

# The Journals of Dan Fewster



*A First World War British  
Army  
Battery Sergeant's  
account of his experiences in  
German  
East Africa and France*

## CHAPTER ONE

# Early Days

*Preliminary training – Promotion to bombardier -- Outbreak of Scarlet Fever -- Promotion to sergeant – A fall from a horse – Recovery at Woolwich – Home leave – Christmas in the Army.*

### September 12<sup>th</sup>. 1914

I enlisted in the First Hull Heavy Battery RGA. Owing to the great rush of recruits, the government was at the outset unable to find us either clothing or barrack room, so we were billeted at home for a time and wore our civilian clothing. We commenced our preliminary training at East Hull Rifle Barracks. I was promoted Bombardier in November. In the meantime we had received our clothing. The Hedon Race Course was being prepared for us to train on, huts having been erected and stable accommodation fixed up at Bond's Farm, Salt End.

[Note: Dan was 40 years of age at this point.]

### December 29<sup>th</sup>. 1914

The whole battery took up its quarters on the race course. It was by no means an ideal place, as events proved, but we were able to get the training required, and for many months we had the daily grind. We had been supplied with four 4.7 guns and a full establishment of horses. I was also promoted corporal, dating back to December 29<sup>th</sup>. During the summer, we were attached to the 11<sup>th</sup>. Division and after being inspected by the GOC of the Division we were ordered for service overseas, our destination being the Dardanelles. Our Regimental title now became the 11<sup>th</sup>. (Hull) Heavy Battery. Whilst in the midst of mobilisation we had a rather severe outbreak of scarlet fever which placed half the battery in quarantine. This was a big blow to us. We were replaced in the 11<sup>th</sup>. Division by (I believe) the 99<sup>th</sup>. Heavies. Our chaps grumbled because they were firmly convinced that the war would be over before we could get out. After all, I think it

was a fortunate thing for our battery, because the battery that replaced us had a terrible time in the Dardanelles, being absolutely smashed up the first time in action. Nevertheless, we got fairly fed up. The year was drawing to a close before the fever was thoroughly stamped out. I believe the drainage system was blamed for the outbreak. I was fortunate to escape any attack, but was twice put into quarantine through being in huts where there was an outbreak.

### September 15<sup>th</sup>. 1915

I was promoted Sergeant and took over C. Sub-section. I was very pleased. I had some fine gunners and, I believe, the very best drivers in the battery. My team was a team of all blacks, in splendid condition, and was a picture when the battery was horsed.

### October 1915

We were sent to Charlton Park, Woolwich to be armed with 60 pdr. guns. This gun was quite the best gun in the field at this time. Indeed, it kept its reputation to the end of the war. It was very mobile, with a splendid range and its accuracy in shooting was never excelled.

The night before leaving Hedon, I took a convoy of wagons to the station in Hull. The night was damp, with a drizzling rain falling, and the wooden road setts were very greasy. On returning, my mare went down sideways in Alfred Gelder Street. I was able to get clear, but I damaged my right knee. The next day we handed our guns over to the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Battery which had come to Hedon, took all our horses and equipment with us and entrained at Paragon Station for Woolwich.

[Note: See elsewhere the brief references to Fred Hopkin, his future son-in law, who had enlisted in the 2nd Hull Heavy Battery. There are frequent references to him in the letters to his daughter Violet.]

We arrived at Charlton Park at 2.00am. My knee had troubled me a lot and I had to report sick at 9.00am. It appears that I had synovitis of the knee, so was sent to the Royal Herbert Hospital in Woolwich, where I spent the next five weeks, the greater part of it I was on my back. This was my first hospital experience, but unfortunately, it was not my last.

#### December 5<sup>th</sup>. 1915

I reported to my battery, discharged from hospital. There were a great number of heavy batteries here, one of which we were destined to meet many times during the next two years, viz: the Cornwall Battery, a Territorial battery from that county.

#### December 14<sup>th</sup>. 1915

I leave Woolwich on four days leave for home, where I arrive at 1.50am. on December 15<sup>th</sup>. This is my first leave since enlisting, so I don't think I have worried the authorities much up to now.

#### December 19<sup>th</sup>. 1915

I report back to my battery. We have the usual training stunts, etc.

#### December 25<sup>th</sup>. 1915

Christmas Day is always the day of the year in the army. From the OC down to the latest 'rookie', the same spirit prevails. A good time for everyone. The usual discipline is relaxed for that day. The best of food is foraged for. Beer is allowed on the men's dinner tables. So long as one can muster enough men for stables, water and feed, guards, etc., no-one worries. Dinner is an imposing affair. Roast beef or pork (and plenty of it for this day), cabbage, potatoes, plum pudding and beer. The rooms are decorated with mottoes and maxims and festooned with gorgeous coloured tissue paper. White table-cloths are dug up from somewhere. When dinner is up, the Orderly Sergeant reports to the Orderly Officer, the Orderly Officer to the OC. Then the procession starts, headed by the Sergeant Major. Then follow the OC, Orderly Officer, Orderly Sergeant, QM Sergeant and other officers who are not on leave. Each room or hut is visited for 'complaints', the officers and men wishing each other all the compliments of the Season. Of course, the OC has to have a glass in each room. I don't know how he would fare if he happened to be a teetotaler. I expect he would go on leave and let someone else carry out the programme. After the round of the rooms, a visit is paid to the Sergeants' Mess, where a tot of whisky is supped to each other's health, then we, (the Sergeants, etc.) get on with our dinner. Taking all things into consideration, Christmas Day in the Army is a day to be remembered.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Voyage to German East Africa

*Volunteering for German East Africa – A call at the Cape  
Verde Islands – Hospitality in Durban*

January 1916

**D**uring the first week in this month we are asked to volunteer for service in German East Africa, which every man does. The Battery is to be made into a brigade of two batteries with ammunition column. Our horses are to be handed in and replaced by mechanical transport. We are to be armed with 5 inch howitzers which are very little better than trench mortars. The howitzers have an extreme range of only 6,000 yards with a forty pound shell. Nevertheless, it proved a useful little gun although it was classed as heavy artillery.

January 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We handed over our horses to the Remount Depot, Charlton Park. There are many long faces among our drivers tonight, these chaps having grown to love their horses, and I may say, always looked after the comfort of the horses before they troubled about themselves. This, of course, is only as it should be.

January 18<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Charlton today and proceed to Denham, a village two or three miles outside of Uxbridge, a small town in Middlesex. I don't expect we shall be here long. We ought to get our new equipment and mobilise in three weeks.

January 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am detailed in a party consisting of one officer, two sergeants and 30 men to proceed to Fort Fareham and take over from a Territorial Brigade, our new guns. After arriving at Fareham, we had to find billets for our men. We did not get them

all fixed up until 11.00pm. It had been raining all the night, so we were fed up by the time we turned in.

January 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We take over the eight guns and stores today and make all ready for them being entrained for Uxbridge.

January 21<sup>st</sup>. 1916

We arrive back at Denham, where we find that our tropical clothing has arrived.

January 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

Our guns have arrived at Uxbridge, so we take our four wheel drives to bring them into camp. It is Sunday morning and we create a little curiosity among the churchgoers by dashing through the main street at about 15 miles per hour.

January 25<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I leave Denham tonight for 48 hours embarkation leave. This was the official length of leave for troops previous to proceeding overseas. Our CO was very decent though and managed it so that we had 48 hours at home, clear of travelling. Even so, I don't think the time long enough for what may be one's last visit to his loved ones.

January 28<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I arrive back at Denham. Everything now is being rushed forward in feverish haste. We don't know the date of our leaving, but it may be any time in the next few days.

February 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

Although we have already been inoculated twice for typhoid, they find there is a

better injection for tropical climates, so today we have the first injection of the second series.

#### February 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have received marching orders, so leave Denham tonight. We don't know the port of embarkation, but it is whispered that it is Devonport.

#### February 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916

In the early hours we arrive at Exeter, where the mayoress personally supplied us with hot coffee and buns, a gift which was most appreciated by all. We arrived at the quayside at Devonport at 8.00pm. We had our guns, stores and equipment to off load and get them on board.

The ship we are to sail in is a captured German ship named 'Derflinger', 10,000 tons. She is now named the 'Huntsgreen'. Her several decks give her a top-heavy appearance. Altogether she gives me the impression that she will roll 'some', when we are in the Bay [of Biscay]. We are all aboard by the late afternoon and have our first meal of the day: hard tack, more commonly known as biscuits and some liquid refreshment that the ship's cooks called tea. It looked like mud, smelled like cabbage water, while the taste, I have never been able to fix yet.

All troops were on board by dark and the ship was moved into the lock pit. I have been fortunate enough to secure a bunk in a cabin to hold four. This was a stroke of good luck, because I see the bags of sergeants of other units laid out on the decks, tables, etc.

#### February 8<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Devonport this morning, and see dear old Blighty disappear in the mist. At a time like this, one's thoughts fly to a lot of places and to a lot of persons. I am filled with mixed feelings: pleasure at the thought of doing a bit for one's home and country, sorrow at leaving those we love. I shall not attempt at a description of my thoughts and feelings. I should make a

hopeless hash of the whole affair. We are picked up and escorted by two destroyers. I don't envy the crews of these boats. We seemed to roll and pitch a lot, but when you see these boats in a rather rough sea, it makes your stomach turn.

I saw the light of Ushant tonight, supposed to be one of the most powerful in the world. After this, I turn in, and for the next 36 hours I had no further interest in what was happening.

#### February 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am about again today, but my stomach is not too reliable yet.

#### February 12<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We passed Madeira today, but not close enough to see any features of the island. It looked like a huge rock and that is all I know about it. We are now well away from the rough seas of the Bay of Biscay. The sea is one long swell, so the motion of the boat is much easier. Whilst we were crossing the Bay we had rather a rough passage, the boat pitching and rolling at the same time. The result was that very few of the troops were able to keep on their feet. The climate is very nice now, the sun having considerable power. The destroyers had left us after convoying us through the Channel, so we are on our own.

#### February 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are again inoculated for typhoid.

#### February 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Arrived at Port St. Vincent, one of the Cape Verde Islands, for coal and water. It has a beautiful natural harbour, and I found everything most interesting. These islands belong to Portugal, who at this time was a Neutral Power. In the harbour were ten interned German merchant boats. As soon as we entered harbour, and before we reached our anchorage, we had a couple of native boats bearing us company, with divers who were offering to dive for coins but the 'simple native' knows the value of money and only

offered to dive for silver. Of course, they were soon busy and one had to admit their great cleverness. Their skill was such that they very seldom lost a coin, no matter where it was thrown. The water is very clear and one could watch the coins zig-zagging through the water while the diver swam down till he got below it, then he cupped his hands and allowed the coin to drop into them. If the swimmer missed first time, down he would continue and repeat the manoeuvre. The underwater endurance of these chaps was very remarkable. By the time our anchors had dropped we had a swarm of these boats around us, and the value of the coins had fallen from silver to copper. There were also a great number off 'bum boats' laden with the most delicious of tropical fruits. They did a great trade too, notwithstanding the heavy price they charged. Curios, cigarettes and tobacco could also be bought, but whatever the native is ignorant of, he knows how to charge.

#### February 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The coal lighters have been brought alongside during the night, and the natives start filling up the coal bunkers. It is pretty heavy work. No steam, the bags being hauled up by hand. The niggers can work when they have someone to make them. Only the officers have shore leave, so we have to content ourselves by watching the town through our binoculars, and dodging the coal dust, which is no easy matter. The sun is now extremely hot and we almost wish we could copy the natives by going about in our birthday costumes.

#### February 17<sup>th</sup>. 1916

A concert was arranged for tonight, which proved a great success. We had a number of good singers aboard and we were assisted by the wife of the English Consul, (a Scotswoman) who had a splendid voice. She sang a number of songs to us and fairly reached our hearts by her rendering of 'Our Ain Folk'. We finished up by vigorously singing 'Rule Britannia' and 'God Save The King', in such a manner

that I believe we put the wind up the Huns on their ships.

#### February 18<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have now got our coal and have to go to another island, San Antony for our water, which is only a short distance away. The hose pipes are laid from the island to our tanks, and we start getting the water in a very short time. As I have remarked, the sea water is very clear and one can see to a great depth. The species of fish are quite different to those we pull out of our home waters. Some are grotesque, whilst others are extremely gorgeous in their colouring. I don't know the names of any of them. The natives seem to relish eating them, but I should not care to risk it.

#### February 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We continue on our voyage today and are very pleased to do so. The sun is very hot and while we have been in these harbours we have not been able to get the least breeze. When the ship is travelling, one is always able to find a breeze somewhere.

#### February 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

Today, I have my first cholera inoculation with another one to follow. I am beginning to wonder if there will be an end to these things. I shall soon have as many punctures in me as there are holes in the lid of a pepper pot.

We are now in the midst of the flying fish, and it is an interesting sight to see them skimming the waves like miniature aeroplanes. They are often chased by other fish. When this happens, you may see thousands of them leap out of the water at once. The other day we saw two water spouts. They were a few miles away from us, but very distinct to see, great columns of water whose heads were lost in the clouds.

#### February 29<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have our second cholera inoculation today.

#### March 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

Today our ship rounds the Cape of Good Hope and I get my first view of the Table Mountain. Of Cape Town itself, we can see nothing.

We are now longing for the chance of having a good meal. The way we have been fed on this ship is simply wicked. The only article of food that does not turn one's stomach is the bread and that is made by an ASC Company of bakers that is going out with us. Our breakfast consists of a plate of mess called porridge which no-one can eat, bread with some vile mixture of grease to take the place of butter, and for a drink, some concoction of liquid which looked like muddy water with an awful smell, the taste of which I have not been able to fix yet. Dinner consisted of bully beef, potatoes boiled without being washed, and whilst we are in the tropics, half a pint of lime juice. Only those who have experienced eating bully beef day after day whilst in tropical or semi tropical regions can conceive how disgusting it was to try and eat a little. Our last meal, tea, was bread and jam and the so-called tea, which was worse than breakfast time, because the water had been boiled in the coppers which had boiled the potatoes at dinner time, and for some reason or other the said coppers were never washed out. Quite a number of our chaps would go down into the stoke hold and help the firemen for two or three hours a night so that they could share the fireman's supper. When a chap does that, he is hungry. Every dinner-time, when the Orderly Officer 'went round dinners', complaints used to be made, but we never had any improvement. I have always flattered myself that I could live on anything but this ship has given me a rude awakening. Oh! how I long for a good cup of tea! -- and some sweet butter with my bread.

#### March 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We expect to reach Durban tomorrow morning for water and coal. The OC of troops wishes to make a good impression upon the inhabitants. For some reason or

another, I am asked to take charge of the guard, although I had a guard a few days ago. If I would do so I could have my choice of junior NCOs to assist. I am agreeable, and select Corpl. Danby and Bomb. Berry. Our usual guard consists of one Officer, two NCOs and 51 men for 17 posts on the ship, but now the OC (Sir John Willoughby of the Jameson Raid fame) desired eight posts on the quayside. This made a grand total of two Officers, three NCOs and 75 men, quite the strongest guard I have seen. My unit was not the unit for duty, so I was at a bit of a loss by not knowing the men who formed the guard. But when the tour of duty was finished, I had the satisfaction in knowing that all passed off satisfactorily.

#### March 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

This morning finds us outside the harbour at Durban, waiting for the pilot coming out to take us in. A little after breakfast time finds us laid at the quayside waiting for our coal and water. The harbour is a most picturesque place. At the entrance the ship passes a breakwater in the course of construction, being made by convict labour. This is not a very enviable job, the water continually breaking over, and all the workers being drenched. I expect this work has been on for many years already, and I should imagine it will continue for a good few years yet. Durban itself looks a fine place and I hope we shall be allowed ashore for a time. On the quayside there are several rickshaw boys and their vehicles waiting for any passengers. They look very fierce chaps and I expect they are Zulus by their physique and appearance. They have a great pair of horns fixed on their heads and designs drawn in red and white on their legs, arms and bodies, which give them a terrifying appearance to those who are not used to seeing them. By dinner the 'boys' are hard at work, coaling. The appliances here are more modern than we had at St. Vincent, and the boys are kept working at top pressure. It is rather interesting to watch them work. As soon as they grow weary and their efforts begin to slacken, they

start to chant a weird tune which bucks them up wonderfully.

During the afternoon the ship was besieged by visitors. Of course, no one was allowed on board but they were sending up cigarettes and fruit till long after dark, which was very acceptable for those who were fortunate enough to get them.

I was waiting to be relieved when I received a message from my OC desiring my presence at the office. Whilst going there, I am wondering what has happened but I am pleased and relieved when he informs me that he has been able to get me a shore pass until midnight. Needless to say, I am not long (after the new guard takes over) before I am ashore, not even waiting to get my tea before leaving the ship. Now I will have a homely tea. I catch a car and board it. I don't know where to go, but decide to ask to be dropped off at the Post Office, which I presume will be near the centre of the town. I offer the conductor my fare but am met with the words "Soldiers free". Eventually I arrive at the Post Office and I am impressed by the magnificence of the buildings. The Town Hall is a beautiful edifice but I really have not much time to spare for beauty. I want some good tea, bread and butter.

While I am looking about for a café, I am button-holed by a gentleman. During our conversation I tell him that I am looking for a square meal. He takes me to a first class restaurant where I have a tip-top tea of bread and butter and two or three cups of the most delicious tea I have ever tasted. I was taken rather aback when he insisted on paying the bill. Knowing that I had no particular place to go to, he suggested that I should go with him to the theatre. This was kindness itself but I had to invent an excuse to get away. I could not stop with one who would not allow me to pay for anything. I wander around until I find myself near the Town Hall about 10 o'clock. I have still two hours to go so I

decide to have another good meal, I then go back to the ship in style, that is, in a rickshaw. I am picked up by another gentleman and I have a fine supper of cold chicken and ham, washed down by excellent coffee. While I am enjoying this meal, I am wondering what the poor devils on the ship would think if they could have had the same. My 'new friend' would pay and when I suggested paying half, I was told not to mention money at all or he would be offended. What was a chap to do? Some men I know would have had a royal time at very little expense if they could have got ashore.

At last I got in a rickshaw and go back to the ship. The stamina of these men is wonderful. They will take two passengers anywhere about the town, and at any time of the day. Their speed is a little faster than our horse cabs. They are always on the run and you never find one walking with passengers. You have to remember that during the day, the glass stands at anything above 90 degrees in the shade to realise that this work is remarkable. I arrive back at the ship in good time. The niggers are still at work and chanting their weird song. My pass is closely examined and I give the countersign correctly so I get to my bunk OK. Thus ends a day I shall always remember, if only for the fact that I had two good meals after almost learning to live without eating.

#### March 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Today, all troops have a route march to one of the Durban parks, where we are to be addressed by the Mayor and other local gentry. We are paraded on our respective parade decks at 6.30am., then marched shore to a parade ground near the quayside. We are dressed in new khaki drill uniform, slacks, puttees, tunics, belts, bandoliers, rifles, etc. We march away at 9.15am. after standing about two hours and three quarters under a sun that was already very hot, while we were very thirsty. We march along the harbour side, which looked very pretty with its avenue of palm trees, etc. We arrive at the park,



where we are formed up, and wait for another hour or so. This is typical of Army routine for any ceremonial parades. Waiting about for an hour or so here, an hour or so somewhere else, but more consideration should be given, especially under a burning sun. We are marched to tables, where the ladies of Durban supply us with ale and cakes. Ale! It was truly the nectar of the gods this morning. I had two glasses and could have drunk more, but I had not the nerve of Oliver Twist to ask for more. After we had been addressed by the Mayor and others, we were marched back to the ship. The sun had now got extremely hot and the rays seemed to pierce one's backbone like knives. We had quite a number of men go down with it while we had been standing in the park. We were marched back by another route, which took us the full length of West Street, Durban's main thoroughfare. We met with a great reception, being literally showered with flowers, fruit and cigarettes. We arrive back to the ship in the early afternoon, most of us being more or less 'done up', and suffering very much from thirst.

#### March 8<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Durban tonight. There are thousands on the quayside to bid us farewell. As we steam gently away, the whole crowd follow us down to the Point. It is a wonder to me that none of them gets pushed overboard.

When we get over the bar and look at Durban, I think it makes the prettiest picture I have ever seen. The whole town is lit up, extending right up the hill-side. The beach front is illuminated by various coloured lights, the whole twinkling by the gentle breeze, makes a most striking show. The cheers are now being drowned by the monotonous thump of the ship's engines and we are at sea once more.

The generosity of Durban will always live in my mind. The people could not do enough for us. From daylight to dark, there was always a crowd around the ship, sending up delicacies of all kinds, running errands for anyone who wanted anything. They would do anything to help, in any shape or form and would not even listen to a "Thank you". I sincerely hope they will not be imposed upon.

## CHAPTER THREE

# The Inland Trek

*Mombasa — Volunteering for German East Africa — A call at the Cape Verde Islands — Hospitality in Durban — An Equatorial paradise — Meetings with Generals Botha and Smuts — On the march to Same — Retreat of the Germans — Costumes of the natives — A hard trek — Dodging the Germans — Attack of the fever*

### March 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

After being at sea, six days out of Durban, the ship arrives at Kilindini, our port of disembarkation. Needless to say, there will be no tears at parting from this old hooker. Since leaving Blighty, five weeks ago, I have not had a decent meal, with the exception of the two I had in Durban. I am not a fad over food but I do like it to be wholesome. The harbour here is a fine natural harbour, and a very tricky one to enter, but the arrangements for discharging are prehistoric. The ships lay-off in the harbour, and all discharging is done by lighters, the cargo being hoisted out of the lighters at a small jetty by hand cranes. And this is an English port that does a great trade with India and the Far East.

The port is more generally known as Mombasa, but that is really the name of the island. Ships of any size greater than local coasters are not able to get up to the town of Mombasa.

### March 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Troops are being disembarked today and although we are 'standing to', it does not look as if we shall get ashore today.

### March 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916.

Today we land with full equipment and carrying our kit bags. The heat of the sun is something terrific. After being in the full heat of the sun for a couple of hours in

the lighter, we are landed where there are further delays. At long last we are off.

After leaving the quayside we are served with some liquid refreshment, provided and served by the English ladies of Mombasa. I don't know what it was but it was very acceptable to us. We afterwards marched off again to the camp where we arrived pretty well 'done up'.

We have another delay while we are being reported as having landed and while tents are being allotted to us. We are under the shade of trees, but we dare not sit down owing to the millions of ants which simply swarmed all over, but we very soon learned to think nothing of a few ants. At last we get our tents and soon make ourselves at home.

### March 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have been busy getting our guns, ammunition, stores, etc. ashore. One gun we have taken down to the camp for drill purposes. The rest we have loaded up on the railway, ready to go up-country.

Our food here is a great improvement to that which we had on the 'Huntsgreen', although there is one thing we miss very much and that is vegetables. All eatables are tinned, except the meat which we get every second or third day. We wait for the oxen to be killed and then it is whipped into the pot, for it goes putrid in two or three hours. The result of this is that we

don't get much tender meat. We have plenty of jaw exercise in our efforts to masticate it. The whole of our food ration comes from India. The butter (tinned of course) is very decent stuff, especially after the vile stuff we have been having since we left England. Taking all things into consideration, we can't grumble.

#### April 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are still waiting for our mechanical transport. I expect it did not leave England until a fortnight after us, and coming with a much slower boat, so we shall not get away from here for a while. It will take some time to get it all ashore when it does arrive.

Although we are waiting, we are by no means idle. We do seven and eight hours drill each day except Sunday. At 6.00am. we have bathing parade. We march down to the harbour where there is a very nice bathing beach. Early morning is the only part of the day when a white man can bathe here. We have orders prohibiting all bathing between the hours of 7.00am. to 5.00pm. One of our chaps who disregarded this order was under the doctor for about three weeks. The rays of the sun are so powerful they badly burnt him, his back being one huge blister from his shoulders downward. Although a shark may occasionally come into the harbour, there is not much danger while there are a number of men in the water at one time.

At 8.30am. we parade for gun drill, fatigues, lectures, etc. which last till 12 noon. At 2.00pm. we have gun drill, squad and company drill, etc. which last until 4.00pm. At 6.00pm. we parade for orders, mount guard, etc., so you will see we have not much idle time.

Sunday we have Church Parade at 9.30am. The service is held under a tree in the camp and taken by the OC of the Brigade. Order Parade is at 6.00pm.

Afterwards, I go to the service in the Cathedral in Mombasa. One finds a very

mixed congregation here. The greater part are Europeans, with a sprinkling of Indians, Swahilis and Portuguese, the Indians and Swahilis in their native dress. I imagine a congregation like this would cause a ripple of mild excitement to pass through a congregation in one of our churches at home. Afterwards, we visit a cafe for one or two iced soda waters, then back to camp, drenched with perspiration, because the nights are extremely hot without the least breeze.

#### April 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have had our first mail today since leaving England and although the news is two months old, it gives us great satisfaction.

#### April 9<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our transport has arrived but it will be some considerable time before we get it all landed. We have had a good look around the island now and we find many things of interest. Just coming out from the Old Country, everything seems so very strange to our eyes. The inhabitants number about 8,000 coloured people with about 300 whites, or I should say Europeans. The Germans have been interned in India. The Portuguese, who have been here for generations, are very difficult to recognise from Indians. The whole of the shop-keeping is in the hands of the Indians, with a few Portuguese and I must say that both races have their eyes open to the fact that 'Tommy' is easily fleeced. I don't think any shop-keeper expects to be paid the sum he asks for the first time he quotes a price. He will usually come down to half the price before he will 'lose' you.

The whites live in one part of the island, the Indians and Arabs in the shopping district, while the Swahilis have a great village of their own, but even here the bazaars are all run by the Indians. The dress of all are also interesting. The Europeans of both sexes wear white drill clothing with sun topees. The Indians' dress is more or less familiar to all Englishmen. The Arab looks rather

picturesque in his long flowing white robes. They usually trade in fruit and one often sees them coming to the market, the Arab walking first, carrying nothing but a stick, followed by his five or six wives carrying baskets of fruit on their heads. These in turn are followed by Swahili 'boys', also loaded with baskets. The native women that one sees walking about are striking in their dress. They have several yards of gorgeously coloured calico, (the more glaring the colour, the better they like it) wound around them in such a manner that they leave both arms and one shoulder bare. They have imitation gold anklets, armlets, rings, bracelets, necklaces and rings on their toes with one large stud (about the size of a shilling) set with coloured stones fixed in each side of their nostrils. I expect these must be the upper class of the natives, because I have seen many of them in the villages dressed in very little else but a broad smile.

I don't know much about botany but the most casual observer must notice the wonderful growth of trees and plants in this place. Some trees are absolutely covered with a white flower, whilst others are covered with a bright scarlet flower. Cactus trees grow to great height. I have seen a banyan tree near here. This is the first one I have seen outside a picture book, and it covers a considerable amount of ground. It grows horizontal branches which in turn, grow branches downwards which take root in the ground, and really start another tree. There are also trees which grow a tremendous girth. These are called baobab trees. They do not grow to a great height; perhaps 60 or 80 feet, but their great girth dwarfs their height. There is one in the native village here which I paced round one evening. It was 17 paces in circumference. I expect they live for thousands of years. Anyhow, they are a very striking growth.

Coconut palms are very plentiful. In the residential part of the island the flower beds before the houses are extremely

beautiful, the mixture of the gorgeous colours being a very pretty sight. But of all these wonderful flowers, I never came across any that had the perfume of our English flowers.

There is an abundance of tropical fruit, but I eat very little of it. During a lecture we had on the ship by a MO, he advised us not to eat any; and dysentery is bad enough amongst us, without me trying to swell the number of patients

Although we have all these wonderful things to see, this place is by no means the Garden of Eden. The situation of the island is within six degrees of the Equator. The sun is terrific in the power of its rays. After sundown we get no cooler, because there is an entire absence of breeze. Topees must be worn from 7.00am. to 5.00pm., even when we are in our tents, the canvas not being strong enough to entirely break the power of the sun.

I understand there is no rainy season here, but the rain falls at any time and when it does come! Gee! I have never seen anything like it before. It doesn't come down in drops but in one huge sheet.

The soil is very sandy and I think it is the playground for everything that crawls and creeps. Lizards, centipedes, black, white and huge red ants, flying ants who shed their wings all over the place, and the common house fly which abound here in millions. At meal times, there is always an exciting race to see who gets the food out of the spoon first, you or the fly. I must have swallowed dozens of flies in trying to beat them.

After dark, the flies are not so troublesome, but the mosquito comes out in swarms, crickets are chirping, monkeys chattering, so that I believe the nights are noisier than the days. I expect we shall get used to it, but the difference between our quiet nights at home and these nights is startling.

Already, fever and dysentery are attacking the troops. When anyone dies the body is not kept long here. I have seen a man on the 8.30am. parade and attended the funeral at 3.00pm. White people don't seem to live for the 'allotted span' here. I have walked round the Cathedral, and and out of a score or two of memorial tablets, I find the oldest person was only 39 years. Pleasant reading, which makes one wonder whether the interior will be more healthy. It can't be much worse.

There is one railway line here. A single line from Mombasa, through the country which is preserved for big game hunting to a place called Port Florence on the shores of Lake Victoria Nyanza. There is a magnificent railway bridge which connects the island with the mainland. All the station staff are Indians, while the engineers are British with Indian firemen. The fuel used is wood, which is sawn into suitable lengths and stacked in great heaps by the rail side by native 'boys'.

During the initial advance by the Germans in this country, they reached a point within 14 miles of the aforementioned bridge but apparently reserved their energy for the capture of Nairobi, the capital of the country. [British East Africa].

*See endnote 1.*

They failed in this, and at the same time made no further advance on the railway, so we were left with a good port and base on the coast. This is one of the big blunders that the Germans made during this war.

May 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

At last we are all ready for going up the line. We have tested our mechanical transport on the sandy ground, apparently with success, but I can see work (with a capital W) in front of us. This morning came in wet, but by noon we have got the whole battery on the train. Of course, we are drenched through within two minutes of starting, but when rain ceases one's clothing soon dries, between the heat of the body and the sun. We leave Kilindini

at 2.00pm., the 158 Battery following in a few days time. At 11.00pm. we arrive at Voi, but stop in the train for the night.

*See endnote 2.*

May 4<sup>th</sup>. 1916

At daylight we started to unload our guns, motors etc., this being the rail-head.

*See endnote 3.*

We are all ready and off by 1.30pm. We camp at dusk by the roadside. This is our first experience of a night in the 'wilds' but the sound of wild beasts, etc., does not disturb me. I sleep like a top.

May 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are away again and already experiencing 'out drag ropes' and hauling our motors and guns through the sand. We reach M'buyini at 4.00pm., this being at this time the advanced base camp. We are now in sight of Kilima N'jaro, a great snow-capped mountain 30 miles away, and in German East Africa. It stands 19,700 feet above sea-level. It is an awe-inspiring sight to see this great mountain standing all alone on this plateau, and snow-covered a great way down, while we are simply scorching in the sun. The natives are said to worship it as a great god...and no wonder.

This is a great camp, and we find it filled with Indians, Boers, South Africans, and a few English ASC (Supplies).

*See endnote 4.*

I see the Bengal Lancers for the first time, and one need wish to see no finer men, nor cleverer horsemen than these chaps. There are also two or three Indian Mountain Batteries, with several battalions of Punjabis, Gurkhas, etc., and we have a couple of batteries of South African Field Artillery, parties of Boer Mounted Infantry forming a nucleus of General Britts' Flying Column. Indian ammunition columns are here with ox transport, the oxen skins scoured with fantastic designs, while at the other side of the camp is a big

aerodrome. So you see, we have some variety in the camp.

The whole camp is surrounded by a 'boma' or stockade, 30 or 40 yards deep, with tricky paths through it to prevent being rushed by the Hun.

*See endnote 5.*

Water shortage is a serious problem here. It is brought up on a light railway and stored in tanks. Our daily ration is four pints per man. This covers all necessities: drinking, ablutions and washing of clothes. This issue makes us keep our eyes open for leakages.

#### May 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I have letters from home today. Our last mail was five weeks ago. Not too bad so far.

The 158 Battery has again joined us. Our battery has been broken up again. Now we are two batteries. The right section being the 11<sup>th</sup>. (Hull) Heavy Battery and the left section, the 13<sup>th</sup>. Heavy Battery.

The climate here is very much better than at Mombasa. The sun is excessively hot, but after sundown there is a nice breeze which reminds one of a hot summer's night at home. Nevertheless, our men still suffer a lot from malaria, although dysentery does not seem so bad. Our altitude is 3,000 feet, so there should be an improvement.

#### May 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am feeling a bit queer today, so I go to the doctor's orderly and get a big dose of quinine.

#### May 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am still shaky but I don't want to report sick for fear of being put into 'dock', in other words, the hospital.

#### May 21<sup>st</sup>. 1916

I am fit again today. Our right section has left to join General van Deventer's column at Himo River, about 20 miles from here.

#### June 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have news of going up with General Britts' Column when the new offensive starts, which we expect will be shortly. We have had General Botha and General Smuts in the camp a few days ago, so that looks as if there is something doing. General Smuts is the GOC of all troops in this campaign, but perhaps Botha came up to see the lie of the land and offer advice. They both had a great reception with all the troops here. Botha is a great burly man, and a typical Boer in appearance, while Smuts is more dapper and could easily pass for an Englishman. I expect they are both thought a lot about by all classes in South Africa. If anyone had suggested to me 14 years ago that I should be pleased to fight under a Boer general, I would have led them to the nearest stable to have their brains kicked out. But this shows how events alter one's opinions.

*See endnote 6.*

#### June 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I take all our spare stores, kit, etc. back to Maktua, a camp some distance to our rear. We are going with Britts and have to travel very light. Each man is allowed twelve and a half pounds of kit. That includes great-coat or blanket and one pair of spare boots, one spare shirt and one spare pair of socks. Mine weighed 15lbs., but I couldn't go with less, so was allowed to take them.

#### June 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The column starts to leave here today. We go tomorrow. We are taking a route through the mountains, which I expect is only possible during three months of the year. Although we have been at M'buyuni for about six weeks we have not had a lazy time. We have had three parades a day, Schemes three or four times a week, calibrated our guns, fatigues, guards, etc., which have kept us from playing with our thumbs during the time we have been here. We have had 40 natives allotted to us as stretcher bearers, porters, etc. We have one detailed as cook for our mess. The head boy is named Juma Ambri and he is a very

intelligent chap. He can speak four languages very well. They are English, Hindostani, his native Swahili and a language spoken in the far interior. He was with the party of natives, (as interpreter) which accompanied ex-President Roosevelt, during the latter's big game hunting expedition in this country. During conversation with him, one is immediately struck by his masterly power over the English language. He can neither read nor write, but the expression of his thoughts and wishes in English is so cultured that it makes one fairly gasp.

#### June 17<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We left M'buyuni at 8.00am. and set off in a south-easterly direction, leaving Moshi on our right and skirting the shores of Lake Jipe on our left. After about 20 miles, we came to a plain which we have to cross. It is nothing but sand. There is not a tree, shrub, or blade of grass to be seen. It is easy to believe that this plain is a swamp for nine months of the year. A more desolate place I have never seen up to now. After a good deal of hauling, we reach the further side where our OC decides to outspan for the night. Our first job is to search for water. After our tins are filled, we sit down for our meal of bully beef and biscuits. These biscuits are 'Hardman's', and I can truthfully say that they are most appropriately named. We ought to have had issued with our small kit, a hammer and chisel. That would have simplified the problem of how to break them. We estimate the distance travelled today at 30 miles. It has been dark for some time so we fix our mosquito nets and turn in, with millions of stars winking at us, until we lose them in sleep.

#### June 18<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We passed through N'gula Gap today and reached Same. The roads have been very bad, but being in the mountains, we have had consolation in the fact that the roads have been hard. Same is a small town on the railway which runs from Tanga on the coast to Moshi at the foot of Kilima N'jaro. This railway runs through a very

fertile part of the country, with the idea of getting the products to the coast.

After the Boer War, many of the irreconcilable Boer farmers, preferring German government to ours, came out here and settled on the farms. Today, this part of the country is in our hands and the Boer once more comes under the rule of Great Britain. Such is the irony of fate.

#### June 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are away this morning and strike some very difficult roads. Some parts, having a gradient of 1 in 4, make it extremely hard for us. We have to unhook the guns, pull up the FWD lorries, then go back and haul up the guns. The same treatment for the Napier cars which carry our ammunition, stores, etc. In the evening we reach Makanga where we outspan by the roadside, near to a river. I do not know name of this river but I believe it is a tributary of the Pangani.

#### June 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our OC decides to give us a rest today, after our hard work of the last few days. We spend the day in washing ourselves and clothing. It is quite a treat to have plenty of water at hand. One can wash one's clothing and be wearing it again in two hours. That is a decided advantage on our own climate where sometimes nearly a week passes before we can wear newly washed clothes.

#### June 21<sup>st</sup>. 1916

This morning we are off again, and after a rather easy day, we reached Bagamojo. These names are simply the names of native villages, and sometimes we don't even see the village because it is hidden in the bush. Anyhow, one doesn't miss much, by outward appearance at any rate.

#### June 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

Today we reach German Bridge on the Pangani River. The original bridge (a fine structure) has been destroyed by the Germans but a temporary one has been

erected in a day or two, which enables our column to get over.

We camp on the further side of the river, and having an hour or so of daylight, we indulge in some bathing. I have my first view of crocodiles in their natural surroundings today, and I must say that they don't make one feel too comfortable. But I expect there is not much danger to bathers if only a few will keep together.

The scenery here is simply wonderful. On either side of the river, the growth of shrubs and trees is so dense that paths have been cut down to the banks. The trees are covered with climbing plants which trail down to the ground again, the whole being smothered with the most gorgeous blooms imaginable.

In the centre of the river there are small islands which are covered with foliage and flowers, making a blaze of colour such as I have never seen before. It is simply astounding.

#### June 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

We continue our march today with the river a mile or so on our left. The country we are traversing is very barren. Nothing seems to grow on it but a very short coarse grass. This seems extraordinary, because on our left, only a mile or so away is the dense growth near the river. We camp at night at Palms. This is the name we give to the place because two or three coconut palms stand alone in their majesty.

#### June 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Palms and having a somewhat easy day over this barren waste (we have now lost all signs of the river), and camp for the night at a spot which we mark on the map.

#### June 25<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are away again this morning and after passing through more congenial country, we arrive at M'kalamo. This is only a place on the map; no sign of any human life but ourselves.

The retreat of the Germans is very rapid. We are advancing at anything from 12 to 20 miles per day but we never get a 'slap' at them, except running rear-guard actions, in which artillery is not required.

Whilst we have been passing through this open country during the last day or two, the Hun has suffered rather severely through not having cover. The dead, of course, have to be buried immediately. After burial, great stones have to be placed on the graves, if possible, to prevent the bodies being disturbed by vultures or animals. Vultures follow the column all the time. I really think the vulture is the most disgusting and loathsome thing I have seen. They never leave a body (unless disturbed) until the bones are picked absolutely clean. They are such gross feeders that they will eat until they can't move. Their filthy habits and mangy appearance fill one with disgust.

#### June 26<sup>th</sup>. 1916

After a long and uneventful day we arrive at Luchomo. I understand we have outdistanced our supplies and we shall have to stop here for some days. We have 'found' a piece of tarpaulin about eight feet long by six feet wide and this proves a blessing to us. We rig it up each evening and it keeps the heavy dews off us. The men use the gun covers for the same purpose, so we are more comfortable than we were.

#### June 27<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are staying here until our supplies catch up to us. Our rations are not good so far as quantity and variety goes. Our drink is coffee or water and our food is biscuits, bully beef (eight men to a 12oz. tin), with a cup of mealy meal and an occasional ration of fresh meat, which is so hard and tough that one cannot eat it. No sugar, tea, milk, butter bread or bacon. Eatables which we once looked upon as necessities are now far beyond our reach. If only we had a few vegetables, it would be better. Mealy meal is Indian corn ground down.



As the natives grind it, it is fairly good and might be compared with our cornflour, but the ration issue is simply split and not ground. Thus it is only chicken corn and not to be recommended to dyspeptic patients.

The natives here are a different people to those I saw in Mombasa. I have always been taught that human beings are the most beautiful of all God's works. If so, He certainly made these niggers whilst He was an apprentice. I am sure I never saw anything that walked on two legs quite so ugly as these people.

The dress of the 'ladies', (when they are dressed), consists of a short, dried grass skirt which reaches midway between the thigh and knee. For ornamental purposes, they have thick copper wire wound around each leg, from ankle to knee, and around each arm from wrist to elbow. Fixed around their necks they have what looks like a huge watch spring. The diameter of this necklace is about two feet. They certainly do not look very comfortable in this finery. I imagine they must carry at least 40lbs. of metal about with them.

The men's wearing apparel requires less describing, for the simple reason that they wear none. Their personal decoration consists usually of a thick piece of round wood stuck through the lobe of the ear. One may frequently see the lobes of these chaps' ears stretched so that they will touch their shoulders. If they can get an empty 'Globe' metal polish tin as an ear ornament, their happiness is complete.

#### July 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Luchomo this morning and arrive at M'bagui, a distance of 22 miles. For some time now, one half of the battery has marched one day, while the other half has ridden. Today, I have had the dismounted party. Now today's march has been a particularly trying one. The whole column has moved along the same path. This consisted of field batteries with mules, batteries with oxen, our battery

with mechanical transport, thousands of Boer mounted infantry and I believe we were the only white troops 'padding the hoof'. The thermometer registered 105 degrees in the shade before we left at 8.00am. What it would be at noon, I do not know. We had full equipment with 50 rounds of ammunition, two days' rations, iron rations and one pint of water.

The path was ankle deep in sand, and the horses trotting and the motors rushing along raised so much dust that it blinded us. We took the puggarees off our topees and used them as veils to keep the sand out of our eyes and nostrils, but even then, it searched through. We halted at mid-day, and those of us who had any water left made a drink of coffee. After a short rest we were on again. When one has done 12 or 15 miles like this, for the remainder of the distance one becomes a machine, plodding on. It does not matter much what happens. You drag one weary leg after the other. There is a place somewhere ahead where you will rest. That is all you know, except that you have a raging thirst and no water. One keeps expecting that every turn of the path will show the column outspanned, but every turn of the path gives you another disappointment. At last you get there and break all regulations by having a good 'swig' at the first muddy water you see. I am told we have done 22 miles.

After the stragglers have arrived in camp, I report to the OC that all men are in. He asks me how they have finished. I tell him 'all right', but a number have blistered feet with the hot sand. He can't understand it at all, but there is a big difference between 'padding the hoof' and riding in a Ford car! Although I don't tell him so.

#### July 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Today we do 15 miles and outspan on the outskirts of Handeni. This district seems to be very fertile. We have passed through miles and miles of rubber and coffee plantations.

This town is the most important one we have seen since leaving Mombasa. There are a great number of houses built by European settlers and a large fort built on a hill in the centre of the town. It is quite a change to see houses or bungalows after seeing nothing but the grass 'bandas' built by the natives for so long.

#### July 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are off again. I leave in the lorry with my gun. We no sooner get started than my driver does me a 'kindness' by overturning the lorry and gun over an embankment. I have 60 complete rounds of 40 pds. ammunition aboard and I am quite sure that 59 rounds are piled on the top of me. After being extricated, I find I have no bones broken, but a rather badly cut arm, a knee treated in the same way and ribs and back skinned and bruised. I am taken up to the fort which is being made into a hospital, and get my cuts etc., dressed. The MO desires me to stay in 'dock' but I decline with thanks. My OC (who has come up in the meantime) states that he will see that I have my 'wounds' dressed daily, so I am allowed to go. I don't like the look of a field hospital. Everybody is laid on the floor and I am very much afraid that I may get 'friends' that I don't like, if I stay. For the remainder of the day's trek, I do the heavy by riding in the Ford car with the OC.

We finish the day by arriving at M'jimbwe, a distance of 16 miles.

#### July 8<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am very sore and stiff this morning, so I am still an honoured occupant of the OC's car. We have an easy day's trek and reach Kangata, a distance of 18 miles from our last halt. Although the sun during the day is very hot, the nights, to us, are cold, the glass dropping to 55 degrees after sundown. Our blanket is now very acceptable.

#### July 9<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We continue the movement this morning and after 16 miles we arrive at the

Lukigura River which is, I believe, a tributary of the great Wami [Pangani] River. The river is not formidable, being only about 20 to 25 yards wide, and having a depth of three or four feet here, but it will supply us with excellent water to drink

#### July 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

By all we can gather, it seems that we have bumped into something hard here. All this time, it appears that the enemy, doing nothing but fight light rearguard action, has now taken up a previously prepared position. It certainly looks a very strong position. In front of us is a range of mountains. Apparently the only way through them is through a neck, or gap. This, the Germans hold in great strength, according to all intelligence reports. They have two or more 4.1 naval guns taken from the 'Koenigsberg' before it was destroyed by our navy in the Rufiji River. There are glowing reports in our home papers about the destruction of this ship, how she was spotted hidden in the river by the RNAS and how she was finally destroyed by our monitors. But they don't say that she was dismantled, that all her guns, ammunition, stores, etc. had been removed previously, but that is so. All that was destroyed was the shell of the ship. We have no artillery that can look at these long range naval guns. Our howitzers have the longest range of any guns here, a range of 6,000 yards, but what is that against 14,000 yards or more?

All our guns are obsolete. They include 9 pdrs, 15 pdrs, 4.5 howitzers and our 5 inch howitzers. Just fancy our comic opera artillery against modern naval guns. It reminds one of a pea-shooter against a revolver.

#### July 11<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are having rather a warm time here. We have dug trenches, and every night all hands man them and form listening posts. The latter is perhaps the most unthankful job a soldier has to perform. At dusk, a party of three is pushed forward about 200

yards in front of the trenches. Their duty is to listen for movements in the direction of the enemy's lines. No word is to be spoken. One listens while two rest. When one estimates that his time is up, if the others are asleep, he awakens them by giving them a kick. Anyone who has been in the bush will agree that this is a very trying task.

In the event of an attack, their position is much worse. They are between two fires and in equal danger from both sides. Their own pals cannot recognise them in the dark so the chance of them regaining their own lines is very small. There is nothing cushy about a job like this.

#### July 13<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Every night the Germans get behind our lines, and dodging the patrols, mine the road, with the result that the first car over in the morning usually goes up. Sometimes the mine is found and is removed without doing any damage. During the day there is continual sniping going on but we don't seem to have much luck in finding them.

#### July 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I finish up the day by having a sharp attack of fever, my temperature going up to 104.3.

#### July 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

After being heaped up with blankets during the night and having 30 grains of quinine, I am much better this morning, but have a terrible head. The field hospital in the camp is a terrible place, so to avoid it I won't report sick.

#### July 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our OC has allowed me to take things easily these last few days but although I still have a thick head, I return to duty today. One must not give way to fever if it is possible to hold on. I think the chaps who give in first are the ones to hand in their cheques first.

#### July 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have Botha and Smuts here today so that looks as if there is another move on. They received a great reception.

This place is proving to be a very unhealthy one. At the present time we have 34% of our chaps in dock with fever and dysentery. This makes it extremely hard work for the chaps that are left, but it can't be helped.

#### July 26<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have had some excitement today. A German force of 4,000 was reported to be advancing from the west. The whole camp was turned into the trenches. We receive a terrible blow at night when we get orders to prepare for a retreat. We are 'hooked in' and standing by for a couple of hours, when a further message comes in to say that we stop. We unpack and turn in.

#### July 29<sup>th</sup>. 1916

There is still the usual mining and sniping going on but we never hear anything definite as to what happened to the force that caused all the excitement the other day. Of course there are plenty of rumours, but Dame Rumour is a lying jade, so I attach no importance to them.

#### July 31<sup>st</sup>. 1916

We are getting a great number of troops in the camp now. It would be quite interesting to the people at home to see them reach camp in the evening. There are white men, Indians, Cape boys, which embraces all shades from almost black to almost white. There is no pomp or ceremony here. No bright buttons or polished equipment. Everyone is dog tired when they reach camp and covered with sand so that it is difficult to recognise the European from the coloured man, if it were not for the head-dress.

As soon as a halt is called, there is no dressing of the ranks. The greater part are so beat that they drop down for a rest. The transport is as varied as it is possible to be. There are mechanical transport, mules in spans of ten with Cape boys as drivers,

oxen in spans of 16 with Indians, Cape boys and natives as drivers. The oxen are not driven with reins but with the whip. A driver with his long whip can reach any one of his team. No horses are seen because they cannot live here. The average life of the mules here is 14 days. Britts' Mounted Men which left M'buyini in all their glory are no longer mounted, because

all their horses are dead. It is indeed an extraordinary sight to see a column on the march here.

August 4<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have no general improvement in our health here. As soon as one gets about, another goes down. We shall be pleased to move from here. It is not a health resort.

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**Notes by Denis Fewster Hopkin, grandson of the author.**

1. The Germans had moved up from German East Africa, better known as Tanganyika and at the time of this journal they had been driven back into their own territory.
2. There was, during the Second World War and just after, an important branch line from Voi down to Arusha in Tanganyika as I was RTO at Voi for a period of time. I presume the route taken by the writer would be roughly through the country that the later line took, assuming that it had not been built at that time.
3. I give a brief account of my own movements during the latter part of World War II and the immediate post-war period because of the coincidence which it contains.

I enlisted in 1943 aged 18 and after about a year's training in the artillery, was posted overseas as a gunner / specialist in Field Artillery. My draft overseas sailed for, to us, an unknown destination, having been issued with tropical kit. Bearing in mind this kit, we were sure we were going to somewhere like Iceland! However, we went south and turned left at Gibraltar and docked in Alexandria, still in ignorance. We ended up in a transit camp near Suez for about a month and during that time received our first mail. It was marked as having been returned from Athi River. Where that was we did not know, but presumably, that was where we were going. We sailed south from Suez and ended up at Kilindini, history repeating itself. We entrained for Nairobi and of course, passed through Voi on the way. We ended up in another camp in the Athi River Game Reserve. There we underwent a several weeks' Africanisation course, the purpose of which was to adapt to the altitude, learn some basic Swahili and instruction in 'the way of life' of the people. A group of us were then posted to join the 307 Field Regiment, East African Artillery at Naivasha on the side of the lake of that name. We then formed the regimental survey party. This was a black regiment with a core of whites to fill the senior and more technical core. I was with the regiment until just after the end of the war. We had been due to go to fellow other E.A. units to Burma in September 1945 but much to our delight, something happened to Japan that made it unnecessary!

Stagnation set in, in the regiment as there was no longer any purpose for our existence. Eventually a request was made to the regiment for any volunteers to go draft conducting to assist in the demobilisation of the black troops by returning them to their tribal areas. All the eight of us in the survey party volunteered, as we were tired of hanging about. We moved to Nairobi and started the job. Without any by-your-leave, we found ourselves transferred to the Royal Engineers' Transportation and were boosted up to sergeant.

Later, I was posted to Mombasa and immediately despatched to take over as RTO (Rail Transport Officer) to Voi. There is a small native village at Voi but the main element in the place is the station at the junction of the Voi to Moshi line with the main Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR). In Dan's time, as he says, it was the railhead for the troops going south to the Moshi area. Apart from the station, there was a post office and a small loco repair workshop. Originally it was a crew change over point as the train crews were changed over here for the second leg of the KUR run up to Nairobi. The crew that was being relieved would spend a rest period in a banda near to the station. Later, when cabooses were attached to the train, the banda went out of use. This banda was in my quarters. It had five rooms, all leading off one verandah. This was going to be a lonely posting as the nearest white troops were about a hundred miles away in Mombasa. I had two black policemen, one a corporal to assist me in doing next to nothing. My only friends were the Mauritian postmaster, the Pathan station master, a local Sikh doctor and a Eurasian locomotive engineer.

At my banda, I slept in the middle one of the five rooms. The rest of the rooms were empty. One day, when in conversation with one of the Eurasian loco drivers, he asked me where I slept. When I told him, he expressed amazement that I did not know that this room was haunted because it had been the mortuary during the First War when the banda had been used as a transit hospital on the route down to Mombasa. A short while after this, I came across a small, fenced off group of graves, some way behind the banda. It contained three graves, one was for somebody who had been killed by a lion, the second I forget about, but the third was that of a Gunner Clayton, Siege Artillery. I mentioned this to Dan in a letter I wrote and he told me that this chap was from his battery, (11<sup>th</sup>. Hull), and they never knew what happened to him after he was sent back sick. It is a small world but it contains some strange coincidences.

As an afterthought, it is amazing the difference between the hardships of the life he led in this part of Africa and the comparatively wholesome life we led. In the intervening 30 years, the improvements in hygiene and medication must have been colossal. Admittedly I spent most of my time at higher altitudes, but I was also in Mombasa. I do not recall anyone going down with the sort of diseases that plagued the battery in 1916/17.

4. There seems to be a designation for South African people of British stock as opposed to Boers.

5. This would be a much larger version of the normal boma round a native settlement to keep out wild animals and made from thorn-bush branches.

6. Dan had tried to enlist for the Boer War but had been rejected as being too young.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Further Inland

*An army of ants -- The Battle of Wami River -- Battles with rhinos and bees --  
A public execution -- Fashions of the natives -- Habits of the Boer soldiers --  
Difficulties moving during the rains -- Sheppard's Pass -- Giving our 'friends'  
a warm time -- Working with the guns*

August 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

**A**t noon today we suddenly receive orders to move. By 2 o'clock the camp is empty, with the exception of the hospital. It appears we are going to try to get straight across the mountains. If we are successful, we shall easily get behind the enemy, if he stops in his present position. I know that it means we have some terrible work ahead.

August 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

At 4 o'clock this morning we have a halt for two hours. What ground we covered I have no idea. I know that we have pulled up every vehicle we have to this place. We have had no food since we left camp yesterday mid-day. There was an issue of bully and biscuits when we halted but I believe everyone was too tired to eat. I know I was. I simply laid down where I was and slept for two hours. I felt sorry for the guard that had to be mounted. At day-break, we start again and have a full day hauling our guns and transport. If we found a stretch of 200 yards where the motors could manage by themselves, we thought ourselves very lucky. Even when we came to a down-gradient, it is so steep that we have to hang on to our drag ropes in the rear to steady our vehicles down. We halt at 5.00pm. This enables us to have a drink of hot coffee. No fires are allowed after dark, so if we are late in halting we have to do without a hot drink.

August 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are at it again today. Although the work is so heavy, the spirits of the men are remarkable. I don't think finer chaps could

be found if the world were searched. An incident to illustrate what I mean happened today. A gunner of my detachment had been suffering from dysentery for some days. He got worse but would not give in. In the end he collapsed and the OC sent him back (on a wagon) to hospital. Would you believe that the chap was crying like a baby when he left us? Nevertheless, it is a fact.

We halt today at 5.00pm. Our water is done and we have to dig for it in the bed of a dried-up mountain stream. After three hours' work, it begins to trickle into our cans. Our hearts go up, for thirst is an awful thing. We filled our cans at Lukigura River but we were only able to carry drinking water. We have not washed or shaved since we left and I don't know when we shall enjoy that luxury again. By about midnight our tins were filled, so we laid down and slept the sleep of the just.

There was one thing which happened today which gave us pleasure. Just after we halted, a parade of all hands was ordered. We were addressed by the Commander of Royal Artillery (Colonel Forrestier Walker) who gave us the highest possible praise for our work. He said that, in his opinion, the task that we had been given was an impossible one, and that if he had not seen it done, he would not have believed it. Those who know Forrestier Walker know that he is not a man to waste words, so the praise was especially sweet.

August 8<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are up and away again at day-break today. After travelling until midday, we receive orders to go no further. It is impossible for wheeled traffic to get any further. This is heartbreaking for us because we all felt sure that we could give the Hun a good basting if only we could have got within range of his position. Anyway, we must put our disappointment in our pockets for the time being.

#### August 9<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are resting today. We find that during this trek of five days, we have travelled 26 miles into the mountains. I think this plainly shows how difficult the road has been. For 12 hours each day, roughly speaking, we have been hard at it, not even stopping for a bite of food and only made six and a half miles per day. Our cars, on decent roads in England, could take us on at 12 miles per hour with ease.

I don't know what altitude we are at, but this morning we were above the clouds. It was rather striking to look down and see the clouds rolling as if it was the sea below. We are happier today. We have found a pool of water in the hollow of a rock. It is not fit to drink, for there are mules and trek oxen paddling and drinking in it, but we take our few rags off and have our first wash since last Saturday. Today is Wednesday so we have not used much soap since we left Lukigura River.

#### August 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We start our backward trek today, and it is a gruesome sight to see the dead mules and oxen strewn all along the way we have come. I have been talking to a sergeant of the Cornwall Battery who has charge of the ammunition column which is drawn by oxen. He tells me his losses average one ox per mile. Perhaps this may give you an idea of what the road was like for our return journey, if the average for other units was the same. The stench was awful. I'm afraid it will linger in my nostrils for a long time to come.

#### August 11<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Last night we had to dig for our water again and we were rather unfortunate. About midnight we found some water after digging for six hours. In the neighbourhood, there was a great number of oxen fastened up to picketing lines. They smelled our water, went half frantic, broke the lines and rushed our 'wells', with the result that they trampled all our holes in again in about two minutes. If there is a recording angel, I am afraid he was kept busy during the next hour. After we had got them driven away and tied up, we started afresh and got our tins filled with drinking water. It was then time for starting off again. We arrived at Lukigura River at 7.00pm. I am dog tired but I am considerably brightened up by finding there is a mail in and I have a letter and photograph from my wife. This is the first news from home for many weeks, although my wife writes every week.

It appears that this outflanking movement has been successful. The Huns have had to beat a hurried retreat from the position they held in the 'gap'. There has been no serious fighting, Fritz being in too big a hurry to stop and argue. We hoped that he would have stopped, but apparently he decided to give us another chase. I wonder where his next stand will be. He knows how to choose a good position anyhow. This move was under the orders of General Smuts in person. He has been with us during the last fortnight or so, so the two 'great' men have been opposing each other, because General Lettow-Vorbeck was in charge of the enemy column.

#### August 12<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are away again this morning and pass through the gap which the Germans have held for the last few weeks. We had not time to view the fortifications closely, but one could see at a glance the strength of the position. At some distance in front of the trenches there was a belt of pointed stakes driven into the ground. The points of the stakes were breast high and they were fixed in the ground at such an angle



that any attacking force would have impaled themselves on them. The belt was from 30 to 40 yards deep. To my mind, barbed wire is but a cobweb compared with these things. The gap itself is only 20 or 25 yards wide with the mountains towering up on either side. The place gives one the impression that it never could be captured by a frontal attack. Yet Colonel 'Jerry' Driscoll (of Driscoll's Scouts, famous in the South African War), now in command of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Frontiersmen) of the London Fusiliers, volunteered to capture the position with all that he had left of his battalion, about 300 men, all told. His offer was not accepted.

The road is fairly good along here, but of course we are hampered by obstacles which the Germans have left behind them. Huge trees have been felled across the road, whilst in places, the road has been blown up with road mines. These are trifling incidents compared with what we have experienced lately, so we make progress. By evening we arrive at a place which is marked on the map as Kanga.

#### August 13<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are away again this morning and encounter similar obstacles to yesterday, but we meet nothing to write home about, and in the evening we arrive at Turiana. We are hard on the heels of the enemy, and are making a lot of prisoners, who have not been able to keep up with the retreating column. This place is on a river, the name of which I do not know. It has been spanned by a large wooden bridge which has been burned down. In a case like this, all hands work to build a new bridge, working in reliefs, so that the work is continued night and day until the job is finished.

There is one consolation. If we are held up here for a few days, we have plenty of water so that we can wash, a luxury we have not enjoyed of late.

#### August 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are busy bridge-building today. Splashing about in water waist high most of the day keeps one a little cooler than usual.

#### August 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Last night we had an experience which brought us in close touch with the insect world once more. A colony of ants had decide to emigrate and their line of march laid right across our little camping ground. I had turned in and was just dozing off to sleep when I felt something in my hair. I expected it was an ant or two, so simply rubbed the place and tried to get off to sleep again. However, I have some on my legs in a minute or so, and more in my hair, so I defy regulations and get a light.

What the light revealed, I am not likely to forget for a day or so. There are millions of black ants, all travelling like a huge army. Nothing seemed to stop them. They simply swarmed over every obstacle as if it did not exist. Our mosquito nets had been no protection to us. They had just come underneath them, through them and over the top in swarms. There were thousands of them in our clothing and on our bodies. Blankets, shirts, socks were full, while the ground was black with them. We had to pick up our things and make a dash for it until we got clear of the column. Then we had an hour or two at work, clearing ourselves of these little pests. Everyone in our outfit was treated the same, so the language was rather strong.

I have seen ant treks before but never one like this. The instinct of these insects is remarkable. In fact it is uncanny. When they are trekking like this, they travel like an army. They have advance and rear guards and also screens to cover their flanks. They carry their eggs with them, so they don't forget the future generations. They can cross a river, if the current is not too strong, with ease. When the head of a column reaches a river, they enter the river along the side of the bank, several files in width. Clutching each other, the head of

the floating ants holding tightly to the bank side. When the length of this floating column is sufficiently long to reach the far bank (how they judge this, I don't know), the head which is facing upstream lets go. Now the tail end has firm hold of the bank. The action of the current gently swings the head round until it reaches the far bank, when it seizes hold, thus making a living bridge for the rest to cross by. When all are over, the far or rear end of this bridge releases hold. The current swings the bridge until it is formed up alongside the far bank. Then the whole colony is across.

I imagine it must be an exceedingly interesting hobby to study the habits of these wonderful insects, but we have not time. Since we have been in East Africa we have seen many millions of ants, and these things that I have just mentioned are noticed by the most casual observer.

We are still working at the bridge. Wood is very plentiful in this country so it is not many days' work to build a strong bridge.

#### August 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our bridge is finished today. We pack up again at 10.00pm. and take to the road once more.

#### August 17<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have been travelling all night but have made very little progress owing to the road being so congested. The infantry, of course, did not wait for the bridge but waded across at a ford. This leaves the road full up with vehicular traffic.

About noon, we get orders to travel ahead with all speed, as a battle is taking place some 15 miles ahead of us. Everybody has to stand to one side while we get through. The road is pretty good, so we soon make headway.

We now have abundant evidence of recent fighting, because dead *askaris* (native soldiers) are laid all the way along the road side. It is not a pleasing sight to see dead bodies a day or two after death in this

climate. The stench is something that will cling for days.

At 2.45pm. we halt and prepare for action. Apparently this is interesting work to some ASC men who draw around to look on, but two of them stop a couple of bullets, so the others take cover pretty smartly under some cars near at hand. We are now 'ready for action' so go further ahead to take up our position.

It is rather 'warm' here, for bullets are flying all around from machine guns. There is a South African field battery somewhere on our left which has come by another route, and what with artillery, machine gun and rifle fire, the din is pretty heavy. Our chaps are in high glee, because now we are going to give them a bit of 'hot stuff' to hold. We take up our position in the midst of some elephant grass. This grass grows to a height of 10 or 12 feet. We are also camouflaged with grass tucked into our sun helmets. We are very short handed so some of our ASC drivers volunteer to run out our wire to the battery commander's post and to the Forward Observing Officer, a very creditable offer, which is gladly accepted. Whilst we are coming into action, an Indian soldier comes up to me and pleads for a drink of *magi* (water). I hand him my water bottle, which is full. He doesn't worry about his caste but drinks and hands me back the bottle which he has emptied. Poor devil. He says it is the first drink he has had for two days. I believe him. An Indian's thirst has to be terrible for him to drink out of a white man's bottle.

At last we 'open out' and give the enemy his first taste of Lyddite. A startling thing happens. After the first round, there is no reply from the enemy position. After six rounds we get 'cease firing'. The range has been very short. Our elevation was only between 12 and 13 degrees or about 800 yards range. We stand by until dark, when we limber up and pull onto the roadside. It is midnight by the time we find our telephone wire and reel it in. We

have a meal of the usual bully and biscuits and turn in under our guns.

#### August 18<sup>th</sup>. 1916

At dawn we take up our battery position again and stand by for orders. News is brought in later that the enemy has evacuated his position during the night. The report of the Intelligence Officer states that after our first round the German askaris got the wind up to such an extent that they broke from all control. The only alternative left to the white men was to clear out.

We received high praise for our shooting. Evidently the Germans had not expected us getting our guns up so quickly. Well, we hope to give them some more before long. This scrap was named 'The Battle of Wami River' and was perhaps the biggest fought in German East Africa up to that time. The Germans held the south side of the swiftly flowing river about 30 yards wide and were entrenched right up to the river bank. Our chaps were several regiments of South African Horse, three or four battalions of South African Infantry, several battalions of Indian infantry and a regiment from the Gold Coast Rifles. The last were a fine body of niggers from the west coast. In physique, I think they equalled our Guards. They had already made a big reputation for themselves by work done in the Cameroons. The only artillery we had was the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Battery SAFA and our battery of two guns. When we arrived on the scene, fighting had been going on for about 50 hours. Our infantry had no water during that time, except what they had in their bottles when the fighting began.

#### August 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Of course, the bridge had been destroyed so crowds of us are building a new one. We seem to have been pretty hard hit, judging from the number of dead and wounded we have, but I think the Germans have lost very heavily. Today I saw Indians burning three great heaps of

German niggers on the far side of the river.

We are still receiving praise from various Staff Officers who are here for our work on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

#### August 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

The bridge was finished yesterday, so we are away again this morning. We start another flanking movement to get in the rear of the retreating enemy. We travel through a path in the bush which is being cut as we go along. The ground is fairly level, but still progress is slow. We are in the midst of elephant grass and dwarf trees and although we can tear through the grass, we are constantly having to fell trees to make our way.

#### August 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

This morning, the part of the camp occupied by the South African Infantry was charged by a family of rhinoceri, composed of a bull, cow and calf. The cow and the calf were killed, but the bull got away, carrying a few bullets I suppose.

These animals are by no means docile. If they cannot understand anything they see, they quickly make up their minds to do one thing, viz. charge. As they are of great weight and strength, and armed with two formidable horns down the centre of the head they are fine animals to keep away from, unless one is well prepared to give them combat. I heard tell of one at M'buyini who saw an engine on a light railway for the first time. He charged and derailed the engine but killed himself. His horns were driven into his skull by the impact. Some charge!

During the morning, we meet another obstacle. The bush has been fired, either wilfully or accidentally. Ahead of us, as far as the eye can see, is one huge cloud of smoke, with flames shooting up into it. It is certainly not a very pleasing picture. The roaring of the fire can be heard at a great distance while thousands of birds are flying before it in great alarm. We get out

of the difficulty by firing the bush behind us. When a ground space large enough to accommodate us has been burnt, we take our convoy onto it.

We have been joined today by the Cornwall Battery so we required a good space. The fire passed by on each side of us with a terrible roar. We then went on but it was terribly hot. The ground was smudging, and was so hot we could hardly bear to keep our feet down. At dusk we outspan and sleep on ground which the fire had passed over. After dark we could see the glare of fires all around. I don't think the climatic conditions of Hades itself can be any hotter than that which we have experienced today.

#### August 25<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have had a short trek today. We camped at noon, but our misfortunes still cling to us. While starting to prepare dinner, our cooks by some means managed to disturb a nest of bees. They attacked the whole camp. Everybody was stung, more or less, while the poor mules went absolutely mad. We had all to clear out and leave everything standing. We could not get our guns or lorries, so we had to keep clear until night fell. It seems a ridiculous thing for everyone to be driven out of camp by bees, but if there is anything worse than being attacked by angry bees, I have yet to meet it. I was only stung four or five times but we had several men who had to be detained in hospital and others who were treated and returned to duty.

#### August 26<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave the 'bee area' this morning and after an uneventful day, we camp at dusk. I expect we are rushing to get astride the main railway in German East Africa. This is a line which runs from Dar-es-Salaam, a large sea-port, to Ujiji, a town on Lake Tanganyika. Once this railway comes into our hands, I cannot see any reason for the Germans to continue fighting in this country. If they decide to carry on a guerrilla war, then goodness alone knows

when it will end. This is an immense country, larger than Germany and Austria put together, so if Lettow-Vorbeck decides to play hide and seek, he has plenty of room to do so. He seems to be much too clever to walk into a trap. He has been the Military Director out here for some years before the outbreak of war, so he will know all about the country that is worth knowing from a military point of view.

#### August 27<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have another day's trek through the jungle, and outspan in the evening about six miles from Morogoro.

#### August 28<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have a day's rest. Yesterday the enemy evacuated Morogoro and our troops took possession.

#### August 29<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We enter Morogoro today at noon. We are the first battery in. I get leave for a look round the town, and find that it is the largest town we have struck since leaving Mombasa. The main streets are very wide with rows of coconut palms down each side. The shops and bazaars are mostly kept by Indians, though there seems to be a good number of Greeks and Portuguese about. When I reached the square, I found a big crowd there, so I went to see what was happening. It appears that a native had been caught looting. He had been condemned to death and after having dug his own grave, he had been brought here to be shot. The Provost Marshal was having his crime and sentence read out in the English, German, Dutch and native languages. The firing party was selected from a battalion of the King's African Rifles. The culprit stood against a wall. After the volley was fired, he stood long enough for me to think that the whole party had missed him. Then his knees crumpled and he slowly collapsed. I thought this rather peculiar. I had seen men hit but if it was serious they went down in a hurry. Apparently it is not so in all cases.

During my saunter round, I met two of our South African motor drivers. They had 'found' a great heap of German tobacco, sufficient to fill a Ford car. This was a godsend to us, for we have had no tobacco for weeks. I had my pipe with me so I go on rejoicing and smoking. The railway station has been badly knocked about by our aircraft, but otherwise there is very little damage. The German ladies are walking about as if nothing has happened. No one molests them in any way. I think this speaks volumes for the good conduct of our troops, considering we had not seen a white woman for nearly four months. But of course, ours is not German 'Kultur'.

#### August 30<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We expect to stay here for a few days. I imagine there will be some reorganising to do. Our column has melted away like a snowball in the sun. There are several brigades here who have arrived by different routes to that which we came by.

One gets a wonderfully picturesque view here. The town lies at the foot of a mountain range. The mountains are wooded part of the way up. Above the woods, the bare masses raise themselves to a great height, while one can see cascades of water tumbling down. I wish I could describe how beautiful these look in the tropical sun. But that is impossible for me.

The native population here seems to be very numerous, and from outward observation, they are very clean. When one sees very clean natives it is worth remarking. The women are very proud of their personal appearance. Yesterday I noticed a number of them dressing each other's hair. A Negress cannot usually part her hair, so to be in the European style, they are shaving a parting through each other's hair. But evidently they did not believe in only having one, so they had three. For ear ornaments they had coloured pieces of wood similar to our draught men. They wore three in each ear. (I have

mentioned previously how natives of both sexes take a delight in piercing their ears, then stretching the holes to an enormous size.) One piece of wood was carried in the lobe of the ear, another in the top, whilst the last was carried in the edge of the ear between the other two.

As usual for the town ladies, their dress consisted of a few yards of gaudy material covered with crescents, stars and other designs which they imagine will enhance their personal beauty. Of course, the country ladies are not so particular so they dispense with the material. In the country, they are well dressed if they wear a short grass skirt.

#### August 31<sup>st</sup>. 1916

Last night we were attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Infantry Brigade under General Breeves. Today we leave Morogoro and strike a particularly bad road. It is a banked up road and composed of loose sand. Every few yards we go, our wheels sink in the sand to the axles. It is heart-breaking to be hauling your guns and transport out of one hole, then sinking into another before you have travelled 20 yards. We toil on until dusk then lay down where we halt, after guards and picquets are mounted.

#### September 1<sup>st</sup>. 1916

We are having another hard day but we make a little progress. We are once more well up in the mountains.

#### September 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

This morning we reach a village named M'kali. News is sent back to us that it is impossible for anything on wheels to get through. We have to wait for further orders. We outspan in the centre of the village. There is quite a large number of goats in the village. The Indians always eat goat flesh and I have never tried it so I send my 'boy' out to buy me one. He eventually arrives back with one which he bought for two rupees. We kill it and I have a leg cooked for my evening meal. That animal must have been one of the two that were in the Ark. I chewed at it but

could make no impression. I have heard of an india rubber man, but I never thought that I should tackle an india rubber goat. I gave it up and handed it to the 'boys'. They got outside of it somehow. How they did so will always be a mystery to me.

#### September 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

We are still here today. I shall not try to eat goat. Bully beef, biscuits and mealie meal will do for me.

Today a remarkable thing happened. We are about a quarter of a mile from a stream. I thought I would have a bathe, so I went down. During the time I was in the water, one of the village ladies came for water. She filled her jar on the up river side of me, then walked down the stream until she was four or five yards below me. Then she walked into the middle of the stream, and commenced to wash herself. Now this incident is worth remembering because I have always been under the impression that the natives did not wash themselves. They certainly don't look as if they do. I have seen them rub themselves with grease often enough, but this gave me quite a shock. Of course, our niggers wash when they are near water, because they have to.

#### September 4<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave M'kali on the back trek to Morogoro. Although the roads are bad, it is easier travelling, because we are going downhill.

#### September 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We arrive at Morogoro and we are attached to the First Division under General Sheppard. We are more than pleased for several reasons. I am not at all impressed by the Boers as I have seen them. They have not the least discipline. Their habits in camp are filthy. No sanitary arrangements are made by them. Every night they will sing and pray for an hour or so, then they will gamble and blaspheme for hours. As soon as they are on active service, they never shave, very seldom wash or even think of putting a

stitch in their clothing. It is easy to imagine that in a very short time, a more ragged or more disreputable crowd would be very hard to find.

There is one thing in which they excel. If there is any loot to be got, they will have it. I have seen examples of their handiwork. What they cannot carry away they will deliberately break up. What they did with all their loot, I have not the slightest idea. We had the greatest difficulty in carrying our necessary articles. This is a rough picture of the God-fearing Boer as I have seen him.

The South African troops which are composed of the British settlers in South Africa, are a different class altogether. They are an intelligent, well educated body of men who could and would fight. I could not say the same of the Boers. Yes, we are pleased to leave these Cape Dutchmen.

#### September 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We leave Morogoro in a south-easterly direction and strike the best road we have yet found in East Africa. The road has been made by the Germans with the intention of placing a railway on it, but the war had stopped the work. The gradient is very easy compared to what we have been used to and the road being even, we travel well and halt by the roadside, after doing a distance of 38 miles.

We find that, according to the map, there is a village about half a mile away in the bush. I have to find the village and search for any lurking German askaris. Night has now fallen, but I eventually find the village. It is not a very pleasant job searching these hovels. Some of them are crowded with several families, all living in the one room. The smell of a nigger is at no time pleasing, but under these conditions, it is simply overpowering. We search every 'bando' in the village but found only old men, women and children. All I could get from them was "*Askari quenda hooko*" (soldier gone that way). I

was glad to get away from the village and breathe a bit of fresh air. After a cup of stewed bully, I fix up my mosquito net and turn in on the roadside.

After all was quiet, a huge monkey, as big as a retriever dog, went shambling by. He was so close that I could have touched him by stretching out my arm but he seemed to be in a deep study, so I did not molest him. He would have been an awkward customer if vexed.

#### September 7<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We continue along our good road, and just before mid-day, as beautiful view as one could wish to see was unfolded before us. Our road had been through the mountains, until at last a turn in the road showed us a beautiful valley with a wide river running through it, hundreds of feet below us. The road was cut out of the mountain side. On our left was the mountain rising hundreds of feet above us; on our right, a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the river. The road itself was about 10 feet wide. I don't mind admitting when we first turned onto this path, I clutched tight hold of the side of my car and hoped sincerely that nothing would happen to the steering gear. In a short time, we reached the bank of the river where it was spanned by a bridge, which we crossed. We now find that we can go no further. The road we have come by ends at the bridge.

We are now on a piece of land of oblong shape, about 500 yards long by 200 yards wide. We are surrounded by the mountains. There are two ways out, the road we have come by, and a road in a south-west direction, about six feet wide which has been blasted out of the rock. But this road is overhung by rocks so low that there is not enough height for our three ton lorries to get through. So here we are. For how long, I don't know.

#### September 13<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have a fresh rumour here every day. One day our chaps are still chasing Jerry.

Another day they have been surrounded while still another day says Lettow-Vorbeck has slipped through the net. One rumour says that we are going back to Blighty while another says we are for Mesopotamia. Anyhow, the Indian Engineers are busy blasting the rock away, so to my mind it looks as if it is intended that we go through.

We find this place is extremely hot, the shade temperature being anything about 115 degrees, so it is not necessary to double about to keep warm. The nights are not much cooler, because being as it were in the bottom of a basin, we get no breeze at all. The light rains are just commencing, so it looks as if we are in for a good thing here.

#### September 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The rains still continue, and although they are called 'light' rains, in reality they are about as heavy as a thunderstorm at home, lasting a few hours and then a break, then another 'light' shower. The result of this is that the roads are now impossible for wheeled traffic.

This is a serious matter for us. Our rail-head is at a place called Korogwe, a station on the Tanga-Mochi railway. This is the nearest railway point to us until the Dar-es-Salaam to Ujiji railway is repaired. As this place is 250 miles in our rear, it does not require much study to know that we are in for a 'good thing'. They are already organising native porters to carry rations and ammunition through, but a native only carries 40 lbs. for a trek of 12 or 15 miles.

I cast my mind back to the 'Old Country' for a moment and think of an attacking force at Portsmouth, with the rail head at York and not a wheel to get supplies through with. It seems impossible. Let us hope things brighten up for us very shortly.

September 27<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are still on the banks of the Ruvu River. The rains are still with us and the river which was a swiftly flowing river before the rains is now a raging torrent. The bridge was in danger of being carried away, but we saved it by dumping hundreds of tons of stone round the piers of the bridge, thus somewhat breaking the strength of the current. We are now living in a very frugal manner. We have been on quarter rations since the 13<sup>th</sup>. of this month. Our full rations since we left M'buyuni have been 8ozs. mealie meal (crushed Indian corn), 4ozs. flour (when we could get it), 4ozs. of bully beef and a quarter of an ounce of coffee, also 4ozs. biscuits. No milk, no sugar, unless we 'found' a bag which was intended for somewhere else. This does not give scope for much variety but we managed fairly well until now. Now we are cut down to a quarter of the above amount. We are not likely to be suffering from dyspepsia through overloading our stomachs.

We encouraged some natives from a village near at hand to bring us some food. They brought us some yams, sweet potatoes, mealie meal and occasionally some eggs, or an old fowl or two. Then we were in clover. I am sorry to say that our officers issued an order to the effect that the natives should be conducted to the officers' quarters immediately on arrival in camp. This put the dampers on us, because there was nothing left worth eating when they left the officers' quarters.

I don't think this was a very sporting spirit, but there it is. A hungry stomach is not a good companion, so we soon found means to overcome this difficulty. A few of us used to go outside the camp boundary, meet the natives coming in, buy or barter according to our means, what we wanted without actually breaking the order that had been issued.

October 1<sup>st</sup>. 1916

The rains are gradually easing, but when they stop, it will take a little time before

the roads will be fit to be used. We have used a back-water of this river for bathing since we have been here. The river is reported to be clear of crocodiles, but I have several times fancied that I smelled them. They smell very much like aniseed. I have mentioned it to whoever I have been with at the time, but they have never noticed it so I thought I may have been mistaken. The other day I was walking along the bank by myself when I got within 20 yards of one which was basking in the sun. It had not heard me approaching and I watched it for several minutes. I then made a noisy movement and he was in the river in a flash. I searched for him for some time but could not find him.

There are also a good lot of wild boars around here but it requires a skilled hunter to get one. A South African who is attached to us took two or three of our chaps with him the other night and succeeded in shooting one that had come down to the river to drink. They brought it back to the camp, where it proved a valuable addition to our rations. There is also a very fine monkey here in large numbers. When it stands on its hind legs, it is about four and a half or five feet high. It has a beautiful black coat and a long flowing white beard which gives it a venerable appearance. It is called the Colobus monkey and is supposed to be very rare although there are plenty here. To shoot these, a hunter must get a special licence which costs £25. Armed with this, he is only allowed to shoot two of these monkeys. I am also given to understand that the skins realise a great sum of money in South Africa. I can quite believe it for they are beautiful things.

October 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are not having so much rain now but the roads are bad. I shall be very glad when we get away from here. The health of the battery has been bad and we have been unable to get any medical attention. If a chap went down with malaria or dysentery, he stayed there till nature



picked him up. We haven't a grain of quinine, aspirin or phenacetin in the stores.

Some of the chaps have been delirious for days together, but we have not had a death since we have been here.

#### October 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The rains have stopped and now we are getting a few Ford cars through. Today we get the news that one of our guns has to go forward. The FWD lorries are still unable to get through. I expect it will be some time before the blasting is far enough advanced to allow the lorries to get through. We are to have two spans of oxen with Cape boy drivers for the gun, along with seven AT (ammunition transport) carts with oxen and Indian drivers for stores and ammunition. I wonder what kind of a sensation the people back home would have if they saw a turn out like this. We certainly do not stand on pomp out here. The other day a brigadier general stopped me to ask a question. He was wearing a pair of khaki drill riding breeches which had a leather patch on one knee, about six inches square. Some swell!

My gun is the one selected to go through. Our OC gives me permission to pick my own detachment while he picked the signallers and telephonists. This has brightened things up a lot here. Our chaps were getting very glum. Now they are holding an impromptu concert. All are happy, some because they are going, others because they hope to be following shortly. This is the spirit which has possessed our chaps right through. All past hardships are forgotten when there is any likelihood of having a go at Fritz.

#### October 11<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our mules and Cape boys in the charge of a corporal of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. S.A.F.A and oxen with A.T. carts and Indians, under an Indian sergeant arrive at 8.30 this morning. While they are getting breakfast we load up and the whole party are away in an hour. After an unexciting day we halt at night at a place called Buka-Buka.

#### October 12<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Shortly after leaving Buka-Buka, we arrive at 'Sheppard's Pass'. This pass is named after General Sheppard and is really a fine piece of work which that general had done during the last three or four weeks. When first entering the pass, you see the plains covered with bush and jungle thousands of feet below you. The surprising part is that one has no idea that one is at such an altitude, until this view suddenly opens out before one. I can imagine that before this pass was cut, it was just like walking to the edge of a cliff, thousands of feet high and no means of getting down. But Sheppard cut a road out of the cliff side. It is very steep and about five miles long. Of course it winds about considerably, but this distance gives one an idea of the great height of the 'cliff'.

When we went down, we had both brakes on the gun wheels, but the speed was such that it kept us on the trot all the time until we reached the bottom. When I say it took us an hour and a quarter, I think I am within bounds when I estimate the distance at five miles. It was a rather nerve-testing journey, because, if you are travelling a short distance with the brakes 'easy' and suddenly had occasion to apply them 'hard', if you applied them too hard in your excitement, in all probability the gun would skid over the side, taking mules and drivers with it. Or if not applied hard enough, and the gun got away, the result would be similar. The road was about eight to twelve feet wide, so there was not too much room to swerve about in. Anyway I heaved a sigh of relief when I got the gun down to the bottom 'all correct'.

The rest of our journey for that day was comparatively easy and we arrived at Tulo shortly after midday. There is a deep, very swift-running river here, so after having a meal we went (as we usually do when there is any water about) and had a bath.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Fight

Sickness strikes the camp – Meeting with a fellow Hull man – The elusive Lettow-Vorbeck – The Rufiji River

October 13<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Last night we had a rum ration. This is the first time that rum has been issued to us. I found that it did me a lot of good although the ration was only two tablespoonfuls. Instead of turning in as limp as a wet dish-cloth, I felt quite vigorous. We left Tulo early this morning and we soon felt the power of the sun down on these plains. The South African corporal with us gives us a very dismal prospect concerning our new district. He tells us that malaria and dysentery are very bad here. Well, if it is any worse than some of the districts we have been in, it must be bad. We have had more than a little sickness since we have been in the country. Of the whole of the battery, there are only the OC, a bombardier and myself who have not been in hospital, sick with one or the other of the diseases peculiar to tropical climes. I am rather proud of this record, because I am not exactly a youngster.

I hope sincerely that I shall continue to have this luck. Today we reach Duthumi and are once again in the firing line.

October 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We find the 'line' here only very lightly held, no one being permanently in the trenches. Our front extends from Duthumi to a town named Kissaki, 16 miles away, both places being in our hands. There are not many troops here, and the 'line' itself is held by patrols of the various units which mount for 24 hours duty. Apparently the enemy hold their line by a

similar procedure. When two opposing patrols bump into each other, then there is a bit of excitement until reinforcements arrive and drive the enemy back. The artillery here consist of one section of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. SAFA with two 18 pdr. guns, one section of the 7<sup>th</sup>. SAFA with two obsolete 15pdr. guns and our obsolete but useful 5 inch howitzer. The infantry are Col. 'Jerry' Driscoll's 25<sup>th</sup>. battalion of the London Fusiliers (Frontiersmen), the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Rhodesian Regiment, which are all of the whites, the Jumna and Cashmere Rifles (Gurkhas) the 30<sup>th</sup>. Punjabis and a battalion of the Nigerian Rifles. All these units are down to about half strength, or even less brought down by fever, etc. I was speaking to one of 'Driscoll's boys' today and he tells me that when all ranks are paraded, they muster about 200 men. Of course, the battalion came out a 1,000 strong, not counting a reserve company, so one may form a slight idea of the losses in this country.

We hear very doleful tales about the unhealthy climate here, but one must not think about such things. I notice that those who worry about their health usually go under first.

October 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We borrow a span of mules, and after travelling about a mile, we come into action and strafe the enemy by bombarding several of his positions, at 4.00pm., 7.00pm., and again at midnight.

October 16<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have not been in the camp during the night so we awoke Fritz up by bombarding him at 5.00am. this morning. We then filled up with ammunition, which was carried from the camp by our boys, after which we went to another position in a village named Dakawa. This place is about eight miles from Duthumi. It is fearfully hot here, so our eight miles trek during the day time is somewhat fatiguing. We have an escort of 50 Nigerian Rifles under an English officer with us to defend us in case of a surprise attack. These chaps are fine men physically, but are awfully disfigured in the face, by having terrible designs cicatrized on that part of the body. Each one has a different design, and if the idea is to make themselves look fierce, they succeed admirably. The officer tells me that he would not wish for better fighters but that they cannot understand why they are held in check when an objective is achieved. The difficulty of leading them is to prevent them over-reaching themselves.

We come into action again at 5.00, 7.00 and 9.00pm. After which we partake of our bully and biscuits. Then we may sleep by the side of our gun. Our telephonists had rather an exciting time tonight. During the afternoon they ran the line out to a forward observing position, about a mile in front of the gun. After dark, they started to reel in and make their way back to the gun. As luck would have it, they bumped into an Indian patrol. They were promptly challenged. Our chaps knew no Hindustani, the Indians knew no English. An Indian usually wastes no time in these affairs. He has a habit of shooting first and challenging after. So our men were uncomfortable and tried to tell them that they were in the RGA. The Indians then felt for the numerals on the shoulder straps, but being only in their shirts, there were no numerals. It was certainly a lucky day for our men, for after much argument, the Indians decided to let them through, but an escort was sent along with them to see that all was correct. I need hardly say

that they were very pleased when they arrived at the gun.

#### October 17<sup>th</sup>. 1916.

We start our trek back to camp. After travelling about half the distance, we again come into action and give Fritz some hot stuff to hold. We arrive back in camp at about 5 o'clock and have a wash, the first we have had since the early morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### October 21<sup>st</sup>. 1916

The last few days we have been busy building bandas and otherwise making ourselves as comfortable as possible in our fresh camp.

The enemy occasionally sends us a 'bit of stuff' but on the whole, he does not worry us too much. General Smuts was around the other day and as far as we can gather we are just holding on here until he reorganises, so we are likely to be here some time unless the enemy drives us back. I imagine that is what would happen if Fritz only knew what a very slender force there is here.

Today we went out and gave our friends a warm time for a couple of hours. We were just 'hooking in' when they commenced to give us a reminder. They had located our position to a nicety. The first shell went about 50 yards over in a direct line. The next about 20 yards over and then the fun started with our borrowed mules. I don't know where the rest of the shells dropped. The mules took up all our attention. At last we got hooked in and reached the camp whilst Fritz was still shelling our position. None of us had a scratch, so our good luck in that respect still sticks to us.

#### October 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

Our men continue to go down sick with fever, etc. We have now about 34% of our men away from the battery under medical attention, so we have not too many men.

#### October 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

I go out with the OC to find another position as he will not have the old one now that the Boche has found it.

#### October 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We come into action in our new position. By some means we disturbed a nest of bees. They attacked us in force. My detachment was driven away, but I did not like the idea of leaving the gun for such a cause. I was foolish because eventually things became too real and I had to clear it, followed by a host of bees. Afterwards a chap drew 45 stings out of my face and neck alone, while I drew a large number out of my hands and arms. We waited until dark, when the bees settled down. Then we got our gun out into the open. We did not return to camp tonight.

#### October 25<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I have difficulty in seeing today, my face being swollen so much with the stings. The OC and myself search for and find another position, which we take up. We have a good day's bombardment, the boys attached to us, assisted by boys from other units, carried up our ammunition from the camp about one and a half miles in our rear.

#### October 26<sup>th</sup>. 1916

There was to have been a big stunt on this morning but the weather interfered. We left camp early so that we should be able to open fire at dawn, as there was to be a general attack. I expect it was just to put the wind up the enemy but with the dawn came a torrential downpour of rain. For hours it came down in one sheet of water. The attack fizzled out, and at noon we were ordered back to camp. Our gun wheels cut into the sodden ground, so that in places they sank almost to the nave. We hooked on our drag-ropes and assisted the mules to get the gun back. If we had had our motor lorry it would have been useless on this ground today. When we reached our camp, we found our blankets and every rag we had, drenched.

#### October 27<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have not been out today, so we have been drying our things. We had to sleep in wet shirts, wrapped in wet blankets last night, but tonight we are OK, having dried all up.

#### October 28<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have a busy day sending compliments over to our friends. The 3<sup>rd</sup>. battery SAFA has gone back to Morogoro to reorganise and rest. That leaves us without any mules. So this morning we had 80 natives to haul our gun down to the position. Tomorrow night they will come to haul it back to camp.

#### October 29<sup>th</sup>. 1916

After finishing our series of shoots, the natives do the needful by taking our gun back.

When I arrive back to my banda I find that it is Sunday and a padre is waiting to see me. He has just come down to the line and he wants to hold a service tonight. I promise, and take him into the men's banda where the whole lot promise to attend. After dinner (we 'dine' late here) we have the service. Quite a lot attended and I enjoyed the address very much.

#### October 30<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We are now getting up some good food, and what is more, plenty of it. The quality and variety is quite the best we have had since we have been in the country. We have fresh beef, oatmeal, flour, coffee, tea, milk, sugar, dried vegetables, etc., with a rum ration three times a week. We attribute this change to General Sheppard, who is the GOC of this column. He is a very popular man, besides being a capable leader. He will frequently pull up a man who is passing him and question him about his living. If that man makes a complaint, the Camp Quartermaster is 'for it'.

We are short of a few things, chief of which are soap and tobacco. We wash ourselves and our clothing with sand. It is not very pleasant to have to rub oneself

with a few handfuls of sand when bathing, but this is the best we can do. I never realised how sweet tobacco is until now, when we can't get any. I have not had a 'fag' or a pipe for over three weeks now.

#### October 31<sup>st</sup>. 1916

We have had quite a big day, and earned great praise for our shooting from the General himself. He has been on the observation hill and observed the whole series. Afterwards he came down to the position and dished out such compliments that it made us all feel like blushing schoolgirls. At least, I am sure that I did.

#### November 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1916

We have had a couple of days rest, so we have been able to get all washed up again. We have plenty of good water here. The river is within a quarter of a mile of the camp, and here it is about 100 yards wide with a depth of three or four feet, but during the rains I expect it will rise very quickly. The name of the river is the M'geti. It is a tributary of the great Rufiji.

We have been out today with the usual stuff for Fritz.

#### November 5<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We again arrive back to camp and find the padre waiting for us. It is Sunday and he wants to hold another service. He has made himself so popular with all the ranks that, tired as we are, we hasten to wash ourselves and hold our open-air service.

#### November 8<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The last few days I have been rather groggy. I have had a high temperature with vomiting and getting very little sleep at night. During last night, I have broken out in a rash which covers me from head to foot. There is only one way out of the difficulty and that is by reporting sick. After being examined by the doctor, or MO as we term them, I am detained in hospital. So the record I was getting proud of is broken.

#### November 9<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Last night I bumped into a temperature again, so I have to have a course of quinine injections.

#### November 12<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am getting along all right, but the MO will not listen to me when I tell him I want to be out.

#### November 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I believe I have already mentioned that I did not like the field hospitals. My experience here has firmly fixed that dislike in my mind. There is very little comfort of any kind. There are no beds of course. Everyone lies on the ground, but the ground is not clean. The result is that one is continually taking one's shirt off and having a 'big game hunt'. Up to the present, I have been able to keep myself clear of vermin, but now I have got to put some energy into the business or I should be carried away.

Every night I am having a 15 grains of quinine injection. It is left to the patient to decide whether he will have it in his arms, buttocks or body. I am now in that state that I don't know where to have mine. I am so sore that I can neither sit nor lie in comfort. We have an Indian on the staff here who carries the Sergeant Major's crown. What position he holds in the hospital, I don't know. He came the other night to give me my injection. But, oh no! I wasn't having it from him. "The MO or no one" I said. If I have to be punctured, it shall be a white man to do it. He didn't seem to like me a bit because I wouldn't let him 'stab' me. It may be a childish whim, but there it is.

#### November 18<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am successful in convincing the MO that I am well, so I pack my kit and get back to my battery tonight. I do know chaps who will 'swing it' to stay in hospital. Well, I don't think much to their taste. I am jolly pleased to get out.

#### November 19<sup>th</sup>. 1916

The battery is out again this morning. The OC wants me to take things easy for a bit

and tells me I had better stay in camp. I don't care much for the idea so I ask permission to go up to the observation hill with him. He agrees, so when the gun leaves camp, I climb the steep hill to watch the shooting. From the post, one gets a wonderful view over the country for miles. We are in telephonic communication with the gun and I find it very interesting to see the results of our shooting. During the day General Sheppard came up. He would have a few shots at one target, and then a few at another. At last he finds a machine gun emplacement. He points it out to our OC "Give them a round there, Floyd", he said. The OC in about two seconds, sends down to the gun the necessary angle, elevation, etc.

I am getting rather excited. In a very short time, the message comes, "No.1 ready, sir". I have my glasses glued to my eyes. I want the boys to do their best now. Immediately the answer goes back, "Fire, No.1." A few seconds pass by. I forget to breathe when up goes the whole lot. Fragments of timber and bodies go up with a cloud of lyddite fumes.

I could have cheered. I turned my head and looked at the general. He was spotting through a telescope. He closed up the glass, stood upon his feet and said, "Damn it Floyd, you could hit a half-crown at 6,000 yards." What the OC felt, I don't know. I felt as if I was up in the skies. The old battery had upheld its reputation once more.

#### November 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

We have some more shooting today. I have been out with the gun again. I have already said that we have natives to haul our gun. I think it is a remarkable sight to see these 'boys' on the drag ropes. We usually have about 60 boys on the ropes, sometimes 80. Going out, they all start chanting a song. It is a most uncanny tune, one that gives you the creeps. Our head boy says that the native always sings it when going out to fight. On returning, they

give a different exhibition. They have a head boy with them who, by the control he has over them, I presume is a native chief. As soon as we are ready to return to camp, we get the boys on the ropes. I give the order "*Futa camba*" (pull on the rope) and away we go. The old head boy starts to sing, the whole joining in. This tune is much livelier than the other but still it sounds very weird. When they get into full swing, the old man starts to run up one drag rope side, and down the other singing loudly and gesticulating wildly. This gradually works them all up into a frenzy. First one and then another will break from the rope, dash into the bush alongside the path and cut a branch about the length of a spear. He will then dance wildly. After this, he will hang on to the rope whilst another goes through the performance.

We are travelling along all the time. It is impossible for me to describe the show. The singing, the running, the gestures, the wild dancing and the frenzy of the whole crowd is too much for my pen. Our head boy tells us that this is their victory dance. Well, it is a sight of a lifetime to see it as these boys dance it.

#### November 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

My section officer has gone sick. This leaves us with only one officer -- the OC, so for the time being I take over section officer's duties. The OC always takes up his position on the observation hill, so I shall be in charge down at the battery. We have been out *straafing* again today. Our OC is always a stickler for rapid calculations, but I think my work has been satisfactory because he complimented me on returning to camp this evening.

#### November 28<sup>th</sup>. 1916

I am again battery leader today when we give the Huns a rather warm time this morning.

#### December 1<sup>st</sup>. 1916

Our lieutenant has returned to duty, so I resume my old work as No.1 on the gun.

We have been out all day trying to give Fritz an unhealthy time.

December 6<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our sergeant major has gone sick today. The general health of the battery is a little better now, although we have had reinforcements lately, we are still 30% below strength.

Our living continues to be good. We get a flour ration occasionally and then we manufacture a kind of bread. I don't know what the home folks would think of it if they had it. I expect it would be thrown into the dust-bin as being unfit for human food, but we think a lot of it. It is a great change after eating Hardman's biscuits for so many months. We are still without soap, tobacco, etc. The mails come up very badly too. It is sometimes 10 or 12 weeks between deliveries, and then one may receive three or four letters at once. If one gets a letter in good time, it is eight or ten weeks after being written. The delay causes us a lot of worry because when there is nothing doing, one's thoughts at once turn to home. The postal arrangements are in the hands of the Indian Field Postal Authorities but I think it could be improved upon. A great number of letters never leave the base, I feel quite sure. I have one sent from home every week and occasional letters from friends, but after eight or ten weeks, I only get two or three, so they must go somewhere.

December 10<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Today we have used TNT for the first time. As far as we can tell, this explosive is very similar to Lyddite in its action.

December 13<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have had some heavy rains during the last few days, and as fast as we dry our things, we have been drenched again.

Yesterday, Fritz came out of his shell, and by some means got his guns close up and gave us a warm time in camp. It is so long

since we have heard him speak that this bombardment quite took us by surprise.

December 14<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Yes, the enemy is still very much alive. One of his patrols had got through ours yesterday and succeeded in capturing our convoy of rations and this was done not half a mile from our camp! Some cheek! I am thinking that if he knew how few of us are here we should be for it. It is very unkind of him.

December 15<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have been out again today returning the compliments for what we received two days ago. I need hardly say that we were especially careful in posting our escorts. We don't want to be the guests of the enemy if we can avoid it.

December 20<sup>th</sup>. 1916

We have had quite a lot of sickness these last few days. I presume it has been caused by the continual drenchings we have had lately. Our OC and the lieutenant have now gone into dock, the one with fever, the other with dysentery. This leaves me as OC of the battery.

December 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1916

I have been looking through our records and I find we left M'buyuni with a full establishment of three officers and 45 NCOs and men for the two guns, not counting the ASC Mechanical Transport drivers who were attached to us. At Ruvu River, we were reinforced by 18 men. Now we have neither motors nor drivers, we borrowed mules and now we have none. As mentioned before, we have only one gun, and it is hauled into and out of action by natives. The gun we left behind at Ruvu River has been sent back to M'Kessi, the rail-head. The men have been sent up to us, but at the present moment we have no officers and 21 NCOs and men only out of a grand total of three officers and 63 NCOs and men.



A great number of people at home are under the impression that this affair is a sight seeing tour arranged by Cooks!

A few days ago I met a Captain Clark here. He is in charge of an ammunition column. He is a Hull man and hearing my dialect, he invited me over to his banda for a chat. He had not seen Hull for 15 years and would like to talk about the old place. I promised, and then did not like to 'push' myself.

Tonight he came to my banda and insisted on me going across to his. I went. He had a stock of 'Johnny Walker'. We drank each other's health and chatted. Then we repeated it, and again. I stayed about an hour and a half. We did in two bottles. This was the first drink of any intoxicant I had tasted since leaving England, except for the rum ration, but I was as sober as any judge. What I am puzzled about is how I could drink a bottle of whisky without being any the worse for it. In normal times I may drink beer in moderation, but spirits I hardly ever touch. Still, that bottle did not upset me. The climate may have something to do with it. I don't know.

#### December 24<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Both my officers are still in dock. I am invited across to Captain Clark's banda again tonight. Being Xmas Eve, I suppose I must go or he will think that I am a poor example of what a Hull man should be.

All is life along this front now. Thousands of Indian and native troops are coming in daily.

We have had General Smuts and his staff here. Today I had the honour of showing him round my gun. He speaks English like an Englishman, but I believe he was educated at Oxford, so it is only what we can expect.

*See endnote.*

All this bustle and activity, with the GOC here, only points to one thing, and that is

that there is a move on the board at any time now. We are all keen as we are convinced this will be the last scrap out here. At least our hopes are that way.

#### December 25<sup>th</sup>. 1916. Xmas Day.

At dawn this morning, I am awakened by an orderly and informed that General Crow, the GOC RA requests my attendance at General Headquarters at 8.30am. After the interview in which I gave him a statement of the establishment of the battery, personnel, ammunition, etc., I go back to our camp wondering whether we shall take part in the 'big do' or not. I have him to understand that although we were so short-handed, we had been fighting our gun up to the present, and could continue to do so. It would be an awful punch to our chaps if we couldn't have a deal in this.

Being Christmas Day, I have had an unusual luxury for dinner. I have hung on to a tin of sardines since the last time I was in touch with a YMCA hut. That is so far back I fail to remember how long I have had it. But I have done it in today.

I have also been across to my old friend and had a tot of Johnny Walker. When crossing the camp on the way back to my banda, I met one of our chaps looking for me. I went with him to where two or three of our chaps were sitting round a candle. Another tot was handed to me. I drank it without asking any questions but I wondered where it had come from.

So ended this day of riotous living.

#### December 29<sup>th</sup>. 1916

Our section officer has now returned to duty but our strength has dropped to 18 men all told. Troops still come in by the thousand. The Cornwall Territorial Battery has also come up, after three months rest at Morogoro. There is also a marine battery of 2.4 inch naval guns. These have not been in action yet although they were at M'buyuni before we were. All these troops look spic and span, while we look

and feel very much the worse for wear, but we are comforting ourselves with the thought that it will soon be over out here.

#### December 31<sup>st</sup>. 1916

Our OC came out of hospital last night. This morning we leave Duthumi to take up a new position at Dakawa. We have had a FWD lorry and 15 Ford cars detailed to us. The lorry had to haul the gun while the Fords have 800lbs. of ammunition each.

#### January 1<sup>st</sup>. 1917 New Year's Day

All the news that we can gather is that Lettow-Vorbeck and the whole of his crowd are in the net, this time for good. Everybody has it so, so we are sure that it must be right. We man the gun three hours before dawn. The attack commences in earnest just as day is breaking. The rattle of rifle and machine gun fire is very heavy till mid-day. The artillery is also busy, so we have a noisy forenoon.

During the afternoon the firing becomes fainter and we were out of action, but still standing by. The heat of today has been terrific, and by nightfall we are pretty well done up.

#### January 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

We can get no reliable news, but one thing is certain, and that is that the enemy has once more slipped out of our clutches. There have been a few prisoners, but if things had been as successful as we had hoped, there would have been thousands of them. We are awaiting orders.

#### January 7<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Our losses seem to have been fairly heavy, but I expect the enemy will have suffered still more. Perhaps the most notable amongst our killed was Captain F.C. Salous of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Fusiliers. This man had a world-wide reputation as a big game hunter and explorer in Africa. His loss is keenly felt by all ranks of the Fusiliers. He was brave even to the point of rashness, and I am told he refused to take cover, with the result that he was mown down by machine gun fire.

The latest news we have is that the Hun is now racing pell-mell for the Rufiji River. Our transport did not stop with us. As soon as they got us here they went away on other work, so we are once again on our own.

#### January 8<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Transport has been sent for us this afternoon, so we hook in and take part in the chase once more. We arrive at Kissaki by sun-down.

#### January 9<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We are away before dawn, and after a hard day we arrive at Kimbambwe on the bank of the Rufiji River. On the way we passed a lake which seemed to be swarming with hippopotami. When one has only seen these huge animals in a zoo, it is something of an eye-opener to see them frisking about like kittens.

We met a formidable obstacle today. We had a desert of some six or seven miles wide to cross. The heat was terrible, and the sand was so hot that one could not hold it in the hand. Our gun and transport were continually sinking up to the axles in it, and we had a lot of trouble digging them out. Even so, we did about 35 miles, which under the circumstances was very good.

#### January 10<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We found our old friend, the enemy, holding the south bank of the river, while we come into action on the north bank. The river here is about 700 yards wide, so there is not a great distance between us. We are in position behind a bank. Jerry searches for us with his artillery but does not meet with any success. There has been heavy fighting all day. We again receive praise from General Sheppard.

#### January 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Our section officer is again in hospital. I believe this is the most deadly place we have yet struck. We are having some 'light' rains. After half an hour's rain our gun stands in water up to its axle. The heat

during the day absolutely burns one up, while at night one swelters in it.

Mosquitoes, tsetse fly and all other crawling insects are here by the million. At night the yelping and howling of wild beasts keep us awake half the night through. We are having a bad time with fever. While we have been here, we have received six men as reinforcements, but our total strength has fallen to 15 NCOs and men, all told. Out of this number, we have found men to connect up all the batteries here with the observation post. We also keep the telephone communications in repair. There are six men to work the gun. This includes the men's cook, the OC's cook and the OC's servant. We are quite ready for a rest when we can snatch one.

We have obtained a footing on the south side of the river. A detachment from both the Fusiliers and the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Rhodesians have been left behind to row the Indian and native troops across the river at night. The remainder of these regiments have been

sent back, to leave the country as soon as possible as they are dead beat with fever and other tropical diseases.

I have not been well lately, being troubled a lot with high temperatures, a splitting head, no appetite and restless nights. I am being attended to by the doctor who is attached to the naval battery, but I have no improvement up to the present. There is only one field hospital here and they have no accommodation for white troops.

January 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Yesterday we had the mail in. With my letters, I received a box from my mother with an Xmas pudding in it. This had been posted during the first week in October, so it gives one some idea how long it takes to get news from home. I smoked the fags but the other chaps ate the duff. I had to take their word for it that it was good.

We have now driven the Huns from their hold on the river bank and they are out of our range.

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In fact, General Smuts attended Christ's College, Cambridge, England.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Sick Leave

*Journey to hospital – Delights of Cape Town – Return to Durban –  
Embarkation for Kilwa – The enemy falls back – Fever strikes – Leaving  
German East Africa*

January 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1917

I am rather worse if anything. Last night the MO came down to see me, after which he had an interview with the OC. Later, the OC came to my banda and told me that the doctor had decided to send me to the base, with a recommendation that I be sent out of the country. I was suffering from several complaints brought about by continual attacks of fever, and until I was in a better climate, it was impossible to do me any good.

This morning the OC brought his Ford car to take me back to the first hospital. He was extremely kind, and told me that if I was well enough to come back to the country, I had to wire him and he would immediately have me back to the battery. The praise he gave me was very flattering, but still I was very pleased to think that he spoke to me like it because usually he was very sparing with praise.

I arrived at the hospital during the afternoon, but what the name of the place was I don't know.

January 24<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I arrived at Baku Baku after dark. There is no hospital here, so I have to lie down on the ground. I have been unable to eat anything for some time, but a sergeant of the South African ASC gave me a big tot of rum, and this kept a bit of life in me.

January 25<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I arrive at the old place, the Ruvu River.

January 26<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Reach Makessa, the rail-head, after four days travelling in light cars. We have an English sister here, the first Englishwoman I have seen since last June.

I have seen a GRO informing all troops that General Smuts is going to England, and that he hands over all troops to the charge of General Hoskins.

*See endnote 1.*

January 27<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I reach Morogoro by rail and I am taken to the Kaiseroff Hotel, which has been made into a hospital. I am now taking a little milk and bread. By the way, this is the first bread (baked by bakers) that I have tasted since the 17<sup>th</sup>. June last. I thought it was a great delicacy.

February 4<sup>th</sup>. 1917

After 14 hours in the train I arrive at Dar-es-Salaam. I am placed in a building on the sea front that had been a fine hotel.

February 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I was examined by the MO yesterday. He at once put me on a draft for the south. I see he filled my sheet stating that I was suffering from a weak heart and anaemia, caused through intermittent malaria.

Today I am sent aboard the hospital ship Delta. We leave Dar-es-Salaam. The German ship Konig is stranded on the beach near the mouth of the harbour, a battered wreck. The Germans intended to

sink this boat across the harbour entrance, but our cruisers found her a splendid target with the result that she is now a heap of scrap iron.

We called at Zanzibar for water, then continued our voyage down south.

#### February 12<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Durban to put ashore a number of South African patients, after which we at once put to sea again.

We are having a real good time on this boat. I am now eating well, and the food is very tempting after what we have been having. At breakfast, I have fish or an egg during the morning, fruit and a bottle of mineral water. For dinner I have chicken and milk pudding and at tea I have fish or an egg, (the opposite from what I had at breakfast), bread and butter and tea.

I am feeling much better and able to get about on deck, but I am so very weak. The least exertion seems to beat me altogether, but I expect I shall soon be fit again.

#### February 15<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Cape Town and entrain for Wynberg Hospital. Wynberg is a suburb of Cape Town, about eight miles from the docks. Ladies meet us at the station with tea, biscuits and cigarettes. We are then put into motors and taken a short distance to the hospital.

#### March 15<sup>th</sup>. 1917

A month has passed and I am still in hospital here. I have been at the MO several times about getting back to duty, but he won't send me for a 'board'. Anyhow, I am feeling a lot better than I was, but if I do any hill climbing I am soon out of breath.

I have had a rare good time here since I have been able to get out. After the MO's visit, (he comes round the ward every morning), we can spend the rest of the day as we please. Three days a week, we can travel into Cape Town by rail without

charge and the city is very interesting. One can pay a visit to the Railway and Harbour Institute where a good feed may be had. When the bill is brought, you only pay half of it as the local Red Cross pays the other half. Of course this only applies to men in hospital blues. Also, one may go to the Feather Market where a very good tea is provided free every afternoon. I have never cared to go there but I expect there is plenty of everything to eat.

There is a beautiful pier also, which is free to our chaps, where one may sit in a chair and listen to an orchestra playing two or three times a week. Then there is the Government Building, a fine museum, an art gallery or the Botanic Gardens, where almost every tropical or semi-tropical plant or tree grows.

If one cares for a ride, one can board an electric car in Adderley Street and go to Camps Bay for a shilling. The route takes you over a shoulder of Table Mountain, where one gets a view which has the reputation of being one of the finest views in the world, and it certainly is wonderful.

There are several rest rooms scattered about the city where one may sit and read or write. Fruit is very plentiful here, grapes in particular. One may buy a pound of beautiful black grapes for one and a half pence or yellow grapes for one penny. There is a theatre and a music hall which hold a matinee every week. They send invitations to the hospital and I am generally lucky enough to get one. So long as we report back to the hospital by 8.00pm. we are OK. Occasionally, gentlemen will drive up to the hospital in cars and ask permission to take a few patients for a drive. Away you go for a long drive through the beautiful country. You are given a good tea and then brought back to the hospital.

Last Sunday morning a lady came into the hospital and wanted four patients, but they must be 'Imperials'. I was one of the fortunate four. She lived at Kalk's Bay,

eight or ten miles away. We all walked down to the station where the lady bought return tickets for us. When we reached her house, we had a cup of tea and cake. She then took us for a stroll on the beach, where we met her husband. Then we all went back for a splendid lunch. The husband suggested a trip to Muizenberg, another sea-side resort about a quarter of an hour's train ride away. We all went together. This place is famous for its surf bathing, and I was very interested in watching the cleverness of the bathers. They swim well out with a plank. Then they mount the plank and come back on the top of a 'roller', which lands them high on the beach.

We arrived back at Kalk's Bay about 5.00pm. We then had a glorious dinner, after which this good lady gave each of us a great bag full of fruit and cakes to take back to the hospital with us, where we arrive back at about 8.00pm.

What can one say about such generous people as these? I was quite unable to thank them as I ought to have done, but I shall always remember that day as one of the brightest I have ever spent.

This lady told me how she longed to see 'home' again. She was a Nottingham lady and her husband hailed from Glasgow. They had been in South Africa for about 20 years. May they be as happy and prosperous as they deserve.

#### April 11<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Three weeks ago I was before a medical board, but they turned me down for further treatment. For what reason, I don't know, because I felt quite all right, and told them so. I have been at the MO several times since, with the result that today I have to report to Simon's Town for garrison duty.

Last week, about 500 patients from the Wynburg and Maitlands Hospitals were the guests of the Cape Town railwaymen. There were special trains to take us to Fish Hoek, a seaside resort near here. When we

arrived there we were at liberty to wander where we liked. There were stalls on the beach with refreshments for us. After spending an enjoyable time there, we were again entertained, and taken to Salt River, a suburb of Cape Town, where we were met by a brass band and marched through cheering crowds to a large hall which belonged to the railwaymen. We had a splendid dinner, followed by an enjoyable smoking concert. We had the pleasure of listening to a short address by Mr. Burton, one of the leading members of the South African Government and Minister for Railways. I am given to understand that this gentleman is a Boer (although the name doesn't give that impression) but I have never heard a more patriotic speech yet. He roused us all to the highest enthusiasm. I was sorry when he had to leave us to attend to his duties in the 'House'.

This outing and dinner were provided, managed, cooked and served by the railwaymen and their wives and once more showed the kindness and generosity of the people out here.

This afternoon I reach Simon's Town and am quartered in the Palace Barracks.

#### April 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Yesterday I was before a Medical Board and I was put on light duty to recuperate.

#### April 20<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I have certainly struck a cushy job here. One day last week, there was a court martial. The sergeant major of the barracks was in difficulties about a sergeant to act as Court Orderly. He asked me if I could undertake the job. Having had a little experience at Woolwich, I take it on. Apparently everything went smoothly, so I was struck off other duties and now I am Court Orderly for courts martial, courts of enquiry, etc. Some job!

#### April 30<sup>th</sup>. 1917

My good job continues, but I am rather restless. I am feeling well so I would like

to get back to my battery again if possible. The rainy season is now on in East Africa and it is reported in the press that when the rains cease, General van Deventer is going back again to take over from General Hoskins. I am rather sorry for Hoskins because he has had no real chance. Shortly after taking over from Smuts, the rains started. The troops he had were more or less worn out with the fever and disease. All this has prevented him from organising any move of importance. Now when the rains cease, van Deventer goes to take charge, just when Hoskins may have had his first real chance. I think that it must be a political move. I am not saying a word against the Boer general, because he has done some fine work in East Africa. Still, I think the whole job is a bit of toffee for the South African Boer to suck on.

If I stay here much longer I think I shall know the Cape of Good Hope as well as any native. I have been able to draw a little money since I have been in Simon's Town, so very often I have a tour in the surrounding district. I have paid a visit to Groote Schuur, one of the residences of the late Cecil Rhodes. It is a great rambling house, beautifully situated on the lower slopes of Table Mountain. It is a gift to the colony from Rhodes, on the condition that it is used as the official residence of the Prime Minister. It is at present occupied by General Botha. In the grounds is a fine zoo where all the birds and animals are kept as near to their natural condition as possible. This was also a gift to the colony. Higher up the mountain stands the Rhodes Memorial. This is a magnificent structure of white marble and can be seen from miles away.

The scenery of this part of South Africa is wonderfully pretty. Every turn of the road gives one a more striking picture than the last. The air is so clear that one can distinctly see a town nestling on the shore of the bay 18 or 20 miles away. There is a remarkable tree that grows here in such numbers that it is very common. It is named the Silver Leaf Tree. As its name

indicates, the leaves are the colour of silver and shine so in the sun that one could be excused for thinking that they were polished every morning. But more remarkable still, the settlers say that these leaves will last for years without dying or fading. I am sending some home to see if their words are correct. I am also told that the tree has been taken to various parts of the world to be cultivated, but without success. Yet it grows here wild!

May 7<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I hear that there is a medical board next week. If so, I expect that I shall go back east. I don't mind that at all. I would sooner be back with my old 'boys' than anywhere else.

May 14<sup>th</sup>. 1917

At last I am declared fit and well, and tonight I leave Simon's Town for Durban by rail. We had a few kind souls to see us off. I am in charge of 49 details consisting of RGA, RAMC, ASC Mechanical transport, ASC Supplies, RE and AOC. We are supplied with three days rations of bully beef, biscuits, milk, sugar, tea and butter. All the crowd are in good spirits. They could not be merrier if the war was over, and we were going home again. We left Adderley Street Station, Cape Town, at 8.30pm.

May 17<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Durban at 8 o'clock tonight, after being in the train for three days and three nights. I found the ride very interesting as we passed through a lot of towns which were very prominent during the Boer War. We had several breaks for an hour or so at some of these, which just gave us time for a glimpse, before we travelled further on. Perhaps the most notable of these were De Aar, the Orange River, Bloemfontein, Harrismith, then over the Drakenburg Mountains into Ladysmith (we had three and a half hours there), Tugela River, Colonso, Pietermaritzburg and then into Durban. A great number of the stations had the altitude in feet of that particular station on

the name boards and I found that at several of the places, we were over 5,000 feet above sea level.

When I called the roll at Durban, I was highly satisfied to find that all were present. Some of the chaps had drunk well, if not wisely, during our stoppages, but I was more than pleased that I had an 'All Correct' report to give in.

A Sergeant Major from the camp was at the station to meet us, and he marched us down to the Ocean Beach camp. After I had got all detailed off to their tents, we had a good supper provided by the YMCA people in their hut.

May 20<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am down with the fever this morning. This is the first relapse I have had since I left East Africa, so apparently it is still in my system. I don't report sick, but grease around the hospital orderly for some quinine.

May 25<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am quite all right again. We are to stop here until we get a transport to take us further up. There are a great number of troops here at present. The greater part of them are bound for India and like us, are awaiting ships.

We have our old friends, the 25<sup>th</sup>. Fusiliers here, who have been down south for three months, recuperating.

I wonder how my poor old battery is getting on? They have had to stick it right through, or at least, what there is left of them. There is another big camp on the other side of the town, at a place called Congella. This camp is for South African troops only.

As there are only two or three battalions of Boer troops (infantry) there, we don't bother them much. We are not hard worked. We have guards, fatigues, etc. and what are left have a bathing parade and an hour's route march each day. The rest of the time is our own, so we are seeing a good deal of Durban.

We are living very well. Our rations are both good and plentiful. I spend a few hours in the town every day. There are plenty of places of interest: parks, art gallery, zoological gardens and botanical gardens that I have already paid a flying visit to, but I intend to see more of them if I am able. I was taken up with the town in the short time I was here before, but the more I see of it, the more I like it.

June 1<sup>st</sup>. 1917

I am still waiting, but the time does not hang on my hands. Only one thing worries me: I have had no news from home since the 14<sup>th</sup>. of last February. Our home is one which is continually suffering from German air raids, and I can only think and wonder, wonder, wonder! Perhaps I may hear when I rejoin my battery.

June 9<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We have embarked on HMT Ingoma. As usual with these ships, it is crowded to excess. We expect to sail tomorrow.

June 10<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Again we bid goodbye to Durban and civilisation. I wonder for how long.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Return

*Journey to hospital – Delights of Cape Town – Return to Durban – Embarkation for Kilwa – The enemy falls back – Fever strikes – Leaving German East Africa – The journey home*

June 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

**W**e have had three very rough days but today the sea is much quieter. What a terrible place a troopship is after the first three days in a wicked sea. If I could describe this ship as she is just now, I wouldn't, but the memory of it will be in my mind for ever, I believe.

June 16<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This afternoon we arrive off Dar-es-Salaam. Alongside us lies one of the Canadian Pacific boats. It is a great ship and dwarfs ours to the size of a rowing boat.

June 17<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We entered the harbour this morning but cannot get alongside the wharf. This ship is able to discharge her passengers on to the wharf, when she can get a berth, owing to her not drawing a great deal of water.

I have spent the greater part of the day leaning over the ship's rail, watching the fishes. The water is so clear that one can see down to a great depth. The fishes are wonderful, both in shape and colour, or rather I should say colours, for they are all the colours of the rainbow. The tropics are a wonderful place for colour. Nature seems to paint everything in gorgeous colours, except the human beings (and when they are dressed, they adorn themselves in garments of many hues). The birds, the flowers and the bloom on the trees are of all the colours imaginable. The rising of the sun, or the setting of the sun, paint the sky in such colours that it

must be the despair of any artist to attempt to copy them. Even after dark, the diamond studded sky is being lit up every minute by vivid flashes of lightening. What a wonderful thing Nature is!

June 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Landed today and camped in the Imperial Detail Camp.

June 21<sup>st</sup>. 1917

The mosquitoes here are lively in the extreme. No matter how careful one is in fixing the mosquito net at night, you are sure to be worried by them all night long, and fleas run them a good second. I seem to be a happy hunting ground for both parties, and in the morning I have as many blisters on me as there are hairs on a dog's back.

June 25<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Yesterday I received orders to hold myself in readiness to embark for Kilwa. Today it is cancelled. I am acting Sergeant Major of the camp, so I am assisting the OC in the office.

June 27<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This morning we received a wire from Captain Floyd (the OC of my battery), asking for details as to reinforcements. I draw up a list with my own name first and took it to the Camp Commandant for his signature. He fumed because I had put my own name down, but I pointed out to him that that was my place, so he signed. But what a chance if I had wanted to dodge the column!

June 28<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We embarked on the HMT Salamis, a cockle-shell affair. I sincerely hope we strike no bad weather.

June 29<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We left Dar-es-Salaam this morning, and arrived at Zanzibar at midday. I approached the OC of troops for a shore pass. Being in charge of 28 RGA details, I 'click' and proceed ashore at 1.30pm., due back at 6.00pm. I found this place to be a typical eastern city. I explored the bazaars and amongst other places I found a place for liquid refreshment. I had picked up four or five other servicemen on my travels, and being hot and thirsty (as usual) we went in. The place was owned by two Greek women who took us into a room where we indulged in some very decent English bottled beer, (Peter Walker's, London). Of course, one is not supposed to drink beer in the tropics, but what can one do when it is there? The room was kept delightfully cool by a punkah but we had to keep making the punkah wallah put a jerk into it, for he kept falling asleep. We refreshed ourselves and went back to the ship, having had a very good afternoon ashore.

June 30<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We leave Zanzibar and pass the wreckage of HMS Pegasus which lay in the harbour. This cruiser had been sunk by the German cruiser 'Koenigsberg'. The latter caught the 'Peggy' in harbour while she was having her boilers and engines overhauled. The English ship had no steam so, she was a dead target, with the result that she was soon sunk. The Koenigsberg was afterwards sunk in the Rufiji River by the English Monitors 'Severn' and 'Mersey'.

July 1<sup>st</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Kilwa Kisiwani, the port of Kilwa Kivinji, commonly called Kilwa. This is another fine harbour with a very tricky entrance. There is no town, not even a village here. I expect the reason for this is that there is no fresh water, all water being carried here from Zanzibar.

The town of Kilwa lies on the coast, 16 miles north of this harbour, but Kilwa has no harbour. No ship, with the exception of native dhows can get within a mile of the beach, owing to the water being so shallow. That is the reason this harbour has been opened out, since this part of the country has been in our hands.

That the enemy is still in the neighbourhood is proved by the fact that two days ago he brought up his guns and shelled the ships in the harbour.

July 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

We disembark and I report to the MLO (Military Landing Officer). He at once pushes us off by fixing us up in cars for Kilwa, where we arrive about noon. I report to Lord Cranworth CRA. When told my name, he shakes hands and tells me that he is glad I have come back, because he is fed up with my OC making enquiries about me. Of course, I blow myself out like a frog after being told this.

There is some transport going up the line this evening, so myself and six others are to go up with it to my battery. I leave the remainder of the 28 NCOs and men here. I have a few hours' liberty, so after having a mug of tea, I have a stroll around the town. The town is extremely old, and as far as I can gather it was built by the Arabs centuries ago. The doors of the buildings show some wonderful examples of wood carving. I have seen similar work in Mombasa, but I believe these are more interesting.

The chief industry of this place is slave dealing. I know the majority of people at home imagine that that trade was killed off years ago. Well, it was carried on here by the Arabs right up to the outbreak of the war, and if it was not encouraged by the Germans, they made no effort to stamp it out. This is a fact well known by all the settlers along this coast.

Whilst walking about this afternoon, I have been surprised by seeing quite a lot of cases of elephantiasis. This loathsome disease is common enough in the tropics, but in no place in which I have been have I seen so many cases as I have seen today. One poor woman I saw had one leg of normal size but the other one thicker than a man's body. Still, she didn't seem to have much pain, although it was difficult for her to walk.

I left Kilwa at 6.00pm. and after a 26 mile ride, I reached my battery at a place called Rombo. The OC seemed pleased to see me but not half so pleased as I was to get back among the old faces, many of which I had not seen for over 12 months. The battery has been reorganised, and all that is left of the 158 Battery, the 11<sup>th</sup>. Battery and the 13<sup>th</sup>. Battery are now all together and we are just strong enough in personnel to man two guns. We came out as a brigade, with its own ammunition column and we are now only a section, but we are still hoping to last long enough to see the finish out here.

July 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1917

What rotten luck! I have had another dose of fever during the night and have spent the night tossing about. I am a bit better this morning but possibly that is because I am knocking about a good deal. I have been given a gun, and am busy overhauling her as we anticipate 'something doing'.

July 4<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We leave Rombo, and after dodging snipers during the whole of the run, we reach Beauman's Post.

July 5<sup>th</sup>. 1917

My 'dose' is much worse today, but the excitement of the scrap we are in helps to keep me going. Whenever there is a 'stand easy' though, I am down and out.

July 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We have had a big fight today, and the enemy has been driven out of all his positions on our front. I am a little better.

July 9<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We are marking time here for the present, so I have been turned in. I am very shaky and I have a terrible head, but I still hope to shake it off.

July 11<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Yesterday we left Beauman's Post and we are again among the infantry in the fighting, but strange to say, we are not brought into action. The name of this place is Kiwitama, and it is 26 miles from Beauman's Post. I think I have shaken the fever off again. Yesterday and today I have felt much better

July 12<sup>th</sup>. 1917

The Germans have fallen further back, but according to our Intelligence reports, they have taken up a very strong position about four miles away.

July 16<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We leave Kiwitama before daybreak and after a short run to a place named M'Tchama, we come into action and have a full day of it. I don't think I was ever so tired in my life as I am tonight. I must have lost my stamina.

July 17<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Once more the enemy has fallen back, and tonight we camp on his ground.

July 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Last night we received orders to move onto the other flank. This morning we left and I am not feeling well by any means. I had another bad night, with high temperature.

We had a splendid run until an hour before dark and then began a full chapter of accidents. We had reached a stretch of really good road and were travelling at about 16 an hour when the tail-pin of the lorry (to which my gun was fastened) broke. The connecting rod of the gun

limber dropped to the ground and slid along until it met a small hole in the ground. The gun was travelling at such a rate that the limber was turned completely over with the trail of the gun resting on the top and smashing the limber boxes to match-wood. We had hoped to reach N'gere-gere by dusk but this put the tin hat on it.

I was near beat myself, but it was no use looking at it. We set about it and got the gun clear of the wreckage. Then we put the remains of the limber in another lorry, made fast the trail of the gun to the lorry and away we went. I had aches and pains all over me, with a thirst like a wooden god, but we would make N'gere-gere by 7 o'clock. What a hope! We had travelled some seven or eight miles and we came to a dry river bed. We were crossing by an old wooden bridge when both hind wheels of my three ton lorry went through, carrying most of the bridge with it. I had a rigor on me and although I had my great-coat on, my teeth were chattering, but this had to be got out.

We worked for hours, and at last got clear and crept into N'gere-gere at 12.30am. I had had nothing to eat all day and wanted nothing now but a drink. After I got that, I laid down and watched the stars all night, until they faded away at sunrise.

#### July 19<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We are away again at day break and find the going more difficult. The paths we are now travelling on are very sandy and we are frequently hauling our transport and guns over stretches of sand.

I was a little better until noon, when my temperature started to rise again, and I commenced vomiting. I don't know where we stopped but I laid on the shells in my lorry all night.

#### July 20<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We have had another tiring day, but to speak the truth, I have not done much. I

have laid in the lorry most of the day. We reach Karongo.

#### July 21<sup>st</sup>. 1917

We have reached M'tinda Wallah, our new position. Our OC came with his car, had me put in, and rushed away with me to the hospital.

#### July 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

I am sent back to Kilwa in a car. I am feeling pretty rotten and after my temperature is taken, I am doused with cold water (to knock it back), and put to bed. We have travelled 70 miles to reach here.

#### July 29<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I have had a week here and I believe that I am a little better, but every night my temperature rises. Then in the morning it drops quite a lot. If we had charts here, I am thinking mine would be a funny picture. I have been 105.4° in the evening, while in the morning it has dropped to 97°, only to jump up again at night.

We have an English sister here to three tents. Each tent has about 18 patients. She deserves a gold medal as big as the face of Big Ben for sticking it in a climate like this.

#### August 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917 and Bank Holiday

I am still here with very little improvement. The doctor has decided to send me to the hospital ship in Kilwa Kisiwani harbour, only my temperature will keep going up and he says that while that happens, he will not move me. I believe the country has got me groggy this time.

#### August 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am now on my feet a bit, but very tottery.

#### August 20<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Another week has passed and I am still here. All the patients in this tent have been admitted since I came here. The others have either died or been sent away.

August 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

Corporal Winter, who took over my gun, has died here today. Poor Tom.

August 25<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am transferred to the stationary Hospital Ship 'Neuralia' in Kisiwani harbour, although my temperature was 103.6°. This morning it was 96°.

August 28<sup>th</sup>. 1917

The MO will not keep me here, so I am transferred to the HS Ebani for Dar-es-Salaam. During the five weeks that I was in 'dock' at Kilwa, my appetite was very poor and during the four days that I have been on this ship, I have hardly tasted food, although it looked very nice.

August 29<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We arrived at Dar-es-Salaam this morning, and I am removed to No.2 South African General Hospital, formerly the Kaiseroff Hotel. I am now a stretcher case, so I don't improve much. After being examined by the MO, I am marked for the south.

September 5<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am carried on board HM Hospital Ship 'Oxfordshire'. The ward I am in had been the 1<sup>st</sup>. Class Saloon in the ship's pre-war days and it is a very beautiful place. I have had a very bad time during the seven or eight days that I was in Dar-es-Salaam. High temperatures accompanied by vomiting and dysentery the whole of the time has been my lot. I have not had a morsel of food through my lips since I landed, and I truly believe that the kindness of the ward sister was the only thing that kept me going. She always tried to coax me to take some nourishment, but I could not look at it. She would leave me and then bring back for me half a glass of brandy or whisky and soda. How that put new life in me! She also left instructions for the night nurse to do the same.

It is impossible for anyone to have done more for me than that lady did, and I am very grateful for it.

September 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We steam out of harbour today, and I saw the last of German East Africa as I was being hauled aboard on my stretcher.

I am examined by the MO and he expresses the opinion that he will have me on my feet by the time we get to the Cape. I hope he does, for I am fed up with this.

September 8<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I have had a little boiled chicken and some jelly today and I have to take a small bottle of stout every night. Things are improving!

September 11<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Durban tonight. The last day or so, there has been a very heavy swell on.

September 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Last night we left Durban and ran into a terrific gale. All the ship's hands were turned out and the hospital staff who were not on duty were paraded for emergencies. But I knew very little of this at the time. I believe that last night was the worst night I have had yet. My temperature started to climb soon after we left harbour until it reached 105.2°. I was delirious most of the night, so I did not know of the rough time the ship had. I am somewhat better now, but not normal.

September 16<sup>th</sup>. 1917

After four extremely rough days, we arrive at Cape Town. I am still a stretcher case. I am entrained for the Alexandra Hospital, Maitlands.

Whilst I am laid on the platform at Maitlands, awaiting removal, a kind-hearted old lady came and gave me a glass of milk. She made me as comfortable as possible on my stretcher, but the whole of the time she was weeping. This is another instance of the kindness of the people out here.

September 17<sup>th</sup>. 1917

My temperature is now 101°. The MO has examined me and told the sister to mark me for England with the first boat.

September 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This morning my temperature is normal and I am feeling a little better. I have eaten a few dainty bits, and what is more, I have kept them down.

September 21<sup>st</sup>. 1917

I am making good progress. I have had no further relapse, and my appetite is now quite keen. For breakfast, I have tea, bread and butter and an egg or two if I can eat them. Dinner consists of boiled chicken with vegetables. Tea is fish and bread and butter and supper, a bottle of stout and biscuits. One should do well on that.

September 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

Today I was allowed up from after dinner until teatime. I sat in a basket chair on the stoep or verandah. The sister packed me up with pillows and brought me an armful of magazines, etc. How good they all are!

September 26<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am now up all day. Today was my first day. There is a boat for Blighty tomorrow, but the MO says that I am not fit to leave.

October 1<sup>st</sup>. 1917

Everyone who is able to go out today is out. It is a general holiday in Cape Town. I should have liked to be out but the MO says, "No, wait until you are stronger."

October 7<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I have drawn serge clothing for home today. I have not told the wife that I am coming home. It would only unsettle her. I expect she would lie awake at nights, wondering whether the ship would be torpedoed or not. It is better for her to know nothing until I land.

October 8<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I sweethearted the sister to get me a pass through, to enable me to get into the town. It came off, but I was pleased to get back after a couple of hours.

October 10<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am transferred to the Australian Hospital Ship 'Karoo'. Although I am mighty pleased at the thought of seeing the dear 'Old Country' again, I shall always think kindly of South Africa. I met with nothing but kindness where ever I was in the country. English people who had settled in the country could not do enough for me. I am by no means good at making friends with strange people, but that counted for nothing here. They simply carried one away, and would not stop to listen to thanks. That's how I found them. May they all prosper.

We left Cape Town today and again found a heavy sea, but the stern of the ship is pointing in the right direction. I shall soon have news from home now. The year is now well advanced and I have had no news from home since last February. This has worried me much more than I can say.

We are not going through with a convoy. We are going on our own, so let her rip so that I can get that long-looked-for letter.

October 15<sup>th</sup>. 1917

The sea has now settled again and we are having lovely weather. I am fixed up in a very comfortable ward. We have a library on board, so after the MO's daily visit, I get my book and a deck chair, plant myself under an awning and there I stop, with the exception of meals, until dark.

October. 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

We crossed the line again today. I am still improving. I feel myself getting stronger, but of course, I have had no test yet.

October 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Dakar today. I think that my geography must be very bad, because I have never heard of this place until now. It is a French coaling port, and a fine place too. There are electric and hydraulic coal hoists all round the fine harbour. The harbour is filled with ships and we cannot get a berth, so lighters laden with coal are

towed alongside and we are coaled by the old-fashioned hand windlass.

October 24<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am pleased we are leaving Dakar today. It is dreadfully hot here, without a sign of breeze, and I am not feeling too well again. I think the 'Torrid Zone' has got me all right.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# England

*Arrival at Avonmouth – The battle with malaria – Reunion in London.*

October 30<sup>th</sup>. 1917

**W**e are getting near to dear old Blighty once more. We are now in a much cooler temperature with a cloudy sky above us. There is a great amount of wreckage floating about, fragments of torpedoed ships, so the mariners tell us.

It was rumoured on the ship that we would take a Spanish officer aboard at Dakka. He would be responsible for seeing that we had no war materiel on board, so that if we were stopped by a German submarine, everything would be in order, but we have no Spanish officer aboard.

I have been looking at a map and I calculate that I shall have travelled, roughly speaking, about 21,000 miles on the sea alone by the time I get back to England. This is not a bad little voyage.

November 1<sup>st</sup>. 1917

England is near at hand. We have been steaming all day through a real English manufactured fog. We are expecting to be landed at Avonmouth, near to Bristol.

All the patients have been detailed into four groups, to enable the authorities at home to place us in hospitals as near as possible to our homes. This was supposed to be in consideration for our friends and relatives who were desirous of seeing us. The groups are:-

- A. London and Southern counties.
- B. Midland counties and Wales.
- C. North of England.
- D. Scotland.

I was placed in group C. It would be very nice if I could get to Leeds, or any place handy for my wife to get to, but I have heard these things before. I am a Doubting Thomas.

November 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

I was awakened this morning at about 5 o'clock by the most terrific din imaginable. The ship's propellers were thumping, the ship was shivering from stem to stern, there was shouting on the decks and the buzzers were blowing. I don't think I have ever heard so much noise, out of action, in my life. On opening my eyes, the first person I saw was the ward orderly. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Good God." he replied, "Have you been asleep through all this? We have been aground for an hour and a half." Oh well, I have a lot of sleep to make up and it is evident that I am making a great start.

I thought I would like to see what was happening so I turned out. The deck was at such an angle that I had to cling to other cots as I made my way to the companion ladder. The starboard side of the deck was all awash, while the port side towered above me. I went back again and turned in.

We got off the bank after three hours and steaming down the Bristol Channel, we passed Barry and Cardiff. The delay caused us to miss our tide into Avonmouth, so we are laid off waiting for the morning. I shall soon be having news from home now.

November 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1917

We arrive at Avonmouth docks by eight o'clock this morning. There are some men

on the quay side so I ask one to get me a telegraph form. I have one shilling, so when I hand him the form back, I gave him it and told him to keep the change. I shall step onto Old England without a halfpenny in my pocket, but I must let them know at home that am here. I can imagine what a flutter there will be when they receive my wire, because they have no thoughts of me being near England.

My group is landed at 1 o'clock, and we are sent to Paddington Station, London. We are assured that we should then be sent up North. We arrive at Paddington. Motor cars are waiting for us, and as I take my seat in one, I hear one of the staff give the order "Bermondsey Military Hospital." So much for all the fuss that was made about getting us near home. I am pretty well tired, so after having my first meal in England for nearly two years, I have a bath and turn in.

#### November 4<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I send my address home. I am examined by the MO who says that I have an enlarged spleen caused by continual attacks of fever, and that I shall be here for some weeks.

#### November 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This has been the red letter day of my life. I have had news from home and all is well. What great news this is, after being without news for nine months. I had quite a heap of letters and I might say that I am not penniless now. I have also been visited by Mrs. Raper, who brought me a huge bunch of chrysanthemums. The sister divided these beautiful flowers and they now decorate the ward. I feel fated to find kind people.

#### November 8<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I have a walk this afternoon into Lewisham High Street but I am dead beat. I have to prop myself against a lamp-post for half an hour, pretending that I am interested in the passing traffic. After that I come back again to the hospital.

#### November 11<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Our ward is only a small one, holding seven beds. Yesterday afternoon all the patients in the ward were invited to the pictures. I was not feeling too good, so the sister made me comfortable in an easy chair before the fire, bringing me a heap of magazines, etc., so I settled down to a quiet afternoon's reading. At about half past two, I was attacked by a severe rigor. I didn't say anything to the sister, but with some difficulty I got my things off and turned in. At about half past four, one of the boys came in. By the look on his face I expect that was the first time that he had seen someone with a severe attack of malaria.

The bedstead rattled on the floor and I expect I was shaking like a huge jelly. He asked me if the sister knew about me. When I told him she did not, he rushed off to tell her. She came back with him and then there was something doing. They put eleven blankets on me, seven of them doubled. I also had five hot water bottles in the bed to help to get a sweat on. The MO on night duty was sent for and he visited me every two hours during the night. I had a sister and a nurse with me all night, so I thought they had the wind up. They were extremely attentive to me the whole of the time, giving me hot drinks and changing the bottles as soon as they began to cool yet still I did not perspire until after midnight. I then started to vomit, and the exertion of retching caused me to break into a sweat. My temperature had risen until it reached 105°. After I had drenched all the bedding with perspiration, I was sponged down, had dry pyjamas put on and dry blankets on the bed. Then I felt much easier but two sisters stayed with me until breakfast time. I had a couple of hours sleep before midday.

The MO has visited me four times since 10 o'clock this morning. My temperature has gone down, but I am fairly washed out.

#### November 12<sup>th</sup>. 1917

The MO tells me today that he had had enough of me last Saturday night, so he has made arrangements to get me transferred when I am fit enough to be moved. I am feeling all right again, but they won't allow me up yet.

November 13<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Tonight I was transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup>. London General Hospital, being once more a stretcher case, but I am feeling much better.

November 14<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am in a ward of malaria cases, as a special treatment of that disease is made in this hospital. I am given to understand that this hospital, and one at Oxford, are the main hospitals for the treatment of malaria in England. I hope they are successful in driving it out of my system.

*See endnote 1.*

Last night a sample of my blood was taken, and this morning the result of the examination was posted on my board. It seems that I have malignant parasites of various types accompanied by 'crescents' (whatever that means) in large numbers. I must have swallowed a menagerie in East Africa. But anyhow, I am longing to be up again.

I have been examined by the MO this morning. The first opportunity I have had to read my board and I see that I have debility, anaemia and a systolic murmur at the apex of the heart (fancy that!) while my pulse, both in volume and tense is fair.

I was weighed and my weight was 12st. 9lbs. I weighed 16st. 10lbs. when I left England, but I wonder what my weight was when I reached the Cape the last time.

I have to be put through a course of treatment which takes six or seven weeks. If I have no further relapses I may get out for hospital leave after that.

Oh, I forgot, I am to have a bottle of stout daily. What ho!

November 15<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This morning I was given a cuticle injection and I am to have one every alternate day until I have had ten. If there is no rise in my temperature, I may get up at 1 o'clock.

November 16<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Yesterday I was allowed up after dinner. I may get up every day, excepting the days I have my injections, when I may get up after dinner if I am normal.

November 18<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Today is Sunday and I have been out for a few hours, but I have been riding on the cars [the name for a tram at that time]. Our leave here is very liberal. I have a permanent pass from 1.00pm. to 6.00pm. daily, whilst on Sundays we are allowed out from 9.00am. until 6.00pm. unless the MO wants to see us.

This hospital is an annexe of the King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, Camberwell, so I am within easy reach of all the most interesting parts of London. There are a great number of patients here. The sister tells me that there are 3,000 civilian and 6,000 military patients altogether. I am in Bessemer Road Council school which is opposite to the main entrance to the King's College Hospital. Behind the hospital, there is a great number of huts where colonial patients are housed, while there are several large houses on Denmark Hill which are converted into temporary hospitals.

Last Friday night the hospital authorities sent my wife a permit and a railway warrant entitling her to visit me at the cost of a single fare for the return journey at the pre-war fare. I consider this very good. I have not seen my wife for nearly two years, so I am eagerly anticipating her visit. I have had a jaunt around the neighbourhood to find a likely lodge for her, but I have done nothing until she arrives.

November 19<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I fully expect the wife will arrive today, so although I am in bed until 1 o'clock, I waste no time in getting on to Denmark Hill to watch the cars, etc., for her. Half past three arrives without any result, so I go back into hospital for afternoon tea, somewhat down-hearted. The sister meets me in the corridor and tells me that there is a telegram on my bed. I opened it and find that she left Hull at 9.30am. Needless to say I did not wait for tea and went out again. As soon as I was outside the entrance, I saw her enquiring her way from a military policeman. As I was walking up, she looked at me but failing to recognise me, turned away. I have now come nearer to her and she looks again. I hear her say to the policeman, "I believe that is him....yes it is." The next minute was the one I had looked forward to for two years, regardless of onlookers.

I cannot help but believe that I am much altered now. I thought she would have recognised me if there had only been my bones left.

We have tea in a restaurant near Camberwell Green and then fix up lodgings in Daneville Road, after which, I return to hospital.

November 29<sup>th</sup>. 1917

This evening I have been to King's Cross to set my wife on her return journey home. During the whole of the ten days that she has been here, I have had no further attacks. The weather has been very fine so we have been out every afternoon. I soon tire, but then one can easily drop into a tea room or mount a bus, or car, for a rest. We have had a good time, but now I am wondering how I am going to spend tomorrow afternoon.

December 6<sup>th</sup>. 1917

Another week has passed and I think I am making good progress. I believe the visit of my wife has made me a bit restless. I am longing to get home again now, as soon as possible. I have already been

sounding out the MO, but he does not fall in with my view at present.

December 11<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I am still here but I think that I shall soon get away. I am at the MO every time I have a chance, so I expect he will soon get fed up with me and allow me to go. I am sure that I am tired of hospital life but I must say that I have been treated with every kindness by all that have had anything to do with me. I wish I could say how thankful I am to the sisters and nurses in particular. They have often had to do unpleasant work to do for me but it has always been done in a cheerful manner. When I have had bad nights, they have never neglected me. They have always made me comfortable, so far as it lay in their power. I have heard chaps grouse about them, but I never found one that was not of the best.

December 12<sup>th</sup>. 1917

I 'touched' all right this morning, with the result that I was able to leave King's Cross by the 5.30pm. train, for ten days sick leave at home.

December 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1917

My leave has expired and I have orders to report at Winchester by 12 o'clock tonight.

December 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1917

I arrived at Avington Park Camp at 9 o'clock last night. I am posted to the 1<sup>st</sup>. Reserve Battery RGA. I am doing no duty until I have been medically inspected by the MO.

December 25<sup>th</sup>. 1917 Xmas Day

I have been medically examined, and the MO has put me on light duty for a month.

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January 1<sup>st</sup>. 1918

I am not much taken up with this place. The whole of the country about Winchester is one huge camp. Our camp lies fully four miles from the old city, yet

one is travelling through camps the whole of the way.

There are thousands of American 'Sammies' here but our chaps don't seem to get on with them somehow. I expect it is because 'Sammy' never tires of telling how soon he will end the war when he gets to the other side. If talk will end it, I think he stands a wonderful chance of being top dog.

January 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

I have conducted a draft of RGA drivers for France, to Southampton today. After handing over to the Embarkation Officer, I have a few hours to spare for a look around. I was rather disappointed, finding the town a drowsy place, considering the importance of the port.

January 16<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am in charge of a sub-section of drivers, the greater part of which are youngsters who have come here for their final training before going across.

It seems as if the OC, Major Hunter, has taken a liking to me. He has made application to have me posted to his permanent staff here. Well, I wish him luck, because I won't have it. I shall apply for a course of instruction at the School of Gunnery, and then volunteer to go out again. I don't see how they can stop me, if I want to go. I would sooner be on active service abroad than in this nigger driving place.

January 19<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I mounted guard tonight, but I really ought to have reported sick. I am as full of fever as I possibly can be. The orderly sergeant wanted me to turn in, but to my mind it looked too much like shirking. Someone else would have to be pulled out. I might be all right tomorrow. We have had some bad weather lately, and I have been wet through a few times. I expect that has brought the thing on again.

January 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

When I dismounted guard tonight I went to the hospital hut for a dose of quinine. The doctor had told me to visit him whenever I had an attack, without waiting to report sick. The orderly takes my temperature, which is 101°. I have a dose of quinine and then turn in.

January 21<sup>st</sup>. 1918

I go to the MO this morning. As soon as he sees my temperature, which is 104.8°, he 'phones for an ambulance, and I am taken to Magdalene Military Hospital. The orderly gives me a bath and puts me to bed. The MO visits me and says he will send me to Oxford for treatment.

January 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

I have had a bad night. This morning I am 102°. The padre wrote a letter to my wife. I am afraid it will upset her when she sees that I have not been able to write.

Tonight I am 105°.

January 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

Another bad night. I have not had a dose of medicine since I came in, until I asked the sister for a dose of aspirin. She gave me it, but told me that I was not to tell the MO, because it was against the rules to give medicine to patients who are down for transfer. How's that for red tape? The aspirin gave me a little relief.

I am now 102.6°.

January 24<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Southern General Hospital, Oxford. We had two changes, one at Basingstoke and the other at Reading. I didn't care about being stared at whilst on the platforms, but that could not be helped. I am taken to the Malarial Department, Town Hall.

My temperature is 104.4°.

January 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have had another sorry night. The sister has been chasing about for me all night. It is now Friday, and I have not had a wink

of sleep since last Friday night. I feel almost as bad as I did in Dar-es-Salaam.

I have been examined by the MO this morning. He says that I have the largest spleen that he has ever seen in a man. But I am getting some attention paid to me here so I shall soon pull up again.

Tonight I am up to 105°.

#### January 26<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have had another rough night, but dropped into a deep sleep before midday. My temperature tonight is normal. I have had a pretty rotten weekend and I feel washed out.

#### January 29<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I continue to improve and this afternoon I am up for the first time.

#### January 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The MO is a strong believer in the benefits of outside air, so I am allowed outside for an hour or two in the afternoon, but no theatres, no pictures.

This afternoon I was out for an hour or so, and it proved to be plenty long enough. On returning to the hospital, I found my mother waiting for me.

*See endnote 2.*

She had come over from Gloucester to see me and I was very pleased to see her, as this was the first time I had seen her since the outbreak of war. Mother came in the hospital again after tea and stayed until 8 o'clock which was the time limit.

#### January 31<sup>st</sup>. 1918

Mother and I had several tram rides to the various suburbs and after a little tea, we went to the station. She had to be back home to prepare for Saturday's market, and today being Thursday did not allow her too much time.

#### February 11<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Today is my daughter's 21<sup>st</sup>. birthday. How I would like to have been with her, but fate ruled otherwise.

I am still kept in bed until dinner time, after which I may get up and go out. I am not too good yet but my temperature keeps down to somewhere near normal, so I must not complain.

I am not able to walk very far, but there is a liberal number of seats scattered about the city, reserved for soldiers in hospital, so one may always get a rest.

#### February 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am still improving and I am now up all day.

I have had a letter from Lieut. Maslin, an officer of ours who was invalided home from East Africa. He is now a category man and posted to the RGA Records at Dover. He tells me that my battery arrived home a short time ago and is now on a month's leave. I wish I had been able to stick it out a little longer and come back with them.

#### March 1<sup>st</sup>. 1918

What a wonderful city Oxford is! It is not great in size, but every yard of it is interesting. Its beautiful and ancient colleges are in evidence everywhere. There is a fine Art Gallery with beautiful examples of the work of past and present masters, both paintings and sculpture. I have already spent five afternoons in there, and intend to spend more. The Oxford University Museum of Natural History is the finest I have yet seen. There is also a fine collection of exhibits, all collected by one local gentleman during his big-game hunting expeditions in Central and East Africa. This proved particularly interesting to me, as I have been through the same countries as these specimens were collected in.

All the colleges are now occupied by cadets, of whom there must be several thousand here. There are two afternoons

each week which are devoted to football, the competition between the colleges being very keen and the class of football good, we have some excellent football shown during the matches.

March 12<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have heard that the OC of my battery is gathering all the old hands that are available to form the nucleus of a new battery. I have been at the MO for some days now for my discharge, with the idea of getting back to the 'old boys'. I had to stay in bed this morning for examination, after which he wanted to send me to Ripon for further treatment. But that was not in my mind. I intended to get to the battery at Aldershot if possible. If I went to Ripon, my chances of getting back would be very small. So I asked for Winchester. He seemed a little bit rattled, but at finish he

said, "Well, go where you like, but it won't be long before you are back here again." During the examination, he said my lungs and heart were sound. He had previously tested my blood and kidneys and they were OK so I don't think there is much amiss.

March 13<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I arrive at Avington Park, Winchester from Oxford. I enter the Brigade orderly room to report myself discharged from hospital, when the first thing I see lying on the desk is a telegram from Major Floyd asking when he may expect me. After the orderly room clerk had taken my particulars, I put in my application for transfer to my batter. "Oh," said the clerk, "I have a wire here from your OC Your transfer will be through tomorrow." When I got outside, I shook hands with myself.

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**Notes by Denis Fewster Hopkin, grandson of the author.**

1. This was an unfulfilled hope as he continued to have attacks for the rest of his life. I have often witnessed these attacks and the necessary steps to overcome the rigor.
2. This is a reference to Elizabeth Miles Allen, my great-grandmother who, after the death of John Fewster in Hull had led a life which is a mystery to me. All we know is that she went to America and then returned and was later married to William Miles Allen, a farmer and horse dealer of Hartpury near Gloucester where she is now buried.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Preparations for France

*Artillery training at Lydd – Crossing to Le Havre*

March 14<sup>th</sup>. 1918

**M**y transfer came through all right today but at 6.00pm. I was ordered to take a guard over to Worthy Down Aerodrome. It was a pitch dark night and no one knew the way. The only thing that I could gather was that the place was some six miles over the Downs. We eventually arrived there at 10 o'clock. We had some job finding the place, and when we got there, no one knew anything about us. I was chasing about until midnight. There was no commissioned officer there, but the senior Non. Com. suggested that I go to another aerodrome, and see if I was required there. "How far is that?", I asked. "About five miles" was the reply. "Oh no." I said "I was ordered here and here I remain until relieved."

There was a guard mounted by the Labour Corps so I found shelter for my guard and we turned in, awaiting instructions from the OC when he turned up.

March 15<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We take over the guard from the Labour Corps this Morning. There is a colony of Portuguese workmen here, bricklayers, etc., working on buildings. They are billeted in huts, and there has been an outbreak of spotted fever. The MO has ordered them to move under canvas and trouble is anticipated. We are told that we are here to squash any trouble. Well, we will see that they go under canvas all right, as soon as we get orders.

March 16<sup>th</sup>. 1918

A machine came down in the aerodrome today. It crashed quite close to us. The pilot was badly smashed up, but was alive when taken away.

March 17<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Last night we had a laugh. The Portuguese had to go under canvas. Two or three of the huts went quietly, the others refused to go at all. We had to use a little force mixed with persuasion. What an excitable race they are! Some of them screamed and cried until they fell into fits. What samples of manhood to be sure. I am told that there are some Portuguese in France. Well, it is to be hoped that they hold nothing important. These chaps are the poorest samples of what a man should be that I have seen.

The pilot who crashed yesterday has died this morning.

March 19<sup>th</sup>. 1918

At noon today, I am relieved from my guard and return to Avington Park. When reporting at Brigade headquarters, I am told to hold myself in readiness to transfer to my old battery.

March 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I arrive at Lille Barracks, Marlborough Lines, North Camp, Aldershot. My old OC, now promoted to Major, seemed very pleased to see me. I had quite a long chat with him in the orderly room. There are not many of the battery left, but he hopes, with this nucleus, to form another battery. We are no longer a Heavy Battery. We are now the 545 Siege Battery. It seems like old times to be among what are left of the 'old boys'.

I received a parcel and a bundle of letters which my wife sent out to me in East Africa. My wife is also receiving returned letters from the East. The parcel is one which my wife mailed last October, containing a Christmas cake, cigarettes,



etc. After its six months travelling, the cake was in perfect condition. I am sending it back home. It will do when I am home on leave.

#### March 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Yesterday we received orders to go to Lydd, Kent, the training depot for Siege Artillery. We are not sorry. For some reason, we have not been happy here. The IGs (Instructors of Gunnery) seem to be down on us every time. So far as we can tell, our work is equally as smart as the other batteries that are here. But there it is. We shall see how we fare at Lydd.

The Sergeants' Mess organised a smoker tonight and we had a royal send off. It was early in the morning when we got to our bunks.

#### April 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

We left Lille Barracks this morning and arrived at Wood Town, Lydd, this afternoon.

#### April 12<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have settled down here. This place has a reputation for hard work. The parades are:

- 6.00am. Rifle, Squad and Company drill until 7.45am.
- 8.30am. Physical exercises, gun drill, lectures, battery drill, until 1.00pm.
- 2.00pm. Route march or box respirator drill until 4.00pm.

We have a fair selection of guns, including the 18 pdr. field gun, 60 pdrs., 6 inch howitzers and 9.4 inch howitzers.

The other morning while we were on the 6 inch howitzers, the OC of the camp was watching our work. I heard him ask our OC if we always did our work like that. Our OC told him we did. The colonel then said we need not be kept on the guns after 12 noon, so we are getting favoured.

#### April 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have made progress here and today we fired our calibration course. There will be a criticism of the shoot by the IGs, tomorrow morning.

#### April 26<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The criticism was very favourable to us. We only had one point which was adversely criticised and that was a technical point which some of the IGs favoured. We easily came out the best of the batteries that fired yesterday.

#### April 27<sup>th</sup>. 1918

This afternoon I had a run over to New Romney and Littlestone-on-Sea. Littlestone is a small, modern seaside resort but the hotels and large houses are all occupied by the military. Romney is an old-time town, and I believe was one of the Cinque Ports, but is now about two miles from the sea. Lydd is also an old town. I observed in the porch of the church a board which had on it a list of the vicars, and I noticed that the first one was dated in the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup>. century.

#### April 29<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have a slight attack of fever today but I don't report sick. Now I am with the battery there is no need to report sick for a slight attack. The OC knows from experience how the fever attacks, and if one lies up for a day, perhaps he may be better tomorrow. If one happens to be with another unit, and cannot attend a parade, he has to report sick, with the result that he may possibly be kept in dock for a full course of treatment.

#### April 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am out again today, feeling all right.

We fire three courses today, all of which are Aero observation shoots.

#### May 1<sup>st</sup>. 1918.

We again come out top in the criticism this morning. Our gun drill came out as near perfect as possible. I was pleased about

this because a detachment gets messed about a good deal in these tests. The IGs are walking about in the battery during the course, putting various parts of the gun mechanism out of action and making casualties in one's detachment with a ruthless hand. One starts with a detachment of ten men and probably finishes with four or five. At the same time, the sight clino and the quick release may be put out of action. During some part of the course you are sure to be attacked by gas and have to work in box respirators. Still, the rate of fire must go on the same.

#### May 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

We have had a proud day today. Our course today included an SOS target. When marching on to the battery, the No.1 receives the necessary angle, elevation, projectile and charge required for this target. The switch to the SOS target is always such that the gun requires to be run up, to get the trail spade out of its bed, so that it is possible to 'lay on' the new target. The SOS order is always given during the firing of another course, with the idea of getting a 'jump' into the work and training units to expect it at any time. One round is fired from each gun and then the detachment stands by for further orders.

The record time for getting an SOS target and firing one round is two minutes. Today we have broken that record with ease. The longest time taken was 55 seconds and the shortest was 37 seconds. My detachment was 39 seconds in getting the round off. The battery received congratulations from the staff at Lydd for this work.

#### May 4<sup>th</sup>. 1918

There appeared in Brigade orders this morning, a Complimentary Order to the 545 Siege Battery for its work yesterday.

#### May 24<sup>th</sup>. 1918

During the last three weeks we have had rather a busy time shooting a series of experimental shoots, as well as some

exhibition shooting for General Sir William Robertson, who has been paying a visit here. Altogether, we have fired 23 courses, which is far in excess of the usual requirements.

Lord Nunburnholme, the Lord Lieutenant of the East Riding of Yorkshire joined our battery as a captain, some eight or ten days ago.

Today I leave Lydd for home, on leave for 14 days. I am entitled to this leave for the two years service overseas without leave. I think I have earned it.

#### June 7<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I consider I have been lucky. It would have been no surprise to me if I had been recalled from leave. There has been some terrific fighting on the Western Front and I thought it would be likely that we would be getting a move on, but I report back on duty tonight after having my full leave. We are under orders to mobilise at Portsmouth.

#### June 10<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We arrive at 'Pompey' this afternoon and are quartered in Hilsea Barracks.

We are to be armed with the 6 inch Mark XIX gun. At first, we were to have the 12 inch howitzer on railway mountings but as there are only two of these guns per battery, our establishment would have been reduced. Our OC did not like to part with any of his men, so he applied for the 6 inch Mark XIX. It is a fine gun and I think I shall like it.

#### June 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have been busy drawing our guns, stores and equipment, etc., but we are having a good time. Our first parade is 7.00am. and we finish at 4.00pm., so it is almost like a holiday. Of course, we have guards, town picquets, etc., but that is nothing and only happens when the battery is on duty.

This afternoon I leave for home on four days' draught leave.

June 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I arrive back from leave.

July 9<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We receive the last of our guns today. Each of the four guns is named after engagements we had in East Africa. My gun is named 'Duthumi' in remembrance of the three months struggle at that place before we cleared Jerry out.

My wife arrived this afternoon, so I was away early to meet her. I was successful in applying for a sleeping out pass. We had digs already arranged, so I am looking forward to a nice quiet time while we are here.

July 16<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have taken our guns, stores, caterpillar tractors and mechanical transport to Portsmouth Dockyard where they are taken over by squads of naval men and loaded on transports for the trip across the Channel. This is different from when we left Devonport. There, we had to load our own guns and ammunition.

July 17<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We left Cosham Station for Southampton this afternoon. I left poor Florrie on the platform, a very sad woman, trying hard to keep back her tears. I ought to have sent her home before this but I couldn't. I hung on as long as possible.

It was raining heavily when we left Southampton West Station. We had a rather long march to Southampton Docks, so we were pretty well soaked by the time we got onto the quay. We were packed onto the transport, barely finding standing room when we got our life-belts on. We seemed to be the only British troops on board, the rest being Americans.

July 18<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We arrive at Le Havre in the early hours of this morning. After some delay we get

ashore and reach the camp at about midday. We enjoy a meal, having had only a bully beef and biscuit ration since yesterday dinner time.

This evening I was able to get a pass, so I spent a few hours in the town. It was a beautiful evening and when one felt thirsty, what a pleasure it was to sit in the open and have a drink instead of being cooped up in some evil-smelling place as we are at home.

July 21<sup>st</sup>. 1918

Today is Sunday and I attended church service this morning, held in a Salvation Army refreshment hut. I note this because I like the open-mindedness of the action. Later, there was a service by the Salvation Army.

I went into Le Havre tonight and had a ride on a railway which climbs straight up the face of a cliff. One gets a splendid view of the Channel and the mouth of the Seine from here.

July 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

We have landed some of our equipment so I expect we shall soon be making a move. There are five or six thousand American troops passing through here daily. Physically, they are a fine body of men, but then they have not had four years of war. Perhaps the most noticeable thing about them is their boasting. One gets tired of continually hearing what we ought to have done, and how they will do it and finish the job. This swanking does not strengthen the friendliness between the two parties and little scraps are pretty frequent. It is a pity because I think the two nations would go far if they would only pull together.

July 26<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Last night we paraded at 8 o'clock, arrived at the Maritime Station at 8.30 pm. and had to wait until 2.00am. for the train. Oh, these dreary hours of waiting when a unit is on the move. It seems to be an Army Regulation: six hours standing on a station

with full kit on! But our 'boys' kept things lively by singing popular songs.

We arrived at Rouen at 7.00am. We were then marched two miles to a rest camp for a meal. I would have liked to have had a few hours for a look around the city, but that is out of the question. There is a magnificent cathedral which towers above all the buildings in the city. It has a most beautiful spire which looks like lacework.

We leave Rouen at 2.30pm. No one seems to know what part of the front we are bound for. It is all hush-hush, and no doubt it is the right line to follow.

#### July 27<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have been travelling all night, but the trains move very slowly here. We are stowed in ordinary railway vans, the junior NCOs and men, 30 to 40 in a van. We are a bit better off with about 12 of us in a van. After daylight broke, we opened the side doors and the first place of note that we arrived at was Calais, so now we had an idea of what part of the front we were heading for. Later we passed through St-Omer and eventually arrived at Aire at 11.00am. Both these latter places have been knocked about with enemy aircraft, the stations and the surrounding districts having had a very rough time.

We left the train at Aire and disentrained our guns and the caterpillar tractors. The motor lorries were coming up by road. We

then took to the road, and after marching eight or nine miles, arrived at a village named St-Quentin. This is not the St-Quentin which has figured so largely in the War Office Communiques.

We get our men billeted and then we, the sergeants, get the barn of a farmhouse. It is knee-deep in straw, but I don't like the look of it, so I clear a space and place my kit on the hard earth floor. I have not had any sleep for two nights so I don't mind how hard my sleeping place is, so long as I think it is clean.

#### July 29<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Our guns have been handed over to the Army Ordnance Corps to have the sights and breech fitting adjusted, the buffers and recuperators tested, etc., after which they will be handed back and certified fit for action.

The SM and BQMS have been fortunate enough to 'click' a bedroom in a private house for their billet. Arrangements have been made for the senior NCOs to have our meals there, so we are able to eat in something like comfort. The lady of the house seemed to be a very obliging sort of a woman. Although she knows no English, and we know no French, we get along very well together. We have a man to do our cooking and cleaning up, etc., so beyond the fact that we are in the house at meal times, we don't upset her much.

## CHAPTER TEN

# The Defeat of the Hun

*Digging in – Bombarding the Hun – In the heat of battle – The infantry goes over the Line – Retreat of the enemy – Signing of the Armistice*

July 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Today, two detachments of the Left Section go forward to the Line, to prepare positions for our guns which will be brought up by the remainder of the Section, when they are returned by the Ordnance.

I have been thinking of the enormous amount of money it must cost to fit a battery out, to take its place in the Line. I was told by the Ordnance at Portsmouth, that each gun without fittings costs £5,000. There are fittings, stores, spare parts, etc. on the top of that. Each gun has a Holt caterpillar tractor of the terrific strength of 200 horsepower. There is a Vickers platform for each gun in the battery, while we have 16 three ton Thornycroft motor lorries for stores, ammunition, etc., a light car for the OC, a motor cycle and sidecar for any work requiring its use and a motor-cycle for dispatch riding. We have all the usual signalling apparatus, including a wireless installation with the battery. Our establishment is about 180 Officers, Non Commissioned Officers and men, not including the mechanical transport men who belong to the ASC. I think that when the total cost of this little lot is reckoned up, it will be some item.

We arrive at our destination and at once commence digging in. We have taken up a fine position for our two guns in an orchard alongside a farm house at Haverskerque. We are just to the right of the main road running through Haverskerque to Merville. On the right of

us is the Lys Canal, on our left and about a quarter of a mile away is the great Nieppe Forest, while in our rear is the village, or small town of La Presse. I think the position is a great one and with care we ought not to be found by enemy aircraft. The main danger lies in us being near to the road. We are sure to get a few shells whenever Jerry 'sweeps and searches' that road. But we should be much worse if we had to take up a position at a cross-roads, for they are bombarded all night long.

There is no road traffic during the day, unless it happens on a screened road. Convoys would be spotted from the enemy observation balloons, and would draw the fire of all his batteries within range. He knows all supplies are brought up at night so he systematically bombards all roads at night.

July 31<sup>st</sup>. 1918

Our billets are in the barn of a farm house, about half a mile in the rear of our gun position. I had a good night's sleep, although Jerry shelled the road and the forest for several hours. We are now ready for the guns to come up.

August 1<sup>st</sup>. 1918

We receive word that the guns of our Section will be up tonight at dusk.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

We had a hard night's work last night. Our two guns arrived at about 10.00pm. We unhooked at the road side and man-handled them to their positions. The total

distance would be about 200 yards. Now our guns and limbers weigh 15 tons. When one has less than 30 men and the night is pitch dark, (of course, no lights are allowed) it means Work, with a capital W to drag this weight over the yielding turf and get the guns mounted on the platforms. To make things a bit rougher, Jerry started his usual bombardment and threw over two gas attacks. Now box respirators are very good things, but they are very uncomfortable when one is working hard whilst wearing them. I find that I have difficulty in getting sufficient air when I am exerting myself. I imagine that others will also have this trouble, but one has to stick it.

At last we get finished without any casualties from gunfire or gas, but one of my men was unfortunate and got crushed between the breast of the gun carriage and the earthwork parapet. At about 4.00am. we mounted a guard, the remainder going back to the billets. We don't march back, but walk back in oddments so that a shell would not wipe out as many as it would if were in correct formation.

The weather today has been vile. It has simply poured with rain all day. We have no blankets (although they were promised to us, in consideration of the battery being two years in East Africa), so we don't look like having a very comfortable night.

#### August 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

Our OC has broken up the spells of duty into three shifts of 24 hours each. A detachment does its 24 hours on the guns, then back to billets for 24 hours' rest and the next 24 hours on fatigues, ammunition, etc. I think this is a satisfactory arrangement. In times of a move, all hands are necessary, so one detachment of each gun will be unlucky. Still, these things are unavoidable.

Up to the present, our living has not been too good since we left Le Havre. We have not been out altogether, but at the same time, we very often finish a meal feeling

just as hungry as when we started. Perhaps, this will change shortly because other troops about us are living top-hole. We almost learned the secret of living without eating in Africa and it was by no means a pleasant experience. I sincerely hope we are not going to have another lesson. Today we have not been idle as we have been camouflaging our position.

#### August 4<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We open fire today on a Huns position. Our elevation was 15 degrees 30 minutes, so we are shelling at about six miles behind his front line trenches.

#### August 6<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have just returned from my 24 hours on the guns. Things have been very quiet. We had a lot of gas during the night, but the wind was in the right direction for us and blew it away. One watches the wind very closely out here, I can tell you. An hour or so before daybreak, he swept the road with shrapnel and we got a few, but no damage was done.

#### August 7<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Jerry gave us rather a warm time last night. He flooded the whole area with gas and at the same time making a heavy air attack. I had to turn our men out into the trenches for shelter, but I am a bit of a fatalist, so I went back for some sleep. I am of the opinion that one is as safe in one place as in another during a raid like this. Jerry is just as liable to drop a shell or bomb into the trenches as he is in the little corner of my barn. There were two archies (anti-aircraft guns) just outside the barn and they rattled away for three hours. Then I went to sleep.

There was an oil store about 20 yards to the rear of my gun. That store is no longer there. Our friend dropped a shell in it during the night. We are now making a requisition for more oil.

#### August 9<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am back again from the guns. We have paid Jerry back with interest. We started a

bombardment at 10.30am. yesterday morning and ceased fire at 5 this morning. All the batteries on this sector have been at it, the whole of the time. Our aircraft also had a busy time. I counted no less than 48 machines going over our lines at one time. It is a thrilling sight to see them going through a barrage [of Ack-Ack]. Their climbing, nose-diving and gliding sideways keeps one's heart in one's mouth until they are through. When they are returning, they remind me of schoolboys breaking off for the holidays. First one and then another, looping the loop until they pass out of view.

#### August 10<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I think we must have had a general attack in this part of the Front during the last two days. I know that there has been much activity during that time. The 124 Heavy Battery (the late 2<sup>nd</sup>. Hull Heavy Battery) which was on our right rear has moved up two miles. The enemy must have fallen back because their front line trenches were only 4,000 yards in front of us.

*See endnote.*

#### August 12<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I had rather an uneventful spell on the guns yesterday. We straafered Jerry pretty strongly without much return, excepting a burst of gunfire for a few hours in the middle of the night, and an attack of gas at daybreak.

#### August 13<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have something to record today. Yesterday we had an issue of one blanket each, so I was able to take my clothes off when I turned in, for the first time since I have been in France. We were shelled a bit during the night, but I was as comfortable as a pea in a pod.

#### August 17<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Things are rather quiet here. We here a lot of rumours about big captures, etc., but I don't take much notice.

#### August 18<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I was 'on' yesterday and we gave the Hun some hot stuff to hold from 9.00pm. to 4.00am. this morning.

#### August 19<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The enemy has been ousted from his positions again and he has fallen back some distance. How far, I do not know, but Merville, a town they have held since his Spring 'push', is now in our hands again.

Our guns were concentrated on Merville during the time that the Germans were retreating through the town and by all accounts the enemy has had very heavy losses. I am told that the centre of the town is a heap of masonry, guns, vehicles and dead bodies. I expect that we shall be going through there as soon as they get out of our range.

#### August 21<sup>st</sup>. 1918

A man of my sub-section was drowned in the Lys Canal today.

#### August 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

Our Right Section, which has been in action on the other side of the canal and about half a mile away has gone forward today to take up a position at St-Floris, an advance in a straight line of about 4,500 yards.

#### August 24<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have just finished a spell of 24 hours which have been rather quiet so far as we were concerned. We only fired 15 rounds during the whole of the time although there has been heavy fighting all night.

#### August 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have been to St-Venant and St-Floris today. These villages were held by the enemy three or four days ago. They are both badly knocked about with very few buildings standing, and the churches seemed to have suffered worst.

#### August 27<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Yesterday was a quiet day again. We are getting nothing back from Jerry, except an

occasional air-raid at night. His aircraft seem very shy at showing themselves during the day.

#### August 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We are very quiet. We can only engage targets at long range. Last night we were putting up a harassing fire at 30 degrees' elevation. Our boys, when off duty, are settling down to agricultural work by helping the farmer who owns our barns to get his harvest in. He is glad of the help and the men enjoy it as it helps to pass the time.

I should like to say a word about the courage of this farmer's sister. She can speak English very well and I often have a chat with her. When Jerry made his big push during the Spring, the French authorities ordered back all civilians. This farmer, who through disability is exempt from military service, refused to go, but sent back his father and mother. His sister also refused to go back, so they worked the farm between them. There is no livestock on the farm, all of it having been killed by gas. During a heavy bombardment, the man used to clear out into the trenches but the young woman would not budge, and stuck to the house all the time. I never saw her show the slightest sign of fear. She was a brick. She estimates the loss of 30,000 francs from damage done to the property and the loss of the cattle. As she says, '*le Boche*' is no friend of hers. They have now got some horses up and I hope their harvest exceeds their expectations. I expect there will be many similar cases, but this is just one that I have seen.

#### August 31<sup>st</sup>. 1918

The retreat in this sector seems to be general. Last night huge fires were burning on our Front. I expect Jerry is burning his stores. I have been speaking to an infantry man this morning who was coming back after going over the top in a raid. He says they penetrated two miles without finding a live German.

#### September 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

We had an air raid last night, so our friends are still alive.

#### September 14<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We left Lord Nunburnholme at Lydd. He had to go through a Battery Commander's course before he could go out with the battery as a captain. He rejoined us yesterday and gladdened our hearts by bringing us all a tablet of toilet soap each. Soap is very scarce out here. I have had some sent out from home, or else clothing and skin would be in a very bad state now.

Our living has been much better of late. The rations have been more plentiful. The chaps go out and 'find' potatoes and other vegetables in abundance. We have been able to buy a little flour, so we are in clover again.

#### September 17<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have had a very slack time of late. We have manned the guns every day, but our friends are well out of range. During last week, the civilians have been flocking back to their homesteads, and are now busy finishing what is left of their harvest.

We are going up again, and today we have been busy taking up our platforms and making ready to move.

#### September 19<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have been working all night, and today we are away again. We pass through Merville, which is simply a great heap of bricks and stones with lanes cleared through it to allow traffic through, then through Estaires, which is not much better. We arrive at our new position near le Doulieu. The position is again a splendid one and I hope we have the luck we enjoyed at Haverskerque.

#### September 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Another night's work, digging in, laying platforms, getting guns in, etc. We were not molested by the Boche during the night, so we had a clear go. I must mention an instance showing the power of our



caterpillar tractors. The Left Section (my own) had taken up their position in an orchard. The lane leading to this orchard was very narrow, with a ditch on both sides. About midnight, we were bringing up the two guns. C Section, in endeavouring to turn into the orchard, took too sharp a turn, with the result that the near side gun wheel went into the ditch. The great weight on this wheel caused it to sink rapidly. The one tractor was helpless, so we unhooked my tractor and hooked up in front of C. All this time the wheel was sinking, until now the top of the near side wheel was almost level with the bottom of the offside wheel, which was on hard ground. It certainly looked as if the gun would turn over, but now we were hooked up with two tractors. We gave the word and the first tractor reared like a horse, but both stuck it, and hauled the gun out as if it had been a hand cart. I believe I have already said that the total weight of gun carriage and limber is 15 tons. I don't profess to know what power would be required to haul the gun out of that position, but the two tractors certainly had it well in hand.

We came into action at midday, but unfortunately we were spotted by an enemy observation balloon. Jerry gave us the roughest time we have yet had so far from him. After we had fired three or four rounds, he pumped shrapnel and High Explosive into us with a vengeance. Bullets and shrapnel were whistling and shrieking, so that it was almost impossible to hear anything else. After a while he slackened down a bit, so then we started again. But the Boche had not finished the argument. He started again with renewed vigour. We had been having it hot for some time when the OC bawled out for us to take cover. We had no dug-outs made so we had to scatter. After an hour or two, Jerry ceased fire and we gathered up to the battery. I then got the biggest chewing up I have yet had from the OC. After the OC gave us the order to clear out, I thought I would remove the fuzes from the shells alongside my gun. I asked no one to help

me, but two of my detachment stopped behind to give me a hand, so I was chewed up for not clearing out when ordered.

We mounted a guard, and the rest had to go back a mile to the Right Section. We had brought rations up for the section and the cooks had rigged up a cookhouse. After I mounted the guard, I felt hungry so I went to the cookhouse. The cooks had cleared out, but all the food was left with two or three dixies of tea on a smouldering fire. Heaps of bread, butter and cheese! Ye gods, what a meal I had! I told the guard, so that they could get filled for once, and then I went back to find where the Right Section laid.

#### September 21<sup>st</sup>. 1918

The Right Section had not been in action here and I found them last night without much trouble. We had no cover, so we rigged up a place to sleep in. We had just finished this job and were thinking we were going to get a long looked for sleep, when orders came through for us to move to another part of the front. We had to go back to our position and pull out again.

We left le Doulieu at about noon. Of course we had no idea where we were going. We went back through Estaires, Merville and St-Venant and are now at Berguette, which is on the railway. This is a small town which has escaped the attentions of the Boche. We are crowded into the YMCA for sleeping. After a look round before dark, we turn in. The hut is so crowded one can hardly find room to lie down. The floor is very dirty, but dry, so we wrap ourselves in our blankets and console ourselves with the thought that we are having a night's sleep in (to us) a comfortable place.

#### September 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

Last night was the first night's sleep we have had for four nights, so we did not move much before 7 this morning. Our train will not be in until noon. It is Sunday morning so we have another look round. Our waggons arrived at dinner time, so we

at once started entraining our guns, tractors, etc. The lorries have again gone ahead by road.

#### September 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918.

We left Berguette last night at 8.00pm. and arrived at Peronne at noon today. We disentrained our guns, etc., and proceeded about three miles outside the town, where we were camped under canvas. The town is a fine place, or at least it has been. It has been badly knocked about during all the severe fighting on the Somme.

#### September 24<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The left section goes out to find a position. We took our platforms with us, but did not succeed in getting a satisfactory place. Towards evening we parked our platforms just off the roadside and returned to our last night's camp after mounting a guard on the platforms.

#### September 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We return to our platforms and find another instance of the proverbial luck of our battery. During the night, Jerry had been shelling the road heavily, so our guard took cover under the platforms. Whilst they were underneath, a shell struck C subs. platform, completely destroying it, without scratching any one of our chaps who were underneath.

We take a position and I think we are in for a warm time. We are in full view of seven or eight enemy observation balloons and we have no cover of any kind. I believe our people intend to make a big push here and cross the Hindenburg Line on our front. There is to be no sitting down. We have thousands of cavalry behind us, ready for the dash. Everything points to something doing in the near future.

#### September 26<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The guns of the whole battery came up during the night and for the first time, we were all together. We have been taught the art of camouflage but I think it is washed out [of no use] here. Around us are

batteries of 6 inch howitzers, 60 pdr. guns, 6 inch Mk.VIIs, 6 inch Mk.XIXs and 9.2 howitzers, all in the open without any cover.

We had one or two incidents today. An enemy aeroplane seemed to spring from nowhere and attacked two of our observation balloons and brought them both down in flames. The observers escaped by means of their parachutes. Before the enemy plane could get away, he was attacked by two of ours, and after wobbling a bit, he crashed.

We have two cooks who go up with the guns to cook for the detachments on duty with the guns. Today when 'dinner up' was called, the whole crowd rushed up with their mess-tins. Just then, Jerry dropped a whiz-bang right in the midst of them. Fortunately it was a dud, but it filled our dixies with mud, so we had to go without any dinner. Didn't the Boche get cursed! Not half!

An Aussies horse convoy pulled up about 100 yards in our rear to snatch a midday meal. This drew the enemies fire and before one knew what was happening, half the convoy was up in the air. Fragments of horses, wagons and men were all over the place.

During the late afternoon we pull out and go ahead about a quarter of a mile, where we take a fresh position on the side of a sunken road. All this means extremely hard work, but we are in action again by dusk.

#### September 27<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have a very heavy day, and I shall be pleased when I have chance of a rest.

#### September 28<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I am relieved at the guns this morning at 9 and when I reached our billets, which are about two kilometres from the battery, I washed, had breakfast and then slept until nightfall. Today is Saturday, and this is the first time I had a chance of a good sleep

since last Wednesday week, with the one exception of the night in the YMCA at Berguette. It is remarkable how little of anything a man can do with when he has not chance of more.

#### September 29<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We are in a typical Bairnsfather's billet in a village named Villers Faucon, which lies west of le Câtelet, and midway between Cambrai and St-Quentin. We are within four or five miles of the Hindenburg Line, at which our guns are pounding night and day. There is a great battle raging along this front and the thunder of the guns is beyond description. The Boche must be having a terrible time, judging by the metal which goes over. We have had it hot enough at times, but we must be cushy by comparison.

#### September 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I take my gun over again today. I think the battle here must have reached its height. There are a number of Yankees here and some of them have just come up to have their first taste of Jerry. They are full of their usual bounce, telling us what they are going to do to the Boche. I wonder how they will come back.

#### October 1<sup>st</sup>. 1918

We are having some remarkable rumours today. Bulgaria has surrendered they say, the Yankees say that they have captured Metz, whilst Ostend and Bruges have fallen into our hands. All of this is too good to be true. I think. I have heard similar tales in East Africa.

#### October 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

I have had a particularly hard day. My detachment is now reduced to three men, myself, the gun layer and another number. This means Work with a capital W to keep one's gun in action, when the gun requires a detachment of ten men.

The Yanks who went over the other night made a terrible mess of the job. They walked straight into a trap. I have been talking to an officer of the Aussies, and he

tells me that the Australians have been told off to cut the Yanks out tonight. The few stragglers who came back were very crestfallen. Orders have come through for us to pull out and go forward.

#### October 4<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Last night we had a hard night's work. We three hauled our gun on to the road and then took up our platform before we had any assistance. Our orders are to go ahead at 12 midnight. We had a couple of hours to spare, which I spent lying on the platform. When we went forward, we passed through a village called St-Emilie. At the cross roads in the centre of the village, we had to turn to the right. My tractor did not take a wide enough sweep, with the result that the off-side wheel of my gun carriage fouled the stone wall of a wrecked house at the corner. Everyone knows how Jerry plastered all cross roads from dark to dawn. We did not have a comfortable time by any means but at last we got clear, and I don't mind admitting that I heaved a sigh of relief when we were once more on the move. We arrived at Ronssoy and took up our position and came into action again at dawn.

The fight here has been raging for days, and shows no sign of slacking. Our troops are making a big attempt to breach the Hindenburg Line, which lies less than a mile in front of us. When daylight came, we found ourselves in the midst of batteries of all kinds: 18 pdrs., 4.5s, 6 inch, 8inch, 9.2 howitzers, 6in. Mk.VIIs and 6 inch Mk.XIXs, all in less than a quarter of a square mile.

The ground is strewn with mangled bodies and derelict tanks, but I don't think it possible for anything to stand the bombardment which we have put up. The German prisoners have all the same tale, and that is that our artillery fire is terrible. I believe them.

By the way it is a remarkable thing how many of these chaps can speak English. I have not the patience to speak to them, but

I hear them speak as they are being driven along.

October 5<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I hear today that Turkey has thrown in her hand. Some hope!

October 7<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The fight still continues and we get orders tonight to be ready to move.

October 8<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Our infantry goes over the top this morning and swarms over the Line, and we follow up quickly. I am not on duty with the guns today, so take our platforms along. We are not waiting for dark, so it appears that the enemy must be falling back rapidly. After passing through Bony, our progress was rather slow. Something went wrong with one of my three ton lorries. We had to scrap her by the roadside, but I was fortunate enough to get a 30cwt. Napier. We went along all right on the level, but had to drag-rope the gun up the inclines. We arrived at Bellicourt, which is situated on the St-Quentin Canal, just as the women and children were being mustered up previous to being sent back down the line. They showed every sign of delight. A little too much for my liking. I didn't much care being kissed by every other woman as we passed through, but these Froggies show their emotions more than we do.

The Yanks have been hard hit here. Just before entering Bellicourt, I saw the American Field Ambulance collecting the dead. There were five rows, with about a hundred in each row, and they were still hard at work bringing more in.

We left Bellicourt, and after passing through Nauroy, we arrived at Estrees. It was now dark and the roads were more difficult to travel on. I still had to go ahead. I had to find my section at a place called Pomchaux, near Beaurevoir. The roads were absolutely crowded; troops going up, whilst going back were Royal Horse Artillery and cavalry (who had been

chasing Jerry all day) and thousands of German prisoners, most of them were carrying our wounded. And how careful they had to be with them!

After leaving Estrees, we had it rather lively. The Germans were shelling the road rather heavily and aircraft were bombing to their hearts' content. We had no searchlights or anti-aircraft guns up, so they were having it all their own way. I arrived at a village at last and made enquiries about my section. In time I found the billets. They were in the outbuildings of a large farm, at one corner of a cross roads. My section was in action about a quarter of a mile to the rear. I was not on duty, so after reporting, I prepared to turn in. I had a pint of hot tea with a rum ration in it and it made me feel quite fresh again.

I had had nothing to eat or drink since 6.00am. and now it was 11.00pm. I had a look around to see if I could find something comfortable to sleep on. I found an iron bedstead and started to drag it back to the barn where the Sergeant Major and I were going to sleep. An aeroplane was circling round, bombing, and when I was half way across the courtyard with the bedstead, he dropped a Very light. Gee! I stood stock still, and in my own mind I thought I was as big as St. Paul's Cathedral. After the light expired, I got the bedstead into the barn and spread my blanket on it. I had just taken my boots off, when: Crash! It took me fully five minutes to spit all the brick dust and rubbish out of my mouth! "Are you all right Major?" when I could speak. "Yes, are you?" was the reply. Jerry had only given us fresh ventilation by dropping a bomb through the other end of the barn that we were in. I rolled myself in my blanket and went to sleep.

October 9<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have had five and a half hours good sleep, although I am told it was a perfect Hades around here last night. It is a sickening sight this morning. There are dead men lying about as thick as leaves in

autumn. Just outside our door, a bomb had been dropped alongside an ambulance convoy of six light cars. All the lot went west, patients and drivers, while the cars were smashed to scrap iron. Further down the road, one of our ammunition lorries was unlucky and had a bomb dropped fairly on to it. There was enough left of the first driver to recognise him but there was not a vestige left of the second driver. Nothing can tear up men like high explosives.

At 8.30am. I went and took over at my gun. At 10.30am. the report came that the cavalry was through the enemy again, so we were out of action unless the cavalry was thrown back.

Before dark, I cleared some of the dead to one side so that I should have clear paths around the guns. After dark, the first time I moved five yards I stumbled over one body and my outstretched hands plunged on to another. It is too ghastly to think about.

#### October 10<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We are out of action. I had to report to Brigade Headquarters with 25 men. I am instructed to go forward to Marez and prepare an advance ammunition dump. We arrive there at about 9.00pm.

#### October 11<sup>th</sup>. 1918

This is the largest town we have struck since leaving Peronne. It has, of course, been in the hands of the Huns since the retreat from Mons. It is not destroyed in any way, excepting the church which had been mined and blown up with a time fuze, the day after Jerry had left.

#### October 14<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I was startled at 2 o'clock this morning to hear that Germany has accepted President Wilson's terms. The rumour grew more persistent as the day wore on, but I think it is a dream.

#### October 18<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I have been billeted in a house here. The Madame gives us some pitiful details concerning the treatment of the inhabitants by the Boche.

I have been amused by seeing the women continually going through the streets with barrow-loads of household linen and other articles that are usually treasured by housewives. I ask the Madame the meaning of it. She tells me that when the Boche advanced in the early days of the war, the women hid their household treasures. They have been hidden ever since. Now they are bringing them out again, I think this is a tribute to our conduct.

#### October 19<sup>th</sup>. 1918

My section goes up again, so today I am relieved at the dump. I have been comfortable here, that is, so far as comfort goes in a war zone.

We proceed through Mauroy (where the Right Section of my battery is in action), Honnechy, St-Benin, and take up a position at le Cateau. I expect the enemy has taken up a strong position in Mormal Forest at the other side of the town.

#### October 20<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We have been digging in today. It has simply poured with rain all day. We have not had a dry stitch on our backs, mud and water squeezing through the lace-holes of our boots. There is an RFA (Royal Field Artillery) battery on our left and they gave us an exhibition of the cheekiest bit of attempted scrounging that I have yet seen, and my experiences have been rather wide. We had just finished one dugout with a roof of corrugated iron and a good thick layer of soil and green sods on the top. A party of this battery came across and started to strip the top off. On being asked what their game was, they replied that they were digging a dugout and wanted some iron for the roof. For a while, London Billingsgate was easily outclassed for language. Needless to say, they went away empty handed, with their ears ringing.

October 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

This morning our artillery gave the biggest bombardment I have yet heard. All watches had been synchronised at midnight. At 1.20am. all guns opened fire. There must have been hundreds of guns round us. The thunder was terrifying. We were switching from one target to another without a stop. This continued for five hours. Then our infantry went over.

October 24<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The effect of the fighting yesterday was that the enemy was driven out of the last seven miles of the forest that they had held. All reports state that they are now falling back again, rapidly.

October 27<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Our guns have been condemned as worn out. Today they are pulled out and sent back to Ordnance at Amiens. I wonder how long we shall be without them.

October 28<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I go back to Mauroy to bring up 30 men of the Right Section to the battery.

October 29<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Last night, one of our ammunition lorries took a wrong turn and ran into no-man's-land before they were aware of it.

October 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

There have been several attempts to retrieve the lorry, but without success. I

expect it will have to stay there until Jerry is driven back again.

November 4<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Although we had it very hot here for the first few days, now all is quiet. The enemy has been driven still further back, and we are not troubled in any way, except for a few air raids at night, which are nothing to worry about.

We don't know anything definite, but we constantly hear rumours that the Germans are asking for an Armistice and that this will be granted on certain conditions. Well, no one will be more pleased than I, when the whole job is over, but I would rather carry on for months, than that the Boche should get off lightly. I have seen something of him, and the more I see, the less I like him.

November 11<sup>th</sup>. 1918

Shortly after 11.00am. our wireless operator reported that the Germans had signed the Armistice terms. Well, let us hope the politicians will make a good job of it. According to the papers we have got through, the terms of the Armistice are such that the Hun will not have a kick left in him, but to my mind, we are in a position to argue better in the field than at the table. At the present time, we easily have the upper hand on land and in the air and, I believe, on the sea also. But it is not for me to think, I have only to obey orders.

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**Note by Denis Fewster Hopkin, grandson of the author.**

A digression at this point for the benefit of my family. This digression results from the reference to the 2nd. Hull Heavy Battery.

Dan's future son-in-law, who was his daughter Violet's fiance before the war, had enlisted in 1914 at the age of 21 in that battery. His name was Frederick Bernard

Hopkin and he was my father. They married shortly after the war finished. He is the Fred who is referred to in many of the letters that Dan wrote to his daughter during 1917 and 1918.

Unfortunately I am going to find it difficult to write even a sketchy account of Fred's war service as there is no written record that has survived. There are no records of either of the two batteries in the local archives. I know that Fred followed Dan, on enlistment to Hedon Race Course and later went to France with the battery as a gunner-signaller and at some point made up to corporal. It must not have been all that much later that the designation of the battery was changed to the 124 Siege Battery RGA because I have in my possession the original notification home to the effect that Fred was in hospital in Rouen as a gas casualty. The notification refers to the 124 Battery, and it is dated 21<sup>st</sup>. July 1916. He was in hospital for a long time in Scotland (at Shotts) and putting two and two together, I believe that as part of his recuperation he was promoted Acting Sergeant and spent some time as a signals instructor at Southampton. Here the trail grows cold. All that I know is that he went back to France in trench mortars where he saw the war out. He was demobbed as a corporal.

I believe that had he still been with the 124 Battery at the time Dan mentions it, then I am sure Dan would have made an effort to meet up with him.

I hazard a guess, from what my father told me, that the 1<sup>st</sup>. Battery suffered severe casualties from disease and privation whereas the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Battery was involved in more action whilst in France. I suppose that I will never find out more than that but I continue to hunt. There is certainly no more in the way of records in Hull. This is a shame because history of the infantry regiments which had a strong link with Hull, for example the East Yorkshire Regiment, is well documented.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Ending

*A visit from the King and the Prince of Wales – A pig to celebrate Christmas with.-  
Organising a Christmas party – A visit to Valenciennes – Leaving old friends –  
The return to Southampton – Demobilisation and home*

November 16<sup>th</sup>. 1918

**W**e have been wondering whether our battery will be for the Army of Occupation in Germany. I hope not, for I want to be home as soon as possible, now the job is over. I think the odds are against us going to the Rhine, because we have got our new guns up and today we are handing them

over to the 189 Siege Battery who have definite orders to proceed up, while we take over their 6 inch Mark VII guns.

November 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1918

We have nothing much doing, except guards and fatigues, so I have a run down to Bohain [-en-Vermandois] in the car to get a few luxuries for the battery, if

possible. I find it a fair sized town, with plenty of excitement today because there are a great number of French soldiers coming in to be demobbed.

I am thinking of Paragon Station, and of at least two faces that will welcome me with smiles.

#### November 30<sup>th</sup>. 1918

We leave le Cateau today, and passing through Inchy, we arrive at Beauvois, or Fontaine-au-Pire, both places being joined together. The whole of the 73<sup>rd</sup>. Brigade of Artillery is mustering here.

We are billeted in a large house in one of the main streets, while the Right Section is in a house further down the street.

#### December 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1918

We are having a quiet time, only one parade a day, either physical jerks or an hour's route march every morning. Today I have a walk into Caudry, an important town about three miles away. It has a really fine church, a large Town Hall and a theatre, but of course there is no play running. I heard about a cafe where beer was sold. I paid for a glass but could not drink it. It was vile stuff. I think it had been brewed from orange peel.

#### December 4<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The King and Prince of Wales passed along here today. I went to Carnieres, about five miles away and I had an exceptional view of them both. A small party of them stood talking, within six feet of where I was standing. I thought the King looked very worn and haggard, but the Prince of Wales, with his smiling face, was the picture of a fine handsome boy. They had a great reception.

#### December 12<sup>th</sup>. 1918

I go to Saulzoir to take over billets for the battery as the brigade is moving there. The OC wants the whole battery together, so I take over a cloth factory.

#### December 13<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The battery moves to Saulzoir today. All the machinery, etc. in the factory has been destroyed by the Germans and in doing this, they have badly shattered the buildings, but I think we can make ourselves comfortable. We have been in worse places.

#### December 25<sup>th</sup>. 1918

It is Xmas Day and we have had a rare day. We bought a pig out of the battery funds, and although the cost worked out at 4/2d. [21p.] a pound, we forgot that when we ate it. We also had a barrel of beer which we were able to sell at 2d. a pint, and very decent stuff it proved to be. Each man was allowed two pints. We had plenty to drink and eat, so under the circumstances, what more did we want?

We have settled down very well and have an area to scrounge. That is, all ammunition, etc. that has been left in this area we gather together and place in dumps by the roadside to be collected later by motor lorries. We parade at 8.30am. and dismiss at noon. Afternoons are devoted to sports. We have football leagues, both soccer and rugby, cross country running, a tug-of-war league and boxing, whilst those who care to improve the mind may do so by attending classes in mechanics, electricity, motor driving, languages or any subject where half a dozen could be got together. In the evenings, there are whist drives, bridge tournaments and a brigade concert party, which gives an excellent show every Friday evening.

The only fly in the ointment is demobilisation. The men grouse a lot about this. We have already had several men who have left for home, and the remarkable thing is that they are all this year's recruits. A few Welsh miners, another in a police office, one is the son-in-law of a London County Councillor, another in the offices of the Scottish Board of Agriculture, and so on. This gets the men's backs up. They argue that first in should be first away, and when all is said,



there is a lot of sense in this. Everyone is anxious to get home. I know I am.

#### December 28<sup>th</sup>. 1918

The Brigade boxing contests are over and our middleweight is now the Brigade champion. About 60 of us went in motor lorries to Caudry where we fought and won the Corps championship in great style. The contests were decided in the theatre at Caudry. We came back in fine fettle, alarming the inhabitants of this little town who had been in bed some hours, by our singing.



By being exceedingly careful with our rations since Xmas, we have been able to save a bit of bread, margarine and tea. We have bought some currant bread with money raised by subscription. We issued invitations, through the Mayor of the town, to all children under five years of age to have tea with us today. We collected tables, forms, seats etc. from all over. The schoolteachers started to bring them up about 4 o'clock, and what a procession it was! What pleasure it gave us to wait upon them! How they did eat. The civilian ration is only very short here. I really think that for the children it was the first unlimited meal they had had for many a long day. Many of them were so small that the mothers carried them here, and after tea, carried them home again. After tea, the Mayor and the schoolmaster made speeches which we did not understand, but we did understand the heartiness of the children's singing of the Marseillaise and the hearty cheers they gave the battery. Poor little kids.

Afterwards, the teachers had their tea in our Mess, which they seemed to enjoy as much as the children, although it was only bread, bully beef, margarine and a piece of currant bread.

#### January 5<sup>th</sup>. 1919

Again I am at Caudry, where our Bombardier Voisy again wins comfortably. This boxer is no novice. He won the Army & Navy welterweight championship at the National Sporting Club a few days before we sailed for East Africa.

#### January 6<sup>th</sup>. 1919

I pay a visit to Valenciennes and have nice day's outing. It is quite a large place and seemed very busy. The cathedral is a fine old place and the art gallery is a magnificent building, but I understand the Germans have removed the greater part of the best exhibits.

#### January 10<sup>th</sup>. 1919

My demobilisation papers from the Record Office have arrived today. I am marked as Pivotal, with immediate release. The authorities are working a new system now, and under it I should not be long before I am home. All troops are placed in one of four groups, viz:-- Pivotal, Guaranteed Men, Length of Service and Aged Men. I come under all four headings, so I certainly shall be next away.

#### January 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1919

I leave the battery for the Dispersal Centre at Cambrai.

I felt more despondent at leaving the boys than I care to admit. We have gone through a lot together and quite a large number is still here who were in the battery when it was first formed. All the officers of the battery came to the mess and wished me the best of luck on my return to civilian life.

I arrive at Cambrai and after tea, I have a walk around, but it is dark so I don't see much.

#### January 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1919

We are quartered in the University here. I have a walk and find Cambrai a fine city, but it has been badly knocked about. All the large shops which face an immense square in the centre of the city are a heap of bricks and rubble. Strange to say, the

Town Hall, which forms one side of the square, is hardly touched. I presume that the greater part of this damage has been done by our guns and aircraft, harassing the enemy during his retreat through the city.

January 24<sup>th</sup>. 1919

I left Cambrai at 6 o'clock last night and arrived at Rouen at 1.00pm. today. After a meal in the Rest Camp on the banks of the Seine, we are marched to the camp beyond the racecourse, well outside the city. Although snow is on the ground and it is freezing very keenly, we are under canvas, having had only one blanket issued.

January 27<sup>th</sup>. 1919

The organisation here for dealing with troops seems very crude. It is a fight for food every time and our ration is not too big. Everyone is impatient at the delay we have had, and this does not improve things.

This morning we were paraded at 3.00am., stood on the parade ground until 5.00am. in the bitter wind, then marched down into Rouen, which we did not leave until 9.00am.: six hours, when one and a half hours would have been plenty long enough. We arrive at Le Havre at 1.00pm., march down to the quay and leave at 5.00pm. Not much delay here considering that we had to wait for the boat to come in.

January 28<sup>th</sup>. 1919

I arrived at Southampton at 11 o'clock last night, after a rather stormy crossing but we did not land until 8 this morning. An officer met us and we had a good mug of hot coffee and sandwiches. I can only say

that I enjoyed it. We changed our money on the platform and each of us was handed a huge paper bag containing sandwiches, poloni, sausage rolls, etc., for refreshments on our journey north. If we were on short rations at Rouen, they are certainly making up for it here.

I leave Southampton at 1 o'clock in the afternoon for Clipstone, my dispersal centre. Although we are travelling at a good rate, the speed is not half fast enough for me. I had dreams of sleeping at home tonight, but I think that is impossible now. I arrive at Clipstone Camp at 7.00pm. This camp is a few miles from Mansfield. We are served with a hot meal and after that we had another medical inspection, then the demobbing starts in earnest. We are all through by 2.00am. but we have to wait until 6.00am. for a special train to take us to Sheffield. I must admit that the arrangements here have been perfect. All night long, troops were arriving for demobilisation and they seemed to pass through the hands of the staff without a hitch. If only a system like this had operated at Rouen, I would have been home in three days instead of being a week on the journey.

January 29<sup>th</sup>. 1919

I leave the special train at Sheffield and send a wire home, telling them I expect to be home by noon.

Paragon Station at 12.15, and those two faces are there to meet me, just as I had yearned to see them for so long. And this is the end of my part in the Great War, a war which reached all round the world.

## Postscript

I have often been asked which of the two campaigns that I have been in was the more difficult. I have always replied that it was the East Africa one. This answer seems to surprise everyone who was not in East Africa for any length of time. I think two years in the field in East Africa was about the limit of a soldier's endurance. The shortage and poorness of the rations, the scarcity of water, the long daily treks in terrible heat told its inevitable tale.

Malarial, Blackwater, enteric fevers and dysentery were rampant, to say nothing about such things as Veldt sores which covered men from head to foot with sores that almost made him frantic. Just imagine marching 20 or 24 miles in a temperature of 120 degrees in the shade, if you could find any. Before you started, your water bottle was filled and if you did not strike water that night, you had no more until the next morning. Thirst is a terrible thing and it is under these conditions that one finds this out. In France, you could always quench your thirst within an hour or so.

Also, I sincerely believe that all the flying and crawling insects in the world make East Africa their playground. They worry you by day and devour you by night. But perhaps the worst thing of all was the scarcity of news from home. The Field Post Office was in the hands of Indian staff. Whether they were careless and did

not trouble to send the mail down the line, I do not know. I do know that a great number of my letters went astray. If one received a letter within three months of it being posted, one could count oneself extremely fortunate. I was once about 10 months without news from home, although my wife and daughter were writing every week. This is very trying when one knows that one's family lives in an area that is constantly being raided by German aircraft. In France, we usually received letters seven or eight days after posting.

I freely admit that there was much more metal flying about in France and that there was a lot of gas, which was unknown in East Africa, but then one had good food and a decent supply of it. The climate was more congenial to our natures. One had spells off duty when things were a bit cushy. In France, one was troubled by only one kind of insect, not dozens of different species. And again, France was a civilised country, and East Africa, away from the larger towns was not. I would sooner hear a big shell travelling along like an express train, than hear a lion roar a few yards away. I have heard both very often, but a shell never made my flesh run up my spine until it turned my hair into pin wire.

If the same terrible time was to come again, and I had my choice, I should choose the civilised country.

*But let us trust that these times will never return.*

*The whole affair is in the hands of the politicians,*

*so let them make it impossible for a nation*

*to run amok through the world again.*

*J. D. FEWSTER*