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Partridge & Co

Eastbourne [stamp on inside cover]

No 5533 Pte K K Saxby

3rd Battalion A.I.F.

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May 12th Saturday 1917

Here I am in Fairfield Court V.A.D. Hospital where I was transferred 3-4 days ago from the Military Hospital Eastbourne. It is more free & easy here – not so strict & we are looked after exceptionally well. I have been in England nearly a fortnight now & getting along O.K. The wound itself is almost healed & hardly troubles me at all, although my chest is weak & will be for some time.

Eastbourne is a big high class town on the sea shore (pop. 70,000) & is a very popular high class seaside resort. The sea front Parade is magnificent, the shops & houses are all big & well built, the streets wide & well made & well kept. I have been driving round the town a couple of times & I am now allowed up to walk about & the weather being perfect I am enjoying myself immensely.

Yesterday I received about a month's mail or more from France redirected by Eric. My! Didn't I have a time reading them. It was O.K. after waiting so long.

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Poor old Eric & the rest are having a very rough time just now. I wish he were here with me!

This hospital is in a fine big old private house. It is a lovely place & the ground are very nice too. If it was in France it would be quite a respectable chateau. This town is full of such places!

Wednesday May 16th 1917

Yesterday, a lot of us were shifted from Fairfield to Kempton, another VAD hospital not far away (only a few minutes walk). It is not nearly so nice as Fairfield but is not too bad, all the same. There is not the system or conveniences here that we had at Fairfield. I suppose I will only be here for a week or so at the most, perhaps less than a week. It appears I should not have come here as this is an "A" class hospital & for operation & other bed cases. So probably we will all be moved on again shortly to a B class hospital. We are all getting sick of this continual moving. It doesn't give a fellow a chance to settle down.

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The weather continues fine, although we have had a few dull days, which are alright as we want rain. I am still getting on alright.

Lately my leg has been troubling me though where I hurt it in France about 8 months ago. It has been getting better very slowly & was almost right. Now it appears to be getting worse. I think I will see the Doc about it. I don't know whether to hope it gets better or worse. If I had only known it I could have got to Blighty with it when it was first done. Our old Doc kept me back though.

Monday 28th May 1917. Tomorrow I am leaving here. I will report back to the Military Hosp. & they will tell me where I am going, probably to an Aus. Conv. Camp nearer London. I hope so anyway. I am just getting to like this place now. This Hosp. is a VAD in a large private house. I and another chap (a Tommy)

share a small room together. We can go out almost any time from 9:30 am to 7:30 pm (9:30 on Thursdays & 8:30 on Sundays with a pass) except for having to be in for meals brek. 7:15 am, Dinner, 12:30, tea 5:0 pm. The meals nowadays with the shortage of meat, sugar

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etc. are very funny. The cook must have a wonderful imagination for she turns out all sorts of mysteries made out of any old thing to hand. Some of them are good too, but others -!! However, we are never hungry so we can't complain. We are left pretty much to ourselves now. The sea front is lovely during the beautiful weather we are having. The town itself is very nice too although there is very little to do. If I get nearer London I will visit Mrs Primmer & Mrs Jennings if I can. I have been two or three times to a lady's place here for tea & music & have enjoyed myself. Miss Goldfinch 5 Hampden Terrace. They are Australians & invite all the Aus's in Hosp. to tea. They are the only people I have visited here. Thursday 31st May. Here I am at Mrs Jennings at Golders Green. I am on my 14 days furlow. A party of us were sent from Eastbourne Tuesday afternoon to report to Horseferry Rd Hd Qrs. We thought from what the doctor told us that we

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were being sent to a Convalescent Camp & when we got there we found we were to go on furlow. It was a bit of a shock & I am only just now beginning to realise it. By right I should be in a Con. Camp as my chest is weak yet. One of the party had a wound that was still discharging. First thing after getting our passes & pay check (which took hours owing to the red tape) I popped my things into the WCC cloak room – hied me hence to Mrs Primmer's. They did get a shock & we had a real nice evening. I slept there & next morning went off & had a Turkish bath & lost about 5 lbs of dirt there according to the weighing machine so I ought to be cleaner. I feel much better for it. After dinner, I sent a telegram to Midgley telling them to prepare to see me on Friday. Sent a few letters to notify my change of address & took a bus to here. They were greatly surprised to see me & it is alright. Both

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here & at Mrs Primmer's they do their level best to make me feel at home. They are O.K. I intend to enjoy myself this time. I will do London properly & I have a free railway pass to Edinburgh where I will stay a few days. I will also visit Aunt Tot Beeby at Farnham Surrey. I have had a letter from here. She is in a Hosp. there.

The weather is glorious & the country is likewise. I have to report back to Hurdcott on the 13th June so I have a clear 14 days. I am quite spandy again now in my new clothes & gold stripe with a nice little SB brassard on my arm. I haven't had to buy any clothes at all yet, I have had it all issued, so that is OK. I have £11 to carry on with so I ought to be alright especially as I have bought all I want already at the Hosp. in the way of brushes etc razor & strop etc etc.

So now I am off on the giddy whirl. If

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only Eric were here it would be O.K. Poor old fellow, he gets all the bad luck!

Thursday 31st May 1917. 11pm [crossed out]

Friday 1st June 1917 9 am

I am now in the train en route for Saffron Walden. The country is lovely & green & fresh. Yesterday I left Golders Green at about 11 am had dinner at WCC & wrote a few letters. During the afternoon I went through Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral & the London Tower. They were all very interesting. The Abbey & St Paul's are very impressive. It is interesting to see all the tombs, monuments & busts etc. of all of England's best & noblest & well-known men from ordinary Mr's to Dukes & Lords & Kings, Poets

etc. etc. The buildings themselves are very fine & grand. The Tower with its Crown Jewels, Armouries, Traitor's Gate etc & towers & Bastions of all sorts, took a long time to go through but was worth the trouble. The best part of it to me was the Armouries with arms & armour for horse & man, from the

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earliest days up to the present. Old Cannon, muskets, pistols etc. etc. the armour of the 16th century knights, rooms & rooms full, were very interesting. If you had the time you could spend a whole day or more in this part alone. I also viewed the Parliament houses & the Tower Bridge etc. etc. but couldn't go through them. Altogether I spent a very good afternoon.

I went to Mrs Primmer for the evening & slept overnight there leaving at 7:45 am to catch a bus at Victoria Stn for Liverpool St Station where I caught the 8:40 train for Saffron Walden.

Sunday June 3rd I am now back again at Golders Green. I had a lovely time at Mrs Midgley's. They were very good to me. After I am back from Scotland I will go up & spend a few more days with them. The country round about is beautiful & especially their garden. We went for one long drive around the district & went for walks in neighbouring gardens & our own & had a good time generally. The little boy & girls of the

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married daughter Marjorie Braithwaite, were there & we were great friends. The little boy's hobby was birds & bird nesting. He took me round & showed me all his special nests, with the young ones in it etc. On Sat. morning Irene took me off to Cambridge to see the Colleges. They were fine all through & very interesting. They were all so nice that I didn't like to leave but I had to because I had promised to be here for today. So I am going to visit them next Saturday & stay till the Tuesday I think. It will be O.K. I wish I had a month or so to put in there. I fixed up their lawnmower while I was there & they were very grateful. It is nearly impossible now to get a simple job like that done.

I will spend today here & tonight at Mrs Primmer's. Tomorrow I am off to Farnham to see Auntie Tot Beeby & will come back Tuesday leaving again that night or afternoon for Scotland. I am having a fine time & am keeping on the move.

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Tuesday 5th Here I am sitting in the lovely sun on the lawn in front of Frensham Hill Military Hosp. I arrived here yesterday at 11:30 am & have had a good time. Auntie Tot was very pleased to see me & I was pleased to see her too. I had dinner with about 200 nurses & after dinner Auntie & I went for a long drive around the country. It was simply magnificent. We had tea at a little shop by the way & got home about 7 pm. She showed me all over the hospital & grounds & took a couple of snaps of me & I took one of her.

This hosp. is a very large & beautiful private residence, given by the owner as a Military Hospital. It is a capital place & the scenery round about is gorgeous. The weather yesterday was simply perfect & today promises the same. I slept at the cottage of one of the housekeeper's I think she was & had breakfast there as I didn't relish the idea of facing a battery of about a hundred eyes for breakfast, as I did for dinner & supper which I had in the Sister's Dining Hall.

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I am leaving by the 12:30 pm from Farnham some 4 miles from here which has to be done by taxi (5/- each way!) The drive is lovely though so makes it worth it. I will catch to the first convenient train to Edinburgh after I arrive in London.

Auntie told me the news about poor Alan. He died of wounds just the other day. It is very sad & Auntie Jess will feel it. It is only when some of one's own relatives are taken that the full realization comes to you, of what war means. The carnage is simply awful.

England is certainly worth seeing at its best in springtime. Everywhere you go are lovely flowers & green trees & lawns & big forests & birds singing away everywhere. It is not too hot, just nice & warm with a gentle breeze. I hope it keeps like this now!

Wednesday 6th 8 am. Here I am high up on a rocky rugged hill called Carlton Hill just outside Edinburgh. The view of the old town is beautiful. I have been through Edinburgh Castle already & it is very interesting

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with its battlements, towers, watchtowers, loopholes, cannon, dungeons etc. etc. It is a very fine old castle & is built on the top of a high precipitous rocky hill like this one & in its day was impregnable. It held out for 5 years once. Old Mons Meg the old Cannon Scott speaks about is in there & is a regular curiosity. The castle commands a fine view especially eastwards over the modern town, which is very fine from an architectural point of view. There are plenty of large monuments & squares & parks & other buildings, streets wide [Trossacs written in corner in different pencil unrelated to text] & well kept. Trams however very antiquated. Old cable system & eve at that a poor specimen of its type. When the Holyrood Palace opens at 10 am I am going through that. It is just on the outside of the town at the foot of this hill on the west side from here you can see the sea & on fine days the North Sea is visible they say. It is cloudy today. If possible tomorrow I will take a round trip into the Highlands a bit & round through Glasgow. The say it is a fine trip. I will make

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enquiries at the station. We left King's Cross last night at around 7:15 & arrived at Waverley Stn at 4:30 am. The other big stn here is Princes St Station. Princes St is the main street of Edinburgh. The old town dates back into 14-15 centuries & parts are very quaint & other parts grand. There are still lots of stone houses built after the style of small castles. Probably the residences of nobility. The Palace from the outside is something of the same style.

The new town is quite modern being only since the last two centuries. The first half of the journey up was by day & the country was beautiful. It was dark however by the time we got to York our first stop. We passed through Peterboro. After York we slept till about 3:30 am when it was light again. There is only 5-6 hours dark here now.

My chest isn't as right as it should be but doesn't worry me much. I have an idea though it will be a trouble when heavy work starts again if it does so before another month or so.

Country round about seems pretty hilly & wooded.

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It is now 6:30 pm. The Palace was very interesting full of old historical rooms connected with Mary Queen of Scots & Darnley etc, with all the tombs of the nobility. The rooms were all full of pictures of old well known Scottish chieftains & noblemen. I also visited the Museum & Art Gallery which were both very good & interesting. I took a drive in a char a banc round to the Forth Bridge & enjoyed the scenery. Immediately you get out of Edinburgh you are in the country almost. I also visited the Zoo but didn't think much of it.

Tomorrow I leave by the 9.7 am for Glasgow & am taking a trip up Loch Lomond & back. It ought to be O.K. I am thinking of stopping the night in Glasgow & seeing a bit of the town.

The weather here is not so good as down south. It is colder & cloudy but not so bad.

Altogether Edinburgh has impressed me very favorably. I like the Scotch people more than ever now.

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Thursday 6th June 1917 2:30 pm

Here I am sitting on a big rock right up at the head almost of Loch Lomond. It is a great pity that the day turned out wet. I haven't seen one-twentieth of the beauty & grandeur of the trip, but even with the weather as it is, the scenery is great & you can imagine how much better it would be in clear sunshine. Just below me is Rob Roy's cave. The banks are very steep & rocky & beautifully wooded, firs, pines, ferns etc. It took nearly 2 hrs in a fast paddle steamer & the trip was very good. I left Edinburgh at 9 am & arrived in Glasgow at 10:15. The trip was good. Changed at Glasgow & took another train to Dumbarton & then still another to Balloch getting there 12 noon where at the pier we got the steamer. We go back the same way the steamer leaving here at 5:15 pm. I have spent the 3 hrs walking through the Highlands. They are very grand & pretty. Something like the Blue Mountain scenery. We saw the big dam which forms a small lake which in

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turn is connected to Loch Katrine about 3 miles distant, to enlarge its capacity as it is the water supply of Glasgow & the finest in the world.

One can understand how the Scots get their character somewhat from viewing the country they live in. The trip back up the Loch (which is 90 miles long) was much better as the rain cleared off & things were brighter. The scenery was beautiful. The water was like a mirror with pretty little islands dotted here & there, with capes & headlands, little bays & arms running everywhere. It is supposed to be one of the finest pieces of scenery in the world & I quite believe it.

It is now 10:30 pm & I am in my room at the Grand Hotel Charing Cross Glasgow. Sounds good. I have a lovely room & bed all to myself for 3/6, including breakfast. It has been taken over as a club for overseas troops & is quite a swell place. I wish I was here for a month. I have already had

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a couple of long rides on the trams which are very fine, one of the best systems in the world & nearly as good as that in Sydney. I have seen Queen's Park which is now half converted into a huge vegetable garden. From the mound in the park centre you can get a grand view of the city. It is a fine place although it is more of an industrial centre than Edinburgh & not so much to see. The buildings are good streets wide & clean. Plenty of parks etc. I have viewed the Uni. & the Museum & the Art Gallery from the outside & they are very fine. Tomorrow I will see them inside also the Cathedral which is supposed to be good. I met a chap in the park who showed me round a bit & told me all about Glasgow. He was a very nice chap & we exchanged addresses. I am leaving by the 4 pm from Queen's St Station for Edinburgh tomorrow & will catch the 10:10 pm from there for London.

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Inspected the Cathedral, Museum, Art Gallery & University. They were all O.K. on about the same style as those of Sydney. On arriving in Edinburgh I took a run out about 10 miles to a village called Penicuik via Roslyn, where is the ancient Castle of Roslyn. It was a real nice run.

Tuesday 12 June 7 pm.

Here I am again at Golders Green. I have just come here from Saffron Walden where I have been for 3 days, leaving London for there, last Saturday at 1:30 pm & catching the 3:30 pm from there this afternoon. I had a simply grand time & it was just like home they were so good to me. They are a lovely family & I enjoyed myself immensely. If possible I will visit them again before leaving for France.

They have an exquisite garden which is mostly all attended by Mr Midgley himself helped by one man. It is beautifully laid out & flowers & trees & bushes trained

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into various shapes of birds & beasts, are all wonderfully. [sic] The married daughter Marjorie Braithwaite is staying there with her 3 children. They are the most charming children I have ever met. A little boy 4, a little girl a bit younger & a baby boy. We had quite a good time together & were good friends. I went for two motor drives around about the district combining pleasure with business. I saw various old historic towns & houses Dick Turpin's place etc & enjoyed them greatly. They seemed as pleased to have me there as I was to be there & I was very sorry when I had to come away. The country all around about is beautiful & so is the weather. I attended their Quaker meetings on Sunday & enjoyed them very much although they were a bit peculiar. The whole family are Quakers & good Christian people & it was nice to be in a Christian home once more.

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June 14th Thursday 7 pm.

Here I am about umpteen miles from nowhere in No. 3 Command Depot AIF Hurdcott, 12 miles from Salisbury & I am feeling very sorry for myself. It is a terrible change after the good times I have been having but I suppose I will get over it in a few days. It doesn't seem at all a bad place only very quiet. It consists of rows of nice huts with ever convenience possible for a military camp so things could be much worse. We only arrived this evening & have been allotted our huts & drawn blankets etc & tomorrow we are to interview the Doctor to see whether we are fit to start training again. This is only a light duty camp but still I feel very homesick & lonely & I guess I will be so for a few days but that will wear off. I don't think there is much leave granted from here worse luck.

Last night, after leaving Mrs Jennings in the morning & sending a parcel of view, my diary etc home & doing a few things, I visited Mrs Primmer's

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& stayed the night.

This morning I visited Madame Tussaud's waxworks. They are not nearly so good as they used to be & were only passable. I went back to Mrs Primmer's for dinner & met Bob Gee as arranged. He is to report to Perham Downs next Thursday. I said Goodbye & he came down to Waterloo Stn to see me off by the 1 pm train. I am a soldier once again & it is not pleasant coming back to it.

June 15th Friday. Today we were issued with all shortages in the way of clothing. We were also examined by the dentist (whom I have to see later to get a tooth filled) & afterwards the Doctor whose verdict will not be known till tomorrow. Some of us were also inoculated once again & I have been very sick ever since. I lost all my dinner & couldn't stop vomiting until long after tea. I have quietened down a bit now & feel much better thank goodness. Innoculation

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always did play up with me. My arm is terribly sore yet, but I ought to be pretty right tomorrow.

This camp is a sort of semi-convalescent camp & from here you have to be sent to a real training camp before going to France. So if I stop here a month or so my wrongs will be righted, but I doubt it very much. The Doc this morning wasn't in at all a good humour & besides I look too well & healthy to expect much sympathy worse luck.

Wednesday June 20th I am now settling down. I have had two shifts to new huts, attended parades (which consist of physical drill & route marches) etc etc. Last night I came off 24 hrs Guard, the first I had done in the AIF. By rights I shouldn't have done it, being an SB but I didn't like to make a fuss. Next time I will point it out though that I am a non-combatant. They are very strict & regimental here & I was very lucky in not making any mistakes or I would have been had up for it. I did a few guards

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in the Militia at home & have seen it done of course often, so I knew a little about it.

The Doctor marked us B1A3, which means France again soon. The Corporal said that it meant, one foot in England & one in France & the one here is on a banana skin.

Arm still stiff from inoculation. Chest still a bit sore & leg still a bit of trouble but nothing is bad enough to keep me here long now that they are sending them off so quick to make up for the heavy casualties in the A.I.F. lately.

Sunday was a good day. Had two good services. Padre is a good fellow but new to the game.

Had a debating society meeting last night. Subject was co-operation. Very good & lively debate. Majority were for it. Treated in industrial & agricultural aspects. Weather cooled off a bit with rain.

Tonight we had a visit from an American YMCA man & a Canadian Captain. We had a real

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jolly sing song in the YMCA hut & then a talk by Dr. Bill the American. My! He could talk & funny! He started off lightly & then got a bit serious & then deeper still & getting grander all the time ending up with an appeal to the me [sic] to talk, live & fight clean. It was a real men's talk & very forcible [sic]. Many had not heard the gospel preached in that form before & were interested. Everybody knew he was right in what he said & lots determined to live up to it signifying their decision by signing one of his pledge cards. He was great & evidently is having a great influence wherever he goes. He is touring round the camps on Salisbury Plains. If only our chaplains were more his way than lots of them are, things would be ever so much better. It gives a chap a lot of bucking-up to keep going to hear an address like that. It is now 9:30 & will be light till 11 pm.

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Saturday 23rd June 1917.

This afternoon I saw Link Primmer & we had a very pleasant afternoon talking. He is in the 16th Field Amb. now, which is in the new 6th Divn. I also saw Beechey one of our old friends in the 3rd Bn SB's. He is with the 61st Bn, also in the 6th Divn. They marched to here from Wareham, a 3 days march, arriving here yesterday. The 2 N divn is taking over there. The new division is composed practically all of old hands. Today I had my teeth fixed up at the army Dentists. I had two old stumps drawn & my jaw is very sore now in consequence. The other day I had a couple filled so now, thank goodness, my teeth are fixed up alright.

The weather lately has been cool & rainy again. They had a terrible "drought" here last week, so we need it badly so the natives say. I would like to see a real good stretch of real Australian weather.

I have had no mail

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now except for a stray one here & there for about 6 weeks. I don't know what can be the matter. It is no good at all!

Saturday 7th July 1917

Here I am at No 1 Command Depot at Perham Downs. I have been here just one week today.

The Wednesday before I left Hurdcott, I had seen the Doctor who had given me another week. Next day however, we had a visit from the A.D.M.S. who inspected everybody in the camp & a lot of us (about ½) were sent out, to make room for a big draft coming from Weymouth.

On Friday I was put into the Draft Company & Sat. morning we left. It took us all day to get here although it is only about 30 miles by rail. When we got here we were fixed up with a hut & blankets & had our numbers names rank etc etc taken about a dozen times as usual before we were finished.

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Next morning we saw the Doctor & Dentist once again & then we were settled. Here we have mess huts & permanent mess orderlies so that is better.

In this camp you are supposed to be fit for France in 3 weeks. You get one week drill, physical drill, etc. etc. one week of guards pickets & fatigues & one week active training, rifle & bayonet, wiring & bombing etc. after that you go into the draft ready to move off at any minute. This morning I with the others that came with me were transferred to the next camp (Medium Camp) leaving the "soft" camp behind, we have been having 7 hrs drill a day. One before brekker 3 each during the morning & afternoon.

Everybody was pretty soft at first & felt it pretty bad but we are feeling better now that the first week is gone. The next two are not so bad. We have 2 route marches

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a week to relieve the monotony & Sat & Sun afternoons off. There is a real good YMCA here with two first class men running it. I have found the Soldiers Christian Fellowship here & it is a real good idea. We have 3 meetings a week where we have discussions on a subject chosen previously. These meetings are very interesting & helpful. We also organise a Fellowship Tea on Sunday afternoon held in the YMCA hut everybody welcome & then we have the evening service afterwards.

There are two fair-sized towns within a mile or two of this camp so it is a bit better than Hurdcott in that respect.

I have had no mail yet. It is getting a bit too thick I reckon & can't think how it is.

Last Wednesday we were once more issued with packs & equipment etc. & so we are soldiers once more. It feels very funny to have a pack on one's back again.

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Funny & not too pleasant, but we will get used to that.

As a stretcher bearer I may be exempted from Guards etc. but it is not certain. It won't do me any harm anyway handling a rifle here so long as I can drop it when I get over to France.

With regard to the war things look a bit more promising for us, but you can't tell how long it may last yet. I predict however, it will end this autumn.

Monday 9th. Things seem to happen pretty sudden round here. Saturday we were transferred to this camp & this morning we were warned for draft. Finish leave I am afraid. We move up to the next camp (Hard Camp) on Wednesday. I don't suppose we will be there long before we are packed off to France. I expect to see the bogs again in a fortnight.

The weather is quite wintry, although it is supposed to be mid-summer. It is no bon!

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Monday 16th July 1917. My estimate last week that I would see the boys again in a fortnight wasn't far out for today here we are on the wharf at Southampton waiting for the boat to take us back to Le Havre. It may be a few days or a few weeks before we actually reach our battalions it all depends whether they want us or not. At present I hear they are pretty full strength so I suppose we will be some little time at Le Havre.

Last Saturday morning we were transferred to the Hard Camp & as a draft was going & wanted men, in the afternoon we were sent straight into the Draft Camp & on Sunday warned for the draft leaving this morning. Since last Saturday it has been one long nightmare of kit inspections, dental & medical

inspections & all the rest of the red-tape that the military seem to think necessary but which is the thing that is accountable for such things as the Mesopotamia & Gallipoli stunts.

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For a kit inspection we have to pack up full marching order, march out to the parade ground stand around for ½ hr waiting for the officer, then unpack all our things, lay them all out on our ground sheet in rows & very methodically everything dressed by the right even to such articles as boot laces, toothbrushes, piece of soap, little tube of iodine & first field dressing, knife, spoon & fork etc. all have to be exhibited & if absent you cannot be taken over by the receiving Company Clerk because your kit is not correct. Then every officer & NCO on parade almost, calls the roll & checks it until you are all absolutely sick of it all. Then you pack up & go back to your hut & have some other sort of inspection. We had 3 kit inspections in two days besides all the other sorts. It is absurd. I expect we will have a couple more yet too before we get to our unit, one on arriving at Le Havre & another when we leave.

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The only thing that made up for it all for me was the real good helpful services I was able to attend on the Sunday. Church Parade & the Communion Service before dinner then the Fellowship meeting in the YMCA in the afternoon with the Social Tea organised by the Association which was A1 followed by the long service at night, when we had the Secretary of the Australian YMCA's to talk to us & my word he was good!

It was my last [Sunday – crossed out] evening there & the best of many good ones, including the other two Sundays. I was sorry to leave on account of all the good friends I had made there but it can't be helped & no good worrying. I will never forget them though or any others of the good of the many good friends I have made in England, including the Midgleys & the Primmers & Mrs Jennings. I have had a most blessed & good time the last 10 weeks & have something to take back to France

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with me in the way of memories.

I am sitting on the wharf resting against my kit, soon to be a real soldier once more. It is only about 12:30 & the boat doesn't leave till tonight so unless they let us into the town, which is improbable, we have a weary wait before us. We arose at 5 am this morning, breakfast at 5:30, fill in at 6:15 & after the final inspections, roll calls etc. we left about 8:15 & caught the 9 am train from Tidworth about 1 mile away arriving here about 11 am. It is a 7 hrs journey in the boat to Le Havre.

Wednesday 18 July

Here I am at the Base Camp near Rouelles, a village about 6 miles from Havre & about 1 ½ miles from Harfleur. We had an uneventful voyage, although we were very cramped & slept anywhere we could find sitting room. Boat didn't leave till about 10 pm & arrived at Havre about 5 am

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& we disembarked at 7am. We had 24 hrs rations issued. Bully & biscuits our first re-introduction. 7 mile route march, not too bad into Camp, the Australian Divisional Base Depot where we will put in a few days training before joining a draft for the line. We go through the Bull Ring as it is called where we get instruction, training, bombing, bayonet fighting, wiring, skirmishing etc. It won't be much use to me except in the way of physical training, all of which I need for my job so I am carrying on. It is interesting too!

Today we had Gas, all about the respirators, gas attacks, warning signals etc. etc. & had a couple of actual miniature gas attacks to get us accustomed to getting our helmets on quickly. The instructors are good & make things interesting. The work is hard too which we need. We rise at 5:30 am

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brekker at 6:15 am, fall in at 7:30, & get rations for dinner (bully & bread), get inspected etc. & set off for the bull-ring about 2 ½ miles away, where we stop all day & have a late tea when we come back at 5 pm. The tucker is pretty good here which is one thing to help us along.

As soon as we got here they made us into "dinkum" soldiers in about 5 minutes. They have a good system here, no wasting time & fooling about. We got here about 11 & by dinner time we were divided out according to our battalions, put in tents, drawn our trench equipment got our two gas helmets tested in actual gas & fixed up generally. In the afternoon we had the usual dental & medical inspection & then got our blankets & were finished.

Trench gear is waterproof sheet, rifle & bayonet (pull through & breach cover complete), two gas helmets (PH, SBR), tin

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hat & a few odds & ends. When we leave we will also be issued with 150 round ammunition so what with the packs we came with we will have some load. As soon as I reach the battalion, I will hand in my rifle & bayonet & ammunition & will rejoin the SB's. Perhaps I won't have to carry the rifle from here if I speak about it.

There is a good YMCA here too as also with a Fellowship Association. So I won't lose these meetings for a few days yet. Last night "Gipsy Smith" the evangelist was here & gave a stirring address & many of the boys made the good decision. He may be back again on Sunday. I hope so.

Tonight there is a concert on but I can't get a look in as the hall is already crowded out even the window sills & doorways are full.

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Monday July 23rd 1917

Last Thursday & Friday we had Bombing, Bayonet fighting & Musketry, interspersed with physical drill. Pretty strenuous training but good & fairly interesting. Saturday was only a half day. I did washing etc. Sunday was good, with a sort of picnic held in a beautiful cool old beech forest by the Padre about 1 mile from the camp. We had competitions with prizes from the Aus. Comforts Fund with reading of poetry & various others stunts as the Padre calls them thought out by himself. It was just OK & we all enjoyed ourselves. We had one also Friday evening. There have been several good concerts at the YMCA lately too.

Today we had a route march in the morning & a bathing parade. This afternoon we were also paid. Pretty easy day but start work again at the bull-ring tomorrow.

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Sunday 29th July 1917. Rouen. Military Rest Sheds near station waiting for train to take us the next stage of our journey to the line where big things are imminent. Warned for draft at the 1st ADBD, Havre, on Saturday morning & after kit inspection etc, left at 6pm & marched 7 miles to Le Havre for train. Full pack up with ammunition rifle bayonet, rations shells weighing about 80 lbs. Did it alright though, rather to my surprise not being quite broken into such weights then. It is about twice what we brought with us from England.

Last week on the Bull Ring we had musketry on the range & a mimic night stunt in the trenches there with attacks, patrols, dummy ammunition & bombs etc flare lights, gas & smoke bombs etc etc, a regular fire work display all night, very realistic. Came in cattle trucks last night so didn't have a good night

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but had a sleep & wash, etc. here, this morning. Rouen is only about 40 miles from Le Havre both fair sized places haven't seen much of them though.

Getting quite used to being in France again now.

I guess there is something pretty hot waiting for us up the line. No use worrying though, or getting the wind up you. I am just taking things as they come. "The Lord is my Shepherd etc." Hope Eric is alright. I ought to just about get there on my 21st birthday (Aug 1st) which I had hoped to spend in Blightly.

Monday 30th Morning early. Passed a rotten night. Cold & cramped – no room in cattle trucks. Left Rouen about 5pm. Passed Amiens, Abbeyville & we are now at Etaples. Passed through Boulogne, Calais & then on to Hazebrouck. Detrained. Marched 3 miles to Div'I Reinforcement Camp reported set off for Battalion at Le Nieppe about 5 miles away, through Ebblinghem in the same district that we came to on first arriving in France last year.

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Very tired indeed when we arrived at Bn Hd Qrs, & then had to report to Coy Hd Qrs about another 2 miles dropped in half way at AMC & saw Eric. Great reception & got all the letters I had been waiting for, a great big bundle tres bon for soldats. Could hardly drag myself away but did so eventually. No blanket tonight. Slept pretty cold in billets.

Tuesday 31st Route march, full marching order this morning, drill this afternoon. Visited Eric again before dinner & will go after tea. He is camped about a mile away. I will be in the SBs again. Work pretty hard here but am used to that & will soon settle down.

Billets & tucker passable. Weather rainy! It is a terrible country I don't think it ever stops raining here.

The weather is miserable, although it is supposed to be mid-summer.

Aug. 4th Sat. 3 years today since war started. Had my

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21st birthday last Wednesday. No rumours of our next move yet.

Germans using a new gas which is very severe. Enough to put the wind up anyone. This no bon, but it has to be put up with. We will have to chance to luck, whether we strike it or not. He generally puts it over in artillery barrages so is independent of the wind etc.

Thursday 9th Here we are on the move again. We left Le Nieppe about 7am this morning & marched about 11-12 miles. We are now in a farm about 4 miles the other side of Hazebrouck from Le Nieppe & will continue our march tomorrow probably. Weather has cleared up considerably so that makes it better.

Last Sunday afternoon a few of us visited the aerodrome not far from our billets & had a very interesting time going around & seeing all the machinery & learning all we could about them. It was especially interesting for me as it was in my line.

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I am now out in the middle of a nice cool green paddock. The sun is shining brightly & altogether the day could not be much better. It was a pretty stiff march, but after a wash & rest & dinner we feel alright. Most of the chaps are wandering around the paddocks or lanes enjoying the rest. This is a decent sized house & nice people. Plenty of fruit trees, apple & pears, but unluckily, the fruit is not ripe enough yet for even soldiers to tackle. The usual big pigs & a few cows & horses are roaming around too. On the horizon are a line of 'sausages' or observation balloons showing where the line is, about 10 miles from here or perhaps a bit more. We don't know yet whether we are making for the trenches or whether it is just a few days stunt we are on but I expect we will know soon. It is possible we will stay here a couple

of days. If so it will be O.K. providing the weather keeps fine which seems a bit of an impossibility in this country. A week's fine weather is almost unheard of!

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Thursday August 16th Been having long route marches all this week. Pretty tough but good training generally about 8-9 miles in the morning & then gas drill etc in the afternoon. This morning we did 16 miles, full pack up too. Starting about 7:30am & arriving back about 2pm. Some march! Most of us did it alright. We are in the same district here as we were when we first came to France about 16 months ago. All the old places such as Strazele, Doulieu, Merville, La Motte Hazebrouck etc etc we pass. Yesterday afternoon I visited Hazebrouck but there is not much to see although it is a fair sized place. Lots of the shops are shut up now Fritz shells it occasionally now I think that a lot of the inhabitants "have the wind up them".

Weather fine with occasional showers. Some of our men are doing farming here now on account of shortage of French male labour. I think we will be here a few days yet.

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Sunday 19th Yesterday we had the 3rd anniversary of the inauguration of the 3rd Battn. We had a commemoration service in the morning with speeches by the Colonel & the Padre, & the rest of the day off. A special dinner was also provided which went down well. In the evening as if to end up the day well, Fritz treated us to a fine firework display in the shape of an air raid. It was exciting while it lasted, but we had no casualties luckily. We have had several of these lately. The weather continues fine.

Monday 20th We had a swimming parade in the River Lys this afternoon. If Fritz comes over again tonight in an air raid he will get a warm reception. All the Battns Machine Guns are rigged up as a lot of extra Anti Aircraft batteries have taken up positions round about.

They are starting football again now. We had a good match after parade this afternoon between B & D Companies. D won by 6 to 5 points.

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Wednesday 22nd Aug. Today we had a marchpast past Birdie. We went about 9-10 miles altogether. Very hot & muggy. Yesterday we Blanched all our equipment & polished all the brass-work until we looked like a new pin. We thought it was to be King Albert of Belgium & it was only Birdie again. It was a bit of a come-down.

Today I attended a court of enquiry as a witness to give evidence about a missing man Tasker who was with me the morning I was hit. There were a lot of others with me to tell what they knew about other chaps who are missing. Tasker is now a prisoner in Germany we have had a card from him.

Saturday 1st Sept. 1917. I had a bonzer mail from home yesterday. Written a good few letters lately. Had plenty of rain & long route marches lately but no air raids.

We are probably moving up the line in a few days now. Last night we had a stand-to about midnight & pack up full marching order ready to move straight

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up into the line. We were naturally excited as the guns were going like mad in the distance, but nothing came of it & we laid down to sleep, ready to move off if needed, but here we still are.

Rumours about us going to the East after this stunt. Hardly think there is anything in it. It is never safe to believe anything you here [sic] in the Army. Had a couple more marches past Army Commander (Gen. Plumer) & Brigadeer, Birdie etc. Weather getting colder. Looks like winter coming back worse luck!

Tuesday 4th Sept.

The advance party returned from the line yesterday so our move is postponed probably for about a week. The weather has cleared so there will be something doing up the line shortly in all probability. Last two days I have been to the dentists as I had an abscess forming in one of my front teeth, one that had been filled years ago & the nerve had died & gone septic. Not much trouble but will take some time to get better. It has been drilled & cleaned out & has to have antiseptic

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dressings every other day for some time now. Had more air raids the last couple of nights. Fritz must have something particular he wants, maybe an explosive dump or perhaps it is the railway. Few casualties so far luckily.

Yesterday & today have been just perfect. I hope it keeps like this.

Sunday Sept 9th

Moving Monday or Tuesday most likely.

Eric is in Paris on 4 days leave, having a lovely time I suppose. It is only a month since I came back so I couldn't go. I might be able to work it however, later – after the next stunt - there won't be so many to go then.

They reckon it is something pretty stiff we are up against this time

Weather still fine.

Thursday Sept 13th

Left Sec Bois this morning & marched 6 miles to Meteren, a nice big village with good billets & shops & a YMCA hut. Probably only stopping the night however, as we are on our way to the line. Reveille was at 5am Brekker at 5:30, Parade 7pm [sic]

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& we left at 8am after cleaning up all the billets etc.

Everywhere now you see the French people hop picking as it is the season. Potato crops are being dug & wheat is being harvested everywhere, all the work being done by women & children, old men & a few soldiers on leave. Some of our men have given them a hand!

The SB's still have their rifles but are getting rid of them now. Not too soon either. We are the only Battalion who is carrying them.

Eric came back yesterday & is quite entranced with Paris. He said he had a lovely time. I bet it is hard to come back.

We had a bonzer big Australian mail yesterday & had a great time reading them. Letters dated June 28th – July 8th. Wrote a couple in reply, but others will have to wait now till we get out of line as mail is closed!

I am leaving this behind when we go in as it would be of value to Fritz if he captured it.

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[written inside back cover of diary]

Hon. Sec. FAF

c/o the Royal Magazine

18 Henrietta St

London WC2

Miss J McLean

Wallsgrave 45 [illegible, crossed out]

High Beech

Essex [some sums written next to this]

1914	Tons	
Arkansas	26,00	12 in guns
1914-17		
Texas		
New York	27,00	12, 14 in guns
Nevada		
Oklahoma	27,500	12, 14 “ “
Pennsylvania		
Arizona	31,400	12, 14 in guns

On looking through his military record, here is what was returned to his family after the battle:

Horseshoe souvenir, pair pyjamas, housewife, 2 handkerchiefs, metal ring, 2 numerals, notebooks.

Per "Barunga" 20.6.18

In case 1099

<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/354796/34>

Buried in Hooge Crater Cemetery

Plot 2, Row B.R.

<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/354796/39>