

My own war experiences.

I went into camp on 3rd Oct 1916 at the old Exhibition camp and later to Mitcham Camp. I went through a grenade school and then a musketry school & then went to the Artillery. While here we trained under a notorious Sgt Major whose picture is displayed. He was a great horseman but an unforgettable character. Soon afterwards we left Mitcham & journeyed by train to Melbourne and marched to the Artillery Camp at Maribyrnong. This camp was on the Maribyrnong River and the soldiers lived in tents.

Soldiering was carried out strictly here and guards were supplied for important factories and installations.

We had model gun pits with underground trenches from one gun to another. Also a lot of horses were kept and were stabled in brick walled buildings with concrete floors.

Each Artilleryman was required to be able to ride a horse, and I was lucky in being passed as able to ride a few minutes after getting on my horse.

Some were not so fortunate, and after riding their horses around the rectangular school at a walk for days they started to drop, and I remember a Professor Wallace amongst the learners. His horse turned at the corner and poor old

Professor went straight on. Had it been any one else, they would have been abused, but Professor had all the officers down on their knees around him & he got a lot of sympathy.

We used to pull the guns with six horses Two + Two + Two and a driver to each pair. The harness consisted of breast plates and all horses had quick release gadgets.

All orders for battery formations were given by arm signals by the officers, and it was funny watching recruits trying to pull their horses to do the wrong thing, when the horses knew the signals better than their riders & they would do the right tactics in spite of the efforts of the drivers.

While in Marbyrnong I got 4 days leave to go to Sydney and 4 days to come back to Nantawarra, where all the family met.

I got an attack of appendicitis at Nantawarra and went back to Adelaide & to Parkmynd Hospital, where I was nursed by my wife. When I had recovered I went back to Marbyrnong and all my old cobbles were still there.

We sailed in the transport A15 Pt Sydney

from Pt Melbourne on 9th Oct 1917. 1600
artillery reinforcements on board and the
holds filled with frozen meat for the troops
in the Egyptian and Palestine areas.

My father and a cousin from Tasmania and another
cousin from Melbourne were on the pier to see me
off, and when we got out to sea I found
that my father had placed a bag of oranges
aboard the ship, which were a godsend to a
lot of us when seasickness took its toll.

Our first port of call was Colombo in Ceylon.
The ship took on coal there and we were ashore
for about three hours. It was a pretty place.

At sea the bird life and flying fish were
our chief interests, with physical exercises,
lectures, boat drill + marching around the decks
to fill in time. We always had Church services
on the Sundays. When the boat crossed 'The
Line' some festivities were indulged in, and
many officers + men went into the water tank
unwillingly, + when things had got out of hand, the
siren went + all had to put on their
life belts and take up boat positions.

We soon entered the Red Sea and were not
far from land. Steep barren hills + sandy
desert was about all there was to see, but the

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sunsets and then the sight of the

moon rising were something to remember.

We arrived at Pt. Telfair and went into camp near Suez. Here the days were hot and the nights cold. When the sun set it was dark very quickly. I went into Suez a couple of times, and my impression was flies, dirt, disease and everything we don't want to see in our country.

Ten days at Suez & we went by train in the night to Alexandria, crossed the River Nile about daylight & the Nile valley was irrigated and looked very nice. We went aboard the "Karoa" and after 4 days of rough seas entered Taranto Harbour in the South of Italy. The Italian Fleet was in harbour & was a memorable sight. We spent Christmas in Taranto & our unit had a very nice dinner to celebrate.

Then we entrained, crossed to Brindisi & then up the Adriatic coast. Steep hills on one side & the sea on the other. It was winter & the country under snow, and we had snow fights at stops. Places we passed through Bari, Foggia, Ancona, Senigallia, Fano, Pesaro & Faenza & Bologna. We saw 1917 year out while standing in Mt Cenis Tunnel, about 20 miles long, in Italy.

After customs officials did their duties our train proceeded to Modane in France and our watches had to be put back an hour so that meant we had to see the old year out again. This time in France.

From here on the country was lovely to look at. We passed through Chambéry, Aix-les-Bains, Caloz, Virieu-le-grand, Lyons, and went into camp at St. Germain for the night. Next day we went through Tours, Le-Mans and finally left our train at Cherbourg. We crossed to England in the "Prince George" and lying on the deck without blankets, it was so cold that we had three pairs of socks on + Jack Darby + I had our feet in a kit bag to try to keep warm.

We landed at Southampton, train to Colford and went to the Artillery camp at Heytesbury. Was put into a Howitzer Battery, and our training became intensive. I passed my gun-laying examination here.

I had 14 days leave from here and went to London, Peterborough and Edinburgh.

Then over to France one night: we used to proceed from one staging camp to another, often carrying our equipment about 30 miles a day.

We found the Y.M.C.A. Salvation Army + other Church hats a great comfort to the troops.

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We arrived in our camp about 10 P.M. after a long march and with no rations, wet and tired & the Salvation Army chaplain got out of bed & made hot coffee for us. He had nothing else to give us, but the hot drink was appreciated.

Joined the 113th Howitzer Battery wagon lines on 22nd May, and then witnessed the Australians in an unusual action. A Royal Horse Artillery Battery was next to us, and they had a man tied to a gun wheel doing field punishment, and with an armed guard mounted over him. The diggers let him go & forced the English Major to promise not to tie him up again.

This was on the Banks of the Somme River and the position received a lot of attention from German bombers at Night & heavy shells would whine over head & land in Lucery further back, but their shells didn't land near the wagon lines.

After a few days I was sent up to the guns at Foullroy in charge of the rations. I wasn't driving but just sitting in the pill box with the rations. The driver had to wait for some time before going through the village because it was being shelled & when the shelling stopped he went through at the gallop.

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Then I went up to the guns and was laying
& firing throughout the night. The Sgt & I did
the shoots and we had to keep awake between
shoots. Each time we would finish a shoot
the gun had to be loaded & layed on the
S.O.S. line. That was a rule that was
a must. One gunner was always on the
look out for an S.O.S. signal and it was
usually red over red over red. These were
fired by the Infantry when an enemy attack
was launched, and the S.O.S. guard would give
the alarm at the Majors dugout, and run to his
own gun and pull the firing lever. It
was remarkable how quickly hundreds of guns
would be answering that appeal.

The Fauvey battery site was near Corbie a nice
town with a very nice Church which had been
badly battered by enemy shell fire. After our
nights shoots were over, we would lay the gun
on the S.O.S. line, camouflage it, and then
prowl around the town. There were lovely patches
of strawberries in back yards in Corbie & we would
eat all we could & then fill our hats to take
back to the other gunners. I saw the best
crop of wheat I've ever seen in about a 20 acre
paddock near Corbie.

One morning I found a piano in a building
in Corbie & after getting help we found an

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old cultivator on which we loaded the piano and pulled it back to our billet, which was then in a nice little house. This piano was carried with the battery right through the war and was used for concerts and Church services.

We moved to new positions very often, and always in the dark. We would dig new gun pits and dug-outs to live in. We supported numerous attacks with a creeping barrage and could gauge the success of the attacks by the numbers of prisoners being marched back in the morning.

Sometimes while we were digging gun pits a parcel would arrive from Australia & we would cut it into shares and each would enjoy their part of it.

One afternoon two very large shells making an unusual noise landed just behind us and did not explode, so a working party was set the task of digging one of them up. It had been sent over without a nose cap, so there was no fuse to explode the shell.

The biggest and most important battle I was in was on the 8th of August at Villers-Bretonneux. The previous evening the Germans were shelling at random and one of their shells landed in an orchard $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of Villers-Bretonneux. The orchard had 18 tanks all loaded with bombs mortar shells, rifle ammunition, petrol in tins & tins of water.