

Letters from a Light Horse Reinforcement

Letters from Robert Cecil McLennan Smyth to his family during military service, 3rd Light Horse Brigade, 1918-1919

Transcribed from the originals by his son David Robert Smyth, 2012-2013 (27 May 2013)

Summary

Chapter 1 Mitcham Camp, Adelaide, training

Chapter 2 Sydney, embarkation, and at sea

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Chapter 5 Zagazig, Egypt, demobilization

Appendix 1 Family photo album carried on service

Appendix 2 Light Horse Order of Battle, from August 1917

Summary

Robert (Bob) Cecil McLennan Smyth was born at Salter's Springs in South Australia on 28th December 1897. He was the eldest son of Peter and Fanny Smyth (nee Ewers). Peter's father David and brothers had settled the land in the area on its release in 1858-9, and developed it as a mixed farm, dryland cropping wheat and raising sheep.

Bob was educated at Alma North and Salter's Springs Schools, and for secondary education he was an enthusiastic boarder at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide from 1911 to 1914. He returned to the farm in 1915, and worked for several years until he was able to convince his father to sign permission to volunteer for the Australian Infantry Forces late in 1917 when he was approaching 20 years old.

His training was carried out at Mitcham Camp in suburban Adelaide from 12th February 1918. He was inducted as a Trooper (i.e. a Private) in the 2nd Reinforcements of the Australian Light Horse on 24th of April, 1918, and embarked for the Middle East from Sydney in the troop ship "Wiltshire" on 10th of June. They sailed to Suez, Egypt via Colombo, disembarking on 17th of July 1918.

Here they camped in the desert at Moascar, near Ismailia on the Suez Canal, for further training. Initially his troop of eight troopers was isolated from other members of the reinforcements because one of them came down with mumps. This was extended for another 3 weeks when a second member developed the same disease. However, they were able to keep up training.

On the advice of Bob's cousin Stan Smyth, and others, he decided to apply to join the 3rd Machine Gun Squadron of the Light Horse rather than become an ordinary member of one of the Regiments. This required further training, and eventually he became a Trooper in B Troop of the 3rd Machine Gun Squadron which was associated with the 10th Light Horse Regiment. Together with the 8th and 9th Regiments, this made up the 3rd Light Horse Brigade. In turn this Brigade was at that time part of the Australian Mounted Division of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (see Appendix 2).

Bob entered active service on 30th of October 1918, and travelled to Ludd in Palestine by train through El Arish, Rafa and Gaza, arriving on 31st of October. This was about one year after the famous Light Horse storming of Beer-sheba. In fact, as he ironically says, he saw only 30 minutes of action, because the Turkish forces surrendered the same day as he arrived in camp. The German surrender at Versailles followed soon after (11th November), and the armistice was celebrated wildly in the camp.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was then moved back to Egypt by train, and shipped to Tripoli on the coast of Syria with other members of the Australian Mounted Division. Here they marked time, and Bob started teaching a book-keeping class, joined in debating teams, marksmanship competitions, and took French lessons. He visited Tripoli, took a trip to the mountains and saw the cedars of Lebanon, and celebrated his 21st birthday.

On 1st January 1919 he was promoted to temporary Lance Corporal, and was able to pass up tending his two horses, "Commodore" and "Joe" which, along with all other horses, were to remain in the Middle East.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was suddenly re-commissioned and called back to Egypt where a rebellion (jihad) of locals had commenced. The 3rd Machine Gun Squadron was sent to Zagazig, a sizeable town in the Nile delta between Ismailia and Cairo. Arriving on 18th of March 1919, duties involved riding in trains to keep the peace. Along with the others, Bob became increasingly frustrated by delays in repatriation. Eventually, however, he embarked on the "Oxfordshire" at Kantara on 10th of July, arriving in Fremantle on 4th of August.

Bob was discharged from the A. I. F. on 26th of September 1919 as a Lance Corporal in the 3rd Machine Gun Squadron of the 10th Light Horse Regiment, 3rd Light Horse Brigade. He was realistic about his minor role in the war, resulting from his late entry into the "stunt". However, he apparently held no grudge against his father who had delayed his involvement by withholding permission.

The following letters are an almost complete collection of his correspondence with his family for the 18 months of his training, action, and demobilization. They include details of his home life as well as of the life of an ordinary Bill-jim [slang for Light Horseman].

Family members mentioned in the letters:

Grandparents: David Smyth (deceased) and Flora Smyth (nee McLennan, "Nim")

Parents: Peter David McDowell Smyth ("PMcD") and Fanny Emily Smyth (née Ewers)

Uncles: John Smyth, farmer Salter Springs, Arthur Edward James Smyth, farmer, Salter Springs ("Shun"); William Alexander Francis Smyth, Western Australia; Will Ewers, Sydney

Sibs:

Dorothy Alfreda Smyth born 1899 ("Dosh")

Alec Boulwood Smyth born 1902 ("Gummie")

Hugh Lawrence McLennan Smyth born 1905 ("Lockie")

Leon Spencer McLennan Smyth born 1905 ("Len") identical twins ("The Burats")

Margaret McLennan Smyth born 1908 ("Marg")

Phyllis May McDowell Smyth born 1910

Jean Ludlow Smyth born 1915 ("Brat")

RCMS Chronology

From National Archives of Australia website <http://www.naa.gov.au>, accessed 21 March 2012
NameSearch World War I, Series No. B2455, Item barcode 8088305

08 Dec 1917 enlisted

Robert Cecil McLennan Smyth, Salter's Springs, SA, No. 52904, Occupation "Boundary rider"
Height 5 foot 7 1/2 inches, weight 125 lbs, chest 30.331/2 inches, vision R 6/6, L 6/6
Medium complexion, grey eyes, light brown hair, Congregational religious denomination
Parental consent signed by Peter David McDowell Smyth (father) and Fanny Emily Smyth (mother)

12 Feb 1918-12 Mar 1918 B company Mitcham, Private

13 Mar 1918-23 Apr 1918 Base Light Horse 1st reinforcements, Private

24 Apr 1918- 2nd Reinforcements "S", Egypt, Private

04 Jun 1918, entrained for 2nd Mounted Division

10 Jun 1918, embarked "Wiltshire", Sydney

17 Jul 1918, disembarked "Wiltshire", Suez

17 Jul 1918, marched to Moascar, Egypt

07 Sep 1918, Machine Gun Training Unit, Moascar

30 Oct 1918, 3rd Machine Gun Squadron, Moascar

30 Oct 1918, "taken o/s Str x Moascar", E.E.F. (Egyptian Expeditionary Force)

30 Oct 1918- 31 Dec 1918, 3rd Machine Gun Squadron, Private

01 Jan 1919, 3rd Machine Gun Squadron, Temporary Corporal

01 Jan 1919, Promoted Temporary Corporal A.I.F. order 1492 of 31 Dec 1918 whilst employed as Instructor in Bookkeeping, E.E.F. (entry dated 22 Feb 1919)

10 Jul 1919, embarked HT "Oxfordshire", Kantara, Egypt

10 Aug 1919, disembarked, HT "Oxfordshire"

26 Sep 1919, discharged, 3rd Machine Gun Squadron, (10th Light Horse), Lance Corporal

Medals:

1914/15 Star

British War Medal 4/24 issued, No. 23355

Victory Medal

Brief Light Horse Timeline from 1915

1915

12-19 May, Light Horse land at ANZAC cove, Gallipoli
19 December, Evacuation of Gallipoli, return to Egypt

1916

3 August, Battle of Romani, Sinai
22 December, Occupation of El Arish, Sinai

1917

26 March, First battle of Gaza, withdrawal
19 April, Second battle of Gaza, withdrawal
28-30 October, Advance and capture of Beersheba
9 December, Capture of Jerusalem

1918

19 September, Race to Damascus
1 October, Capture of Damascus
26 October, Capture of Aleppo
30 October Armistice with Turkey
11 November Armistice with Germany

1919

9 March, Egyptian rebellion

Chapter 1

Mitcham Camp, Adelaide, training

Mitcham Camp,
Feby. 13th, 1918.

My Dear Mother,

Aeolus [the wind], it appears, thinks worthy of strenuous celebrations my eventual change of calling - for last night and today he virtually played blazes with our physical comfort here. I doubt if I slept even one hour. We have but 2 blankets and no mattress (summer issue) and the wind was freshish at least. But however windy it might be that would not matter if it were not for the dust. Cripes I never knew it so before. When I got up this morning my blankets were like an obstruction on a surface which a sandrift had come to - absolutely silted to the floor. Sand and dust - dust and sand! We eat it, sleep in it, fill our ears with it and soundly curse it, but never does it disappear one iota. It was general leave last night and I went out to Rooneys', finding Doris and Lottie on nightshift. Today I have been messing around with preliminaries. Firstly a dental inspection, then a thorough medical overhauling, after which we were inoculated against typhoid and vaccinated. The old cuss digs the innoc needle into one about a foot. Cripes though I reckoned he was probing my "innards". The vac is very "piffly". A church parade before breakfast this morning for all denoms. This afternoon I received enough drapery to begin a business - two prs. boots, 3 do. socks, 2 singlets, 2 flannel shirts, greatcoat, hat, white hat, 2 dungaree coats, 2 dungaree pants, cardigan jacket, shaving outfit, brushes, clasp knife, 2 pairs underpants and numerous sundries. The complement of men here now is of more than average quality. Not one even talkative last night after leave. Moreover there are about 30 or 40 young chaps here from the colleges and I have almost decided to put my lot with theirs in the L. Horse [Light Horse]. The only drawback is the horses. I strolled down the lines dinnertime and failed to see anything of first quality. Of course we would not take them with us. I transacted the various business on Monday morning barring Reed's sub. which I shall pay on Sat. morning. I invested in a bike so very likely I may put in an appearance Saturday. The machine is now being overhauled and renovated and I shall take it guaranteed. By the way it is one that has been especially used for racing. Pay day here tomorrow when I will receive 10/-. Had to pay £1 deposit on the bike. Tell Lynch I am having an extra strong carrier attached for her substantial presence. Eck may be able to accompany me on occasions too. Well there is a concert due presently so now I shall say goodnight. Best Love

From Yours affectly
Bob.

Business -

I want Father to remit £54 cheque to Eyles and Crowle, Pirie St.

I want to get bike on Sat morn. and money must reach them fore that. Tell him send immediately.
Bob.

No 30597

LEAVE PASS.

NOTE.—If the holder of this Pass should fall ill whilst on leave he MUST report to No. 7 A.G. Hospital, Keswick, personally or by message, giving full particulars of the Unit he belongs to, and must notify his C.O. within 48 hours.

Failure to report will cause pay to be stopped.

Date..... 15 FEB 1918

A.I.F. TRAINING CAMP,

Place..... E. Coy. MITCHELL

PASS.

Issued to..... Pte W. M. Smith

Available for..... 2 hours.

From..... 10 a.p.m. 16 FEB

Till..... 12 a.p.m. 16 FEB

Issued by..... L. Glyde

C.O. Coy. Bn.

No 30597

LEAVE PASS.

This counterfoil may be taken from the holder by any Officer, Warrant Officer, or Non-Com. Officer, or by any member of the Military or Civil Police if the soldier on leave is guilty of any misconduct or irregularity, and if so taken will be forwarded to the Officer who issued the Pass.

A.I.F. TRAINING CAMP,

.....
Taken from the holder of the pass
for the reason that he.....
.....
.....

Date.....

Place.....

Signature.....

This Pass may be withdrawn if the holder of it is unsteady or unsoldierly in conduct in any public place ; if he is slovenly or untidy in appearance ; neglects any soldier duty ; does not salute properly ; or breaks sanitary regulations against spitting on paths or roads or in public conveyances. The soldier on leave is expected to do credit to his uniform and to the Corps to which he belongs.

MitchamCamp
18/2/1918

Dear Mum,

It may interest you to know that I lobbied here at 6 p.m. yesterday. That made me 12 hours on the road, but I learned about motor bikes in those 12 hours than I would have in a life time otherwise. Between Templers and Roseworthy I almost took it wholly to pieces and so located the trouble - a stuffed up carburettor jet, a carbonised spark plug, a screw missing from the clutch, and a jammed brake. I was fortunately able to replace the screw by "robbing" an unimportant one. Pushed the curse till I was unable to lift an eyelash. However she was blith from Gawler but I intend "taking her down" again tomorrow. Some one else went on guard in my place - so I cannot be off on Thursday. Do not trouble to come here on Thurs. as I most probably will strike guard that day. Expect me home on Sat. Concert here tonight. Ta ta.

Much love from Yours affect.
Bob.

Clearing Hospital
Mitcham Camp,
Tuesday [undated]

Dear Mum,

When Sat. morning came around I could see that my weekend would be spent well in here. On Sat. and Sunday my temp. kept 101 [°F] but yesterday and today it has been normal. Have been up all day, but they won't let me leave here until the swelling in my arm goes down. Didn't get my transfer last Thurs. as the C.T. Officer went away. Again today I have missed it and will have to wait until Thurs. even if I get out tomorrow. They transf. on Tues. and Thurs. only. Gosh my arm has been a sight. Almost ashamed to own it, it's so distorted and ugly. Comes out abruptly at the wrist and takes a curve outwards and downwards to the shoulder. They have been painting it with iodine yesterday and today. It's not painful but weak and inconvenient. My knee is well again. The soft beds almost drove me silly first two nights. Tucker is first class. Orderlies d- lazy though. 7 patients in here - from consumpt. to alcoholic excess.

I have Miss Lynch's films, tell her.

Lovingly yours,
Bobby

Mitcham Camp
Monday Feb 25, 1918

Dear Mum,

I sent a telegram up this morning as the letter pillars here are not cleared on Sundays so it was futile for me to write last night. You will notice that I diplomatically addressed wire to Brat so as not to give you a shock. Well I did not arrive here as early as expected. All went glorious until I got to Gawler - an hour and 15 minutes out from home (about 35 miles) then as I reached the turn in the main street I was conscious of an uncanny movement in the rear. Glancing down and around a flat out tyre greeted my expectant gaze. Do you know that I extracted 3 nails or tacks from the cover, all of which penetrated the tube from side to side. I was possessed of one patch but a real sport gave me 1/2 a dozen, and more-over, being a motor mechanic in May-Bros, gave my machine a test - pronouncing her good. Came on from Gawler A.1 with but one stop to light up - as I put in 2 or 3 hours in Gawler. Started up with ease after having lit. Had my second inoculation this morning - and my vacs are rising towards the light.

Thanks for the sentiments expressed in your last letter. I see it as my duty to you - if for no other reason, to keep myself on the narrow track and to live my life without taint. I have always aimed thus, and now give you my word for it that in my military career there shall neither be done nor occur any deed or incident which I should hide from your eyes or ears. God help me. You cannot understand the temptations and lures that openly and brazenly abound. I was astonished myself. More-over the majority think that they are to be indulged in. But thanks to the views I am blessed with, I may say that they do not attract me one scrap, and through the Christ that loves me I mean to return triumphant.

The Light Horse, Artillery, A.M.C. and surplus officers are entraining today for Melbourne - there to embark. On March 6th the infantry refects [reinforcements] are going. Tomorrow I shall probably have my riding test - providing my bosom isn't too sore. I need not have had my innoc. today as they had over looked me, but I don't want the crowd to get away from me, for the sake of a week or two longer in B Coy [Company]. Bit of a coincidence over in my hut. Through no "engineering", just by chance, the names of those sleeping in my row are - 1. Miller, 2 Millis, 3 Smith, 4 Smyth. Reckon that's worth putting in the paper.

Tell Lynch I received today her note re photos and will send some on tomorrow, reaching her Wed.

That's about all there is to tell I think and so as I am writing several letters I shall now close -

With love to all -
I am yours affectionately -
Bob

On Guard
Thursday Mar 12

Dear Mum,

As the L. H. had to supply guard today I gladly volunteered so as to be clear on Sat. Have had nothing to do all day save loll around in guard tent - my beat doesn't start till after 6 p.m. I have all my clobber now - spurs, leggings and all. We have a fair number in the bird tonight as 7 new ones this afternoon. We have guard in full uniform with rolled great coat over shoulder gosh I could feel the drops down my chest and back on this morning. Seems a bit spurs on again and have a gord scratch on one we have to sleep in them am anticipating a few caresses from the other green horns during the night. I am over loaded with civilian stuff - so on Friday evening I intend taking it in a bundle to Mrs Lynch's, Sth Terrace. It will be handy there if they will oblige me. Well with love to all

I am yours affect. Bobby

Mitcham Camp
Thurs night

Dear Mum,

Expect you have been looking for news from me before this. Well we have been down the Port [rifle] ranges every day since coming back and I have not been energetic enough at nights. The first two days we did only practise, 20 shots the first day, and 45 the 2nd. Today was the final - the class firing. We had 50 shots at different ranges and at different targets in different times. What is called the "Tommy's mad minute" is 15 shots to be loaded and fired at a head-and-shoulder-target at 300 yds in one min. The figure is but 18 ins across. At this shoot I scored in the 15 shots - 10 bulls eyes, 3 "maggies", and 2 outers - or 38 pts out of 45. In the 10 rapid in 45 secs. at 200 yds, I scd 9 bulls and 1 outer - 28 out of 30. At 400 yds. I got 18 pts out [of] 20 in slow fire. The same at 200 yds slow fire. All the "rapid" is done standing, over a hurdle affair about 4 ft. 6" high. Snap-shooting is shooting from 200 yds at head-and-shoulders silhouette exposed for 4 secs at [a] time. I hit him 4 out of 5. The possible aggregate for day was 165 pts. The classification is:- over 125 points - marksman; over 90, less than 125 - 1st class; over 55, less than 90 - 2nd class; under 55 - 3rd. My total was 136, being 11 points over marksman mark. The next man to me was 23 points below, at 113. He was an old St. [St Peters College] so it's my honour to be the only m. in the L.H. [Light Horse], which is "no mention" considering the experience I've had. You might tell Shun [uncle, A. E. J. Smyth] these totals as he would be interested as he understands them.

I have dropped in for guard on Saturday which is really up to me as I missed everything last week. When I landed in H.B. [Hamley Bridge] on Monday I had time to go up to Robert's [Bob McKenzie's] for afternoon tea. He drove me down to the station in the motor. He is getting the war fever again.

Most of the camp is out on street parade tonight - a recruiting stunt. We musketeers were excused.

I must close now to write some more letters.

Love from your affect'ly

Bobby

P.S. Ask L. if she was near the engine going up on Monday night.

Mitcham Camp
Tuesday 12.30

Dear Mum,

Your letter with Uncle Tom's [Ewers] rcd this morning. Was very pleased to hear of the good rain. They ought to be able to get a start at the seeding pretty soon as I believe there is more rain about. Didn't get very much here - only about 1/2 inch I reckon.

I was going to try and get home next Monday and come back on Tuesday night. You see Monday is a holiday and by doing duty on Sun. I could get Tuesday off. It will be all right providing musketry is over, but the school has been postponed and may have started again by then. Rcd. letter from Dosh [sister Dorothy] during last week with one of Jack Lake's encl. She spoke of coming out here when she gets back but didn't say definitely when. You might let me know when she leaves Sydney.

When I came off guard on Sunday morning I rang Fred up., and in the afternoon I went down to Black's. Stayed there the night having leaves till 12 noon on Monday. Mrs B. seems very well and carries her age well I thought. She has happy memories of your part of the world and anticipates a visit to Nim [grandmother Flora Smyth] in the near future. Fred and I went to Pirie St. to church on Sunday evening. The dope is just as much a pest at home as anywhere else. Gives Mrs B. no rest. He had a nice buster off his horse on Sunday morning. Milk-cart suddenly coming down a by-lane scared the wits out of old Don and brought both to the road.

Yes, I got three prints off that negative you asked about and will send one on.

There are only 40 in the L.H. [Light Horse] now, in two reinforcements. I am in the 2nd. We are having mounted drill today and in future we are keeping our own horses. Tell Lynch mine is a chestnut. No blacks available of course.

So long now - much love from
yours affect'ly - Bobbie



R. C. M. Smyth

J. M. Symons

W. G. Sutton

A. L. Duffield

March 1918

On Horse Picket,
7/4/18

Dear Mum,

Haven't received any word from you since you went back but expect that Kelly's social etc would have kept you occupied a few nights. You see by the above where I am - although it is Sunday afternoon. Went on this job at 11 o'clock last night with young Lord (O. P.A.C.) [Old Scholar, Prince Alfred College] from Strathalbyn. Both went to Rooney's for tea last night at Cheer-up. On the Friday night we went to the Theatre Royal but to my disgust it was blooming drama - however my dopey friend thought it lovely and you know how I like novels so we have been arguing ever since on its merits and demerits. This morning - nothing to do - we had some revolver practice down the bottom paddock and I slightly took him down. John Kelly is down at Keswick somewhere - he rang Rooneys up and gave them a number for me but I have forgotten the blinking thing. Last Wed was "tank day" and we L.H. formed a street parade. Was fairly interesting but the weather was very sultry and the sweat was running. However Rooneys say I am fatter than ever. Wasn't too bad getting the wallet back again. The coot said he saw it as soon as I went. When Harris Scarfe send the invoices for football, bullets etc. - please send them on to me, as I put them down only to get wholesale prices. Am having a lot of trouble writing this as this dopey pal of mine is fooling around with cameras, revolvers, etc. Some of the base have been warned to go away on the 15th but my name wasn't down. Am thinking to come home next weekend as the one after is intercollegiate sports. Well I have just been reciting to the Dope and it is nearly feeding up time so with best love I shall knock off.

Yours affectly,
Bobby

On Picket Duty
15/4/18.

Dear Mum,

Suppose you expected a letter from me today, but somehow yesterday I wasn't inspired. You see if I had posted it here it would have not gone. Let me start from the beginning and explain. We were relieved off this business at 3 p.m. Sat. and I had to go back at 3 p.m. Sunday. Well i went out with an old Saints chap for the 1/2 weekend as it were. We went to Clayton Church on the Sunday morning and directly after dinner had to come back here. We have absolutely nothing to do here but have to sleep fully dressed and equipped and are not allowed to leave the lines. We are in a couple of tents pitched down at bottom end of camp - standing by for emergency. Twelve on for 24 hours and then a relief of 12 others. Do not know how long this is going to go on, but this week we will go on at 3 pm on Tues. Thurs. and Sat. being off duty the intervening 24 hours. This detail is a very decent crew - there being 50% college chaps. Went out to see Alf [Ewers?] on Thurs night. Was going to Rooney's but from 6 30 till 8 the cars were stopped so I gave it up and walked out to North Adelaide. The late Lieut-Col Miell's son came into camp Thursday. We were at school together - he being a bonzer kid. Has Quinn started the house yet? They are pulling down some of the huts here for erection in another capacity elsewhere. There are only 12 huts occupied out of the 32. Well its nearly time for us to hop out of this so I must close.

I will write again shortly

Love from yours affectly,
Bob

Mitcham Camp,
22/4/18

Dear Mum,

I hate recollections of a promise to write twice a week, and I remember having written only once. However (some excuse) I left it until the latter end of the week and eventually was too much occupied. Wednesday night I struck horse picquet, Thursday ditto - the L. H. were called out at 7 p.m. from saddle cleaning operations to extinguish a bush fire up at Belair. We scaled mountains and precipices half the night and arrived to find the fire under control. On Friday evening I went to the Theatre with Mrs. Rooney, Doris and Lottie.

All last week we were making great preparations for the street parade on Sat., afternoon. About 50 new horses were brought in and allotted. I worked well away from the horse racquet because I wanted to see something of the sports and those who went mounted would have to return to camp with their steeds. So I got a place in the dismounted guard of honour, and although the strain of standing absolutely still for an hour while the troops marched past, was very severe - we were dismissed at 3.20 p.m. - where-as the others were not until 5.30 pm. The new horses created some fun during the week. One morning there were 10 air flights. Anticipating two more street affairs this week - Thurs A. Day [Anzac Day?] and Friday in some patriotic "celebrance". Then we will probably supply station guard on Wednesday when the Inf. Gen. Rfcts. entrain. I am going to try and take out my long leave in College holidays - beginning May 10. I expect there will have to be a public farewell, and so I would rather it took place outside my leave. Any Tues. or Friday night can be secured, will leave next morning for time enough to allow for one's train getting in. Some of the heads of the district have to apply for it I believe. And, pardon my mentioning it, if there will be a presentation - I wouldn't mind a money belt coming that way. I haven't bought one because I reckoned I might knock one up then. I have a watch, and fancy pipes don't appeal to me. I am just telling you that so you may drop a few hints. It's no good a fellow getting what he doesn't want.

I went to the sports on Sat. from 3.30 and enjoyed them. The standard of athletics seems to be steadily improving every year. Young Dick Fowler seems to be a human goanna. Stayed the Sat. night at Bruce Henderson's (old S.P.) [St. Peters College] after going to an evening at home of Geo. Hardy, also old St. [Saint]. Bruce and I went to Fowler's for dinner on Sunday and in the afternoon I went out to see John K. at Rhodes', Gilberton. We all went to Archer St. to church at 7. That is Mr Lade's church, and this will interest Dosh, Margaret L. is engaged. The captive is one Clem Holder - the old family - and is at present at camp for the second time. He is only 20 and she about 19. Mollie Rhodes was enquiring after Dosh, you can tell her. I have meant to write to her, but like everyone else, I let it drag on. Haven't written Miss McCloud yet. Noticed T. Ashhurst enlisted. Tell Nannie I am in receipt of hers and say I said she ought to take in knuckle-bones to liven herself up a bit. She can have a ride on Bette occasionally if she is game. Suggest to Father that perhaps the stink-wort is settling the sheep - it is flowering now. Weighed last night, 11-13 [11 stone 13 pounds] in uniform. When I bend now, I get wrinkled up and pinched a treat. May come home Sat., tell you later, but not the week after, at least I don't think.

Well with best love -

I am yours affectionately
Bobby

On horse Picquet today.

P.S. Had two days of pick and shovel work last week and quite enjoyed it. Also experienced rheumatism during those east winds but am clear now again.

Mitcham Camp,
April 24th,

Dear Mum,

Letter received from you on Monday night and tonight. I was much interested in Doshes letters - cripes she isn't half lucky is she? It was decent of Jack L. writing, although his advice made me smile - like carting sand to Egypt. Not at all pleased to hear of your headaches reappearing although I wasn't very surprised. I often wish you could be as easy of mind as I am, for although a comfortable life in the flesh is very dear to us - sooner or later we shall all be taken hence, and at most it is a short wait before we all join up for everlasting life. There fore it is ours to trust the future, to continue in Hope, find comfort in Faith, and make it our duty to conquer what is human in us by what is divine. Personally I have a great trust that things will not be at all hard you as regards your soldier son - felt it ever since I took the oath. And let us pray to God that he has a job for me in this sphere. Even if -, (pardon my mentioning it) there are more men dead in Rundle - King Wm St - and in the land around, than in "those foreign fields which are forever England".

Referring to this war scare, expect you found some consolation in today's Register. There seems to be a certain amount of suspicion but an armed internal resurrection [sic] could not long endure. In the case of anything occurring, we may be called out, but the chances are remote. Each state has its "Home Guard" of well trained men, mostly "returned" and we are considered untrained. I believe we would volunteer to a man did any occasion arise - but my advice is - keep calm.

The first general rfctmts. of Inf. [reinforcements of Infantry] left here today and the unit L. H. [Light Horse] leave on Friday. Goodness knows when we go! I was so worked up at seeing and saying farewells this afternoon that I talked it over with Bruce H. about getting into the Inf. Eventually we decided on the infallible "toss" and it came down "tails for Palestine". You know, to see all the poor kiddies kissing their daddies - sometimes the last for ever - makes one's heart ache, and it occurs to one that he could make the chances better for them if he could go quickly into it. Yet men stand of and see these kiddies' outlooks blighted! The harvest matters not to those gathers but it's the ones left not able to understand that hits me.

Went last night to a feeling lecture by Dr. Duguid (returned from Palestine). He is a youngish Scottie with a glorious outlook and a fearless tongue and conscience.

Well I cannot come home this week as I am on musketry course. In fact one is not allowed to risk being late returning.

Well now good night. With fondest love
I am you ever loving son
Bobby

Letter card postmarked 27 April 18

Monday night

Dear Mum

Your letter card to hand to day. I have struck guard tomorrow so you may be certain that I won't be able to get home. Sixty odd L.H. went away this afternoon and only 40 left now so duty will fall pretty often. College sports tomorrow too. Had a street parade, in the mounted troop, this morning. There was a large crowd lining the route. That's 3 times I have marched through now. Been a day of terrible bustle today. Details later.

Love from yours affect.
Bob

Mitcham Camp,
Thurs. May 16th, '18

Dear Mum,

Your letter with Stan's [cousin Stan Smyth] included reached me on Saturday morning. I may state that there is always a delivery here on Sat. afternoon at 3.30 p.m., so that if you write me on Fridays I can always get them Sats., if I am here. Re my long leave - I tried to get it from last Tuesday night until the following Monday night but they wouldn't grant it. Now I'm going to take it from tomorrow - (Friday) - night, until the following Wednesday night. Can someone be there [Hamley Bridge Railway Station?] for me F. night? I was again on guard last night but I struck it very lucky and missed the showers. The season is great now isn't it? As regards my service on Sunday - Gosh I don't know how I shall get on as I haven't had time to prepare anything lately. It will be mighty short. Anyway I have picked a text. On Tuesday I was mounted dispatch orderly between Keswick and here. On first mounting in the morning the old nag well slung me off. Wearing spurs put me under a disadvantage as whenever he bucked and my legs gripped - the spurs pricked him. After a bit of "continuance" I decided to put my legs forward and chance it. Well I was up on his neck and well on my back in two seconds. The curse leapt right over me and caught me a bang on the arm - but no discomfort. Tell the boys to see that Bette [horse] is in for Sat. please.

Trusting you'll meet me Friday night - I am yours lovingly
Bobby

Mitcham Camp,
27/5/18.

Dear Mum,

Now for my promised letter. Remembered just in time to write last night. I had a very busy weekend and am feeling a bit tired today. After I reached town Sat. dinner time, - I rode up on push bike, - I bought a few things out of the cheque. Got them at Harris Scarfes and they were - money belt, fly-proof sand goggles, and an illuminous [sic] compass, wrist style. I still have 18/- in hand but am not settled on how I shall spend it yet. After dinner I called at Dimonds' photographers, and have had a couple of positions taken. They are a cheap show, but will do to give away. Proofs will be here tomorrow. Kellys were pleased to see me and are hoping to be favoured with a visit if you come down. May, Floss, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy were home on Sunday morning. I rode there on a bike, from Hendersons where I slept Sat. night.

Managed to get on light duties this morning as I was feeling a bit "light". Tomorrow we go up for our final medical exam and in the event the Cheer-ups are giving is a farewell. They tell us now that we leave here on Tuesday June 4th for Sydney, from whence we embark on the Wiltshire a day or two later. The W. is a large boat and used to carry cargo between U.K and Australia. I remember seeing her at Semaphore Anchge when we were at the Grange once. They let us go out for the night now from Wed. till entraining. Will write you in a day or two and advise you as to what I will do about getting home again. I may say it will be uncertain as the whether it can be arranged,

With best love
from yours affectionately
Bob

Mitcham Camp,
Wed. May 29th.

Dear Mum,

Your's of yesterday received this evening. You may put me down to be home for certain the weekend. This is what I propose to do -. Have put in an application for leave from 8.30 Sat. morn. that will give me time to catch the 9.10 a.m. and could someone be there to meet Gummy [brother Alec] and I? Shun [Uncle Arthur] perhaps would go as I do not think there is council on that day. Failing my leave being granted I will have to get the 4.50 train. Tomorrow dinnertime I will know how my leave is and then I can advise you and Gummy too. They would not let us out tonight and I had promised Rooneys too. Last night I practically wasted at the cheer-up farewell and I have tomorrow and Friday nights engaged. Poor Mrs. Rutt will have to go without me I expect. Rotten luck, but I have to cut so many out.

Forgot to tell you that Dorothy Haslam, Mrs. H's eldest girl, is going to M.L.C. [Methodist Ladies College] now. She is such a little girl but she is in IVB and is second in the class. Saw her report - she had 89% and this is her first term. She hadn't started school when I left college.

You must come back to town with me although I wouldn't advise you to see the train off. Rooneys say they are coming down but it would suit me just as well if no one did. I will be mighty glad when we get on the boat as it is one long confusion after we pack up here. Fairly sure of a trip to Sydney, and possibly a call at N.Z. Trust you are becoming as used to the thought of going away as I am. Although it is hard to leave the dear old calling and place, the action gives one an unspeakable feeling of self respect and ease of conscience.

Writing again tomorrow -
Best love from Bob

"Ardee"
30/5/18

Dear Mum,

Just a hurried note to say my leave for Sat morning is granted. Gummy [brother Alec] and I will be along all right by the 9.10 train from here. Finished up our training this afternoon. Last and final medical exam tomorrow. Am afraid Mrs Rutt will be disappointed as I am sound as a bell. Had 3 fillings put in my teeth this week.

Goodbye till Sat.

Love from yours affectly,
Bobby

Chapter 2

Sydney, embarkation and at sea

In train
30 miles Melb
5/6/18

Dear Mum,

Feeling very well this morning. Slept like a log from 1 am, although I had a miserable time previous owing to a head ache. A blasted wheel ran hot and the train had to keep stopping. Of course this got on my nerves properly. Nearing Bacchus Marsh now. Everyone cheerful and all sober now. Writing again soon as chance offers.

Fond love to all
From yours lovingly
Bob

Was proud of your showing at the train. Bravo

The Alliance Hotels Ltd (Commandeered)
 Corner Castlereagh and Park Streets, Sydney
 June 7th, 1918

Dear Mum and everybody -

To keep my promise of last night I now am writing you this, and to let you know how we are faring living. (Was not quite sure how to spell that word scratched out.) To start from the beginning -. After leaving Murray Bridge one of the wheels ran hot, necessitating long and frequent stoppages. Two places in particular. I will always remember Tintinara and Keith. I had a headache and wanted to sleep but we stayed at these two places for ages, with crowds of yapping rural life lining the platforms and our chaps singing and bowing discords on bugles. My nerves stretched to snapping point until suddenly sleep relived them. When I waked next morning headache was clean gone. Owing to our small sojourns at the cities in the desert we arrived in Melb. two hours to windward. From 12 till 3 we were allowed off. I bought a few specimens of Eng. literature from Coles' and otherwise mooched about. Left M. at 4 p.m. and arrived here 11.30 a.m. next day. Promptly we re-entrained and went back to Liverpool to our temp quarters. L. is 21 miles S.W. of Sydney. Compared to Mitcham it is a horror. Dirty, dusty, damp (swamps) and generally no improved conveniences. The huts are all closed in, and the sanitation would have made old Piggy Hill green with disgust. However, we are given leave all day and over weekend. Sleeping in tents. Got in touch with Uncle W. [Will Ewers] soon as landed. Was out there last night and going tonight, and tomorrow for a sail, or row (as the motor inclines). Had my photo taken this morning and have arranged Uncle W. and aunt to select from the proofs. They cost 30/- per doz in panels. Ordered only a doz. and paid for them. Had 5 pos. taken so surely two will be all right. Some heavy showers of rain this afternoon. I intend to do a bit of shopping and then take a ferry some where. We are having some funny experiences in finding our way about. Last night coming in car from Drummoyne we came to where a big building (sweets factory) was alight. The car could not pass so we had to walk a mile or more. The blaze was a grand sight with firemen and appliances all over the shop. Will put a few names on back of those to whom you can send photos.

Closing now with fondest love from your loving son and brother -

Bob

Haslam Henley Sth
 Dockett, C/- Garrison Inst, Mitcham Camp
 Rooneys
 Roberts - Rev
 Rutt -
 Richards - Owen
 Kelly - J.G.
 " Ramsey
 Allmond - Park St. Magill
 Lakes
 Nim (Bust from Dimond's)
 Calder, Miss D., Murray Bridge (Sydney one, without cap)
 Freebairn - Mrs Jas

Mander - 1 Bowen St, N. Adelaide

Maybe you'll have to get some more printed



52904 Trooper R. C. McL. Smyth
2nd Reinforcements, Light Horse

Sydney 1918

Enoggera
Brisbane
Wed. night

Dear Mum,

Just a more detailed letter. We have not been having a very bad time. The journeys have been interesting except at night when we couldn't see outside. Adelaide to Melbourne was the most uninteresting as the scenery was not much except for Ballarat where we stopped for a good while to have breakfast. Onwards from here there are thousands of acres of potatoes. I have not seen any wheat at all to speak of although feed and water is twice as good as in Sth. Aus. even. In Melbourne we stayed for about 7 hrs. Before getting there we passed through the places of several great railway mess ups - Sunshine etc. just little insignificant sidings. Melbourne is very dark and smoky. By gum here as well as in Sydney the buildings go away to de blaze - 12 stories above ground and about 73 underneath. Melb. G.P.O is a near enough palace [?]. You ought to see the business - Gee! 100's and 100's posting letters every minute. Flinders Street Station is supposed to be the busiest in the world. It has a masonic frontage stretching about 400 yards. The Yarra River is rather lousy so to speak. I didn't go down to St. Kilda but some did and said it was blith. We were glad to get away from Melbourne about 5.30 p.m. It is a bonza bridge over the Hawkesbury River, but we couldn't see to advantage as it was just getting dark. The bridge is about 3/4 mile across. A couple - aw blow a forgot; I was thinking that we had left Sydney. Well coming back to Melbourne again. We arrived at N.S.W. border at Albury at 12 p.m. and had to change trains. Oh it was blith. By cripes this night was cold but there were colder to come. We had a beautifully pretty trip though the mountains after Goulburn - a big town - tunnels, cuttings galore. All along the line of country had been timbered and it continued for nearly all the way to Brisbane, stringy bark, blue gum, and bushy stuff. The N.S.W. trains go like de blaze all the way. We got to Sydney and put up at the Alliance Temperance Hotel, Saw nothing but chows for the first hour or two. Sydney swarms with the coots. See a name up See Poo, and another - Ah Hop. I saw one pea pick up a cigarette holder, just a paper affair, out of the gutter, light it and smoke it. Gee I laughed. He looked so serene too. We had a good look all over Syd., harbour and all. It's a bonza place. That's the place for a holiday next year, Mum and father too. (and me too.) Well when we left we went over the Hawkes. and on to Newcastle. Newcast. is a pretty big place. It was night time. This was the cold night. Cripes! It was awfully high land and here was a hang of a frost. The country was white in the morning. One station was 4470 feet above sea level - Ben Lomond - so you can imagine it. We changed trains on the Queensland border about 11 o'clock in the morning. The weather was a bit warmer now. We went on through scrub, mountains tunnels etc. till we stopped a good while a Toowomba. Didn't see much of the noble city. The prettiest part of the journey came now. Gum it was beautiful. We got here late at night and came out to this place. It is very pretty. Well I think I'll knock off ... to all from myself and ...

Goodbye

love from ...

Drummoyne
Sunday, June 9th 1918

Dear Mum,

We have just had dinner, luncheon to be precise. They allowed us from yesterday morning until tonight as weekend leave. I brought a friend out with me - young Scott from Clare. He was one of the few who didn't know anyone over here.

Yesterday afternoon Uncle W. [Will Ewers] took us up Lane Cove R. in the boat. The engine goes fairly satisfactorily nowadays. We called at a certain spot to partake of afternoon tea and they showed me the tree on which Dosh [sister Dorothy] carved her name on April 20th. I cut another piece of bark away above it and chiselled out my initials and date. Uncle W. took a snap or two of Scottie and I standing beside the historic-to-be tree. The afternoon was not as good as could be desired - thunder and showers came on.

This pianola is just the idea. I could play the thing all day. Am a bit sorry there aren't more pieces to it that I know. Uncle W. is fond of the phonograph which really is an atrocious mechanism. Most of his records too are Yankee, and what with nasalisms and the "tin" it would simply delight you.

We slept here last night and didn't wake until 9.10 a.m. You see two train nights and then two 1.30 a.m. evenings in Liverpool wore us down a little.

This morning we rowed a little way up and tried to fish but had no luck. There are any amount of oysters down in the baths and I had quite a "supper" this morning. Gosh you must get over here soon - the train is nothing.

Instead of getting field glasses with the note of Shun's [uncle A.E.J. Smyth], I decided on an automatic Browning revolver. It is a dazzler my word. Not as big as my hand and very compact. Tried it yesterday up Lane Cove, finding it accurate and very powerful. It cost me £5.10. - The beauty of the thing is its ease in being carried.

We will embark tomorrow night after a march through Sydney. My word this is the place to get the "glad eye". Men seem to be very scarce.

Fond love from
yours lovingly
- Bobby

At Sea
17/6/18

Dear Mum,

Rumours of landing mail at Albany so am just sending short note as we have no convenient conditions for letter writing since leaving a week ago. Had a rotten trip so far - rough and bleak. We are about 3 days late - one day doing only 50 miles in 24 hrs. The spray is chief trouble. Haven't been sick but have felt better when bogging around in S.S. [Salter's Springs] mud. Had a great send off from Sydney. Received your letter all right. Haven't caught any cold yet which is rather wonderful considering. Will supply all details later Mum. With fondest love from yours ever,

Bobby.

Marked "No. 1"

At Sea
June 25th, 1918

Dear Mum and Father
and all the mob,

Our mailbox closes tomorrow, and in a few days we are calling at a little port, so I'll start now on this long postponed letter. I will begin from Sydney. On the Monday morning we began a march from Sydney Rlwy Stn. We were composed of a quota from each state - the larger states having a 2 or 3 hundred men. You know I had about 4 marches in Adelaide but this Sydney stunt will be remembered when all 4 of Adelaide's are in oblivion. It was a long march and from start to finish was one long display of enthusiasm. The women folk of eligible years were particularly attentive. In S.A. we marched as on parade, but what with a city gone mad and its girls crowding all over one, shaking hands, embracing and throwing that wretched confetti over all - I tell you it was impossible to march. It soon happened that I was on the outside of my section, so you can guess that I had rather a warm time. Three or four girls pressed their addresses into my fist as they shook hands, but I hadn't over much to bask in the light of their countenances. Also a couple gave me addresses to write to for socks, but as I had not the need, I passed them on when about 3/4 way through our route. Uncle W. [Will Ewers] caught up with a letter from you Mum and very overcome. Poor Uncle was absolutely "blowed out" having coursed up and down the procession several times without seeing me.

We reached the wharf and duly arrived in our allotted quarters on board. We are right up in the bow of the vessel, which is a good sea boat. Of course you know we have no cabins or separate places for meals. The floor is thick with narrow tables, and the ceiling thick with hooks for our hammocks. When all the hammocks are slung and men in them - you may guess the population is very dense. On each side of one, his neighbour touches him, whilst one's head and feet are directly adjacent, long wise, to the feet and head respectively of two others. Anyway when we were all on board we went out into the harbour and anchored for several hours. During that while a number of crowded motor launches came out and kept slowly encircling us. Many were the kisses thrown, and love was much expressed between the new acquaintances. Some of the boys were sorely tempted to jump overboard and accept the proffered embraces of enthusiastic wenches.

However, we soon forgot all about our Sydney loves when next night we began on 8 day's run of rotten weather. The wind was in our face and greatly retarded the boat, two knots per hour being about her limit for two days. Had she gone faster things would have been washed overboard. We passed all the Australian ports without calling in, and as soon as we got out of Australian waters we got it calm. Of the miserable cursed experiences, that first week was the worst. Being in the bow, we got all the spray off every roller she struck - and there were some big ones. The decks are almost devoid of shelter although there are winches, hatches and fittings enough about, to take up the room. One could not stay below so had to go up and get wet. For those who were sick it was proper blazes. Think of what it was below - crowded as I've explained - wet and damp with water dripping in, and ever and anon an overpowering odour of stale "emetication"! Never the less we are always happy. Some of the incidents were so funny that I often lay awake laughing over them for nights. For instance, picture a long and narrow "right-of-way" between the

gunwhales [sic] and saloon wall. This was supposed to be shelter, and 3 of us were there talking. Suddenly an immense wave loomed up and we turned our backs. ...

[page 5 missing]

...magazine called the "SPUR". They published a contribution of mine the other day, and also the concoction that I took 2nd prize with in the limerick competition. This is how it ran -

"When the SS Wiltshire was crossing the Bight
 "The wastage of food was a sickening sight
 "For they all hadn't learned
 "That our bread is returned
 "When cast on the waters - not quarters, at night."

Our deck is known as B, and our mess B, so I signed myself - "B-mess". So it was, these first few nights. One thing that I am proud of was that I wasn't sick. Although I couldn't stand it down below I conquered the ocean with my old borgy [?]. We get any amount of tucker, although I don't take too well to frozen meat. One morning we had fried steak. The piece I had must have been situated under the yoke of a 30 year's old bullock. Whatever pieces I dislocated with my teeth wedged themselves there, and I remember as I walked up from breakfast my mouth felt as though it had...

[page 7 missing]

...They fly with a straight stiff motion, like little aeroplanes. In ordinary circumstances they don't fly higher than 8 ins above surface, but occasionally the wind throws them upwards. They fly anything up to 30 yds at a time. Average size is about 9 ins long. [flying fish?]

When you send a parcel, please enclose some ""pill-form" cold cure such as peps or eumenthol jubilees. Those Hudson's jubes are good. I have a bit of a cold in the head now, although its worst is past.

I expect you have those photos from Sydney now. That tree affair was just 6 months after my day of enlistment. Sat Dec 8th - Sat June 8. I have some snaps being done which I will enclose if they are ready tomorrow. Keep me well up on the news when you are writing. I always dream of the old place although I think I can "willpower" this job through without getting chronically home sick.

So long for a bit - God is with us who believe -

Fondest love to all from your loving son and brother,

B.O.B



At sea?

Marked "No. 2"

Reply to: 52904
2nd Rfcts. S. Egypt
A.I.F.

At Sea
Sunday July 14th, 1918

Dear Mum, Father and extras,

I don't know how the beloved household will like the term, only I couldn't always style them "the mob" - it would be monotorsy [sic]. Notice my writing is a trifle shaky? I've just been 3 days on my back with a blinking low fever. After we left Colombo this complaint made itself manifest among the troops, also mumps appeared. Well I thought I was going to escape, so long did it hang off. However, when there were only 4 out [of] 15 left on our mess table I got pains in my legs, back and head. Next morning was admitted to hospital at 102°. Nearly everyone has had it now and are none the worse. It was of very short course, two or 3 days usually. It has left me as weak as a kitten. By cripes, I was fat too you wouldn't imagine how fat but suffice it is to say, I was not fat when I left Mitcham! But with the fever I sweated so terrifically that I am now reduced to the shadow I was when you saw me last.

Since I wrote last we have travelled a good way and also seen the sights of Colombo. Whilst ashore I sent a few p.c.s [post cards] which I expect you'd get as soon as my letter. We arrived there on Sat. afternoon and left on the Monday. On Sunday morning I went ashore with the first batch, for 4 hours. My main objective was to get a skin full of fruit and ye gods didn't I too! The natives are an awful curse and nuisance. Rickshas [sic] abound in the hundreds and fares are very cheap if you don't pay what they ask. The niggers themselves have an awful hum about them. Every cuss you meet has something to sell - one fan, another a fountain pen, a kid with a flower, etc. In the streets one notices the little bullocks in the primitive waggons, on 2 wheels of solid wood. Every where there is a terrible babble. The words simply jabber out like the tappings of a typewriter and their voices are high pitched like children's. The municipal scavengers are ravens. These things are as tame as fowls and are everlastingly squawking. Now for pineapples and cocoanuts for 2d and 3d. I filled up two or 3 times and walked around till it shook down again, and finally brought a cargo back to the ship. Oh it was some feed! The heat was very trying that day and so in the afternoon I chanced the sharks and climbed down the side of the boat and had a swim in the pale green water of the harbour. I have a few coins of Ceylon, about 5 or 6, which I will send to Dosh later. I have washed them well so you needn't be afraid of them. A cent is about 1/6 of a penny, 100 cents = 1 rupee or 1/4. Am sending along 3 snaps as souvenirs of when I was in the "spicy breezes". Since then we've had a few days of rough weather which renewed maldemer [sea sickness] but mostly it has been calm and fairly warm. We haven't done any work or exercises whatever so you imagine how fat and soft we are.

The next land we saw was Aden, rising up abruptly and looking like an immense thundercloud. The barren-ness and contours are indescribable - but an enormous black thunder cloud coming up from the horizon is something like it. We have seen some very rugged and rocky islands since

then, and there is more "life" on the water. We don't know whether we'll get disembarkation leave yet.

Have written Edgar and Stan [Smyth cousins] notifying them of my coming. Our "Kell" and "Thom" have got mumps and will be held back awhile I suppose. '

I remembered the other day that I had neglected to cancel registration of my motor bike. Father, would you write and do it? No. 11213. Otherwise they might be after the tax.

Now, as I am feeling neither humorous nor sentimental, I think I'll close and write as soon as we get to our further abode.

One of these days send us a small pocket dictionary and see if you can get hold of a small book of maps. Something that gives the smallest detail and covering all countries etc.

Now with best love to you all,

I conclude

Your affectionate son and brother

Bob

Postcards from Colombo, Ceylon (undated)



Victoria Park, Colombo

Mrs P Smyth, Salter's Springs, Sth. Aust. Australia

Dear Mum

Arrived here yesterday afternoon. Have about 4 hrs leave. Wretched climate. Sweating like a horse. Fruit the only consolation.

Yours affecty, Bobby



Colombo Harbour and Jetty

H. and L.Smyth, Salter Springs, Sth Aust. Australia

Dear Boys

Our ship is in this harbour, but it is bigger than these. Have had a great feed of bananas today. Hundreds of tame crows in the streets here. Big breakwater round this harbour.

Love from Bob

Chapter 3

Moascar, Egypt, training

Marked "3rd letter home"

Reply to 52904 2nd Rfs [Reinforcements] "S" Egypt,
Anzac Mtd [Mounted] Division,
Stationed at Moascar

Sat. July 20th 1918

My Dear Mum, Father, and little smithilites,

At last I have begun my career in the land of the Caliphs and so far I have no complaints to make - it's a rather pleasant beginning. Our old jigger landed at Suez on the morning July 17th and when we had mobilised all our engines of war and sufficiently blessed the benevolence of borrowing brothers - we went off in lighters with all the gear that remained to us. For my part I lost absolutely nix on the voyage, but most were less fortunate. After a few hours' wait at Suez we entrained in very eastern railway compartments and came to our quarters here - a couple of miles from Ismailia.

It is a rule here that all new drafts go into isolation for 3 weeks. Well the first night there were 8 of college dopes in a tent and in the morn Stacey - a St [St Peters College Old Scholar] - had mumps. So the 7 of us had to go into the "contact" isolation. We are here for 3 weeks but carry on our training just the same. As yet they have not worried us at all and it has given us a good opportunity to get our land legs.

The climate is A.1. - not extremely hot yet, and glorious nights. The reveille goes at 4 am, and we fall in at 4.45 and drill until 7.30 then breakfast. Parade again at 9 until 11.30 am and then we are finished for the day. The afternoons are often up with bathing parades - we march a couple of miles to the lakes on the canal. We went over this afternoon for our first dip. The water is too blooming warm if anything.

All the boys here received their mail this afternoon which came over on our boat. The old soldiers one meets here are very generally absolutely bonzer fellows, and it makes one look forward in a way to his future existence up there. One hears all sorts of yarns about the goings on up there and it's a very interesting campaign. Heard poor Billie Kelly was killed the other day. Has [sic] was an extraordinarily popular officer and an old Red [Old Scholar Prince Alfred College]. Went home on convalescence after Gallipoli.

As regards war news. On the way over the wireless picked up synopsis every day, and here we get daily papers for 2 piastres (3d) each. Everything is very dear here and a chap hasn't the slightest difficulty in "fiddling up" his 2/- per day in the tuck shops. Our first 2 days here were rationed by biscuits (?) and bully beef. We had biscuits in Aus and again on boat, but we had to come to the flesh pots of Egypt to find the paragon de-hearth-brick. By all the solidarity of the pyramids, these are adamantine! They shine on the top like these polished tiles and the trouble is they are not brittle. One chap broke his knife blade this morning - that's dinkum - trying to dissect a "Gippo" biscuit. Now stale bread melts in one's mouth like butter. The stew we have 2ce a day is very good, and the tea - heaven. Troopship tea was farcical but I could consume buckets of this. Any amount of jam is allowed but is very rough orange marmalade, and marmalade only. The fly bogey has virtually busted, there being no flies to speak of.

The little flies with [bull's-eye symbol] on the under wings abound. Every day they entertain us with the most amazing aerial stunts. Cripes the modern aeroplane is a marvellous machine with which the pilot can do any mortal thing. They tumble around up there all ways and always eventually you'll hear the engine opened out with a roar and the plane came back to straight. Our camp is on the line that goes from Cairo up thro and the traffic is interesting to watch. The length of the trains is surprising.

Tomorrow is Sunday and church parade I believe. I always think of you in church on Sundays. I kept Adelaide time all the way over [?] so could always know about what you would be doing over there. Now we know that this place is 7 hrs 5 ms behind Adelaide. Our training here is going to last for 3 months at least, unless the L.H. [Light Horse] get cut up and we are sent up in emergency. Anyway we won't see the front before late October or even November. Nearly all these old soldiers are very optimistic about end of war. They reckon on being home in 12 months at extreme, whereas I say that in two years will surprise me. However this is good happy life and it doesn't plague me. Further installments coming immediately

- love from yours,
Bob

Marked "4th letter home"

Moascar
July 26th 1918

Dear all at home,

As I have passed away the warmer part of the afternoon in washing and sleeping, now about quarter to 5 I feel disposed to write a little. Down here in this contact area our mess tables are unsheltered, and on these, or on one of them, I always do my writing. Consequent to the lack of shelter this position is free from snow drifts during the middle of the day, and so one doesn't feel inclined to use them then. Conditions are not desperately hot at all, but the sun can scorch. I suppose the shade is always near the 100 [°F] from 12 to 3 p.m. In my last letter I told you a few things about this joint but there are a couple more paragraphs I can give you.

We are having the time of our lives down here. All the afternoon and evening we poke "borack" at one another although the greatest victim is one "Goldstein von Steinveidels" who went to Princes 14-16. He is an only child and was properly pampered at home. It is his ambition to be superb, which in his mind is to live in an artificial atmosphere of cigars, new suits, and "haw-haws"! His only comforts in military existence were (i) a khaki collar and tie, (ii) a riding whip, (iii) a pneumatic cushion. Poor beggar also had a great weakness for his mirror, and upon these peculiarities hang the main bantries of us his companions. In peaceful life he worked in Elders, whom he speaks of as "we" and he was known as E. Vernon Goldsmith. In Mitcham he was "Soldier Goldsmith".

Re this contact stunt. We have prospects of having to begin our 3 weeks again as one of our number - Jack Bagot - shows signs today on the mumps! "Dogs" as he is known in terms of love, is a peculiar chap. Seems to believe he is going under, often causing mirth by his humorous comments on it. For instance, as his number ends in 7, he tells anyone whose number ends similarly that it is fatal! Cheerful companion, eh? When he was in Syd [Sydney], he received a telegram from home and it opened thus:- (through some strange freak) "Dead Dear John". Well to any superstitious person that would be rather disconcerting, wouldn't it? Unfortunately he cannot ride for sour apples so probably we will go on ahead of him. Of course old Kell and Thom strayed away with mumps but another chap we still have with us is Ern Barritt. He also is an only child but is 28 and bald. He went to Saints [t Peters College] and later went to an English school. Although old-looking for his age he is very light hearted and spends tons of money. His father owns a station near Mt Crawford known as "Yattalunga". This chap was an interstate tennis player and a polo enthusiast.

Well we were in this camp for a week before they found anything for us to do. Then we gave in a lot of our clothing - the spare uniform, 2 shirts, pr. boots, overcoat, all blueys, white hat, one towel, cap, cardigan, and cholera belt. They send us up the line very light from here, and it is really the best thing. It seems funny tho having the second uniform just for the trip over when one doesn't use it.

No Palestine doings are ever published in the Egyptian papers so we live on rumours etc. I am going to post you a copy of a Gippo paper for a curis [?].

I am continuing this letter from yesterday. It's Saturday which day is mostly a holiday from drill. We do our 2 hrs B4 breakfast and at 9 a.m. take down our tents (very simple matter with bell tent) and scrape away the sand from off floor. One is then homeless until 11 a.m. when we put the tents up again, 5 mins operation. No other duties for rest of day.

I was very energetic today so I washed 8 pairs of socks, 7 handkerchiefs, 6 prs underpants, flannel shirt and crepe shirt which I bought in Colombo for 3/4. Besides all this, I had a spring cleaning through my kitbags. In these days I wear only singlet and trousers (slacks). In a week my complexion has undergone a slight variation. The process of tanning was a great success losing no peel whatever. A snowy patch on left wrist hides under my watch.

As regards vermin. The camps nowadays are singularly free mainly due to a periodical "chat parade". If one of a tent's complement is found guilty, he is dipped and all the occupants of his tent have to have their clothes and blankets baked or steamed. If a chap baths frequently and keeps his clothes clean I think he is pretty safe. We are not allowed to bathe in any fresh water pools or canals here as the water contains a germ or [?] which gets into the blood system as a small worm. All our water comes from the fr wtr [fresh water] canal but is well filtered. Although we have had no opportunity to get boiling water, hot water is always procurable and for the day hot water only. It's a good while now since I've tasted really cool water. The old Sol soon influences it in an iron tanker.

Whilst in this joint we cannot get leave. After 3 weeks the others will be allowed into Ismailia about every 8 or 10 days. After one puts in 3 months here, 48 hrs leave is given in which to visit Cairo. They say there is not too much to write home about in Ismailia but it is a sort of civilisation. The European quarter is fair they say, but the niggers joint is the usual mud huts and filth. Of course there is a little vegetation about, date palms, vines, maize, pine trees, lucerne, and flower gardens. We get a glimpse of it when we go to bathing parades.

We have well started on our training now which begins from right turn etc. A point on which great stress is laid is bayonet fighting and a chap has ample chance to become very proficient before going up the line. They also give us a course in Hotchkiss gunnery and in the use of gas masks. My word, the week's fighting in France has been different from the usual trend of late.

I am going to write further tomorrow to the Brats. We will not get up till 6 tomorrow as it is Sunday. Dogs left us today with the mumps.

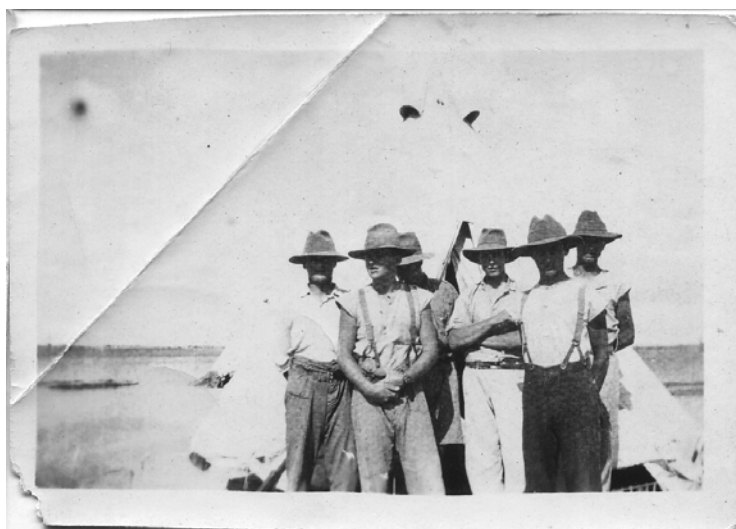
Best love to all from yours affectionately,

Bob



Our old home in contact

Left to right
top: - Tpr X, G Hardy, Earn Barritt, Vida Goldstein, Sgt Cook M.M.
bottom: Bruce, Gordon, mineself.
See I'm slightly poorer physically!



Our contact home again

Left to right.
Earn B., me, V. Goldst., Bruce, Gordon and Geo.
This was when I had influenza.

Marked "5th letter home", addressed to Messrs. H & L Smyth

Moascar,
Sunday July 28, 1918

Dear Burats [twin brothers Hugh (Lockie, later Loss) and Len],

I know you would like to hear a bit about this country and things that happen which would interest you. Well when we first landed in Egypt and travelled out here to the camp, "Moascar" means camp, we saw only a narrow strip of cultivated country. The strip is along a freshwater stream from the R. Nile. The niggers of course are the farmers, and as far as I could tell, two acres was a farm. The houses these people live in are dirty mud ones with flat roof, no doors in the doorways and no windows. The fowls, long-legged thin affairs (like Hazel) all make their home in corners of the rooms. These people have cows, goats, camels, and donkeys. Their milking cows are about the size of the little cow although they are light brown colour all over. Little kids about as big as Jean [youngest sister] lead them about to feed. The donkeys are often about half the size of Nut and, you see the big men riding on their rumps. No bridles or stirrups are used. Sometimes we see a flock of about 30 goats and 3 or 4 women minding them. The goats are mostly black and the sheep black also. They never tail the sheep here which are lanky, roach-backed and scraggy. When one sees a few sheep there is always a shepherd for every 10 with them. The natives plough with two bullocks in a wooden affair which is shaped thus [sketch]. Anyway the furrows are mostly nice and straight. The fields are free of fences and just now there is maize growing with Egyptian clover, as a sort of undergrowth. Date palms are scattered everywhere, just at present heavily laden and will be ripe in about a month. We get any amount of water and sweet melons but they haven't the flavour of our melons. For a melon the size of a football, the price is about 8 pence. Grapes are ripe now but they are lacking in taste, and are 5d a pound. They say there are lovely grapes up in Palestine now. You remember how the old Israelite spies (in Joshua's time) brought back bunches that took two men to carry. Well they are not as big now but they are well known for their quality.

Palestine is lovely they say this side of the Jordan River Valley which is about 1000 feet below sea level. As for the wildlife about here, I don't think you would get much fun with your rifles. The only birds we see are numerous hawks about the size of river hawks, a few of the good old spoggies [sparrows], and a few night birds. The hawks fly around all day picking up rubbish about the camp. You have heard of the jackals, haven't you? Well there are some sort of their descendants which live in the desert and along the canal and which prowl about the camp at night. They are not particularly wild but they make a deuced of a row at night. However, they will be silent after tonight as poison is being laid about the camp. Old Scotty is something like them. Down the desert further, Tel-al-Kebir way, they say the desert dogs are a plague.

My word the weather over here is all right. The days are what we'd call perfect reaping days, the nights are cool, not cold, and with a dew. Sometimes the mornings are foggy. All out stars up her are strange to you below there. Well not all of them because we see the Scorpion to the south, and you see that. The Southern Cross dropped below the horizon before we got to the Suez. There is a star which is always due north, called the Pole Star, and all the stars revolve round it. Its position is about half way up the sky. Near it are seven stars called the "great bear" or "plough". Like this [diagram]. The dots are the stars and I have drawn in the plough to show you. The worst of the

nights are the blasted skeeters [mosquitoes]. Cripes they have made a mess of my ankles. Don't know if I whether I leave my feet uncovered or what happens.

The only jam we get here is marmalade. How would you coots like that? I am quite used to it now. Our bread contains a fair sprinkling of weevils which one eats as a matter of course. It would cost too much exertion to remove them. Our stews contain onions, spuds [potatoes], rice, barley, melon seeds, beans, and an odd lump of brisket. But there are plenty of things worse than our stews. I hope this is some interest to you.

With best love from your valiant (?) brother, - Bob

Since I came here I have picked up two coins (1/2 piastre and a milleime), a rising sun badge, a "tommy's button", two pencils, and shellfond [?].

Marked "6th letter home"

Moascar,
Sunday July 28th 1918

Dear Mum,

I expect you are looking for a private letter from me - all my others have been general. Well it's Sunday night down your way, somewhere after 9 o'clock, and I suppose old Pat and the invincible Squirrel are wishing the hour hands back. I am writing in the tent with the paper on a cigar box - a position which I hate, but it's better than no position. It's not nearly so hot today, a coolish breeze blowing. I received your last letter in Sydney 7 weeks ago and so it will be great to receive our first mail. My health so far is perfect, except that I am still a trifle soft. This Egyptian sand though ought soon to stiffen up my muscles. If anyone speaks of sending me socks, you had better tell them I do not need them. You may post one of those surplus pairs occasionally and they should be ample as I have about 9 or 10 pairs now.

I do not know when I will see either Stan or Edgar [cousins]. Have written to them both, but don't know for certain if they are with their regiments as there is a certain amount of malaria etc. up there. Dave Freebairn is still here but he hasn't anything to do with us now. All the mob is in a fairly decent state now, having had no pay since we left the boat. Again there being no leave, opportunities for dissipations are few. The canteen is "wet", but lack of money keeps the majority in a dry condition. The beer is said to be very inferior to Aus. product and doesn't tempt excess to any extent. I haven't tasted even lager beer since I enlisted, although the general thing in the army is to be at least a moderate drinker. Anyway my idea is that if I and keep my principles through this job I will be able to say that the fights' won, even it is not now. As yet temptations have not engaged my thoughts. It is easy enough to resist if one makes known his principle among his comrades because then pride keeps him from going back. Your letter was very refreshing to me as you showed up your triumphant spirit; and if we can keep that feeling between us, and God's grace over us, weary months will be brightened for you and rough places smoothed for me. Somehow we never seem gloomy out here. The atmosphere seems to imbue light-heartedness and optimism. "Although we haven't much money", the saying goes, "we have lots of fun". It's not only fun, but a forgetting of trivial luxuries and liver complaints. One wonders how he wasn't always hilarious at home, as now he can be happy anywhere, although there is undeniably a loathing of military underneath.

This afternoon I am sending a small parcel to Dosh containing 6 Ceylon coins and some water and rock melon seeds. Plant the seeds and see how they act. I will collect the Egyptian coins soon and send them along.

One thing here we can appreciate is our instructor. He is a Tas. [Tasmanian] and was just an ordinary employer in pastoral concerns. But he has a perfect understanding of men, with the coolest temper. He won the Military medal at Beer-sheba for rescue of wounded. I expect he is between 35 and 40, very sociable, has had two brothers killed and now has his parents to support. His home is in North Tas. I think. Bayonet fighting is his pet form of strife, and I pity the Turk that would run against his 14 stone. The one thing in particular that kills spirit in the military is a sneering, over-bearing man in charge, and gosh we are thankful for this chap. Imagine his blue eyes, modest when you look at them, strong square face, wide forehead, strong nose, straight but

for a middle bump, and black neat moustache. I'm writing description because I always like myself to have facts to frame my pictures with, and suppose others do likewise.

It is not probable that I will cable for money at any time because I can draw on my other 3/- a day when I get leave. If however I ever do, my signature will be "Maclennan". Don't take notice of any except that - for security. I came away without any photo of you which was very thoughtless of me. Try and manage to send me one even if you have to pose again. How were my Sydney photos?

Much love from your ever loving Son,
- Bobby.

Moascar,
Sun. Aug 4th, 1918

Dear Mum and Father, and all,

Four years ago today we had little idea that this day would find war still blighting Europe, and what's more - it would find me encamped in the desert of the Pharoahs [sic]. I could be in a worse place than this anyway. Perhaps the next 4th may still find us pottering around over here but the situation is getting very cheerful now. Providing intrigue and corruption are kept out of our administration all should be smooth from now on. Father, try and get "Rasputin, the rascal monk", by Wm. le Quex. It's not for all to read, but the thing is astounding in its revelations of murder and bestiality on an enormous scale. It falls out that only for Rasputin we would have had no need to be here.

I expect you heard of the scrap they had up here a week or so ago. It was very successful from our point of view. That was when Bill Kelly went out. There were also five original Anzac Sergts. killed. Seems jolly hard for those poor blighters. We have had the bad luck to lose our instructor. One of the dug out officers here interfered with Cook's squad and he straightway stood on his dignity and was "hauled up" for it. Consequently he has been transferred out of the Officer's command. He is nevertheless in our tent now - having a yarn.

I have to go on guard at 6 p.m. It is not a very great guard, chief duties are to turn out to the commandment of Col. Arnott. Him we call "Biscuits". An anecdote is that he once told a trouper on the range that "You cannot shoot!" "Give me a shotgun", said the trooper, "and I'll shoot all the parrots on you biscuit tins." We have been issued with our rifles, which we are to take up with us. Mine looks pretty good, of the 1917 pattern, but it has been in the line before. Some of the rifles are of poor and old pattern, - Geo. Hardy's is 1905. We won't be going on the range for a week or so, meanwhile we are on the old instruction course of how to aim, fire, etc. which I learned when I was 13.

During last week they put us through gas mask training, and lecture on gas warfare. The instructor says that if gas was the only destructive agent used in war, with our respirators there would be practically no casualties. The Germans cannot copy our patent because the main material is rubber - the one material the blockade has shut Germ. off from. All the air one breathes in the mask comes through a canister containing: i. a layer of charcoal, ii. layer of sodium lime permanganate, iii. layer of charcoal. The air thro this is simply lovely, fresh and cold. Various devices keep the nose closed, the eye-pieces undimmed, the "dribble" from running into the canister, and the air from going back thro the canister. All breathing is thro the mouth which goes over a mouth-piece. In cases of bullet holes etc. there are various emergency capers by which on can carry on. These masks are proof against all poison gasses known. We had a whiff of our own shell gas - a liquid which vapourises. It's of a bright red coppery colour and smells exactly like a fruit shop. In the air in the density of 1 in 2000, death is immediate, whilst its odour is perceptible as high as 1 in 1000000. They call that gas S.K., its formula is secret. We have also made a start in bayonet fighting. Two lines have never yet met with the bayonet in the history of the war they say, one side always imshis. Cripes, I don't wonder either. I'm glad we have the name of being able to use the pin. Four or five of us started on Semaphore signalling last week and in about 3 days we could read and send anything, in good time too. Cripes it's really

astonishing how quickly it comes to one. It would be a very convenient acquisition for use on the farm too.

No word from Stan or Edgar [cousins] yet. However, a mail from Australia was supposed to have arrived in Egypt yesterday. Kell and Thom arrived back on Friday. They have been in an acre enclosure ion Suez all the while. Am still adding to my "picked ups". Last week found a Greek half penny, an Arabic 1/2 piastre, a Catholic charm (a little silver affair) a moonstone from a ring, and a tin opener. Have picked up 5 coins in the sand.

Well must go now and shave for guard.

With best love to you all,
I am yours affectionately - Bob

Marked "8th letter"

Moascar,
Sunday Aug. 11th

Dear Mum,

During the past week mail has been coming in gradually. It appears there are two lots, one closing about the 15th and another about the 22nd. The first letter I got was from Rooneys dated 21st. Well a few days later I got one from you dated the 4th and also a couple of others. Well I been [sic] waiting for the first one to turn up but it hasn't and so I'll answer now. I haven't received any papers or parcels yet - only the top of the alphabet been sorted yet. "Barry" and Goldsmith of our tent got parcels and for dinner today we had tinned pigeon from Java (I said I was sure they were seagulls). Worcestershire sauce, tinned peaches, apricots, cherries and cream and then the old marmalade.

We have but a week to go in our little home here, then we go up to the main camp. This week we are going to have our musketry. They gave us a few shots last week to see how we could shoot. It was generally pretty ragtime.

Received a letter from Stan [cousin] and he advised me not to get drafted to a regiment but rather to get into some technical corps. We will see. Only a short letter as Padre is waiting to censor. Writing more tomorrow. The snap came out fairly well, ey? The old brat [sister Jean] with Marg [sister Margaret (Peggy)] clutching at her hands. Gosh it's getting dark. Capt. Throssell V.C. going back on the boat we came over on. Too many wounds for his nervous system I think.

Manufactured a new wrist strap for my watch out of some of the leather from money belt, press stud from money belt, rivet from leggings and some cotton. Real success.

Well Mum I enclose my fondest love - trusting all are well - and I am magnificent (!).

See my fat face in the Chronicle?

Yours ever

Bobby

Marked "9th letter home"

Moascar,
Monday 12/8/18.

Dear Mum, Father, Sweet 19, coots and Brats,

It has occurred to me that this is a month of birthdays, and the ones concerned will soon be able to say in the "vulgarative" - "Another lump of time fiddled up". In strict slang, however, to "fiddle up" means to spend or consume and have nothing to show. I trust that isn't true in your case although individually these times we generally think that was.

I had a small diversion this morning from the usual job. The authorities are concerning themselves about the construction of a road near their H. Qrs. As the war shows chances of soon being over, and because the site of this camp is under consideration for removal - they are "rushing" to construction the military way. Well I was detailed for this job. There were 19 of us with one limber [?], about 4 x 4 floor space, and 18" deep, and 2 horses. We dug the "metal" up from the dung heap of an old stable and carted it about 70 yds to the road. For our day's work (we knocked off at 10.30 a.m.) we transplanted 8 loads of that manure etc. Of course that cost the Govt.- 19 men @ 6/- = 5/14/-. 1 sgt @ 10/6 and 1 cpl. @ 10/-. Total £6/14/6. This old stable manure and straw makes a fair roadway thro the sand. It settles down and becomes springy. Where much traffic has to pass through there are the stone-metalled roads. The most used form of transport here seems to be a swab [?] horse trolley. It's not light and springy as you'd imagine with one horse, but is a great lumbering curse with very low fore wheels. One doesn't see local draught horses, but these trolleys are drawn by one little skinny animal with legs like sticks. They are wonders the way they pull although it would make Miss Lloyd slightly fightable, I reckon, to see it.

What do you think of this blinking paper? 50 sheets cost me 5 piastres (1/-). The YMCA seem a ragtime show over here. None, or few, of the men who have been up the line have anything to say for the Y.M.C.A. I was skeptical about these tales once but now one hears a good many of them. They (YMCA) may be good help in France. The army canteens are established close up to the line and they stock a good range of goods at prices to pay working expenses. The A.I.F. canteens is a big service.

As regards sending parcels - you can leave out tobacco as I don't smoke half of what's issued. Twenty cigarettes per week is my maxm. Whilst the old pipe never finds favour, cocoa and coffee are good, and dried fruits, meat extracts, and the good old home cake would make a hit. You may enclose occasionally some antiseptic or patent medicine - bound to be handy, or a pencil. Good old gum leaves for perfume would do me.

Blowed if I understand how one settles down to this yellow desert after a haven of trees and green. Sometimes here, too, when I shut my eyes, the heat and the hum of the aeroplanes carry me back to harvest fields and reaper-threshers. The drone of the aeroplane engine is strikingly like the hum of a harvester. Often there as many as 15 planes up a once. Old Stan wanted me to go in for the aeroplane stunt but I'm not dragging that on. I had a good yarn to Dave Freebairn yesterday afternoon and he sent his kind regards to you, Mum, and to "Doovie". He was telling me of the silk dress she got out for him. [?] you'll notice a cutting from the Bulletin. By gum, it's

on the mark. This "sport" business is the rottenest curse to our moral integrity. In the army especially its undermining influence is the first of the temptations to a young life.

I must catch the padre [censor] with this, so with heaps of love

I am your affectionate son and brother -

Bob

P.S. Many happy returns to all.

Marked "No. 10"

Moascar,
Aug. 18th, '18

My dear Mum,

It is Sunday afternoon and I am just getting into step again after 3 or 4 days of influenza, or the good old Egyptian style of cold. Came on with a headache then cold in chest followed by a thick head. I lost my appetite for a couple of days and got pretty weak but I saved the situation with tomatoes. We can get tons of them here, and they are good ones too, at 4 for a piastre. We moved up from our old home in the contact area yesterday. In some respects we were darn sorry to see the last of it. The others of the tent got leave for the afternoon and 4 of them went to Ismailia while Bruce Henderson went to Cairo for 3 days. Col. Fulton up there is his cousin and he got the leave from him. I saw Dave Freebairn yesterday just previous to his going down to the "detail" camp, from which men are drafted to their units. He thought he'd be sent up the line very shortly. Said it was 5 months since he left the front, and by crumbs he looks like a new pin. The fellows who went into Ismailia yesterday had a real good time. We've been here over a month now without seeing anything but ourselves and sand, and a little civilisation, even if it's only 2nd class, is highly appreciated. There is a Church of England organisation in there - a sort of tea garden - with which they were highly delighted. The beauty of it was here were English ladies to wait on you. The respectable inhabitants (Europeans) of this country won't look at a soldier such is the reputation the tail-enders have got for the whole. Cripes it gets on one's nerves to think of it. There are some lovely French homes in Is. they say, which in ordinary circumstances would probably welcome us.

The afternoons are now beginning to blow up dust and the nights are getting colder. I believe it's still blazing hot up in the Jordan Valley though. I can't make out why I don't hear from Edgar. Have written him twice. I intend to enquire if he is in hospital. No papers or parcel arrived yet altho George Hardy got a parcel a couple of days ago and another got a paper today. I think it would be as well to wrap the cover of the Obs. [Observer] over with brown paper. Be sure to pack parcels in tins because what I've seen arrive have all been worse for wear. Keep me in touch with the monthly rainfall, the condition of the feed, sheep transactions and manoeuvrings, etc. I suppose Father will supply those items.

An old "Gippo" squatter, owning about 3 acres, wanted 100 piastres for a turkey and 400 pts for a sheep when we enquired of him! 97½ pt = £1 English. 100 pts = £1 Egyptn. The blooming sheep wouldn't weigh much more than old Suisse after it was dressed.

Tell the boys I discovered another bird the other day. It was about as big as a wattle bird only it was a lark, a big species of lark. Flew and ran just like our ground larks with white tail feathers and its body was about the same shape, except its beak. It had a very dull dopey appearance tho like everything else Egyptian. I expect the star thistles are almost crowding the larks out of Bartels now.

What style does Lynch live in now with her increased ration of gold? She'll almost think that Pat should have a car to take her out in. At least I don't suppose she'll be wearing the old felt hat this winter.

The Burat's [brothers Lockie and Len] pigs will be a diversion, but I bet they are a good old eyesore to John. That other darned old pig put a couple more to the several wrinkles to his neck. See that the boys don't let my big rifle get rusty if Father doesn't use it, or if Cyril hasn't taken it.

I usually give my letters to the chaplain to censor, so you know it's all right when I include anything that could be exploited - such as code for cabling etc. It wouldn't perhaps do in occasional circumstances.

Well tea is about ready so I shall close.

With fondest love from yours
affectionately - Bobby

Marked "No. 11"

Sunday Aug 25th '18
Moascar

My dear Mum,

We have passed a very good week since my last date of writing. Our course for satisfaction lay mainly in the fact that the courses we were doing exempted us from all guards and fatigues. Last Monday we proceeded to the rifle butts to fire a course in conclusion to the theoretical parts of our training. The butts here are situated on the ordinary desert which circumstance is supposed to make the shooting difficult owing to the heat waves and mirages. As a preliminary we fired a practise on each range, then going on with the classification course, firing in all about 80 rounds each in the morning. I didn't find the shooting so very difficult and after a few preliminaries, I came into my old form. At the finish of the day my score stood 21 points above marksmanship, or 121 out of 145. It is the best for the "Wiltshire" draft and perhaps it would carry further. What pleased me most was that in spite of the sarcastic inferences of these "Tommy" officers that none of us would hit the target 8 times in a minute - I was able to load and fire 15, and duly hit the target each shot in under a minute. The following day we were taken for a 5 day's course on the Hotchkiss automatic rifle. It is a species of machine gun, weighs 26 lbs, and can fire at the rate of 600 per m. It consists of 26 parts about which we learnt all, and also about the mechanisms, action, etc. and stoppages which might occur. Our instructor could separate every part of the gun in 16 secs and put it together again in 45. By crumbs he was slick. Yesterday morning we went onto the range with it and fired about 35 shots each. One can fire single shots or automatic by adjusting an indicator affair. I don't like it as well for shooting as the old rifle, although one can spray a bit of lead about with one of them. Even so, one can shower bullets at a row of figures and it's simply marvellous how hard it is to hit one. Shows what comparatively big chances a man has under fire.

Friday afternoon Bruce, Thom, Earn, George Goldstein (Vida) and myself got leave for Ismailia. We had a swim in the lake and then afternoon tea in the C. of E. establishment after which we strolled around the town and through the gardens. Earn Barritt and I went down to the railway station from where I sent a cablegram which I hope you receive. Just "Half trained, well. Bob". My reason was, inter alia, was to give you some idea as to how long they were going to keep us here. We should be trained in another 6 or 7 weeks, having been here nearly 6 now. Well we retired to the C.E. joint for tea and after went up the streets again. The business quarter is wretched sort of concern with shops of one crowded room only. I had the opinion that articles of curiosity and of souvenir interest were very cheap here but by gosh prices fairly startled. Even that gaudy silk stuff is too dear for an earl. The machining of those luridly coloured designs is good to watch, being very cleverly done. There are some decent avenues in the residential parts, but hard-headed goats and drought-stricken sheep mooch and lounge about where ever they please. We went into a restaurant, which we wouldn't be seen dead in over in S.A., and had some steak and eggs for 6 piastres. There were 2 eggs (probably lizards', or pigeons') and several chips of spuds, tomatoes and onions. While we were having this, about 6 little cusses were getting me wild wanting to give our boots and leggings - "Dinkum Australian shine - give it a backshee shine". Ismailia is always full of soldiers on leave, Aussies, Tommies, Irish, NZs and Indians galore. Beer shops open only 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. I believe English beer is 12 piastres (2/6) per bottle. I bought some quinine tabloids, and also a cotton singlet, very thin. There a re a couple of

good chemist shops in there. I paid 18 "dizzies" (3/8) for the singlet. Some cream puffs caught our eye at the C. of E. place, but oh blazes the cream was crook. Some faked brown stuff.

Bruce came back from Cairo not greatly enthused. Fultons live in a house-boat on the Nile. He couldn't get ½ of what we wanted from Cairo. Egypt is a real fool of a place nowadays, water melons seem to be the only things worth living for. The heat seems to be dying down appreciably now, so I expect the cold weather is beginning to set in.

Last night I went to the Y.M.C.A. marquee and sat listening to a gramophone. It was quite a treat to recall the memories of the old one at home. A lot of these songs appeal very strongly to a chap out here, even off a gramophone. I wonder that the 3 and 4 year chaps can listen to such things as "There's a trail that leads me homeward", "Oh there's many a step grows lighter - going home", etc. I remember once I heard Ada Reeve sing the soldiers' favourite - "The long, long trail". I was carried away to the ceaseless desert vigil, the shattering frenzy in France; and I was able to experience the terrible yearnings and the sickenings of vanishing hopes, which beset the human in these heroic machines. For a man must be a mechanism after 4 years of what they have endured. Thank God there are few prospects of another such stretch. If the national and social life of the allies would now humble itself, I'd place cessation of hostilities before Xmas.

I am including 3 photos taken about here and am sending some more per next letter. There ought to be a mail in this week, 3 weeks since the last one.

Now where I'm writing this, 4 big old camels are working, carrying black mud for bricks. 2 little niggers no bigger than one of the boys and Marg are driving them to and fro. When one of the kids twists a camel's tail, the camel makes a noise look Sook does when the brats tease her and she's feeling flash.

Well I hope you are all doing well and are enjoying the mud and muck.

Fondest love from your loving son,

Bobby



Ants around a dead butterfly. A view from top of gun shed Aerodrome and 2 or 3 machines in background.---- nearest pole in centre ----



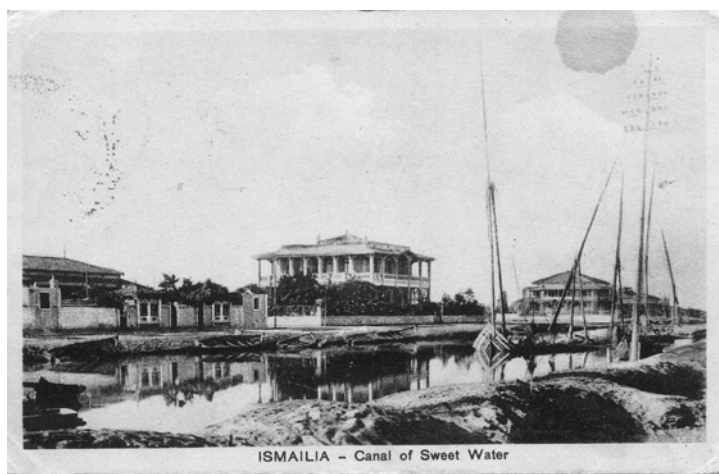
Beach of lake Timsah off which we do our bathing. Spire of mosque visible in centre background where lies Ismailia.



Mine sweeper washed ashore (El Arish).

Postcards from Ismailia, Egypt (O. A. S. On Active Service)

All postmarked Field Post Office, T. M. I., 26 August 1918



Mr H. L. Smyth, Salter's Springs, South Australia, Australia

Dear Locky,

This water is as sweet as that in the engine tank during a mouse plague. See peculiar masts on boats.

Love from Bob

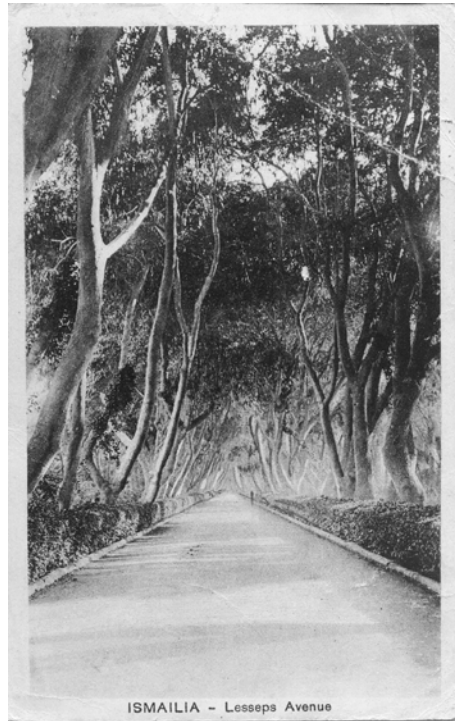


Mr L. S. Smyth, Salter's Springs, South Australia, Australia

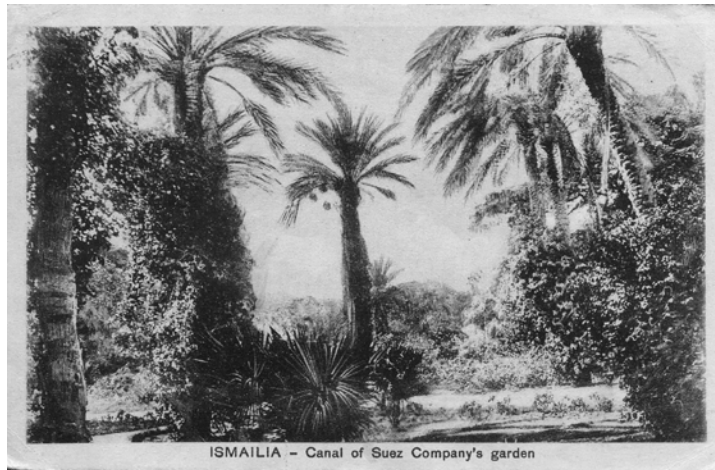
Dear Len,

This is a real rotten old Gippos town street. It's rather a good one though for Gippos.

Love from Bob



Miss M. Smyth, Salter's Springs, South Australia, Australia
 readdressed to c/o Mr Kelly, 5 "Ramsey", 2nd Avenue, Joslin, Payneham
 Dear Marg, These are the sort of trees which grow over here. I saw one gum tree yesterday too.
 Many happy returns for tomorrow 26th.
 Love from Bob



Miss Jean Smyth, Salter's Springs, South Australia, Australia
 Dear Brat
 These are the trees where the dates grow. They are getting ripe where I am. The brats over here
 get very sticky hands and faces when they eat them. - There is no grass in this garden. It doesn't
 grow here.
 Love from Bobby

Marked "12th letter home"

Maoscar,
Sunday, Sept. 1st, 18

My dear Mum, and home,

Oh there is some joy in the camp today in spite of it's being broken up - the mail's arrived! There are letters and smiles all over the shop. Of course it's an event which is spread over several days, but the trooper's letters come in installments. So far I have received 7 - yours (!) is dated from 9th July until the 12th. Also heard from John and Cyril. Crumbs old Cyril was funny - "Whensday evening I was over your way there seems to be a magnet that draws me that way". Then he goes on to say how he misses me! Shutting the stable door after the milk is spilt. It seems too bad me repeating his confidentials, but gosh I'd like to see Dosh when she reads this! Haha! Never mind, it might be Lloyd yet. Can't be but amused at the idea you hold of our route. The opinions expressed in the others' letters too are interesting - "hope you enjoyed Singapore", - "it must have been great going thro' Panama", - "why didn't you write from N. Zealand", etc. Whereas we just slid through the common water way via Colombo, as you now know.

You mention sending Observers every week but none have yet reached their destination although I'm living in hopes of their so doing this week. Our old Gippo paper is a blessing for war news although we are perishing for Austn. and S.A. news.

This last week has been very strenuous. An English officer has been giving us some "hurry up" on foot out in the desert. That is we have been training in attack and bayonet charging. Before breakfast for 2 hrs we have been doing advanced bayonet fighting. Thursday we did attack and collective rifle fire, on the range. On Friday, I struck guard duties and my job was the protection of over 10,000 gallons of petrol in tins, and a big supply of methylated spirits.

The happy family, minus Miell and Hardy, are evidently here for another month or 5 weeks. We have been fighting ever since our arrival to get into the machine gun school together. Now machine guns are not a suicide club out here - some say they are not anywhere, it depends on the man; so do not, as the saying goes over here - "get the wind up" as I'm sure it's a good thing. A M.G. squadron is always left to itself where as the tpr in regt. is continually being fooled around and gets the worst of everything. A smaller unit is better every time than a larger corps. Soon as I lobbed Stan advised me to keep out of a regiment and dozens have since said the same. The technical units are the homes from home, if there is such a thing. Consequently as the fruits of my labours, the 6 of us who were desirous stayed behind this morning while the others marched out to the "details", preparatory to going up.

We had a riding test yesterday morning instead of the 3 week's riding school. Goldsmith and Stacey failed, as was naturally expected. After breakfast, those who passed were given 2 innoc. for cholera and typhoid - in the arms this time. My affects were not bad.

Yesterday afternoon Geo. H., Gordon, Miell, Bruce, Earn B. and I went into Ismailia. Spent most of the time in the cool C. of E. hut with iced lemonade, cakes, and salad. I bought a pair of puttees 50 pt. or 10/-, and a revolver pouch. Came home in a motor car for 5 pt. each.

Have not heard from Edgar yet. Went down to the 11th regts. details - their base here, and found a chap who had just come down from the reg. He told me that Edgar was all right and in his unit a fortnight ago, and he thought he was due in Pt. Said resting camp with the next lot to come down. That was reassuring and probably Edgar will turn up here shortly.

Gordon Miell and Geo. Hardy have gone to join Gordon's father's regt., - the 9th. Old soldiers say the 9th is a brute of a unit for cleaning up and polishing. That's what breaks chap's hearts on active service. "Kiwi Lancers" [after Kiwi boot polish] they call that sort of unit.

We don't know when we will be going down to the MG school, probably within a few days. The course lasts about 4 weeks and entails a little note taking and study. One has great conveniences etc. down there for instance - ham and eggs for breakfast. When I come home you may say marmalade and stews are well off please. Cuss them.

Oh I forgot. I have the temporary job of hdqtrs. orderly trooper. Commonly speaking a messenger etc. One day on and one day off. One has the chance of getting shadows of coming events by keeping ears and eyes open. They were in a whirl this morning transferring the new men and getting them fixed up. There will be a change on this front shortly. Opinions are that Jacko [Turkish soldiers] is very dopey and "jumpy".

Boys [brothers] - out in the desert the other night I caught two yellow mice. It was bright moonlight you see. They had thick heads and noses with large eyes, and they were the size a rat just walking from the nest. How are the wirrills [?] now? An immense flock of ibis flew over last week, must have been 2,000. They settled up on the fresh canal.

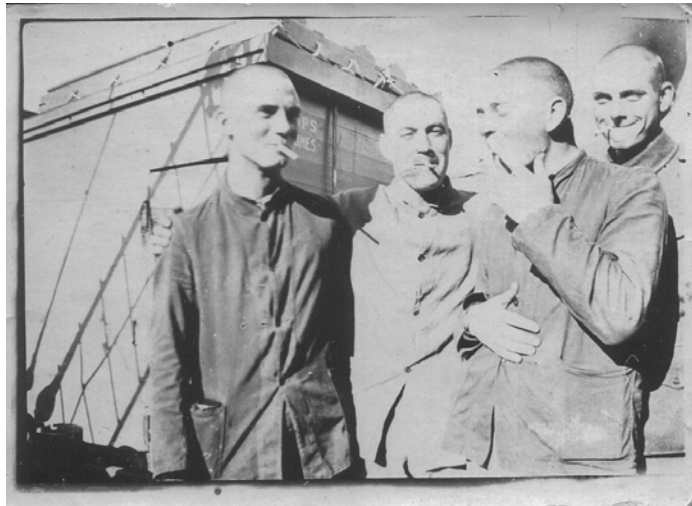
Great photos Mum. The brat is no poser. Enclosing 5 snaps. By cripes I have some writing to do this week.

Tons of love to all and yourself from your loving son,
Bob

Note on margin: Transferred M.G. School today - Sept. 2nd.



Bruce H. lopping a lump of wool off me. Bruce, owning a pair of clippers, drops in for all this work.



Haircuts

Reading through, the characters are -
 Bruce Henderson, Harvey Kelly, myself, Ron Thomson
 J.Gs [?] know Kell and Tom.
 Note rafts on top of the "shithouse"

Moascar
Sunday Sept. 8.

Dear Mum,

Your letter posted July 12th reached me during the week, but no papers or parcels have come along yet. However, only a few of the latter have been sorted, the A's and B's. I think it would be a jolly good idea though if you camouflaged the Observers.

As yet I cannot tell you anything about these lovely machine guns as we have spent the week cleaning out horse stables. The manure we had to load in a timber wagon and cart it away to the Sweet Water canal, where we slung 1/2 of it on to barges and the rest into the canal - to add to the sweetness of the waters. Of course you know these jobs in the army never occupy one for more than 4 hrs. If in that long day, one gets tired, a nigger may be hired to shift the heap for a piastre or two.

Tomorrow though we begin our course on the "reeking tube". Poor Bruce has been left up at the other camp through a bungle in the orderly room, but we are working hard for his transfer. We have been having the company of a lot of old boys, from the rest camps and hospitals, and their company is a peace and quiet after these dopey greenhorns. Undoubtedly "the line" soon quietens these vociferous youths who are never satisfied unless they are cursing, squabbling and making the atmosphere hideous. As far as I can see, the so-called "recruiting" campaigns in Aust. army soon be dropped. It's hardly good enough to drag married men over here, and what eligible ones may come won't matter much, As a matter of fact they to a large extent work some scheme to get soft jobs. The Roberts' [?] I should say, are doing more harm than good. For although one cannot say anything against anyone showing how he or she stands, Mr and Mrs Roberts appear to be losing influence in their allotted sphere and dividing their flock. The little counteracting good would appear hardly worth while in the face of the cooling enthusiasm of the church. This morning I went, as I thought, on church parade, but I "came a gutser" (as the saying is) as it was C. of E. [Church of England] service - which I do not go too much on.

Did a lot of washing this morning and a bit of sewing. Cripes I'm becoming an expert over the tub and you may see me washing my own clothes after the war. I guarantee I won't let my rags get so dirty anyway. Those greasy harvest and shearing time trousers must have been heart breaking. It was rather thoughtful of the district to leave us alone this Australia Day. I was rather cold-bloodedly amused at your mention of Father, gravel, and sheep. That's what it was when I was in camp and when I went away. Perhaps he is still carting gravel (!) Anyway he may now look the other side of Quinn for a church contractor.

Monday

There is great building activity going on here now. Goodness knows what it's for, unless it is in anticipation of demobilisation. Some stone is being used but mostly bricks made from the mud deposits along the S.W. canal. The sand of course doesn't require the shepherds' labour to cart (!) Roofing material is plentiful and cheap and they cut it with sickles.

A few days ago I received the long awaited letter from Edgar [cousin]. He see... [sees little?] opportunity of getting down here. So I won't be able to see him until I go up. He had just seen Stan who supplied my address, which Edgar had lost.

Earn Barritt received four parcels this morning, 2 were outstanding from last mail so I may get mine all right. There are a lot in the office now and probably will be delivered tea time. And you send some cammonilla [?] one of these days? This is a very rotten climate for a chaps tummy. I have grown sick of the latrine track these last 3 days. Sorry to say though I am again accumulating a lot of rubbish around my bones. The trouble is that I eat such a deuced old lot. Those snaps you sent were good but the ink you put on Father's eyelids rubbed off leaving a weird effect.

Old Bill Sutton [Bill Sutton's father?] knew Bill Smyth [uncle] very well, so I discovered this afternoon. Sutt used to be head dispenser in Fauldings, Perth branch at the time. Syd Bickford and uncle Will often provided happy company for old Bill, so he says. Bill [Sutton junior] was educated at Way College (now M.L.C.) whilst his brothers (one now suptdt. of E. Ad. Meth. Sunday S. [East Adelaide Methodist Sunday School]) went to Princes.

My circle at present is Harvey Kelly, Ron Thomson, Earn Barritt, Bill Sutton, and myself. We will get to 3rd Brigade whose colours are purple and gold, thus - [diagram, rectangle with diagonal line from top left to bottom right, purple in top right, gold in bottom left] - gold at base. We started on the gun this morning and it proved rather astonishing in its complications. But a chap ought to master it in a month easily enough. We have a machine gun cat in our lines. The little cuss is marked almost exactly like Abdulla, but all the Gippo cats are long bodied and lanky. This chap is a great cat - always on for a piece of fun. There are also 3 rabbits belonging to a peri....[?] man. It's a mockery to see the poor beggars squatting out on the sand with nothing to do.

No papers today - it's the worse day of the week. Now we're captives the switch line opportunities should present themselves [?].

Trusting you are all well and with fondest love

Your loving son

Bobby

On envelope:

10/9/18

Rcd 2 "Observers"

Marked "14th letter home"

Moascar,
Sunday Sept 15, 1918

Dear Mum, Father, and all,

My word if this blooming old place keeps me here very much longer I will have nothing to write about at all on Sundays. Although we are learning the machine guns, life in general is becoming the essence of monotony. Watching aeroplanes is perhaps the only interesting "past-time" and that's interesting only because a new type of machine appears occasionally. Every day is the win of the preceding, - glaring, cloudless and hot; the same old sand is everywhere; the same "dopes" get on one's nerves daily; but!! - one radical change a fortnight ago the humanity of the military machine altered the hour of reveille - allowing us now to lie in until 4:30 a.m. Gosh I often wonder now what it was like when "reveille" never entered my mind until 8 o'clock. Cripes I'll make a welter of it when I get home.

Well we've had a week on the gun and have learnt quite a lot. On Friday morning we had a bit of shooting practise. To group (i.e. to get all shots close together) we had a burst of 6 shots and after that we had two bursts of 5 each at a couple of figures. So a machine gun is greatly different to fire to a rifle. We still have to carry rifles when we go up the line, as there are about 16 or so men to one gun which needs only one man to fire, one to feed, and 2 or 3 ammunition carriers.

Bruce and I went into Ismailia on Thursday afternoon. First we went and had a swim and then called on the Misses Waterhouse, friends of Bruce's. One of them is going to marry Lt. Paul Tisdale-Smith, 9th L.H. who is now convalescent. These Waterhouses came over on the Wiltshire. They entertained us at afternoon tea and after took us for a drive out to the Suez canal proper. The canal is no wider than our dam, when it is not running thro' lakes, such as the Bitter Lakes, and Lake Tims at Ismailia. Bruce and I went into a Dago joint for tea. We ordered fried eggs and potato chips. They brought us 4 pigeon's eggs each and a heap of oily sweet-tasting strips of anti-potato. The eggs had been fried in cocoanut oil and were hardly edible - curse the land of Pharoah! Bang went 17 piastres (3/6). I had a "shave" hair cur after that, the 3rd I've had since embarkation. Don't remember what I looked like when I had a part a la plaster.

Poor Bruce unable to get in here yet. The annoying thing is that they have during the week detailed (conscripted) about 40 men to join the M.G.'s, men who don't want to be in it, where as Bruce, in another squadron, [is] breaking his neck to get in, they take no notice of! And he has done nothing the while! However, those are the ways of the great machine that has only just started to win the war after 4 years' glorious hiding.

The aerodrome here has lately acquired some very fast little machines. Gosh they slip along. The beginners in the flying school occasionally have slight mishaps, mostly in landing. We saw one turn a somersault as it landed, coming to rest with its wheels to the sky. The two occupants just dropped out on their heads, unhurt. They had only a couple of feet to drop. Beyond a broken propeller the machine was practically intact.

Our old paper keeps reporting wars on over in France. I expect you in Australia are wondering if we will see any fighting. Apparently we will not get such a fill as the 1914 soldiers, although I expect a taste or two will be allowed us.

Contrary to custom, a paper will be published tonight, but none Monday night as it is a Moslem holiday. Been great ceremonies over here lately, bathing the Khalig and the "Mahmat". The khalig stunt is to do with the Nile flood which is the blood of the agricultural community. When the flood is about due some sheikh dope cuts this khalig stretched over the stream, announces the depth of water and blesses everyone at large. The expenses of this are about 300 to 400 £ born by the government. The mahmal is the procession of pilgrims to Mecca, carrying the holy carpet. This is a very elaborate stunt to which the Egyptian govt. votes £50,000 yearly. A military escort is provided part of the way, and progress reported by telegrams. Thus a few days ago we heard "The Mahmal has reached Mecca, all pilgrims are in perfect health". It is estimated that 200,000 go yearly and each pilgrim spends at least £5, a fortune for some of them.

The old Observers have turned up at last. The 15th and 22nd June I recd. on Tuesday, whilst the 8th came Friday - tail up as usual. No parcels yet Bruce, Ron Thomas and others blank also. I think a lot must have been withheld in Australia on a/c of shortage of shipping space. I received a Bulletin from Doris Rooney with the first two Observs. Noticed that Drover McEvoy of Erskine Park was fined £5 for travelling his [lice] infested sheep. Hope our curses don't catch them.

Letter from Stan yesterday. Busy training as cavalry and had had a touch of Spanish --- [flu?]. He said Edgar was looking splendid.

Well I have to darn up the knees of my blueys yet this afternoon as well as write another letter. I suppose you've recd. ere this the first mail from me here.

Closing now with fondest love from your affectionate son and brother,
Bob

ADDRESS- Same a usual
Post Office here will fix up.



Taken at Hotel du voyageurs in Ismailia. Left to right: Me, Aliss Joyce Waterhouse, Lt. Paul Teasdale Smith D.C.M. (9th L.H.) and Miss Helen Waterhouse. Two last named since married.

Marked "15th letter"

Moascar! (mark you)
Sunday Sept. 22nd

Dear Mum, Father, and all,

I suppose you are all saying "Oh I'll Bob's in it!" "What a great time Bob must be having, etc." Yes, oh a truly great time. I am absolutely the most disgusted coot in all Egypt. I've missed the great stunt! I really thought I'd get there just in time but it has started earlier than I reckoned. If I had kept to the old 9th Regiment I would probably be seeing the lot but this flash m.g. [machine gun] stunt has settled a great opportunity. The worst of it is that they kept us a week in Isolation doing nothing, and when we got down here they put us cleaning stables for a week. Had that time been utilised it would have wiped out the fortnight or so which we have to go. Ron Thomson, who managed to get here some time before us went up the line on Thursday morning. A very decent chap is Thom, the best of his cronies - (Kell and Earn B.). Bruce Henderson lobbed down here Thursday but I do not think they will start him on the course until next week. Poor beggar will thus be placed a long way behind us. We have our tests on the gun this week and next week we learn the horse part about it. I expect then we'll be a couple of weeks looking for our unit somewhere up round Damascus.

Kell, Earn and I went into Ismailia yesterday. We had a swim and then tea, after which we strolled up the street. An uncommon sound of music met our ears. Following up we saw a good crowd in front of a good sized place all lit up and decorated. We approached rather warily with the thought that the per usual "No admittance to Australian ptes." was in vogue. However all was clear. By cripes it was the best thing I've seen this side of Aussie. It was a sort of patriotic bazaar and jumble show run by the French. I had never seen a decent looking girl in Ismailia before, but cripes there were any amount of real dinkum proverbial French girls here. Everything was run on the gambling system, "hooplah" for bottles of champagne, drawing nos. for articles, gambling tables such as one sees in pictures of Monte Carlo, the profits being for the fund. Earn, Kell, and I had a go at some tickets for all sorts of gaudy, and some of them valuable, presents. We drew from a barrel affair containing thousands of tickets. Out of 5 each we all struck a number. I won a Japanese fan, Kell an ash tray, and Earn a post card! I autographed my fan and gave it away.

There is mail imminent. It should be delivered tomorrow as a new lot of cobbers arrived Friday. I'll be writing again then when the mail comes.

With best love I am
Yours affectionately,
Bob

Marked "16th letter"

Moascar,
Sept. 29th, '18

Dear Mum and all

As I said in my last letter re mail - so it came to pass. I believe it was about 24th when I received my packet of about a dozen. By gosh I had a glorious afternoon wading through. You bemoaned the (supposed) fact that your letters were uninteresting etc. Good gracious, you must have been dreaming things! Had you seen the amusement and interest the different items gave me you'd have felt very satisfied with your efforts, Mum. There is a marvellous psychologic power in home letters which I never before realised. You were well fortunate in getting news of us so soon. Mr Stacey was very thoughtful, considering I don't know him either. I derived great amusement from the "Deemster" film yarn. Just like them not to do things properly. Fancy taking one's fiancée to a mantinee [sic] when one had to leave 1/2 way through! I reckon it was great. Wonder what they would think of me if they I laughed at their expense! So fancy M?g Wood is getting her tail up again? The worst of things is, in civil society like that, one cannot give "knocks" or "breaks". In this glorious army, you know, it is permissable to just about insult anyone as a break to our arrogancy or a bit of dog. It's always a great joke, sometimes a "mill" ensues but not often, as everyone laughs. As for showing my cups - well I don't value them at all, mainly because they are not for the top wrung. When I am able to get a clear run at some of that business I may get something to show.

Yes, am going to write to Miss du Bois shortly. She is indeed a good soul.

The boys seem to be getting all the harvest from the duck season now I am away. They must be learning some points in duck lore, stalking etc. Anyway they are free from my sarcastic wrath when they make a mug of things. Remember how I used to roar them up? Believe they are camped in the "incubator" now. That will foster Lockie's [brother Hugh] spleen I'll bet. Shun [uncle A. E. J. Smyth] should be a great help to the town-planning people, with his powers of suasion, long experience in architecture, deep insight into the future, capacity for burying blocks, etc. A very unsuccessful dive he made at the council elections, eh? So the sheep skinning business has still to go on! Gosh it is peculiar. Earn B's father in writing said that 4 good Romney Marsh ewes of theirs had died. Ask father if he ever misses any dead sheep the first day? From all a/cs [accounts] it seems as if things are occurring more swiftly at home than on the many battle fronts. What with the social functions, birthday present, and other, Hermitage exituant, Shun's car, renovated house etc. there is sure some source of interest over there. I regret the passing of the Hermitage. Who is buying the hills? Closer settlement round there will make inroads on my game reserves and remove the lovely solitude of the place. It was quite thickly populated for me.

Poor old Tom Cleary! - where will he hide his forehead and his eyes? Unlike his wife's nephew, he won't find in the "Y.S.M.". Thanks for the Cyril "bulletin". He wrote to me again. A screamingly funny letter grammatically. One statement re his Salter's visits - "Wish could break the ice". It's ice all right poor beggar; but did he mean - "wish you could," or "wish I could". I gave him my advice similar to what you said. Told him not to let it cause his missing other opportunities. The entry of the other power into the struggle should prove interesting. Cripes I can guess her thoughts! Haha! Yes you did quite right in giving my address. I wrote to Evelyn on

the boat. Was going out there one [of] the last couple of weekends - but I was home a few and then crowded the ret. Yet not fulfilling all my promises. Poor old Dave! They've got him on the pastoral industry again. Gosh he used to hate sheep! We used to rouse on him so, and more-over he was always sort of shy with them.

You imagine us eating bully beef over here. Don't think I have ever described our victuals here in the M.G. [Machine Gun] school. Well three mornings a week we have porridge, bacon and tomato and cucumber salad for breakfast, with tea. Occasionally we get ham and eggs. The other mornings we get stew. For dinner week days is bread and jam, - twice a week desert (tinned fruit, maizena, blancmange, plum duff). Sat. and Sunday's dinner is roast beef, spuds, marrow and onions. Weekday's tea is either stew or roast beef and vegetables, and 2 or 3 days a week - plum duff. So you can see we don't starve. Again we always buy extras. I am doing very well on it, 'cept that the life is too lazy and we get very flabby.

We finished up our exams on Sat. and I just scrambled top by one point. The second chap had done a course previously. For the whole exam I averaged 95%. We are darned glad we are finished, but horror upon horrors they are going to keep us now and give us a course on the Barr and Stroud range finder. It may only last a week thank goodness, and then we do a bit of horse work. Meanwhile the whole Turkish armies are being captured - 50 000 now. Trainloads of Jackos go past here daily on way to internment.

On Wednesday night a deuced of a storm blew up and we had 1/4 inch of rain. Washed 3 miles of railway away down Suez line. Set desert hard for a couple of days.

Say J.J's bust-up was a comic, eh? Balfour's supper! Good gosh. Like sugar on bread and honey. Oh how is the apiary? Is Lloyd still in command? Rcd. 2 parcels last week. Yours - coffee, cocoa and sardines and another from Rooneys, a beaut.

Closing with fondest love to you all
- from Bob

Marked "17th letter"

Moascar,
Sunday, 6/10/18

Dear Mum, Father, and all,

Still a civilian soldier! Cripes I'll bet you're not expecting that I am still here. Time's dragging terribly. We have concluded a week on the Barr & Stroud range finder, and this week we are going to have a little riding with pack-horse leading etc. This morning we got in a few more horses, fed, watered and groomed, cleaned out stables and then cleaned up saddles, bridles, stirrups and bits. It was quite the busiest morning I have had for a month, although it was Sunday. During the week papers and parcels have been filtering through. I received "Observers" date July 6 and Aug 3 and also a Chronicle from Rooneys Aug 3, and a "mail" from them too, July 13th. Kell and Earn have had most of the papers that I haven't rcd. and strangely enough the 2 I did get they didn't. (That's all crook English, but I mean papers of same date.)

Well since last Sunday, the Macedonian stunt has gone bung, with the Bulgars down and out. Old Jacko [Turkey] has a spacious bruise on his "front Palestine" which must be nigh winding him. So what with the Salonika chaps out of a job, and the Mesopots. and our mob with the taste of blood, all going for his fistful of Europe, we are expecting that he will soon sky the rag [surrender]. Next thing is where will they send us? One hears discussions and arguments everywhere. Austria, Italy, Russia, France all seem to have equal chances. What concerns me most is that they may not require us up there till goodness knows when. However, we hope that after this week on horses they'll send us along. Casualties seem to have been phenomenally light. The 11th L.H. had a few but glad to say old Edgar doesn't appear anywhere in the list. Two or 3 of the originals among the killed, worse luck, also one of the "Wiltshire" mob.

Oh I received the small packet containing tin of Eum. [eumenthol] Jubes, chewing gum, and Jean's lollies. The others got a pretty good assortment of inevitable clothing. Bruce gave me a leather waistcoat which he got - he already had one. The blooming nights are now decidedly cold with frequent fogs and occasional sprinkling of rain.

Starting on the 1st of October the heads introduced a new routine. Reveille goes at 5 a.m. 1st parade 5.45 till 7.45. 2nd from 9.30 till 11.30. 3rd from 2.30 to 4.30. You'll notice that an afternoon parade is included. As yet it hasn't amounted to more than gun cleaning and swimming parade. The 5 a.m. idea is good, but one is just as sleepy as he was at 4 a.m. reveille. By crumbs I've been vowing lately that I'll work like blazes when I get home. These "devoid of result" jobs are giving one the pip. The older comrades say it is worse than being back at school. We are all getting very argumentative, liver I suppose. I usually have to argue against the whole mob now old "Thos." has gone up. He always backed me. Anyway the other cusses reckon I'll be a fair old alligator when I'm 40. They are worse than I really but they make me a common Aunt Sally on which to vent their spleen. So you see I have to raise a special supply of bile to deal with them. If this life lacks anything, it never lacks fun, anyway.

Somewhere about now hills are worth visiting. I hope you will persist in getting them to take you up occasionally before the spear grass goes to seed. Bartel's is a nice patch of star thistles now. You haven't mentioned the sale of my motor bike yet. If you haven't heard anything Father had

better enquire. No. 11213, Indian, at Eyes & Gawler. Don't forget the de-registration. Gosh I learned a bit over that curse. I'd like to hear from Father re the fate of the different mobs of sheep, the % lambs, condition of crops and feed, how last year's lambs are for wool etc. How is the aggregate and average rainfall going also? Don't suppose by any chance the "cursed young horses" have been sold. A new woolshed will be the next proposition. There is a good bit of old iron on the old buildings around. Perhaps I'll be blooming near home for next shearing. J.G.s may remember a prophecy of mine made 2 yrs ago that war would end Nov-Dec, 1918. Vera nearly bit my head off at the time for she expected Will Edgerly home in about 9 or 12 months. All depends on Germany now. Austria "soon finish". Well, I've filled up a lot with nothing.

All please receive fond love, from your ever loving son and Brother,
Bob

Thanks "Brat" [sister Jean] for lollies.

Moascar
13th October '18.

Dear Mum,

We have got a step nearer being sent up the line since last Sunday. On Thursday I think it was we were allotted to our units. As we applied, so it came out. Kell, Earn, Sutt and yours plus a Queensland cobbler, young Harrington, were transferred to M.G. Squadron of 3rd L.H. Brigade [Machine Gun Squadron of Light Horse Brigade], which brgde. consists of 8th, 9th and 10th L.H. Regiments. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx. xxxx. [shaded text censored] A chap feels a little guilty now, with this campaign history and Germany crumbling on the West front. Anyway, it wasn't my fault - I haven't shirked or malingered and again I bear no grudge against anyone for holding me. It Father it was who restrained me - well I was his, so there's the end of it. But when I read in these English papers of the accomplishments and sacrifices of thousands, cripes I feel as cheap as dirt.

We were supposed to go out on Sat. (yesterday), but now been delayed almost indefinitely I believe. The trainloads of Jackos [Turks] are still daily passing through to Cairo etc. The results of this stunt are so tremendous and our losses so ridiculously trifling in comparison, that it savours of more strength physical, of more strategy than human. You remember how the "signs of the times" used to interpret Daniel re the fall of Turkey? I believe they have come the result of an unsuccessful dive [drive?] again, as the battle of Armageddon, which is the plain of Esdraelon, rolled up the Turks right wing, captured two armies and recovered the cradle of Christianity - the same is Galilee.

A mail boat came up the canal a day or two ago and I thought I'd have had my mail by now. Kell and Earn got theirs dinner time. Mine won't be long and then I'll write another letter. Went into Ismailia the other evening and bought pair of khaki "drill" slacks for 75 piastres (15/-) some price? You can send an occasional pair of socks occasionally now.

A few aeroplane incidents lately. Have seen several stand on their noses and yesterday morning one fell into a mess marquee next door. Frightened blazes out of mess orderly. No one ever gets killed. Finished with horse drill and not sure what we'll do until we get out.

With love to you all, I remain lovingly yours,
Bob

Address -
52904 etc.
Machine Gun Squadron
3rd Aust L.H. Brigade
A.I.F. Abroad



The machine foul of the N.C.O's mess tent. It's a 2 seater rotary engine plane. Note a plane flying in top left background.

Marked "No. 19"

Moascar,
Monday 14/10/18

My dear Mum,

My mail turned up at dinner time yesterday and included your letters marked 4 and 5, written Aug 25th and 28th. Crumbs it's good to get a refresher from home, although it's only 3 weeks since the last mail arrived. Old John sent me along a line with the doings of his side of the show. Seems the Rifle Club is hanging on well, while the vivacity of the Literary Soc. is marvellous. "We bloods" were not the blood of the community by any means it proves. The Australia Day too was good-o, eh? Old Maggee will be some kid now, what?

I'm hearing a good bit about the Freebairn's boys lately. They must be getting into their stride. Tell Dosh that I don't know how it is that they come to tea now I'm out of it. Has Father suddenly become very interesting to them, or do they come as pilgrims to my birthplace? I do reckon it's Dosh, who's like a dog with a tin on its tail - cursed with the causings of its own timidity and unable to escape. Poor Dosh! - spouse I'll be used as a "chucker-out" for her when I get back. Not that I don't expect she welcomes an odd one but from the numbers mentioned I guess there are a few "gang aglae".

Don't expect you had to wait very long after 28th for the first mail from here. Understand mails have been going fairly frequently lately. Poor Mollie on the "nomad" stunt again. She's evidently following some ideal of a ministering spirit hand in hand with romance. She's playing the game hard though when she goes up there.

The Grange was hit very hard through the war all at once. First young Jack Oswald, then Jack Sinclair and Hambridge and now I see Griegs have lost Colin. He was at Saints when I was at Princes. Geo. Hambr. is a loss, not to say all aren't - but that chap had a decidedly lovely strain to his nature. I remember the poem you mention together with several that I memorised. Two of Nelson's bosom pals have gone out, and Rev. Blacket's son Capt. J.A., yet there are of us who have suffered not, neither have we helped. I can see the point - somebody's got to be substitute for faded stars of dawn, so God please kindle a glow within me to brighten dark walks of life. An endless struggle it is - the soul calling for idealism, the brain balancing worldly against spiritual, and the fallen in me cringeing and whispering "Ah! tho broad the way and wide the gate!" Anyway, Mum, I've had you for a mother and the lines have so far fallen in places spiritually pleasant. I'll be well pleased to leave this machine-like existence though. Glad you got the cable so punctually. Think I'll send another this week. Bet it will alter your dreams. Suppose you imagine my exploits of prowess in the liberation of the Jew. "Finish prowess", as the gyppo would put it.

It was sad - Mrs. T.A.F's "prowess" with the poddy veal. Presume the beast will be known as the "calf of Mrs Tom's arm". I can't imagine the "two coots" [twin brothers] away from home yet, but cripes they are nearly 13! That's the age at which you exiled me at P.A.C. Lockey is pretty right on the birds at Aus. day, yet if you wanted some poultry home I can see him having to knock it with a brick. I can't see them absorbing many volumes of Latin, Euclid, Mathematics, etc. at college. Sewing wool bales and tailing lambs would be more to them.

I borrowed this pen off young Harrington, our Qld, cobber, and hardly know how to use it, after so much pencil. Harr.'s brother was in the original 9th Battalion, as a M. Gunner, and is now a Major in the machine guns in France. Been wounded 4 times. This brat is an enlightened kid, decent, and a ready wit. Pestors old Bill persistently.

As far as we know we are going out of this in about 2 or 3 days, am looking forward to meeting Edgar, Stan, and others I know.

I am just as fat as ever although the weather is very hot for the time of year. You know we average 16 hrs. out of 24 on our backs in the tent! Kell and Earn have worn shirts out between the shoulders. Kell looks well now in a Tommie's helmet. He lost his hat and new ones are scarce.

Trusting you are all well and hoping that Xmas ushers in a strange spell of peace on earth in literal sense

- lovingly yours
Bobby

Marked "Starting numbers from 1 again after 20."
 "No. 1 Vol. ii"

Moascar,
 Friday Oct. 25th, 1918

Dear Mum and all,

I believe I prophesied a mail last letter I wrote. Well, it lobbed along all right on Wednesday. Received your letters 6 and 7, Sept. 9 and 13th respect. Had about 10 letters altogether. On the day B4 the letters came the parcels posted with the previous mail arrived. Good gosh didn't a mob lob in! Earn got 5, Bruce 4, Kell 3, Vida Goldstein 4, Bill Sutton 3, and I got yours containing pineapple, sardines, butterscotch, cigarettes, eucalyptus, coffee, camphor ice etc. I believe the tent mustered up over 12 good sized cakes from the lot. Rather than send tinned fruit please send jam. It is very scarce over here and when obtainable is 1/3 per 16 ounce tin! That coffee and cocoa should be very good up the line, but we haven't much opportunity to use it here. You may continue sending a few cigarettes occasionally but not too much in the nicotine line. As regards the cutting out of newspapers - you could possible send magazines and such like in parcels, to fill in. Should like the school chronicles at least. Funny thing where that first parcel went to. Think there was some forged signature that went down on the parcel's post bill. Crumbs it took a long while for you to get my 1st letters. You seemed to have got the numbers right and were the snaps all there? I always say in the letter how many snaps are enclosed.

Bruce, Goldsmith and Stacey are going up the line in the morning to join the 1st Brigade Sqdrn. So we are split up after all. Again we had finished our training when they came into the school. We are not being sent up because our brigade is away up to blazes between Damascus and Aleppo somewhere, whereas Bruce's lot were operating out of Amman and Es Salt way - East of Jordan. We must get sent up soon if operations continue. Sickness is showing itself up there, because of the carrion lying around probably. Spose you have heard of the slaughter of Turk and beast and the Nablus to --- road?

We have been spending the week on mounted work, which keeps one occupied. No parades today because last night it rained like the dickens and continued this morning. I woke up in a pool of water this morning about 3 a.m. Just a quiet soaking rain it was too, following after a week's heat wave. The other morning when we got up for breakfast we beheld 2 aeroplanes amiss. One was on it back so [sketch] almost undamaged, and another a 100 yds away was like this [sketch]. We often see them standing on their heads. Applications for flying corps were called for recently but although it must be intensely interesting it is too flash for me at present.

I was on town picket on Wednesday night. Inspecting and keeping order round the seamy side of Ismailia. It was a good while from last pay day so it was not at all exciting. One of the young Saints who was working some ground on the Hermitage in 1915 is here in the school. He is going up to the 1st Brge tomorrow. Was in the old Camel Corps - now disbanded. I have had some yarns to him about the old spots.

Mrs Roberts in a letter mentions the new church which non est. Remember my £20 from savings bank is to be in it. I told Mr R to count on it when he started to get an "igri" on with the scheme. Suppose father can fix up the withdrawal.

Don't hear anything about the motorbike yet. Someone will have to hop onto Eyes and Crowle if they don't advise something. I notice the car's tyres are still pretty chronic. More worry than the price of new ones.

I like to get the Brat's [sister Jean] freakish sayings. Young Harrington has a small sister he is very proud of and occasionally we contest Jean against his sister. I know who'd win as far as intellect and vivacity goes were they personally pitted. Young Harrington himself though is as irrepressible as a kelpie dog and he has taken enthusiastically to the language I am teaching him - to whit - the slang and originality of Gummie [brother Alec], the coots [twin brothers Lockie and Len], and myself.

Re address - as long as a chap's no. and name and "Light Horse" on "Egypt" is on a letter he'll get it all right. The P.O. knows where one is, Card system.

Almost time to water horses so I'll close with usual love etc.
from your loving son and brother -
Bob

Added small page:
Saturday 27/10/18

Nothing definite yet about going out. Bruce's lot also are being held back. It appears fairly certain though that we'll be gone ere November drops in. It's blooming hot today again and I am going down to the lake for a swim in a minute. Earn got some papers this morning sent parcels' post. Believe Gordon Richards has been married! Poor Gertie Young. That Scott who was with me at Drummoyne has joined the engineers and gone up. That was his sister's marriage. Scottie is balder than Cyril though only 24. Cripes I've a lot of letters to write to catch Xmas mail. Hope yours is cheery as usual - with best love from Bob.

Chapter 4

Palestine and Syria, on active service

Marked "No. 3 II"
 "War over - finish
 Censor, Savvy?"

Desert Mounted Corp
 Reinforce^{ts} Camp
 Ludd (Lyddia)
 Nov. 4th 1918

Dear Mum, Father, and all the roost,

You'd probably reckon that I'd have something to write about now, but I think I'll leave most of it to my tongue and your auriculars when I get back. Anyway we girded up our loins (and incidentally our ribs, shoulders, briskets, etc. etc.) with all the gears and weapons that the soldier carries until he gets into action (when he throws away or burys all but his singlet and shooting iron) and we left Egypt to the Gippos on the morning of Oct. 30. Consequent to the entanglements which enveloped me, the cork, which the bottle of iodine in my tunic pocket belonged to, hove off from the berth in the neck of said bottle and contributed to a cooling sensation on a certain part of my self, simultaneously wafting an aromatic suspicion of the presence of the above drug, and penetrating with an orange-red several encasings of apparel.

We disentrained at Kantara W., crossed S. Canal and re-entr. at K. East. Thirty of us to an ordinary truck. Crossing Sinai desert nothing but the endless waste, a few villages where an oasis lay, and now and then a lonely cross - the emblem of sacrifice - blazing the way to Britain's liberation of an enthralled people. I couldn't help but notice how the chaps looked at those crosses, desolate, profound - swept by the aimless winds that blow all night in a wasteland where no-one comes. I can understand now the line in which the voice of Britain says - "The crosses stab the heart of me!" That's what the feeling is.

Romani - where the L.H. smashed the Turkish invasion on Aug. 4 1916 was passed about 3.30. Next was El Arish on the coast (captured Xmas 1916) where we stopped right on the beach of the tideless Mediterranean. We had tea at Rafa where the Turks suffered on Jan. 9 1917, and where Lana Lewis received his wound. This was about 10 p.m. and when we went through Gaza I was asleep. On this very night 12 months previous the L.H. were doing their forced march eastward to Beer Sheba which culminated in the smashing of the Turks' left at the mentioned town and the rolling up of their whole front on morning of Oct. 31.

Our old bus stopped at this place (Ludd) at 4 a.m. on Thurs Oct 31. and we de-trucked and came on to this camp about 1½ miles from Station. Harrington ("Hamit") and I ("Nassed") hired a walad (native boy) and piled our luggage on him. No bigger than Slick Hallion yet as marvellous as the little donkey. He carried easily twice his own weight with about 2 short spells, all up hill too.

There is a tremendous camp here, every arm in the service is camped around. Indians, Tommies, Aussies, N.Z.s, Br. W. Indians (negros), Gippo soldiers, and also big prisoners' compounds. Well when we got here we found that we had about 30 minutes left in which to get into action, but as the line was 300 miles up we didn't trouble. Hostilities ceased at noon that day. Great veteran am

I not? We understand that Austria has skied the rag [surrendered] also but news takes about 5 days to get here, except the Palestine affairs.

This Ludd, a small dirty village, is about 10 miles inland from Jaffa, 3 miles from both Ramleh and Richon. The soil is beautifully rich, but the country has now a droughty look. The land is very undulating whilst to the east the Judean hills heave their rounded heights into the glow of dawn. The weather is perfect just now, like an early April day in warm South Aus. I am sorry to say that the star thistle of the bushier class [sketch] (not [sketch] bushiest) has the country in its grip. Cactus, like prickly pear, is also very prevalent. Olive groves exist in miles and afforded camouflage for Allenby's cavalry (including our ex L.H. Brigades) prior to debouching onto the coastal plain. There are any amount of orange groves about and the trees are full bearing. One can take as many as one likes - no one seems to own anything over here, there are no fences.

We went to Richon on Sat. and it was Jewish Sunday so couldn't buy anything. Gosh though it's a treat to see white people and decent looking girls. They dress up really flash too. The kids have all learnt English since our occupation and treat us like brothers, show one anything and everywhere. The houses in Richon are up to date but the streets etc. are just dust. Richon is noted for its wine and there are some great oranges here.

Our camp is but rough at best but I am feeling grand. Nothing to do, just roam around. Never saw such a variety and multitude of lizards in my life. Believe the mob is coming back to here from Damascus.

Writing again shortly - with best love to you all,
affectionately yours,
Bob.

They shouldn't censor this as the show is finished

Des. M. Corps. Rfct. Cmp.
Ludd
Sunday Nov. 10th 1918

Dear Mum and all,

Another old week gone by and only Germany left. This old joint will probably be our base now until they begin to draft us home. Although we get news in very scrappy pieces we understand Germany has been given 72 hours to surrender or take consequences of unlimited military action. In view of her very weak condition there are 10 chances to 1 of our not being sent to the west front. Rumour says 3rd regiment is going to Gallipoli to straighten up the graves and historical localities. The Scotch and Irish divisions are rumoured in occupation of Dardenelles forts. The Anzac mounted division comprising 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th 7th regts and the New Zealanders, is camped at Richon 4 miles away. Saw Bruce Henderson as they marched through here on Thursday. The 8th, 9th, 10th, 4th, 11th, 12th, 14th 15th and a French regt form the 3rd, 4th and 5th Brgdes, which collectively form the Australian Mounted Division. We don't know where it is but expect to see it come in any day.

This is a rotten place for water. Can get plenty for drinking purposes but haven't done any washing of clothes since I came here. All watering troughs and tank filling places are guarded by strictly disciplined Italians and petty Tommies. If an Aussie guard was on, one could get enough to drown himself. The water is pumped from wells and is jolly good. It is carted about ½ a mile to our camp in "fantassies" or camel tanks containing 15 galls. each. Two are put on a camel at a time. An enormous number of camels and mules are used here.

We are not supposed to leave the camp under any circumstances without permission but strike a light a man would go magnune. I often go out with my revolver and shoot lizards or jam tins to relieve the monotony. Every place is out of bounds - orange groves, Ludd, Richon, Ramleh, watering places, etc. At night one lays on his back and tries to find the seventh sister in the Pleiades. Bill Sutton and I walked about two miles over to a dump of salvaged material. It consisted of haversacks, pouches, gas masks, steel helmets, paper sand bags, old shell cases, pack saddles, rifles, bayonets, machine gun belts, and tons of rifle ammunition. We picked it over but got very little that was acceptable. There are some huge dumps up the line further if a chap could only get up there. I got hold of a Turkish belt and buckle off a prisoner. Bill Sutt. got a revolver and dagger but swapped his revolver for a Gallipoli star - the Turks distinction for those who brought about our glorious failure there, [sketch]. That's something like it, the background of the crescent is red. Am trying to get hold of a German belt and buckle. The latter has "Gott mit uns" (God with us) on it. [sketch] Buckle cover, steel on brass
[sketch] Jacko [Turkish] buckle cover, also steel on brass

The weather is keeping warm and dry with cold east to south easterly winds during the night. As there are 10 of us to a tent, I haven't slept under canvas since I came here. We had a very rough night during the week. Woke up with ¼ inch of sand between my face and the old kit bag - the bill-jim's pillow [Bill-jim - slang for Light Horseman]. Dust and flies are the pests which make the lack of washing conveniences felt acutely. We each wash in a steel helmet with the innards torn out in which we may place about a pint of liquid. I tried my revolver on a German steel hat

but it was "finish bullet". Whereas our own tin hat is this [sketch] the German one is deeper [sketch]. Not so much rim on the back as that one. A lot of Jacko haversacks are made of calf skin or cow skin with the hair outside. Say in answer if much of this is censored.

With best love to you all,
from yours affectionately,
Bob.

Marked "Letter 4 in (ii)"
 "I think last was 3"

3rd AMG Squadron
 Tripoli
 November 19th

Dear Mum and all,

Since I wrote last we have been careering around a bit. You'll notice a change in the name at the top. Anyway it's not so crook as the Tripoli in N. Africa. This joint lies on the coast somewhere in the "arm pit" between Syria and Asia Minor. Let's tell you all the yarn.

We left Ludd on the 14th after a 4 am reveille, in the rain and mud. For two days it poured rain and Ludd was a quagmire. Must have rained about 2 to 3 inches. Well we got out of it just as the disturbance was passing away and entrained to go south. A mile and a half march with one's home etc. on his back just about took the flashness out of me. Though it was raining, the sweat drops were on my eyebrows like rain on wire fences. We went back in daylight through all the country that we went through during the night going up. The old defences, battle fields, litter and graves round Gaza were interesting. There were about 7000 killed on our side below Gaza, mostly Tommies. There were 3 attempts made before it was captured March 26 and April 19 and then Nov 2 in 1917. By what one can see Gaza is the usual eastern city - dirt and mediaeval customs. We got to Kantara about 0.45 in the morning after sitting up in trucks all the way - the floor was mud and pools of water. Then we marched out to a Tommy camp and camped anywhere. They let us alone next day so we washed our clothes and had a bath - luxuriant! Up at 4.30 next morning and humped our swags to the wharves - 1½ miles. Cripes a man is like a camel - weight! it's terrible 2 blankets, bivouac sheet, ground sheet, all one's clothes, 2 days rations, water, haversack full, 120 bullets, rifle and bayonet, sticks and pegs for one's "bivvy", and overcoat. Well they put 1700, us, Tommies and Indians, on a 3000 ton boat "Abbassieh", and we passed up the canal and came on here with 2 destroyers arriving in the night of the 17th. About a 48 hrs trip. Spent most of the time on top of the latrine of the common "dyke" variety, it was the roomiest place.

This country is very mountainous - rising to the snow line direct from the coast. Tripoli looks a beautiful town from the sea but it's disappointing when it's investigated. It's built up in terraces and the houses are re-tiled with white and greenish stones. Quite an extensive town but utterly disorganised. There is a donkey tram service. We are camped about 2 to 3 miles behind the town in a beautiful spot. Mountains ½ way round us with snow gleaming in the sunlight. It would be a good days going to get up to the snow. The 3rd and 4th brigades are camped here and I had a good yarn to Stan [cousin] last night. He is looking fit and the army doesn't appear to have spoilt him at all. I haven't had time to look Edgar up yet although the 11th reg. is only about ¼ mile away. I haven't written any letters (except those home) for ages. Anyway I am going to try to get a few away now. Haven't had a mail for nearly a month - suppose it's been following me about. Stan said he got 12 parcels all in a heap a few weeks ago. In our tent at Ludd we had a young Chapman from Burnside - brother to Bob Chapman and son of Prof Chap. He has been over here a long time and once went to Eng. for his commission but his high spirits "done it in", so he is still a "garden trooper". Another cobbler we had was a chap Bill Dee from Vic. Asked him if he

had relations Lynch but he hadn't. Chapies [?] name is Wallie I think. Knows the Murphys. I am on orderly trooper today and am writing this in spare time waiting for messages etc.

(Later) - Have just been over looking for Edgar. Poor beggar is well inside a hospital somewhere though. They said he got malaria sometime before they got Damascus. The whole Hotchkiss section that he was in went away to hospital together. I am very disappointed but may come across him if we move down. Young Gordon Mill has also gone away crook, although he saw the stunt out first. George Hardy and Moss Symons and young Lord are still in the 9th regiment. There are only about 6 of Wiltshire draft left in it now. All the rest have been crook.

To get back to this country again. The population is much thicker than round Ludd, although even then the amount of farming districts in S. Aus. can show more people per mile. Some of the poor beggars are in a pitiable condition. The cultivation is as a rule for olive trees, oranges, apricots, plums, mulberry (for silk worms) and a little corn. All shipping is done with lighters. We came ashore in lighters and they bounced around a deal I tell you. The soil here is stiff and clayey. The track where the horses go to water is now shining like a stream of water as the sun is behind it. The damp clay, you see, beaten hard.

We had a great turn in Ludd when Germany signed the armistice on 11th. We got the news about 6 p.m., dark. The band was called out, flares were going up in sheaves, every one was cheering, machine guns rattled into the stars, and ever and anon came the stabbing boom of guns in the near vicinity. One anti-aircraft gun began firing shells which seemed to burst immediately over us. You could see fireworks all round. Sorry to say though a number of men gathered at the feet of Bacchus instead of giving praise and thanks when it was due. Anyway one cannot imagine it's all over. 4 years and over sort of made it a natural part of our existence. It must be a great relief to those whose boys have been fighting in the heavy battles in France.

Earn B. and Kell got a good haul of parcels today but mine are not here yet.

Now with love to you all,
I am yours affectionately
Bob

I remembered the Brat's birthday a few days ago.

Marked "No. 6 part II"

Tripoli
Dec 10th.

Dear Mum, Dad and all,

I had 2 sides of a sheet written in letter no. 6 when the heavens opened and rain was upon the menu for 4 days and 3 nights. Strike a light but an estimate of 5 inches would be very stingy. Yes at 3.30 a.m. on the morning after I wrote those 2 pages, I was sitting up in bed with the rain teeming down through, under, around etc. and I was trying to light a damp candle wick with soft headed matches - when - mush! the whole blasted caboose come down on us. Old Bill had been suffering a recovery that night and by gosh this sobered him somewhat. Anyway it kept raining incessantly for several days. Our blankets, drenched the first night, were never dry; our overcoats were wetted about 3 times per day; and mud France would be a drawing room to it. It was the crookest time I ever hope to have. You see there is no shelter whatever here barring our bivvies, and for two nights I just sat up under a piece of drenched garbardine (that's something like our bivvy sheets) and did a perish. To make matters worse the cussed niggers shook my cardigan a few days before. Anyway, Mum, we came through all right - not even a cold, and yesterday Sutt and I built up stone and clay walls and have the sheets for a roof - which closed well, run the water off. Don't know why they didn't issue us with ground sheets - we need them bad enough. I was wishing very hard often that I had gone on the infantry. Two blooming horses to look after is no joke in the slush and rain. However the weather is good now - it's incomparable here when it's not raining. When the clouds lifted from the mountains a beautiful sight was revealed. From the crests downwards about 2000 ft all the brown was blotted over with downy white. Of course it's too far up to get at but the sight is undoubtedly lovely. The snow that was there was dwindling a lot when this fall came along. This should be deep enough to last right through till the next fall.

Some parcels came along yesterday. Earn Barritt got 11 - mostly grocers' made-up. I recd. 3, two from you and one from Doris R. Haven't opened D.'s yet but believe it's a cake. Yours were - Ellis cake, chocolate, sugar, milk kisses, chewg gum, bacco and the other butter, (real, good order) ditto scotch, soup, and dried apricots, + a few sundries. Stan recd. the cake one with the sugar, peanuts, bootlaces etc. that you sent him. Old Sutt gathered in a nice few too, so now we are all set up. They are very welcome just now as mungaree (tucker) was rough and ready during the exciting period. The damp from the cake liquidised the milk kisses - that's all that was wrong with mine. I could do with a couple of pairs of socks now, but don't send them too often. Anyway we may be back in Egypt before I get the answer to this. Sad to relate we are now falling victims to ye badd louse. I am as "ticky" as a cuckoo-clock. There is not the luxury of a phenyl bath at this joint.

There is an army scheme in vogue now - mostly educational classes. I am learning French and have taken on the job of teaching book keeping. So here-after letters may be shorter. Heaven only knows where the time is going to come from. Meeting this afty about Lit. and debatg. society.

Don't know if I mentioned this before - but about 10 days ago I recd. a letter July 14th from you and Dosh. It included form of service etc. for O. Sch. service. Blooming thing had been in England, not having "Egypt" on the address.

Met a chap in the squadron named Doug Milne, from W.A. It appears he knew Uncle Will Smyth very well - he having been in Milne's father's business for years. M. is a young college lad from Perth. There are a good many W.A.s in the 3rd Gun Squadron.

Saw Dave Freebairn the other day - he was going "home" with a big bunch of ferns. Some good ferns grow about, and a great variety of bulbous plants. Oranges and pomegranates. Kateer [?] I tasted the best pommy in my life the other day. By the way, two days ago was the anniversary of my enlistment. Great circumstances for celebration, eh? Was wishing for our old chaff house to crawl into, or a mouse plagued stack to get behind.

Went into Tripoli the other day but it's a fool of a place. Bought a few p.c.s [post cards] which I will send along later. There are no homes over in this country which a chap can get into. Moreover it's a court-martial offence to enter the house of any inhabitant. You may guess how we long for decent people and pretty faces. My word I reckon I was fat enough without any more feeding up before I left Aust. The old fat hasn't all slipped off either. I hope I'll feel like shedding some of it when I get back. Hope to hear soon what the plans are re the farm. Give my love to Nim [grandmother Flora McLennan] when next you see her.

With love to you all,
affectionately yours,
- Bob

Marked "7th letter home II"

Tripoli
Dec 15th, 1918

Dear Father,

There was a sort of a spare mail arrived a couple of days ago - what we'd call a back-sheesh delivery, that is a couple of letters at the most, but in a lot of cases a blank, for each man. Your letter of 17th Oct. with some photos from Lynch was my "issue" out of it. I was pleased to hear how the game was going on but it is not good to hear of a possible late shearing - with a lot of grass about too. Not quite clear about the new working arrangements of the two farms. Are you taking over all of Wridgways barring Haystack paddock? And Cousins also? I reckon Bartles is a problem well solved as far as farming it goes although I doubt if Uncle Jack will conquer it. Poor old Mack's lump of the continent is a very second class ribbon around Jack's neck.

By cripes if some one in the army is enterprising they'll put in for a piece of Palestine or Syria when the machine is dismantled. The soil is wonderful in places. However neglect has given root to many noxious weeds. Star thistles, stinkwort, Canadian thistles, and numerous large bulbous plants thrive everywhere. Very little of this Lebanon country is devoted to cereals - hence the starvation which is so noticeable. Olives are universal and grown to a great size, and are mostly ancient trees. Rock, - flinty and conglomerate, is very prevalent here. Glacial action is traceable generally, the erosion, and deposited muraines [sic] and boulders one can see all about. There is a steep height, quite noticeable from here, with one side worn clean off showing all the strata on a gradual convex side, thus: [sketch]. Couch grass grows very well all over the flats, and where water is, bamboos and blackberry briars grow like a jungle. I have had some good feeds of blackberries. In sheltered valleys they can grow bananas and dates, and yet I believe we'll get a winter rainfall of 20 to 30 inches this Xmas. Been raining like the dickens all day, rained 3 inches 2 days ago, and 5" last week.

I have just been down to see Stan [cousin]. He's been in field ambulance for a while and although he's out now doesn't look too good. Showed me a letter from Dosh [sister Dorothy] dated Oct. 17.

We received a lot of gift food and clothing yesterday from Vic, Racing Club and Sydney War Chest. It is very acceptable being what is scarcest on the military issue, jam, milk, tea, coffee, golden syrup, tinned fruit, cake, butter, cheese, pastes, sweets, etc.

By gosh I'm sick of this blessed existence and I'm longing for the old job again. The army makes a fool of everybody for work or thought.

The best of luck from your affect. son,

Bob

We shifted camp 4 days ago.

Marked "Letter 8"

Tripoli
Dec. 20, 1918

My dear Mum, Dosh, Marg and all,

I have some letters of yours to answer, now I'm going to try to wipe the debt out with one letter. The latest letter (No. 7) I wrote to Father. Since then I have to acknowledge receipt of - letters 12, 13 14 (from Mum, Dosh and Marg), a dictionary, a book of maps etc., school chron., 2 A.C.W's, about 5 Observers (to Oct 12), and a parcel containing 3 cakes, potted meat, salve, and cocoa milk etc. The cakes were knocked about a bit and one had a mouldy end, but they were moist and decidedly eatable. Sutt and I have got more mungaree than we know what to do with just now, having cake and chocolate left from previous parcels. Your latest letter was written Nov. 1, am glad you've heard of Turkey's demise but sorry mails had been scarce. Received a character of a letter from young Bill Pearce. Cripes she's a ---- [illegible]. What were the Brats up to if they couldn't shoot a fox or two when West could poison so many? Hope "Scurvey" leaves a few for me when I get back.

By gosh the game is getting crook for news. Our life is so humdrum. Have got my book-kpg class well started and derive considerable amusement in tangling up my students. We have a small marquee for a school room, ammunition boxes for seats, and the tailboard of a limber for a black board. Of course I am as rough as the proverbial guts with no text book. It's all memory from 4 yrs ago. French is going good and I find my old knowledge very handy. Our Lit. opens next Sat. night - debate on Prohibition (a burning question to the "escarri" soldier). Stan was here last night talking and eating cake till late. I had a letter from Alf Mander about a week ago, written in Sept. and having no number on it took time to get here. The weather continues wet but I am in perfect health and as fat as a pig.

How unfortunate you were, Mum, unable to attend Tarlee show. You may have been made an O.B.Emp. Seems the fashion (vide Observer). Fancy that bold Grace Scobie ----- [ineligible] in Exhib. Building - "Give me a bayon-ette!" "You white liver'd curs!" etc. Somebody should have given her a bayonet to cut her fingers with. My word, Mum, you don't encourage Brats' [twins Len and Lachie] ambition when you say you hope they don't qualify. Nevertheless I can understand your feelings.

Well, it's Christmas in 5 days, and I believe we are going to have a tolerable day, but I don't take much notice of these sort of things. The 28th will just be an ordinary day for me [21st birthday].

Fondest love to you all - and Nim too -
Bob.

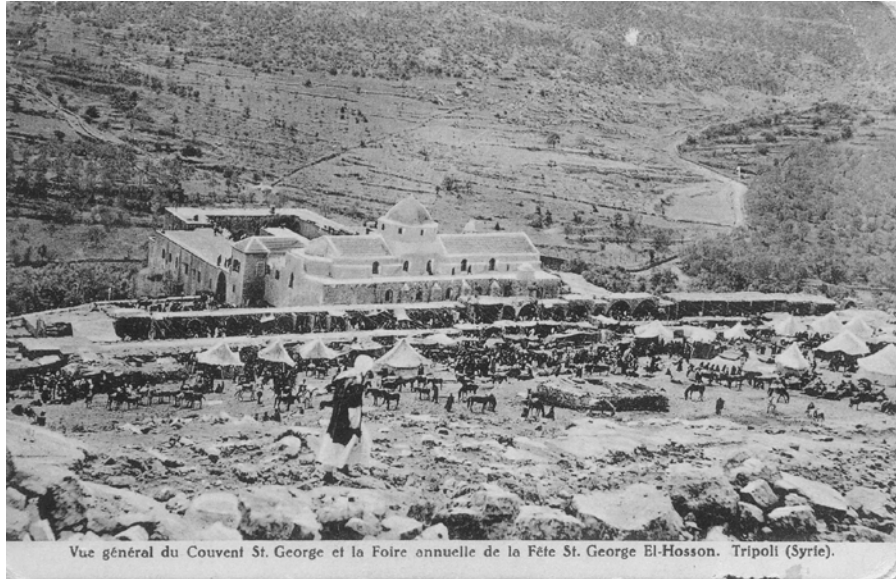
Dec. 21, 8 a.m.
P.S.

Forgot to tell you that we shifted camp on Dec 12. The old camp and watering place was in a terrible state with bogs and water, so we (3rd. Brgde) packed up and marched out on the said date. Our new site was only about 6 miles away, on the beach 2 miles south west of Tripoli. We

arrived at the spot about dinner time and soon had lines laid out and bivvies up. The sand goes about 300 yds back from the sea shore where high cliffs rise straight up. This strip of sandy ground is about ½ mile long. Needless to say the rain doesn't matter much now as the sand soaks it straight in. The sea of no tide is very handy too - water being quite warm and surfy whenever there's a breeze. Soon after Christmas I believe we are moving down to Beirut. The 3rd Brgde Brass Band, a goodly company, enliven every afternoon for an hour with a selection. The music goes very good.

Well I suppose I've got to get out and clean my stirrups. Inspection this morn.
Love from Bob.

Postcards sent from Tripoli, Syria (undated)



Marg

This is a Syrian tea meeting. All the "daddies" ride on ponies and donkeys, and the "mummies" and burats have to walk. Thanks Marg for your last letter. See none of the horses and donkeys are tied up. They wont run away.



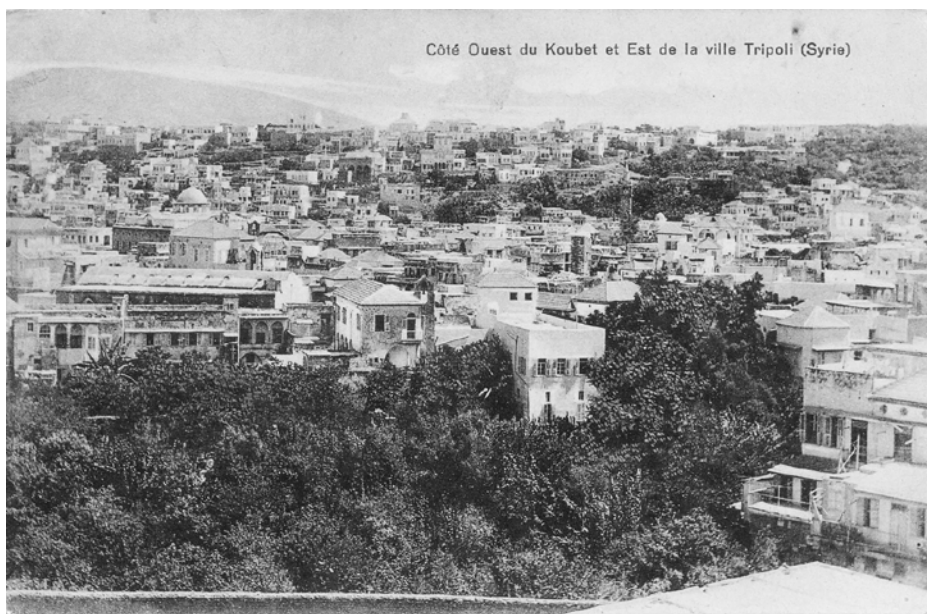
Lockie

A neighbouring Syrian village. Notice flat roofed houses - and they leak worse than ours used to. The roof is only a sort of plaster and stone. There are a lot of poplar trees growing round the village.



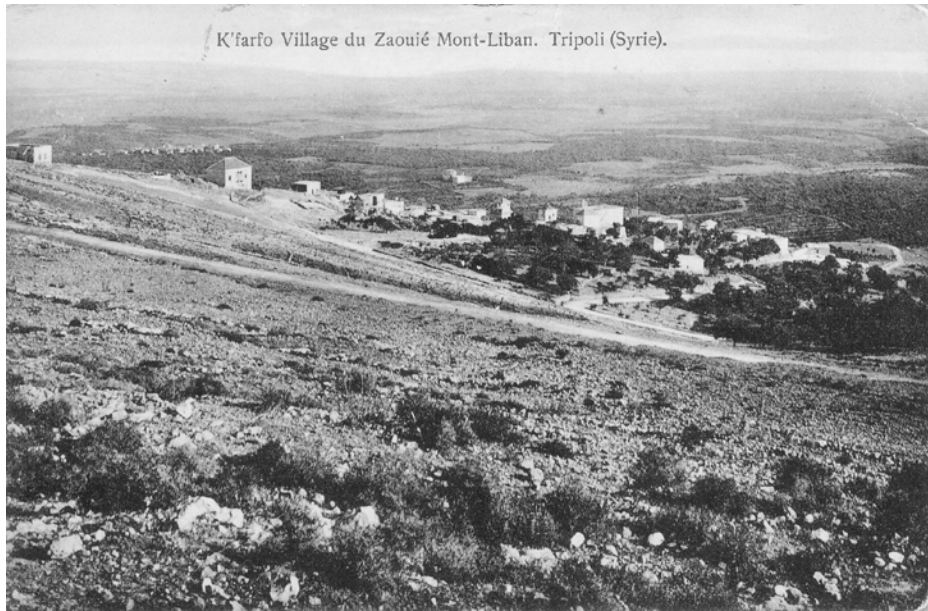
Leon can have this one. How do you like it, Burat?

A portion of Tripoli, with a Mohammedan cemetery and tombs in the foreground. A "walad" with baggy pants and belly band looks at you.



The Brat, or Jeankins, or Kinny, or Jean.

This is the Alma where Bobby has to go when he wants anything from the bi-shops. The brats in this town don't go to school. Can you see a banana palm on the left hand side?



Charn

See all the olive trees away down in the valley? Priests house with a bell tower on top of it. Can you read the printing over the picture?



Backsheesh for anyone

View of Tripoli Citadel in left background. The town is depicted with the existing "blues".

Tripoli
Dec. 31st

My dear Mum , and all,

Nearly time I let you hear of me again. Well since the last letter I have survived the double festive season of Yuletide and getting my majority, although I am not a Major. Yes, it passed off all right, and I don't think I was drunk and sick for Christmas as a good few were. There was a fairly good issue for the occasion and the beer being a certain hard hitting brand (Bass) the casualties were considerable. However as old Sutt didn't get into the emetic state, I had a fairly comfortable time, except for cheery nocturnal fools who think I chap likes to be waked to see an inebriated unfortunate be sick.

The 28th was a very ordinary day, of grooming, cleaning saddlery, and watering parades. Fancy getting up at 6 am in the depth of winter on one's 21st b day. Reveille is always 6 a.m., Sundays and all. On the evening of the 28th, though, we were given a very fair concert by a mob of Tommies. Old Sutt gave me a cigarette case for a b. day present.

A couple of days after Xmas we got our Christmas boxes. All for this unit were from W.A. The sender of mine was one Grace Matthews, a school girl of Northam. The parcel contained cheese, paste, tooth brush, soup tablets, carb. tooth pdr, writing pad, pipe and tobacco, and handkerchief. We also got a lot of tinned fruit from Racing clubs and comforts fund. By gosh I'm fat! It's no blooming good trying to keep thin in the army. Perhaps Stan mentions my condition. I generally consume a dozen oranges per day as just a bye line. Very probably the sea air has a good effect on a man's health.

Last night after 12 we had terrific rain. When I got up this morning there was 2½ inches in my pannican which was well out in the open. The sand soaked it all in though. Sutt. and I have now beaten the elements with scientific bivvy construction. Can always keep dry now. Yesterday we were issued with combination cape-ground sheets. They are made of a rubbersied material and are a godsend. By the diagrams [sketch] you may see how it is used as a cape. The dimensions would be about 6 ft x 3 ft.

My book-keeping class is going good-o. I am sometimes surprising myself with what I remember. Today, however, I secured a text-book and so won't have to think any more. The L. and Debtg Soc. [Literature and Debating Society] is holding 2 meetings per week, it having proved very popular, although there is often more humour than genius displayed. Would back Alma Soc to knock it rotten. From an original class of some 40 scholars, the French tutor now expounds to some ½ dozen. I am sticking to it but don't get any time for revision and memorising.

Have rcd. letters from Edgar, and Bruce H. during the past week. Edgar was on sick leave in Cairo and Bruce is still down at Richon. That book Dosh sent (The Mud-Larks) came along a few days back. Thanks very much Dosh, I have read it and passed it on. It's the army all right, and it made me hate the machine the more. Did you read that about "leave", and the military police? That was very true.

I have been versifying a little lately, just one of my spasmodic affliction, and will enclose a song of the last 28th. I had a job the other day of writing the story of the campaign from notes supplied by the Capt. Noticed that in one instance ----- of the ---- (---- and 2 M. guns) [illegible] took prisoners 3000 Turks and Germans, with 4 field guns and numerous M.G.s just by sheer bluff and coolness. No one received any distinction. Probably you know better than we do when we are likely to get away. ----- [illegible] blooming horses, both mine (Commodore and Joe) are original veterans. "Commodore" is a little cuss and as hard as his life has been.

I think that's all the news so with love to you all - yours affectionately -
Bob

RCM Smyth on his 21st birthday

December 28th, 1918

This day I reach the summit of my Youth,
Which, while ago, was blurr'd in distant blue;
But all my path has been so gay and smooth –
I scarcely know the years that are now my due.

Ahead roll on the higher table-lands,
Which lift my Manhood's path above the plain,
And I must climb, before the sinking sands
Engulf my labours in a drift of Pain.

I have a task no idle hands can do;
I have a road no slip-shod feet will tread;
Yet Faith is mine with which I will win thro'
All earthly chaos, and all Lethal dread.

Dear Lord, who gave to me a mother's love,
Please help me shine it in a manly life!
With cleanly hand, as through the world I move,
Partaking in a weaken'd brother's strife.

Tomorrow takes me out upon the Way,
The same World has gone a million years,
And if it lead thro' pain, I still can say, –
"Ev'n they shall reap my Joy, who sow in Tears!"

[In conversation, he said he spent this birthday on the hills of Lebanon above Tripoli with a bottle of sour white wine.]



Inscription on back:

52904

Trooper R. C. McL. Smyth
Australian Mounted Division
3rd Light Horse Brigade
A.I.F Egypt

With all good wishes for
a Happy New Year
from his mother
Jan 1919

Marked "No. 10 II"

Tripoli,
Jan 12th

Dear Mum, and all,

Peace at length! Have just been through a very troubled period what with a busier than usual book-kpg week, Brig. Gen. Wilson's inspection yesterday morning, leading a debate for neg. side last night on "Will Australia become a great industrial nation?", and "Joe" Allenby's review of 3rd Brgde this morning! Through a lot of it, rain and cold has been the order. I expect you people in Aussie would have given a lot to see Allenby - not so I. The average Bill-jim leaves the "heads" right out of his category of desirables. To see the great "Joe" we had to be cleaning harness and gear for several days, like idiots - see one's face in his stirrups and heavy military bit. If you ever see me cleaning harness more than twice a year, you may send for medical attention. Cripes I've got a skin-full of it. Well anyway after all this polish and a laid out inspection for Brig-gen., we are yanked out of bed at 5.30 this morning, in the rain and dark, to practice for a bit of pure "bosh". At 8 am the Brgde is all drawn up, full dress with rifles and bayonets. At 9 the enemy is sighted, about 12 of the curses, all shining with red caps, and C.M.G.s and V.B.s and the like. They come on to parade at the canter, Allenby's arms flapping like wings with the motion, the band strikes up, the Union Jack is unfurled and we all present arms. Old Joe then rides around and "screws us off", after which we close up in mass and he addresses us. (His address was all what the Bill-jim calls, in terms less prim, cow-dung. i.e. of no importance, praise, eulogies, etc.). He said we'd soon be home, anyhow. So, after a march past, ended Joe Allenby's acquaintance. I'd sooner he and his chest full of rainbow fragments, 3 strings of colours, has left us alone.

About a week ago a good load of parcels and papers came to light. I got a surprise as I wasn't expecting any parcels, when I was asked to sign for 3. There were 2 from you, Mum, containing all that dried fruit and sugar, the other per Drummond. The other parcel came from Aunt Grace with birthday greetings. It was a good sized cake filled up with almonds, lollies, etc. By packet post also came a tin of 50 cigarettes from Mrs Bishop. There were 2 Observers, Oct 19th and 26th. By them I noticed that 2 more of Stan and Nelson Kelly's chums had gone, Soapy Norton and Joe Barnes B.A. Out of the 6 that went to France together, Stan alone remains. Nelson, George Solway, Gerald Roberts, Soapy Norton and Joe Barnes have joined the 50 odd thousand Aussies [casualties]. Barnes was unfortunate, suppose you heard the circumstances. Sorry to read of L.W.McNamara's death. An old red [Prince Alfred College scholar] with a brilliant civil & military record. We had our last letter mail about Dec. 20th, so we reckon the next is slow in coming. Your latest letters were Nov. 1st, over 10 weeks ago now. We heard that one of our mails from here reached W.A. on Oct. 26th, so you should have received it soon after you wrote last. Stan received notification from Red Cross, about 10 days ago, that Allen had arrived in Eng. on Dec. 3rd. He is right at last.

My word the situation in Germany and Russia is obscure. Blowed if I know what to make of the Russian business. Be pleased when we embark to be free from possible military action there. They are talking of taking us for a trip to England. I won't volunteer or reply rather, to go if it means longer sojourn in the Nth. hemisphere. Old Allen is lucky in getting back there (England) as a base. Heard from Bruce H. the other week, his Brigade and Division, Anzac Div, (Aussies &

NZs) had moved down to Rafa in the Sinai Desert. Believe I mentioned B4 that this Div., 3rd, 4th & 5th A.L.H. Brgdes, is called "Aust Mounted Div."

Sutt and I would ask you if you require any chewing gum, rexona, or eucalyptus. We get so much of these commodities that the receiving of them is now a great joke. Of course we appreciate the spirit of doing all you can for us, but we are shy with chewing gum and healing ointments.

Mum, I'll remember you on the 23rd.

Best love to you all, and Nim, Miss Lloyd, etc.

Yours affectly,

Bob.

Marked "11 II"

Tripoli
Jan. 19th, 1919

Dear Mum and all at home,

Time keeps wearing away but we are still in the same place. In fact most of us don't want to move from here, now we are settled, until we are ready to embark for home. It appears that we will hand over our horses eventually to English Remount Units at Beirut and then go home in units. Therefore the "civilians" and "tourists" [the reinforcements] will be home with the old originals. There is nothing to say how long yet it will be before we do leave our horses and gear behind, but orders are that we go home without arms or equipment. All censoring is done away with from this on [?], it has been a farce in large respects always. Mon--- [illegible] rundown has it that mails from Aussie cease on Jan 20th, so we should be embarking 6 weeks or 2 months later. You'll know if this yarn is true by the time this reaches you. We are busting for a mail from home, over 4 weeks now since the last. We should soon experience a more regular service.

It has been wet for a couple of days but today is lovely. Windstorms seem to be unknown in this part, very rarely above a breeze. One never sees a tree blown down and yet hundreds may be seen, especially ancient olives, rotten through to just a few splinters which hold it. One is still able to enjoy bathing on the fine days although it's mid-winter.

I had another letter from Bruce Henderson last week. Their camp is 3 miles from the sea, at Rafa. He says the days are pretty warm but the nights are cold. R. is on the borders of Sinai and Palestine. They were shifted down there after giving a Bedouin village a "rough house", casualties on both sides I believe. These Beds. are the lowest specimens of humanity - we think, treacherous as tame tigers. By the way, the conduct of this Brgde has been exemplary since hostilities ceased.

We (the Gun Sqdrn) have a little rifle range rigged up just alongside our camp. Last week each troop had a practice day in which to pick a team of 8. There are 6 troops in this Squadron, and a transport troop also, 7 teams in all. Yesterday and the previous day the competition between these 7 teams of 8 men was fired. Good old B troop was to fire last, but when the time arrived we found we had to average over an "inner" per shot to win. Of course no one, 'cept me and a few, fancied our chances at all. However - we won, by 4 points in the aggregate. Then we just put out our palms for 24/- each, the prize money. Next Wednesday there is a rapid fire comp., with extra prize for highest individual score. Earn B. beat me for top yesterday by 1 pt.

I am saving up for a few more coins now, mainly Turkish ones. One uses dozens of foreign coins over here. I used to give Bruce a lot, he has a good collection. Managed to get hold of a Turkish sovereign yesterday, which I'll keep.

Stan [cousin] paid a visit last night, and as we were debating against Field Ambulance team, I took him along. There were 4 men a side. Ours were voted by ballot, being Capt. Briant, Ray Spargo (Gippsland), Wally Chapman (Bob's brother) and myself. It may have been an honour to debate for one's unit (180 men) after so short a connection. Anyway the subject was Prohibition, we for it. Moore, padre of the 10th Regt, was adjudicator. To cut a long yarn short,

we wiped the floor with them, in spite of the fact that Webber of the Amb. is an MLA of Victoria. Marks allowed were 4 for style (per man) and 6 per man for matter, and 5 per team for plan and co-ordinated effort. Our scores were - Gun Sq. 28, F.A. 20. I gained 9½ out of 10, being most scored individual. Webber got 9, Chappie 8½ and others lower.

I have found that moles abound in this country and am trying to catch one and skin it, they are as big as an average rat.

Trusting a mail will arrive B4 next Sunday - love to all
Yours affectionately -
Bob

Marked "13, possibly 12 (last letter written Jan 19th)"

Tripoli,
Jan 29th, 1919

Dear Mum and the mob,

I am able to advise a receipt of mail this time. On the 22nd I received letters 14, 15, 16 and 18, on the 23rd no. 19 came to light (dated Nov. 28th) and yesterday no. 17 turned up. The shirt you sent came along with the second lot, and also the sox with the zam-buk [?] and salve. Sutt and I died laughing over the healing balms. Surely we never could have died of wounds! Every mail our pharmacy expands. Stomach and chest medicines are good, but I think our present stock will carry us through, and the skin lotions and balms probably will soothe a Syrian some day. My health has been magnif. haven't had a cold since I had that crook influenza in Egypt last August. The very day I received the shirt I wore it. Had got wet through twice that afternoon, and having only the 2 shirts, the new one filled an inconvenient gap.

Well I have two yarns of interest to tell you this time. Firstly - about a fortnight ago the military held in Tripoli a sale of all their donkeys, captured animals and a few obsolete mules. The gun squadron used to run about 8 donks, little white chaps, and I was told off to take 2 of them in. You should have seen me skithering into Trip. bareback on one and leading another! My legs were only a foot off the ground. Met Stan on the way in, and he being on police duty came in with me. The auctioneer was Syrian and all the bidding was in Arabic. The prices reached were astounding to us Australians. The donks. averaged about £20 ahead, one going to £30 and none of them were more than 10 hands in height. A few camels went @ 40 to 50, a mule @ £62, and Jacko horses, fine slender animals and entires all, made from £48 to £66. The last named figure was paid for a gray mare, the most perfectly shaped animal I have seen, gosh she was lovely - one of those slinking slidey gaits she had, and her head was a paragon. These better class Turkish horses are a cross between the Arab and Barb breeds. I had a very interesting day at the sale except it was sundown B4 I got rid of my donks. All were cash sales and it was surprising how the buyers could pay up. 78 animals were sold and the proceeds exceeded £3000.

However, the next yarn is about my trip to the Lebanon Mts. Stan went up with some of the 9th a few days before. There were 10 of us from the Gun Squadron and we left here at 5 a.m. on the 24th. We rode all day along a road which was worse than a mangled snake for tortuousness. Eventually we reached the village of Becharri at 4.30 p.m. Becharri (Besharry) is a village of 4000 inhabitants and is now just on the snow line. The people are exceptionally hospitable and more over are clean, and Christians although very priest ridden. The scenery on the way up is what may be termed tremendous. It would be a haven for geologists. Anyway, we put up at one of the many "hotels" in the place and settled for a good old spell.

Next day, after a good 12 hrs sleep in a good bed and eider down quilts we went out to see a certain gorge and "blow hole". One lies down on his tummy and looks over. Eight hundred feet down the mountain reaches the mountain stream reaches the rock in vapour. A large stone thrown over bursts into dust, with an echo of dull booming sound. Cripes I cannot describe the magnitude of the places. After seeing these places we went to some flour mills and bakeries. The "mills" consist of a room, a hopper, a round flat stone, a spindle, a wheel and a mountain stream.

The bread made consists of flour and water, the "loaves" being 1/16 of an inch thick and about 14" across.

Next day we went up the mountains to see a cluster of the world famed cedars. After a climb of about 2 miles we arrived there. There are about 30 trees here, of great age and bulk. Some of them are 6 to 8 feet thro. Strange to say they are not cedars as we know them, but a species of pine with horizontal boughs and needles on the upper side. They are growing very thickly and once were all over the country, ads mentioned in Biblical history, but wholesale destruction in centuries past has depleted the number to a few scattered clusters. How the timber was transported I don't know. It must have cost Solomon millions to get it to Jerusalem. The snow here was very dazzling in the glare of the sun, but made no sign of melting as it was so deep. You may guess it made me act the goat a bit, it makes one feel very hilarious. Snow was flying in all directions.

At the place I was staying there was a boy of about 15. He could speak only French and Arabic so I used to parlez-vous with him. He took a great fancy to me and we are going to correspond when I get home. His name is "Jamil Joseph Katarre Karouze", "Jimmy" for short. It would surprise you the number that can speak English in Lebanon. We came back on the 27th, being in Becharri 3 nights and 2 days @ a cost to me and horse of £2/10/- very dear but maleesh.

Demobilisation preparations are going on. Our horses have been classed and graded accordingly. Commodore is A and Joe is B [RCMS's two horses], the other class is C.II. The brands are just clipped on the hair so they will not last long, therefore we reckon on handing over very soon. All university students and engineers' apprentices have left us. Wallie Chapman and Geo. Hardy (9th) left here for embarkation this afternoon. Two members of this squadron have been killed in Tripoli lately. Hare-brains and intemperance mainly responsible. Lt. Col. Todd of 10th Regt. died the other day from result of wound received at Gaza stunt Apr. 19 1917. Decayed bone in the nose.

Fancy old John engaged! Strike me pink! What has gone wrong with the joint? Every body gone mad! I was not surprised with the prospective bride, but with the early pledge. I can see myself leading a forlorn hope for a single state in the near future.

Old Earn has gone to hospital with heart trouble. Good chance of his getting home as his father died some time back and he's the only son.

Look - if Eyes and Crowle haven't sold my curse, (motor bike) ask them for an offer, and take down to £30 for it. I have £40 in my pay book now with which to make up the deficit. £55 was cost price. Bad business but a good lesson.

Love to you all,
 Remaining affect. son and brother
 Bob

Marked "15"

Tripoli,
Sunday Feb. 16th.

Dear Mum and all,

Some time now since I wrote, Jan 29th was the last letter I believe. However, I have been pretty busy all along, and, as I sent a card about a week ago, there may be some excuse. Oh gosh my correspondence is going "kark" - owe letters in dozens. We received a fairly big mail about a fortnight ago in which your letters 20, 1, 2 and 3 reached me together with 2 parcels and half a dozen Obs [Observers]. Parcels contained - cake each, apricots, sardines, cheese, cigarettes and tobacco etc. and in a packet I got the socks and camomilla plus Chamberlain's tablets. Oh more medicine! However some more Hudson's "Yumenthal Yubbillees" would not be out of place. I may say that the two cakes received were not in very good order - seemed too moist and went a bit mouldy.

Well we know a little of what is to become of us. The Egyptian A.I.F. is going home in units, by 3000 per month, beginning with the 1st Brgde, then 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th. There are 15000 of us in Egypt etc. The 1st Brgde is leaving end of this month (lucky Bruce and Goldsmith etc.) so that will allow of the 3rd Brgde leaving at the end of April or beginning of May. Leave for 10% of the Egyptian forces is being granted to England, but I am not "dragging it on" - all my efforts and desires are to get back to Australia and to do a bit of work. I celebrated my 12 months' service in our army on Feb 12. - and it was an absolute curse. First horrible winds and frightful dust for 2 days, then torrential rain, tempestuous gales, and freezing cold for 3 or 4 days. Blooming tents etc. were blown to blazes, the sea swamped some of the lines and a bloke couldn't sleep for thoughts of the bivvy carrying away. Yes we had a doing for a week, the same as my first night and day at Mitcham camp.

Well, I have risen a little (imaginary) in rank lately, being now known as the "Padre" [promoted to temporary Lance Corporal from 1st January]. I have given over my horses etc., and now am free from all fatigues and picquets, but have charge of the "Reading and Recreation tent" and carry on as sec. of Lit. and Deb. Soc., and Concert Club, and still teach the book-keeping mob. Also we have a "Squadron Scrap Book", published weekly by Sig. Ray Spargo of B troop, and to this I contribute in several columns as "Packhorse". Last Thursday we had a concert and staged a play written by Ray Spargo. It was pretty rough but went off all right. We had piano, and singing. Also our Lit. and Deb. Soc. held competitions last night in Impromptu Speeches. Elocution, Essay writing on two subjects original stories and original poems. We had the "dinkum padres" as judges. Well out of the 7 competitions, B troop got 6 wins and 4 seconds and 2 thirds. Ray S. won speech, poem, and short story, I won the essay on "Future of Aust", and the humorous recit. with "Xssing the Bar", and my poem was placed 3rd. In impromptu speeches I spoke on "Should sexual hygiene be taught in schools?" and tied for second. My arguments were for the affirmative. I won £2/10/1 in prize money. A short while ago I led a debate for affirmative side, on "Does professionalism benefit sport?" and although entirely against my grain, Ray Sp. and another, and I, beat Capt. Bryant and Lieuts Brede and Bryant by 50 odd votes to 2. Today we have been holding a "try out" to select a rifle team of 8 men to represent the Gun Squadron in the Brigade competition. I am well in its scoring possible at one shoot. The competition comes off on Tuesday and the prizes are worth winning, without the sport of it.

Pleased, in a way, that the Coots [twin brothers Lockey and Len] passed their exam, tho' I can understand your feelings, Mum. By cripes, Lockey - by the writing of the letter you sent me you should be in the 2nd class what absolute tripe! Get a good hold of your pen and watch your down and up strokes, to keep the same slope. Anyway I was pleased to get your letter, and Doshes excuse for the Freebairns' boys visit, I won't pay. I hear that Archie is getting a good hearing - and so he should, he's a jolly decent lad. Well Dosh I am getting a lot of coins to bring home, although I "done in" my Jacko sovereign. (Made 40 piastres on it.)

We are shifting down to Rafa shortly and leaving our horses here. Worst luck we may have to look after the 1st Brgdes' horses until we- embark! A first part of another mail came in this morning. None for me yet, but s'pose I'll get my issue tomorrow.

We hear there is a bit of this influenza getting into Australia, and I notice S. Aus. has a number of cases. There is none of it here at all.

This is about all the news I can scratch together so I will close up now with best love to you all, and Nim.

Remaining affectionately
Yours
Bob.

P.S. Note the "Martin Comely" in the front centre of the school group.
Last letter Jan 29, Don't know whether 'twas 13 or 14. This one numbered - 15.

Chapter 5

Zagazig, Egypt, demobilization

Marked "No. 17"

Moascar,
March 17th.

Dear Mum,

As you can see we are out of Syria once again. Left Tripoli per boat on morning of the 15th and lobbed here last night. Tomorrow morning at 7.30 we leave for Zagazig or Cairo. The Gypos have been causing some disturbances up there, and the 3rd brigade is being sent up to preserve order. Don't suppose there'll be much excitement as the Gypos have no arms. Am trying to get this home per one of the chaps going tomorrow. Slipped back a lot re the hopes of early demob. Be here a month more yet. Will write at length when things get settled. Health good-o.

Love to all -
yours affectionately
Bob.

Marked "No. 18"

Zagizig,
March 20th

Dear Mum,

At present we are dumped here. The 3rd Brigade is scattered all along the line from Ismailia to Ben-Aar and Cairo. Everyone was re-equipped, although only two squadrons of the 3 regts have been mounted. Our machine guns are coming along tomorrow, but we have not seen any disorder yet, only the affects of it once or twice.

Having arrived in Moascar on the 16th, we left there after 5 am reveille on the 18th, per rail westwards. It was a very long train and also we were packed thick enough - 50 in a truck with our homes and arms too. At about 11 a.m. when about 3 miles from Tel-el-Kebir, we came to a stop, and remained there until 7 a.m. next day. Some of the rivets had been taken from the rails and a train load of wheat coming along had been derailed, capsised, smashed and telescoped. Gosh there was a mess. However 3 special "breakdown trains" arrived with their magnificent appliances (cranes etc.) and overnight cleared the track. Passing Tel-el-K. we saw where a similar occurrence had taken place. At Tel-el-K. there is a huge prison camp. Nearly all the Jackos and Germans captured on this front are still there. From the line can be seen the system of earthworks thrown up for the battle of Tel-el-K (in 1882 I think it was) with Ali Pasha. The country at Tel-el-K is hard and barren, being very gravelly with a few shallow watercourses bearing the tinge of yellowy-green. A few miles this side the Nile delta begins and the nature of the scenery is in great contrast. Deep green meets the eye as far as can be seen and the soil is black loamy stuff with irrigation channels everywhere. Dotted around are small water wheels, worked by cows, camels, buffaloes or donkeys, which lift the water from the channels into the drains which intersect the fields. These animals are blind-folded and mechanically walk round and round without any attention. Every now and then a clump of palms rises above the level of the crops of barley, beans and lucerne, or a group of mud houses lift their grass-roofed walls into the drowsy heat. The crops seem very heavy and the cereals are now all out in ear, but the old binder is missing.

Last night we (B troop) were supposed to be a guard on a train back to Ismailia but the train didn't go so here we are. Aeroplanes bring messages several times a day, which they fly low and drop with streamers attached. (Bad English, maleesh) This town, which is some 20 to 30 miles east of Cairo, is a fairly large place, pop. 35000 according to my book. A good few Europeans reside here too. The Gyppos have a notice posted up addressing us as their Australian brothers and proclaiming "Long live Egypt and Australia". They are scared of us.

We were mighty glad to leave Tripoli although it was at an hour's notice. Our boat, the British-Indian liner "Ellenga" of some 10 000 tons did the journey down to Said in 19 hours. Hundreds were sick, but I wasn't so I reckon I can sail now. From Said to Moascar we did per train (trucks).

Anyone moaning about my not writing, please give them my sympathy and say I often think of them (more so the letters I owe them). The 2nd Brgde and best part of the 1st haven't left Rafa yet, so goodness knows when the 3rd will get away.

Love to all, from Bob.

Zagazig,
April 2nd

Dear Mum

Enclosing 5th edition of our scrap-book [missing]. As a mail is in am not writing at length until I get your letters. Only one for me so far - from Lynch dated Feb 1st. Everything is now quiet here and I am good-o except for blasted fleas.

Love from yours affectly
Bob

Marked ""No. 19"

Zagazig,
7/4/19.

Dear Mum and all,

Have been holding off writing for a while pending the arrival of an expected mail, but now I am giving in as the letters won't come. There have been a few dribbling in but I can't score. Your last letter received was written eleven weeks ago, 20th Jan., so that news is rather old now, eh?

We are still carrying on here - the squadron scattered around in groups. I am with the Head Quarters lot, and our jobs are train escorts, lorry ditto, and guards. Have been a couple of trips on trains but they are very uneventful, and the scenery is the most unvarying I have seen, barring the deserts. One small privilege I now enjoy is that of being eligible to attend the sgts'-corps' mess, but somehow I regret it because, gosh - I am fat. My word it will be calamitous if I cannot rid me of this great burden when our discharges come along. In this mess we pay 10/- per head per fortnight, and that buys a lot of extra mungar, what with a good cook the menu is something special. However it has spoilt my good intentions as I was before living on bread and jam alone, to keep my bête noir away.

The fleas and lice are giving us a rather misquoise [?] time still, worse than I ever knew them. I would willingly give 10/- for a tin of 'bane, but don't trouble to send any after you get this because in all probability we would have moved.

Well I don't know what to write about, I may as well say something about the bird life, to interest the boys. I was quite surprised when I came here to see the variety of birds. In the desert parts there are only a few seen. Here there is the usual mob of hawks, plus crows, doves, herons, cranes, (white) plovers (2 kinds), hoopoes [sketch] (that's a hoopoe, brilliant colours, size - MINA BIRD), kingfishers (black and white), larks (brown ones & pied) and thousands of spoggies [sparrows]. The curious thing about these birds is their state of friendliness and casualness towards humans. They won't get out of one's way. Of the crows, black and grey birds with a very hoarse croak compared to ours, one could shoot hundreds. I have seen 10 or 12 Gyppos working in a field of about one acre, and cranes and crows almost tangled up in human legs in their endeavours to get worms etc. The Egyptian never harms birds. When we came here we found a dove's nest, with 2 eggs, in a heap of hoop-iron tibbin bands. Crows and hawks' nests are everywhere within easy reach, yet the old bird is to be seen calmly sitting tight in all cases. The kingfisher does pretty well on the fish which abound in the numerous irrigation channels, (they won't bite a hook but can be stunned by firing a rifle into shallow water). The people here keep thousands of pigeons. Every dwelling has its mud pigeon loft, shaped like a giant ant hill. They get 8 piastres a pair for them they say.

Am enclosing a clipping to interest Father if he hasn't already seen it - you should hear the boys here comment on it! [missing] Makes one marked all right. Sending edition 6 of scrap-book later, 5 numbers have gone to you.

Love to you all

Affectionately yours -
Bob.

Marked "S.B. [Scrap Book] no. 6."

Zagazig,
9/4/19

Please preserve these numbers of the local rag which I am sending along periodically [missing].
Very wretched weather now, blinking hot and dusty. Gyppos are celebrating their "victory"
today, their agitators have been repatriated. No mail yet -

Love from
Bob

Zagazig,
18/4/19

Dear Mum,

Enclosed photo of our troop taken last Sunday. Also posting some mail a copy of last week's scrap book. No mail as yet but have the postman's promise of some either today or tomorrow. Demobilisation seems knocked on the head. Cripes Pearce is a slightly unpopular member with us. Suppose old Stan is $\frac{1}{2}$ way to Colombo now. Bruce Henderson and his lot are out here now doing duty. Terrible fall for them, when their boat was actually fitted out for them. We received some A.C.F. papers the other day dated up to Feb. 20 and yet we cannot get letters.

The Gyppo drivers and firemen on the railways are out on strike now, and Tommies and our own chaps are doing all the driving. The old Wiltshire left here a couple of days ago for Aussie. Bruce H tells me that boats from France go through daily without a miss.

Well goodbye for a while,
Love from Bob.



B Troop
 3rd Australian Machine Gun Squadron
 3rd Australian Light Horse brigade
 1919, Zagazig, Egypt

Back row: Harvey Kelly, Dave Hardidge, Mat Evans, Frank Franklin, Dick McCorry
 Second row: Bob Turner, Bob Smyth, Dug Spratt, Bob McGuiggan, "Vid" Vidler, Dan Arnold,
 George Franklin, Jim Coffey, Bill Sutton, – Roberts
 Third row: Harold Armstrong, "Longpin" James, Gerlad Brookshaw, Phil Leeming, George
 Richardson, Perce Redding, Les Carter, Les Robinson
 Front row: Ray Spargo, Charlie Chatten, Bill Brennan, Bob Akin

Zagazig
20/4/19

Dear Mum,

Day of days! Received 15 letters this afternoon, the best Easter egg ever likely to come my way. Six were from you Jan 28th to March 17th. I am not answering at length now but sending along this issue of S.S.B. [missing]. I edited this - Ray S is away in Cairo. Some of our chaps (4) went home yesterday, which shows demob. has begun again. Going to Moascar tomorrow to get some books for the Captain.

Rumours of embarkation in early May.

Love to you all,
affectly yours, Bob.

Zagazig,
May 15th, 1919

Dear Mum, and all the mob,

Last letter written 9 days ago, I believe [apparently missing]. Since then I have been carrying on mostly as per usual, travelling and sleeping. A full passenger service is running now, and we supply one n.c.o. [non-commissioned officer] and 2 men on all trains leaving from Zagazig. Same ridiculous farce. By cripes it narks me; really it's inconceivable that men of supposed soundness of mind could be so stupid. Nevertheless they are, and they are people who are leaders in war. It is no wonder that the war lasted over 4 years. There is no consideration of a man's qualifications, not the least. A village idiot with one stripe (he'd get it if he "crawled") would in a few fights rise to Brigadier Gen. if his seniors were all casualties. Again, a brilliant man, born modest, would probably remain 2 years in the ranks. Once a man starts with rank, maleesh how he got it, he won't stop unless he's disgraced for breach of discipline. So the biggest dopes get command of thousands, and when someone is game enough to mark them incompetent, they are given jobs in a base, with, most probably, a promotion. Once confirmed rank, one can't lose it until a breach of discipline is committed, and then, 5 to 1, it is dismissed where a Bill-jim [Light horseman] would get 12 months. That's a mere detail in the scheme of things, just one that makes us hate the life.

Last Monday I went down to Kantara on duty. Came back Wednesday afternoon. Whilst at K. I stayed with the 1st Mach. G. Sqdrn, on the banks of the canal. I had my first swim across the canal proper - from Egypt to Sinai. The first squadron and 3rd Rgt are embarking this morning. Bruce H. not going home but taking leave to England. Whilst in K. I was able to get a bit of "oil". This month there are 11000 odd Tommies coming out, 5600 Tommies are going home for demob., 4400 are going home on leave, and 1650 Dominion troops are actually being released! Dom. troops are Austs, N.Z.s, Brit. West Indies, and South Africans! and Aussies alone were promised 3000 demobilised a month from Janry. Cripes I feel like going mad. Since the armistice, 67000 Tommies have left here for England. These are not rumours, they are official figures. They know that at the present rate the Australians here will very soon run amok, so in today's orders the Brigades are being scattered. 10th L.H.R. is going to Suez, 9th to Tel el Kebir, the 8th is coming here. The second Brgde is scattering from Salhia, Damanhour to Tanta (across Northern Egypt), the 4th Brgde (Edgar's) from Mansourah, Kantara, and Damiette. The 5th Brigade is in 2 pieces about 40 miles apart. The iron is sinking into all, I don't mind telling you. Six months since the armistice and only 1 brigade (with today's lot) embarked. If 3 or 4 million Yanks and and [sic] Tommies can get home from a civilised land with reasonable climate, then they should be able to send a couple of L.H. sections home as a sample of soldier from sand, heat, and barbarism. This letter is a bit wailsome, but we are not too happy all said and done.

Nearly a month since the last mail. Enclosing wahed (1) [?] photo of cedar trees at Becharre, just to give you an idea of what they are like [enclosure missing].

Well trusting to be with you ere July has gone -
Love from yours affectly, Bob.

P.S. The Jackos are being sent home in droves per boat.

Zagazig,
June 2nd.

Dear Mum, Dosh and all,

A week ago yesterday I received a letter from you, Dosh and Mum; it was nearly 2 months old and was received just 5 weeks from the previous mail. The mail services are just simply wonderful. You should hear the expressions of opinions re the same conveniences. By gosh I reckon it's scandalous. Here we are - haven't received newer letters than March 30th. 9 weeks ago, and steamers returning from Australia 2 and 3 a week! The blasted authorities should be strung up by the heels and well flogged. Somebody must be deserving of the sack, and a good rough-up too, as I notice the people at home are beginning to question. I am sick of government strokes if ever anyone was.

I have been travelling about a lot since last writing. Two trips to Kantara, one night there, (hereby hangs a tale), a day and night in Tanta, and 2 days and 2 nights in Cairo, with the various trips to smaller joints on train guards also. Re the night in Kantara, Ray Ochernal and I were sent down for shell cases for the heads, my 3rd trip down for the same things (I had discovered a way where others had failed) and as we reckoned on securing beds at a buffet, we took no blankets. The buffet turned us down, so we took unto ourselves couches at the YMCA lounge. After 20 minutes repose, one of our 20 odd comrades uttered his convictions re the presence of tick, and as I had previously scented a presence of the odorous beasts, we struck matches - and then imshied. The place was alive, blokes had big white lumps on them as big as sparrow's eggs, but I hadn't been bitten. However we went forth into the wilderness and the hour was about 11 p.m. Anyway we camped in a motor ambulance and the cold was something maddening. I slept only 2 or 3 hours, the whole of the memorable night, and I had only khaki drill slacks and cotton shirt beside my tunic. We were up at 4.30 trying to get warm.

I went to Cairo on duty last Friday morning and returned yesterday afternoon (Sunday). Didn't go in for much sight seeing other than the city and Heliopolis, saw the Pyramids in the distance only. I am sick and tired of seeing things in Egypt; everywhere one goes he is bled white if not very shrewd. The biggest curse of a nation on earth, and the worst country. Blast it. I bought a few little mementos to take back to you, brooches (3), mummified pencil and case (1), and small Damascene vases (2) and a good assortment of foreign coins. About £3/10/- in all. To buy presents in Egypt is not worth the while of a millionaire.

We shifted camp this morning, and are now settled in a house, such as it is. By gosh I worked this morning cleaning this room out! It was packed with lumber, and dirt inches deep, together with dead mice and cats and the filth of years. However with a good sweeping and a flood of phenyl it is excusable at least. The probability though is that we will be shifting down to Moascar in a fortnight at most. Don't believe this, but we can tell you that Egypt will be as a dream that is broken off in 4 week's time. 5 boats are leaving this month, dinkum and will average 900 troops each, that's 4500. The 1st Brigade has gone, the second Brde. holds about 2000 and this Brde about 2300, so we should score, eh? Don't you expect us till you see us anyway.

Oh 3 Observers floated in from the unknown, the other day, March 1 and 8th and Feb 22. Old as the pomegranate that was presented to the bint who was stolen by King Pluto for 6 months.

Well it is harvest time in Egypt now and as hot as blazes. The natives are absolute goats the way they go about the operations. Work like the diggins and have nothing to show for it. I am going to get photographs of the methods employed if I can. The cotton which was planted only a month or two ago, is now about 9 inches high. Hope I don't see it in flower.

Well saïda for a while again, hoping to see you soon
lovingly yours
Bob.

Zagazig, Egypt,
June 13th, 1919

Dear Mum,

Well it is no good withholding this letter until I receive a mail, because then there would be doubt as to your ever receiving it. No letters since your last of March 30th. We are still in the same old place, hanging on to life in the same old way.

The latest news as to moves is this. Up to the 8th Regt. were to embark before June 2nd, from 9th to 11th exclusive, with their Brigade units (we, us & Co) were to leave in early June following 7 day's warning. This was official (the paper is on this table now) from Director of Demob. Anyway the 6th, 7th and 8th are still here, so what can one do with promises like that? It has been the same ever since New Year. Our old Debating Soc. is about to be resurrected. Tonight we are holding a mock court. I am also going to renew the Book keeping classes in the near future, continuing them on the voyage home.

The scrap book comes out every week. There are a few copies accumulating which I must dispatch soon. We have a tennis court here, but one has to be lively to get a game. It is engaged from daylight to dark. I played a set the other day in 115° of heat in shade.

Well hoping I have a letter to answer soon,
Love to you all - from Bob.

Zagazig,
17/6/19.

Dear Mum,

Latest official is as follows:- "Following boats and complements are due to leave Egypt for Australia on approximate dates given:- Essex 15/6/19, 848, Madras 28/6/19, 1483, Burma 30/6/19, 1366, Pilsna 30/6/19, 977, Africa 5/7/19, 977, Oxfordshire 7/7/19, 1214, Dunluce Castle 10/7/19, 300, Delta 15/7/19, 1000, Malta 15/7/19, 1150, Dongola 20/7/19, 798, Innsbruck 20/7/19, 977."

Either the Pilsner or the Innsbruck will carry N.Z.s. Working an average on this our unit should be aboard the Burma or Pilsna. If the Pilsna goes to N.Z. we will probably get part of the Africa. Of course this thing has happened before and then fizzled out, but it gives us satisfaction to believe it while it holds good. The Essex did leave on the 15th, with the 4th Regt and 2nd A.S. Hospital and details. Unless the very unusual happens we should be right this time.

No mail about yet.

Love to all, Bob.

Zagazig,
June 20th

Dear Mum and all,

Just going to show you how well I can now use the old typewriter. It is a captured German machine, as you may see by all these affairs: ää öö, however she is not a bad old jigger and gets a lot of use. Not very much fresh news here since only that the Australian Base is being moved from Moascar, which place is being taken over by Tommies. We have a debate on this evening. I am leading the Negative side in the argument on "Has W.M. Hughes as a politician been beneficial to the interest of Australia?" Our Mock Court was a huge success. Several of the complement were slightly under the influence, which led to a large display of super-natural wit. By gosh, if you only knew, if you could have only the least idea how the days drag in this place! Just about nerve wracking. Waiting for old Mick to turn up with the mail on his late days was only a momentarily action to what this is. We crawl out of bed about 0730, which is military time for half past seven, and wander down to the mess for breakfast; that over in 10 minutes, we wander back to the office again. Then we smoke cigarettes till we are sick and tired of them, but keep on smoking 'cause there is nothing else to do. We study the few pictures on the wall and the few octogenarian magazines same as we have done for the last month, then at 1230 wander down to dinner. Afternoon try to sleep while some-one who can't mucks about with the type-writer or plays the same 6 grammophone records that have been played every day for weeks. At night perhaps we take a stroll to see the same Gyppo scenery that we see where ever we look; then about 2030, half past eight, get full up with water melon and crawl into bed cursing the fleas and mosquitoes. If I am feeling in a cantankerous mood, Spargo then starts an argument, which usually proves highly amusing to the listeners, and, I hope, educational to Spargo, because although he never gives in, I always reckon myself in no way second place. Yes, it's a great life all right, and I get ten bob a day for it! Even so, I am not making my fortune. Have drawn 60 quid since leaving Australia; it's 12 months ago but 60 is a lot. Goodness knows where it has gone, plenty of bad debts I know. Maleesh. I've got 65 in the old book, and 20 deferred, am still getting paid, so should be able to pay my debts when I get home. Well our one interest in life is will those boats leave on the appointed dates? If they do, we will be home before August.

Love to you all,
from yours affectionately,
Bob.

Good luck on your birthdays, I've forgotten how they run.

Zagazig,
June 25th

Dear Mum,

The drought is well and truly busted, mail at last! One letter only, but the best mail I have had so far. It was your letter of May 14th which you thought would miss me. Good job it didn't, as things were getting very desperate; any monotony is bearable with mail, but with it religiously off the menu, life is very second class. Was very, very sorry to hear about poor old Jacob. Always the good men.

Well our latest news:- Orders came through yesterday ref. boats, embarkation dates and men taken. Approximately only but cheering. "Oxfordshire" embarks at Kantara on 5th July, the 8th Regt. and "Brigade units", that is, us, Field Ambulance, 3rd Signal Troop, and mobile Vets. and Engineers. Please don't believe anything which the Depts. say, other than the official notification of sailing. They say anything.

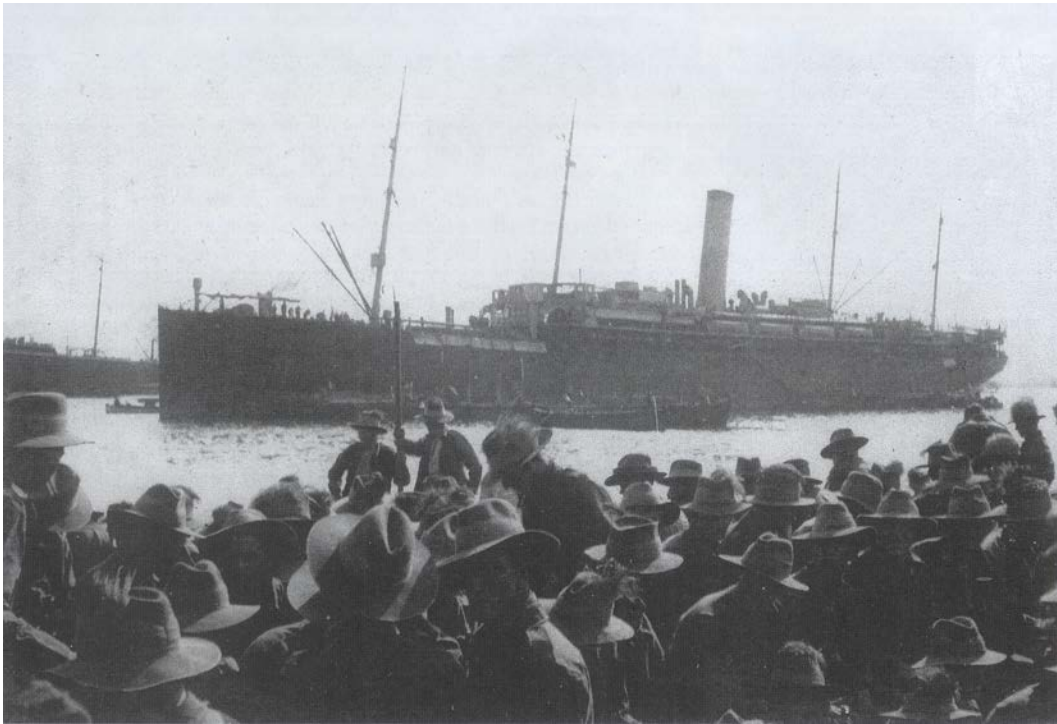
Bit of a bombardment here about 2.30 this morning. The Indians hopped into a few Gyppos who were trying to trade on the dump. Fired 30 or 40 shots and knocked only ½ a dozen. Disturbed a good night's sleep.

Trusting there will be no time to write more letters home,
Love to you all from Bob.

If we leave on July 5, you should hear before you get this.

Below: Goodbye to Egypt as the transport Oxfordshire sails from Kantara on the Suez Canal in July 1919, to enter the Red Sea the next day. She carries men of the 10th LH Regiment and other troops from Western Australia—1000 in all, who will reach Fremantle on 4 August.

(Private collection)



From

Jones, Ian, *A Thousand Miles of Battles, The Saga of the Australian Light Horse in WWI*

Revised edition, published by ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee (Queensland) Inc, 2007

Original edition, published by Time-Life Books (Australia), 1987

Telegram received Hamley Bridge, Sth Aust, 8 am, 5 August 1919

Fremantle 14 1/- R 4-45- 10.30 a
Smythe
Salter's Springs SA

Probably arrive Saturday clean ship well sea been rather wavy.

Bob

Appendix 1

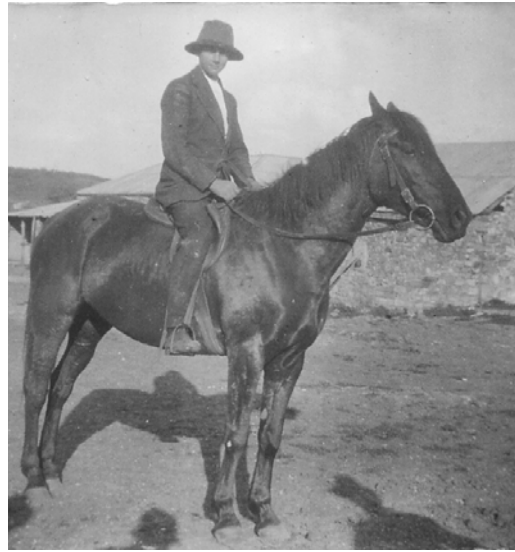
Selection of family photos pasted into a black book



Red riding hood
[sister Jean Smyth, "Brat"]



Knitting Sox for Soldiers
[mother Fanny Smyth]



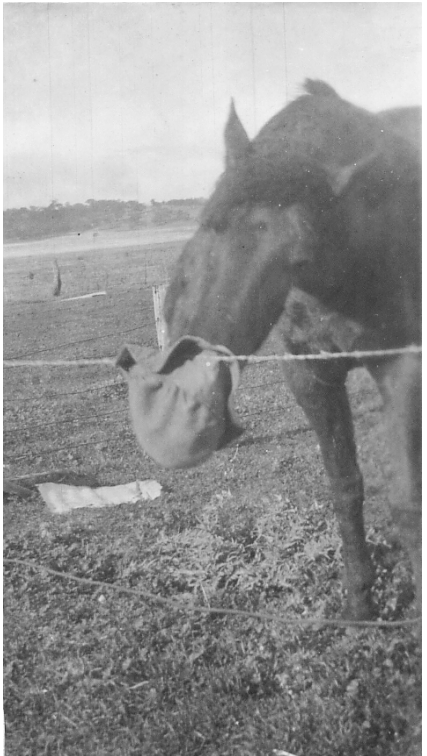
Almost a man
[brother Alec Smyth, "Gummie"]



Ready for our photos
[sister Jean Smyth, "Brat"]



Tired of waiting
[sister Jean Smyth "Brat"]



Just a Bite



Sisters
[Phyl, Jean "Brat" (front), Dorothy "Dosh"
and Marg Smyth]



Lunch Time
[brother Len Smyth, or Lockie Smyth]



Bette in a hurry



Juveniles
[sister Jean Smyth "Brat"]



In the garden
[mother Fanny Smyth]



Till you come home
[mother Fanny Smyth]



Alex and Bette
[brother Alec Smyth, "Gummie"]



Lockie
[brother Hugh (Loss) Smyth]

Appendix 2

Light Horse Order of Battle, from August 1917

ANZAC Mounted Division

- 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade (1st (NSW), 2nd (Qld), 3rd (SA & Tas) Regiments)
- 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade (5th (Qld), 6th (NSW) 7th (NSW) Regiments)
- New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade

Australian Mounted Division

- 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade (8th (Vic), 9th (NSW), 10th (WA) Regiments)*
- 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade (4th (Vic), 11th (Qld & SA), 12th (NSW) Regiments)
- 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade (14th, 15th Regiments) from Imperial Camel Corps in 1918

Imperial Camel Corps Brigade

- 1st (Australian) Battalion
- 2nd (British) Battalion
- 3rd (Australian) Battalion
- 4th (ANZAC) Battalion

Yeomanry Mounted Division (British)

*RCMS was a reinforcement in this Brigade, in B Troop of the 3rd Machine Gun Squadron, which was an auxiliary Squadron, rather than part of a Regiment.

Reference:

Jones, Ian, *A Thousand Miles of Battles, The Saga of the Australian Light Horse in WWI*
 Revised edition, published by ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee (Queensland) Inc, 2007
 Original edition, published by Time-Life Books (Australia), 1987

Other References

Bou, Jean, *Light Horse A History of Australia's Mounted Arm*, Cambridge University Press, 2010

Gullett, H S, *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine*, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. 7, 1925