



IN GREAT SPIRITS

**THE WW1 DIARY
OF ARCHIE BARWICK**

From Gallipoli to the Western Front and Home Again

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**IN
GREAT
SPIRITS**



“If this book gives anyone as much pleasure
reading it as I have had writing it,
well it will be time well spent on my part.”

IN GREAT SPIRITS

**THE WWI DIARY
OF ARCHIE BARWICK**

 HarperCollins *Publishers*

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Front cover image: Group portrait of three members of the 13th Brigade Light Trench Mortar. The Sergeant on the far left has a Military Medal and Bar and is possibly 2234 Sgt Charles Thompson MM. Held by the Australian War Memorial, donated by Mr Kerry Stokes on behalf of Australian Capital Equity Pty Ltd. From the Thuillier collection of glass plate negatives, taken by Louis and Antoinette Thuillier in Vignacourt, France, during the period 1916 to 1918 (AWM reference number P10550.038). Only a detail of the original photograph has been reproduced on the front cover. The soldiers in the portrait are unidentified at the time of going to print.

Back cover image: Four unidentified Australian soldiers of the Photographic Sub-Section of the Australian War Records Section, playing leapfrog in a snow-covered field. Note the soldier on the far right is armed with a snowball. Held by the Australian War Memorial (AWM reference number E04298).

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Contents

Publisher's Note	vii
Foreword	ix
Maps	xiv
Diary of A.A. Barwick	1
1914	3
1915	23
1916	77
1917	221
1918	295
1919	369
Afterword	373
Glossary	381

Publisher's Note

Archie Barwick's diary is contained in 16 individual notebooks, held by the State Library of New South Wales. He was a prolific writer, so in order to make the diary more easily accessible to the modern reader, we took the decision to edit it down from roughly 400,000 words to approximately 133,000 words. We also very lightly edited the diary where necessary to improve readability, all the while being mindful of the integrity of the writing and Archie's natural narrative rhythm. Even though some sentences might seem a little out of place, we haven't moved them elsewhere — it is a diary after all. We have also retained his preference to use the ampersand rather than “and”, “on to” rather than “onto”, among other things.

We very much hope you enjoy reading Archie's diary as much as we have enjoyed creating this book.

Foreword

by Peter Cochrane, historian

When war was declared in 1914, Archie Barwick was among the first Australians to enlist. He couldn't wait to get away. He worried he might be too short. When he was passed fit and able and sufficiently tall, he did two somersaults, thus confirming his readiness for battle. He was a country boy from Tasmania. He was 24 and as strong as an ox. He was fair-haired, blue-eyed, rubicund, single, Church of England and, yes, he was short. He was one of the "originals", No. 914, 1st Battalion, Australian Imperial Force.

Archibald Albert Barwick thrived on war. In war he was unstoppable. He grew in confidence from one battle to another, first at Gallipoli, then in France and Belgium. He was as cool as a cucumber and brave too, and proud of it. He had so many close calls he was certain someone was watching over him. God, maybe. The hard times were very hard but he relished the entire adventure. He even surprised himself for it was very soon clear that he could lead men in the most terrible of times on the front line. When men were falling apart around him, Archie stood firm. So they made him a Corporal; then they made him a Sergeant; they told him he was officer material and he was chuffed. "I seemed to be walking on air," he wrote. He was disciplined, tidy, polite, abstemious and moderate in all things save in the white heat of battle.

Archie was good with weapons and he was also good with words. He had limited schooling but he was a keen reader, a "bush scholar" and a lover of language, and doesn't it show in this

In Great Spirits

extraordinary diary. It shows in the homespun lucidity of his prose, in the dramatic power of his front line reportage, in his sense of his own part and the Australians' part in momentous events; in his love of travel, his appreciation of the great cities such as Paris and London and his bucolic eye for beauty, from the smallest thing — the flower petals he pressed into his prayer book — to the unspoilt French countryside which he took to be “almost a paradise”; and the gardens of England too, gardens that sent forth, as he put it, “a perfume & incense that defies my poor humble pen to describe”.

But that's the wonderful thing — for the most part Archie's “poor humble pen” was up to the task. He was an aesthete who wrote of leaves “golden & russet” and he was an Aussie bloke who wrote of C Company, his company, “strung out like a mob of fluke sheep”.

Still, keeping a daily diary did not come easily to Archie. He had to work at it and, typically, he did just that. Initially he couldn't settle to the routine but he was determined to hone his literary skills. His first two volumes come close to the immediacy of the moment but not quite. He wrote them on his way to France, his recollections of training and embarkation and Egypt and Gallipoli still fresh in his mind. Then he got into the swing of it, writing continually for the next three years, with breaks here and there, the writing routine punctuated only by sheer, unavoidable necessities like ceaseless battle or injury, or the needs of his men or a reunion with his soldier brothers Stan and Len, or those rare occasions when complete exhaustion overtook him.

The end result bears the hallmark of the true diary — raw and unpolished prose that is rich with the “diamonds” of more or less spontaneous, sometimes urgent jotting. Here is a diary that is intensely in the moment, all the more so in the trenches where death is everywhere. In one of these trenches Archie and his mates are literally sitting on the dead, for there was nowhere else to go and nowhere else to rest.

Foreword

Many diggers tried to keep a diary but few kept a diary as long and lyrical as Archie's serial volumes. Writing or fighting, his endurance was phenomenal. He turned himself into a dedicated diarist and it is not hard to see why. At the close of his first volume he wrote: "I hope all at home will find something of interest in it for them, for that is the reason why I wrote it." In the course of the war, Archie mailed home 14 volumes and the last two volumes came home in 1919 in his vest pocket. His diary was a record of his travels as well as his war. He was a pilgrim, a lover of life, a glass-just-about-full man, a man of keen aesthetic sensibility, relishing the chance to see the world and to share the experience with the folk at home. This is not simply a war diary; it is much more than that. It is the chronicle of a gifted soldier-tourist, a self-made storyteller.

Archie did not hold back. He wrote graphically about the horrors and the heroics of his front line existence, as in the Somme offensive in July 1916:

All day long the ground rocked & swayed backwards & forwards from the concussion ... [like] a well-built haystack ... swaying about ... Men were driven stark staring mad & more than one of them rushed out of the trench, over towards the Germans. Any amount of them could be seen crying & sobbing like children, their nerves completely gone ... We were nearly all in a state of silliness & half dazed but still the Australians refused to give ground.

His stamina enabled him to lead his men year after year, to dig in, to fight, to suffer as he did and transcend that suffering, and somehow to keep writing whether early in the morning or in the few spare minutes just before tea, or in his dugout in the midst of a bombardment or when he was on leave, delighting in the comforts of a clean, dry bed or the delicious tucker in a French estaminet.

In Great Spirits

“Here I am,” he wrote on 21 April 1917, “scribbling away as if my life depended on it.” Well, in a sense it did, for whether he was writing about the bloody business of war or the beauties of the countryside, the discipline of writing was therapeutic and I believe he knew it — writing helped to keep him steady and sane when others about him went to pieces. “I know I always pride myself on my nerves,” he wrote in April 1918 after an operation to remove shrapnel from his chest. He was sitting up in a hospital bed writing letters to “the boys” at the front and bringing his diary up to date. Scribble scribble scribble. Archie had become a seasoned scribbler. He was never idle.

Most importantly, Archie managed to balance the horrors of the war with the joys of sightseeing, which was a refuge and a consolation in hard times. Reading his diary, it sometimes seems as if the war was a monstrous intrusion into an otherwise delightful, all-expenses-paid tour abroad. What you notice is just how much he relished his surroundings — the people, the panoramas, the flora, the fauna, the crops, the livestock and so on. All the things that caught his eye and warmed his heart seemed to renew him, to ready him for the next battle.

The war did not stop Archie having the most wonderful holiday in France! Indeed, you might say France saved him, for at Gallipoli there was no beauty to compare but in France he found beauty and abundance everywhere. “Imagine us here bogging into the cherries ... I am never tired of praising France,” he wrote. Nor did he tire of praising the countryside in France and Belgium, for it seemed to hold him in a kind of rapture. Even the most exhausting route marches provided him with an opportunity to enjoy the glorious panoramas beyond the battlefields and, of course, to register the experience in his diary. His long, flowing paragraphs are the mark of his enthusiasm.

We constantly find him reaching for superlatives: “Truly a grand sight” and “Oh how I would like some of my people to see this country”. In many a soldier’s diary that’s all you get, but Archie

Foreword

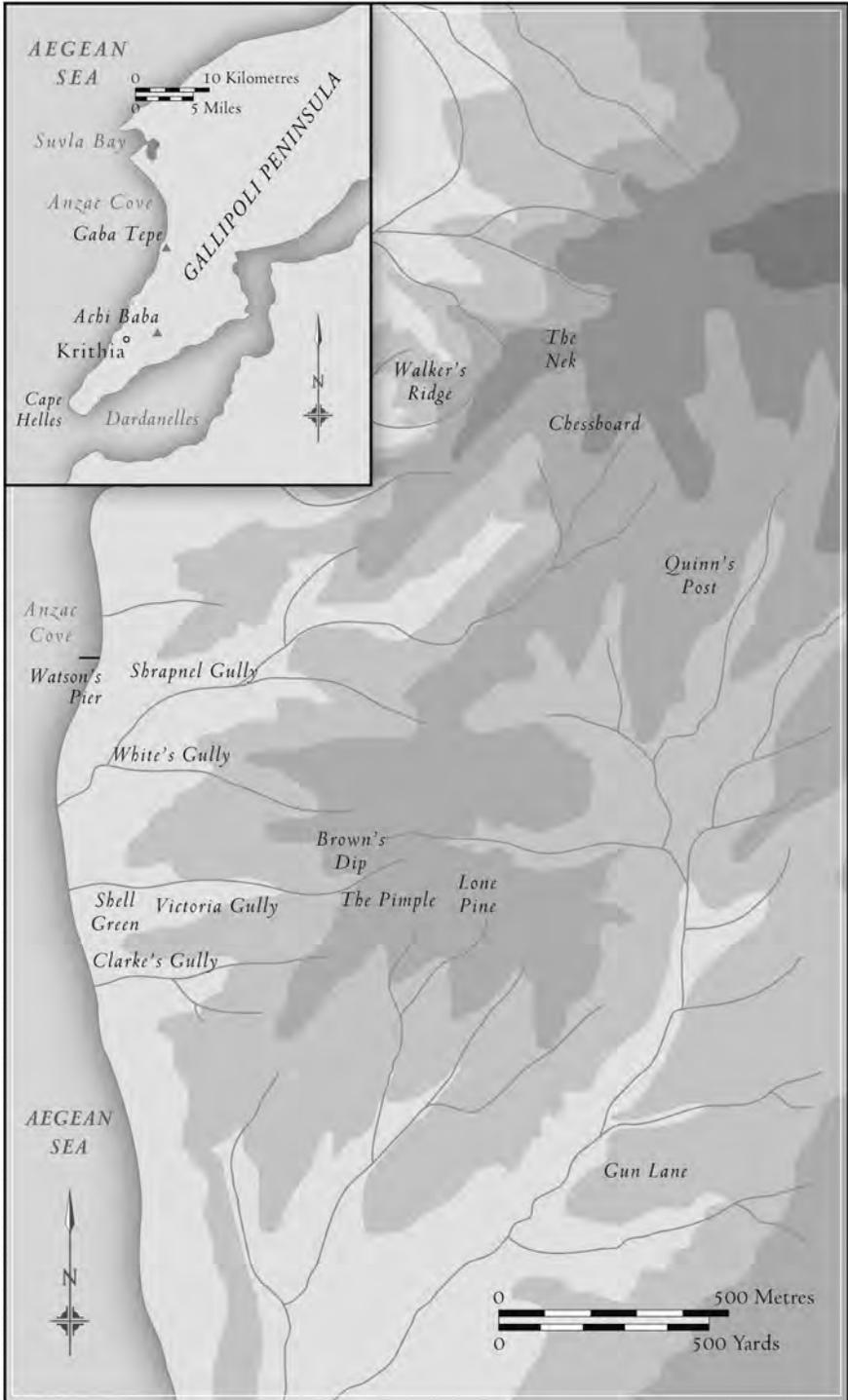
had the literary wherewithal to “paint” the scene for us and he does this in each and every one of his volumes. In Archie’s diary we encounter a tragic entwinement of splendour and devastation.

Archie wrote letters too and occasionally mailed off photographs, and it is clear the diary was part of a serial conversation with his mother, sister, aunties and others at home. He is thinking of them, almost talking to them, as he writes the entry for the day. “Just imagine us if you can,” he says. And “Oh I can tell you I am writing under difficulties.”

He wrote for himself and for his family and his words were ties across time and space, ties as strong as iron yet light as air. They were a means of survival and a mark of his dedication. They remind us of how love was magnified, exalted and enhanced by the perils of war, and of how much loved ones felt the heightened emotions of separation in such perilous times. The author in war, and his audience in waiting, lived in hope.

I have suggested this diary played no small part in seeing Archie safely through the war and delivering him home in good health and good spirits, so it is a joy to discover that he lived a long and fruitful life thereafter, for he deserved nothing less. Now, almost a century since he left these shores to fight, Archie’s diary will embark upon another journey and serve another valuable purpose. Having been kept safe for posterity in the climate-controlled “vaults” of the Mitchell Library, it is to travel once again, this time in published form to readers everywhere. Australians should know about Archie Barwick. He was a resourceful and resilient man, a brave and decent and chivalrous fellow, and his diary testifies to that. “Chivalrous,” I hear you say, “where does chivalry come in?” Well, there’s a sweetheart or two, or three, in this magnificent story and that’s where I’ll leave it ...

June 2013





Diary of No. 914

A.A. Barwick

C Company, 1st Battalion

1914

Training in Sydney, Australia

Travelling overseas

Training in Egypt

In this journal I am going to put forward to the best of my ability a few of my impressions & experiences since joining the Army.

Well I will start first of all from the time I left Surveyor's Creek in New England, New South Wales. How pleased I was, one fine Saturday morning, to find in the mail box a letter bearing the Government stamp addressed to me. I was almost afraid to open it for fear it might say that I was unsuitable for the Force, but I plucked up courage & opened it, & to my great joy & no less surprise, I was requested to report at once to Victoria Barracks in Sydney for medical inspection. I think I threw 2 or 3 somersaults.

When I finished reading the note, for we were all more or less crazy at that time, I was pretty sure I could pass the Dr as far as medical fitness went, for I had just been through a fairly stiff examination for the A.M.P., but I was not so sure about my height, so I took the precaution to write to Colonel Antill & ask him if my height (5 ft 4) would pass & the note I had just received was his answer.

On receipt of the note I straight away telephoned Mr Mitchell at Rutherglen, telling him of my decision & that I would be coming down on that night's train passenger. He said he would meet me at Danglemah, as he & Mrs Mitchell were going to Sydney.

So you see it was pretty short notice. I made a rapid pack up & said goodbye to as many of my friends as I could, & that night young

In Great Spirits

Golledge drove me to Walcha Road, where I caught the train & so away. At Danglemah Mr & Mrs Mitchell got in. We arrived in Sydney on a Sunday morning, & I went & took a room for the night.

The following morning found me making my way to Victoria Barracks & after some sparring about & a lot of questioning, I was taken into a room & given some papers to fill in. There were about 30 questions we had to answer on this paper, & by the time you had finished filling them in, what they did not know about you wasn't worth knowing, provided you spoke the truth.

After this was over we had to line up with our papers in hand & wait our turn to see the Colonel. The chaps all spoke of him as being an old tiger & so we were all more or less afraid when our turn came; however he must have been in a particularly good humour this morning, for when he had a look at my papers he only put a few short sharp questions to me, & marked my papers as accepted.

As we came out from this ordeal we were formed into different squads & marched off, some to Kensington & some to Randwick Racecourse. On arrival there we were formed up in 2 ranks, & Captain Jackson came along & picked so many men out for his Company (old H). I was among these, & that is how I came to be in the 1st Battalion.

After this was over, we had all our names taken again, & then we went down to dinner. I shall never forget that dinner as long as I live. Just imagine about 600 men all shouting & talking at the one time, & some of the language was pretty warm I can tell you. For dinner we had "what do you think" roast beef, no chance, for the tables were laid with big boiled potatoes with their skins on & great junks of bully beef. Ho, ho, I thought, so this is how things are carried on, eh well that's no good to me, so I & a few more does a get & goes into town for our dinner. That sort of tucker was going to take some getting used to, after the way I had been living.

There was not the slightest sign of any system when first I joined, for things were in a terrible state at that time, for the war had caught the authorities totally unprepared; however after a couple of weeks they began to get into their stride, & after a little time we settled down to it as well as could be expected.

That afternoon was the **24th August 1914** & from that date my military career started.

I went out to see Mr Mitchell at Croydon that afternoon & had a good yarn with him, & later on I went back to town & stopped at the People's Palace that night. I rose fairly early the next morning, & caught the Coogee tram, & went back to Randwick. I arrived there in time for roll call, & had a sort of breakfast, of tea, jam & bread. After this we fell in for drill. What a crowd we were. I suppose there were 9 out of 10 who had never formed fours in their life before, & I was one of them. It was funny to see us trying to get through the most simple movements, & getting completely boxed up. It was about 3 weeks before I mastered the form fours properly — I could never remember whether it was the odd or even numbers who had to move. We were enough to break any drill instructor's heart, & when some of them were spoken to they used to get quite shirty about it; however they knocked us into some sort of a shape by the time we left Randwick to go to Kensington.

The day we shifted we had our first route march with full kits up & water bottles empty. The march was about 8 miles — it seemed more like 20 by the time we finished. Everyone was glad to see that our tents were up as we marched in. That night we had a good square meal, & by this time we were beginning to get used to roughing it.

We all had our khaki & how proud we were to get it. Our Company was one of the first to get properly equipped, & we were not slow to remind the others of the fact, who I am sure were

In Great Spirits

quite jealous of us, for there was the keenest of rivalry between the different Companies & this holds good even now.

They worked us pretty hard, & we were fast coming on. We had plenty of route marches, & a fair bit of musketry, which we used to do at the Long Bay rifle range. (It was out at the Long Bay range that I first saw a machine gun in action, & I had my eyes opened.) By this time I was thoroughly enjoying the life for I had got to know a good few chaps, & was beginning to get into my stride & each day was a pleasure. We had good officers, at this time.

Our food was much improved here. A typical breakfast would be viz chops or steak, plenty of bread, butter & jam, whips of tea. For dinner we generally had a stew or roast with onions, cabbage, potatoes & etc. For tea at night they always turned out boiled potatoes, what for I don't know for no one used to eat them. We always had plenty of good tea or coffee, & stacks of bread, butter, jam & etc. It was shameful to see the bread that was wasted there, & the jam we had tons of it, good jam it was too, nearly all from Jones factory at Hobart. We used to have good times at Kenso, for most of the chaps had friends & relations, & they used to bring big hampers of all sorts of things, & of course the boys would share them round.

Not so very long before we left Kensington, Len [my brother] came down from Scone to see me, & while there he kidded me to have my photo taken in my equipment. I have regretted ever since that those photos ever reached home. If I could lay my hands on them, I don't think they would live long — a chap looks a perfect fool in them.

While training here, I first came in proper contact with drink, & my determination never to touch it was strengthened properly. I saw enough to convince me for the rest of my life of the evils arising from the curse. Lots of our chaps only lived for pay-day, & as soon as they got their money, off to town & straight to the pubs they would go. Next morning would find them with a big head, a

terrible thirst & empty pockets, & they would be humming for the rest of the week. It used to be funny some nights, when the chaps would be coming home late, & had to pass through the guard at the gate. The majority of the revellers would have bottles with them, & if the sentry was a thirsty soul, he would give the order "halt bottle pass soldier", & if they had a bottle with them they were right, & if they could not produce the needful, well into the guard tent he would go.

One night we had a terribly heavy thunderstorm, the rain fairly fell down, & in about an hour's time the whole of our camp was under water. Most of us lay in bed till the water started to carry us off, & then we were forced up. The drunks got a terrible ducking that night. One of them came into our tent with only his shirt on & an entrenching tool in his hand, & started to dig a gutter round the tent pole to let the water off, not bad was it. We got a proper soaking that night. All our clothes & equipment were carried away by the water, so a lot of us camped under & on the grand-stand, & needless to say we passed a most miserable night.

A fair sample of the day's work here would be reveille at 6 o'clock, physical exercise from half past 6 till 7, breakfast at 7.30, fall in at 8, we then would drill till 12, dinner at 12.30, parade again at 2.30 till 4.30, tea 5 o'clock, night march or something from 7 till 8.30 & sometimes as late as 9 o'clock, so you see they kept us going. They used to cull a certain number from each Company nearly every day so that kept us up to the scratch.

We used to have some bonzer route marches at times. One of the best was to La Perouse. We all enjoyed our march to there, & we camped on a lovely green patch of grass overlooking the ocean. We had our dinner there, & then we all went for a swim, & the water was bonzer.

We had several marches through the suburbs of Sydney, & the people used to turn out in thousands to see the boys marching.

In Great Spirits

During these marches we used to get plenty of chocolate, cigarettes, fruit & etc from the people in the street who were very good to us, but one fine day we had a big march through the streets of Sydney itself. I remember it well for it was a very hot day, & marching down the closely packed streets was worse than 100 in the shade. All along the route the streets were absolutely packed, & opposite St Mary's Cathedral they were about 100 deep — even trees were full. We went down as far as Hunter Street, then turned up George Street & from there back to camp at Kensington without a spell. I think they were afraid to let the men fall out, for fear they wouldn't turn up again in time for the march back. That was the most tiring march I have ever been on, & I have taken part in a few pretty solid ones.

After we had been in camp about a month we began to think we were fully trained & ready to have a cut at anything, & so the rumours began to fly about that we would be sailing any day. You can't beat a military camp for rumours — the little country townships haven't got a look in with the camps. Once these rumours got going, we had fresh ones every day, & some of them were very funny, but most of them seemed to come from the cooks or the pieman.

I saw the first aeroplane of my life here. It was a Frenchman flying over Randwick early in the morning. We were doing our physical drill at the time, & I can tell you there was not much notice taken while the aeroplane was in sight — we nearly screwed our necks off.

It took me some time to forget the life I had been leading previous to joining. I was always on the lookout for rain, grass, horses, birds, weather & suchlike things, instead of letting others do the thinking, for was I not in the military, where if they follow Imperial regulations they would try & make you a machine but they will never, never do that with Australians. We are not a bit

better disciplined today than we were 18 months ago, & I don't think, judging by what I have seen of well-disciplined troops, that we are any the worse for it. I think once a chap gets a liking for the country, he will never be able to shake it off. I know I am full up of the cities, & only long for the country life again.

We had a medical examination nearly every week. They were determined to find out all the weak ones before we sailed from Australia & I think they succeeded as far as that went.

We were ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to move at any time, but we did not place much reliance on it for we had had so many false alarms that we did not know how to take it.

The morning of the **18th October** broke dull & stormy, & as we formed up on the parade ground at 6.30 in readiness to march off it started to rain slowly, but we did not mind that for it seemed as if our wish was at last to be fulfilled, & that we were really going to move at last. The march through the streets was very quiet for they took us round the quiet way so as to avoid the people, but before we reached the wharfs a pretty big bunch of people had collected, & we had a job to get through them in places. They gave us all sorts of things as we passed them, & there were a few tearful scenes, but they got us away well.

As each Company passed through the barrier, they were checked & marched straight off to the ferry boat, & they lost no time in getting us over to the *A19 Afric*. By the time the last of the men were on board, the streets & Botanic Gardens were alive with people in spite of the rain, which was now falling fairly heavy, but they were too late, & there was many a chap on the boat who they would never see again, & who no doubt was taking a last look at old Sydney & wondering when he would see it again. I know I was one of those chaps & those were some of the thoughts that passed through my wooden head.

In Great Spirits

As soon as we got on the ship we were taken down to our troop decks, & our different portions allotted to us. Our Company was very fortunate for we had as good a place as any in the ship: we were on the first deck on the starboard side, just close to the poop. After all this was settled we were served with some hot soup & bread, & we then made for the deck to see what was going on in the harbour. The crowd of people had increased if anything, but the rain was still falling, but showed signs of clearing up.

After dinner was over we were paid, & our Book opened from that day. About 4 o'clock we lifted our anchor, & followed the *Suffolk* who had the 2nd Battalion on board. As we passed down the harbour we could hear the cheers floating across the water to us & all the boats in the harbour set their sirens going for all they were worth. We could see the people still waving as we disappeared round the Heads. Everyone was straining their eyes to get a last look at Sydney. The rigging was full of men, who waved to the last.

We got rid of the pilot at the Heads, & we could see the sea was pretty rough outside, & I for one did not like my chance for even then I was feeling a bit funny & I am sure I was turning yellowish. I had not long to wait for I was soon feeding the fishes with a vengeance, & I might add right here that I was not the only one at the game, oh no. I had plenty of mates in the same boat as myself. We were hanging on all over the place, & I am sure I did not care if the whole concern went to the bottom. Shows you how selfish a man is, don't it. My attack of seasickness did not last very long fortunately for the second day out I was feeling alright.

We skirted the coast most of the way down, & the afternoon of the second day at sea we ran into & through a group of very rocky & bare little islands just off Wilsons Promontory. There were a lot of birds round these islands & we sighted a whale blowing & also a full rigged sailing ship — she looked from a distance like a great white bird. That night we passed several passenger ships making

for Sydney; they looked capital with all their lights shining. We thought once that we were going to Hobart, but no such luck, & then again Melbourne was suggested, but we were all out of it for we passed them both.

The third day out I think most of us had been all over the ship, & knew our way about alright. The way our troop decks were arranged we used to eat & sleep in the same place. All along the side mess tables were built running crossways in the ship. These tables were numbered & each table had a number of men (36) detailed off for the trip & 2 permanent mess-orderlies who were exempt from all other duties while they were on the job. After breakfast everyone had to get up on deck for an hour to give the orderlies time to get things cleaned up down below for the ship's inspection, which was made every morning by the ship's captain, Dr & some of our officers. After this was over the ship was free for the rest of the day.

We slept in hammocks slung from hooks let into the ceiling. Each hammock was also numbered so as there would be no confusion, & each man had his own number. We were all supplied with 2 snow-white blankets each. We used to have some fun I can tell you of a night, rocking one another's hammocks. Some of the chaps used to get mad & often there would be a fight. Every morning as soon as reveille went we would all turn out or be pulled out, one or the other, & fold up our blankets inside the hammock. They would then be stowed inside a big bin at each end of the deck till about 8 o'clock, when the orderlies would put them on each man's hook, ready to be slung when you came down to turn in. At night time all our portholes were covered, & we were only allowed a certain amount of light, for at that time the *Emden* was knocking about & we had to be careful.

We reached Albany after a trip of 7 days. We lay in the harbour for a few days, & then we moved up to the pier to take water in. At the entrance to the harbour a strict watch was kept by our cruisers;

In Great Spirits

they were constantly on the move, backwards & forwards. We had a march through Albany & the whole town turned out to see us. That night a lot of our chaps borrowed the fireman's clothes, & went ashore. Not a bad little ruse was it. They caught some of them coming home in the early hours of the morning, drunk of course.

While we were at Albany the New Zealand ships came in, & very smart they looked, for they were all painted a grey colour, like the warships. We now had such a fleet in the harbour as Albany never saw before; the harbour seemed to be just a mass of big ships.

On the morning of the **1st November**, we lifted our anchors & the great fleet set sail. The Australian ships led the way & the N.Z.'s brought up the rear. We were escorted by 4 warships at this point: the big Japanese cruiser was in front, the *Melbourne* on the right flank & the *Sydney* was watching the other side, while the *Minotaur*, a British cruiser from the China squadron, brought up the rear. Our position in the line was well forward, & it was a fine sight to look back on the ships as they ploughed their way through the water. All the transports were in 3 lines & we were in the middle line, about fourth boat from the front.

All that day we watched the Australian coast fading away, till darkness shut it out, & when we got up in the morning we were out of sight of land, & nothing but the calm blue sea all round us like a sheet of shimmering glass. At last we felt we were fairly on the way to England, for when we sailed we were under the impression that we were bound for the Old Country, & great was our disappointment of learning later that we were going to Egypt to complete our training. We had a very quiet little run till we reached the Line, though of course we had plenty of fun & concerts & debates every night, while we had tugs of war, gloves, foils & etc. We saw plenty of flying fish on this run. They get well out of the water & look very pretty of an early morning with the sun shining on them as they dart through the air.

Early on the morning of the **9th November** we were all surprised to see the *Sydney* swing out from her line & come racing over towards us. She looked fine as she tore through the water, the white foam flying from her sharp-cut bows & the black smoke pouring from her funnels. We guessed something was up, & so we watched till she disappeared from sight. We heard nothing more till nearly 10 o'clock. I was down below at the time, & all of a sudden I heard a terrible noise on deck. I hopped up & there was a notice pinned on the wall to the effect that the *Sydney* had destroyed the *Emden*. The boys were delighted, seeing as how it was our boat that done the trick, & got in before the Japanese, & our China squadron who had been thirsting for her blood ever since war broke out.

Shortly after this came another wireless saying that she was after a collier, & when she had finished with her, she would return & transfer her wounded & prisoners to the *Omrah*, which was our Headquarters ship. We never saw the *Sydney* no more till she reached Colombo, for she went on to there after the scrap. I guess she lifted a good bit of trouble off the ships' captains, for there was always the danger of the *Emden* getting in unawares at night. After this we were allowed lights at night.

Our next bit of excitement was crossing the Line. We had a great big canvas bath fitted & filled with salt water, & some of the officers were dressed in all sorts of costumes. We had a Father Neptune (Capt Swanell — he was killed on the first day at Anzac at the head of his men in the charge) & then special constables, who had been duly initiated, that is ducked, & were told off by Father Neptune & his Court to arrest all & sundry they came across. These constables grabbed hold of anyone they could lay their hands on — it was no good of them protesting, in they had to go; the more you struggled, the worse it was for you. When they got them to the tank they shot them in, clothes & all on, & when you came up some of Neptune's slaves shoved you under again with a pole until you

In Great Spirits

were nearly drowned. When you went to get out, they were there to help you with hands all over grease & tar, which they took good care they rubbed all over you, besides scrubbing your teeth with grit & grease, & trying to shave you with a piece of hoop-iron. Oh we had some fun I can tell you.

Once you had been through Neptune's hands you were free to go & help the others drag them in, & sometimes we had to storm a position taken up by some of the chaps who objected to being ducked, under a perfect deluge of water, from buckets, dishes, hoses & etc. Water & wet towels were the only weapons that were legal & the deck was a mass of flying towels. If you showed your head round the corner you would be met by a volley of them & forced to retreat unless you had a strong following to back you up. It rained that day, but being in the tropics, we were almost sweating in spite of the water flying about (the majority had nothing but their trousers on). The game got a bit too hot for the captain so about 4 o'clock he stopped it.

The heat was very intense in the tropics — the pitch used to be nearly melting in the daytime. At night everyone slept on deck. I only slept down below till we reached Albany; after that I used to sling my hammock under one of our guns, & I can tell you I enjoyed the trip.

We had a daily newspaper printed on our boat called the *Kangaroo*. It used to cause a bit of fun.

Sailing across the Indian Ocean the weather was lovely, scarce a ripple on the water. The water here seems very full of phosphorus, & looking over at night time it used to look lovely. I have watched the water churning away from our sides for hours at a stretch.

Colombo, our next port of call, was reached on the **15th November**. The town looks very pretty from a distance, snuggled away among palm trees. This was our first sight of the East & very good it looked. Of course everyone was anxious to get ashore, but we had no luck. We left Colombo the next day & 7 days were

occupied in the run to Aden. We sailed fairly close under some bare & rocky cliffs. The water here looks very deep & is alive with sharks. The town itself looks a very miserable affair, as indeed it is, for it is one of the hottest places on earth, nothing but sand & rock to be seen. Looking back as the fleet came swinging in was a very fine sight, & one that I shall remember for some time.

Leaving Aden on the **26th November** we steered a course for Port Suez, which we reached after a passage of 5 days, some of it through the Red Sea. As you approach Port Suez, the sea gradually narrows until at last you would think you were going to rush the beach, for you can't see the canal. The thing that is most prominent here is some enormous tanks, stocking petroleum I think. While we were waiting here, a big fleet of Indian transports came in & very fine they looked with the setting sun behind them.

On the **2nd December** we went through the canal, & just at the entrance a fine French battleship was lying. As we passed her, the bugles sounded "attention", & every man sprang to it while our band played the "Marseillaise". Didn't the Frenchmen come tumbling up on the deck when they heard that tune, & they cheered us, & we returned the compliment.

By 4 o'clock that afternoon we had fairly entered the canal. You could throw a stone from the deck to either side. It seemed very funny such a small stream of water carrying enormous boats & the desert on either side stretching for hundreds of miles, & nothing but sand, sand, wherever you looked, with the exception of a few small clumps of date palms. We steamed about 6 miles an hour through the canal & every here & there we would pass some enormous French dredger. We went through a bright moonlight night, & I & a few others stopped up most of the night for it was a most beautiful scene.

Most of the way along the banks of the canal there were British & Indian troops entrenched ready for the Turkish attack. They were dug in on the Arabian side.

In Great Spirits

We reached Port Said just as day was breaking, but early as the hour was, the native population was astir. Port Said (one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world) seemed alive with shipping; most of it I suppose was waiting for their turn to enter the canal. Half the population of this town must surely live in little boats for there were thousands of them there, & they swarmed all round our boats, selling all sorts of things. I saw my first hydroplane here: she flew all over the harbour & town, & settled on the water as easily as a duck.

Leaving Port Said on the **5th December** we passed the fine statue of de Lesseps, the great French engineer who was responsible for the Suez Canal. It stands at the western entrance, & he is looking out over the sea. We were now in the Mediterranean & it was fairly rough. We passed several little torpedo boats, & they were being tossed about like corks.

The next morning found us skirting the Egyptian coast & with Alexandria in sight. They have an immense breakwater here & Alexandria looks to lie almost level with the sea. There were a fine lot of captured German ships all tied up to the wharfs. That must make the German people mad to see that, a sure sign of Britain's power on the water. The day we arrived the Sultan of Egypt cleared out to Turkey. We buried our first patient here. We were lucky — some of the boats had as many as half a dozen deaths during the voyage. We lay in the harbour 3 days before we disembarked. We were not sorry to get off the ship either for we had been 51 days on the water.

We left Alexandria for Cairo on the **9th December**. We were marched straight into the train & away we went. The trip to Cairo was most interesting. We followed the Nile for a fair distance, & as far as the eye could reach on either side of the line was nothing but lovely green fields & groves of palm trees, with canals running everywhere. We crossed 2 or 3 very fine bridges between Alexandria & Cairo. They have peculiar sorts of houses, built of mud, & the

fowls roost on top, & from what I could see the camels & buffaloes & people all doss in together. There are miles upon miles of gum trees planted along the line & they look well, even though they are in a foreign land.

We arrived in Cairo about midnight & on getting off the train, we were served with cocoa, cheese & a roll. It was very acceptable I can tell you. After this was finished we were all "fallen in" & marched down to the trams where they were waiting for us. Some of the boys done a get & never turned up for about 7 days. In a few minutes we were in & off, down a long street lined on either side by trees. We went about half a mile, & we came to a branch of the Nile, with a nice little bridge over it. By this time we were approaching Giza, which is about halfway between Cairo & the pyramids, & everyone was beginning to crane their necks to get a view of the pyramids. At last we spotted them, & very fine they looked in the moonlight with a light fog hanging round them. The Nile was in flood at this time, & all the flats were under water, which made the country look like a big lake.

We arrived at Mena about 1.30 A.M. & had to march about half a mile to our Battalion's piece of the camp. There were only a few tents up when we reached there, dog tired, & so we threw ourselves down on the sand. We had no blankets or nothing to sleep in but our overcoats & oil sheets, & if ever I nearly perished well it was that night. We got a shock, I can tell you; we all thought Egypt would be a hot & warm place at night but we were never so sucked in in our lives. I do believe that once or twice during that never-to-be-forgotten night that I was frozen absolutely stiff. Wagga & I slept alongside one another, & he used to swear that he was as stiff as a poker more than once, & everyone had the same experience. One poor devil died through it & that was our Sergeant, Meadmore. He went to hospital the next day, & died with pneumonia about a week later.