

17th St. Supply Co.
Hance 1916

Macpherson St
Narrabeen

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via Manly

July 6th 16

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The Editor
"S. M. Herald"
Dear Sir

I am enclosing an
article which my husband has
just sent through, for your
consideration.

Yours truly
Lucy Edwards

Mrs E. W. Edwards

AUSTRALIANS IN FRANCE

A Re-union

(Silver Wattle)

(I)

France was very beautiful, for the budding greenery of an immature spring was hidden under the fallen snowflakes which had danced their way down to Mother Earth. Here and there the black points of the tree trunks, the eaves of the houses, and other sheltered positions served to show by contrast, the purity of the white coverlet formed of the late winter snow. Along the creek the leafless bushes were clothed as it seemed, in a pure white blossom even more pleasing than the glorious peach blossom of our own land. The old church thrust its glistening, shot torn spire upwards into the sunlight.

In the village square a miniature battle was in full progress. In its combatants was all the earnestness and vim which is born of the vigorous free life of the colonies. There was no shortage of ammunition, for the snow lay inches deep and the drifts were piled up against the lorries. The sections of the "park" had formed themselves into hostile camps and were eager for the fray. Attacking parties advanced laden with ammunition, while in their rear were ammunition bearers with buckets of snowballs, round and crisp enough to require some little force of impact ere they burst in a smother of loose wet snow. To and fro the tide of battle surged and the village square was lost and won successively, just as some months before, it had been lost and won to British and German troops. On both sides the capture of prisoners led to determined sorties for their release and, more often than not, the sentries themselves were taken prisoner in the attacks for the release of one's own men. With the warmth of action surging through our veins and the joyous sense of a vigorous boyish rivalry in our hearts, we did not grudge the appearance of the "hat" for contributions to pay for a couple of broken windows. I guess some of the boys would not have missed that fight for the price of many windows.

There came a day when the Company received orders to be ready to move off on the following morning. We were to leave our English Division to whom we had been attached for months past and were in future to support our own boys who had just arrived from Egypt. Perhaps the reader will not understand that we were to some extent, reluctant to do so. Such was the case however. We had supported one of the best divisions on the line—perhaps the best. We had won from the command a sincere regard because of fearlessness, enterprise, and efficiency in the work of transport. We Australians had won—can you imagine it—a name for discipline. Not the discipline of the cowed and broken spirit as is the case sometimes, but the discipline born of a distinct "esprit de corps". Our company had good officers and willing men and—well, I suppose we were desirous of being worthy of the name won so gallantly by the boys of Gallipoli and which naturally had been applied to us as well. In all our career we had never failed an appointment for work. Upon the exacting and usually dangerous work of the Engineers, and where some companies had failed or made excuses, we had accepted the chances and had taken the lorries into supposably impossible positions. So we were "good" with the Division and the record of the Division was an honour and a source of pride to us.

The work prior to moving off can be done in two ways. It can be the systematic sorting of gear, packing of all useful material, and the cleansing of lorries, billets, and of the "park" roads themselves. On the other hand it can be the emergency call in which essentials only are taken, and in which in the matter of, say, twenty minutes, the lorries swing out one by one on the trail for the new position. In emergency calls the workshop is the main difficulty. Naturally its material is somewhat scattered, for the smiths and the carpenters have their own little shops, and the main shop—consisting of a rough moveable tarpaulin covered framework reaching from the workshop lorry proper to the stores lorry—is large enough to accommodate three "patients". In emergency the store and workshop are closed and run out in a tangle of debris which has to be cut away. Any lorries which cannot be moved in time have necessarily to be abandoned to their fate. Luckily we have never yet been

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in such a position though we have had the order to "stand by" for an emergency. Upon the present occasion however, the day was before us and by evening the rows of lorries were a picture of cleanliness and order, and the street, in the words of one French Madame, was a picture of "propreté", such as had never existed since the advent of the war. On the following morning the men lined up in the village square. The old Colonel faced his audience of vigorous colonials. In those tense moments we realised perhaps what we were to each other — such is the regard of man for man, regard born of mutual admiration of each other under service conditions. "Officers and men of the — Company, I am sorry indeed that you are leaving me! You have done your work nobly and well, your discipline has been perfect! My loss is your gain, for you are going to serve these gallant countrymen of yours who have made themselves heroes at Gallipoli! I wish you well! If you are as sorry to lose me as I am to lose you then I am well pleased!" The answer came in the form of three ringing Australian cheers. This old war-tried veteran had won the regard of the boys, and the fact that he had faltered as he spoke, was a "bitter sweet" to us. Three minutes later a lorry swung out of the line and trailed down the roadway — it was followed by another, and another, and another. With many goodbyes to the townspeople, and banter and floating of kisses to "les demoiselles," we bade adieu to a very happy period of service. The country was ~~the~~ delicious with the colour and growth of a European spring. We were leaving behind the rolling hills and valleys and were seeking the lowlands of Flanders. The long trailing dustcloud stretching for several miles ahead marked the course of the moving convey. We had said good bye with reluctance, but now a dormant hope took lively shape — we were to see the boys — the fellows from Egypt and Gallipoli. Nine months had been spent almost as the only Australians in France, and somehow we wanted to see a "bit of Australia" again. At sundown the convey had come to rest in a village street. The perfection of the day had carried on into the long evening. A clatter of hoofs was heard upon the cobble stones and word spread quickly "they are Australians". Riding with all the unconscious freedom and grace of the bush born Australian, healthy and suntanned, men so utterly unlike the British Cavalrymen in appearance, were to us as a glimpse of our own native hills and plains — they were our idols for the time being. Perhaps they wondered at the cheers and enthusiasm which welcomed them, but there, they did not know the loneliness of a handful of Australians amongst peoples so utterly unlike themselves. With the advent of these men has come to us a new vigour in life. Naturally we look forward to the supreme effort. Thank God — and Kitchener — our boys are trained now, and they have learned that there is such an element as prudence, so essential to ultimate success in this war. What this self control costs is best estimated by one's own feelings caused by the tauntings of the enemy. On one occasion the Australian coat of arms was displayed from the German trenches and underneath were the words "Advance Australia — if you can!" Such is the life of patience and bitterness which will exact a terrible recompense from the world spoilers. What of the morale of the boys themselves? Two days ago I met a New Zealander well out upon the road. We were both very dusty and perspiring freely from much walking. My friend had his "kit up" in addition to his equipment and two blankets. Had he been in civilian garb I would have imagined him anywhere out in the heat of the "never never" country. As he passed his words to me were, "Never mind, Australia, we'll soon be there!" Say! What is the value of such men as these?

About 1480 words

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