Battalion.

After five months of training life, we left Australia by the transport 'BORDA' from the Outer Harbour on the morning of January the 11th, 1916. The 'BORDA' is a nice clean ship of 11,000 tons and a speed of 17 knots. It was a pretty but a sad sight to see when we began to move away from the Wharf. Mothers, Sisters, and sweethearts, were saying perhaps their last farewell to the ones they love so well, and many sad faces were left behind after the hundreds of pretty streamers and ribbons had broken.

My second day on water was far from pleasant, in fact we were all cussing 'BILL' (Kaiser Wilhelm), and after this all was well. That was the 12th, the same day that we lost sight of land and then we saw nothing until the 16th, when in the morning we arrived in Fremantle, W.A. They say we kept 40 miles out of the regular mail track, to foil any spies there might be on the mail boats.

We anchored in Fremantle at breakfast time on Sunday morning, and here the vessel was coaling all day Sunday and Sunday night. Sixty of us were put on Sentry Duty on board all day Sunday, while the others had leave until 6.00p.m. in the evening. The next day, 17th January, we were granted leave from seven until half past ten. Four of us intimate friends went up to Perth, which is twelve miles and three quarters of an hour in the train.

We had a good look over the city and especially the River Swan. After buying a few luxuries for the trip, we went back to the port and got there at twelve, despite being left behind. Then the fun began. We could'nt get through the Guards and the boat was already moving. One chap dropped his parcel of biscuits and anchovy paste and forced the guards aside. After a little struggle the four of us got through just in time.

We were making to our quarters, when a Sergeant told us to go to the Guard Room and get a rifle and bayonet. We were dumbfounded but had to obey. Thirty of us were armed and lowered to the water and pulled ashore. Curious, we did'nt know what for, until we were in the Port again and then it was made known to us.

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About thirty soldiers from the 'BORDA' were drunk and had run amok in Freemantle. Some had no intentions of coming with us and some were too drunk to know what they were doing. Well, to arrest these fellows, and get them back to the boat was a very exciting piece of work. Rifle and bayonet were of no use. We had to put them down and get in with our fists. After handcuffing two or three, and knocking half a dozen over, we got the upper hand and the crowd by this time was enormous. When we had these fellows at our mercy, we could'nt get them to move, so a Lieutenant stopped a horse and trolley, and we loaded them up like hay and ordered the driver to go to the wharf. The BORDA was then three miles out at the anchorage so they got a steam launch and we took them all out. Some of their uniforms were red with blood. They were all tried and got duties for the rest of the voyage.

We left the anchorage at 3. o'clock on the 17th., and up until the the 23rd the sea has been very quiet. On the 24th the sea was very rough and a lot of soldiers were repeating their experience of the 12th. Perhaps this was the reason for us seeing so many sharks this day, and there were thousands of flying fish also.

On the 26th of January we were all paid with a £ note, and I noticed all the gambling had started again. There were six 'Crown & Anchor' schools going, and one two-up school, besides dozens of 'nap' players. To see the boys you would never think they were going to war. It was very much a pleasure trip. And so it was - we had concerts and parties of all kinds, besides Boxing and Wrestling.

On the 28th January we had a picnic and general sport's day. It was very interesting. Up till dinner time we had Boxing, Wrestling, Tug-of-War, and numerous other items, our Unit featuring well among the prize list.

At 2 o'clock that day we crossed the Equator and it is a general thing for those who have not crossed the line before to be dipped. This practice is carried out on all ships. They had a canvas dip which held about five hundred gallons, and every man, with a uniform on or not, was dipped twice by special Military Police. There was no getting out of it. You were arrested and put in and the boat was searched from stem to stern. It was all done in proper style. There was Father Neptune, his wife, and a Judge and Jury and, of course, a lot were tried and found guilty for different actions.

After all this was over, and while we were at tea, the fire bell started ringing. This is practice for the troops in case of Fire. We all fall out with life belts on and in dead silence. It's just the same with the alarm whistle and boat drill. Once we were called out in the night just to see how quick we could do it. We all had out 'Parade Decks' and knew where to go. One afternoon we were feasting on canned fruit which we had bought, when the bell started. Everything was left just as

it was and when we were dismissed and went below to finish our tea

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The food on the boat was anything but good. We have three parades a day, principally physical exercises, for three hours a day. Quite enough for the food and the hammocks we have to sleep in, too.

On the 2nd of February we were surprised at waking up and seeing land on our port side. This was the first land we had seen since leaving Australia. After a lot of questions and surmising we were told it was the coast of Africa. It was very mountainous, with high rocks and very high cliffs. A light-house here caused great excitement. It was on an island all by itself. The island contained about half an acre of surface and went nearly perpendicular to the water. The light-house was perched on top at a tremendous height from the water.

While at breakfast we passed the troopship 'AFRICE', with troops from all States of Australia. All that day, off and on, we saw land. In the evening orders were that all port-holes to be closed, no matches to be struck on the upper decks, and all naked lights to be put out. This was while we were passing Aden, in the Red Sea.

Up until the 5th February we saw steamers of all description and occasionally, land. We were paid again on this day, and it took great effect on the gambling schools again. A few days before pay day you will hardly see any of it.

On the 6th, our unit was detailed for Guard and Fatigue duties. The Sergeant told two of the fatigues to go and shift some cheese out of the Canteen. They asked him where they should put it, and he thought they knew, so he said, "Oh, chuck it over", and so they innocently went and threw it over-board. Big 75 Lb., cheeses, never been opened. After a while, the Sergeant asked them where they had put it, and when they told him he nearly went mad. I don't know how he got on. The two chaps said it was as much as they could lift and when it struck the water everyone on that side of the ship looked to see what it was. They thought it was a man.

We reached Port Suez and anchored at the anchorage at seven o'clock on the morning of the 7th February. This was the first time we had stopped since we left Fremantle, and we had to stay on board until the 10th. This day we disembarked and left by train for Heliopolis, which is eighty miles distant. We got there in the early hours of the 11th February, a month to the day from when we left Adelaide.

Well, during this day we did nothing. In the evening we went up to Cairo, which is seven miles distant from the 'Aerodrome Camp' where we were. The train and car does this in fifteen minutes and are entirely worked by natives. Cairo opened my eyes. I saw things here I would never have believed before. It is all natives, thousands of them - one wonders what they live on. They are very poorly clad - you can't tell the males from the females, and by what I have seen, I am not anxious to know the difference. However, there are some very fascinating French girls here and there are some natives dressed as well as any European.

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We had to leave the City before 9 o'clock as no man in uniform is allowed out after ten. We returned to camp to our little 'Mye-myes' made out of bamboo, which, I suppose, is cheaper than canvas. There are hundreds of them built by the natives. They are very cool during the summer months, but are very unpleasant when it is wet, - and this is the wettest winter known in Egypt for fourteen years.

On Sunday, 13th February, we went for a tour under a French Guide, which cost us 20 Piastres. (Equal to 4/2 English money.) We were taken through all the historic buildings of Old and New Cairo, some as old as 2,400 years. We were taken and shown the Mosque of 'Abraham Pasha', an enormous building where the Arabs used to pray. In this building were the two Pillars they would kiss when feeling ill, and they were supposed to get well again the next day. One could see where it was worn away with kissing. They are preserved now with a steel railing.

We also saw the two large pillars of marble, nine inches apart, that every Arab was forced through every year. If he failed to get through they said he was a bad man, and would imprison him. The marble here is as shiny as glass. I suppose thousands and thousands have passed through them.

There were other Mosques, of little or more importance, and the Kings, or men, that built these places were all buried inside. The buildings were all done by slave labour. Then there is the old 'Citadel', a fort which was built to defend Cairo. Now Old Cairo, hundreds of years ago, with all its guns, of course now out of date. Half a dozen spots on the walls were called to our attention and explained that this was done by the Arab cannon Balls in an attempted invasion of Egypt, two thousand years ago(?). It explained the difference between the 'Jack Johnson' shells we have today.

In one old church we were shown a solid block of gold, about nine inches square, which was built into the wall when gold was of little value, and is still preserved there. Yes, we all tried it but it was quite tight. In the same building were tombs of the great people of Egypt, with age clinging to them. One was of solid copper, valued at hundreds of thousands. Also here was the 'Sacred Carpet', and a Kingdom would not buy it. We were made to remove our boots before entering. All these buildings are guarded by sentries and will be for years.

We can imagine the damage done in Belgium to these old places by the Huns. Enormous would be the loss of relics if that were to happen here. It is funny to see the Jews praying and repenting, they go through all sorts of antics. They come to their sacred 'God' with a very sad face and go away smiling and look quite happy.

We were taken into the place where the 'Holy Family' hid whilst fleeing from the Arabs in the invasion. It was a little underground cave under a church and their table and chairs are still there.

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Then, on an island in the middle of the River Nile, we were shown the place where Moses was found, and the box he was in, and the old door he was taken through. We were dissapointed when we could'nt see the 'Bull rushes'. They were all dead. This is Old Cairo, and every wall left standing has graves in them. There are thousands of natives living here, it's wonderful what they find to eat. Sugar cane is their principal diet.

While I am writing this, it is understood that there are four of us friends, very intimate, and we allways knock about together. We went through camp together and we have been together ever since.

On Sunday, 20th February, we visited the Zoo, which is the finest in the World. It's laid out fine with plenty of room and with a specie of almost every living creature in the world. It would take four good days to go through this Zoo.

I've seen the prettiest parks and paths here that I have ever seen. Getting about to these places is very awkward. You don't know the cars and then it's a hard thing to read them, and it's only about two in ten of the natives that you can make understand. I've been arguing with them for fifteen minutes, and then then went away none the wiser so you are in an awkward position if you happen to get lost here.

On the 27th of February, 1916, we went to the 'Cheops Pyramid', which is the largest pyramid in Egypt and is about seventeen miles from our camp. We get out there at a cost of threepence by the car. It's a very interesting ride and we pass over the largest bridge on the Nile and this is a wonderful construction.

The first thing that meets your eye when getting out of the car are the donkeys and camels and their owners, waiting to take people to the Pyramids. You can get a donkey all the afternoon for five Piastres. Anyhow, we walked this afternoon, it was too far from pay-day. On getting to the Pyramids you are pestered with Guides, who we refused, and undertook it ourselves.

The largest Pyramids cover a surface of eight chain square and runs to an enormous height. One little opening in this takes you to the interior, which is as dark as a dungeon. Here we saw where a King and Queen had been buried in a little room. The coffin of cement was still there. One is very glad to get out of there as it is very stuffy.

Next we visited the Sphinx, which is wonderful, and close by is a large building that has been dug out and was supposed to have been buried for hundreds of years. In this were found some 'mummies' and inside the boxes were found thousands of pounds worth of jewels. Even now they honour their dead by burying valuables with them. In one wall of this building there was a solid piece of granite measuring sixteen feet by four feet by four feet. Now, how did this get here, as there is no granite for miles. It's the same with the Pyramids, this is where the '?' comes in and no living man can answer.

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On our way home from the Pyramids we again visited the Zoo and saw a few more things of note, including two Pontoons that were captured from the Turks on the 'Canal' in 1901. We also saw a Turtle with a circumference of seven feet and aged over two hundred years old.

On the 1st of March, 1916, we were roused out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, and were on the train ready for 'Telelkabir' at 9 o'clock. We were all jammed in ordinary waggons but we had to make the best of it. After four hours ride we arrived at Telelkabir. This is an enormous camp. There are forty miles of tents here and the camp is close to the Suez Canal.

As soon as we got here we found things were more 'war like' and everything is far stricter than we were used to. Here we get a fair share of 'dog food'. The biscuits are as hard as iron and we get them in bagfulls. You could make a good tile floor out of them. We also got a taste of Piggy - we call it Lance Corporal bacon because there is only one stripe of lean on it.

The longest trains I have ever seen in my life I have seen since being in Egypt. They are a tremendous length. I have seen eighty vehicles and one engine - this is all level country here, otherwise they could'nt do it.

When we first arrived in Egypt we found the money very difficult, but after a while, when we are taken down a few times, we soon jerry. There are eight different coins in the Egyptian money, from the quarter 'Milleme' to the twenty 'Piastre' piece. Then starts the note money. They are similar to our Ten Shilling note. The money commonly used is the half, one, five, ten, and twenty Piastre pieces. One Piastre is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pence. It's wonderful how one can beat the natives down in prices. In one case I tried to buy a walking stick from one of them in the street and he wanted a hundred Piasres for it. I beat him down to six, and then I never bought it. One delights in arguing with them.

There are hundreds of them in the streets selling oranges, peanuts, matches, and cigarettes. There are also hundreds of Boot Blacks and you can get a good shine for half a Piastre. The town of Heliopolis is built principally of bricks made of sand and there are some buildings here which are very fine. It's quite common for one building to have a hundred apartments and the finest building is the 'Palace Hotel', built by a syndicate of natives, and now called the 'Palace Hospital', because it is at present filled with wounded Australians. Heliopolis is a second 'Monte Carlo', built by a millionaire for the purpose of gambling, and by what I have seen, it was no failure. Thousands of Pounds change hands here every night.

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On the 1st of March, 1916, we were re-organised, and helped to form a new Battalion - the 50th Battalion. This seems a long way from home after being used to the 10th Battalion.

On Sunday, 12th of March, some of us went out into the desert and had a look at the trenches that were made thirty-two years ago by the Arabs in defence of their country from the British. I can remember the battle of Tel-el-kabir from history lessons. There are miles and miles of trenches here, and one wonders how they have stood for so long. Battles in those days were decided in a few hours. The British came across the desert by night and took the Arabs by surprise and that is how Egypt is now a British Protectorate. There must have been an awful slaughter here, for you can dig up skulls and skeletons by the hundreds of both sides and also old rifles and bullets and all sorts of war materials that have been drifted over by sand in the years gone by. The deserts of Egypt are not all sand, as one might think, but a mass of pretty little stones, and there is no sign of vegetation for miles, not even a bush.

On the 16th of March we were inoculated again and had to go through the agonies of that again. On the 19th of March we got our first big mail, and no-one but the boys know how we accept it. They nearly go mad when they get a letter from their dear ones at home. This is my first Mail and I got eight letters I could'nt sleep that night for joy. A lot of letters go astray, and one can't wonder why as they are unloaded like hay in bagfuls.

On March the 22nd the Prince of Wales and General BIRDWOOD paid a visit to our camp. This is the first time I have seen our future King and I was surprised to see such a boy. He was riding a splendid black horse and he had all his Guards with him, as well as Staff and two or three other big 'Heads'. The Prince was carrying three 'stars' and as he rode along the lines we all 'Hip-hoo-rayed' him. In the afternoon he ordered a half holiday for us. We were wishing he would come every day for the training we have here is very hard. I have worked hard but never before in my life have I felt so broken down. It was awful, and on such little food.

On the 23rd of March we were all issued with helmets to protect the back of our necks and also shorts, and once again we looked like little boys, or rather the bottom half of us did and the top half looked like an old Indian Game Hunter, so you can picture the sights we were. Nevertheless, we were glad to get them.

On the 24th we were inoculated again and went through the same agonies again. In a few days we are going to move, and today the 27th March, they have got us out in the desert marching every where with a full pack, breaking us in (or at least down) for the journey. The sun and the heat is intense and almost unbearable and we are only allowed one bottle of water per day. Only the strongest of us can do this.

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On the last day of March we left Telelkabir early in the morning and marched 18 miles along a fresh water canal to a place called 'Mahsama', which is a railway siding, and we stopped there for the day at two o'clock. This was a terrible task and I shall never forget it. When on the march we always go for 40 minutes and then have ten minutes spell. This is marching rules for the whole of the journey until the destination is reached.

On April Fools Day (1st April), we again left our camp at 3 o'clock in the morning and went on another twenty miles to a place called '.....', well, I forget the name, anyhow this was another terrible day's march and on very little water. Water carts were following us but we only get enough to make us thirsty again. Natives were following us with oranges and they were a terrible price.

On the 2nd April, after another heavy day's marching, we got to Serapium. This is a camp in Asia Minor, just over the Suez Canal. The distance we have come in these three days was just on fifty miles and they were the hardest fifty I have ever done. A Brigade that went over the same route about seven days prior to our trip lost three men from want of water, and one Private shot an Officer and then shot himself. Water is a hard thing to get in these places and some were paying five Piastres to the natives for a bottle of dirty water. The next morning found a lot of us in the Suez Canal, which is only a half a mile from the camp. A dip in the briny was all we could wish for and it was here that I learned to swim.

On the 11th April I weighed myself and was surprised when I turned the scales at 11 stone, 4 lb. We get a fair share of gift stuff in the sweets line from Australia, which is very acceptable, and a bigger share in dust storms and gnats, which are most unwelcomed. It's nothing to see a couple of chaps sitting down in the sun 'gnatting' themselves. Every time I looked, and that was every day, I found about ten or fifteen of them on me on the average.

On the 16th April I was working all day and night digging out a train that was drifted over in a dust storm. We were glad when we found the rails. Sixteen Turkish prisoners went through today that were captured in a little 'box-on' not far from here. This area is where the Turks made a raid on the Suez Canal a while ago, and we saw the grave of Major Von Hagan, a German who was leading the Turks. One of our boys dug him up and took his buttons and a few Piastres from his body and he got three years for it.

On the 20th April we had a march past the Prince of Wales and General Murray, in review. The next day was Good Friday and it hurt us when we had to work all day.

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On Easter Monday we were taken out into the desert, with very little water, and when we came back to camp we rushed the tanks. Officers and bayonets would'nt have stopped us. The lousy devils they have plenty of beer and refreshments and the poor privates can't get even enough water, considering we have salt bacon for breakfast, or at least 'lance Corporal bacon', as we call it.

On Anzac Day we had sports on the Canal, which were a great success. On the 8th May, 1916, we left Serapiam for the Railhead, a distance of five miles, and were very sorry when we had to leave the Canal behind as I often used to nick off down to the canal and have a dip and I was never once caught by the Red-caps. At the Railhead we were issued with smoked glasses to protect our eyes. We made camp there and we used to parade there at four in the morning and rest during the day.

On the 18th May we left Railhead at three o'clock in the morning for the trenches, only four miles away, and on the 20th May slept in the trenches for the first time. These have been built to protect the Suez Canal from a threatened invasion by the Turks. There are eighty miles of trenches and they are guarded by very few men because more men could be got there from Egypt in a few hours. On the 20th we also got our first mail addressed to the 50th Battalion. On the 31st of May we were relieved by some Hampshire men, and the next day we left the trenches at 2.30 a.m. and arrived at the Railhead at 4.30 a.m.

On the 2nd of June we went to Serapiam to get our clothes disinfected and have a wash. It was the first chance to wash our faces for days as all we got in the trenches was water for drinking. The heat here is as high as 124 degrees and it took some water to cool that.

On Sunday, 4th June, we left again at 8 o'clock at night for No.2 Siding, across the Canal, in an awful sand storm. We arrived there and left by train at half past twelve in open trucks and got to Alexandria at nine the next morning, the 5th of June. The morning just dawned in time to see the pretty country close to Alexandria. This is a large port, though I didn't see much of it.

We embarked here on the transport 'ARCADIAN', a ship of 1,400 tons with a speed of 24 knots. There were numerous other transports here also. Well, we were put on, and it was a put on, jammed in everywhere. There were 2,500 troops on board and room for only about 1,500. This was a very uncomfortable trip and only like soldiers we grinned and beared it. I was glad when the journey was done.

On the way we were never once sure where we were going, and only knew that we were in a 'dangerous Zone' and had to be constantly on the watch for whatever might turn up and the whole of the way we had to wear our Life Belts. I don't know what good they would have been to us for we would never have got out of the ship in time unless you were up on deck, we were that jammed in. There are Cruisers and Battleships every where you look, and we travel at nights with all lights out and portholes closed.

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Well, after five days on the sea we finally reached the port of Marseilles, in FRANCE, on the night of 11th of June, 1916. The next morning we disembarked and camped in the port. In the afternoon we were given leave to have a look at the town and had to go through the same ordeal with the change of money and language. However, everything here is much cheaper than in Egypt and you can get a decent feed here, even though it be 'frogs & snails'. My first meal in France cost me Ten Francs, about 8/4. There are seven coins in French money and one, a Franc, is equal to 10 pence in English value. Here we also get a lot of Belgian money. Marseilles is a very pretty place, densely wooded with very pretty trees.

On the 13th of June we left Marseilles by train and travelled day and night for 60 hours, or two and a half days, from the south to the north of France and I shall never forget the sights and pretty scenery that I saw on this journey. It was one long 'Paradise' of gardens, crops, and running streams of water, with ferns, fruit trees, and tall trees of all descriptions looking at their best. This is the best time of year to visit this part of the World. One thing I have noticed here in France, and that is you never see an iron roof, every building is roofed with red tiles.

At the end of this pretty ride we passed Calais, stopped at 12 o'clock, got out of the train, and marched three miles to a village called Hazebrouk. Here we were billeted in houses and barns and it was nice to get a rest and lay down. We couldnt sleep in the train as it was too crowded. I forgot to mention that during the journey we passed through the suburbs of Paris.

The first thing we noticed when we got to Hazebrouk was the roar of Artillery, which is only nine miles away. I will be able to speak more of this later on, no doubt. On the 17th June, 1916, I had a look at a few of the villages, and although they are so close to the seat of war and thunder, everything looks so peaceful. The fields are green and look lovely and one can hardly credit this after seeing Egypt. I also forgot to mention that on the train journey we passed through some very long tunnels, one of which must have been a mile and a half in length.

On the 19th June, after several days, we left this billet and marched twelve miles to a village called Saily. There were one hundred men fell out on this march. It was a forced march and the hard cobble stones were too much for the feet. When we reached our new billets there were not many in the Battalion that could have gone on much further and we were all glad when they stopped.

After a week we left Saily on the 26th June to go up as 'Supports' in the trenches. We left our billets at ten that night in groups of five, as it is too dangerous otherwise. For the four hours it took us it rained all the way and we arrived in the Supports with everything wet through, except for our blanket, which was in our oil sheets. Otherwise, everything was wet through and soaking, packs and all. We settled down in the dark and had to sleep as we were and were not allowed to take any of our wet clothes off. We were too close to the Firing Line now to undress and any man caught with anything off was 'Crimed'. Fancy sleeping like this in civilian life. Practically in water, you might say.

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Well, around here one can see the devastation of War. Everyone you see is in uniform, houses are on the ground, churches are burned or destroyed, roads are rooted up with shells, telephone wires are cut and the country is one mass of hidden trenches, barbed wire entanglements, ammunition depots, and dug-outs. Some of us are in dug-outs and others are in old houses.

We are in the region of Armentiers and this country was once held by the Germans in the early part of the War. This is a pretty place too, and there are hundreds of fruit trees gone to the pack from want of care. It is two years now since the inhabitants have left.

This is where I got my christening under fire. Our batteries are hidden along here and the Huns are fishing for them. A big 'Johnson' shell would go just over us and our boys would sit up and say, "A little bit lower, Fritz", and "Another one, Fritz, another shell for .....!". I got another mail here, twelve letters, one from everyone back home.

On the 10th of July, 1916, we left the supports at Croex Blanck at one o'clock in the morning and marched as far as Estaires reaching there at 8 o'clock the same morning. Here we camped in an old Flour Mill for the day. This is a fairly large town, with wonders of all sorts. A very old and large Catholic Church here drew my attention and I was told that the Germans wanted £25,000 to leave it alone and untouched, from the French. Whether they got it or not I can't say, but it was never touched. The Germans held all this area in the early part of the war and this is easily depicted by the little wooden crosses, or crucifixes, in every field and all through this country. Some are in remembrance of unknown heroes and others have names on, these are British Soldiers and I also had a look at the French cemetery here. They also have a plot of land set aside for Australian Soldiers in this cemetery and there is quite a hundred heroes lying here, and in quite a short time, too. I also saw two of our boys buried here. They died that morning and I happened to be in the cemetery when they were being buried. There was no crowd, only the four bearers and the Parson. The bodies were on a stretcher, wrapped in a Union Jack flag and sewn up in their own blankets, and they get a very decent burial. Then there is a little cross at the head of the grave with the Rank, Battalion, Religion, age, and casualty, died of wounds, or killed in action on it. Very decent indeed. One can find their dead heroes easily, and photos can be procured of these graves.

On the 11th July, 1916, we left Estaires and went back to Castre, 12 miles hard march, and it was my luck to be billeted in a pig sty. Pigs were turned out to make room for twenty of us. This is a fact. I woke up in the night with some-thing on my face, and found it was one of the pigs slobbering my face through a hole in the wall. She wanted to get in again, I suppose. I stuffed the wall with wet straw (some of my bed), but she would eat it as fast as I could stuff it in so I had to shift outside and I would have liked to have let her in on the others. After this we were crawling with lice and fleas again.

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At 5.00p.m. on the evening of 13th July, 1916 we left Castre again for 'somewhere', because we never know where we are going, and marched eight miles to a railway station called Bailleul. Here we entrained at 10.00 p.m. and, jammed in, 40 men to each horse truck, we travelled all night and arrived at Candas at 4.00a.m. the next morning. We left the train there and marched ten miles to a village called Pernois.

During the day there we had a ~~tin~~ tin of Bully Beef each and a few 'tiles' to eat. The day before we had only had one meal, too. Oh, God, let me live to tell this, this was the worst village we have been in so far, for you can't buy very much in the line of eatables and for days we had no bread, and we did a lot of Route Marching here at the same time. We are 25 miles behind the 'firing Line' and we can hear the guns plainly.

On the 29th July, after about a fortnight, we left Pernois and marched 12 miles to a village called Hessaratt and this was a terrible march. It was a very warm day and out of the Brigade eight hundred men fell out, some with their legs and feet bleeding. They were still coming into the billets all the next day. We were then about nine miles behind the front line.

One thing about this part of France is that you can get fresh water anywhere at a depth of about ten feet, which is a God-send in one way, and difficult in another way for we can't get out trenches deep enough because of the soakage. One can get plenty of liquor in France because every house has home-made beer and 'vin', as they call it, although it is very rotten stuff and very weak. One can drink three bottles and hardly feel the effect. There is no such thing as a general 'Hotel' anywhere I have been yet, but instead there are 'Cafe's' everywhere and they all have liquor, and they are making a fortune out of the Australians. Anyway, Hessaratt is a nice little village and one can buy a few loaves of bread and a bit of French cake. While here we did a few more Route Marches to keep us fit.

A few days later, on the 1st August, we left for a place named Badencourt Wood, eight miles distant, a roasting hot day and the march took the stuffing out of us. This is a very large 'Wood' and the timber is straight and very high, and all around it is nothing but a mass of trenches and wire entanglements in case of invasion, but the Germans never reached as far as this. We were camped in huts here, four feet high and painted a colour that aeroplanes can't discern.

On the 5th August, after 5 days, we left this wood and went to within half a mile of Albert. We left our packs at Badencourt Wood and just took a blanket, ground sheet, razor & towel with us. We reached Albert at 1.00 o'clock in the morning of the 6th and we camped in the open. We are now six miles from the lines as our boys have pushed the Huns back a few miles, and one more time we have the sound of the guns roaring in our ears.

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The Somme region has been very busy since the beginning of the War. Here you see not one, but hundreds and hundreds of 'air craft' manouvring all day long. We also saw a couple of 'duels' fought in the air and there are dozens of Observation Balloons up a good height. Albert is, more or less, a heap of ruins. It is a railway town and the first train to run for more than two years was run on the 5th of August. This shows the great advance we are making.

A very large church here is a mass of ruins. I have been right through it and I have some stone I took off the broken altar. This is the finest church I have ever seen and I should say it would have cost about £100,000 to build and not too many years ago, ether. The steeple is 90 feet high and on top there is a statue of the Virgin Mary with a child in her hand. This piece of metal work, which would stand another 20 feet high, is now lying in a vertical position overhanging the street, and they say that when this piece falls the War is going to finish. There must be tons of metal in it and I can imagine it coming down. In the church there is padded furniture, organs, pictures, and fine pieces of sculpture and solid blocks of marble lying and torn everywhere. This can never be repaired again. There was, I am told, two thousand high explosive shells put into this church.

There is a 'salvage party' working in this town now, and they have plenty of work, for everything was left by the fleeing inhabitants two years ago. The Germans never entered Albert but it was in their view and we can see from here the Germans first line before they were pushed back. I saw all this on the 7th. Today is the 8th and I saw W. Manow this morning and C. Underwood from Mannum, near home. This is more encouraging as they told me good news from the Front.

The 9th August was a wet day and we all got wet through and with no change of clothes to put on we had to grin and bear it. On the 10th August General COX gave us an address and wished us good luck in battle.

On the morning of the 11th we left Albert at 5.00a.m. for the 'supports'. We got there, had dinner, and then an order came down to move off to the front in five minutes and we were told that we had to be ready to hop the 'parapets' at half past ten that night. This was a great surprise that had been sprung on us as the Battalion that were to do it could'nt get in in time. Well we all knew it had to be done, so the sooner the better, and get it finished, as we were getting shelled where we were anyway.

Well, the five minutes passed and we were moving down along the communications trench into the Front Line. All the way we were heavily shelled but we got in with only a few casualties and no-one killed. We had to move in in groups of five with 50 yards interval. Several times we were halted and the smell of the dead was terrible. We got into the Front Line trench, or what was left of it, and had to huddle up anywhere and wait for the time to attack to come, which was another two and a half hours.

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This two and a half hours was a terrible time for we were being shelled all the while with high explosives and had a lot of casualties. Here we were, crouched between the dead and dying - I shall never forget it. We remained there like that until 10 o'clock and then we were given an ammo issue.

At twenty five past ten we crawled out of the trench with fixed bayonets and rifles loaded and advanced fifty yards. Here we laid low and waited for the artillery. Exactly at half past ten every gun was speaking and raining shell after shell into the German lines. With this we up and advanced to within fifty yards of the German trenches and then waited for the artillery barrage to cease, which was to stop at ten to ~~ten~~ eleven.

As soon as they stopped their barrage onto the German supports we sprang to our feet with one mighty yell and ran and jumped into the German trench and got to work with bayonets and bombs (hand grenades). I won't explain this. The next thing was to dig in and we lost no time in doing this. It was 'life or death' because we were in there no more than half an hour when the German artillery found out and turned their big guns on us.

This was the last I knew until I found myself back at the Dressing Station. I was buried twice and the M.O. gave me a pass to get away, and I can assure you that it didn't take me long. I had had enough of it. I got into an ambulance and was taken to a D.R.S. twelve miles away, arriving there on the morning of the 13th August.

A battlefield is a horrible spectacle, with the mighty craters and ground torn up, big 750 pound 'duds' lying around, dead and dying men, and the awful smell. The noise of bombs, ammunition and equipment and the mighty roar of the guns all add to make it worse. Villages and woods were no more to be seen. I shall never forget the smell of burnt cordite.

After several days, on the 18th, I left the D.R.S. and on the 20th I joined up with the Battalion again. It was then that I learnt fully the Casualty List. The Battalion came out of it only six hundred strong and had four hundred casualties. Some came out without rifle and others without equipment. I lost everything I had, including all the presents I got when going away in South Australia.

On the 21st we marched to and billeted in a village called ..... Here we stayed until the 25th August. On that day we marched to another billet towards the Firing Line again. This place was called Rubempre and we stayed there for a day. On the 27th we went to Vadencourt Wood, the place we were in before, previous to going to the Firing Line. This is where I was put in the Company Machine Guns after having passed three weeks training. On the 29th we left here and went to Albert again and this time we were billeted in the town itself.

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On the 2nd September, 1916, 'C' Company's Machine Guns and a party of bombers, moved up to the firing line to assist the 51st Battalion in the stunt they were going to make this night for 'Merchy Farm. The rest of the 50th Battalion were in reserves. We got to the Line at 10 o'clock that night and took up a position in an isolated spot after having got in under heavy shell fire without a casualty.

At ten past five next morning the artillery barrage started and it was a pretty sight. In the darkness behind us there was one long continuous line of light and fire from the many, many guns, and on our right, about three hundred yards in front of us there was a mountain of smoke and earth rising sky-wards. This barrage lasted about forty minutes.

Then the infantry charged. We Machine Gunners stayed behind to repulse any counter attack and keep up a flanking fire. The infantry took the farm at the point of the bayonet, but after being in possession of it for three hours they were driven out of it again. There was no counter attack but Fritz's artillery was too strong for them to hold it so they had to retire back to our own lines.

There were hundreds of Germans at this farm and our boys took over a hundred prisoners. The country here is all mined. The Germans have underground communication trenches here and large, deep dug-outs which are fitted out with electric light, papered walls, and all conveniences one could think of.

That day, the 3/9/1916, was a very eventful day for us 12 Machine Gunners. We were only fifty yards away in one place and they were all around us on three sides. One had to be constantly observing for the snipers were giving us blazes and we didn't give them their own way either. We could see them in their trenches when the Star Shells were fired and we put a few magazines in there.

Victor Bampton, our corporal, and two of us, were ordered to move our gun to another position and we had to do this in broad daylight over no-mans-land. Anyhow, we undertook it and got there alright and we were just putting the gun in position when a large shell struck the parapet and out of the four of us standing there together it got two. A marvelous escape.

At 4.00a.m. in the morning of the 4th September, we got word to get ready to get out of it as the Canadians were coming up to relieve us and it didn't take us long. This was good news for we were only in thirty six hours but we had a terrible experience. The trench was maddy and it was trying to rain. The whole time we were lying low in the wet, cold, muddy trenches and they were too narrow to turn in. When we got away from the front only half of us came out - the others were all casualties. We walked back to Albert and were damn pleased to be able to lay down and have forty winks.

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From Albert we marched to Atheule, a railway village, which took us two days of marching. We entrained there and after a six hour ride we arrived at Candas again, in the Ypres region, on the 8th September. On the 9/9/1916 we were billeted in a village called Steenrade, a fine large place. The whole 13th Brigade were around here.

On the 16th September, after about a week there, the 50th Battalion were moved by motor transport to a town called Tottinghem, at a distance of about 20 miles, for the purpose of new Officers to try their hands with us.

There was a fine large town close by called St. Omer and we had a real good time here. We were the first Australians that have been in this area and we found the people very good indeed. There are some very pretty woods and fields here. Hops, Mangles, and Beans are cultivated here to a large extent and these are just about what they live on. Also, blackberries grow here anywhere, mostly wild, and many a good feed I had on them. While we were at St. Omer, young Roberts died.

We were here till the 8th October, when, after several weeks we entrained and after a four hours ride arrived in a place called Dickybush, in Belgium, on the 'Ypres Salient'. Here we were doing fatigues building trenches and all sorts of work. This is a real home after the 'Somme'. We were here until the 23rd of October, and on the last day here we were shelled very heavily and had to go back to our billets early. We had very few casualties.

On the 24/10/1916 we marched to Benninaherst and stayed a day and while we were here we handed in our steel helmets and gas respirators so the big query was, 'Where are we going?'. 'Are we finished with war and going for a holiday?' All sorts of rumours were current, some mentioning Ireland, England, Salonika, and Egypt. Nobody knows but we are all surmising. Some say we will be on the 'Somme' again before long, but God, how can we live there, With winter coming it's almost too cold to live in good trenches - what must the open fields be like?.

Anyhow, the 25/10/16 found us billeted in a little village five miles further on. I am expecting to get word to go to the Royal Flying Corps any day, for I have volunteered and been accepted about six weeks ago, and I am anxious to go. I have been Number One on the Lewis Machine Gun since the last 'stunt'. Our gun, 'C' company's No.2 Lewis Gun is Serial No.5524, and I am the Corporal in charge. The chaps in my crew are privates P.L. WETHER S.N.4907, Pvt.G.D. BUTLER S.N.1650, Pvt.F.W. COLLINGTON S.N.1763, Pvt.J.N. COAD S.N.1656, and Pvt. W.J.F. ARTHUR S.N.1526. We are all very close friends.

On the 29/10/16 we left Bemminghurst (or Benninaherst) and marched to Boerhip. We stayed there one day and then went to Popperinghe. Here we entrained for St. Riguer, heading toward the 'Somme' again. This was a ride of about 70 miles and in dirty old horse trucks all night. We stayed at St. Riguer for about three hours and then marched on to Bussess, where we stayed until the 2nd November, 1916.

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On that day we went to Ruecamps, stayed there for a night, and then went to Vignacourt, a fairly large place. It was while I was at Bussess that I officially got made Corporal and got my stripe. On the 7/11/16 we left Vignacourt in French Motor Busses and after travelling for eight hours arrived at a place called Burieu. This is about 15 miles from the Firing Line and there are three big hospitals here, and mud - I never saw anything like it before. Now we are sure we are on the Somme again and we are getting all sorts of rumours about the front. It was here that there was an 'Air Raid' on the Hospitals and Fritz managed to kill three Sergeants and wound a lot of others. I happened to see the raid and the guns firing up at them.

On the 13/11/16 we handed in our packs and blankets and marched to Fricourt, and here the roar of the artillery is getting greater. While I was at Burieu Victor Weate got a letter from London asking him for assistance in finding me, as I am posted as 'Missing' since the last time in on the Somme. I don't know yet if the news has gone home and I am anxious to know. This will show how easy mistakes can be made. I immediately notified the authorities in London and asked them to cable home.

After the five mile march to Fricourt we stayed there for one day and then marched on ~~the~~ to the Front Lines. This was a distance of about eight miles and we were all dead tired when we got there. We had a terrible lot of mud to travel through, up to our knees in places, and we were all carrying a big load. Considering it was dark, we were travelling through shell holes, and we were being shelled going in, it was very unpleasant travelling.

Anyhow, we took over and relieved the 9th Battalion. This was an isolated position and during the 24 hours we were here we never had an enemy shell in the trench, but on the morning of 14/11/16 someone put up the S.O.S. signal and our own artillery began to sweep no-mans-land in front of us. This is their duty in a Counter-attack, but a lot were bursting over our heads and several of our chaps were hit, but not serious.

There must have been some big battles fought here for there were dead men lying about in hundreds. One Australian Major I saw was evidently bogged down and sniped, for he was up to his knees in mud and standing partially up and I could still discern the 'Crown' on his shoulder.

On the night of 14/11/16 we were relieved by another Company of the 50th Battalion and we came back into the supports. There we were doing Fatigue work to the Front Line trenches until 17/11/16. Then we went into the Firing Line again, a position more to the left of the last one. Here we stayed until the 19/11/16, a total of 48 hours, and this was a cow of a place. Fritz knew we were there and was continually shelling our position. We had 20 casualties out of 50 men in 48 hours. That will give you a good idea of the position. It was very uncomfortable as the trenches were all full of mud and water and to make things worse we had three inches of snow on the morning of 18/11/16 and this continued until that night. Cold! - Oh God, it was cold, and mud - I never did see anything like it before. I shall never forget this position. This is my third time 'in' on the Somme.

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On the night of 19/11/16 the 49th Battalion relieved us and I could'nt get out quick enough. We all came back to Delrille Wood and were put in dug-outs on an old trench. We were doing Fatigue work here for the Brigade for a little over a week until on 30/11/16 we moved back into huts at Fricourt.

We remained there until the 6/12/16 and then entrained for Buire, arriving there the same day. Here we were put into billets again and this was a little more comfortable for we soon dug up a fire bucket and bought some coal from the Engine Drivers. We put in a fairly good time here. After a few weeks we left by train for Vignacourt, arriving there at ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ten in the night. We then marched another five miles to St.Vart, arriving there at 1 a.m.

It was at StVart that we spent our Christmas and while here it snowed, which made it very cold. We spent Christmas as well as could be expected and had vegetables and pudding for Dinner. We left St.Vart in the New Year, on the 4th January, 1917, and then marched to Burieu, arriving there on the 6th January. We left there making for the Front Line again and arrived at Fricourt on the 8th January. We stayed there two days and then went into 'Close supports' at Flers, and then on the 12th January we went into the Front Line again for two days, and then back into the Supports for two days, and from there we went to 'Switch Trench', about two miles from the front line.

We were engaged there on fatigue duties for nine days and it was incredibly cold. And snow, did'nt it snow, it was nine inches thick and was the first snow fall I have seen of any importance. This settled all the mud but my God it was cold.

We left 'Switch Trench' on the 28th January, 1917, and went further back from the Lines to Burnapay Wood, into huts called 'Perth Camp'. Here we got all our Christmas boxes and gifts from Australia. I also got a big parcel from home and one from Queensland, so I had all I could desire. It was either feast or famine. While at Perth Camp we were doing fatigues to the Front Line and the near vicinity and most of it was night work.

We left Perth Camp on the 17th February, after several weeks and went back into the Firing Line again. We were relieved again on the 19th February, after two days, and came back into the Supports again until the 21/2/17. Then we went back onto the Firing Line again until the 23/2/17. Then on that day we left the Line and marched to a place called Becant, a distance of about eight miles, and we then stayed there overnight. The next day we went on to Burieu, arriving there on the 25/2/17.

This is the 5th time I have been in the Front Line on this Front and I am full up with it. On the 22/3/17 we left Burieu and after a three day march found ourselves in the Firing Line again. It was while at Burieu that I got my Second Stripe. In going up we marched over a lot of country that the Germans had just evacuated, including Bapume, and a lot of other villages. We went into what was then our front line for three days. It was practically only outposts and new sort of fighting for us.

Well, we came out, had two days rest, and on the morning of 2nd April, 1917, went back up to the Line again fully equipped. At 5.15a.m. that morning we charged the German Lines through the village of Norieul for a depth of a mile, in the face of dozens of Machine Guns and heavy rifle fire.

I had charge of thirty-eight Lewis Gunners on starting the attack and when we reached our objective there were only seven men left, but we still had all four Guns. I was only in the German trench about an hour and during that time I was trying to drive off a counter attack with a Machine Gun. I could see the Germans within forty yards of the trench we were holding and they were shoulder to shoulder as they advanced with bayonets shining and they were big men, too. They dropped like hay before a binder from the fire from my gun. I claim it was my gun that broke the attack.

It was like that for about an hour, when suddenly I found myself in the bottom of the trench with a bullet through the top of my head and another in the right shoulder. That finished me. I had to get away as soon as possible and the best way I could. The trench was by then nearly full with dead and dying men. After walking for three miles I found a dressing station and here I got assistance.

I went through several dressing stations before I found myself in the 13th General Hospital at Bologne. It was there that on the 5/4/17 I was put under the 'X-Rays' and the next day had an operation and had the bullet removed from my shoulder.

I left Bologne at half past five in the evening and boarded the hospital boat called the 'St. Dennis' bound for Dover, ENGLAND. It took us two hours to cross the English Channel and I was then put in a Hospital Train bound for London. After four hours ride I arrived there and found myself in the 1st London General Hospital. All the way over from France the people were very good and could never do enough for one.

I was at that Hospital for three days and while there I was put under the 'X-Rays' again and they discovered that there was another bullet still in my back very close to my lungs, but they would not operate. In this Hospital we had a real good time, but there were some very bad cases there. The visitors were very good, fetching flowers and whatever one asked for. Our Australian Red Cross were giving us the needy things required.

I left this Hospital on May 17th and went to a convalescent Home at Bloomsbury. This is a fine large place and holds about eighty soldiers. We get plenty of outings here. The very first day they took us to the Theatre and everything was free for us. The next day we went to the pictures and then on a motor ride to the London Zoo, and then tea to follow. Noticed nothing of importance here except that Australia was well represented in birds, especially parrots, and I think they were nearly all from South Australia. I passed that remark at the time.

It is now June 1st and still we continue to have good times here. I have seen very little of London yet but hope to later on.

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I have been X-rayed here again, and still the piece is in my back. I don't know why they don't come and take it out. On the 12th June we had an all day trip on the ~~the~~ Thames River and enjoyed it very much.

On the 13th June, 1917, I left Bloomsbury for a Medical Board Examination and found myself back in the 1st London General Hospital again. It was terrible, coming back to Hospital again after being in such a lively place as Bloomsbury.

The first thing after arrival here I was X-rayed again and still the Doctors shook their heads. Imagine me, with my thoughts of going home.

After nearly six weeks in that Hospital, on the 26th July, I was transferred to Harefield for another Medical Board Exam. I did'nt get my 'BOARD' here as expected but was marked 'B.I.B.' and transferred to Weymouth, another Australian Depot.

This meant a hundred and fifty mile trip in the train. I had a lovely ride in the train and got a good view of the country of Southern England. While in London I saw two of the biggest 'Air Raids' the Germans have ever tried on London. On one occaisio Fritz came over with fourty flying machines and did a lot of damage besides killing a lot of people.

Weymouth is a pretty place and is situated on the coast and we can see miles out to sea here....."

THE DIARY ENDED HERE

Corporal William Alfred SPURLING, No. 4275,  
'C' Company, 50th Batt, 15th Brigade, 4th Austn. Infantry.  
died of wounds at the Weymouth Camp  
Hospital on the 16th August, 1917,  
at the age of 24 years, 6 months.

.....  
He was buried on the 20th August, 1917, in  
the Melcombe Regis Cemetery, WEXMOUTH, in  
Grave No. 3143, Plot 'C'.  
.....

B.I.B.

B. 2157

BACK