

31.12.1915 Tel-el-Kobin

Dear Mother & all,

*My last letter to you was I think written on the Peninsular – since then dramatic developments have occurred. Of course there is no need for me to start to detail to you our evacuation of the Peninsular. You of course will know everything.*

*Well Mother as I intend to write an extra long letter I will start & detail as best I can what has taken place since my last letter to you on the old Peninsular. Rumors started to go around about us leaving & of course we all thought it was only a joke. However the next day orders came that we only had 24 hours to remove our 18 pound (8.2 kg shells) guns. I smelt a rat then but could not believe we were going to leave. However, some of the boys from the Infantry started to leave & at last it came out officially. That we were going to leave. From then on everything was hustle. Guns, ammunition, troops etc. started to leave.*

*The majority of the supplies had to be destroyed and it was terrible to see thousands of pounds of goods being thrown into the sea. Everything was hustle and bustle.*

*On Tuesday 14/12/15 our brigade column started to carry the 8 pounder (3.6 kgs) shells from our guns. We had about 4000 to carry down to the beach and when we had finished we could leave the Peninsular. Now Mother, to describe that day and night would be impossible.*

*We started at 2 pm on Tuesday 14/12/15 and did not finish until 4 pm the next day going every hour. Really, how I did it is impossible but the shells had to be brought down. We had to do it. We had to carry them one on each shoulder a distance of 1 mile nearly all the way uphill and all of the way under shell fire. However Arthur and I kept going and when we had finished we both fell down on the ground outside our dugout absolutely done.*

*We had to pass along the beach and of course “Beachie” was pretty busy so you stood a pretty good chance of getting a crack. However we were pretty lucky and managed to escape all the shells.*

*On Wednesday at 6 pm we had all our kit ready to move off and arrived at the pier on the beach at 7 pm. We did not have long to wait and a browden conveyed us to a boat lying about 1 mile from the shore and we made way for Lemnos Island after having that 1 month on the Gallipoli Peninsular.*

*The evacuation started on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December and finished on the following Sunday. The trenches were all mined for fear “Abdul” the Turk charged. If he did this we had only to press a button and “Abdul” was no more. Of course we all thought he would smell a rat, but I believe after everyone had left he was still firing away. I fancy I can hear Dad saying “His gills would be all there when the running part came.” However I did not want to be left last as I really thought “Abdul” would charge.*

*We had a last line of defense trench close to the beach lined with machine guns and barbed wire entanglements but of course the war boats were standing ready to cover our retreat in case the Turk charged. However, everything went off splendidly without a single casualty, or at least one got wounded by Beachie I believe but he was able to walk down with his kit.*

*The authorities were giving us as much linen and clothing as we could carry away. I got a complete new turn-out and threw all my old things away. It was indeed a sight I never can forget and cannot explain on paper.*

*You will of course by this know all about it. I suppose the people in Australia will not take it very well but as we could do no good what was the use in staying. Well now I will continue my narrative. As I said we reached Lemnos Island and disembarked the next morning and went ashore. We marched I should say about 3 miles and went into camp. As we were marching down we heard someone sing out "Hello Arthur" and we were delighted to see Jim Hague. He was at Lemnos on a spell and missed the evacuation. He, it so happened, was camped right near the artillery camp so we had many hours of chats and long talks etc. he was looking well considering he has been through from the beginning and out of his company there are only 5 left with himself. (A company had usually four platoons totaling about 200 men.)*

*We stayed at Lemnos from Thursday until the following Thursday. We had a good look around but as we did not have any money we did not have what you could term a good time as we had not got paid for over 6 weeks. Lemnos is a pretty little place, mostly Greeks – the most striking thing is the beautiful harbour – it is something lovely. There are about 50 cruisers and destroyers, submarines etc and large hospital and troop boats and when everyone is lit up at night it is a lovely sight.*

*Well, on the following Sunday a large mail came in for us – it was on its way to the Peninsular but had been stopped at Lemnos. I can tell you there was excitement in our camp, but not for me, for I think out of the whole 200 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Column Gnr H S Dumbrell was the only one who did not get a letter and a parcel of some sort. Arthur got three letters and four papers. I was alarmed and thought something must be wrong at home for you promised me you would write every week. It was then nearly 3 months since I left Australia.*

*I went away and had a good old cry and could not sleep that night thinking of Home and wondering why I did not get a letter. Arthur tried to brighten me up but I can tell you I felt pretty miserable and fully intended to send a cable to see if anything was wrong when I got to Egypt. We then got paid four pounds (\$8) each and each received our Christmas Billy – as well as a plum pudding. The boys were just like a lot of school children on Christmas morning looking to see what Santa had brought them.*

*The whole tent was literally covered with everything imaginable. The contents of mine were as follows: - one tin pineapple, 2 tins of curry, one tin of cheese, 2 tins of sardines, 1 tin chocolate, 4 pair laces, envelopes and paper, 2 pencils and a packet of playing cards. My Billy was from a Miss Irwell of Ballarat and I of course wrote her a nice sweet little letter thanking her. Arthur, it is strange to say, got his from a resident of Albury named Stevens enclosing him a dozen views of Albury. Some of the boys got 5 one pound notes in theirs – but I was not so fortunate.*

*We had a fine old time that day and if I only had received a note from Mother I would have been the happiest boy on Lemnos. This was on the Sunday and on the following Thursday 23/12/15 we received orders to pack up and be ready to move off in a minute's notice. We departed from the camp at 9 am and boarded a 2 funnel boat named the Caledonian a photo of which I sent to you.*

*We stayed in the harbour all that night and next morning made way for Alexandria. We did the journey in 36 hours doing a zig zag course as submarines were very plentiful. We had our Christmas dinner on board but we only had bread and butter and tea. I guess you had something more tasty. Well we arrived at Alex on Sunday night but did not disembark for 2 days as there were many other boats in front of us as the piers were full. We all thought that we would go back to our old camp at Oasis – however we at least got the word to get ready to go at 11.30 pm on Tuesday night.*

*We entrained and made way for what we thought Cairo. After travelling for 7 hours – sleeping mostly – we found that we were right off the Cairo line and going right out into an unknown destination. We were all disappointed as we were expecting a couple of days in Cairo to have a general feed and a nice hot bath etc. We*

at last arrived at a place called Tel-el-Hebir. Here we disembarked and found to our intense disappointment that it was going to be the main Australian camp. It is near the Suez Canal – about 20 miles away – and 90 miles from Cairo. We are the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of defense we are told. We immediately started to put up our tents and make our self generally useful.

It is surprising how quick a camp will spring up when all hands get to work. The first thing I did was to look for any mail which may have arrived – but was told that there was 16,000 bags at Alexandria for us which was sent down to the Peninsular and brought back straight away. This was good news and I took fresh heart.

The next day we got about 40 bags and I received 12 letters – 4 from home, 4 from Olga Swann, 1 from Mrs Swann, 1 Grandma, 1 from a cobber of mine at Broadmeadows and 1 from Jack. Also your Xmas packet and 4 papers. Of course you can imagine my surprise and joy. I hastily sorted out all from home and read them. They were numbered 2,3,4 and 5 and dated Oct 19<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. I have not got the No 1. Perhaps I will get that shortly as we will get some mail for the next week every day. I also got another one from Jack today written from Adelaide.

Oh Mother, it was so lovely to get letters from home and oh the parcel. It is so good of you Mother to think of me so. I read with much delight that you would all be moving to Melbourne after the old year. It is what I hoped and when I come home from this war I will have no need to entrain for Wodonga I hope. Won't it be lovely for all of us to be home together – Ollie working with me at Jack's. Oh Mother it will be lovely. Jack has been making his fortune at the new ring (as a jeweler) he invented and informs me he has now 10 men working. However he deserves to get on. We heard from Bob with surprise about the increase in his family. He is making a bit of a welter of it, isn't he? However, good luck to him. John, Harold and Arthur, Robert etc. How is poor Edie getting on. Is she all right again now. I said I got a letter from Grandma. It was written from Sth Melbourne. It was such a nice letter. Also a paper.

Olga Swann has written every week. Look Mother, I may tell you that I don't like Olga Swann. I used to like her once when children going to school, but since I came to Melbourne I have lost all my childish love. She spoke about engagement when I was up to say goodbye. I feel myself in a rather funny predicament. I have not written to her since I left although she has written every week and sent me her photo. I will have to make an explanation I am afraid when I come back. I did not like telling her anything about it when I was up as I thought she was not taking it serious.

Who was this girl you were talking about at Fremantle? I know a little girl there who promised to write to me – but how did this Miss, whatever her name is, come to open my letter and put another inside as you say. I remember now. I gave the letter to a girl to post, but it was closed. She must have had a bit of cheek to go and open it and write one herself.

I want you to send this letter on to all the rest as I cannot write like this to everyone. I am going to write a small note to Jack and Grandma but I won't be able to write in detail a letter like this.

Today is Friday. A lovely sunny day. I wonder what you are all doing at "Glenan". I am tent orderly and have nothing to do only order the food for our tent. After being over on the Peninslar it seems so funny to be in tents and regiments as over on the Peninsular the officers were the same as the men and you were able to say and do what you liked. I would have sooner be there than in this rotten place. We are waiting for "Abdul" to try and cross the Canal and I am thinking he will receive a lively reception from us. The Turk reckons he can capture Egypt without Germany's aid but I am thinking with Germany's aid he will be up the pole.

*I could tell you a hundred and one things of interest but the letter has to be censored and it would only be destroyed. So you will have to be content with only 'stale' news or rather news that is mostly personal. I see by letters that it is practically compulsory in Australia and so it should be. However, Mother, I am sure of one thing as it is this. That I was over in time to see the Peninsular. We were the last to land before the evacuation so we ought to think ourselves lucky. I have got a couple of Beach and Bills shells and bullets and I am going to try to keep them and bring them home if I can. Arthur sends his love to all. He got a letter from Ede this morning.*

*We are allowed leave about once a month – 36 hours, 2 days. You can go to Cairo or Zag and Zig, the nearest town a distance of about 12 miles.*

*Poor old Alf has gone out to Wallan I believe. I do wish he was over here with me. Write plenty of letters Mother, the more the merrier. A letter from home is as good as 4 pounds over here, to me anyway. It is surprising how one appreciates letters from home. I enjoyed your Xmas present immensely and you can send one as often as you like but the salts are not needed thank you. I am in the best of health, getting as strong as a lion and as tough as nails. I have never had a day's sickness since I left Australia, bar a touch of dysentery on the Peninsular. I only trust and hope I can keep so all through.*

*How is Maude and Arthur getting on. Give them my best love. Please excuse pencil, than pen, but I can write better with a pencil. I will try the pen again 'tho. In a very short time there will be a little township here and it will not be quite so bad then. I am glad you are receiving your money all right. I only wish it was twice as much. I am going to look Jack Bailey up if I can but his camp is about 10 miles long and he will take some finding. Fancy Jack Bailey Snr being so sick. Fancy I have been away from home just 3 months and they have been the most eventful 3 months in my life. I have many things to tell you when I come back if I am spared. Tell Dorrie and Oll to write, also Maude. You ought to have got my mail from Egypt now also the Christmas present I sent you and the girls. I have met many boys I know in my travels and the other day on the boat I met a Dalgety Boy and he has been over here since the first. Norman McGroth is over here too.*

*Now Dear Mother and all, I think you have had a fair fly this time so I must close. I will write every week from now a small letter or a card or something.*

*Love to Auntie, Uncle and all.*

*Your true son*

*Harold*

*Address letters to*

*5295 Gnr H. S. Dumbrell  
2<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade  
AIF  
Egypt xxxxxxx*

**Transcribed by Mr John Burnet**