

BOOK 5. (From January 1917.)

When the previous book was completed I was in the middle of my first day in Malta Harbour. In the evening everyone was happy and lights were allowed on board after dark and also no restrictions regarding noise. Although no one worried very much during the four days coming from Alexandria to Malta, still on our arrival in a place of safety there was a feeling of relief. The view of the city from out in the Harbour is a fine one and to me very interesting.

Lying as we were just a couple of hundred yards from the wharf and facing the entrance it does not take much exercise of my memory to bring the whole scene before my eyes again. On our right the wharf was comparatively close with its shops and streets running along the water's edge, behind was a steep incline with a portion of the town built on the side and on top. From where we were you could pick out a lot of the main buildings. Further along towards the Harbour Entrance was to be seen a very powerful wireless station on a crest of the cliff, a huge hospital and sort of barracks whilst below were at intervals of every few yards venomous looking naval guns jutting out of holes in the rock. The other side of the Harbour was further away and therefore did not attract so much attention from us but that was the main business side of the wharf and also over there was the principal business portion of Valetta. The Harbour itself was full of shipping of all sorts. Transports like ourselves loaded with troops homeward bound or else outwards to Salonika, Egypt, Mesopotamia and India, hospital ships, war boats of all sorts and Mine Sweepers whilst dodging in and out amongst all this mixture were just numerous Maltese boatmen, working their boats about in a wonderful manner. Every now and again our boys would drop an empty case overboard and then the fun would once more start with the bombardment of potatoes. I guess the ship owners lost some 'murphies' during our stay in the Harbour.

Up to now I was still a comparative stranger on board amongst our men. With the exception of a few wireless men and a couple of my own Regiment, none were known to me even by name. One Bluejacket (English Navy) who was coming home on leave had chummed up with me on the first day out as he kindly showed me how to sling my hammock so as not to fall out when a rough sea was on. We used to meet sometimes and have a yarn but apart from that I used to spend most of my time reading and sleeping. But at Malta we took on a couple of hundred Bluejackets going home to England on furlough after three years service off the coast of Greece, Gallipoli and Africa.

Soon after they came on board I chummed up with two of them, one a young man about 23 called Langdown and his close companion a few years older named Jackson. I cannot remember what it was that drew us together but I have to thank them for many hours of happy companionship and numerous kind acts. I never met two men so inseparable, where one was the other was sure to be found not far away and both so totally different to the ordinary run of sailor.

They both were from Devonshire, had always been on the same boat and were hoping at the expiration of their furlough to be transferred to the Submarines together. We would meet up on one of the decks and yarn by the hour, talking of England which was a source of interest to me and of a night time when all lights were out but too early to go to bed I would grope about down below till I found their sleeping apartment and we would sit in the dark talking. One day a little incident happened that brought us together closer than ever. On board boat one misses a lot of things through ignorance of the fact that they are due to us. These sailors that we had on board of course knew all the little tricks of the trade and demanded that rum should be issued to them. My two friends came to me one day and said that some rum was issued to them but neither of them drank it so if I liked I could have their share, when they found that I did not drink it either it served to make us still more of one mind. When I come home I can show you several photos of these two men.

Langdown is the younger of the two and had just finished reading a book and strongly recommended that I should read it, it was nicely bound so I did not want to take it as I could not finish it before we parted, but he made me take it as a gift, it was a book all about Germany entitled "The First Violin". I sent it back to Australia after I was done with it and I believe they found it as interesting as I did. Most of the boys had not been paid for some time before coming on board and going to a strange country had no prospects of getting money for sometime after



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landing. Before these two parted from me at Southampton they had told me that they had plenty of cash having been paid off before leaving their boat, and wanted to know if I had plenty of money to see me through. I have their home address and received one letter from them after we parted, but like many more friends that I have made in my wanderings we have simply lost the run of each other and probably will never meet again. The life we live as soldiers or sailors points to the fact that probably they are dead whilst they on their part think the same of me. I often wonder what has become of them, and if ever I am down in Devonshire intend to hunt up the address to see if there is any chance of us coming together once more.

It was Wednesday morning when we steamed into Malta Harbour, naturally everyone was anxious to go on shore but no leave was granted, in fact for three days we were cooped up on board ship without being allowed to land. Soldier like we blamed our C.O. but I fancy there was a different reason.

Lord Methuen of South African fame was the Governor of Malta and according to reports he had a holy set on Australians. Many of our wounded had been taken to the Malta hospital from Gallipoli and as usual had played up. The Governor had been rather severe and bad blood existed between them. On one occasion Lord Methuen was to address a meeting (concert or something) and when he rose to speak our boys counted him out, everytime he got on his feet they howled at him drowning his voice. The consequences were that every time a boat came into harbour with Australians on board they were prohibited from landing unless an Officer was in charge.

I cannot vouch for the truth of the above but it was given to me at the time, anyhow there we had to stay on board within view of one of the most historic cities in the world and could not visit it. Our boys wrote insulting things on the ironwork of our boat with chalk about our Officers but it did no good until Saturday came and then a Route March through the city was arranged for all on board. I think it was about 2p.m. when we formed up in a street just off the wharf and commenced a two hour's march all through the city. It was a good way to see everything in one visit for the leader knew what streets to take us along but most of us I'm afraid were ungrateful and wanted to get away on our own. It is a long time ago since all this happened so I cannot give you much of an account of it but two things have remained in my mind connected with Malta, one is the enormous underground grain-store-house many centuries old and the other was the Street of Stairs. The latter is a long street with fine shops on each side and all the time you are going along it you are mounting steps. It was a wonderful sight once seen never forgotten. Eighteen months later I used to go along a street in a town in France which resembled this one in Valetta on a very small scale and when I asked someone what it reminded him of, he immediately answered "the Street of Stairs in Valetta".

Well they eventually got our procession up onto the hill where the Wireless Station was and overlooking the bay, it was going to take some considerable time to get the 1,800 men forming the procession back on to our boat again as everyone had to be taken across to the old "Kingstonia" by rowing boats so some of us disappeared down a side street and saw a bit of the town on our own, we arrived on board late that evening with the last of the mob so were not missed only we had not gained very much only managed to secure a few souvenirs such as books of views, picture Post Cards and what was best of all we bought a lot of fine oranges as they were fairly cheap at this Port and would come in very handy when once more we were out at sea. I suppose you are wondering what was keeping us so long at Malta, so did we wonder at the time but later on we found that it was on account of Submarines outside the Harbour. They had missed us coming in and were determined not to do so as we came out. Since there was no hope of going on land again everyone was becoming impatient to continue the trip on to England.

Sunday 21st saw us at a Voluntary Church Parade, nothing unusual happened only that I remember it was the first time I saw Captains Bell and Muir with their hats off and they were both as bald as I am. Both these Captains you will hear a lot more about later on.

During the day some more Blue-jackets and Marines came on board, amongst them were the two that I have just been writing about. They were in charge of a Lieutenant who had risen from the ranks (a most unusual thing in the Navy) and these men were proud of him too. He proved himself a very fine fellow on board, level headed and never messing his men about. During the afternoon he got some of his men together on the upper deck and gave an impromptu concert which was really good. He went through a performance of hypnotizing three of his men and the antics were most laughable. I cannot say if it was a put-up job or not, my friends said afterwards that it was



genuine, anyhow it was extremely funny. I got a fine photo of the performance.

Late in the afternoon an air of excitement began to run through the boat, no one knew any thing and yet no one was at all surprised when preparations were made for us to be towed out of the Harbour and once more continue our dangerous trip. As we passed out under the noses of those big Naval guns, I guess some of the boys wished they could take them with us. Once out of the Harbour we fell into our proper position, first went the Mine Sweepers, those men who are daily doing the most dangerous work and who are rarely mentioned in our papers, after the Sweepers came our escort in the shape of two French War boats about 3/4 of a mile apart with our old Tub coming up between them but slightly behind. It soon got dark and once more we had to be careful not to show any lights, some time during the night the Mine Sweepers left us and returned to Malta.

Next morning I was up very early and somewhere about 7a.m. saw land standing boldly out in front of us. We sailed in through the Island of Sicily and the mainland of Italy, it was so narrow that we could plainly see the villages clustered along the coast of each country and the vine clad hills running up from the beach. We were now travelling along a track that the "Kingstonia" had never been over before, it was meant that we should pass between Sardinia and Corsica therefore we ran North in full view of the Italian Coast but the weather came up very rough and our Captain decided that it was too dangerous to try the Straits so kept hugging the coast and going North. The weather was becoming very cold, it was mid winter and although that did not count for much in Egypt we were now a long way further north and getting well into the snow country. The mountain ranges of Italy were covered with snow and the sun shining on them made a beautiful scene as we sailed northward.

On the 22nd we passed between the mainland and the Island of Elba and then still keeping land in view on our right we headed westward for France. I think I have already told you that the custom was to go at about half speed during the day and then as soon as night came on to extinguish all lights and go full speed ahead. This our last night out gave us as near a scare as any since we left Alexandria. It was about 10p.m. and a heavy storm was raging when all of a sudden our engines ceased working and we came to a stop. A minute or so after we continued on our way but only at half speed and also with certain lights burning.

Next morning the explanation was forth coming. An outward bound transport bearing troops to Salonika sailed in between our escort and our boat. One of the sailors said we went too near to each other, in fact so close that the two Captains shook hands whilst passing. That sailor must have been either a Yankee or an Australian but all the same some of us were very close to 'Davey Jones Locker' that night, and the sea was in a nasty mood too, would have been an awkward night for an accident.

I am on the lookout for the end of our voyage as far as the old "Kingstonia" is concerned and most of us won't be very sorry either, a slow rolling old Tub, full of lice and reeking with the smell of her cargo of onions, but we have nothing to complain of as she served us well and has given us a safe passage over to France. All day long we looked anxiously ahead for the first sign of Marseilles Port, every now and again we would pass some town on the water's edge or perched away up on some high hill, it was all very pretty but our boat was straining every nerve to reach her Harbour before dark. We arrived outside the river mouth about 9p.m. and it was fine as we steamed into our anchorage to watch the mass of search lights playing on the waters around, one continual chain of them reaching as far as the horizon on both sides of us.

The next time I saw any of this kind of work was away up in Scotland, as the train I was on board crossed the wonderful Forth Bridge. Later on still search lights played a very active part in my life.

Early on in the morning of the 24th our boat once more got on the move and steamed through miles of shipping to her place at one of the wharves. Labourers soon got to work unloading the cargo, mostly onions, and we loafed round watching the busy life amongst all the shipping and comparing our first introduction to a French city with our own Native Ports. When evening came we thought perhaps some of us would be granted leave to go and visit the city but were doomed to disappointment. The 25th was simply the same programme as the 24th. I never thought it was possible to stow away so many sacks of onions.

Huge nets were filled with these bags and a crane would hoist them up and drop its burden on the wharf, our only bit of excitement would be when



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one of the bags would burst open and shower its contents on the niggers doing the work and the funny sight they cut when this happened would always bring forth a roar from our boys. As evening came on and it looked like another night on board, some of our Squadron got together and laid plans to break ship to visit the city as soon as it was possible. As soon as it was dark about eighty of them stepped over the gangway and made for the wharf gates, Military Police saw them but probably had had dealings with Australians before so were too cowardly to turn them back or ask for their passes, instead they came on board and reported to the Major what they had seen. If our Major had acted fairly he would have immediately called a Muster Parade and noted who was missing but instead of that he placed a guard on every gangway to catch them on their return. Of course when the boys came back and found how the situation was they simply rushed the boat and as the guards were their own mates no arrests were made. One very amusing and almost fatal incident happened, our boat was touching the wharf on one side and the fore part of the boat was hitched up to a post on the wharf by a long and very stout rope. Two of the boys saw how things were going at the main gangways so commenced to crawl along the rope, one of the guards was at the other end and he stood on the rope to tighten and steady it for his mates. The first one got on board safely whilst the second one was half way along when the Orderly Officer came along to inspect the guard, he may not have seen anything as it was pitch dark or perhaps he knew what was going on, anyhow he stood looking out over the end of the boat for sometime. Poor Jack Long was clinging like grim death to the rope, it was freezing fast and at last Jack could hold on no longer so dropped off into forty feet of black dirty sea water. They eventually got him on board almost frozen to death, fortunately for that Officer he was not one of our men, he belonged to another unit which was on the boat with us. And now comes the punishment part of it, and the dirty way it was administered. It is the one action of our Major that cannot be explained, he tried the same trick twice afterwards but once bitten twice shy is a good motto to follow.

Next morning on Parade the Major said that certain men had broken ship and if they had any manhood in them they would step out and thus save innocent ones from being punished. Immediately 60 or 70 men stepped out, (of course you always find a few skunks in a crowd.) Major Watt then passed judgement on them, viz. Twenty eight days pay = Nine pounds sixteen shillings per man. Military law does (ON READING ON I FEEL THIS SHOULD HAVE READ DOES NOT - I MAYBE WRONG) allow so severe a punishment for that crime but you will always find that when the ordinary Aussie takes a risk and gets caught he carries out his punishment without any crying, these chaps took the risk and all decided to accept his punishment without asking for a Court Martial. Now when a soldier is crimed and fulfils his punishment, such punishment is entered on his crime sheet as a lasting record against him but from every other point of view that crime is wiped out as far as future treatment is concerned, in other words a man cannot be punished twice for one offence. Then again when an Officer relies on your honor to stand out and acknowledge your crime to save one's mates you would naturally expect that Officer not to be too severe in his verdict. Our Major went beyond his power in his sentence. Still the boys did not protest but that was not the finish of it, for months after the Major continued to punish them for this one offence. Most of them had a large sum of money in their pay books but the amount was not deducted from that, they had to work it off on arrival in England, nor would he let them draw from their surplus, secondly when leave came our way every man was to have leave before any of these boys, and again if two men were crimed, one a 'Marseilles stunt' man and the other not, the former would be heavily punished whilst the latter would probably get off with some very light punishment. It got that way that some of the boys instead of putting A on their shoulders for Anzac bought an M and wore that. Our Major was a strange man of two parts, good and bad, and though he boasted to his brother Officers that his boys were all experienced and tried soldiers from Gallipoli and in the desert he found them a tough nut to crack, he got many victories but we got some good ones as well.

The morning of the 26th January saw us all busy getting ready to move on, we were not sorry to leave the old "Kingstonia", most of us had come on board with clean clothes and free from vermin, we were leaving it covered with vermin as the boat was full of lice and fleas.

And now the exercise of a little fore-thought was going to save some of us a lot of discomfort. Whenever a Unit is moving about like we were all baggage and stores are put in a separate Van and a guard told off to be held responsible. Our Wireless Sergt. was detailed to be Baggage Sergt.



and we asked him to take as many of his Wireless men as possible to make up his guard.

It is usually rather a strenuous and unwelcome job but there was method in our madness of asking for the duty. We were in for a long weary journey across France, we might take a week if traffic was blocked, any how it was going to take three days at the least, not only that but a severe winter was on and as baggage guard we represented a little lot on our own, perhaps having many opportunities to add to our comfort which those in the carriages would not have. Anyhow about eight of us were chosen for the job so immediately disembarkation orders were issued our party went on shore to take charge and pack the wagons that would carry our stuff from the boat to the train, and then pack it in the train.

We had a good three hours hard work but that was nothing, our reward was to come. If I remember correctly it was about midday or a little after when the rest of the boat load joined the train and very soon after we steamed out of Marseilles. Practically if not all the troops that were on the boat were now on this train and it was a tremendous length.

We folk in Australia cannot hold a candle to the French for long trains. I cannot say now how long this one was but we had an engine on each end and in this country the engineers who built the railways in the South of France never tried to climb over a mountain, he always tunnelled through it. In that way he escaped snow drifts in winter. At one place we travelled for miles through one tunnel, we went up hill for a long way and then downwards and all the time were underground.

Well I would like to be able to give you a detailed account of our trip across France but with all our scheming after comfort but from the time we left Marseilles till we arrived at the end of our journey in England that portion of our trip remains in everyone's mind as a huge nightmare. I don't want to paint it worse than what it was for many thousands of others have had the same trip but what I would like to point out is the fact that our boys had come direct from the desert where even in winter surplus clothes were a nuisance, practically everyone was in rags as twelve months on the desert without an issue of clothes was what most had gone through. A promise had been made to provide us with everything on our arrival in England, none of the boys had more than a couple of blankets and in many cases no overcoat. I was one of the few fortunate ones for I had come direct from a place where tons of clothing was to be had and if I suffered from the cold what must some of the boys have gone through.

All that day we travelled due north, not over the mountains but through them, being winter time everything seemed to be dead, bare gaunt trees, huge forests of them whilst everywhere was ice and snow. We passed through Arles at the mouth of the Rhone River and travelling due north late in the afternoon came to a large city called Avignon but although we were going at a very slow pace no stop was made for a meal and so we crowd in the Luggage Van started to make ourselves comfortable for the night. And here we reaped the first and greatest benefits of our Voluntary fatigue duty. The boys in the carriages could not lay down, they were in dog boxes of carriages as bad as any I have seen on our "one train per day" lines at home. In our Van we had all the Kit bags and rolls of blankets and by levelling them down were able to lay down which was more than the others could do. Our nights on the train were warm enough and I for one slept comfortably but the day time was agony. Our last meal had been at about 11 a.m. and about 1 a.m. the following morning we came to a halt at a station (I think it was called Valence) where hot tea had been prepared for us. Some very funny things happened at this spot and one that is very fresh in my mind was in connection with "Ginger Mick" as our boys had named one English Officer.

We were a mixed mob on board of English, Scottish, Australians, Marines and Bluejackets all under our different Officers but directly controlled by the Officer commanding the train and his Adjutant. The latter was a very excitable red headed Irishman whom we nick-named Ginger Mick. Light Horsemen are not disciplined like the Infantry and coming over on the boat we had proved the curse of Ginger's life, some of the boys would play some trick just to see him get excited.

This trip across France was a badly managed affair altogether and when we pulled up at Valence all soon became confusion. Every small crowd began to scramble for their own mob. At last Ginger got things sorted out a bit, only we found that to get our food we would have to go along to the front of the train to where the Australians were. It was practically impossible, for as a guard we could not leave the Van. I



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pointed this out to Ginger as our Sergt. was not on the spot and explained that with a Dixie of tea for the Baggage Van, we could rub along all right but Ginger thought we were working a scheme and would not listen. When I complained that we had received nothing for fourteen hours and had to fight for ourselves, he said he was just as badly off simply because he had the worry of providing for us. I replied that as an Officer he had a Batman to rumage for his meal which would be ready for him when the train was on the move, but he said his Batman was nowhere to be found, and one of our chaps stuck a bottle of wine under his nose and said "Poor old Ginger, have a drink." Instead of going mad he laughed, took a drink and allowed us to have a Dixie to ourselves.

With all our annoying him he was, like many other English Officers, tried to tread on us and when he found we were not to be trod on he admired us, when eventually we parted company at Southampton he sent a message through our Major to be kindly remembered to his Australian boys and he wished he was coming further with us.

Daylight on the 27th did not see us much further north as during the night our train had been run on to a siding to allow the Southward bound trains to pass, but during the day we still continued due north passing Lyons, Macon and Chalon. If we could have kept moving it would have been all right but often at some stations our train would be stuck up for an hour or more and then our boys would hop out of the carriages and try to buy food and drinks in the adjoining shops and then you would see Ginger Mick at his best, yarding them up, it was a wonderful thing that no-one was ever left behind (with one exception and then it was not an accident but a deep laid scheme.) Every station we pulled up at it was the same thing, as the train moved out there would be a long line of soldiers and sailors rushing along the platform with bottles of wine and loaves of bread in their hands whilst mates were hanging out of the carriage doors waiting to drag them on board.

And now the cold began to get almost unbearable, I saw a Dixie of tea boiling on the fire and thirty minutes after it was a block of ice.

Sometimes the train would be puffing up a long incline and all along the line would be men running beside it trying to get a bit of life into their frozen limbs until at last thoroughly exhausted they would once more crawl back to their places. Still as far as our boys were concerned you never heard complaints for all this meant going further away from the hated desert wastes of Egypt and somewhere on ahead meant civilization and with people of our own nation to mix with and associate with. These hardships would come to an end sooner or later so that was enough for us, they laughed and sang until the Bluejackets told us we were the finest companions they had ever come across.

The 28th saw us passing through the city of Versailles on the outskirts of Paris for during the night we had turned westward at Dyon. At Orleans where we had a fair stay my knowledge of history took me back to the days of Joan of Arc, Maid of Orleans and I would have liked to stay to explore the place. At Versailles the burning question amongst our boys was "would we pass through Paris", but the authorities knew better than that for we did not touch the beautiful Parisian Capital but kept well south of it.

Some of the Bluejackets got left behind here, officially it was an accident but really a scheme on their part, they got a train to Paris, spent some hours there and caught us up on the other side on account of our train meeting so many obstacles.

About three times a day we would stop at some station where French women would have steaming cups of tea and each party would come forward and fill their Dixie, but it had to be drunk at once or it would freeze.

If I remember correctly we left Versailles about midday and from there to Rouen we did not have so many stops. Just before we ran into Rouen we came to a place of some interest, viz. all the Railway Engines that the Belgium Government had saved during the first weeks of the invasion. I cannot say how many but there were miles of them. A Belgium Engineer told me that they had saved all their engines when the Germans invaded their country, some two hundred had been sent round to Russia for the Russians to use on the German lines when they got into Germany as the Russian gauge was not as wide, no doubt now they are being used on German Railways but not for the purpose they were sent for but we little dreamt that was going to be the case then.

We stayed at Rouen Station for an hour or more, the boys were not supposed to go off the Station but a lot of them did so, and it was amusing to watch Ginger Mick yarding them up all the time. From Rouen to Le Havre was a pretty run until it got too dark to see we watched the



French people skating on the canals along the line.

My notes tell me that we arrived at Le Havre on the 29th, but to be correct we landed at the Station about 10p.m. on the 28th only I was fast asleep, no-one left the train that night and next morning we poked round and found some water not frozen for a wash, our first wash for nearly four days, we did not have any breakfast and about 9a.m. were formed up to march away to a Rest Camp until arrangements could be made for us to cross the English Channel. Light horsemen are not good men on foot and for a solid hour and a half we plodded along, up hill all the time, close confinement on board for ten or twelve days then three days and nights on a train with very little food, our Officers tried to get us to sing as we passed through the city but it was a dismal failure, no one had any heart for anything, anyhwp we got warm for the first time. During the night two Tommies were frozen to death and one German prisoner. We arrived at the camp about 10.30a.m. and now started a day of absolute misery. I don't suppose we can blame our Officers, it was more the fault of the Administration, you only have to mention the name Le Havre to any of the old 68th boys now (nearly two years after) and they begin to curse. The camp was away up on a high hill at the back of the town, no doubt a very pretty spot ~~xx~~ in summer but this was the middle of the worst winter France had seen for fifty years, a bitter wind was blowing off the sea and we only had tents for shelter.

It was only a one day camp, troops coming from the trenches never stayed more than 24 hours and then crossed to England and visa versa from England to the Front. Consequently no accommodation worth speaking of was provided, canteens were there but such crowds gathered that unless one was properly clothed, you would freeze to death waiting in the wind to go into the canteen. Our Officers were making arrangements for tea to be made but it looked very much as if the tea would not be ready till evening. One Tommy Unit must have had some smart Officers for at 11 o'clock a big boiler of tea was ready for them, our boys were getting pretty desperate and with Dixies in hand they gathered round but a Warrant Officer was standing by guarding it for his own men.

One Australian crept up behind him and made a dive for the boiler, the W.O. grabbed at him but missed and then the fun started, away went Australia followed by the W.O., round and round the camp whilst the rest of the Aussies calmly helped themselves to the tea. The first man was never caught as someone tripped the W.O. and he crashed to the ground and lay there half unconscious, was carried away to hospital. As you sit beside the fire and read this you will think it was an act of hooliganism by our boys but let me tell you that in your comfortable homes you have never seen a mob of men half starving and almost frozen, therefore you cannot judge. The existence we were leading taught us that life was very cheap and self preservation always the first law of nature.

After our cup of tea and some bully beef, things began to settle down. During the afternoon we tried to make ourselves look a bit decent as most of us had a week's growth of whiskers but it was positively impossible. I saw the water freeze on a man's face before he could get a lather going, for my part I tried to keep warm by walking but was so done in from the morning's march that I eventually had to crawl into a tent and do a perish.

No-one was allowed out of camp as word was expected any moment for us to move down to the boat. In the evening we had a kind of a meal and tea that was not stolen this time. The thought that we would be in England by next morning seemed to pacify the boys for they kept out of mischief until a rumor got round that we were to stay in this camp till the next day. It was about 6p.m. and just getting dark when this report got round and our boys did not take long to act. They gathered up wood round about and lit a fire but in a camp of this sort wood is very scarce, so they started on the deck boards. These boards are laid all over a camp to enable men to walk about in wet weather as the whole place soon becomes a Quagmire when the snow begins to melt, they are made by two pieces of timber running parallel with short boards nailed across at intervals of every six inches. The boys heaped these on the fire and as they began to run short they pulled down an old shed which was used as a kind of Cook House. Of course you wonder where our Officers were whilst all this was going on. I won't definitely say where they hung out but judging by certain events I should say they were well and truly dug in beside the whisky bottle.

At 8p.m. word was passed round that we were moving out at 8.30, and my word no one was late for that Parade, all the old "Kingstonian" mob were formed up and ready to march out on time, we were only too pleased



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to get away from this spot, and once more we started to march down through the city, but it was a different mob to the morning, we had our stomachs full, were rested to a certain extent but what was more to the point it was to be our last stage before we reached England. No necessity this time for the Officers to try and make us sing, every man used his lungs to the best of his ability.

All along the route the French cheered these boys in rags for we were a ragged unshaven mob (only the Australians though for most of the others were fairly well equipped.) We went on for an hour and then a halt was called, whilst moving and carrying our gear we would be warm and in fact perspiring, but as soon as we stopped it was so extremely cold that we would begin to shiver. And now for another hour we kept on, our leader (we blamed Ginger Mick) had lost himself amongst the miles of shipping and could not find our boat. It was the first time the fellows started to growl and as every fresh halt was called our boys would hoot the Officer who was the cause of it, they were on their last legs and pretty desperate and the Officers showed their sense by not interfering. At last somewhere about 11p.m. our boat was reached, all our baggage was there waiting to be loaded but all discipline was gone, the Military Police at the gangways were pushed to one side like so many insects and we walked on board independent of orders.

Half a dozen of us had kept together all through, giving each other a hand and trying to keep our spirits up, we were ordered to help with the baggage by our Sergt. Major but he was told to go somewhere much warmer than France. We went down below on board as far as we could get, right down to the bottom of the steamer, hundreds of others were with us and throwing down our packs we lay there and were sound asleep in two minutes. There was no possible hope of sorting us out from amongst the hundreds of others and though all I possessed in the world was in my Kit bag, it could stay in France as far as I was concerned. Some of our Kits turned up safely next day, some fell overboard whilst being loaded, for I believe the Officers secured men to do the work from elsewhere, when we arrived at Southampton I found mine all safe.

Everyone slept like logs. Had our boat been torpedoed that night, not a man in the 68th would have done a thing to save himself. No-one had life belts and it would have been an absolute impossibility to get up above from where we slept away below the water line. But everyone was too far gone to worry over that, there was only one desire to find a place to lay down and sleep. It was near midnight when I lay down and the next thing I knew was for my mate to wake me up and tell me I was in England.

Went to sleep in France and woke up in England. We disembarked about 8a.m., sorted out our baggage as it came off the boat and were marched along the wharf to a large shed where the trains ran through.

As soon as the order was given to "stand easy" we again lay down and most of us were once more very soon asleep. At midday arrangements were made to serve out a meal of hot tea, bully and biscuits and after dinner we began to roam around a bit. Strict orders were given not to go outside the wharf gates but as there was miles of wharves we had plenty of room. Our half dozen mates wanted to see a bit of Southampton but the Police were in force at the entrance so for a long time we had to submit to circumstances and stay inside until we found some girls working in a warehouse leading on to the wharf, the first English girls we had talked to for many a long day, we soon became good friends, made our case to look very sad and pitiful until they smuggled us out through their rooms into the street.

In less than five minutes we were sitting in a restaurant ordering the best dinner money could buy. When hunger was done with someone suggested a walk but we had not gone far before we noticed how much attention we were attracting and no wonder for our clothes as I said before were awful. Some were showing almost as much bare skin as pants so we beat a hasty retreat back to the wharf.

At Southampton I said good-bye to all my sailor friends, their special train took them away to Plymouth, just about dinner time and the Australians were sorry to part with the Bluejackets, they had proved great companions. As their train moved out there was great cheering and waving of friends from both sides, then the Tommies and Marines went away to their respective destination but they were not of the same stamp of man and we did not worry over them. I might just mention that several of these Bluejackets whom I had chummed up with were amongst those wonderful lot who landed at Antwerp a couple of days after war broke out in 1914. England's Pioneers in this war.



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It was between four and five in the afternoon when our train came along. None of us knew yet where we were to be camped, vague rumors were going round of Farnborough 40 miles out of London, others said Grantham in Lincolnshire and others again said further north on the moors of York. Anyhow by 5p.m. we had left Southampton behind and were bound for London, our boys were beginning to find their spirits again as the worst was behind us, and our troubles were over, nothing could happen in England as bad as what had come our way since we left Kantara away back on the Suez Canal.

We sang and cheered every human being along the line, you would have thought the war was over and we were on our way home. So the war was going to be over as far as we were concerned for some months to come. Every man decided that during his stay in England he was going to have the best time of his life irrespective of Officers and Regulations. I think on the whole they carried out their determination well and truly, we received many rebuffs at times, but we scored some victories too, and left England with a very good name.

We arrived in London (Waterloo Station) at 7.30p.m. and although I have mentioned several times lately of our appearance I really intended leaving that part out until this present moment. Our Kit bags were further down the train but at Southampton we all took our blankets into the carriages with us as no one knew when we would see our Kits again and blankets would be required. I guess you could safely call Waterloo almost the Central spot of this world. Can you picture for yourself about 180 Australians getting out of this train, each with his swag of blankets strung over a shoulder like the tramps at home in the bush, every man burnt brown and in some cases almost black from the tropical suns of the desert, hair not been brushed for weeks, whiskers an inch long, clothes in rags, twelve different varieties of colours as we were made up out of our twelve Regiments of Light Horse, a few of us with lovely Emu Plumes waving in our hats and to cap it all a weary tired look of physical exhaustion in the eyes of every man, as one day's rest could not take that look away. No-one had taken his clothes off for three weeks, boots almost falling off our feet and altogether a general break up. The crowds of folk coming and going would stand to look at us, no-one knew where we had come from but we were Australians and that was enough, old ladies would come and talk to us, men offering to shout for us and young ladies willing to shake hands and talk if we made any advances. Yes they made our boys feel very contented, almost as if they had come home to their own country and two hard cases amongst us commenced to sing that Anthem which runs, "What are these?" whilst the other one came in with "These are those who have come out of great tribulations." I reckon if ever Australians took the heart of the good, homely and kind hearted English civilian it was the 68th on this winter night at Waterloo Station, the very picture of misery and wretchedness and yet all singing, laughing, talking and shaking hands at once. All our troubles were forgotten, they were passed and gone and now we were back amongst our own countrymen.

As soon as our Major could get us into formation again we were marched down stairs to a huge Buffet run by English women (and I have a lot to say on their work in this war later on) where huge mugs of steaming tea and coffee was served to us together with sandwiches, buns, cake and other things. There was plenty for all and lots over, we were making up for what we had lost in the last few weeks, no need to apologize for our appetite, one lady told me she only had to look at the way our clothes hung on us to understand everything, that her son was out at the front and in feeding us she felt she was doing something for him.

No money was accepted for this and when some of us urged payment they pointed to a box on the counter where any small donation could be deposited. Not many of the boys had money, so far I had kept financial but my pocket was beginning to feel the strain, but I put in half a crown with the greatest of pleasure.

After the inner man was satisfied we still had an hour to fill in, no-one was allowed out of the station into the street, but Waterloo was big enough for us, some rushed the lavatory for a wash, others got a shave and hair cut, and after that was over we poked around amongst the book and fruit stalls, chatting to any who wanted to talk, and there were plenty to talk to. At 10pm. the whistle blew for us to fall in once more and now commenced a new and amusing experience for we Colonial boys.

It was necessary for us to get from Waterloo to Charing Cross to board our north bound train for we were going on to Grantham that night. Major



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Watt of course was thoroughly familiar with the underground railways, so he took us by Tube. We took up too much room in the lifts so had to go down the stairs and away we went in one long stream, but this time without our blankets as they were sent some other way. We seemed as if we would never come to the bottom of those stairs, round and round, ever going down, until we came to our platform, and then the fun started. The trains were fairly full and as we boarded it men and women would jump up to make room for us, young ladies would demand that we took their seats whilst they stood. Our boys were not used to that kind of hospitality and many an argument would crop up. All along the train would be seen a dirty delapidated looking Australian sitting with some children and in many cases young ladies dressed in the latest fashion sitting on their knees, whilst old men were pressing cigars and cigarettes on us and as usual plenty of laughing and talking.

We soon had to get out of that train and then it was a repetition of stairs, up and down until we did not know whether we were as high up as St. Pauls or down as deep as one of the Bendigo gold mines. We eventually reached Charing Cross and just in time for the Edinburgh Express. was all ready to move. out.

This train was not so crowded and I think everyone managed to secure a seat without robbing any of the civilians. I managed to get a corner seat and was very soon fast asleep. We did not seem to be able to get enough food or sleep and yet since our arrival at Southampton early that morning we had done nothing but eat and sleep. Snow was falling outside and everything was lovely and white in the brilliant moonlight.

Our train did not stop until we got to Grantham, 110 miles north of London. It was somewhere about midnight, cold as it could be and snow everywhere and on our arrival we found there was no one to meet us and show the way to the Aerodrome. It was three or four miles out of the town and at that hour of the night it would be very difficult to find. After an interview with the Station Master our Major came to us with the news that the Station Master had very kindly allowed us permission to sleep in the Waiting Rooms, Railway Offices and in fact any part of the building where he could provide a fire. Our blankets were to come on by a later train arriving in an hour's time and Major Watt gave us the option of staying for the night or marching through the snow to a cold and supperless camp. We did not hesitate for a moment, even with all the kindnesses that were being heaped on us there was no denying some of the men were nearly down and out to it. The last three weeks were beginning to tell, not one man had dropped out so far but we were very near the end.

We all voted to stay where we were so our Major took us over to the Soldier's Rest Home on the opposite side of the road, paid for a hot pie and coffee for every man and then let us make ourselves comfortable for the rest of the night as by the time supper was over our blankets had arrived. I slept very comfortably and warm with my feet to a hot fire and my boots for a pillow.

From now on I suppose you will get sick of listening to me railing at English Officers, here was our first of many experiences in England. The Aerodrome we were going to had another Squadron on it also, they were advised that we would arrive at midnight. The men prepared huts for us, put four new blankets in each man's place, lit fires in every hut and put a guard on to keep them burning till we arrived, prepared a hot supper for all of us and waited up till 3a.m. to attend (to attend) to our wants.

An English Officer was sent in to meet the train and guide Major Watt out and he returned to the Aerodrome to say we had not arrived. Of course we never heard what explanation the idiot gave the next day when the C.O. found what sort of a 'brainy' Officer he had under him. We were all right where we were, but it was no joke for the men who lost a night's sleep waiting for us as they had to do their day's work next day just the same.

And when I throw off at Tommy Officers in these accounts I will give you a fair account of the incident, and also will tell you of some very fine gentlemen that came my way at times.

Trains coming in and going out did not disturb our slumbers for the few hours we had for sleep, also we were not disturbed till about 8a.m. when the order was given to fall in out on the street in front of the Station. All our baggage was going to be carried by motor lorries and there was only room for some of the boys to ride. Our Major intended to



march out with us and allowed those who were not able to face the march to ride. There is not the slightest doubt some of the boys were in a pitiful state. Ever since we left Australia we had been in the habit of riding on horseback. We came off the desert hardened in some ways but very soft in other ways and not by any means strong. Our journey cooped on board boat and a crowded troop train, then on top of that the severe marching at Le Havre combined with weather that none of us had ever faced all our lives, all tended to break us down. The thought of reaching England had kept the spirits of the boys up but now they were completely done, and out of our 180 men, only about 40 marched out to the 'drome behind Major Watt on this winter morning of January 1st. 1917. Snow was on the ground and wherever any moisture had settled it was frozen hard. My feet were nearly done but I did not want to give in at the last stage of our journey so made one of the forty. It was a long four mile tramp the way we went as our leader stuck to the main road and I for one thought we were never going to reach the end of our journey. But it's a long road that has no turning" and at last we turned into Gorse Lane and found ourselves "At Home".

Viewing the camp as it was then and as it was when we left it eight months after, is like comparing an early settler's home in the bush to a Toorak Mansion but on this morning it looked to our eyes like a glimpse of Heaven. For many months our life had been as rough as the poorest swag-man in Australia and now we were going to have an iron roof over our heads and a fire in the hut. Laid out ready for each man was a straw mattress and four nice warm blankets, the Tommies had a hot breakfast of fried tomatoes and bacon ready, and we appreciated their kindness. Further on I will probably say some nasty things about the English soldier for many things have happened in between the time of writing and when we landed here, but I want only to write as we found the men and there is not any doubt that they did great things for us on our arrival.

But our boys soon proved themselves old soldiers. During the morning we were left to our own devices and soon commenced to poke around and make ourselves at home. In this camp the men slept on the floor of the huts, but N.C.O.'s were allowed low trestles about six inches high on which fitted three boards, thus raising your bed off the floor. We found a stack of these and soon had a set each, but the Tommy told us we would soon have them taken from us, but that did not happen, perhaps the English Officers did not want to make a bad start with the Australians for we soon found that in most cases they were anxious not to mix things up too quickly and the average Tommy Officers who had had previous experience with Colonial Troops in France or Gallipoli was not anxious to renew his acquaintanceship as far as discipline was concerned. As men in the field he admired us but as a home soldier he had almost a contempt for us.

The outcome of the bed boards was that the Tommy soon had them to sleep on also. That was the first of many benefits that the Englishmen reaped out of our coming amongst them.

We were granted a holiday for that day and a group of us after resting all the morning decided to pay Grantham a visit. We found a short cut across the fields that got us into town in half the distance, and my first introduction to an English country town was rather amusing. I had a fine group of Emu plumes in my hat sent to me by Miss Hinton of Queensland. Just as we hit the town, school was coming out, and a whole dose of youngsters followed us along the street. Every now and again they let bang with a snow ball and calling out "Look at the soldier with his mother's hat on". Of course we took it in good part, nothing else for it but all the same I for one did not appreciate the welcome. But I was not in England many weeks before I was very proud of those same plumes. Girls and women used to beg for "Just one feather" and I often had to get very serious or would have lost them all. At this time I wore a very heavy moustache and I think when once I began to look serious my countenance could not have been too attractive for they always took notice of what I said.

I was constantly being asked what bird those lovely plumes belonged to and I invariably said the Kangaroo, which was accepted by nine out of every ten questions. I cannot call to mind anything of much importance happening that day. It was happiness to be able to walk into a shop and to be spoken to by an English girl, we were happy just to read advertisements on the boardings printed in our own language. The most important item was sitting down to a good square meal and having a girl to attend to us (food was not restricted to any great extent at this time.)



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By the time we had spent three parts of a year in Grantham we were all ready to acknowledge it was a deadly hole, but to-day I for one reckoned Grantham would do me for some time to come. Most of us wandered home fairly early that evening and went to bed with our clothes off for the first time since we left Egypt three weeks ago. It was a relief.

For a few weeks things were very haphazard and easy. Of course we had no machines of our own so we soon scattered all over England in different Aerodromes. Some were sent down South to a place near London, some up on the Yorkshire Moors outside Darlington, others to Spittlegate about four miles from our place and the rest of us stayed where we were. I gave you an account of what our clothes were like coming from the desert. The English winter was awful, worst experienced for fifty years and if Australians lack in some things they certainly have initiative. The boys were promised warm clothing when we arrived in England, and when we got there it looked as if red tape was going to let us freeze for a month before we got anything.

Those who were sent up on the Moors took things in their own hands by going to bed and demanding that a doctor should come to them. The Tommy Sgt. Major stormed and threatened with no results, he was simply told to go to a climate much warmer than what he was in at present. He tried trickery and coaxing but they said the beds were warm and comfortable, so at last a Doctor came. After examination our fellows were told they could stay in bed until a second shirt and warm clothes were sent to them by their Squadron, and in bed they stayed for two days until they got what they required.

We wireless men had a very easy time for a couple of weeks. There was no plant on the 'drome and practically no instruments. We would fall in on the Parades and when everyone was dismissed to their work we would gather round a stove in the back of the Tommy Technical Stores and smoke, yarn and stoke a fire until 4.30p.m. If we had cleared out for a week no one would have been any the wiser but there was one thing to prevent us, we had no decent clothes or I for one would have been off to the North to make the acquaintance of my relations in Newcastle.

But as I have always found in the Army no matter how black things look, if only one will wait a while they usually improve. The Aerodrome we had come to was only being built and had very few conveniences but a large gang of workmen were employed at improving it all the time until it became as near to perfect as human means could make it, all through the winter we had an open shed to wash in or to stand in the snow and ice around the tap. Later on we had hot and cold shower baths. I'm afraid many of us went dirty during the first few weeks of our stay in England, the weather was cruel. I would go down to town and about twice a week have a hot bath at a Public Bath and in that way managed to keep myself fairly respectable.

As soon as we began to settle down I turned my mind towards leave. It was about eighteen months since I had left home and as far as actual leave was concerned none had come my way. Our Major was very good in that way and used to let us have as much leave as possible. I cannot say exactly the date of my first leave but it must have been very early in March. I can remember it well, I walked into Grantham and caught a train at about midday. It was bitterly cold with snow on the ground, but that was neither here nor there for I was a free man for six whole days. Before leaving Grantham I sent a wire to Kenmirs as that was the only English address I had and on arriving at Newcastle Central Station at 4.15p.m. I stood and waited for someone to come and speak to me as I was the only Australian there and knew they would pick me out. But I was doomed to disappointment, everyone went off on their business and I was on my own. I found the Lemington train and made my way to Mr. Kenmir's only to find that Mary had come in to meet me and we had missed one another.

Old Mrs. Kenmir was in a great state over it, she fussed round and made some tea for me and half an hour after Mary came home. After tea Mary took me out to Gosforth South, as it was not convenient for me to stay at Lemington. Mary was at business all day and Mrs. Kenmir is always in very poor health, and they were afraid it would be too slow there for me. All the time I spent with the Newcastle folk their one thought was for me to enjoy myself, they were marvels in their endeavours to make my visits happy ones and the way I used to look forward to a run up to Newcastle is proof enough of how I appreciated their endeavours.

On the way out to Gosforth that evening I had my first taste of Tyne-side dialect. Some girls got in the same carriage as we did and it was



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absolutely foreign talk to my ears. Mary told me it was Tyneside and it highly amused me to think I could not understand a word of their conversation.

Mary Errington and I became great pals very quickly and we had many an enjoyable hour together. When we arrived at Balmoral Terrace it was to find the whole household at home, two Miss Pyes and Kitty and Lily Biggar. The Australian cousin was duly introduced and all hands immediately fell in love with his soldier's hat and lovely plumes, I was a secondary consideration for the time being.

Mary did not stay long as she had a long journey home and I was left amongst a house full of strange ladies and after my rough life away from civilization I was feeling very strange indeed. But I was not allowed to remain strange for long, for as soon as I came downstairs next morning I felt I was at home, in fact a few weeks of that sort of hospitality and I am afraid V.G.K. would be spoilt for life. No doubt after my life in the deserts of Egypt I was thin and miserable looking, still I felt well only Miss Pye used to make me laugh in her great anxiety that I should not tire myself. And it was grand how each relation was jealous, that one would have more of the Australian soldier's company than the other. I have never been used to being fussed over, so this was all new to me and perhaps you can hear me whisper nice also.

One cousin would take me into town, I must never be left in the city alone for fear I got lost. They would hand me over to a second party for perhaps a few hours when another would come along and take charge. I think for the six days I was in town alone for one hour. During my first day I met Olga and her Mother and then Jock Kenmir. Jock carted me round to his favourite Coffee Shop and there I met his favourite pals and enjoyed their company very much. Every morning I would go into Jock's Office and he would come out for a morning cup of coffee and an hour's walk around. Being a Newspaper man he was very busy and I often enjoyed a run round with him, through the courts or to some function or other. At this time Australian soldiers were very rare in this city but their doings on Gallipoli and France were well known consequently I got a warm and sometimes embarrassing welcome wherever I went. I was asked here, there and everywhere, and I could see my six days extending into sixty if I was to go everywhere I was asked.

My first evening was spent at home and they soon found that I was willing to talk about our lovely Australia. I think we all went to bed about half past one that morning for they kept me going, in fact it was the same every night. If I was out late the ladies would sit up waiting for me and we would gather round the fire for an hour's chat that used to run into two and three hours before we said good-night.

I spent one evening round at Jock's home and met his wife Lena, after tea we had a few games of Bridge and then came supper when I should have been ready to come home but they started me on Australia and I arrived home at midnight to find them sitting up waiting for me and thinking I was lost.

I used to see a good bit of Jock and his wife and liked them both very much. I also met Ted Kelsey but on this visit was not able to go down the Tyne to his home. One afternoon was spent at the seaside with Lily and Kitty.

One very funny incident happened. We had been round to tea I think at Mrs. McCullochs. The two Miss Pyes, Lily, Kitty and myself. It was my last evening and after tea we hurried round home as some more cousins whom I had not met up with were coming to spend the evening and then I was to catch the 11p.m. train back to Grantham. Up to now I had not received very much tuition in snowball fighting, I was always afraid of making them too hard and hurting someone. Unfortunately when throwing at me others did not think the same as myself. Just as we left Mrs. Mc's. home Lily gave me a beauty behind my ear and we commenced our usual fights. The two Miss Pyes kept well ahead out of the danger zone and we three fought all the way home. I was most decidedly getting the worst of it as two experts were against me and at times their aim was deadly. Eventually I settled Kitty by planting one right on her bare throat just where the V shape is cut out of the blouse, the snow all ran down inside so Kitty beat a hasty retreat in to her bedroom. I then made a rush at Lily and grabbing her in my arms rolled her in about two feet of snow and then as the front door was open I made a dash inside and straight into the drawing-room leaving a trail of snow behind me.

The room was full of strangers and I looked around for some familiar



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face to introduce me. Lily rushed in and grabbed me by the arm with "Verner you are in the wrong house." They lived in a terrace and both interior and exterior were all alike, I was in a house three doors from their place. I did not wait to offer explanations but turned and went out as fast as I came in. The lady of the house ran to the door and called me back as she wanted to meet an Australian but I was not having any of it, but made sure my next entrance was the right house.

We had a happy evening, I remember one of the favourite songs was "Australia will be there" (I suppose in my honor) and I was sorry when it was time to go into the Central and start for camp. I had lots of company Miss Pye, Kitty, Lily, Olga and her Mother. The train was crowded but I managed to get some sleep and got to Grantham at 4a.m., when I had nearly a three mile tramp through snow to our camp at Harlaxton. Still I did not mind as I had looked at the map of England ever since I was old enough to understand and always used to look at Newcastle as the spot where I intended to visit at some time or other although I had not the faintest idea how I would get there.

Now my dream was realised and the welcome had far exceeded my expectations and my one wish was for the time to come when I could once more return to what seemed to be a home in every sense of the word.

Just a word about another snow fight, and then I won't make this monotonous, for we used to be at it amongst ourselves every day. There was a canal down behind our camp in the Manor grounds where skating used to be going on, so a party of us went down early one afternoon to try our hands. We found a lot of young ladies and children on the ice and as they seemed somewhat shy of we Aussies the boys simply took up a portion of the canal a little further down. We soon got weary of trying to skate on ice and amused ourselves making slides on the ice. Suddenly a snowball shot past one of us and in no time a pitched battle was going on, English girls versus our boys.

It lasted for two hours and being very inexperienced we certainly got a hiding. I could not help standing back and as I watched the fun, thinking that just a few months before these same boys were starving and practically dying of thirst out on the desert, shooting men and suffering terrible hardships and yet here they were like a lot of school children just let out of school. It is the salvation of a soldier to be able to get away from all his surroundings for a time and absolutely forget what he is called to go through at times.

But we had all settled down to work by now and things were going on well between Officers and men when a hitch occurred which made the Tommies look on in amazement and predict disaster to some of us. We were in the dead of winter, snow was never off the ground and I must say the Squadron were keen on their work and proud of the way they turned the machines out but there was one thing that they objected to and did most unwillingly and that was every morning we had to turn out at 6.30a.m. and do an hour's drill in the snow. The boys argued that they were a Technical Unit and if they had to commence a day's work by doubling round the field for half an hour the work must suffer. Needless to say we did the drill in a very half-hearted manner and as the Tommy Squadron was so good at it we showed up all the more. Not only that but every man of us being a Light Horseman we could not drill as Infantry for everyone knows that our drill done on foot is far from smart although it is fine on horseback. Certainly a great deal of the fault was on the men's part but not all. One particular morning our Orderly Officer was an ex-Infantry man and I suppose our work got on his nerves for he lined us up and made a speech something after this style, "I must say I never saw such a disgraceful exhibition of drilling in my life, you are worse than a lot of raw recruits, as soldiers you are not an apology for one. If you cannot drill as soldiers try and bluff the Tommies that you can. I am going to give you five minutes more drill and if there is not a decided improvement I will make you double round the field for quarter of an hour." Well the next five minutes was worse work than the previous hour but he was not game carry out his threat as he guessed we would refuse to do what was to us in the condition we were in almost an impossibility. He eventually dismissed the Parade and we stood and counted him out in good old style. He went white with anger but controlled himself and walked off the Parade Ground. We all took great pains in our washing and shaving that morning and as we were 15 minutes late coming off Parade we made it 30 minutes late for breakfast and a lot of us missed that meal. We paraded to the Officer and demanded our



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breakfast on the plea that it was his fault we missed. He was a sport for he told us he knew the trick we had played only he would see we got the meal and that afterwards we would hear more about the counting out. In the afternoon a muster parade was called and the Colonel of the Wing (a Tommy who was beginning to hate us like poison) addressed the Parade. "After my thirty odd years of service," he said, "I have never come across such a disgraceful exhibition of insubordination, I am ashamed of my Command," (and a voice called out, "Go to Gallipoli and France and say that") he continued, "Until I have the culprits and ring-leaders in front of me for punishment this Squadron is not to go outside the camp grounds. No man will be allowed visit Grantham of an evening. Dismiss!"

Now that was disastrous for there was a dance in town that night, I myself had promised to spend the evening at a friend's home. No Australian uniform left camp but over 100 of us were in town in borrowed clothes. There were Aussies dressed as Royal Flying Corps, English Infantry, Gordon and Seaforth Highlanders and any other uniform that could be procured. Well this state of affairs went on for some days, things were getting horribly mixed and the Tommies reckoned someone would be put up against a wall and shot, we did not exactly know who that someone would be and some of them did not care very much. At last a little threat was conveyed to the Orderly Room that unless things were cleared up very soon some of the Pilots who went flying would come down faster than they went up. Another Parade was called and this time Major Watt addressed us and he cleared up a lot that was news to us.

He said, "Men of the 68th I am sorry to be in this position to-day. I have been proud of you boys up to now. As regards this drill of a morning I want to tell you that ever since the Royal Flying Corps came into existence in England it has been compulsory for the mechanics to do some hours drill every day. You did not know that did you? A threat has been conveyed to me, you as old soldiers know what it means if the man is found who made that threat, twelve years in a fortress. I am glad I have not been able to find that man. You boys have had a hard time on Gallipoli and Sinai, most of you have been through Hell, now I want you to have as good a time as possible during your stay in England but I want you to remember that I am Major and anyone up before me will find I'm no milksop. We are all going to start afresh from to-day, all previous crimes are wiped out, every man will start out afresh. The morning Parade will be 7a.m. instead of 6.30, it will be half an hour duration and men can visit Grantham the same as usual. There will be a pay parade in an hour's time. Parade Dismiss!"

I might state that whereas future pays (I THINK THIS SHOULD READ "PAST PAYS") had been only for a limited amount, although many of the men had as much as 150 pounds in their books, on this pay day every man got as much as he asked for, some of them as much as 10 pounds. Just a word about the Officer who caused all this bother. He stayed with us right through and came to France with the Squadron. In France he did more for the comfort of the boys than all the rest of the officers put together, he eventually over-stepped the mark for one day he went off with a lorry and helped himself to a load of timber belonging to a Tommy Regiment and had a recreation hut built for us. The English complained and our Major gave him a week's Orderly Officer duty which really meant a weeks Confined to Barracks as no Orderly Officer must leave the camp during his term of duty. It is always a one day job taken in turn by the Officers of a Squadron. This incident of the counting out cleared things up beautifully and improved our condition one hundred per cent. Officers and men understood each other better and work went on swimmingly.

I think it was about three weeks after my visit up north that I got a restless fit on me, and so laid my plans to be away from camp for two days and nights. At this time there was not a strict supervision kept over us and if any enquiries were made I reckoned on my mate fixing it up for me. I left camp about 11a.m. on Saturday morning to catch the midday Scottish express. Once I had bought my ticket the police on the Station were my only risk. I tipped a youngster to go to the Booking hall for the ticket and then I tested a way to get on to the platform which proved a great success and a way that was often used by me on future occasions. I arrived at Newcastle about 4p.m. and Lily and Kitty met me, they smuggled me out of that station right under the noses of the M.P.'s and we made straight for home. All day Sunday I kept out of the city and the girls and I had a very enjoyable day. In



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The evening there was a sing song and so as not to be molested by the Police in the St. Hall at the Central Station we travelled in that night by an electric train which put me down right on the platform from which my train was to leave. I travelled all night and found on arrival at camp that although there had been a muster parade on the Sunday my name was answered at the Roll Call so I was not missed. It was a long way to travel just to spend Saturday night and Sunday but my previous taste of "home" made me want more.

My third visit to Newcastle was a scheme of a different kind. In the North it seems to be more important for families to gather together at Easter than at Christmas as is our custom so I thought I would work on it as orders were issued throughout England that on account of the expected heavy traffic as few soldiers as possible were to be allowed travel on trains during the holidays. I drafted out a letter and sent it up to Jock Kenmir asking him to re-write it and forward it on to our Major asking for me to come to them. He wrote the letter but made it more pressing than I had the cheek to do. He said that when I got my previous leave I met a lot of them, but at Easter so many relations came home who would not see me at any other time also that his sister, Nurse Kenmir of a Military Hospital at Sheffield was expected on a visit, he urged me to try and come up if just for a couple of days and in his letter suggested my presenting it to my Major to read. (Which of course I intended to do.) On the Thursday morning I was paraded to my O.C. thinking perhaps he might stretch a point and give me a couple of days. He read the letter carefully and then asked me how much leave I wanted. Instead of saying two days I replied that I simply wanted what he could spare me. So he told me I had better catch a train on Thursday afternoon and report for the first Parade the following Tuesday morning. I retired from his sight as fast as I could for fear he changed his mind. I naturally had a good time and though that year they had a record in the fact that it snowed for Easter and it was a very late Easter too. The snow did not prevent us from flying round as usual. On this trip I visited Ted Kelsey's home at Jarrow for an afternoon and evening accompanied by Jeannie (Nurse) Kenmir.

Ted and his wife kept up the reputation of the Newcastle folk by being exceptionally nice and their little girl soon became a great favourite of mine. She wants to come out to Australia with me. Jeannie and I missed our last tram from Central to Lemington that night so had to walk, got home about midnight and received a very motherly lecture from Mrs. Kenmir for our carelessness. Monday night 11p.m. saw the usual party saying good-bye to me on the platform once more. I forgot to mention that on Easter Monday Jack Donaldson our champion Australian foot runner was racing in Newcastle, I was not able to attend but as I was personally acquainted with him since we had lived and played football together at Kerang in Victoria I sent an introduction for Jock to him as he was reporting for his paper. I myself went down to Ovingham with Miss Pye, Kitty and Lily to spend the day with Will Dobson and his wife. One more family added to my list, I wonder will I ever be able to accept all their invitations to come and stay with them.

One day I was busy in our Wireless Office on some work when an Officer came in asking for me. I was pointed out to him and he came over to me and shook hands. I was absolutely at sea as to who he was and we stood there causing great amusement to the other occupants of the room. He would not tell me his name but commenced asking me did I remember certain very funny things that happened to three of us (Eddie Baker, Tom Grant and myself) down at Warrnambool in Victoria until I burst out with, "Surely you are not Tom Grant." It was he right enough and we had a long yarn about our old friends and what we used to do over there in days gone by. The way he found me out was that morning whilst looking through the mail he came across my name and reckoned that there was only one Verner Knuckey in the world so came looking for me. He was surprised that I had not taken up flying but I said I was only waiting to form my own opinion of it. Tom said I would have to come up with him and he would get me used to the sensation. I had a vivid recollection of a certain wild drive we three had once and had my doubts as to the wisdom of letting him break me in. But I had not much choice as a few days after that one of our machines crashed somewhere out in the country and Tom was detailed to go up in an 'Avro' to find just where the crash was situated, without consulting me he asked permission from Major Watt



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to take me with him which was granted and Tom found me and said what he had done. I did not wait to think but hopped straight into the front seat. I had plenty of time to think all the same for the engine would not work satisfactorily, in fact would not start at all and on examination, they found something wrong with the petrol and oil tanks which took a considerable time to rectify. Now, for a first flight this waiting was rather trying on the nerves, I remember Capt. Muir was standing by and he evidently thought it would make me nervous and he kept telling me it would be all right which I devoutly hoped would be the case, as an accident on your first flight generally settled a man (as far as flying was concerned) for life, and I did not want that to happen to me.

But at last we were ready to start. The engine was put to it and completed the required number of revolutions per second thus proving that everything was working O.K. The "All clear" signal was given, chocks pulled away from the front of the under-carriage wheels and after taxi-ing smoothly out into the middle of the Aerodrome the machine was turned to face the wind, it stood for a minute and then the pilot opened her full out and we flew along the ground at a terrific pace for about one hundred yards and then gracefully rose up into space. Whilst the machine is within a couple of thousand feet of the earth the ones in it can tell what a terrific pace he is going at, as everything is shooting from under him. I felt no extra sensation, only that we were rushing through the air and rising as in a lift for a while. I was afraid to move for fear of over-balancing the machine but that soon wore off and I was looking first over one side and then the other. We were flying over Grantham in no time and steadily rising until we got to about eight or nine thousand feet and at that height you don't appear to be moving at all, simply feel as if you are being held up in the air, the only way to tell from my seat was to try and put your hand out and the rushing of air was so strong that to do so is impossible. Of course the wind screen protects your face.

It was a beautifully clear afternoon, not a cloud. Tom circled round over Grantham half a dozen times first banking to the left with one side of the plane pointing to the sky and the other towards the earth so that I could see everything beneath me, then to the right for me to see that side, we kept near the Aerodrome at first for we had arranged that if I felt queer I was to give a certain signal and he would land, you may be sure no signal was given for the fascination was getting hold of me. I wanted to go on.

For the first 15 minutes he did not try any tricks, then, he would fall down, down hundreds of feet, rise up again and dive again, they told me that my first experience of diving would make me feel as if my inside was coming out of the top of my head, lots of people get air sick but it had no such effect on me. I signalled for him to rise until we got as high as an Avro will go and then we started out across country. We were now so high that the world beneath was a land of Lilliput. Houses appeared no bigger than rabbit hutches. The fields took the shape and appearance of a patch work quilt, only the hills in the far distance maintained anything like their original shape under us. Once we followed a train and at our speed and height it appeared to be a long worm crawling along. All the white roads were very distinct and being familiar with the surrounding country one could always recognise whereabouts he was steering his machine for. We were soon over Nottingham with all its smoke and still no sign of the lost machine, coming back Tom went in a northerly direction and then down towards Grantham. We went further east until the sea was well within sight, and I felt as if I could go on for ever. We were away for over an hour and a half and no success with our search so at last turned once more for home. Tom would shut off his engine and then there was almost no noise as we glided down towards what Lady Madden used to call "Terra Cotta". He took me for a few more circles over Grantham, Harlaxton and Wenton, and then getting up as high as he could he turned off his engine and we glided for eight miles coming down so beautifully and gradually that I did not know we were falling until I got to about two thousand feet, when once more the woods and farms began to fly past at eighty and ninety miles per hour. Tom gave me a beautiful landing and we taxied up to the hangars as if we were in a modern car on a good hard road.

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END OF BOOK 5.

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