

8.4.15 - 14.7.15  
EXTRACTS FROM LETTER WRITTEN BY DAVID G. ALEXANDER (Private)  
1509A

TO HIS MOTHER.

Aerodrome Camp.  
Heliopolis.  
April 8th, 1915.

My dear Mother,

I dare say you have been annoyed at not hearing from me for such a length of time but there is no need to be anxious on my account for I am still enjoying perfect health. We arrived here on 22nd of last month. The voyage across was an ideal one in every way. We came by the northern route calling at Brisbane on 13th February to pick up some overland troops. We didn't go right up to Brisbane, but stopped at a place called Pinkenbar about six miles from the city. We left there next evening about sunset stopping off Townsville on the night of the 15th to take on mails. The stop was only for a couple of hours. On our way through the Torres Strait the troop-ship which accompanied us went aground on a coral reef about 4 a.m. on the 18th. Fortunately both ships were fitted with wireless and we picked up her distress signals and went back to give assistance but she was stuck firmly on the reef and we were unable to pull her off on that day. When the tide went down she seemed likely to stop there for some time. We spent all next day working at her but were unsuccessful. Hundreds of tons of coal were thrown overboard to lighten her but she didn't come off the reef until about 12 O'clock on 20th. We reached Thursday Island the same evening at 4 o'clock and were allowed leave ashore. We all enjoyed ourselves immensely and were very sorry when time came for us to go aboard again. The island is very small and has a very mixed population. About one third of the population is white the remainder are blacks, chinese and Japanese. The total population including the Australian garrison is about six hundred. We left there on 22nd about 8 a.m. and didn't sight land until 24th when we came abreast of the East Indies which were on our right hand. Immense mountains were plainly visible and with the aid of glasses we could see the coolies working on the rice plantations. We were then in sight of the islands until we reached Colombo where we arrived about noon on 8th March.

There is no wharf at Colombo to accommodate large boats so we had to anchor about two miles from the jetty. We were hardly at anchor when the ship was surrounded by hundreds of native boats loaded with all kinds of fruit, curios etc. I need not tell you the natives did a roaring trade. We were not allowed ashore that day but were taken on a route march round the city on the following day. There were a couple of French and Japanese ships in the harbour and as we passed them going ashore they cheered us to the echo and dipped their flags in salute. We of course returned their greetings fourfold. We got a rousing reception ashore also. The whole population black and white turning out to greet us. We halted at Queen Victoria Park and had a rest and refreshments. After about an hours rest we formed up again and marched back to the ship via the military barracks where we halted again and were served out with a glass of beer or a bottle of mineral water as we desired. When we got aboard my company had to go on guard and we had a lively time until next morning as some of the boys broke leave and went ashore to obtain drink. A number of them were arrested and fined £2 each by the major next morn. I obtained some of the money used in Ceylon and will send it to you as a curio. The rupee is the standard of currency. Its value is 1/4d. and this is divided into 50 cents. These are also divided into half cents so you can get as much money there for 10/- as Rehoe's big engine could pull. Just before we left Colombo a troopship came in with native Indian troops on board bound for the front and when we saw them we gave them a mighty cheer which they answered. I think the echoes of the cheer are still ringing round Colombo. We sailed from Colombo about 7 p.m. on 10th. It was just dark as we left the harbour and we had the searchlights from the ports playing on us until we got out of the range. They have a range of about 15 miles and can easily spot a ship at that distance. We passed Aden about 5 a.m. on the 17th and shortly after passed a couple of cruisers, one of which accompanied us. We entered the Red Sea on 18th passing quite close to Vocha which was shelled by British ships when Turkey declared war. On entering the Red Sea the ship was placed in a state of defence on account of a rumour about other ships being fired on in the canal by the Turks. The precautions however were unnecessary for fresh orders came and we disembarked at Suez where we arrived about 8 p.m. on the 22nd. We disembarked on the 23rd

23rd and entrained for Cairo proceeding via Ismalia and Tag-a-Teig arriving at Cairo about 12 midnight. We branched off there on a Suburban line and detrained at a small station near Heliopolis called Palais-de-Koubbeh. From there we did a 3 mile march across the desert to a rest camp named Abassieh getting to bed about 4 a.m. I cannot describe the scene that met my gaze next morning but I'll try and give you a rough idea. On one side was the tower of Heliopolis on another lay the English garrison barracks and on the other two was the open desert with miles of level sandy plains stretching as far as the eye could see and low sand hills in the distance. We stopped there about 4 days and then came on here to join our battalion. We joined our battalion about 12 o'clock on Monday and had to turn out on a review with our brigade an hour later to be inspected by General Sir Ian Hamilton who was very pleased with our condition and passed the brigade as fit for active service. Nearly all the brigade has now left it is supposed for the Dardanelles. Only the reinforcements were left behind to guard supplies etc. The paper will probably give you an account of their being in action before this reaches you. We expect to follow them up shortly. There are several battalions of English Territorials here in the Garrison barracks and alongside us we have the New Zealand contingent encamped. There is one company of Maoris amongst them.

It is very warm here during the day and gets quite chilly at night but we have plenty of blankets and overcoats and we make ourselves quite comfortable. We are of course living under canvas. We do about 6 hours drill per day and get a half holiday each week. Sometimes we have dust storms which make it impossible to go out and the sand getting into your eyes nearly blinds you as well as chokes you. I have bought myself a pair of goggles with smoked glass in them to protect my eyes from the dust and the glare of the sun.

We are now undergoing a very steady training under the tuition of some officers from Ceylon and an adjutant from the Imperial army - a Scotchman at that. Of course we have Australian officers as well. We have route marches a couple of times a week to keep us fit. We go

out along the famous line of watch towers built by Napoleon, which extend from Cairo to the Suez at intervals of about 5 miles. Sometimes we go out on what is called a bivouac. We march out from camp in the morning taking with us greatcoats, blankets and waterproof sheets. The field kitchens which are drawn by horses accompany us and cook our meals as they go along and when we halt there is always a hot meal ready for us. Each of the kitchens cook enough food for 300 men. We sleep in the open at night and return to camp next day skirmishing all the way returning in time for tea.

I entered a raffle the other day for a camera and was lucky enough to win it. I have taken some photos with it and will send them to you if allowed to do so by the censor. It is only a small one but the photos will give you an idea of <sup>what</sup> it is like in Egypt.

Egyptian money is very funny at first. There is the Egyptian pound which is worth about 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. more than the English one. A pound is divided into 100 parts called "piastres". Piastres, or "Pusahers", as the Australians call them are divided into 10 parts called "millieures." A millieure is worth about 1/3rd of a penny. Piastres are of two kinds. One silver about the size of a 3d. piece and a nickel one about the size of a shilling so it is very easy to make a mistake. We found them very awkward at first, but have now got quite accustomed to them. I will send you some specimens.

I was selected to make one of the guard at the 1st Australian field hospital on Tuesday last. The hospital was formerly a big hotel owned by the Belgian Government and was given by them to the Australian authorities to be used as a hospital. It was the largest hotel in the world and at one time the Czar the King of Belgium and the Kaiser slept there for a night. The building in all contains over 1,000 rooms. It is in the centre of Heliopolis.

I suppose you will be bored to death reading all this dry stuff but it is such a length of time since I wrote that I am trying to make up the deficiency now. I sincerely hope you and all the family have been keeping in good health, I am very anxious to know as I haven't

had any letters since I left Australia but may get some to-night as the mail is in.

Must draw to a close now for this week.  
Trusting this will find you enjoying perfect health,  
Fondest love to all as if named from

Ever Your loving son,

David.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTER WRITTEN BY DAVID G. ALEXANDER  
TO HIS MOTHER. (PRIVATE 1509A)

On the High Seas.

My dear Mother,

..... I was very sick for about two days after leaving but am now feeling O.K. again and have such an appetite that I can scarcely get enough to eat. I don't mean to infer that we are stinted of tucker for such is not the case. We are getting the very best of food and plenty of it at that. Besides, we have every form of amusement you could mention and nothing is left undone to make us comfortable. We have all kinds of games and at present there is a sports in progress for which very good prizes are given.

..... We are having a very idle time. Nothing to do and all day to do it. The only work we do is about a quarter of an hours physical drill morn and evening. During the remainder of the day we just sit about the decks and read. The Australian people presented a lot of books etc. to the Government for our use. ....

Ever your affectionate son,

David.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTER WRITTEN BY DAVID G. ALEXANDER  
TO HIS MOTHER. (PRIVATE 1509A)

On Active Service.

May 15th, 1915.

My dearest Mother,

..... Well as regards myself - I am still safe and sound. Haven't got a scratch yet. I seem to be bullet proof. The bullets whizz all round but do not touch me. We are still giving the Turks a "doing" and driving them back steadily. They got up a bit of a surprise for us the other day in the shape of a 9.2 siege gun and began to shell our position but it did hardly any damage. The next day one of our battleships got its range and blew it to "smithereens" with two shots. Our boys christened it "Gentle Annie." The noise scared us a bit at first but we took no notice of it after a couple of shots as we saw it wasn't capable of doing much damage. Their artillery has done us very little damage up to the present. It is of a very old pattern.

We are looked after pretty well here and up to the present we haven't had a single case of sickness of any kind amongst us. Our rations are very good too. We have bacon for breakfast every morning with plenty of jam, tea, cheese etc. and for dinner we get beef or mutton and vegetables as well. So you see we are living pretty high. For dinner yesterday I had steak and Onions and mashed potatoes. Cigarettes, tobacco and matches are issued to us twice weekly. The Navy very kindly presented us with tobacco and cigarettes last week. The issue is not very large there being such a large number of us to go round but it is very welcome. Send me a couple of packets if you can but don't send many as they might go astray.

You can't imagine how glad I was to get your letters. They were the first I had since I left Sydney. You have no idea how much it means to us to get letters here and how envious we are if we see one fellow with a pile of letters when we have none. As for papers they are simply rushed. Was sorry but not very much surprised to hear about Ralph. His parents must be heartbroken. Things seem to be pretty lively

all round Borris just now what with balls, parties,  
weddings, etc. Glad to know that Ada enjoyed herself at  
the Ag dance. Borris seems to be going ahead so much  
that I am expecting to find it nearly as big as Dublin  
when I get back. ....

Fondest love from

Ever your Affectionate son,

David.

Have written most of this with moonlight with  
bullets flying round so please excuse any mistakes.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTER WRITTEN BY DAVID G. ALEXANDER  
TO HIS MOTHER. (PRIVATE 1509A)

"B" Company,

On Active Service.

July 14th, '15.

My dear Mother,

..... Was glad to know you got the snapshot safely. I wish I could send you snapshots of some of the things I have seen here. They would open your eyes a bit. They have opened mine I can tell you. I often go up on a hill in the night-time, when the fleet is bombarding a Turkish position, to watch sight. There is an awful grandeur about it. You have no idea what it is like. The heaviest thunderstorm I ever saw was nothing to it. I almost feel sorry for the Turks when I see those big 12 in. shells falling in their position like hailstones. The flashes when the shells exploded looked like a gigantic fireworks display and lit up the sky for miles, like lightening. Sometimes as many as fifty of these explode together, hurling stones, trees, clods of earth, etc. yards in the air. It is a case of "goodbye" to anything that comes within range of those 12 in. guns or the "Lizzies" 15 in. She spotted some Turks bringing up a big gun one day and had one shot at it. The result was, big hole, no gun. ....

Fondest love all as if named from

Your loving son,

David.