

# **The Journey to Gallipoli**

**First World War Letters and Records of  
Rupert and Alan Henderson**



Edited by Margaret Henderson

*The Journey to Gallipoli*

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## Foreword

Three Henderson brothers saw service in World War I and two (Rupert and Alan) died in Gallipoli. Kenneth served in France on the Somme as a Chaplain to the Forces and was invalided home in 1918. Much of his experience is recorded in his book *Khaki and Cassock*, published in 1919.

The Henderson family was literate and close-knit, a product of their strong Christian faith and the years of peace following the Depression of the 1890s, the Boxer Rising, the Boer War and Federation.

George Henderson was a well-regarded Estate Agent and Valuer, and his wife Jessie a strong and handsome woman, devoted to her family and committed to the welfare of the poor and under-privileged, later to receive the CBE.

The supremacy of the British Empire was assured; Australia was modestly affluent and her loyalty and closeness to the Mother Country were unquestioned. When war threatened in 1914 it seemed to her young men a huge adventure, a welcome challenge to their predictable and unexciting lives and a chance to be part of a larger world order. Given the rightness of the cause a victorious outcome was assured.

They could not envisage the ghastly and debilitating toll of war in the Dardanelles and in France, and the final price in the lives of young men on both sides of the conflict.

There were four Henderson brothers and two younger sisters. The youngest boy, Wilton, drops out of their story in 1906, at the age of ten, with appendicitis. All were enrolled in 1903 as Foundation Scholars in the new Grammar School established in association with Holy Trinity Church of England in Kew, Victoria. The elder three grew up with the school, active in sports, leadership and the Cadet Corps. Kenneth was an outstanding scholar who won a scholarship to Trinity College in the University of Melbourne. Rupert and Alan were not destined for academic careers but both matriculated, Rupert to enter his father's business and Alan for accountancy and also in his father's office.

On leaving school both Rupert and Alan joined the Militia and Citizen Forces. Alan served as a Sergeant and Rupert was commissioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and attained the rank of Captain. This was part-time soldiering and we have one letter from a camp in 1913.

YMCA Marquee Military Camp  
Heidelberg  
Monday night 1913

*Dear Mum*

*Have just left Rupert who is going into the officers' department to write to you. Have only a few minutes before Lights Out and am dead tired, and have just come off duty as Coy Orderly Sergeant which I've been since 6pm last night (Sunday). Got into bed after 12pm last night thro' the Orderly Officer's not knowing his job and keeping us out unnecessarily. Am as sound as a bell all the same, although I was up at 5.45 after rather a poor night's sleep. 46th is a good regiment but they are working us altogether too hard and most of the men are pretty tired. Dad might bring out a little bit more choc on Wednesday. It's very handy if your breakfast or meal is cut short. A large number of men are getting chafed feet. The following is routine:*

*6.30 Reveille Rouse out and roll call. The roll call at this parade is very large. Consequently the men are no sooner dismissed to wash and dress than they are fallen in again for 7-8 parade.*

*8 Breakfast. Sergeants start when men are all through, very seldom get a comfortable one.*

*Then all alternately parade and meal, close on one another till tea, then off duty.*

*Must go now, Mum, don't get nervous about anything, am as fit as a fiddle.*

*Your loving son  
Alan*

**I**n June 1914 Alan writes to his brother Kenneth ('Prof') in Sydney telling that he had failed in book-keeping "as I expected". He reports on the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party of Kenneth's fiancée Sharley and says that he has applied for a commission. He reports on his work:

*Things are fairly satisfactory as far as my work goes, but apparently the Boss does not intend paying more than the Wages Board salaries... I'm getting £1 now, £1.5 next year, £1.12/6 next and £2.8 next. The last of course is rather solid. I won't get anything much better in any other accountant's office and the training is very good.*

All other letters were written after their enlistment in the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

On the outbreak of war in August 1914 both Rupert and Alan joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade, of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF. Rupert as Captain and Alan initially as a sergeant. His commission appears to have come through within a few weeks. Kenneth was about to be ordained in December 1914 and married in January, so that his enlistment was deferred. Rupert was then aged 22 and Alan 20. They had the full support of their parents who shared the common tide of patriotic fervour and enthusiasm for the cause of Empire. George G Henderson was personally known to their Commanding Officer, Colonel “Pompey” Elliott.

They left behind two young sisters, Peggy, a lively schoolgirl of 14 and Lynette, aged six but still known to them as Baby.

These letters have survived 90 years as a random collection in an old suitcase, many in their original envelopes and mercifully preserved from damp and marauding insects. Some bear Egyptian stamps and some are stamped by the Army postal service. A few of the later letters are “Passed by Censor” but the only deletion apparent is obviously an afterthought on the part of the writer.

The chief intent of the letters was the reassurance of their parents as to their health and safety. They therefore convey nothing of the horror and chaos of warfare, except for Rupert’s last rushed and crowded card written on the Gallipoli battlefield a few days before his death. Their only complaints are of the tedium of camp life and the uncertainty of their future movements.

A convincing picture of the true carnage and waste of young lives emerges from the letters of their CO Colonel “Pompey” Elliott, to their parents soon after their deaths in action.

The letters of Rupert and Alan emphasise the strong bonds of affection between the boys and their parents and sisters, and the strong Christian faith in the family. They had many friends and there must have been many other letters, particularly to the elder brother, Kenneth, to which we have no access now.

The letters are their sole legacy. One or two minor omissions have been dictated by personal considerations and the expressed wishes of the boys themselves. I am indebted to Maggie Helass for helping me to publish them.

**Margaret Henderson**

September 2004

## ***Illustrations***

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*The Journey to Gallipoli*



## First World War Letters and Records of Rupert & Alan Henderson

**T**heir first camp was at Broadmeadows, a Northern suburb of Melbourne. It was a rigorous routine. Alan wrote:

(August 1914)

Dear Mum,

Arrived alright last night and rolled in about 12.30, roused out 5.30, caught a train at 7.30 and was in the trenches marking at Williamstown<sup>1</sup> all day. Then Mess was late as we didn't get back till 6.30 and the Brigadier rushes us over to a blessed lecture to which I couldn't attend for the life of me as I was so sleepy.

Our bed valises have arrived and I intend to draw a kit bag and my clothes tomorrow afternoon... The Governor General is inspecting us tomorrow afternoon... Going away on Saturday is out of the question - it may be next week and some even say the 24th. The ships are allotted but we have not learnt ours yet, so you can please yourselves as to which day, one day seems as good as another... I just learn that no Field Glasses will be issued as they cannot be got - get Rupert to hussle round and get me a good pair, marking my name on them. I can claim £5.9/- on them.

Must go now Mum,  
Your affectionate son Alan

Later from Broadmeadows 25.8.14

Dear Mum,

Just a hurried line to tell you I've got leave from 6pm Saturday night... The Duntroon fellow - Heighway - who lives in Auburn wants me to ride with him - to borrow horses here - and to ride back leaving midnight Sunday, but I don't think I could get a horse and it would be pleasanter by train. The horse would be a nuisance. Would Ken get me a flask like Rupert's and have it for me. Everything well, Mum, plenty of hard work and not much time to spare... Must go now for mails. Goodnight Mother, plenty of love to all.

Your loving son Alan  
Just got my pass signed by CO 5pm Saturday - 6am Monday. Hooray!

*A list of clothing with prices includes Cartridges for 15/- and mouth organ and whistle 17/6.*

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1. A Rifle Range

Broadmeadows 7.9.14

Dear Mum

Landed here at 11pm last night and heard that as we were the picquet we must sleep ready dressed in our clothes, also that Reveille would be at 5.30 which means that the picquet rouses out at 5am, so I put in the night till 1.30am yarning with our new Colour-Sergeant, who has been right through the Sudan and Boer wars and certain rebellions, a very fine soldier. He was a Sergeant in the Northumberland Fusiliers, famously known as the "Fighting Fifth". You can guess I'm pretty tired as we've had the hardest day's work we've ever done, having marched about 15 miles and working hard over the country all day.

I said goodbye to Sharl, Olive, Dorothy and Ken MacDougall this afternoon. There is an epidemic of matrimony in the regiment, three of our officers having married since camp started. We celebrated the Adjutant tonight with a dinner at which the Brigadier was present. The lecture just over was the funniest up to date. I don't suppose that there were half-a-dozen out of about 30 awake, altho' the lecture was a very good one.

I resume after putting the Senior Sub to bed. I think the dinner was a bit too much for him. He spouted Mark Twain's speech on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday all the time...

I must close now as I've got to inspect the feet of the Coy in the next 20 minutes.

Goodnight Mum.  
Your affectionate Son  
Alan

*The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to sail on the TSS Hororata in a large convoy which was to include New Zealand troops as well. On September 14<sup>th</sup> two heavy cruisers of the German Pacific Fleet, the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau, were detected in the southwest Pacific. The departure of the convoy was thus delayed, the Hororata leaving Melbourne on 18<sup>th</sup> October to join other Australia and New Zealand transports at Albany. Rupert describes the initial impact:*

TS Hororata 9.30 18/10/14

Dear Old Mum,

Just a line or two in a bit of a hurry to say goodbye once more.

Our embarkation was carried out most successfully. The men were quiet and went through a rather difficult and new performance very well.

We are very comfortable, we have a good saloon and a fair amount of deck space. The lounge is small but we use the saloon for writing etc. My companions are very good. The Cabin is small but will suit all right.

We leave here, off Williamstown, at 5am tomorrow morning and make for Portsea, and it is quite on the cards that we go straight away from there

*Captain Rupert Henderson  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn 1<sup>st</sup> AIF*



*Lieutenant Alan Henderson  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn 1<sup>st</sup> AIF*

tomorrow. Tell Dad to write at once and let me know the state of my finances, bank account, etc. He might catch us before we leave, but it does not really matter. Alan would like to know his also. He has been appointed Co-librarian with a very nice fellow named Palmer who Dad may remember as a tenant of ours. We have quite a good library, so also have the men.

The men are very packed in their hammocks and I am afraid that in the tropics we will have some trouble in making them comfortable.

I took a few snaps today of the troops on the wharf but did not get one of the sight as we left the pier. The cheering men all over the ship made a very impressive sight, then in silence the Band played 'God Save the King' and we drew away from our berth. There is not much news yet Mum, and I have not finished my work yet.

I must say goodbye once more, Mum and same old messages and all the love that my heart can feel for yourself, Dad, Peg, Babe and Ken and keep up your cheerful spirits and keep your interest in your same old works till we come back.

From your ever-loving and thankful son,  
Rupert

*Both Rupert and Alan write on 24<sup>th</sup> October to catch the mail in Albany, West Australia:*

SS Hororata 24.10.14 11.50am

Dear old Mum

Everything is all right. We are having a splendid trip, days of sunshine and water perfectly smooth. Yesterday afternoon it came on to blow for a while and rained very hard but cleared up during the night.

We are both of us very well and have three very fine meals every day with early morning coffee and afternoon tea thrown in.

I have three very fine cabin mates, Capt Mason (Judge Hood's associate), Capt McKenna (director of Hicks Atkinson), Capt Hunter of Bendigo, a dentist and rather wild sort of chap, all of our battalion.

Our days are always full and we are tired at night, there is really not much time to read or write.

We start work at 6am, issue rations at 6.30. Breakfast at 7am for men, clean and scrub troop deck at 8am. Officers' Breakfast at 9am, parade at 10am or 2pm, issue Beer at 11am, men's dinner 12 noon, officers' dinner 130pm, issue rations at 4pm. Men's tea 5pm, issue hammocks 6pm. Officers' dinner 7pm, lights out for men 9pm, Lights Out in saloon 11pm.

We can only actually drill the men (physical drill only of course) for 35 minutes per day for each company. This is worked down to its finest point. We are terribly overcrowded here as far as the men are concerned, there is actually not room for them on the troop deck without sleeping on the arm

chests, hatchways, tables, seats etc. and slung between the NCOs' bunks and in all the gangways.

The deck space is inadequate and above all, the cooks galley and bake-house are barely able to do the cooking required for such a large number of men.

The contract of the ship was to give our men three hot meals per day but the galley is not able to cope with this, so the men are now having bread, butter, jam and tea only for the evening meal. This will relieve the pressure on the cooks to a great extent and is I think sufficient for the men. Latrine accommodation is also barely adequate.

Reports have been sent in on the state of affairs by all company commanders and it is probable that half of our battalion may be moved off when we get to Albany. We are also likely to lose our sword instructor who may go as quartermaster on the 'Orvieto'. I think wireless messages have been sent and received but we have no idea as to their purport.

I have been Battalion Orderly Officer once and Field (or Ship's) officer once also since we left. Both duties are very heavy and last for 24 hours. As ship's officer you are responsible for everything connected with the ship, duties, cleaning, fatigues, etc, etc.

I have taken a few snaps of the embarkation and the men on board and will send the films back from Albany for you to develop and use the pictures for yourself. Please take great care of them, get Dad to have them developed pretty soon as they don't keep for a very long time.

Nearly every man on board was ill on Wednesday night, we have been trying to discover the cause and can only put it down either to spite on the part of the ship's cooks who may have 'doped' the tucker, or to a bad carcass tainting all the meat utensils. Some of the men suffered agony but it very quickly passed away.

On the first two days that we were on board the bread ration was very short, and after a great deal of enquiry it was discovered that the cooks were issuing short rations to the men and afterwards selling them sandwiches made from the bread that should have been issued.

Needless to say this has ceased and the men get good food and plenty of it.

Our officers are a much better crowd than the 6<sup>th</sup> officers; they are a light-headed and rather heavy drinking lot and their lack of discipline is shown in the men also. We are really a much finer Battalion than they are.

Well Mum, Alan and I are both in perfect health and strength and are getting along very well indeed.

I am not going to finish this letter off now but will wait until tonight for more news.

Tonight has come bringing with it the news that tomorrow's mail will close at 7am. This of course means that we will come into port during the night. We are already sighting several ships going in the same direction as ourselves and believe them to be fellow transports.

We will be anchored out in the bay so do not expect to get any shore leave. In any case I expect it will be my turn to have command of the ship's guard one day while we are in port.

Inoculation against typhoid begins very soon, so I expect we will have a good deal of sickness in a short time.

I will write to Dad by the last mail before leaving Albany and tell him any more news. We will be sending you two or three films to have developed.

Well Mum goodbye for the present and heaps of love and kisses for yourself, Dad and Peg and Baby and Prof.

from your affectionate son,  
Rupert

*Alan writes more briefly and personally, less conscious of his responsibilities; more sanguine in outlook as befits his family nickname, "Fat":*

SS Hororata  
Saturday evening 24.10.14

Dearest Mother

I'm sending you a fairly detailed diary which you ought to receive, as it's free from anything a censor might object to. It at any rate gives you most of the news and shows you what a splendid trip we are having. The weather has been absolutely beautiful, scarcely a man on board seasick. Everyone is happy and contented – a number of young men usually strike some way of amusing themselves. Most of us are writing tonight, 'tho there are a few singing at the piano. They are a real good crowd of fellows.

It is peculiar how this sort of thing brings out a fellow's weaknesses – nearly every man in our line of cubicles has a photo of his mother or girl, or both, tacked up over his bed, and one often hears them comparing, in confidential tones, notes on the subject, especially of the girls, of course a fellow doesn't usually talk about his mother. It is about the best part of war. Well, Mum, we are not being overworked by any means, of course study starts now in earnest and with boxing every day I hope to keep fit and well. Rupert of course is writing you tonight, but lest his letters are censored I may as well say he is very well and doing alright. He has very good cabin mates.

We are learning how to make the most of space now and are settling down comfortably into what promised to be a terribly crowded ship. It certainly is crowded but is nothing like as bad as it looked at first. All the men can be in the air at a time. They are made to keep everything spotless. Their tables and floors and all eating utensils are scrubbed and polished every day, till they shine. The whole ship is inspected by the Captain of the ship and the Colonels every day. In addition to their fatigues and duty work the men get 35 minutes Physical Drill per diem, just enough to keep them healthy. The horses are all walked round their part of the ship every day for half an hour, which will make a tremendous difference to them as compared to having none at all, which looked like their lot at first. Our meals are very good and

one has to be careful not to eat too much. However I'm not drinking or smoking at all just yet, as one does not need to. We play draughts a good deal, the Colonel is a crack, he is just the same as in tactics, can grasp a position in a second and trick you into losing about half your men at one go, and he does it in a second.

My expenses are very small, my first and only to date being a dozen of soft drinks for wearing white shoes between breakfast and dinner. The fellows fined me as they had just been fined a drink all round, most of them for going to sleep in a lecture. It was most effective, no-one went to sleep today.

Tell Dad I made my Will in my paybook yesterday and got it witnessed by Jimmy Johnson, Lieut. The saloon is full of fellows tonight all writing as hard as they can lick. I may send my first film. I daresay they will be failures and I have missed two spaces out of the ten by twisting it too quickly.

A boat is just passing us and has signalled "Goodbye Good luck". We have seen two or three other lights on the horizon tonight. Well Mum I can't think of anything more at present. Tell the little girls I'm still thinking of them and wish them all the happiness they can have. Give Dad and Ken my love and tell them to write to me regularly.

With heaps of love and kisses to yourself, Dear Mum. Goodbye.  
Your very affectionate son, Alan

*Alan had already started on his diary which, in his cramped writing on the pages of a tiny pocket notebook, would chronicle day-to-day activities until they reached Egypt. But there was still time to catch the post from Albany.*

In Port  
Monday evening 27.10.14

Dearest Mother,

Rupert is not writing tonight as he is in bed, prior to going on Guard from 2 to 6am. Ship's Guard Company is strenuous work – the watches are four hours each and you have to be climbing all over the ship all the time. Things are getting quite business-like. At night our sentries have ball ammunition and are ordered to fire if any boat approaches which has been forbidden to approach and warned to keep away. I cannot tell you where we are. All our further doings you will see in my Diary I am sending you of the last two days. We may be sending two films tomorrow if they are allowed but I think most of mine are failures. Well Mum it is no good my repeating my diary which I write as much like a letter as possible and keep up-to-date so that I can pop it into an envelope at any moment.

We received all your letters today and it certainly does one a lot of good to hear from home as one gets rather stale in a way without the surroundings and blessings of home. I am glad you and Dad take the pleasure, or shall I say pride in our going. That alone makes it worth the while. I will not write separately to you all... read this letter to the nippers and give them plenty of hugs and kisses.

Wednesday 28.10.14 8.30am

Dear Mum,

We are now lying at the pier having come in for stores etc. last evening. I am sending you another small piece of my diary.

Everything is going splendidly but my company is at present grieving over the loss overboard of our Colour Sgt O'Meara. Of course he is only announced as missing up to date so don't show everyone the page of diary I am sending.

The particulars must be kept private. He was a good man and I suppose he was sitting on the rail and perhaps fell asleep and slipt. He could not have lived two minutes.

Rupert is writing you and I think we can get off a letter or two before we sail again.

Another ship drew up on the other side of the pier after us last night. The troops come from another State, the chiacking was tremendous. It resolved into an effort to swear or shout one another down. This morning only friendly conversations are taking place. We would not be surprised if the Brigadier paid us a visit this morning and inspected the ship.

The weather is beautiful again this morning but we are not allowed on shore. The ship gets very close when not on the move, I'm afraid it will be awfully warm with a following wind in the Red Sea...

We have all been inoculated with typhoid on the left forearm. It puffs up the arm and is a little sore but nothing serious. There is no more news at present and I must knock off now. Give my love to all.

Your very affectionate son Alan

*H*e sends a postcard of the SS Hororata and on the 29<sup>th</sup> a card:

All well, Alan Henderson. In a hurry. Good bye.

*R*upert writes before leaving port:

SS Hororata  
At Albany Pier  
Wednesday 28.10.14

Dear old Mum,

Since writing last a good many things have occurred.

On Saturday last the 'Shropshire' who is anchored some considerable distance down the harbour signalled that she had mail for us. It was blowing very hard and a slight sea running but letters are letters and we wanted them so Major



Mac got permission from the Captain to take a boat out and he called for a crew from the officers and we started off.

We got to the ship easily, collected a mail of one parcel, two letters, one telegram and a small organ and started home again. It took us a long time of very hard rowing to get back, sometimes we were making no way at all and it was very doubtful if we would be able to get back. This meant either trying to make one of the steamers we had to pass on the way home or run for the beach. We were in a magnificent boat and were not shipping a single drop of water.

We decided to have a shot to get back and after over two hours of very hard plugging we reached the ship. Then came the difficulty of getting to her side, hooking on the davit ropes and hauling her up while we were rising and falling a height of about six feet on each wave. We did it but it was very hard.

It was one of the most valuable experiences I have ever had. We arrived in the middle of a sacred concert: every man left to come to the side and cheer us. Our Parson who was holding the show is the most long-winded and modest and retiring (I don't think) man or parson I have ever met. In short he is a nuisance. He has five of his own photos stuck up in the saloon and you would think he is the CO of the ship.



Colonel Semmens has been ill ever since we left and will not be about again for two or three weeks, he is suffering from neuritis.

On Monday night B Coy was Guard Company. The Guard Company furnishes all guards and sentries over the guns, kitchens etc over the ship. There are between 20 and 30 sentry posts.

The three officers divide the watch into four hour watches and during your watch you have to visit the sentries every half-hour and spend the rest of the time on the Bridge with the Ship's officer of 11<sup>th</sup> watch.

During Conder's watch from 10pm to 2am and at about 11.30pm when he was right for'ard and inspecting the sentries, one of our officers came on deck to latrines and thought he heard a man call faintly for help three times.

It was blowing a very hard gale at the time (of course we were at anchor out in the harbour). He, apparently frightened of appearing ridiculous by raising a false alarm, went along and questioned two other sentrys if they had heard the calls. The sentry right astern had heard what he thought was a man being sick and another had heard the call. These men of course waited for the officer to take action. Instead of doing so before all this preliminary enquiry which took several minutes, the latter went and woke up several other officers, two of them came along and woke up the Captain of the Day and happened to wake me as I was sleeping in the same cabin. I booted one out at once on to the Bridge to tell the Officer of the Watch.

By this time it was too late of course to do anything. No one thought of immediately throwing one of those flares, Buoys or answering the supposed calls. Everyone then turned in again and waited for morning to see if anyone was missing.

On Tuesday morning (yesterday) the Colour Sgt of Fat's Company was missing and has not yet appeared. There is no doubt that he was the caller for help. It is possible that he had been sitting on the rail, fallen asleep and been blown off. There are other theories with just as much weight as this. However a Court of Enquiry is now sitting on the whole matter.

I am afraid I may lose one of my best Sergeants also. At Camp he hurt his knee and this is now giving him trouble. I am afraid that it is the same trouble as I had, though our Doctor at Camp said it was not. However there is a great doubt now as to whether he will be fit for active service. His name is Russell and he has seen a lot of service in India. He is only young and a very cheerful chap and a hard worker, very straight and liked by all his men. If I lose him it will be a great loss.

Our old Colour Sergeant is improving and will yet turn out a good man. He is beginning to realise that he must obey orders.

Yesterday we underwent the first half of our inoculations against typhoid, and I have a left arm this morning that is very sore indeed. The other arm has to be inoculated in about seven days' time. The men will all be done when we leave for sea. No shore leave is granted to any ranks so Fat and I did not get our day on shore.

Last night we came into the Pier for fresh water and are leaving this morning some time early for our anchorage...

Both all well Mum and everything going all right. Heaps of love and kisses to self, Dad, Peg, Baby and Ken.

Your affectionate son, Rupert

We received Dad's and yours and Peg's letters yesterday. We may be leaving here about Friday or Saturday.

SS Hororata  
Albany 30.10.14

Dear Mum,

Last time I wrote to you we were just about to be inoculated. We were done the next morning and the men were ordered to be done also. One of my Lance Corporals, a very fine chap, refused to be done (either vaccinated or inoculated) as some time ago he nearly lost his life when vaccinated.

This caused a good deal of trouble, several men refusing to be done. The CO gave the L-Cpl 24 hours to reconsider his decision and all were put in Guard Room to be later charged with disobedience of orders if they persisted. Another Corporal who is a real bad egg and a relation of the Lance Corporal's induced the men and another Corporal to support the Lance Corporal. The men with one exception have now been inoculated but the three NCOs are now in detention, soon to be dealt with by General Court Martial.

My sergeant, Russell, who has been laid up with bad knee was sent in to the Hospital in Albany yesterday to be discharged as there is little chance of his being fit again for duty. The other three NCOs I expect to lose also, of course they have been immediately reduced to the ranks. This means that I will have to find four or five men to fill their positions. This I can do from men who were absent without leave when we left Melbourne and have been sent on to join us here. Some of these men may yet have to be returned again to Melbourne.

This morning we went for another trip. The skipper wanted a crew to take him into the Bank in Albany and another crew was raised from the officers. Alan and I were again chosen. We had a very good sail in, spent no end of money on tins of biscuits, pickles, notebooks, hats for hot weather, khaki slacks and any number of odds and ends.

We behaved generally like a lot of schoolboys let loose. A whaler, which they have chartered to carry stores from the town to the ships, gave us a tug all the way home, a distance of about five or six miles. We got soaking wet as a stiff wind was blowing when we started for home and as it would have taken us perhaps four or five hours to row home we were very thankful for the tug. We earned it by helping to load the whaler with stores for our own ship.

Needless to say we are all very tired and sleepy tonight and I can scarcely think what I am writing.

We cannot give you overmuch news now, as all our letters must be left open to be read by censor and all information as to movements etc must be rigorously excluded.

They are moving two companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battn over to two other ships, this will ease the overcrowding a little but not enough.

Anyhow we are both in perfect health and spirits and are really getting along exceptionally well. I forgot to mention that we met Permezel in Albany today. He is on the 'Miltiades' and is looking very well indeed...

Dear Mum,

I just want to say that for my part I accept the great trust of the two girls which you place upon us and pray that God may grant us the power to carry out that trust in full.

God bless you all from Rupert

*From here on the tale is taken up by Alan's diary which he started on embarkation. No attempt has been made to edit the text and there may be some errors in the transcription of proper names. It is written on loose pages from a pocket diary 7.5 x 13cms, in a very cramped hand, chiefly in black ink but some red, when he ran out of black.*

Sunday 18.10.14.

After 8 weeks training at Broadmeadows we embarked this morning on the SS Hororata. Uncle Frank was on the wharf and said goodbye. The men were quiet and orderly. We marched on about 11am. I took 2 photos of my ½ Coy 'F' on the wharf with my new camera. Dinner was served about 2pm to the men. We left the wharf about 4pm and went out a couple of miles. There was a tremendous crowd on the shore all the way to St Kilda. The Band played patriotic tunes from the boat deck. The whole scene was very inspiring.

All the men can get on deck and in the open quite easily tho' there is very little extra space for games. After tea hammocks were drawn by the men unknown to the Coy officers. Not knowing how to hang them they were all 'ski-wif'.

The 6<sup>th</sup> have made a bit of a muddle. The man who is ship's q.m. seems quite inexperienced and nothing appears to have been previously organised, meals or anything else. However things are fairly straight and the men very happy. Like a lot of children having a new war experience.

Monday 19.10.14

Rose 5.25 and had a hot sea bath and freshwater shower. Attended men at Reveille – they rolled up hammocks in a very clumsy style and were slow about it. They were still happy and all went on deck. I got everything well cleaned up. They had breakfast and there was another 'welter', the two regiments clashing – arrangements for rations again being very poor, and there not being enough. I raised some more tho' and had to do the same each meal. Work was very hard – supervising and pushing things all the time. We left our anchorage about 8am, passed the Rip about 12.30 and Cape Otway 6.30. Only a gentle swell and a few sick. Men slung hammocks well tonight but are very crowded and close. Was appointed as librarian with Palmer last night. Have been indexing all this afternoon and tonight. Feeling well.

Things generally were much better today. The cooks are getting sober and organisation being made. Canteen starting. Am in a little cubicle with Grills – not overmuch room but sufficient. Well ventilated and more comfortable than the four berth cabin Rupert is with. All of us subs have a line of cubicles to ourselves. I think we'll make things lively in a few days.

Diary of Lieutenant Alan Dudley Henderson  
7th Battalion 2nd Brigade 1st AIF

Diary: 1  
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55  
Sunday, 14-11-14.  
in A.C. arrived Chel.  
- Bad  
- sand with - man swimming  
- went into port.  
Rupert went to the H.C.  
service held by the Padre, he is  
a Baptist & said it was  
fearfully crude scarcely a service  
at all, not going again.  
I am at sea alongside with  
Officers from Droicte & 2  
sick men who are 1000  
ahead of us. Bell for  
Colombo fog picked up by  
2nd Captain. W. D. D. S.  
Wells on Dec. 5. 1914  
was named by nigger. The  
usual annual was  
caused by blowing pannes  
down with his then scum  
for then the very fine yellow  
oil by called Rodriguez has to  
be operated up to the Stokes

Diary pages from 18th October to 29th November 1914  
Covering embarkation on SS Hororata and life on the troopship, to Alexandria in Egypt.

Tuesday 10pm

Rose at Reveille – couldn't make out why it was so late and forgot about having to put my watch back 20 minutes. Meals improving but short of bread. It seems there has been a miscalculation somewhere. Today we had a firestation parade – our Coy's is in our lines. Routine is getting more like routine and the men are getting to know their jobs. Spent two hours this morning and one this evening indexing and cataloguing books. Our Coy has just come on Guard – my relief is 2-6am so I think I'd better lie down now for a few hours. Foolery has already started. Watt of the Sixth has a pair of hair-clippers and they are catching everyone and taking a few streaks of hair off each. They even did me and Rupert. It means we all have to have it completed. The weather is still splendid and very calm – only a long swell. It is breaking everyone in gradually.

Wednesday 21.10.14

Rose at 1.45am and went on watch till 6am when Weddell relieved. Tiring game, inspecting sentries once every hour – 30 posts which take nearly an hour to do. Examined troop decks crawling from hatch to hatch on hands and knees in the pitch dark to look for cigarettes alight – we were running due West and from the poop got a beautiful sunrise, the sky first being a lovely golden then as the sun touches the horizon it sparkles very brightly. The weather was perfect all day – a number of large sharks could be seen this morning – also a few whales not far off, spouting.

At Breakfast we looked curious after last night's foolery. We had all had to have another hair cut, including myself, and looked very bald. Jimmy Johnson has shaved the top of his head – it shines like a rising sun. During the morning packed away all the clothes and uniforms I don't want in the baggage room with the help of my batman Forbes. Went on watch at 2am – found all the posts had been increased and had to chase round for more men. Had a good quiet afternoon visiting sentries.

We have a good party at table. The Marconi operator is our president and we have Loyd Johnson and Mason and Hopkinson among us. The latter is a great talker and quick with his tongue and keeps us going. They're a grand lot of fellows all round. Am going to bed now to make up for last night. There's also a bit of shaving moustaches. Every man has shaved his off and they all intend starting off scratch and growing again.

Thursday 22.10.14

Rose this morning more restful. Not Orderly Sub today. Grills and I take three days each and share Sundays and I've been at it since I came inboard. Started on Physical Drill at 8am. Colonel said I had a good chest expansion – boxed Grills but I was out of practice and he was a bit too quick. Physical drill for 30 minutes with the Coy. That is all the exercise we can give the men daily. At 4pm started sword exercises with Ricketts, our QMS. It's very difficult holding a sword properly and your wrist nearly breaks. It certainly aches after a couple of minutes with the weight of the sword. We will be practising with single stick very soon. Went to bed early.

Friday 23.10.14

Lectures started today. 10.30-11 map-reading with Major MacNicoll and 11.30 to 12 Tactics, Lt Finlayson starting at the beginning of Field Service

Regs. Both good men and good lectures. Took the Coy for 35 minutes PD<sup>2</sup> this afternoon they enjoy it. At the end it started to rain. The first we have had yet, the weather has been so perfect. Did about 1½ hours study at Map Rdg<sup>3</sup> problems and FS Regs.<sup>4</sup> Boxed the Doc this morning. He's 6'2" with a very long reach – hit him once or twice when I sailed into him at first but after that his length and reach told and he cracked me once or twice in the forehead. I'll go for his body in future and I think I can tackle him with a little practice. Will go to bed now and read in bed. Our cubicle is very comfortable and we are all very happy. The men are settling down and making the most of the little room they have. It certainly is not as bad as promised.

Saturday 24.10.14

Will not write much tonight as I must write letters by the score. Mail closes at 7am tomorrow, Sunday. Had lectures again this morning. They are very good. All our map-reading work is going to be done on big detailed maps of Belgium and France so that we will be as familiar as possible with the country. Sword work again this afternoon and an instructional spar with Captain Hunter who was champion sprinter at the Melbourne University and also a crack boxer. A few lessons from him and I'll feel much more comfortable. I might start sparring with Captain Mason in the morning. I believe we might sight land tomorrow for the first time since we left Victoria. Will send this lump home tonight. Keep it for me carefully. Made out my will in Dad's favour. Of course being a minor it reverts automatically to him but having a will like that would save a lot of trouble and expense and it would be handy for the office now to communicate with home.

Dad will be sorry to hear that Colonel Semmens has been ill and confined to his cabin since he came aboard. His trouble is Eurasthenia and he is far from well although latest reports say he is improving.

Sunday 26.10.14

Church Parade conducted by Chaplain Captain Miles, Baptist, from the Bridge Deck to troops massed in the Shelter and Boat Decks. He is a big easy-going fat chap about 45 and is getting longer-winded every day. He is by no means a good preacher as he rambles on and on and all over the country as he does in his prayers, from the King and Queen to safe embarkation.

We are in port (*name deleted*) now. A beautiful harbour, rocky granite hills all round us while there are ships everywhere. A beautiful sight on a sunny day. The 'Omrak' is swinging about a ship's length ahead of us and about five ships behind us, all about ¼ mile behind one another (*more deletions*). Had our first experience this afternoon. The 'Shropshire' signalled they had mail for us so that the Major asked for a crew to go for them. Twelve of us went, eleven of the 7<sup>th</sup> officers and Borwick of the 6<sup>th</sup> with McNicholl as skipper. We had to climb down the side on a rope ladder and as it was pretty rough it was a great job getting in. All the men were over the side cheering.

The 'Shropshire' is over two miles away and with a fast sea running and a strong wind we got to her in about 15 minutes. It took us three hours to

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2. Physical drill

3. Map reading

4. Field Service Regulations

get back. Jove, it was a pull. The wind freshened and the sea got rougher and those ships' boats are heavy. We pulled from ship to ship, tying on and having a rest at each. They didn't expect us to get back without help and sent the launch that goes round for us, but we got back without them in the dark at 8pm. Then it was a job, we had to get on from the starboard windward side in the dark. One chap was knocked out by the block – a great heavy lump of wood with a big iron ring in it. Eventually we managed to hook on and were hauled up on the davits. The cheers we got from our boat on arrival were tremendous, in fact it was the same at each boat as they could all see us fighting our way to them. Of course there was not any danger but it was a very tough pull.

Started this in the middle instead of the beginning. Woken up early with a talk of land and got up and looked out. We were about 400 or 500 yards from shore, creeping close in the channel. It was just near the entrance where the shore consists of big, rounded granite about 150 feet high. It is very pretty. We took up our moorings in line with three or four other boats only about ½ mile from land. (*Deleted*) came on board later and made us move to a slightly different mooring. The 'Doura' came in later in the afternoon. It was a beautiful sunny morning and the hills show up all round. The banks seem to drop straight down to the water and I would think the harbour was very deep.

Monday

A day of hope and anticipation. Rupert and I were in the list for leave. Some of the fellows went ashore yesterday and say the surroundings of the town are very pretty. They took cars and motored out to tea gardens about 15 miles out. We intended doing the same and hung over the side all the morning awaiting a launch. They appeared to go to every boat except ours and when one did arrive it brought an officer from the 'Orvieto' saying there was to be no more leave. The 'Orvieto' only arrived this morning (more deletions). However the launch also brought the mails. Then things got busy – all sorting mails in the dining room. It's about the greatest treat of all, everyone is terribly anxious and excited and it is quite amusing handing the letters out to the men. We got them from Dad and Mum, Ken and Peg with messages from Baby written on the Monday we left and also some on the Tuesday. Didn't expect my bank account was so big. Spent most of the afternoon writing up this diary and obliterating the parts that the censor might block. I hope it is alright now.

Tuesday 27.10.14

Not a good day for the Coy. Last night about 11.30 two sentries thought they heard a man cry for help. They were not sure it was not a man being sick and wasted time looking overboard instead of calling out straight away and then came and told us in our cabins. They apparently lost their heads. Well, by the time the officers were told nearly ten minutes had gone and there was still some doubt as to whether there was a man overboard. A gale was blowing with a very fast tide and rough sea. The boat could never have got back to the ship. When we came to see who was missing next morning my Colour Sergeant could not be found. He was a good fellow and a great favourite.



We took a boat's crew over to the shore to see if we could find him but of course there was no trace. He would never have lived in the sea tho' he was a strong swimmer. We came into the pier last night between lines of ships to the inner harbour a about 7pm. The town is very pretty and I think I will take some views. Am sending you four by this mail. All still well and happy.

Wednesday 28.10.14

Moved out from the pier this morning to our anchorage again about 11am. Took a film full of photos of the Warship 'Minotaur' and two other smaller ones. Two more came in while a Japanese boat lay anchored out in the harbour. I hope that the film will come out but am afraid of some not being properly focused. A big NZ Troopship No 3 arrived with them. The other nine stayed out in a line. A Japanese launch ran past us, which we cheered. They answered with Banzais. The NZ also cheered vigorously as did the Queenslanders we left at the pier. It is a great sight in the harbour, three long lines of ships. The warships ran out tonight. I suppose they will let us sleep sound tonight. The 'Minotaur' I believe is a big boat of 14 000 tons and armed with 9.2in guns. The sight of the three boats only about 100 yards away makes one feel intensely British. I read out Pearce's message and Lord Kitchener's order to the Coy last night. They cheered and clapped their mess tins heartily.

This is a very historic time for Albany. The NZ troopship was the big 'Maunganui'. The men are in a very smart undress holland and came to attention and cheered us all together.

This is to be an historic day. Thirty-eight boats, not counting four warships in the harbour. All practically in sight. It is a glorious and most impressive sight. Orders are out tonight against private letters but I think ours left the pier alright this morning. We gave them to a lady, or rather Rupert did, but this ends sending my diary home or even my love, for the printed postcards are to be sent. The time of suspense also starts now for the brave hearts at home. No news has yet been heard of poor O'Meara. According to today's orders all letters posted before 12<sup>th</sup> November from home will reach us en route. I am told FS Regs contains a sample postcard – must look it up.

Our new Col Sergt Kennedy is shaping up well. He was such a remarkably quiet old bird before, but very observant. He shook up the NCOs a treat today and I spoke to them myself. Also the men were getting lax. I also went through them and rung in a few extra fatigues. It was necessary. Am also getting things done more in the clockwork system now, having things done sharp to time. Visited my two sick men in hospital again this afternoon – gave one fellow a singlet yesterday. He had not got any decent underclothes and had a bad throat and cough. Forbes is his name, and Grills and I share him as our batman. He is a good smart Scotch boy. Also had a yarn to Lieut Spargo of the 6<sup>th</sup> who has had pneumonia since he came on. He is a very decent fellow. Another of their men is only just out of hospital after a spell of the same thing. The 6<sup>th</sup> have had bad luck. Col Semmens, Lt Spargo and Ryan all came straight onto the ship and went to bed.

Am feeling sleepy today with the inoculation. It is treating me very well tho'. Some fellows are quite rotten with it.

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup>

A quiet routine day on board ship.

Friday 30<sup>th</sup>

Another boating excursion. We sailed into the town with Captain Cameron intending to pull back but while we were in town the wind freshened and the sea got rougher so we got the tug to tow us. It was a great run with the water splashing all round and over us but we drew up to the ship's side soaking wet and happy. We had a quick round in town buying clothes and soap etc, and having lunch in an hour. They were like a crowd of schoolboys let loose. Fortunately no-one knew we were officers in our jerseys. At the leading hotel we struck a big dinner and cleared out but I'm afraid the brigadier saw them and another major who had gone into lunch there. There are a number of little whalers about – terribly rusty little steamers. They go out with a big mother steamer and carry harpoon guns in their bows. They say the fleet account for about 2000 a year.

Saturday 31<sup>st</sup>

Wrote letters home. One to Mother to go thro' the censor, the other not, but to go by the Doctor. However as we might have sailed tonight he did not go out but gave his letters to a man on the launch, which means it will go thro' the censors. I hope that is as far as it will get. We had to row the Doctor in today. The sea and wind dropped and instead of sailing we had to pull to the mouth of the inner harbour, there we got a tow. Tried to Semaphore the 'Orana' and send Borwick and his Coy luck. I doubt whether they got it. We rowed and sailed back and got hoisted on board, the Colonel and the Captain assisting. Hear on arrival that we may have to be ready by 5am to sail at 13 knots full speed. There is talk of West Africa. Captain Mason is fearfully disgusted and all of us will be disappointed. He says there will be no fun for infantry in such a country of distances. He says it is like Queensland. However, let's leave everything to fortune.

*(In red ink)* Sunday 1.11.14

A red letter day in truth. I haven't got any black ink but I think this day deserves red. We left Albany about 8.30 this morning. It was a glorious morning, sunny and calm. The 'Orvieto' was the first to go, followed by all the others about 300 yards in the rear. We were in the rear of the Australians with the NZ following. I snapped the shore as we passed the lighthouse. Then we deployed into three long lines about a mile apart with 800 yards distance between ships. It was a beautiful sight. We steamed along the shore till about 6pm when we turned NW. This is I think the last of Australia. God bless all while we are away. Church parade was held up for about ½ an hour this morning by a wireless message.

We don't know where we are going or what port. It may be Colombo, it may be round or to the Cape of Good Hope. It was nearly Cape Horn. Let's hope it means Colombo and Europe. Plans have apparently been altered the last 24 hours. Whether it means German cruisers it is hard to say but we have a fairly strong escort of about six warships. One can see the 'Minotaur' right ahead

with the 'Melbourne' and 'Sydney' on our port and starboard. We will soon begin to travel without lights. There are three other warships somewhere. They ought to catch the 'Emden'. A chart has been put up in the lounge on which our position will be marked every evening. For the next few days it will be interesting.

(In pencil) Monday 2.11.14

**M**uch rougher this morning. Ship rolling considerably and a few men sick. I felt a bit off colour myself and hope to come thro' alright. Exercised a bit this afternoon up and down the boat deck. Had a war game this evening on Lilydale maps. Rupert in command of one force – got badly beaten. Am starting NCO's classes tomorrow. We are heading NNW and passed Lewin last night. Hear today that Great Britain has declared war on Turkey. Will it affect us? Perhaps bring in Italy and Greece and the Balkan states.

Tuesday 3.11.14

**N**othing out of the way. Went on guard 6-10. Got a good sleep. Rough again – not feeling too good. Heighway down with measles. Hope it does not spread.

Wednesday 4.11.14

**Q**uiet. On guard this morning. Feeling better – don't think anything is wrong with me. Boxed Conder two rounds. Got up a good sweat but rather weak (*two lines illegible*). Second inoculation this evening. It does not make me worse. Doc had to announce inoculation but got a very warm reception when he got up at mess. Loud hoots, cries of brute and butcher and a shower of orange peel.

Thursday 5.11.14

**A** beautiful day. There was another fight arranged between Carey and Ike Smith. Bet Bert 5/- Carey would win on the strength of his last fight. It was a good go for eight rounds but Smith was winning all the time. While the fight was on the 'Osterley' caught us up – very few 1<sup>st</sup> class but a large number of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. She looked beautiful. Spent a good while up on the bridge and came down later. Found my bed all upsidedown.

Friday 6.11.14

**N**othing eventful but an alarm practice for attack. All portholes closed, boots off, life belts on, perfect silence etc.

The magazine is for'ard and so two Coys per gun had to form a chain to pass ammunition. Kersley our 4<sup>th</sup> was ordered to pass it and only passed projectiles with no cartridges. The Captain was quite annoyed but the boor bugger has never seen a shell before, so he told me afterwards.

Had some interesting practice this morning on the Gun. It is very fascinating

keeping the sight on the ship and is hard work with the shoulders to keep the sights on the marks as the boat rolls. Have just been tricked into going upstairs for nothing – apparently Rogers wants to upset my bed again. Came down again and advised him to leave it alone. I'm afraid there may be a row if he did do it. I'll have to get back on him to square things and for my reputation. So here goes. Not touched, but on entering the lounge to hear that the (*illegible*) about 11.45 was assaulted and had a great tussle for about five minutes. Had a bath after.

Saturday

**H**ad a night attack practice. All lights out for about ten minutes. The men behaved very well and kept very silent. It is getting very hot now.

Sunday

**V**ery hot day. Found we had one man too many in the Coy. Colonel a little annoyed, but did not have to attend Church Parade. Our Padre is terribly long-winded and most easygoing. He talks too much and does not keep up on a pedestal enough to do any good. He makes himself too cheap and tries to be funny. He was an English officer before the 'call' came.

The first issue of *The Expeditionary* was issued this afternoon. Am keeping it complete – it is a very good start. Connelly is the Editor. Lights are being obscured now from tonight on and the fleet bunches up at night and the warships close in. I wonder if they have heard anything.

Monday and Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>

**A** Great Day. Interest grew about 10.30 this morning when it was noticed that the whole fleet steamed as hard as they could over to the East – the Jap going at a tremendous bat. Also the NZ suddenly closing right up.

We heard late this afternoon that the 'Sydney' engaged the 'Emden' off Cocos this morning at seven following on a message we received from there by wireless. The news has come through in scraps so I'll put it as clear as possible.

At 9am the 'Sydney' sighted the 'Emden' which had already cut one cable, but it is thought the second and third are intact. They destroyed the wireless, but the operators had buried one instrument which is now working. Much credit is due to them. After twenty minutes steaming the 'Sydney' came within range, and after a brisk engagement the 'Emden' had to beach herself to save herself from sinking. The 'Sydney' has her casualties being treated in hospital at Direction Island and when she has taken on board the German captives and wounded will proceed direct to Ceylon.

After disabling the 'Emden', she steamed after and captured the collier, took off her crew and sank her, then returned to the 'Emden' – who surrendered.

The 'Sydney' started for Cocos at 7, sighted enemy 9.30, within range within 20 minutes and signaled that chase was speeding north, at 10.30. She was engaging the enemy briskly and at 11.10 the 'Emden' beached – three

funnels and mast gone, but flag flying. The 'Sydney' went after collier etc.

The 'Emden' was apparently doing the damage when she was caught in the act. Great excitement and enthusiasm on board ship, everyone following and arguing at once. The favourite topic is as to whether the Commander was a brave man, or whether he has been a pirate. However, he has done his dash and perhaps gone, so let him rest. Unconfirmed reports say the 'Sydney' has lost three killed and thirteen wounded. It's a great thing, about the best that could have happened to us.

It was such good luck for she did not know we were about and is reckoned to have passed within 20 miles ahead of us on Sunday night. There must be great excitement at home and Darby's brother on board too. It was peculiar that he once had a brother on the island.

Had to write in Grills' autograph book, so wrote as follows: "In these distracted times when each man dreads/the bloody stratagems of busy heads".

Tonight (Tuesday) we drank the toast of the 'Emden'. Finlayson spoke well, and Mason magnificently. He spoke of Australia's first naval victory, the great good fortune of the Expeditionary force, of our now being "blooded", of how it would effect us at home, in their eyes in England, the relief to our people – to the fact that there were English officers on board who had taught our navy their job as well as our army, and how anxious and proud we should be to get to Europe to fight side by side with them in their famous regiments as old as history. He spoke broadly and hit the right key and we all clapped and congratulated him. He is a man who distinguished himself in the Boer War and was on Methuen's staff for some time and has had broad Imperialism rubbed into him.

More excitement about 2.30. Woke up and could not see any fleet anywhere! The continual clang of the signal woke me as I was sleeping on the Bridge Deck and then I noticed the propellers were being worked separately – the steering gear had gone bung. We zigzagged all the pm and all night and fixed up our gear. It was a funny feeling without the fleet and only their lights on the horizon. However, it went wrong again and we are steering from the stern and keeping a little out of the line for safety.

Wednesday 11.11.14

**F**ixed up the steering gear and took up our position in the line again. Instead of drilling the men we allowed them to sit down and lectured and questioned them on "Attack!". They asked questions and seemed to have a very intelligent idea of the work – even better than I thought. Had our usual two lectures: Laws and Customs of War, Mason; Camps and Bivouacs, Finlayson.

Got into my togs this afternoon and boxed three rounds with Swift. His nose bled and we had to stop. So I ran round and round the deck and did some physical culture. Had a grand shower in the men's showers on the troop deck then got dressed in my whites. Very cool. The weather is getting very hot. Slept on deck but ran into heavy tropical showers and had to return to cabin. We had spent the evening yarning upon the boat deck – Frank Hooke and Spargo both reciting

Thursday 12.11.14

Very hot – dressed in whites. Attended usual morning PC and Semaphore officers' parade.

Mason announced at Breakfast that the ceremony of crossing the line would take place this evening – we cross about 10am tomorrow. Officers of course are having one of their own. He asked if all were agreeable as no resistance or horseplay was desired. All agreed except one or two who may have been joking. Woke early this morning and told that Jap Boat 'Abouki' and 'Melbourne' were close in.

A beautiful calm morning. A small launch was travelling between the two and the 'Orvieto' was just leaving them, apparently a conference. I believe the NZers and the 'Orvieto' go ahead today to Colombo to save time.

Friday 13.11.14

About 5pm the 'Empress of Asia', and the 'Empress of Russia' about 8pm. Both are auxiliary cruisers taken over from the CPR by the Navy. They may be going to Cocos to fetch the German wounded and prisoners. The 'Melbourne' left us today and the 'Minotaur' yesterday. I wonder if they are off to Valparaiso.

This evening we had a great trial. Tubb, our little Transfer Officer, accused Conder, the T0<sup>5</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup>, of pinching his two white pairs of pants. Mason was Tubby's counsel, Connelly for the accused. The case for Tubbs: at 8.45 he left for a bath and when he returned at 9 his pants had disappeared. He thought he saw one of them running away with them in company with the other. The Vet said that his attention was attracted to them also by the horse he was attending to looking towards them. However, evidence showed that the Vet was on the other side of the boat at the time, while strong medical evidence proved Tubb to be insane. Major Bennett summed up. The jury after a short discussion tossed up as they were thirsty and gave 'guilty'. The Judge gave an order for return of trousers, fined the accused drinks all round, Tubb to pay the costs. So the accused supplied Drinks and Tubb paid for them. It was a splendid trial and the cross-examination was splendid.

Wrote about 20 postcards and letters. Started on a letter to Mother. Crossed the line about 12 noon and carried out the ceremony at 2.30 in conjunction with the sergeants. All the officers wore a pair of nicks and sandshoes. They painted weird faces and animals all over one another's chest and back. Then marched up to the deck in single file. Got tried separately by Father Neptune who had a strong bodyguard and was attended by his wife, and sentenced to lathering and dunking. We were well lathered with paste with a big paint brush then tossed into a big canvas bath and ducked the required number of times. Then we all got in together and made things willing, ducking all and everyone and finishing up with Father Neptune and his staff. It lasted about an hour – was very amusing and very pleasant. We are to get certificates of initiation.

Went to the shower and got cleaned, then went on as Reg Ord Sub at 6. Very hot again but getting used to it.

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5. Transport Officer

Saturday

Hot again but a beautiful morning, calm and clear. Started on post cards and wrote about 20 all told including Oxlade and Wilson. Fire station parade at p.m. A great fight this afternoon – a ten round go between Ike Smith of the 7<sup>th</sup> and Darcy of the 6<sup>th</sup>. It ended in a draw. They both punished one another severely. Conder is a splendid referee. Wrote still more letters and post cards – am sending this diary by enclosed letter which means it will be delayed for a couple of weeks. The mail closes tomorrow morning at 11am. We reach Colombo tomorrow evening and leave on Monday night.

I believe we are timed to arrive in London just before Christmas. We stop at Aden or Port Said – so it is rumoured. I hear that the ‘Sydney’ catches us up about 5 tomorrow morning. She has two killed and about 30 wounded. By Jove it’s interesting to think she was fighting 50 miles from us. I hope she passes close enough to see the marks. There are to be no demonstrations owing to her wounded. It will interest you to know that the little nipper Jimmy Johnston had out at camp, who used to turn her nose up at the Kaiser, has her father on the ‘Sydney’ as an engineer. He is Jimmy’s brother-in-law.

Sunday morning 15. 11. 14

Land in sight – very hilly and mountainous. Very hot. The ‘Sydney’ with the auxiliary cruiser ‘Empress of Asia’ passed this morning at 3.45 and apologised for not passing in the daytime. We arrive in Colombo about midday. Church Parade 8.30am. It was too dark to see if the ‘Sydney’ was much knocked about.

Good bye. Alan D Henderson Lieut 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion SS Hororata

*This first section of the diary was received by Alan’s father in Melbourne without further censorship.*

## Colombo

Sunday 14.11.14

Rupert went to the HC service held by the Padre. He is a Baptist. Rupert said it was fearfully crude, scarcely a service at all, not going again.

Launch came alongside with officers from ‘Orvieto’ for sick who are to go ahead and perhaps be left at Colombo and to be picked up by 2<sup>nd</sup> Expedition which leaves Melbourne on December 5. It was manned by niggers and the usual amusement was caused by throwing pennies down and watching them scramble for them. One very fine fellow of our Coy called Rodriguez has to be operated for gallstones.

Colombo harbour is beautiful from outside the harbour and the colouring of the buildings is wonderfully varied in browns and red and grey with thick palm forests behind. The club, the Barracks, Hospital, Galle de Face Hotel and the Grand Oriental Hotel, can be seen along the shore. There are also long sloping greens said to hide forts. We were anchored about two miles out. The afternoon was sunny and calm.

This evening the Brigadier paid us a visit. Captain Wallace came round our quarters and remarked on their neatness.

Monday

Nothing eventful – lay alongside harbour. Launch alongside again. Man dived off a rope ladder hanging over the side for 1/- bet. The silly fool did not realize the harbour is full of sharks. Moved halfway into harbour about 8pm but, as no pilot turned up, anchored.

Tuesday 17.11.14

Took a photo of the Russian cruiser ‘Askda’ lying beside us. She is an old-fashioned five-funnelled light cruiser. She was in the Russo-Jap war and escaped from Port Arthur. It is said she wouldn’t go out and fight the ‘Emden’ tho’ she was challenged. Of course that is natural as she is not a match. Went into harbour about 9. Stood to attention while doing so. The harbour behind the breakwater is crowded. There near us lay the Jap ‘Ibouki’. She carried four 12 inch guns and is the most heavily armed boat in the Southern Hemisphere.

On the other side of her lay the big auxiliary cruiser (CPR) ‘Empress of Russia’ 16 000 tons, armed with maxims and 4.7mm. Further over still lay the ‘Hampshire’ and the ‘Yarmouth’. In the rear lay the ‘Sydney’ but we cannot get a decent view of her. There are a number of transports also. We are taking in fresh water – it is our difficulty we have not had fresh water to bath in for four or five days and there was even a talk of a limited allowance.

Jimmy Johnson got his brother-in-law on board, Chief ERA<sup>6</sup> of the ‘Sydney’, and he was in the conning tower in the fight. His account is something like this. The ‘Emden’ was under full steam, not unprepared as I said before. She had 50 men, two off on shore who escaped in a schooner and it is thought it is aiming for Batavia. The ‘Empress of Asia’ is looking for them.

The ‘Sydney’ sent the usual secret signal to the ‘Emden’ when she sighted her at 12,000 yards. It was answered showing she was foreign. The next thing that happened was the ‘Emden’ firing four shots, all of which dropped 100 yards short. Then ‘Sydney’ answered taking the range from the ‘Emden’s’ guns, which can be done by telescope, fired. The first three shots took the foremast funnel and hit her somewhere. Then they got to work. The German did the circle tactics to throw out the ‘Sydney’s’ range but as she did not vary them the ‘Sydney’ soon made allowances. The ‘Sydney’ on the other hand did both the P2 and cobweb moves and mixed them so well that the ‘Emden’ only scored five hits out of 1400 rounds. The ‘Sydney’ fired 500 rounds. Her first broadside killed nearly the whole of the gun deck and men had to be brought up from the stoke-hold to man the guns. Consequently the shooting was poor. The whole of the upper deck was cleared – nearly all the guns blown overboard – all the funnels and masts. She was sinking when she ran for the shore at 23 knots 20 miles away. At times the ‘Sydney’ was doing 27 knots. She (*the Emden*) was in a fearful state – bows riddled – stern shot away and on fire. The closest range was 4000 when the ‘Sydney’ was hit and just missed the ‘Emden’ with a torpedo. The worst losses were suffered when the ‘Emden’ refused to lower her flag. (Earlier in the engagement she turned and

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6.. Engine Room Artificer



attempted to ram but she got the 'Sydney's aft guns and it was too hot for her). The Captain of the 'Sydney' asked her to pull down her flag, the answer was, "If you want it come and get it". The 'Sydney's third call was "For God's sake and humanity's sake pull down the flag", as the Germans were then crowded up for'ard. The same answer came back, and so with three shots she took the mast with the flag on it down and almost swept the decks. At the same second as the 'Emden' fired a torpedo shell hit her and jammed so that half of it was sticking out of the ship's side. The 'Emden', an awful sight, ran ashore.

There was a tremendous sea so the 'Sydney' could not risk her boats till next morning. The ship was burning and the men were even blistered by the hot deck. Some jumped overboard, even the wounded, and crawled ashore. Some were found dead and being eaten by land crabs. One of her two doctors, wounded, had gone mad drinking salt water and died. The rest were praying for water. There was the job of saving the wounded, only the 30 best could be saved, it was so rough. As every third big wave lifted one man was dropped into the boat. The rest were so hopeless the 'Sydney's doctor was forced to put them out of their pain or they would have been burnt to death. As it was five of those rescued died in the 'Sydney'.

Eighty unwounded were rescued, 300 killed. The wounds of the Germans were fearful, those of the 'Sydney' much milder. Darby by all accounts has done magnificent work. After fixing up their own 11, he has been working at the Germans night and day with scarcely two hours sleep till he arrived here. Lyddite makes terrible wounds, tearing a man in one case from shoulder to knee. He is a fine chap – in fact Pearce reckoned he and the Captain were the two finest and coolest officers on board. The 'Sydney's losses were 4 killed, 11 wounded. The 'Sydney' is going to replenish ammunition at Malta and is to go into the North Sea. The 'Melbourne' is to be one of a Light Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean.

German prisoners could not be landed in Colombo as the feeling is so bitter, so are split up amongst the fleet, 'Orvieto' and 'Omrak'. The wounded and their Captain and the Commandant are in the 'Empress of Russia' to be taken home. The authorities here could not vouch even for the safety of the wounded. They would all have been on the 'Empress' but as soon as the Frenchmen and Germans clashed they had a free fight. The Germans have been wonderfully treated, which they admitted. Their Captain before leaving the 'Sydney' had the crew called together and thanked them for their generosity and kindness. He and the Commandant are prisoners, they cannot give Parole without the Kaiser's consent – however they are allowed to keep their swords. The Germans said they were pleased to be beaten by English, they could not be beaten by anyone else. They also think we are the most humane. They are highly educated and speak English, instruction in English is their punishment for small offences.

Four battle cruisers, the 'Monmouth', 'Melbourne', a big French boat and others are all looking for the 'Scharnhorst' squadron. It is thought they are cornered. The 'Emden' had Colombo terror-stricken. She had said that she would pay them a visit shortly. The story about her having sunk the French

and Russian cruisers is all a yarn. The Russian cruiser supposed to be sunk is with us now. The day after she (*the Emden*) was sunk 68 boats left Colombo harbour. She was after the 'Osterly' the night after she smashed the wireless. She had even seen her. The 'Osterly' passed but I'm sorry to say cleared out with our mails. I hope we get them at Port Said or Aden.

The first and second Divisions went ahead about 11, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, including us followed travelling full speed. Fell in as we went out of harbour – searchlights are flashed on channel from breakwater. The harbour looked very pretty – just like Henley.

Wednesday 18.11.14

Cool breeze – nothing eventful. Some of the cubicles had a beer up. One Chap lay on the floor with his legs in the air thinking he was marching and performing strange evolutions as he said deeply "Form Fours". Slept out – beautiful night.

Thursday 19.11.14

Read some Colombo papers – not much news except lists of casualties, Officers – I suppose they appear in Melbourne too – all the old Regiments appear to be engaged, some suffering heavily. Wearing white. Tropical shower about 1.15pm. Nothing unusual. Went on Guard – my Guard 2-6.

Friday 20.11.14

Lectures in morning. On Guard 2-6, nothing happened. Very bright sunrise and sighted lights of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. About 4 caught up with NZers. Very warm. Three Boxing matches starting 4.15 – very poor. Two prelims ended with towel in 3<sup>rd</sup> rounds – the fight stopped in 2<sup>nd</sup> by a hit to the throat.

Saturday

Woken up by the whistle blowing. Saw the two ships in front stopped and turned round. Thought at first a man must have fallen overboard but found out later that the 'Ascarius' had run into the 'Shropshire'. Very slight collision – only a boat or two on the davits smashed, but it must have been a pretty close thing. Our Division with five fast NZ ships are going ahead. We will go on like this till we get "home". We may then be a week ahead. We coal at Aden.

Half the Coy and the officers were vaccinated this afternoon. Took it coolly enough, all of them.

Sunday

Dodged Church Parade again as the Coy are all doing fatigues. Don't think I'm degenerating but these silly shallow services are rather repulsive than beneficial.

This afternoon read 'Notes on the French Army' – very interesting. Hear one's mails will not be censored at all at Aden. Glorious sunny day. Church parade voluntary at 7.30. A theolog called Pte Turner preached a very good little sermon on "whom will ye serve etc", very simple and far better for the men than the long-winded stuff of our Padre. The latter is most peculiar, his manner is to say the least very rude and whenever one asks him a question he does his best to squash you. He does not seem to have any breeding or true sense of the dignity of his position and I am sorry to say does not earn the respect and admiration he could so easily do if he tried. He announces that he is to be visited between 6 and 8 in the morning, the most impossible time for men to visit him, while he is never seen on the troop deck talking with the men. I can't understand him, he is terribly self-satisfied. However I'm keeping my mouth shut and don't say much. Intend looking up Turner and seeing if he knows Ken. Pte Paul is going to preach next Sunday.

Denehy has written a splendid poem on us, The Cubicles. Will send home a copy. Also a copy of *Expeditionary*. Intending buying an autograph album at Aden if possible.

Monday 22.11.14

Nothing out of the way. Coy Orderly Sub and uneventful. Lectures by Major MacNicoll on FS Regs. We are up to 'The Battle' Chap VII. He is a splendid teacher and makes things very clear, digs out the main headings and gives us splendid notes. Finlayson is lecturing on musketry at which of course he is very complete and up-to-date.

It is getting quite cool, and as we are going at about 13 knots instead of eight or nine it is a great improvement. Early this morning we passed Socotra about 30 to 40 miles South of us. It looks very mountainous. I believe it is inhabited by uncivilized natives and is not the safest place to land on. An Engineer told me that a Shire liner lost a boat's crew there once. We lost sight of it this evening.

Fog practice as carried out by the Division Morse code on the whistle while they let out a barrel about 300 yards on a rope so that the following boat can see it and keep its distance.

Arrive at Aden early Wednesday morning. Geoff McCrae, Mrs Perry's brother, is in hospital with a bad shin – he was down the stoke hold working with two or three others when something slipped onto his leg and hurt his shin rather badly – bruised the bone. Will write a few Post Cards tonight and start a letter home.

Wednesday 25.11.14

Arrived in Aden. The coast is barren rock, running sheer up for some hundreds of feet and ending like a rough saw edge with sharp points, and so sharp are the hills that I think it would be very unpleasant to sit on them. Aden is nothing very much. Even a big boat like the 'Orvieto' looks tiny with the big hills behind it. On the West it is not so hilly. Big sandy ugly hills run clear back for miles to the mountains. One can see about 30 miles or more inland. The buildings appear to be very big and are spread continuously for about one mile along the waterfront. Running back into a valley between

two hills can be seen the Arab quarters. We coaled from lighters with scores of yabbering and shrieking niggers, to whom the men were seen to throw silver to make them scramble. It was a terrible waste of money. We had to keep the men aft in order to get the niggers to start work. They appear to be a very poor mixed mongrel mob that come alongside. There were about 20 boats selling things. They throw a weighted rope up with a basket on the end and traffic in post cards, fans and beads for which they swindled us terribly. There was really nothing worth buying. We finished coaling at night.

Thursday 26.11.14

**L**eft Aden early at 6am and fell in and passed a number of Indian transports returning from France. The highest number seen is 152. All the fleet are together again, the NZers ahead. About 11am we sighted Perim Island. We received some news about her. A gunboat and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Infantry have cleared out a Turkish fort on an island very near Perim guarding the straits of Babel-Manziban, Hell's Gates as they are known for their danger and the heat in the Red Sea. We could see them clearly standing out in the hills. Just five or six miles further on is Perim with the Light Horse and rather an interesting settlement. It used to be the place where officers were sent for punishment. One officer who was put in charge there, as the post was only inspected every six months, used to go to England for four months of the six, until he met the Inspecting Officer in London.

Africa and Arabia can both be seen, faintly mountainous tho' the mountains of Arabia are the edge of a plateau. We are passing three or four ships a day, some are Indian transports coming back very light with their screws thrashing the water.

Friday

**N**othing eventful but very hot. More ships passing. On Wednesday night one of our men, an old Scotch College boy named McColl, who was a corporal but thro' being too goodnatured was not suitable for stripes and had been asked to resign them, swam over to the 'Orvieto' about half-a-mile or more away. He wore his dark dungarees and slid down a stern rope attached to a buoy. He hoped to have a yarn with his Public School pals in the 5<sup>th</sup> and hoped to get attached to them. He was brought back unconcerned in a motor launch. He spent all his life pretty well in the water at Sandringham.

Saturday

**H**ot – feeling sleepy and unwell thro' vaccination. Just the usual paralyzing news!! "We are to complete our training at Cairo!" What will it mean? Will we fight the Turks? Or be landed at Montenegro. Will we land at Marseille later on?

Will we be stuck in Europe – I hope, sincerely hope we won't. Nothing eventful.

# The Expeditionary.

The Official Chronicle of the 6th and 7th Infantry Battalions, Australian-Imperial Force.

Registered as a Newspaper in Federal Registry of the Secretary Post Office for transmission by Aerial and Submarine Mail

The Song of the Expedition  
By "The Band"

Down south of state cabins and cabins we have  
 60 cabins in two columns on a ridge,  
 And on a low hill of C.O.,  
 There's never a one row is a pair—  
 Down on about this golden coast,  
 The steady of front of the hills—  
 With the peace where abide, on the other board side,  
 They are together in the hills.

But Davey's "Dun" there's the name "Highway"  
 And the "Heron" laid all up a tree  
 Who came and left with the paper young "Gulls"  
 And the "Gulls" are "Dun".  
 If the "Chaplin" you see, there's the little man,  
 You will find called "General" Black,  
 And the very next lad was "Jimmy" and "Roger",  
 And the little "Whisker-Black".

Though we chip and we chaff from a little night on,  
 And our feet are not soor-lets  
 Though we have the other side of the road is a station,  
 There's been the war for the fight.  
 But should there across the sea "Dun",  
 As there also the "Heron" man,  
 Our promise repeated, with force they repeated  
 As for as the port side cabins.

Then here's to the Cubicles, father and son,  
 The "Dun" and "Heron" the bird,  
 The "Chaplin" and "Dun", and that who little man,  
 The "General" "Heron" who referred;  
 And when through life's "Highway" we divisions by-way,  
 Convinced glasses we chide,  
 Every son of a mother with drink to his brother,  
 "Gulls", "Heron", "Roger", "Jimmy", and "Black",  
 Our dear little "Whisker-Black".

Chas C. Dinkley Lieut  
 7th Batta A.S.F.  
 27/1/14.

The Expeditionary  
 by "The Band"

General Officer Commanding

The two columns  
 were  
 in the  
 of the

*The diary ends here and this section was forwarded to his parents. Further progress is recorded in a number of letters and another instalment from Mena Camp posted 13.12.14. There are a few letters which cast more light on their progress towards Aden, across the Equator:*

Troopship  
November 1914 8.30am

Dearest Mother,

I'm writing to you now as we are approaching another port. It is very hot and has been for a week or so. We are crossing the Equator today, in fact we are just about on it now. There was to have been a big ceremony but as some silly fools organised a resistance rather than make a farce of things it was called off. This certainly seems the best time to cross the tropics for it has not been insufferable at all, usually a breeze all day and the wind freshens and it rains fairly heavily at night. These evening showers have put an end to one sleeping on deck, worse luck. Twice I've had to retire to my cabin or cubicle or in common parlance the "carbuncle". We are a happy crowd in the carbuncles, of course we have no use for the curtains and they are certainly the coolest cabins on the ship. There is a cool draught right thro' them all day. We certainly hit things up amongst one another but there is nothing but friendliness and happiness always.

Rupert and I have not been at all sick since we left. The only weather we have had was for two days out of our first port when it rolled heavily, but though I was not quite myself! was not seasick.

I am posting the rest of my diary to you in enclosed letter, it will be sent to you after a few weeks delay. In it you will get an idea what we have been doing. An officer's time by no means drags. The worst part of the day is waiting for breakfast.

The routine for the men is like this:

6am Reveille when they rollup and stack away hammocks.

6.30am Rations Two men from each mess go along to the hold for bread, butter, jam etc.

7 am Breakfast Two men again from each mess line up to the galley with dishes for cereal and tea and then the men have breakfast.

The galley is rather small for the number so the sergeants have their breakfast at 8am and we have ours at 9am! From 6-9 is terribly long and you feel horribly hollow, especially when you fall in for an officers' class at 8 in Sword Drill, Semaphore and Physical Culture which we have every morning. Then at 10.30 there is a lecture followed by another which takes you on to 12am, when the men have dinner. Ours is at 1.30, at 2.20 the Coy has 45 minutes Phys Cul then you take an NCOs' class perhaps every second day, at 4pm is afternoon tea and at 5 is the men's tea. At 7.30 Officers' Mess, at 8pm the men sling hammocks and at 9pm lights out. We turn in about 10.

So one cannot loaf, in fact one does not have sufficient time to study and read up as he should.

The men's time is difficult to fill but they do a good deal, have lectures, games, cards and seem very happy. They have all been inoculated but have quite recovered. It always left one in 24 hours, the only effect is to swell the arm, make it ache, make you sleepy the next day, then passes off. The Health of the ship is good. There is however a very mild form of measles going round. I've been round all the hospitals but it has not troubled me in the least and I'm sure it won't as I exercise fairly regularly, boxing and so on in the evening. The white clothes I brought are certainly a boon, most of the 6<sup>th</sup> brought white uniforms with them. The men wear dungarees.

Ussher and Hughes are well and happy. You can tell their people that if you like to ring them up. This letter is being written in scraps and will be written during the next two or three days till we reach port.

This afternoon we decided to have the Ceremony of Crossing the Line, our costume was a pair of running nicks, with plenty of grease paint. I had a big blue and red cat painted on me with a black eye; it was a most wicked-looking thing. The Doc had skull & crossbones, Conder was a "Bookie" with a horse painted on him, a white betting bag, straw hat and some of his teeth black-waxed. He looked a real tough. Conder is a good little sport and popular – a crack boxer and a real good chap. I have boxed with him a couple of times. Have written about 20 postcards today to all the intimates, male and female and sections of the family. Am telegraphing you as soon as we reach port. All my postcards and letters contain Christmas greetings. I sent one to Oxlade and Wilson each. We lost our first horse today – he died of pneumonia. Some of the ships have lost about 20, of course they are ships full of horses. On the whole losses have been extremely light. Must knock off for a while again. The ceremony was a simple one, after all the officers had painted themselves they marched up in single file like a lot of Indians on to the Boat Deck. There was Father Neptune, his wife and attendants. Some of them had charges made out against them – the sentence was usually "lathered well, shaved and ducked twice". You were slopped all over paste with a big painter's brush, pitched into a big canvas bath and ducked well. Very simple and effective, plenty of fun and a good way of keeping up an old tradition.

Last night we had a trial, Tubb charging Conder and Eller with pinching two pairs of his white pants. The verdict was "guilty, costs against Tubb, the accused to supply drinks all round, Tubb to pay for them". Rather a startling verdict, especially as they were really guilty.

Well I'm sending you two or three postcards to make sure of reaching you, a telegram if possible and an enclosed letter with my diary in it, which will be delayed.

Goodbye, Mum, I hope you will be merry on Christmas Day and that everything which happens in the New Year will make you happier still.

God bless you all at home.

Your very affectionate son, Alan

Arabian Sea Tuesday 23.11.14

Dearest Mum,

I am starting to write to you now as our time is so broken that we can only get a few minutes at a time to do so. One's mail is not being censored this time as it is expected we will be home<sup>7</sup> before these letters reach Australia. We expect to arrive in Aden tonight or early tomorrow, so the mail may be closed on us this evening. I don't know how long we stay, only to coal I think. The convoy is split up, our fast division, ten ships and four New Zealanders have come ahead with the Jap 'Ibuki' which is expected to leave us at Aden or Port Said. The road is now considered safe, so the fast division is keeping on ahead at about thirteen knots and perhaps (*will*) arrive in England a week earlier than the rest.

The 'Orvieto' with the General etc. catch us at Aden and come on with us, worse luck. There is to be no leave or communication with the shore there. No talk of leave in England as yet. I suppose that depends on how long they intend to keep us there. You will get all the details of news from the Diary.

Rupert and I have not been at all unwell or sick in any way. We wrote a big round of letters and postcards to pretty well all our old friends at Colombo. No mails have reached us yet from you since Albany. The 'Osterly' carried our mails on thro' Colombo for some unknown reason. They will be given to us at Port Said, we hope. She had a narrow squeak. The 'Emden' intended following her after she had finished the cables and wireless at Cocos. I have given a fully detailed account in my diary, a bit too detailed but it's for record purposes. I'm sending you a copy of *The Expeditionary* also a poem written on The Cubicles by our oldest member, a schoolmaster called Denehy. My arm is just beginning to feel itchy after vaccination so it is taking all right.

The trip from Colombo has been perfect, yesterday we passed mountainous Socotra to the South, today the sea is without a ripple, wonderfully calm, you can even see the reflection of the ships in the water. The QM has just come in with the chart on which the daily run is marked from noon to noon, today's is 286, yesterday our highest 299 miles. He says we reach Aden tomorrow morning.

The weather is now beautifully cool and sunny, they say it will be quite chilly at night in the Red Sea and Suez. This is certainly the best time to travel in the year. Lectures go on and everyone is happy and things generally run very smoothly indeed. Another 'Trial' is being arranged for Wednesday night, this time by both regiments. The Cubicles are a very happy family as you will admit when you see the poem. I sleep on deck every night under the stars, the sky and moon were glorious last night, the moon on the water made it like silver, while when it set it was like a big glowing quarter orange. The Sunrise and Sunset are the same. It is worth sleeping out for the scene alone.

The cubicles tho' well aired have not any fans and are very stuffy as are all the 'tween deck cabins at night. Their being runups no roof ventilation can be had, only port-holes. We are always scrapping and fighting but tho' willing at times it is all in fun. We can all semaphore signal now fairly well, as we practice every morning. Well it is no good my rewriting all my Diary which I

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7. In England



am sending you and I'm going to write to Dad if I can get the time. Give my best love to all at home...

Your loving and affectionate son

Alan D Henderson Lt 7<sup>th</sup> Btn (I added this so the letter can be returned)<sup>8</sup>

*T*here are several closely written postcards to his brother, Kenneth, soon to be ordained:

Gulf of Aden or Arabian Sea 23.11.14

HMAT 20

Dear Ken

Having a good time. Everything satisfactory and everyone happy. The trip is not half as tiring as we expected, there is always something to do or look forward to. Writing up our diaries is very interesting too. Weather is cool. Last Sunday night a theolog called Turner preached, next Sunday a fellow called Paul. Turner was very fair. The Padre is a good fellow but terribly self-satisfied and rather rude, he means well but overdoes the 'good fellow' business and is not particular enough in his own talk. He is also a skite. His service Sunday evening consisted of illustrated hymns, hideous lantern slides with the verse printed in the corner, awful tawdry yellow and brown things. It's his way tho' and I suppose he thinks it draws the crowd. I wrote to Sharl at Colombo. My love to you and her with all good wishes. I suppose they are very pleased with the "Sydney". Darby did fine work on the German wounded, so I hear.

Good luck in your theology and everything else. God bless in your clerical career.

Your loving brother,  
Alan D Henderson

At Sea  
Nov 1914

Dear Ken,

Rupert and I are enjoying ourselves splendidly but I often go up on deck at night and think of you all at home. I suppose it is quiet. If you get married next year I wish you every possible happiness and prosperity that can come to you. Let us hope that this war does not upset things in Australia too much. Give Sharl my love and wish her the same from me. Look after them all and give the kiddies a good time at Christmas and help Mum and Dad all you know.

Well, old man, God bless you and Sharl, give our love to Babs and Peg. Au revoir, we wont be able to answer the letters we receive at port as there is to be only one mail which closes tomorrow at 11 am. ..

Your affec. brother,  
Alan D Henderson

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8. This letter was postmarked in Melbourne 9<sup>th</sup> January 1915 and stamped with the Australian Id stamp.

*The next is a coloured postcard of Port Said:*

3.12.14

Dear Old Ken,

The news that you are to be married in January came as a surprise. I didn't really expect it till later in the year – about Feb or March. However, old man, God bless you and prosper you and Charl. This pc is all I can send you at the moment in the way of a letter. Give our best wishes and love to Charl. Tell her I think she'll do alright!! Remember us to the Captain<sup>9</sup> and the rest of the family. Rupert has just got the measles. Again every wish for your happiness,

Your affec brother  
Alan

*Rupert sums up their voyage from Albany in an undated letter posted in Cairo, apparently uncensored:*

SS Hororata

Dear Old Mum and Dad,

Just a line or two with what I can say which is not much at the present time. We are not allowed to mention dates, names of places and ships, so our news is pretty restricted.

We left Albany in beautiful weather but ran into a storm very soon after.

We ran on for two or three days with the ship rolling in a heavy side-wise-on swell but lately the weather has been very good but hot, very hot, and we are wandering about with as few clothes on as possible.

Life has been pretty full all the time. We have been kept very busy with lectures and lecturing. I have just finished giving lectures on Military Law, Offences and Court Martial. I am very glad they are over as I have had no chance to write until tonight, the night before the mail closes.

We are all very well and happy and bar sore arms from inoculation we have not had any illness. We get scraps of news over the wireless from our surrounding warships.

We have heard of the naval action at Valparaiso and of course the sinking of the 'Emden', the first success of the Australian Navy. We had quite a celebration, enthusiastic speeches, toasts etc. We were specially grateful for this news as we knew that the 'Emden' was a household word when we left, and must naturally be causing some degree of anxiety, although only a very lightly armoured ship.

We have had two very good prize fights on board and a number of amateur scraps and the men look forward eagerly to these.

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9. Capt Tickell, RAN, Charl's father

Yesterday we had great celebrations going over the 'Line'. We were tried before Father Neptune, convicted on various charges and sentenced to be soaped, lathered, shaved and ducked three times. We had a great deal of fun, all eagerly assisting in the ducking of the next man.

I have not taken many photos since those I sent you from Albany, only one film of one or two of our ships, Albany Harbour and a warship. If I cannot develop them on the boat I will have them done in London.

Those men of mine who refused inoculation have all been done now but have been transferred from me to other companies. The man Smart, who I thought was so good, has been a great disappointment to me. I do not think he is quite alright in the head. He is still under arrest (open arrest) awaiting trial but I am afraid the whole thing will fizzle out.

We have been practising fire, collision and attack drill lately. My company have the job of handling the shells from the magazine to the guns. Did I tell you that we were armed with two 4.7" guns on our stern?

We are doing a small amount of signalling now and I am picking up all that I have forgotten. I am teaching my men Semaphore signalling also and I am going to take them through a course of engineering, simple map reading etc. as well as their drill and field training.

Neville (Ussher) and Hughes are both well and they are getting on splendidly in their work. The CO has his eye on them for promotion to commissioned rank if the necessity should arise.

Did I tell you that measles and influenza are pretty rife throughout the ship. All the hospitals are full at the present time but the cases are very mild. Vaccination which takes place shortly will cause a great deal more trouble. I hope the weather is cooler before then.

Our Horses are standing the journey very well. We have had to kill only one horse who has been ill from the start.

Well old Mum and Dad there is a lot of other news and interesting bits which I would like to tell you – but I am not doing so in this letter so you will get it quickly. Alan is sending his diary in a closed letter. This of course will be delayed for a while.

Heaps of love and kisses to yourselves and Peg and Baby and Kenneth and kind regards to Maggie and to all our other relations who we may have missed writing to.

From your affectionate son, Rupert  
Wish Prof many happy returns of the day, my birthday is now 26 days distant.

Those fountain pen tablets are not a huge success. Fat is writing a huge mail this time.

*Enclosed with this batch is Alan's menu card of a Farewell Supper for the Capt and Officers of HMAT A20 (TSS Hororata) held in the Red Sea on 30.11.14. It's an entertaining and witty menu, autographed by 13 of his fellow officers. Alan next writes on a YMCA letterform, on arrival in Alexandria where it is posted, but it is stamped Cairo 7.12.14 and received in Melbourne 8.1.15.*

From Alan  
Alexandria  
4<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

Dear Dad,

We left yesterday midday for Alexandria and arrived early this morning. We were to have disembarked at once but the port has been too full so intentions are to do so tomorrow. The journey in the train to Cairo is eight hours, from there we march out to camp, Mena Camp just near the Pyramids, about ten miles. Rather stiff just coming off the boat. We are the Advance Guard for the Division so I suppose will have to make preparations for the lot. Rupert has the measles slightly, so with all the rest of them was taken ashore to the hospital today and will join us at Cairo in about ten days. The hospital is a beautiful place. I can see it through my glasses, it was once a palace. I overheard the local doc saying the harem was in the middle of it. We land at Alexandria early tomorrow so we think but we have been waiting here expecting to land all day. Two or three of the New Zealanders emptied, also the 'Orvieto'. It is our turn next. I only had time to send Ken a postcard and won't have much time to write properly till I get to Cairo. I notice they are having a very small quiet show. I suppose that has advantages to them. You don't state their intentions, flat, boarding-house or villa they all seem to make a bit of a hole in his screw, poor chap, but he is determined and has ability so should do all right. Somehow or other I think he will come through it, as long as this war does not hit things up with the school too badly.

By the way, Sgt Ross late of TGS<sup>9</sup> staff also went ashore with measles, as did Sgt. Ryan, no relation but a friend of Watson's, he was his best man and I should say clever. What is Charlie doing, is he coming away with Monash? Must close now, Dad, there is no further news, except someone said today there were 100,000 Turks preparing to march on Egypt, of course this may all be a yarn. They were entrenching strongly along Suez while we passed through... Every happiness to yourself and Ken. I am,

Your very affectionate son  
Alan Henderson Lt 7<sup>th</sup> Batn

*Rupert writes from hospital. To Kenneth, in pencil:*

Le Station Quarantine du Gabbari Alexandria  
Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 1914

Dear Prof,

I am not writing to tell you much news for I have written a long letter to Mum and have not much time before we are moved on to the Convalescent side of the Station.

---

9. Trinity Grammar School

*H. A. D. Henderson*

**FAREWELL SUPPER**

tendered to

**Captain Cameron and Officers of H.M.A.T.  
A20 (T.S.S. "Hororata.")**

---

To mark the appreciation of their many  
kindnesses on the voyage to the Front  
of the 6th and 7th Batt'ns. A.I.F.

Red Sea,  
30-11-14.

*Please return to Lieut A. D. Henderson*

*Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Masoni.*  
*Shannon Grilles Lt.*  
*Armstrong 8<sup>th</sup> Engineer*  
*Hughes Lt.*  
*Johnston Lt.*  
*P. C. Mason Capt*  
*M. W. Cooper (Sixth Bngr)*  
*to Grant Electrician*  
*Bleazard, Capt.*  
*A. R. Highway Lt.*  
*Chapman Lt.*  
*W. Hill Lt.*  
*Asst. Quarters Lt.*

**CAFE HORORATA.**

. . MENU . .

**BILGEWATER.**  
Consomme Coyte

**SOMETHING FOR'ARD.**  
Asperges Glaces

**CAMERONIAN CARGO.**  
Cole Rosbif Tongue de beouf  
Jambon et petits pois

**GETTING AFT.**  
Salades de Russe Saute de Murphy  
Blancmange aux poires glace  
vacaou Saltana

**DRINKS.**  
Somervillainous and Somernot  
Biere Eau-de-vie Genievre Limonade

**TOASTS.**  
"The King." "Our Guests."

---

Aeroplanes 2 a.m. Sub (dead) marines  
2.15 a.m. Camel Furphy leaves  
depot C deck at all hours.

Alan's menu card of a Farewell Supper for the Captain and Officers of H.M.A.T. A20 (T.S.S. Hororata) held in the Red Sea on 30.11.14. autographed by 13 of his fellow officers.

Mum said in her letter that you were going to get married about the 5<sup>th</sup> of January. Well old chap, I wish you all the good wishes I can. It is no use my trying to put my feelings down in so many words.

We have lived together so long and know and love one another too well. That you are marrying a good and a wise girl there is no doubt and there is no doubt that she will make you a perfect wife, but remember, old man, remember that she is only a human being and in all your thoughts, words and works you must take her into consideration, in all those things which you do which you ought not to do and do not do which you ought to do remember that it is Sharl who must undo or do them for you.

I am quite sure that she will think of you and for you in the same way.

So remember Prof that you have a whole life to live and a way in the world to make, you are starting under adverse circumstances and at a bad time; this only speaks well for you I think.

So go ahead old chap and I know with God's help you will succeed. I cannot say any more and you know what I think.

Give heaps of love from me to Sharl. Tell her what I think, you can say it better than I and you cannot say too much.

Goodbye and God bless you  
Your affectionate Brother  
Rupert  
I will send you a small present when I leave this beastly hospital.

*Kenneth married Charlotte Tickell (Sharlie) on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1915. I was born in November of that year.*

Dec 10<sup>th</sup> 1914

Dearest Mum,

I suppose you remember what a great day this is<sup>10</sup> and I hope you are all happy and celebrating it in proper style.

Well Mum I am well and happy and still happier thinking of you all at home.

As you see I am still "unclean" but we are supposed to leave here next Monday or Tuesday. I would like a couple of days leave but expect they will take us all straight out to Mena Camp. I am very anxious to get there and see how my men are getting on.

Cowper and I are now over on the convalescent side of the station; we are now a party of about nine officers and 100 men, all from various regiments

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10. His Birthday.



*Captain Chaplain Kenneth Henderson, author of  
Khaki and Cassock, an account of WWI in France.*

and states. Two or three men are New Zealanders. We came across on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. There is a Major Marsh head of the Transport Services, three Queensland officers (Major Robertson, Lieut Young and Lieut Kerr, all of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment) and Cowper, myself, a youngster called Angel of the ASC and another Young of the 6<sup>th</sup> and Mick Ryan also of the 6<sup>th</sup>, he is a cousin of Mrs Watson's. We are happier but not as comfortable over this side; our meals are not as good.

Our waiter who speaks only French, Italian and Arabic is a dirty brute and is known as Pietro the Pungent or Spring Violet and a few other appropriate names. My French is awakening and I am learning a few Arabic terms and words.

Life is not very exciting. The Sisters and Mrs Broadbent are very kind and jolly. We had a concert one night. Mrs Blunt on the piano and we supplied all the items, some of the men are very clever and the good talent you get is really surprising.

All our horses are I believe being left at Alexandria for the time being, it is supposed until we leave which is also supposed to be at the beginning of March.

We hear that the Turks have withdrawn most of their troops from Sinai and Jaffa into Armenia to stop the Russians, so the probability of a scrap

with them, I am sorry to say, is getting more remote. This would be a great opportunity for us to get our hand in.

We do not get much news from the front, but it is very evident that we are making steady headway. Russia has apparently received a temporary check. We do not know exactly the nature of the action at all. Most of our news comes to us over the telephone. Great news that about the 'Scharnhorst' and other German cruisers being sunk. What has become though of the 'Nuremberg'?

Tell Dad he should have *Illustrated London News* and *The Times* sent to him. It would interest you properly, Mum, and give you a much better idea of things. All these papers are sent here and we of course read them.

Well Mum darling love to all and to Dad, the kiddies, Prof and heaps for yourself from your loving son

Rupert

PS I have written to both Ken and Sharl.

*The Australian contingent had passed through the Suez Canal, which was strongly guarded by Indian troops, and disembarked at Alexandria. Rupert, with other victims of the measles, went to hospital there, but the main force went by train to Cairo and marched five miles out to the edge of the desert to Mena Camp, close to the Pyramids and the Sphinx.*

From Alan  
Mena Camp Cairo  
8<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

Dearest Mum,

... We settled down at once – all the settling necessary! For the men it consists in rolling themselves up in a blanket and lying down on the sand. The officers have tents and there is one stores and office tent per Coy, the rest we expect in the next day or two. Everything is sand, rolling away for miles – our camp is in a valley about two miles wide all sand and very fine. At one end is a steep sandy ridge, just on the other side of which can be seen the tops of the two pyramids of Gyser with the Sphinx below them.

They are very deceptive as to size – tho' one is 150 feet higher than the other, being 450 feet high, they look about the same. The top of one is broken off and is about ten yards square with a pole stuck in it to show the original height. The smaller cannot be quite surmounted, as the upper part is smooth, covered with alabaster. The other is like a long series of steps, some three feet high. It is a big job climbing it, we did not go up today as it was warm and there was too much to see at one visit, nor did we have time to see the tombs to which there is the entrance from the Northern, shady side. The Sphinx is also remarkable, being about 60ft high, yet with the pyramids and sand hills



behind it altho' being in a hollow about 20ft deep, it gives me the impression that it is much smaller than it really is. Capt Mason, Jimmy Johnson and myself climbed round it. Its set, awful expression is indescribable but is very distinct despite its being very dilapidated.

There is a temple next to it, not very large and peculiarly enough in the shape of a cross, it does not stand up from the sand but its roof is on a level with the surface. It appears as if the sand had been blown and built up all round it.<sup>11</sup>

These little places are pitch dark (they might have been confessionals) and have some beautiful alabaster and granite in it – the whole floor for that matter is alabaster. The dots are big upstanding pieces of granite supporting other pieces as you see in the pictures of Stonehenge. We marched there – the whole Battn – this morning passing Mena House, now a beautiful big hospital of 350 beds with nurses.

I have received no news from Rupert or of any that went ashore but they are sure to be with us in a day or two. Twenty per cent are getting leave – may get mine tomorrow night. I believe social life in Cairo is almost dead – no one at Shepheard's, the big tourist hotel, in fittings and comfort one of the most famous in the world – may go there for dinner. We get off at 3.30. The Territorials are here, tho' they may be better than our men at things like saluting I don't think as soldiers they are as good by a long chalk and all appear very small and even as young as our own.

Our men are being very carefully taught not to have any truck with the natives at all, and to avoid the native spirit. They cannot bathe at all as a germ gets under the skin and causes an incurable disease. In spite of their being warned against being at all familiar with the native women, one New Zealander got drunk and pulled a veil off a woman in the native quarter, they set on him, broke his neck and cut his throat – a really horrible thing and an awful pity as it might cause ill-feeling. The men are also forbidden to go into any of the native villages. Some of the Territorials did so and were badly beaten. Rather a take down and it shows they are not all friendly. Some of our officers were talking to an English Doctor who had just come from Turkey and who said that the bringing in of so many troops into Egypt has caused a profound impression. We hear the Khedive who has bunked off somewhere is to lead the Turkish Expeditionary Force against us, we wish him luck and only hope we get the chance to kick him out again! Will finish off in the morning. Good night.

Heard last night they had been fighting round Suez with some Bedouins and Arabs, 150 Ghurkas being brought in wounded. Some tell us we will be at them soon, others say we won't see anything, the same opinions vary about the war. Russia does not seem to be doing very well, while we are only holding them still in the North of France. I don't think it will end just yet. This letter will be posted tonight in town. I hope I may get leave if lucky.

Last night it poured, the men had to huddle up under their waterproof sheets – one of their first experiences. The men are remarkably well behaved. I am writing today to Ken and Rup and I will send him a present in the next day

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11. He draws a small plan

or two. There is nothing more to tell you, Mum, love to everyone, am sending the nippers some Post Cards tonight. Will write and tell you any of our movements.

Goodbye,  
Your very affectionate son Alan D Henderson Lt  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn AIF

Dear Dad,

Very little to tell you than above. I don't think I will touch my money £10 in the Corn Bank in London as I don't need it and we don't know where we may go any day. Most of us are having our pay credited to us in the Anglo-Egyptian Bank in Cairo. Living here will not be as economical as in Australia, our messing is done by contractor at 4/2 per diem. I believe it is very comfortable in tapestried tent and so on, but at Melbourne it only cost us our allowance 3/6 and then the mess had a big surplus to its credit.

The men are on English rations, 1lb of meat per diem instead of 1 1/2, less bread and other articles, so they now have to buy themselves things from the canteen. The YMCA are building a big place at the head of our lines and our Mess Tent will be up today. I hear from Barry of the 8<sup>th</sup> that the Turks are building a railway to Egypt and have been in touch with our outposts for some days. They are only 18 miles from it. If we go to meet them I suppose we'll be sent from Cairo by rail straight across to Ismailia. Of course all this is very unofficial and surmise.

Well, give plenty of hugs and kisses to Peg and Baby and Mother and love to Ken and Charl if they're spliced yet.

Your affectionate son  
Alan

*T*here is a further note to his young sisters:

Dear Peg and Bubs,

Having a grand time. Arabs riding round on camels and dromedaries all day, and with little white mules that they hire for 1 piastre or 2 1/2d a ride and run along behind belting them. You sit right back near their tails, I think you'd break their backs if you sat in the middle.

Your loving brother, Alan

*A*lan resumes his diary on Dec 9<sup>th</sup> 1914:

**W**rote home – no news from Rupert. Am on leave – scarcely anyone went in to Cairo as most of them have been on leave or are short of cash – their first night's leave cost them £2 or £3 – dinner or supper at Shepheard's or the Grand Continental – these are world-famous hotels and tho' everything is half-price to us they are still very expensive. Dinner is 25 piastres – 5/3. Went in by 4.15pm tram – it takes a good hour – and found my way to Shepheard's where I picked up Bert Layh and Jimmy Johnson. We had dinner at the 'Sault' for 18pt, strolled around, sent some postcards and a cable and at 11pm went to supper at Shepheard's. Had a beautiful supper or dinner *à la carte* – it cost 130 piastres for the three of us – that sounds terrible but of course we won't indulge every time. We were so sick of the 'Hororata' and the fearful dinners. I never mentioned before that the dinners on the 'Hororata' and all meals were very poor, tho' meant to be 1<sup>st</sup> class. It was a very poor 2<sup>nd</sup> we got. It was all thro' there only being one small galley. We went right thro' from Hors d'oeuvres to Black coffee while Layh and Johnson had some champagne.

Cairo is a rummy place. Poorly lighted, irregular narrow streets. Beastly dirty as it was raining. The 'phaeton' affairs are numerous as are taxis driven by Egyptian drivers. The Egyptians are very intelligent fellows. All the waiters in Shepheard's are Egyptians in white trousers red jackets and sashes. The other great hotel is the Grand Continental where all the Military Heads are staying.

Intend driving round more next time. You cross the Nile in the tram – it is a magnificent river, about ½ mile across, a grand place for "eights", you could row any number. By the way, you never let us know any Henley results. I wish you would; you mentioned it but no one told me any results.

10<sup>th</sup> Dec Thursday

**A** quiet day. Marched towards Cairo. The road has trees not unlike a big beech, which meet overhead. A beautiful asphalted road. The road is about 20ft above the flat, which is irrigated and here and there on the rising ground are the queer crowded villages all walled round, but the houses seem so bunched that some have been forced up above the rest. They look very dirty. The women all in black watch from the doorways. The native children are thick and awful pests, so much so that nearly all the men have bought canes of their own accord. One man was going in today with a hippohide jambok, a fearful thing, so I would not let him take it.

In the afternoon we just pitched tents which we are now supplied with, but not in very large quantities.

Friday

**S**pent the morning on rifle exercises – my voice has lost all its carrying power and strength but I suppose it will soon come back. The sand tires you very much unconsciously, but the men worked well. This afternoon the Brigade went for a route march into the desert for two hours, plugging

along. It is just the same as the beach, fortunately the heavy rain we had the other night has settled it and there is very little wind but it is a pest the way it dirties the rifles. The men marched or rather plugged, for it means lifting the feet and shorter steps, well. The sentries and guards and inlying pickets all have ammunition tonight as natives have been trying to enter the Territorials' lines. An RC Jesuit Priest has been attached to us, Father Hearne, he is a reserved, dignified yet very pleasant man – must have a yarn with him. We have two officers, Scanlon and McKenna who are RC so he is not lonely. Tonight our contractor starts, the table looks well but he won't be ready till 7.30pm. This waiting for meals is our most warlike and painful experience we have had to date.

My cable caused some amusement today. I mentioned their cheapness at 1/9 per word and someone asked me what I said. I said I thought it was "Arrived. Both well". The Colonel asked me amidst a great laugh what you would think and how you'd interpret it. Will try and send home some silk and stuff from Cairo. They say some of it is beautiful, only it puzzles me what to buy. The price is also restrictive, but even the shorter-priced things are beautiful.

Saturday

Our first Field Day – had to act as Adjutant – marched out about two miles – did this job all right but made one or two small slips. Then had to take command of A Coy as all their officers were in Camp. They're a good crowd and worked well.

1. Bayonet exercises ½ hr.
2. Entrenching 1hr on a steep forward slope. Difficult in the sand but made a steep lying trench.
3. Charging a trench and following up a fleeing enemy. Very strenuous work running up a steep sandy hill for 200 yards.
4. Charging out of a trench for 80 yards to meet a charging enemy.

Marched back, the Colonel giving us all the names of the hills and valleys for some miles around. Got a magnificent view of the camp from the hills about 180 feet above it. It looks quite small in the desert.

The desert is a remarkably queer lonely desolate hilly treacherous deceptive dry sandy – damn funny place!! It is not flat as we imagine it, but it is rolling in a series of valleys with absolutely no system or regularity about them, but if you get on a high point you can see for miles. Distances are very deceptive, you at first imagine a stretch of country to be twice the distance it really is till you see a human figure appear, which looks much bigger than it really is. However we'll soon learn it. It is very tiring to tramp in indeed. Grills has a very bad cough, contracted I think by this treacherous climate. He has been lying up for some days – it also affected his throat. I have a bit of a cold myself. The days are warm, not hot, and one sweats considerably and comes in with underclothing quite damp, then the sun goes down and at once it gets quite cold and increases till it is very cold indeed about 2am. It is the sudden change that is so dangerous.

Sunday 13.12.14

Church Parade 9am, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> together under Miles, the Chaplain. He and Decker CE and McPhee, Presb, are now going to change round – thank Heaven. Marched round past the Pyramids and Sphinx then down past the cemetery. The tombstones are square blocks of stone with three or four stones put on top. Some go up like some you see in Melbourne, in steep squares on top of each other, getting smaller each time. Then over the hills on to the flat and along the valley to Camp.

Colonel made me go in front and show the band the way. He said to go round the East side of the Pyramid but my compass jammed and I nearly went round the West. He went off a treat. Talked with Father Hearne at lunch. He has been in Belgium and says it was the picture of thrift and peace. Brown – secretary of the YMCA – dines with us. He spoke of an amusing way he got back on a wealthy old Egyptian who backed out of a contract to put up and hire a tent. He tried to make peace and offered Brown a lot of timber that he had on the ground. Contrary to Oriental custom Brown said he would be very pleased to take it and the old boy nearly fell over with surprise. Brown however is going to use it without damaging it and return it when we go away.

Neville and Billy Hughes are well and happy.

*This section of the Diary ends here and is enclosed in a letter to his parents:*

Mena Camp  
Cairo

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

Dearest Mum and Dad,

Am sending you my diary for the last few days since I wrote last. We are still kept in the dark as regards our future movements. We have settled down in to our sandy but clean camp in the shadow of the Pyramids which we can see just over the ridge on the East side of our camp. I have not yet had the opportunity to explore or climb them. Two of the three are dangerous and now forbidden to the troops as two men have already been killed falling down them. But for a slight cold I am quite well. Rupert has not written to me to let me know how he is but the 6<sup>th</sup> have heard from Lt Mick Ryan that they will be with us sometime this week. Our three senior Captains are in hospital, Blezard and Jackson with Bronchial pneumonia and Rupert with measles.

No definite news comes about the war that you don't know, the Naval Engagement etc. The invading army seems to be a rumour up to date, nothing in the way of news comes to us. I think we are only an "Army of Occupation". What is this about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Expeditionary Force being disbanded, is it true? Is it because of typhoid? Is it because they are not deemed necessary? I do wish we could get something in the way of news and more letters, Mum, for now and then that sick of everything stale feeling

touches one and makes you pine for “the touch of a vanished hand” etc, but don’t think I am ever miserable. There is far too much to do and to think of for one to allow such things to affect him. Everyone is happy and so are the men, their hours are shorter, all parades being between 8am and 12.30pm as one hour in the sand is reckoned worth two hours anywhere else, also they are getting their pay and 25% are allowed off on leave every night to Cairo.

I have only paid it one visit yet and intend going in the daytime and having a good look round and studying the place. Leave is plentiful as it is left in the hands of Coy Comdrs which means at least one night in three if you want it.

Well, Mum, I think that is all the news. Grills is going off in the morning to hospital, pretty bad with his cough and cold, it has laid him up for four or five days, and in this climate of sudden changes in temperature there is no better place than hospital. Mena Hospital or House was a magnificent hotel and makes a beautiful hospital, balconies out of each window, 350 beds. It cost £1000 a month to rent. Give my love to the nippers, Peg and Baby, tell them I hope they have a grand time at school this year.

I suppose the war is hitting up the schools this year and the same with everything else. Goodbye Mum and Dad. God bless you all at home with best love.

Your very affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson 7<sup>th</sup> Battn Lieut AIF

*To his brother, Kenneth, some fraternal advice:*

Mena Camp Cairo  
13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

Dear Prof,

Just heard there is a mail leaving tomorrow morning so have only time for a line. Well, we hear you are going to get married and want to wish you all the luck in the world and every happiness. You have a good little girl in Sharl, you don’t mind my speaking like that – you know what I mean, a good job and a promising future and tho’ you are going to be a parson there is no reason why you should not always be comfortable and very happy.

But please don’t forget this old boy – at business you’re a silly old chump and it’s that side of your life that you are so neglectful of tho’ you kid yourself you’re pretty shrewd. No that’s a bit frank perhaps but what I want you to see is this, you have a Mother and Father who have had as hard a tussle and as varied experiences as they could possibly have gone thro’ and have therefore learnt a lot, for that reason they are over-anxious that that lot should not be yours, as to a parson it can so easily fall, therefore don’t neglect to consider every word of advice they offer you in your coming new life. Now perhaps I’ve said too much but don’t be offended because I’m over-anxious too. Well, old boy, you can’t go wrong if you stick to your own straight course and hold the same faith in God as you always have done in your life so far. Good luck and God bless you both all your lives, with love to Sharl.

Your loving and sincere brother  
Alan D Henderson Lt  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn AIF

When Rup comes out of Hospital will send you some little present to remember us by.

Mena Camp Friday  
18<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

Dear Mum and Dad,

Nothing very unusual has happened since I wrote to you on Sunday. Training has continued as usual, about three miles out in the desert every day. On Monday we did more entrenching and charging. The ground in part under the sand is very hard rock. Major Glassfurt, Director of Training of the Staff came round on his horse and asked a few questions. He made the remark that it was very different country than what we would be working in. I hope there is something behind his words.

On Tuesday Weddell who had had a rich supper the night before was sick and I had to take the Coy in attack. We found that the irregular and crooked lines of the country tend to throw the men out in the direction of their advance. In the afternoon Capt McKenna had to carry out a scheme with E and F Coys which did not work out perfectly as the two coys had to meet at a point supposed to be under cover but which could be observed from the top of the Pyramids and therefore under artillery fire from the enemy. Unfortunately three of my scouts thro' carelessness or misunderstanding lost themselves and the Colonel went off pop. However as I had not given them their instructions but made one of my sergeants do so it was not my fault, which he understood.

Wednesday

**O**rderly Subaltern. Left in Camp to attend to all the duties etc. A quiet day – nothing unusual.

Thursday

**T**he Battn marched two coys at a time to Mena House to bathe in a beautiful swimming bath there is there. It is surrounded by a high wall and is about 5ft at the deepest end. It is emptied twice a day and two battns bathe a day. We will get down every Thursday morning in future. The afternoon was a holiday. Thro' a change in the order of duties I was to go on as Orderly Sub again but as I wanted to go in and see Cairo in the daytime Wally Conder relieved me. We, Jack Scanlon and myself, went to the Museum. It is all Egyptian and there seems to be a great sameness about everything you look at. The statuary is very impressive. The main pair, I think it represents Rameses and his wife, stand or rather sit a good 20ft high. It is wonderful work, this Egyptian stonework, all the figures sit in the same position with the cold sphinx-like expression on their faces. There were also a great number of coffins and mummies and those big wooden figures. The body was swathed in a coarse linen then put into a wooden coffin shaped like

a big enlargement of the body and that again was sometimes placed in a big wooden coffin and then put in the tombs.

We wandered all over Cairo or rather the business or more modern half of the city all the afternoon. When we have another Sunday or holiday we are going to explore the native part of the city – the old town itself. We also intend seeing some of the Mosques. Jack is a good companion, satisfied to go slow and look around instead of rushing around with a voluble lying dragoman or guide. The city we saw has some beautiful buildings, far more so than anything in Melbourne. I refer to the outside of course – a big building here is so coloured and the cement work is so beautiful that a building does not appear to be a heavy lump of stone only, nor are the streets, thro' the varied architecture, of the monotonous grey that runs thro' Melbourne. The whole scheme, or want of scheme, makes the streets much brighter. The cafés are open on to the footpaths and the tables and chairs sometimes come out so far that you have to walk on the road. Here the men sit drinking coffee and smoking their oriental pipe affairs, you know with the bulb and water, things that stand on the ground and have a long tube running up to the mouth. I must examine one next time. Just as on the Block you see some of the Egyptian boys in exaggerated American cut suits and shoes lolling about and strolling up and down. Others ride round on bikes or drive round in smart carriage turnouts. The majority of the women go about in black flowing dresses coming up over the head like arms with black veils fastened by means of a piece of bamboo which runs up between the eyes about two inches long. The veil comes down in a point in the middle of the chest. The higher class unmarried ladies wear white veils. The men wear some pantaloons, others flowing costumes. Now and then you see some wealthy man in a gorgeous gold-braided red and blue suit. The red 'fez' is very universally worn even by those in European clothes. Most of the shops are run by French. In fact the French seem to run the trade and predominate altogether, it is quite refreshing to see an English face – rather an English lady's face. We went to Shephard's at 4pm, met some of the others, had a rest and a read in the lounge and a hot bath. By Jove it was great! Then we had dinner in the Dining Room. The Dining Room is really beautiful, in the centre there is a fountain which plays amidst red and other coloured lights. The whole room is really Oriental, the walls and ceiling are beautiful enamel work and stone and the whole is softly lit by bunches of red, green, yellow and other coloured lights. It is absolutely perfect in its artistic effect. The dinner, table d'hôte, is beautifully served by Egyptians in their red suits and fez and costs 25pt, about 5/3. I'm not sure that that is not V2 price. The Grill Room where you order what you want is far more expensive. Jack and I are teetotallers and only had lemon squashes but even those drinks cost 5pt or 1/- each. It is worth it all to see the Dining Hall alone. The hall itself, the bathrooms and other rooms are also perfect in their comforts. It costs an officer to live there, which he does for ½ price, about £3/10 per week. After dinner we bought some paper and stamps and drove home in a carriage. It grew very cold on the flat, a very cold damp mist comes down every night now and does not clear away till about 9am, just like a thick fog at home. We got into bed at the early hour of 10.30pm.



Friday

The usual duties and uneventful day in camp. Took some photos of the Machine Gun section on the hill at the back. The Battn I think is just coming back a little later than usual, it is now 3pm, usual time is 2.30pm.

Rupert should arrive late this afternoon unless as he said in his letter he may come tomorrow. Our Regmt has been done a great honour. One Battn per Brigade is to go in to line the streets of Cairo for the Annexation of Egypt tomorrow and our Battn has been selected. It is a straight out acknowledgment of our being the most efficient and best drilled Battn in the Brigade and the CO is highly delighted as all of us are. The ceremony may be postponed till Monday but nothing official is announced yet. I very much hope Rupert may be back in time as it will be a fine thing to look back on and remember. I hope to describe it to you in this letter on Sunday as the mail does not close till Monday.

Saturday

The ceremony was postponed till Sunday for some reason not known to us, so had another training day. Worked with A Coy defending against another pair. By the way, our organization is not to be altered. Today the Proclamation of the Protectorate appeared in the papers. The ceremony tomorrow is the accession of the Sultan of Egypt.

Sunday

Rose at 3.30am, marched out of camp at 5.30 and reached Kasr-el-Nil Barracks at 8am – it is a 10 mile march. We lined the streets leading into the square, single rank on either side of the road, a road not much wider than Little Bourke St and somewhat shabbier and dirtier, tho' the colours of the natives were more varied as is the ramshackle architecture.

We waited till after 9am, nothing more diverting than one or two French girls to smile at on a balcony opposite. The procession was not startling. First a squadron of English light cavalry, then a squadron of Westminster dragoons on magnificent big horses, well-trained beautifully turned out, then the squadron of Egyptian cavalry and HH's bodyguard mounted on Arabs, the latter in purple and gold uniforms. The Arabs are glorious horses, smaller than our own, full of fire and spirit, they dance along. Their feet hardly touch the ground, like the daintiest and proudest of the "demoiselles", they are fascinating to look at. Beautiful greys, perfect milky whites and the richest of rich deep dun brown, made a very fine cavalcade. Then the Sultan's carriage with four runners at the side in bright robes and waving wands, four magnificent horses lifting their feet almost up to their heads before putting them down. The Sultan with another man was in plain European frock coat; he is a thin sallow Egyptian prince, uncle of the ex-Khedive. Some of the fellows reckoned he looked worried and the popular idea of him is that "the poor blighter was given a sufficient rise in screw to allow of his keeping an extra 'Missus' or two, and has been told he can do what he likes as long as he does what he's told".

The two carriages of the Consul General and some smart-looking English diplomats which followed struck one as magnificent. After a few odd

carriages of Egyptian officials Lieut-Gen Maxwell and a Naval Officer drove past unostentatiously in a carriage. It was all that came behind the Sultan which seemed to carry weight. We returned to Kasr-el-Nil barracks about 11am, had cheese and bread and entramped home.

Have been yarning today with a fellow called Glenn of the Irrigation Dept; a Scotsman, only on general war matters and Cairo.

It is out in Divisional Orders that General Birdwood, or Birdwood of India, is to command an Army Corps consisting of 1<sup>st</sup> Aust Division, an Indian Divn and a Composite Divn of New Zealanders, 2<sup>nd</sup> Austn Expeditionary Force, Ceylon Planters' Rifle Club and some other odds and ends, about 60,000 in all.

This Army Corps it is said has been promised by Kitchener that it shall go to the Front not later than March. This is private of course. I also heard that our 2<sup>nd</sup> do not leave till early next year thro' their equipment not being ready.

Rupert came back last night but went into Cairo and stayed at Shephard's for the night and met us at the Barracks as he is hardly strong enough to march far yet. I am quite well but for a bit of a cold I hope to get rid of soon, it is leaving one gradually. Everyone else is well and happy.

We received your letters from Peg and Carrie and Mum and Dad all dated 25<sup>th</sup> Oct. yesterday, tho' we received all your letters dated 4<sup>th</sup> Nov some time ago. These letters have been for a nice little trip to England and back, and arrived with a letter from the Commonwealth Bank in London offering to remit my money to me in notes or transfer it to an account at the Anglo-Egyptian Bank and asking me to send them two more signatures which I will do but I don't intend to touch the money just yet. However I've not made up my mind and it may be wise to have it all together. For the present I'll send them the signatures and leave it at that. Am writing to Sharl and perhaps Ken by this mail. Rupert is writing to you now. No more news for the present.

Your loving and affectionate son  
Alan

*Kenneth was married on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1915. Alan writes to Sharlie Tickell:*

Mena Camp Cairo  
20<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914

My dear New Sister-in-Law,

Or if you are not yet I suppose you very soon will be, which will mean that Alan D will have to be perhaps a little more brotherly but a little more respectful and polite to a married lady than he was to the little girl to whom he used to give much cheek. This seems to be the usual condition between a Brother and Sister-in-Law judging from my observations. At any rate, thank Heaven! you won't have to be as the Egyptian ladies are here, covered to the eyes in veils and at whose dark orbs a wink is the only way of showing the admiration they earn (and by Jove they know how to use 'em too). For this

strange country is one in which “full many a flower is born to blush Unseen and waste its sweetness neath a silken veil”.

Well, Sharl, there is very little I can and need say to you, old girl. I think you and Ken are very well suited to “sit opposite one another at breakfast for a few years” and to look after one another in your future lives. I can only wish you all the best of luck and every possible happiness for many years to come – you’ve got a good fellow as your dear “hubbie” who has always been able to do what I’m sorry to say this chicken has not, that is determine on his course in life and keep his mouth shut and his mind with God and go right thro’ with it whatever it was. Well, Old Girl, give my love to Ken and all your people. God bless you both.

With every good wish and love,

Your very sincere young brother-in-law

Alan D Henderson Lieut

7<sup>th</sup> Battn

2<sup>nd</sup> Inf Bgde

1<sup>st</sup> Aust Div

*F*rom Rupert to his Sister-in-law:

Mena Camp 12.1.15

Dear Sharl,

Mrs K.T.H. or whatever they call you now, anyhow a sister of ours and very proud we are to own you and to claim you as one.

We got your letter (undated as usual like most women’s but we think the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> Dec) and thoroughly enjoyed it.

You can knock off talking of pots and “stews”; if you can’t cook anything else but a stew in a pot I for one am not coming to call except between meals.

Anyhow we are dead keen to get your next letter and hear all about the Teas and D’oyleys etc. etc. and to have an eye witness or “sole survivor”’s account of the ceremonies.

So Baby is to hold your train and Marge and Luce and Peg are Bridesmaids with Holmes and Friend as Groomsmen.

The only thing wrong with the whole show is that we are not there to take part. Best man was the job I had ear-marked some time ago...

We have been going pretty strong lately, four nights’ work during one week, three of them running, night reconnaissance, night march, attack at dawn, defensive position to be entrenched and defended at dawn, and a night march for the whole Brigade. Our men are quite good at this sort of work which entails absolute silence and constant attendance to signs and whispers, which makes it very tiring.

We have had one or two dust-storms lately, you want to see these to

know what a real dust-storm is, thicker than any fog and infinitely more objectionable.

You will have to do your best to read this letter. We are very short of knibs etc., this one has been lying in the shade of the YMCA with its legs crossed for some time and must have caught a chill "when the sands of the desert grow cold" which by the way they do, every night. The bloke what wrote the afore-mentioned song can't ever have seen sand even on a beach much less this desert.

You can tell all your girl friends who have presented us with cap comforters etc that they are not being used for bootpolishers but are being put to their proper use and treated with due love and respect.

You need to be away on a game like this to really appreciate all these small gifts and letters, in fact everything which reminds us of home and our friends.

I'm glad to hear that Studley Park<sup>12</sup> is bucking up a bit and that Tony is succeeding as a secretary. Can you imagine me in his job?..

Everyone seems happy and contented and we have given up worrying as to what is to become of us and accept all news and rumours very quietly. This pen is truly damnable.

News of any kind, especially mails, have been very scarce, most of our first letters have gone on to England, a mail dated 9<sup>th</sup> November has just arrived. The postal authorities in Australia have shewn about as little consideration for us as possible and it has been really astounding the messes they have got into generally. However things are improving now.

Well, Sharl I must knock off and write a few lines to Prof.

Heaps of love and every happiness to you both and mind you have a roast or a pie when we come to dinner, for heaven's sake not stew.

From your affectionate Brother-in-law. Rupert H H

*The force found prevailing monotony and future uncertainty very hard to endure:*

Mena  
Egypt  
29<sup>th</sup> Jan 1915

Dear Mum and Dad,

I suppose that you have been hearing a good many fearful rumours about Turks and revolutions etc. But the position appears to be somewhat like this. The Turks are about 40 miles from the Canal and there was a skirmish of patrols on the 26<sup>th</sup> in which four men and one officer were wounded. Some of the New Zealanders are up there since Monday or Tuesday. Some of our Austn artillery have been warned to be ready, and tho' a great number of rumours are circulated as to other infantry brigades going nothing definite

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12. A tennis club

has reached any of them or us. Moreover training has not been altered in the slightest and a new syllabus is being drawn up for each week including next.

One rumour said we would go to Joppa and have a cut at Damascus, the Turkish base, and try to cut off their lines of Communication. That seems possible but does not appear probable, at any rate as affecting us. Two of the 8<sup>th</sup> officers were at dinner the other night and Birdwood said he had received a definite promise from Kitchener to take us to the front in March but that may be a translation of the promise to take us when we are fit. Physically that moment has arrived and as far as I can see the men do not need much more and they are stale now, very stale indeed and need more breaks. This sand work reduces a great deal of the work to drudgery and they don't get a whole day spell since they've been here. Officers feel the same. What I would suggest now would be leave the men alone for a time and polish the officers up in practical Mapwork etc. I think you can make up your mind to this, that unless the Turks are a great deal stronger than we know they are, we will go into the Field with Kitchener's Army in March. Requisitions for all deficiencies have been sent on and we will soon be finally fitted out.

The Regiment is happy, happier I think than any other in the Brigade – no ruptures or quarrels amongst officers – while every day impresses me of the soundness and solidity of them all. No illnesses are current amongst them, none invalidated yet. Rup and I were never better. Jimmy Johnson says Rupert never looked so well as he does now in the last 18 months.

We were going round the bazaars on Wednesday with an English civil servant, Vaughan, to buy some presents but as the Mahomedans had a big religious procession and festival on – the birth of the prophet – no troops at all were allowed in Cairo.

I'm writing to Helen this week. I suppose Ken and Sharl have quite settled down. Give them my love.

On Sunday last Conder and Heighway, Rupert and myself drove into Cairo, took a car and went up to the Citadel. I suppose you've already read about it in those guide books. It is a very strong old fort over-looking Cairo – it now holds a garrison of British Terriers – a hospital of sick Indians from Ismailia and our detention men. It is a magnificent view from the top. The whole of Cairo and the Nile were shining beneath as the sun was setting. The minarets on the mosques stand up clear above the town by the score. There is also an old roman viaduct running thro' it. I forget what it was for. The Saphara pyramids could be seen way back on the horizon 20 miles away.

The Mosque on the top is beautiful. There is a big courtyard with an alabaster fountain in the centre 900 years old. Water is pumped up 300ft from the Nile for them to wash their feet, arms and faces in before going into the Mosque to pray. The Mosque itself is beautiful – no furniture to disfigure it – very lofty while the floor is covered with thick red carpets and the light is let in thro' beautiful glass windows. The walls are polished alabaster – almost like pearl. There is a very high gallery in which the Sultan's family and harems attend at the Feast of Ramadan five times a year. Mahomet Ali's tomb is in one corner, a magnificent open gilt screen divides it from the rest of the mosque and it is only entered five times a year by the Sultan.

After leaving the Citadel we motored out to Abbasia thro' the old cemetery – ruined tombs with crumbling domes and towers on either side. Abbasia has big barracks... Heliopolis is the modern part of Cairo some miles out – built by a Belgian syndicate – beautiful big buildings and modern hotels with wide open streets, clean and healthy – a great change from Cairo and a city built in the desert. We stopped at the Heliopolis Hotel where Miss (Sister) Findlay late of CEGS is staying. Unfortunately she was out.

We then went to tea with Mr and Mrs Vaughan. Mrs Vaughan came from Queensland, Vaughan himself has two brothers at Melbourne Grammar. They have a comfortable little flat and an Egyptian servant, and as she is very jolly and talks about 50 to the minute we had a very nice time. The first time we've been in a drawing room or a private house since we left and we appreciated it very much. We just yarned and left for Cairo by train about 10pm and met in the train a Miss Ogden, a schoolteacher very nice looking and like Stotty – felt quite struck right off! Wally had met her before and introduced us. He's going to dinner with her this week. He's a great little sport, full of life and wit and a real good little chap.

We receive your letters regularly now Mum and it breaks the monotony – tho' we only have time to glance at the newspapers. In fact we scarcely have time to write. I'm on Guard at present and am taking this opportunity to write a long letter. Goodbye and God bless you all at home.

Your very affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson Lt.  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn AIF

*F*rom Rupert in pencil:

Sunday  
Feb 7<sup>th</sup> 1915

Dear little Mother,

We are on the go at last. We moved on Wednesday last, just after I had written to you saying it was not likely we would be used against the Turks. Anyhow we arrived here (can't tell you what place "here" is) late at night and have been practically standing by for orders and more since then. I am writing this on my back out on the sand, lying on my bed-valise and by candle-light. The men are just behind me singing all the old songs in creation, this is a sort of touch of home and their voices are rather nice to listen to as well.

We very nearly went into the trenches on the second morning after we got here. I was given my orders at midnight to move with another company (the two under Major McNicoll) at 9am the next day, Friday, but for some reason the disposition of forces was altered and we have all remained here.

I am under orders to be ready again tonight. The Turks are only 3V2 miles from here and entrenched 800 yards from our trenches. It is only an advance guard of 10-12,000, badly equipped and badly clothed that we have come in contact with. Their main body, reported about 50,000 strong, is steadily

advancing. They had some big guns which we believe they have had to abandon for a time at any rate on account of the great difficulty of transport. We are not greatly worrying about these fellows and are apparently content with catching a few prisoners occasionally. They tried the German trick with the white flag and caught an English officer and a platoon of Ghurkas. They were disarming some Turks who had surrendered when suddenly a Turkish officer clapped his hands and they opened machinegun fire on them, killing one English officer and wounding or killing most of his men. The Ghurkas then took to them, killing 400 and taking 200 prisoners. A couple of German officers have been taken and between 500 and 600 Turks and Bedouins. They are terribly angry when they are told they are fighting against fellow Mohammedans; they are told they are fighting Christians only. We have seen a number of prisoners, they are very disreputable looking and apparently very full up of their fighting.

Our Battalion and (*deleted*) are the first Australian soldiers to be attached to the Suez Canal defensive troops. Two platoons of Alan's company leave for some port tomorrow (not Alan's platoon) and expect to see some fun at once; we were all very disappointed at not getting moved to the trenches before.

Well Mum I'm getting cold and must turn in. It is very cold here at night but we manage to get warm. Of course we are all out in the open, living, eating, sleeping etc. Keeping our clothes on ready to jump. I have not had my clothes off for five days and am still happy and contented and conscientiously believe myself to be clean. Alan, Ussher, Hughes, Conder, McKenna and all of us are in excellent nick. News of Helen's wedding arrived just before we left. I will write when I get a chance. Please ring her up. Heaps of love and kisses to yourself and Dad and Peggy and Baby and all the rest of our family. Things are going well with us. Goodbye and God bless you all.

From Rupert.

PS It is now thirty-three days since Prof's wedding.

*F*rom Rupert, a week later, a ten-page letter:

Mena Camp 14.2.15

Dear Mum and Dad,

Your prayers have been answered and very well answered too as far as we can see at the present time, and a fellow really cannot feel disappointed for himself. Of course we are all anxious to get into a scrap, but so long as you are happier as long as we are out of it then I am fully repaid for my disappointment. From this you will gather that I am not breaking my neck to get into a fight at once; I am ready for absolutely when the orders come but do not experience any great excitement or anxiety.

Chiefly why I am sorry that the Turks have withdrawn so hastily is because it deprives our men of learning an absolutely invaluable lesson before they get into the much heavier and severe fighting in France. We (the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>

Battalions) were moved from here at very few hours' notice, the Company Commanders were woken at midnight on the Tuesday and given their orders to be ready to move by 10am next morning with war equipment only. We packed just our maximum allowance (35lb) and the Battalions marched into Cairo (11 miles) and entrained at 2.30 and 4.30pm arriving at Ismailia at 10.30 and 12.30am (Thursday).

We then had to unload our train containing our baggage and a quantity of stores belonging to the Army Service Corps.

It was midnight by the time we had cleared the station and reached our bivouac ground; it was very cold and sprinkling rain and of course we had to wait until the transports were able to bring our blankets to us before any attempt could be made to sleep. This took some little time as teams of six horses had to be used and only small loads carried on account of the very heavy travelling in the sand which is particularly fine and soft here. Luckily the Bivouac was only about 400 yds from the station. The teams were working till nearly 5am on Thursday morning. As soon as each load arrived the "section" bags were distributed and the men turned in sharing blankets as far as possible with those who were waiting.

I borrowed a couple of spare blankets and when all the men were settled as far as possible tried to get to sleep. This was not till after 2am. My own valise did not arrive until one of the last loads. I fell asleep for a while, but as I was sleeping by myself where I could be easily found soon woke with the cold and found my batman had found my valise and put it at my head. About 3.30 I crawled into this and was more comfortable.

We were told when we arrived of the bombardment during the day and that we would be right into it in the morning. In fact, if we had arrived a few hours earlier we would have gone out that night.

The following day we did nothing, hostilities had ceased and we waited. That night we (C and D Coys) got our orders to man the trenches next morning. That night also a green rocket was sent up from close to our camp, the man who fired it, a Turkish spy, has we think been caught. It is believed that this was some notification of the arrival of our reinforcements, and that night they commenced their withdrawal. Anyhow our orders for immediate movement were countermanded and we waited in readiness all day.

The Turks were entrenched only 700 yards from the position we had to occupy and of course if we had been sent on we would have been there before they withdrew and would have vigorously assisted them to clear out. However it was not our luck and the lot fell to the Cavalry instead. Then for some days we simply waited in readiness to move at an hour's notice.

Then last Friday we returned to Mena and there are rumours now of our leaving in about three weeks; the idea of the march through France from Marseilles is still on the cards. The trip to Ismailia did us the world of good, the work here was getting very tiresome; it is heavy and tiring and it is hard to keep the men's interest in it.

We had 9 days of next to nothing to do, and we considered it a very late night if we could not get to our blankets by 7.30 or at latest 8pm. We slept



like Trojans till Reveille (6am). We went for a couple of route marches through the city, it is a beautiful little place, absolutely spotless and nearly all beautiful gardens and Park. Some Territorial and Indian medical services are encamped in the Park together with a Wireless Signal Section and some Indian Army Service Corps. I have got some fine photos to send you of this place.

Down here we had our first experience of aeroplane reconnaissance. There are quite a number of machines here and about 3 per day would fly out over the Turks, covering practically the whole of the length of the canal. They were shot at regularly every day and the planes are all patched in places but no pilot or observer has been hit yet. They have had only one accident that resulted in the loss of an aeroplane. The engine stopped on the return journey and in volplaning to earth (or rather sand) the tail of the machine hit a sand hummock, rupturing it and crumbling it up. No one was seriously hurt.

These aeroplanes used to go out about 8.30 or 9 in the morning and return about 12 noon.

We had an opportunity to inspect the defences of a section of the Canal close to us at the northern end of Lake Timsah where there is a ferry and also a French hospital and quarantine station.

It was close to here that the heaviest bombardment took place. Some of the shells went fairly close to the Wireless Station and one close to the supply depot but most of them into Lake Timsah. Despite this, the Turkish shooting was fairly good.

After the first day of their attack we moved one of our batteries to a different position, the next day the old position was heavily shelled of course to no purpose but the power of Germany is seen in that their spy system is perfect and they must have had very accurate information as regards our position.

Later we discovered 3 Turks trussed up and shot. It is believed that these are the spies who gave the information about our position and as it was not considered accurate (which it was) they were shot for giving wrong information. It was a piece of great good fortune that our battery moved. The Turks brought heavy artillery with them, we believe an 8" howitzer and some other guns. It is believed they have now buried those guns (according to aeroplaneist) and our Canal Transport have gone out to find them.

You will know by now that they are some distance from the Canal and when last we heard they were packing up baggage etc. and clearing out. Of course they may come on again, in fact it is quite probable but I think they are doomed to failure in any case and probably they have realised it.

You will probably get all the news before this letter reaches you. At a place called Serapeum about 15 miles south from Ismailia where two platoons of Alan's company were sent after the fighting, the Turks attacked rather heavily and succeeded in throwing some pontoons across the Canal. Of course we allowed them to get pretty far on with their work and then opened fire with rifle and artillery and blew them up. We secured 16 of their pontoons made of light galvanised iron and capable of holding 40 men each. These are being used now by our own engineers.

The Turks on this job were regulars and exceptionally well trained; they came on under heavy fire with these pontoons working steadily and in silence. Most of the troops forming the attacking regiments are irregulars and poor soldiers. They are badly clothed and badly equipped. They carry large quantities of ammunition sewn all over them in the lining of coats, belts, everywhere. They have evidently suffered severely from that worst of all enemies, the army contractor. We have picked up charges of cartridges of which the case only is good, the powder being of very poor quality and the bullets actually of wood instead of lead, with a light metal casing or even a casing of a thin aluminium sort of material very like tin foil. We also have got wooden shrapnel bullets and opened one of their unexploded shrapnel shells which felt to us rather light. This shell was fitted with a fuze, only the interior was absolutely empty, not a bullet and not a speck of powder. It is absolutely extraordinary how it has passed the eye of the German officers; if the whole people were not as corrupt as possible it would be past belief. Did I tell you that a number of men were found dead in their trenches with their hands tied behind their backs. These have been shot by their own officers, evidently men who have refused to advance.

It is now believed from bodies found that their dead number fully 1000 and their prisoners are over 600.

Our Australian Engineers have been doing wonderful work at Ismailia and in its locality and have twice been “mentioned” for their efficiency.

There are 2 Battalions of New Zealanders still at Ismailia. These chaps saw a little fighting and they had one killed and one wounded.

I am sending you a copy of a small pamphlet describing the Indian soldiers and also the Turks. This was issued to the men to prevent any possible mistake in identifying them. We came into close contact with our Indian troops here. One night I had charge of the outpost line and had to arrange for intercommunication between our section and theirs. They belonged to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Gurkas and could not speak a word of English. I had to meet their officer at 6pm but something delayed him and a Gurka corporal and myself by means of much pointing and sign-making arranged an efficient watch. They sent for their officer who visited our nearest post later.

Nothing exciting occurred but it is very tiring work, the strain is fairly strong. I slept in the centre of my section, which is about 2 ½ miles long, with my horse behind me. I had to visit the posts on horse-back too, which was rather dicky or would have been if there were any prowlers about – however the horse made no noise whatever in the sand. If there had been any real danger of course I could not have visited the picquets at all. I had to have my horse there for fear I was sent for to any part. Alan was on this work in charge of a subsection, some nights later.

Some of the 8<sup>th</sup> were sent into the Ferry Station trenches after the fighting was over for a couple of days before we returned.

You see the nearest we got to a scrap was to hear the shells on the Wednesday and only those in the advance party heard these.

We had a very easy time indeed and half of us were allowed away at a time

for swimming parade in Lake Timsah – five men at a time into Ismailia for a couple of hours' leave. This was one huge loaf and was worth its weight in gold as we were getting so stale.

We are suffering no delusions as to the equipment of our force; it is very poor indeed in comparison with the Territorial or Indian troops and with the New Zealanders, we have to do with many things of inferior quality and do without many things we should have. It would do some of our ready-made politicians a world of good to spend a week at Ismailia to see these other troops. They would never grumble at expense after it, and they would realise that the only way to save money is to spend it heavily in the beginning. They are beautifully equipped down to the last detail. It gives a man a much greater sense of "efficiency" to feel this.

Well our tents were up again for us when we returned. Col Simmons had this done for us and tea and everything cooked for officers and men when we arrived. This was very good of him indeed.

On Saturday we had a whole holiday after having nearly nine of them, so Alan McKenna, Mason, Major McNicoll and I went into the Museum in the morning and McKenna, Alan and I went through part of the Bazaars. We bought a few things and are sending you for yourself a brass vase inlaid with silver and copper also for the kiddies two small jewel cases of the same material and for Dad a small brass ashtray. These things were not very expensive here but you would pay something for them in Melbourne. Also for yourself one large square tablecover of silver thread work, one smaller rectangular one of silver and one of gold thread work. These are all very good especially the large one, now use them Mum. We are also sending you two smaller table centres of coloured designs all hand worked, and very inexpensive here. I don't think you could buy any of these things in Melbourne.

We are also sending you for Helen and Alec a Brass inlaid vase to which I have tied a tag to identify it. Please send it to them from Alan and myself. We have also a couple of camel wool scarves, very fine and warm but absolutely plain. I think we will send them to you, one would do for Peg and I was thinking of sending the other to Lucy. However I may get something with a bit of colour in it for her; these things are beautifully warm.

Now, Mum, nothing on this earth would give us more pleasure than to send you something that you really like, so if there is anything that you fancy or would like us to get you please say so at once.

We have not done yet and will possibly get a few more small things for the kids and for yourself and Dad.

We have got your letters up to 11<sup>th</sup> January, and also one from Prof. Tell him and all others who have written that I will answer as soon as I can.

You will have heard further by now of our recovery from measles and that I was present at the parade on the accession of the Sultan.

Well I have a lot more to write but really must stop for the present. I will post this probably if I cannot finish it and write again before the last mail closes in Cairo on Sunday.

Goodbye and heaps of love and kisses to yourselves and Peg and Baby, from  
Your affectionate son  
Rupert

*B*y the same mail Alan writes:

Mena  
Egypt 14.2.15

Dear Mum and Dad,

I wonder if you've heard of our visit to Ismailia – it was very pleasant but disappointing. Rupert is giving you all the details I suppose and I'm terribly sleepy but here goes.

We bivouacked outside the Railway station from Friday week 5.2.15 to Friday 12.2.15. A few hours before we arrived shells were landing within ½ mile on the gardens and the lake. One ship was hit. We were told that probably we would be fighting next morning and tho' we had orders to be ready to move at the shortest notice and once or twice received orders to go at a certain time, they were countermanded each time. Only two platoons were sent to the trenches to relieve New Zealanders – they went out of our Coy A, 1 and 2 platoons, mine is No. 3 you can imagine how I felt – it was a good experience for them but it was after the Turks started to clear out and they did not see any. Their position was on the spot where the big scrap was, 400-500 Turks are buried there and they left weapons, boots, bits of equipment by the score. The poor buggers had been badly taken down. One of our chaps has an unexploded shell, he thought it seemed light and opened it up – it was empty. Wooden bullets even were found – old-fashioned Gardiner quick-firers with soft bullets, all different kinds of rifles, Mausers mostly – the prisoners were in rags with feet bound up – some of us had to guard them and others had to take them to Cairo. They were very tame – some of their wounded had been on the desert two or three days without water – poor devils, they fought game but had not got a hope – our losses are very light.

If only we had been 24 hours earlier – it would have done the men so much good. One night I was on outpost round the town with orders to shoot anyone trying to get out or in with information.

Ismailia is very pretty and on a big lake – it has been made beautiful by big gardens and groves – beautifully shady with asphalt roads like glass running thro' them – all built on the sand. We were bivouacked out in the sand – the work was light and twice we had a bonsa swim in the lake – the rest and change did us all good. Only the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battns were sent up – another feather in our caps. I suppose you will be very thankful we were not engaged. The Australasian losses were one New Zealander killed and one wounded.

We received Mother's letter at Ismailia and Dad's and Ken's when we got back here – the wedding seems to have been a great success – and also the newspapers.

Doubtless you will be glad to hear that I've been included amongst those promoted First Lieutenant (2 stars) – the recommendations were made

I think when we landed here – about eight of us have been shoved up, including Conder who, Ken will be pleased to hear, is doing very well. It's satisfactory to think that the Old Man reckons you've been successful.

Must close now as I am on duty and have to go check the cash in the canteen. We sent a couple of presents away yesterday – I hope you will like them. We have not quite finished yet.

Your very affectionate son, Alan  
This letter seems very scrappy but I'm sorry I can't help it this mail. We are all very well and happy and I think we will be away from here in a few weeks.

*F*rom Alan in Camp:

Mena 21.2.15

Dear Mum and Dad

My last letter was very scrappy as I was very sleepy and in a hurry being on duty. Nothing very much has happened this week. On Wednesday Rupert and I went into Pookoomul and bought you a few presents I hope you will like. Rup is giving a list and stating whom they are for. We did very little for the little girls and Dad and are sorely troubled what to buy them as we want to get them something lasting and good. We nearly got a couple of nice dress lengths in silk but that would not last very long – however we'll find something and have sent them some handkerchiefs, Egyptian brooches and trinket boxes for the present. We picked you and Sharl two nice opera cloaks, yours is very pretty. I do hope it suits your taste and you'll always wear it. It seemed the best thing for Sharl, as being a parson's wife she won't want many beautiful dresses but can always wear a nice cloak anywhere any time. That sounds clumsy but you can get the hang of what I mean alright. We're sending you home a draft for the £10 next week<sup>13</sup> I'm thinking of making an allotment again and it will limit my extravagances tho' I've not been bad up to date-it has the advantage too, when we are near the town and all the chaps who have only an allotment want a good time or to buy presents, one is asked for a good deal in the way of lending and when everyone knows you can draw the money one can scarcely refuse; so I'll do it this way. Make the allotment as at a date in March about one month ahead from now to give it time to reach Melbourne and have it transferred to my account in London in exactly the same way as Rupert's – Commonwealth Bank of Aus (not Savings Bank).

As regards news. The Regmt had a manoeuvre day with Gen Birdwood and staff on Friday. The work seemed to satisfy them very much and their advice to us was very good. He has a very fine staff indeed – all splendid men picked from India.

He impresses one greatly himself – very fast talker – electric – very quick in grasping things – young and like Ian Hamilton has that nervous, pleasant, highly strung manner. He spoke to us on one or two points in our work – said we had improved tremendously.

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13. Ken's Wedding Present.

On Wednesday evening four Generals have accepted an invitation to our stadium:

- Gen Marshall GOC in Egypt
- Gen Birdwood GOC Australasian Army Corps
- Gen Godley, NZ Aust-NZ Division
- Gen Bridges 1st Aust Divn

If they all turn up it will be a brilliant gathering. There is just a chance there won't be room for some of us juniors – we will be very disappointed if that is so.

We had a visitor today – Billy Crane looking better and brighter than ever. He has grown up a fine chap with a really fine nature. He and Malcolm are in the 6<sup>th</sup> Light Horse NSW 2<sup>nd</sup> Expeditionary who arrived by 'Suevic' three weeks ago. He says they're a grand crowd. Wallace Irvine is over in the 5<sup>th</sup> NSWLH. Ask Prof to pass this on to the *Mitre*.<sup>14</sup> Billy is doing well in a Bank – he earns £180 per annum and boards in Crotty's parish, where he has run up against the Bishop several times. The Bishop told him we were here but he got a great surprise when he found me an Officer tho' he knew Rupert was one. He thought I would be in the ranks. He showed me a photo of a "girlfriend", a Miss Mackay, of his. He says she is not his "girl". She is certainly very nice-looking. He expected to land and call on you in Melbourne but they did not land at all. His people are all well and he is studying accountancy on my advice. Ussher and Hughes are very well and so are Rup and I – the great trouble is I'm getting so fat.

By this mail I'm sending some photos and postcards home, you will find interesting.

I don't think there is much more news. Down in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bgde there has been a slight outbreak of smallpox – eight cases but none since Tuesday – and they have located the source and are taking every precaution and tho' our vaccination "took" well on the boat are re-vaccinating us all. But there is nothing to be nervous about especially as there have been no new cases since Tuesday, six days ago.

Everything points to our clearing out very soon, about the middle of March. Of course this may be wrong but the odds are at present on our going then. It does not seem that we'll go anywhere except straight to Marseilles and the story that we would trek up from there thro' France has been contradicted. This is of course made up on unofficial tips and rumours of which the air is always full.

Am writing a short note to Peg, so Goodbye to you all, give our best love to everyone, our family and friends with best love to you Mum and God bless you all.

I am, your affectionate son Alan D Henderson Lt.  
You know we only get mails once a fortnight and so have not received any this week. We will get it on Tuesday or Wednesday.

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14. Trinity Grammar School magazine

*From Alan, two days later:*

Mena  
Egypt  
23.2.15 Tuesday

Dear Mum and Dad

Am slipping this into the mail late as the Postman is one of our own men.

We have just received it “dinkum straight” from the Brigadier that we will be on the water within a fortnight off to Marseilles. The first batch go to Alexandria and embark there – the transports are there waiting – on Saturday. I suppose we’ll get off next week and as there will be a tremendous rush of mails etc. you might not get a letter for a week or two, but I’ll get one in thro’ the postman alright. Well the news is great! I think you will be pleased too. You must not be nervous as regards the officers and men of the force – especially in this regiment they are good and sound right thro’ – absolutely reliable – splendid shots – smart soldiers who know exactly what they are doing and ought to do. My own platoon I would not swap for another in the Batt. That is not skiting but the men are such a fine crowd.

I don’t think there is anything in the story that we march up thro’ France and of course very likely will be on LOC work for some time.

This as usual is all surmise as no-one knows what will be the developments in the next few weeks. From our arrival in Marseilles on everything is blank. I don’t suppose the General himself knows what will happen. We are both perfectly fit and well off for everything in the way of arms, clothing and equipment. I’m going out for some revolver practice on Friday or Sunday. We Officers may get web equipment and rifles. Well, I can’t say much more Mum. I’ll write again by next mail and let you know anything new. Best love to all at home... You must just go on in the usual way, think of us now and then and carry on with your Benevolent work as you’ve always done and tell Dad he must do the same, play his golf and keep himself fit.

Your very affectionate son,  
Alan

PS Some of our chaps wrote awful yarns about Turks from Ismailia but don’t believe them if they come round to you. The same I dare say will happen in France so don’t let rumours worry you, there will be scores of them, of all kinds! as soon as we leave. Some men are awful skites and take a delight in spreading lies – of course this is only a small percentage.

Mena, Egypt 26.2.15

My dear Dad,

I have your letter of 26<sup>th</sup> Jany by me now and will talk to you about each point as I read it again. It’s apparently the best way as I’ve been leaving out a number of small matters in answering you; but, to begin with, we are both very well and very happy – everything goes swimmingly and is OK. Next week we leave for unknown lands – Brit East Africa – Dardanelles – Constantinople – Syria – Jaffa – France – England all possible, I can’t even

tip you – Dardanelles or France take my fancy. France is first favourite. We are pretty right and ready for business—finished our musketry courses – the shooting being very satisfactory indeed and our equipment complete. Tho' Rup's position is that of a Major we have not heard as to whether the Coy Comdrs are to be promoted. You will have heard last week that I have been promoted, a great and pleasant surprise. I could not get my Captaincy for a long while, unless we lost about half our officers and I did something very remarkable – which is not very likely.

I've not read the cutting on the carpenters' strike yet, but will do so as I finish the mail.

It was my neglect in not acknowledging your papers. They are very interesting and have all come to hand. We've not much time to read them thro' but they keep us in touch and go round the regiment.

We have already told you about Ismailia and how disappointingly close we were to a fight.

It's good to see business is brisk and has woken up a bit – it must do so when a war lasts as long as this.

Rupert has not had to buy a horse – some remounts arrived after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Exped and he has one – not a bad, lightly built, black, but a little silly. Good enough for his work tho'.

We bought you all a few small presents that I hope you'll like from absolutely reputable firms – famous firms who only sell genuine stuff, but are very puzzled what to buy you, Dad. We'll pick up some little thing tho'.

Don't worry about our health or colds. It is disastrous not to wear good flannel and belts – some have been careless which has caused a fair amount of pneumonia and kidney trouble, also dysentery. In my opinion it's all a cold in the stomach. We have not and are not, DV, likely to get either. The only trouble is I've got much fatter but once we get on the trek that will cure itself. We have more than enough of clothes, boots and socks: everything in fact. I can get everything I need here. Though some have suffered from varicose veins, mine don't trouble me at all now. I never even think about it, so that's all right. I'm sure you'll find the typewriter will pay – it's so much quicker and more up to date.

We got Ken's and Charl's letters – short, newsy, and sweet. They seem very jolly. Also the Henley paper which was very interesting. I don't hear of any of our mail being lost or stolen from the 'Moldavia'.

Eric Permezel called today – he and all the officers of the reinforcements are being hum bugged at the base at Abbassia – all their men allotted to Regts – a very good crowd – and nothing to do. He looks well but is very impatient and dissatisfied.

Bean's article<sup>14</sup> is causing a lot of annoyance. He wrote it when we had only been a fortnight here – at Christmas time. (What was every town in Aust like then or in the Empire for that matter?) The Australians I know from residents

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14. Charles Bean, Australia's official War Correspondent, accompanying the AIF



have caused a profound impression on the natives – far greater than that of the Territorials, their physique and vitality have done that, and that is what we came here for, and officials say 90% of the inhabitants are hostile. Certainly a number of wasters hit things up and we are weeding them out! They are men of no moral character, unintelligent and bad. Experienced soldiers say they won't do any good in the firing line for the reason they have no honour, determination or backbone.

The same applies to the men with ribbons. Amongst them there is only the one or two per cent, the rest being fine fellows. A meeting of Sth African soldiers is to be held shortly about this.

His comparisons are very unfair. The *(deleted)* lesser in numbers but wearing the same uniform as ours are equally bad in our opinion, as a force much lower in efficiency, poorly disciplined and worse behaved. That is strong but true. *(Deleted)* has never been considered as good as Aust in military matters. 400 of them broke away in Alexandria.

The Territorials, the Military Police tell us, when they first came were worse than our men but have now quietened down, just as our own have done also. In fact the little swines lead our fellows astray and they know the dens and chum up with our chaps and hang to the open-fisted Australian till he has spent his last piastre. Very friendly with it all and very cute.

Now our chaps, but for a case here and there of drunkenness, are perfectly behaved. It is the slur Bean has thrown on us all and Australia which annoys us so. It is really unfair and seems to be inspired by a desire for notoriety. The waster who is being sent home is a man, as I said before, who won't make a fighter – a sneak-thief or suchlike as a rule. We are not sending back every man who gets drunk but only the very worst. You see it is all very well for people to say "let them take their chance in the firing line" but a man these days must be honourable, determined and reliable – if unintelligent or careless he may reveal a whole movement or body of troops to the enemy and have all his comrades wiped out. Then again he delays, distracts and worries his NCOs and officers and causes trouble that way. One can't have any passengers at this game.

Now Cairo, Dad, is one of the rottenest places on earth – it is hard for a man to find a place where he can be sure of a decent drink, even in the restaurants in the main streets. Once a man gets bad liquor into him he'll go mad. Then again even greater temptations than drink abound, there being no laws to restrain vice of any kind. Disease abounds in all these places which accounts for a fair percentage of the "medically unfit". What's more in Cairo there are no counteracting influences – no decent music-halls or picturetheatres – they don't start till 9.30 or 10pm when every man must be out of town.

Let me tho' say a last word for those going home. The majority are "medically unfit". The wasters have not been sent yet. Of these  $\frac{2}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$  have genuine complaints of no fault of their own. The work here has tried and found the weaknesses in all men. Pneumonia, varicose veins, piles, rheumatism, kidney trouble etc seem to be the big items. Now don't blame these poor chaps for the faults of others. The  $\frac{1}{4}$  or less are perhaps venereal. This place (Cairo) is full of it.

Bean is an awful fool to start so absurdly. We have done no worse than all others. The Gordon Highlanders are notorious. Their fame hangs here still. Besides it only lasted two or three weeks and the men are as quiet and steady as ever.

I can't tell you much more news and I'll write again on Sunday. Goodbye and love to all, Dad, to mother and nippers.

Your affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn AIF

Don't publish any of this by any chance – it's against Regulations and would mean trouble.

This may be our last letter for some weeks. Cards are to be issued. I think we are off for Damascus. One Bgde has gone.

*F*rom Rupert, in green ink:

Mena Camp 28.2.15

Dear Mum and Dad

I am sorry to say I missed writing anything but a postcard last week, things have been pretty busy and opportunities to write scarce.

You have asked us a lot of questions. Yes, we are getting a good many papers from you and they are quickly devoured.

Yes, you will have heard by now that I was fortunate enough to get out of hospital on the night before the installation of the Sultan Hussein.

We are rather sorry to hear of the impression you gathered from the report of Sir George Reid's speech and later from Capt Bean's letter. To a certain extent it is true for where there is smoke there must be fire; but where Bean made his great mistake was in his comparison, in bringing the good name of Australia into the question at all and in gathering his information on the steps of Shephard's Hotel.

With regard to his comparisons: He is comparing our force first with the Territorials who had been in Cairo some time before our men and whose "back had been broken" so to speak, and despite the fact that the pay they receive is much less than half that received by our men, still had a greater percentage of men dealt with for misbehaviour during the time of which Bean writes, than ourselves.

That they are easier to handle than our men is certain; they are not to be compared with our men physically and are not so argumentative when drunk.

With regard to the New Zealanders, they as a force are not so good as ours either, they are more sour, sulky and surly.

Now as to Australians, our crime record is not as bad as the New Zealanders'. We have had some rotters, bad men, bad to their very core; they come principally from NSW and especially from Broken Hill; these are a few men who could honestly be hung on their faces; they should of course never have been enlisted; they were evidently taken without any idea of selection.

These men could never be made into soldiers and are a constant drag on the force, consequently the one and only thing that can be done is to send them home but they should be made to take out the money spent on them in some of His Majesty's prisons. It is these men, about 400 out of 30,000, who have caused all this trouble; of course you know it lasted only for the first three weeks.

Some of us would like to put Bean in the duck-pond for the great injustice which he has done to the Australian troops who are a much finer and better disciplined body than ever went to South Africa.

He has written absolutely without judgement and without thought especially of the consequences of what he has written. There are quite a large number of men have been returned to Australia through illness or failings or rather physical weaknesses which this very heavy work has brought to light; these men must inevitably suffer and receive some of the kicks we hope the rotters will get. We all consider that the names of all men returned should be published, together with their conduct sheets and full particulars of discharge.

The effect if they did this would be very great. The numbers returned ill are much greater than the defaulters. I myself am returning two for misconduct and five thro' illness.

Numbers of course are to be returned thro' illness brought on by their own weak-mindedness and stupidity. The temptations held out before these men of ours, 99 per cent of whom have never seen a Continental city in their lives, are very great and numerous.

This place is absolutely beautiful in appearance but is rotten to the core and it is typical of the Egyptian that such a state of affairs is allowed to exist.

These men of course are classed with the bad eggs; they are infinitely more dangerous and are not many in numbers.

There is one thing of which the people of Australia can be absolutely sure and that is that the force will never disgrace itself or its country, and the good name of both are to all of us absolutely sacred. Bean would get a hoy if he were recognised in the Australian lines.

I am glad you had a good time at Beaconsfield; although there are always the same old people there, you get a fair amount of pleasure from them.

It's a great pity Mum's holiday was broken, first by the wedding and then by the visitation of the Aunts. I hope to hear next mail that you went away again. I suppose Mum that you and the others had some real good "chips" together and expect their visit was really as good as a holiday despite the fact that Baby seems to consider it her duty to "liven the family up".

Rex has done splendidly and we are really glad to hear he is going to the

University, he will do well. How about Headley, he has done well too.

With regard to my will, I will get Eric Connelly to tell me how to word it and fill it in in my pay book, also send you home a duplicate.

I am very, very glad Dad to see that business last year was really better than the previous one; please Heaven it may continue so next year. It is good to hear that everything else is keeping up, especially the rent roll. I suppose this is about the best index of the financial condition of the people and business generally as you could get.

Please apologise to Abercromby and Penrose; they have both written several letters to me and I have not written more than two or three in reply, they must forgive me. I am sorry to hear JRA has had a couple of "trips", it is a great pity he cannot pick himself up for good.

Alan and I met young Roderick in Cairo for a few minutes. He is looking very well and getting on well too. He is a real good chap. Billy Crane also came out to see us, he and Malcolm and I think his cousin Rex are all serving in the Light Horse, they arrived with the 2<sup>nd</sup> lot, and are now at Abbassieh. He is a fine big fellow, much smarter than he ever was before; business and this life have made him. Malcolm he says is "just the same".

You tell Mr Ivor Evans that when I return, in addition to playing him tennis I will sing to him as well, My voice is big and strong enough but every trace of a note has I think gone from it. Sometimes I try and sing but I make too much noise.

You say Dad that you are keeping the garden going yourself. Don't overdo it. How is it we have heard nothing of golf for a long, long time, do not give that up for the garden, it would never pay you in a great many ways.

I am glad Peg is leaving Merton (Hall), Fintona is I expect the best place for her. She is passing through a stage now which means perhaps the making of her character and evidently companions at Merton Hall and acquaintances between home and school were not doing her any good.

You say that you would like to send me a revolver; it would be useless to me unless it fired the 4.55 Webley service ammunition, this is the only stuff carried, in fact any but the authorised arms are absolutely forbidden. In any case we are leaving here in a few days now, perhaps Thursday next, some have gone already. Where we are going we can only guess, there are quite a number of places to choose from. We do not think it is into a scrap at once as we are taking tents and all our baggage. This augurs a change of base. The transport ships are now waiting for us at Alexandria. It is thought by some that we are going to Jaffa or Beyrouth, others to assist in taking Dardanelles forts, others to England to refit, get new pattern rifles etc and others again direct to Marseilles and trek up through France (this would be magnificent for us). German East Africa is also mentioned. Anyhow you will probably know where we are going before we do.

We are going to have all our leather work taken from us and wear the web equipment of the men. This will make identification very hard for the enemy.

We have been doing a lot more night work lately. We cannot have too much

practice in it and we avoid parading in the very hot days. We have had a few days' spell of very hot weather – luckily it came during a period of night training.

With regard to promotions, you will have heard by now that Alan has been made a first lieutenant, the two senior company commanders have been promoted to Major. This means that Mason and I are still Captains. The two seniors only were allowed by regulation the step in rank. However I am not sorry and am much more than satisfied with my good fortune. They have issued us with Australian horses; mine is a fairly good one, black in colour, powerful enough but in rather poor condition. Much as I try to spare him he is worked pretty hard and does not have much of a chance. He is rather a silly horse with a reputation for buck-jumping. He has tried his tricks once or twice but I have never had a serious battle with him.

We both keep off the sick list without difficulty and wear our “flannel belly bands”. These have been found of great value here and it is an order that all ranks should wear them.

We have just heard that this is the last mail by which we will be able to send you letters; hereafter or rather for a while we will only be allowed to send you those service postcards “I am well” etc etc.

We are drawing all our clothing equipment on Tuesday. The news from the Dardanelles points in that direction, either to help in the reduction of forts or to hold them. We do not worry much though we reason a good deal. European news here is very scrappy, worse than it was at home, but apparently things are satisfactory with us and almost as good again for the Russians.

Today, Sunday, has been a full day for me. On Friday night one of my men, an Englishman named Martin was climbing round the side of an Electric train to change seats. They were just leaving town for camp. Another train came along when he was on the step, struck him and killed him outright. Today was his funeral which I of course attended. The Cemetery is some distance from Cairo and I was on the go from 9am to 3.30pm and nothing to eat till then. Martin is a loss, he was a very good man indeed.

These trains here absolutely shove one another. The driving of all kinds of vehicles here is absolutely wild. There are numbers of accidents every day.

Coming home by car tonight I passed Sister Stubbs, one of the nurses who were at Gabbari with us. She and a friend, Mrs Badrey, a very excitable little Irish woman, came first with us. These women go fairdinkum wild at the sight of a soldier and became a bit of a nuisance by insisting on waving to a couple of companies of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the way to Alexandria and to all the troops along the road.

Well, Mum, this is all I can tell you at present but will not close the letter till the last moment.

Sending registered packet of photos. No more news. In great hurry.

Heaps of love and kisses to all from your loving son  
Rupert

*A*lan to his Mother, the next day:

Mena Egypt 27.2.15

Dearest Mum,

I've put most of the news in Dad's letter as it is the kind of stuff this week that will interest him so. On Wednesday we had four Generals coming to the Stadium. Two turned up – not a bad average – Maxwell and Bridges. The fighting was good and we had a splendid supper or almost dinner afterwards. They did not stay very long and said very little – a man in Maxwell's position has to keep very reserved.

Well we are off very soon – we don't know where. Straight tips for Dardanelles, Syria and France. You'll know, I dare say, before this reaches you.

We have everything, Rup and I, in clothing etc. both for hot and cold climates – thick and thin stuff Galore!

I've written to Peg and Baby and am sending you some photos of prisoners and our wounded. Ismailia was disappointing, wasn't it, in one way – just missing the fun as we did but it was a fine change and a holiday.

It is a very pretty French town with the Arab quarter in the desert on the West side. The whole of the French part is a big plantation – I don't know how they grow the trees – of firs, and some beautiful gardens. It is on the Timsah Lake (bitter) and Canal. The Canal is strongly entrenched – our Engineers have done a great deal of very fine work there. We try to brush up our French and Heron and I one evening were having a great yarn in awful French to a couple of French girls thro' the bars of their gate. It was very amusing. It started by talking to a little girl of Peg's age who went in and fetched her elder sisters. They gave us cigarettes and some very nice homemade cakes. We slowly spelt out awful French but Heron spoilt things. He said something about "Promenez vous avec moi?" and the old Tante in the background got huffy so we "Bon Soir"-ed and cleared out. We were bivouacked in the sand on the north of the town. We had two swims in the Bitter lake which were very enjoyable. There are two or three warships – one had its funnel blown off by Turkish artillery.

Eric Permezal is attached to us but will be swapped for our own man Liddless who is attached to the 5th. He is under Rupert for the present. Cedric is out here now – he is still at base on odd jobs – unattached. Our two Senior Captains have been promoted as Majors. Good smart men – they were recommended way back in Broadmeadows. I don't know whether Rup and Mason will be promoted yet.

Sunday: Charl and Ken seem happy and very satisfied with their lodgings – or rather flat. Peg wrote from Mornington – she said she would like to go back to Fintona. I daresay that it would be better – nearer home, more time for music, sport and work and more under your own care. Make her get on her dignity more to the CGS<sup>15</sup> fellows and she'll be a grand girl.

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15. Camberwell Grammar School

There is no more news, Mum. We don't know when we go or where – Syria now seems as likely as any.

I hear a rumour this morning that the Artillery ducked Bean – it serves him right if it is true.

With best love Mum, and to everyone at home  
Your affectionate son,  
Alan D Henderson Lieut 7<sup>th</sup> Btn AIF

Sunday night 28.2.15

This may be your last letter for a few weeks. I think now we are off to Jaffa or Beirut, thence to Damascus. You will get the printed cards and I may get a note thro' during the week. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade left for Alexandria today and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bgde Artillery and Ambulances too. I hope it is Syria and the Turks which are now at Birshiba. That fighting will suit us.

Mena Camp Egypt  
7.3.15

Dear Mum,

Another week of waiting and still here with promises of having to move any day. The Brigadier said this morning he did not know where we are going but he had been promised plenty of fighting. Of course he always has talked in that strain until now we almost treat him like a weather prophet and go by contraries. Nothing unusual has happened this week. We do a good deal of night work, out two nights a week at least and are getting used to it. On Friday we had our first Divisional scheme, less the Bgde which sailed away a week ago to the General only knows where. It was very successful so I hear, for in these big manoeuvres you don't see much else outside what goes on round you; we were in reserve and bivouacked from 12-5 when we were wanted suddenly right out on the flank to meet a flank attack and had to double in the sand in full marching order with greatcoats on and over two hills with the Colonel at us all the time, roaring at us to keep going. We got there just in time feeling rather winded. The rest of the week was just ordinary work. Yesterday Heron and I went out to Barrage, the centre of the irrigation department, an absolute network of canals leading to Alexandria and all over the country. We also visited the Mills, ordinary woollen mills.

Barrage village is somewhat smellier and bigger than most. The gardens are very beautiful. You get out of the station and sit on a little trolley carrying four, which a native pushes along at the run for about one mile crossing all the canals as you go over the lock bridges. All the canals are worked by locks, thro' which pass the big Nile barges carrying grain and coal for miles and miles. Peculiarly rigged with a very long yard fixed to the top of the mast, one end at the side of the boat the other way up in the air and a very big triangular sail which, as it is so high, catches the wind the canal banks would otherwise stop. The more one sees of Egypt the more one sees what we have done for it. The country is wonderfully fertile for miles and miles where the irrigation touches it – every inch a very bright green with beautiful healthy

crops everywhere. They get four crops a year in some places.

We went to the Museum also, it was my third visit with different fellows and it stands the test easily. There are some very interesting mummies of Egyptian kings, two or three thousand years old. They certainly look a little the worse for wear and as if they needed three square meals a day to fill them out and get them into good condition again. However they're wonderfully preserved and most life – like tho' the skin has dried down on to the bone.

There are some wonderful stone statues especially those of Rameses and others. You can read all the descriptions in the Guide Book.

On Wednesday I climbed the Pyramid with Captain Hunter, 469 feet. The Guide shows you the track, they're awful pests and come round you thick and pretty well pull you up between them. The view is magnificent, one can see the surface of the Nile and boats eight miles away and look right down on the camp and the excavation of the old city at the foot of the pyramids and also right into the back doors of the villages close by. Filthy mud huts crammed together. I only wish you and Dad and everyone could come away with us – when I've made my fortune you must. Seeing a strange land like this makes one very anxious to visit other countries too; if the war lasts long enough for me to save enough I think I'll go for a trip after I've been home. This of course is only imagination; you can bet your life that when this show is over it's a bee-line home for me.

While at dinner last night I saw Dean Talbot of Sydney, he looks a fine chap. He ran an evening service out here shortly after we arrived. He looks a grand chap and very well on it. Does Ken know him? Next time I might butt in and introduce myself. Dexter is also an awfully decent old chap, straight, sincere and simple. His sermon this morning was on temptation, and he spoke of Cairo as "nearly the worst city in the world" and he is quite right. Every vice is openly committed. The mixture of Mohammedan, Oriental, a very mixed population of Greek, French, Italian everything, with a big floating population of tourists, soldiers etc is scarcely conducive to much restraint. I think England will begin to straighten things up after the war.

Dexter conducts a HC service every Sunday morning at 7am just opposite. I went with Heron this morning.

We also visited yesterday All Saints' Church, Cairo – the most beautiful little church I have seen: beautifully tiled and clean. Every window is coloured and in memory of an Englishman or one of his family while the walls are covered with tablets in memory of British soldiers from Gordon, Baker, Pasha and others down, died or killed in action. The history of Modern Egypt is on its walls. There is a beautiful little chapel on one side – it was the first church I'd seen since I left home, and we felt pretty impressed I must say.

We ran across Billy and Malcolm Crowe having their dinner. They have both grown up really fine fellows – their mother is such a fine woman. I'm just waiting to see next week's programme of work before I telegraph them to meet me at dinner somewhere during the week.

Rupert is also writing and I am run out of news. I hear we shan't get a mail until the 18<sup>th</sup> – this waiting is very trying.



Well there is no more news, Mum, so I'll say Goodbye and God bless you all again. With best of love

Your very affectionate son,  
Alan D Henderson Lieut  
7<sup>th</sup> AIF

We are still as healthy as ever. In fact I'm putting it on so I'm quite worried. Give Maggie<sup>16</sup> our love, also Auntie May and Mo and Max and Julia, Carrie and Tot etc etc etc.

It is rumoured that we go to fight Turks and also that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bgde have gone to Lemnos Is (*Greece*) off Dardanelles.

*H*e writes by the same mail to his father, with his future in mind:

Mena Camp Cairo Egypt

Dear Dad

Am enclosing a draft payable at Bank of NSW for £10 to refund you for Ken's wedding present. I am trying to fix up an allotment tomorrow of 10/- per diem as the borrowing racket has got a bit too strong lately.

I wrote a long letter to Mother giving her all the news this afternoon. We are both as well as could be and anxious to get away, which we hope will be this week. At any rate it is obvious we will be moving shortly somewhere and the Brigadier this morning said we had been promised plenty of fighting. Of course that yet remains to be seen and I think we are all ready. Remember us to all in the office and our fond relations.

I am very glad that business is alright and that last year turned out alright. It is a mighty comfort. I'm still wondering what I'll do when I come back – if the war lasts very long my savings might be sufficient to put me thro' a university course – I could never let you go to the expense and risk when I was unsettled and so uncertain but when it is only my own cash I think I'll chance it. Of course as I say to Mother it is all castles in the air, but it looks to me as if it is what is the best thing for me. Perhaps Law – my business qualifications would be so valuable – however I must think a lot yet, my mind is not made up.

There is nothing more, Dad, Goodbye and God bless you.

Your affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson  
7<sup>th</sup> Battn

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16. The family maid

***B**y the same mail, from Rupert:*

Mena Camp 7.3.15

Dear Mum and Dad,

Here is another mail leaving and we are still here at Mena, expecting to go in two days' time, to where we do not know yet, carrying with us all our baggage, tents etc. We now expect to be pushed into the Dardanelles affair and then later to Europe when our base will be moved again to England. We have been told to take only warm clothes with us, of course this may mean anything for it is very cold even here at night. They are dying of cold in Armenia and also in Europe.

I am going to take only warm clothing wherever we go. Do you know I have never worn three shirts of yours yet and scarcely worn any of the under-clothes, I brought enough old stuff to wear out... Boots are our greatest trouble here, the sand and stones tear the leather away leaving the nails, these also are burnt out by the heat of the sand and constant friction. Knees and elbows also, need attention.

The second contingent chaps still continue to swank it horribly here, they think they are the absolute cream; we were never quite taken that way and are now content so long as we are clean. Well I have succeeded in meeting three nice families in Cairo. Miss Vaughan I told you about before. On Saturday night Major McNicoll took Liddelow, Connelly and myself to a Mr and Mrs Howie's place at Cubba Gardens, a sort of garden suburb of Cairo on the way to Heliopolis. We went by train to a place called Demardasche and thence by a one-man-power trolley to within a few yards of the house. This trolley line was laid by the land company who a few years ago subdivided the Cubba Gardens Estate. This trolley was originally run by them and goes right through the Estate. The niggers now run the trolley themselves, charging a half-piastre as fare. It would make you smile at home to see these trolleys, each carrying four persons, being pushed at a trot by niggers, past some very fine houses.

We had a very nice dinner and met some very nice people. A Mr and Mrs Reynolds, Mrs R teaches at the Military School, Charles Knowles the English opera singer who is a Quarter-master Farrier Sergeant in the Westminster Dragoons, a Miss Boyce and her father, and a Mrs Williams, just a young English girl who was married only four days before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade left here. She was coming out to Australia and instead met her husband here. He was a teacher at Rockhampton High School and an Englishman. He is signalling officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battn. We had some very good singing and music. They pushed me up to the piano and chose my song for me. "Because" of all things. This I valiantly sang, luckily Knowles left before my spasm.

Mrs Williams and Miss Boyce were out to see me this afternoon. I am taking a letter to him for her. I have promised them if we are here next Saturday night to go to the dance which is held at the Continental Hotel every Saturday. It is not likely we will be here.

At a meeting of officers at Brigade Headquarters this morning the Brigadier said he had been promised plenty of fighting and that very soon, I think our

turn must be about here now.

This week there is not much news to tell you. The work has been rather easier. On Wednesday (our whole holiday) I had to prosecute in a wretched court-martial. A sergeant, one of my own named McKechnie a man who has given a lot of trouble one way and another was charged with being absent without leave. He was found guilty but managed to prove that he was detained by the Military Police and got off with a very light sentence, simply forfeiture of his seniority. I will leave him at the Base if I possibly can.

We have now absorbed all the reinforcements for us in the first batch, they are a very fine lot of men indeed.

We take all these men with us and leave a certain number behind at our next base. I will keep all these men and drop a few of my worst offenders, there are only two or three thank goodness.

Last Friday, Friday night and Saturday morning we were on a big Divisional Scheme working against a skeleton enemy. We were out of course all night. I had charge of half the skeleton enemy this time and represented the Turks.

We got a great deal of fun out of it and had a great opportunity to see the whole of the manoeuvres. They were not on the whole very successful and fully demonstrated the enormous difficulty of handling transport in the desert sand. The pace of any column would be terribly slow. It took six hours to move the transport for two miles.

The water question is another very difficult of solution should we ever have to work across the desert.

Well, there is no more news that I can give you, we have been very busy with musketry and the issue of odd lots of equipment. When we leave here we will put on the web equipment as worn by the private, it will be a great advantage, but rather awkward on horseback as the Haversack and Water bottle come too low each side for comfortable riding.

Well goodbye and God bless you Mum and Dad, heaps of love and kisses to yourselves and Peg and Baby.

From Rupert  
There is a new stamp on this for Peg's collection.

*A* week later, to his brother:

Mena Camp 14.3.15

Dear Old Prof,

It is a long time since I wrote to you or it seems so anyhow. It is after 11pm now and I am tired.

This is a bright way to begin a letter, however short. Mum tells us of your honeymoon trip, of its characteristic commencement and of its characteristic end, well you are still the same old absent-minded beggar.

I think you have done very wisely and well to take a flat and board especially where you now are. You will save at that game all right. Conditions here are becoming rather trying now, heat, hot winds for two or three days at a time, dustladen and oppressive and three months of this place has quite satisfied us. We move in a few days' time now, where we do not know but the betting is against the Turks and in the Dardanelles. You will most probably know as soon as we do. We have been doing a good deal of night work and heavy trench work lately and are out all night tomorrow night awaiting attack which may come between 6pm and 6am. It is very realistic fighting at night under flare lights and carving through entanglements, it gives you some idea of the real thing.

Our second batch of reinforcements have reached us and are all coming from here to our new base with us. They are good men but poorly trained and have not made the best use of their time. Still we give them special instruction as they come and after a week, bar their condition, they are really fit to go into the ranks, in fact I will take them in preference to three or four men who have been here since we left Broadmeadows. I have met one or two nice families in Cairo, unluckily just before we leave. People here once they know you are very good; it is very funny though the lines which even English people here seem to draw, even amongst themselves, of course it is necessary to a certain extent.

Well, old man, I really must go to bed. I have a lot to write about and will do so at once, in the meantime please take the will for the deed. Could you send us a list of OTGs<sup>17</sup> who have enlisted and where they are, and if any are coming on get them to write and let me know. I may be able to help them in another Corps or collar them for myself. Heaps of love to self and Sharl from your affectionate brother,

Rupert

If you feel inclined you could gather a few scraps of information from my letters home and hand it to the *Mitre*. Don't forget to send them to us. Rup.

Don't let Sharl be lazy. Make her write some real long scandal-mongering letters.

Rup

*F*rom Alan:

Mena 14.3.15 Sunday night

Dearest Mum

Just finished my other letter to you when the one arrived dated 17<sup>th</sup> Feb – awful luck two in one week. Had packed away my pen and papers in fact. However here goes to answer it. Your remarks about St John's are very interesting.<sup>18</sup> Poor old Perry must feel like “throwing in the towel” at times – he ought to be boss in his own department. He's the “fire-escape” of all the

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17. Old Trinity Grammarians

18. This was their parish church in Camberwell.

people in his parish and yet some of them want to mould him into a wooden staircase instead of leaving him in his natural iron.

I hope the depôt's a great success. You should have told us to send you some stuff, these Egyptians are stars at "takedowns".

Wish Mrs Kerr luck with the "peace movement" and ask her from me how much the Kaiser offered her to start it, because he's made another strategic victory in causing dissension among the Allies.

You know I told you we met Willie and spoke to him for a few minute in Shephard's – in the bar by the way (don't tell her that) looking very well indeed.

I do hope you're not overdoing things again Mum in this charity line and knocking yourself out. You and Dad must still knock about and take a good many outings; we're having a rattling time so it's no good you worrying.

The Stadium does not affect the YMCA you see it does not clash with lectures or services etc.

I see you all look to France – we think it is about 6-4 on the Dardanelles. Also, the blow in March, it is still winter there and when it comes it should be in April or May for it is about then the weather gets decent.

Well Mum there's nothing else. God bless you all for thinking of us and don't forget what I told you – never believe a rumour or anything unofficial or your lives will be "little hells". Rumours are thick, the worse they are the quicker they get exaggerated and spread so "don't believe 'em". Our motto now is "is it in orders" then we've got to believe it.

Your very affectionate son  
Alan

Tell Peg I've just got her letter, it is certainly a rather newsy letter and I'll try and answer it in the morning if there is time. Also tell Lucy her letter has just arrived and has been read.

Mena Egypt  
15.3.15

Dear Dad,

Your letters dated 18<sup>th</sup> Feb arrived this morning. I am in camp this morning and am answering them now in the hopes of catching the mail – the weekly mail which closes this morning.

*(Name deleted)* being refused looks to us like a game of his father's tho' there is a chance of its being true. At any rate I remember he is 21 early this year so developments should be interesting. I can't understand his father – he ought to have a bit more 'guts' and face it – he is not doing his son or his son's name much good.

Have no fear as regards Rupert – he is doing very well. I can tell you now the two "old" Coys he took over were both weak in discipline and NCOs and training, but he is steadily kneading them into shape and will have them as

good as any very soon.<sup>19</sup> Neither worry about me. I am back with my old crowd of men and they could not be bettered in the Battn.

As to the Turkish fight, you will have heard all about it in our letters by now. We did not see very much – only “sat on our haunches” and waited.

Rupert is quite alright now and we both have plenty of belly-bands. Three newspapers arrived last week, they arrive two or three days later than the letters and we very much appreciate them. I don't think I am the one on the camel in the photo you speak of. I don't remember being photographed on one except in the pyramid group.

Ken's letter arrived this morning too. Thank him for it. I'll have to answer it later on. He did not tell us about the Bull Dog episode though but I can imagine a good deal of it.

About the missing letters – they and the newspapers had all arrived by about the end of January – perhaps we neglected to acknowledge them – writing in a hurry or mislaying them.

Tell Abercrombie we are very glad to hear of his baby's promotion to a cot. I think that is the word you had written. Ask him to remember us very kindly to Mrs Abercrombie and the “wee bairn”.

The Prince of Wales Horse is not the corps in which Boy Francis is a machine-gunner and is what is known as Reserve at home, not “regular” and more than Militia. I think you do six month's continuous on joining, then a good deal more time than the Militia or Territorials. It is a fine corps. These particulars are only from memory.

Auctioneers are doing their share. Chas Forrester jnr is in the artillery. I have seen Joe Tuckett, a private, down in the Ordinance Dept.

I'm glad Ken did well with his results in Senior Public, they will count a good deal with him.

I'll send the cable if possible and if the notice is not too short. It won't be France for Cairo is still to be our base, where our big hospital will be. You have something to comfort you there, that our hospital equipment and system are splendid.

Don't think the Regimental Doctor does everything from operating down in action – his is only the First Dressing Station from which you are sent for more extensive treatment to the Brigade Field Ambulance which has a big staff and equipment, ambulances etc, and if bad enough e.g. not likely to be right for some weeks, you go back to the big Base Hospital. Ours is the magnificent big Palace Hotel, Heliopolis, the finest hotel here with the best men to look after you. This is for Mother's benefit. As you know we carry FS<sup>20</sup> dressings in our pockets, containing two bandages in a weather-proof bag sewn up, a later patent than the kind we had at Broadmeadows.

I hope Dad you are very careful whom you show our letters to. Anything to do with internal economy of the Battn or concerning officers etc must not

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19. *Marginal note*: “Don't breathe any of this”.

20. Field Service

be repeated, as they fly round, become exaggerated and perhaps reach the people of those concerned, or if it reaches official ears it is marked against you. That is talking in extremes but there is a little in it. I'll write again and give you the news. Once we get orders to go our letters will be censored.

Your affectionate son, Alan

*The continuing uncertainty and tedium are hard to bear:*

Mena Camp

14<sup>th</sup> March 1915 Sunday

Dear Mum and Dad,

I suppose Rup has told you all the news as he had your letters this afternoon while I paid off a few duty letters – Uncle Harry, Auntie May, Rowan, Darby and one or two others. Both Uncle Harry and Auntie May were a bit hurt I think, the former wrote and I go by what you said for the latter. Perhaps it's forgetful but do they know that when Sunday afternoon comes all you feel like doing is writing home and letting everyone else go hang and when you do sit down to write more than one you have to repeat yourself over and over again till you are sick of it. That sounds horribly irritable but we work five days a week and two or three nights these days and are feeling a bit stale and sick of the desert and its surroundings. Even the pyramids come in for a great deal of abuse. In fact these romantic pieces of architecture might be a couple of old delicensed pubs for all they're thought about now. Unfortunately you can't say of the Pyramids that subject's worn out because they've a long way to go yet. There is an ironical criticism of Kitchener's saying of us that "We are here till we are fit". "Guess why the Pyramids are still here" – answer "because they are not yet fit!" And so the men who after all deserve the most sympathy pass over their long wait and staleness with similar wit and humour.

I'm very glad Peg is at Fintona – it will be better and pleasanter for both of you – she can do more work – have more fun and be a companion to you and Bubs. I suppose they are both growing up fast and furious. I hope you don't overdo that Benevolent Work. We want you to keep well and strong...

Ken and Sharl seem to have settled down pretty well – as a matter of fact I don't see how they could improve.

Dad's letter is newsy and cheerful. I'm jolly glad he had that luck – he always comes out alright. It must be his faith and what he has won thro' his unselfishness and hard work...

You must not think that every Double Coy Commander can be a Major, only two of them and Rup is 3<sup>rd</sup> in the seniority list and so must wait a bit.

Mother has triumphed again and is now President.<sup>21</sup> We're very proud (but do hope that she'll keep the Secretary in her place).

I sent Dad a refund of £10 – a Bank Draft last week on Bank of NSW. I hope he received it alright.

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21. Probably of the Hawthorn Benevolent Society

There is nothing else to tell you in the way of news. We have not been on any trips since writing last except the march to the Zoo on Thursday. There we saw two of the big aluminium pontoons the Turks had brought across the desert all torn and holed with bullets or shrapnel at Serapium.

The Giraffes are real beauties and also the Ostriches covered in beautiful black feathers. We only had a few minutes to look around.

Well Mum and Dad so long for a time. Rumour now says we go Wednesday but time enough to trouble when we get orders. Goodbye and God bless you all at Home.

Your affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson Lieut  
7<sup>th</sup> AIF

*A*lan's next letter is full of brotherly advice to his fourteen-year-old sister:

Mena Camp Saturday  
20<sup>th</sup> March 1915

Dearest Peg

Thanks for your very newsy and interesting letter of 17<sup>th</sup> Feb and am very glad that the views have taught you something about this country of strange contrasts and peoples. Cairo is a big place – its population is 600,000, the same as Melbourne about, but much more crowded.

I am very glad too to hear that you are happy at Fintona. Funnily enough the first crowd always seems the best. When I was transferred to another ½ Coy they never struck me as being as good as the first crowd and I was quite glad to get back to the old lot again.

You seem to have picked a very good group indeed for your exams. Stick to French and German or History and English and do Honours in them. You'll get to enjoy them very much.

You ought to do well at Tennis and Basketball – they are good games for your physique while if you are a good tennis-player you will get a lot of pleasure in different ways after you leave school.

Being at Fintona will give you time for the music too, tho' 1½ hrs seems a long time to practice. You get up early I suppose. Our rising time is 6.15am so that ought to be a comfort to you.

Baby and you must keep on hitting things up and helping Mum to run things – she must be very busy on the Benevolent work etc these days. Aunt Madd and Amy must have returned long ago by now to their happy homes.

Remember us to Maggie and give her our love.

Now I think I've answered that letter fairly fully. You know we will be shifting in the next few weeks to the Dardanelles where with the French we will have to rout out a force of Turks and Germans from there. The sooner the better though.



Well Peg all the rest of the news is in Mum's letter. Goodbye and Good luck for the coming year to you and Bubs.

Your affectionate brother  
Alan

*Rupert writes to his brother by the same mail, after a considerable interval:*

Mena Camp 20.3.15

Dear Prof

Things have gone on and it is a long time since I have written to you. Despite your various duties and the many things which have happened lately to attract your attention you have written to us regularly and we are very thankful, for you can give us a glimpse of home that we could or would not get from Mum and Dad.

Well everything is well with us. The camp has suffered from a slight epidemic of influenza, we have all had our turn, otherwise nothing extraordinary has happened, this accounts for the large percentage among the medically unfit being sent home from results of pneumonia. Other medically unfit sent home are suffering from varicose veins, kidney trouble, heart, chest, lungs and liver and a good many feet. You say that it is reported that 2,000 are being sent home with syphilis; now you are on absolutely safe ground if you say that there are not more than 50 (fifty) men being sent home suffering from venereal diseases; this is a very liberal estimate. There have been about 500 men leave here medically unfit, all together, that is from the whole division. Of course from now on there will be a continual stream. The total number of cases that have passed through the venereal hospital is about 600. You can see from these how greatly exaggerated have been the reports.

One of my men, a chap called Logan, got kicked in the head by a horse. He is a bit soft sometimes but will be all right in time. They are sending him home. I gave him Dad's address and told him to look in and see him in the office. Tell Dad he does not want any assistance or help or anything like that. He is a baker, has a good job to go to and also a Mother with plenty of money. I'm only sending him along as he will tell Dad about us. He thinks the world of me.

Rumours still continue to fix the day of our departure from here "within the next 3 or 4 days" but the "day" never comes and we are now fairly settled to another fortnight. Rumour today tells us that some 15,000 British troops and a French Division are landing at Alexandria. This is possibly true, as we believe that two British Divisions are coming out here and that we are waiting for them.

Another rumour states that there are some 200,000 German troops in Constantinople but no faith is attached to it. Nevertheless, if we are to undertake operations by land against the Turks we would require quite a good army. It must be remembered that they are still a nation but I don't suppose they will long exist as such. I doubt from the point of view of the balance of power that Britain would agree to her extermination. Then again comes

up the religious question. What would be the effect on the Mohammedan peoples of the world, especially our subjects?

This is not a question I have studied, we scarcely get time for this, though it is intensely interesting. We have absolutely no news of Russian or British operations in Armenia.

Some of our chaps met the officers of the 'Swiftsure' on the Canal and they told them that they then had orders to proceed to the Dardanelles after the Turkish attack. They also said that it would require a toll of 75% casualties in ships before they got through. This sounds heavy somewhat, but three Battleships looks like a good beginning.

Well, Prof, I must go to bed now. I have been interrupted since 5pm till now 11pm and there is an early reveille tomorrow.

We are out digging trenches tomorrow with a Divisional scheme on Tuesday and Wednesday.

My interruptions have been:

1st Mr Foster-Smith, one of the Directors of Education who has been to Mess with us. I will tell you about him later.

2nd Frank Henderson

3rd Hodgson

4th and last Billy Hughes who wants a transfer to the Light Horse with his uncle. I don't think he will get it.

Quite a lot which I had to tell must remain till next mail. Goodbye – love to self and Charl.

From Rupert

*R*upert to his parents:

Mena Camp 20.3.15

Dear Mum and Dad

Here we are still in Egypt and as far as we can see with no immediate prospect of clearing out. We have been going to move every second day for some time now, but the days seem to go on and fresh rumours crop up. We are very full up of this place; it is getting much hotter and decidedly oppressive and if we stay here much longer they will have to issue us with a summer uniform, but Heaven forbid we should stop here long enough for that.

We are watching the Dardanelles operation very closely. Some of the men on the 'Swiftsure' told us that there would have to be 75% of casualties amongst the ships before they could get through, the first three battleships lost is only the beginning. The Admiralty states that there are ample Naval and Military forces engaged. This looks as though we may not be wanted for some time unless they send us to France, which I wish they would.

They continue to work us pretty hard, both by day and night. Night work is really the only work that the men will take an interest in, though they always work well and cheerfully. On Monday last we had to occupy the position we had previously prepared in the afternoon, and defend it against attack at night. The enemy kept us busy from dark till 3am when he launched his main attack but he lost his way and the attack touched only our extreme left flank, the bulk of his force attacking a position where there was no enemy or rather only an imaginary one. We did not get back to camp till 4.35am. This night was the only wet night we have had since the first week in Egypt and you could count the cloudy days on your two hands.

The rest of our time has been put in route-marching and filling in old trenches. This is rather funny as in a month's time the wind will have done it all, and nobody ever goes anywhere near them to fall in.

On Wednesday we had another Divisional day and next Tuesday and Wednesday two days and a night of it again.

We hear on fairly good authority though it is scarcely credible that there are some 200,000 German troops in Constantinople and that we are waiting for the arrival of French and two British Divisions before we move. We hear also that about 15,000 Territorials landed in Alexandria yesterday and that our 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade is still there also, but this last I do not believe. I am going to write to Mrs Broadbent and see if she can find out anything for us.

We hear that very few troops have yet left England, this through letters only. Newspapers here have no news at all.

Well, who do you think came up to see us on Wednesday night, Frank Henderson, he is in the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse from WA.<sup>22</sup> He is not a big chap but medium-sized and well built; he is very quiet and has sandy hair and moustache. His twin brother Edgar I think is doing very well as an architect. Gilbert is considered the cleverest dentist in Perth, his two younger brothers are I think he said with his Father on the farm. He is the only one coming away.

Well that is all that has happened during the past week and we can see nothing immediately ahead.

Well Mum and Dad I am glad that you are pleased at my change of command, and I think I explained last week that no actual rise in rank can come my way just yet.

The responsibility is certainly fairly heavy and the worries fairly continuous as of course can only be expected. Worrying is a bad habit to get into as it is no training for quick thinking and instant action, but when you are dealing with perhaps the most complete mixture of all classes of men it is hard for a kid of 22 to do anything else...

By the way could you obtain for me, that is if there is one published, a statement of the monthly or quarterly upkeep of the Australian troops in the field. Perhaps something in the nature of a balance sheet has been laid before the house. Do not worry about even enquiring if you do not know of it. It is only to satisfy our curiosity...

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22. A first cousin

A good many of our letters as well as yours seem to have gone astray, how, when or where we do not know. I think we get most of your papers but a parcel from Helen, one or two of her letters and from others also have been lost. I hope you are getting all ours and all the photos I am sending you. Will you describe each packet as it arrives.

It would help also if you would number all your letters to us.

I am enclosing with this letter a negative and print of a snap of myself, it is not a bad one and we'll get some other snaps of ourselves and Ussher, Billy Hughes etc. I generally manage to escape the camera or be holding it myself.

I posted one lot of photos to Peg on the morning we left for Ismailia: this was rather a good collection... You should have between 200 and 300 snaps from me alone by now. I will be sending a few more in a day or so.

Well Mum and Dad I must knock off now and write to old Peg and to Baby.

Please remember us to all who have enquired after us and let our family know how we are getting on...

Heaps of love and kisses  
from Rupert

*From Alan, written about the same time with the same lack of news and action:*

Mena 21.3.15

Dearest Mum and Dad

I answered all the topics in your letters last Monday dated up to 18<sup>th</sup> February so can only tell you the news of this end...

I don't know whether I remarked on the Melbourne AA<sup>23</sup> Club letter re a Rifle Club – it was a bit of a dig Dad gave them but it served them right. Mason also thinks so – he is a member and my Coy Commander. They are a very self-satisfied crowd down there – monied young barristers mostly, and at any rate as a club they might have found out who was going away and written them a note just as the Banks Club did. Talking about shooting on miniature ranges in case of home defence comes as rather “pussy” from an Athletics Club where perhaps 50% might reasonably be expected to enlist. That is talking a bit strong but those articles in the paper complaining of the insufficient enlistment are rather annoying and sickening when one thinks of the men he himself knows who should be away by now. Oxford and Cambridge are almost empty, why should not Melb Uni be the same? Don't go repeating these remarks for fear of hurting any of our friends.

There has been some strange development lately. We were to have gone on Wednesday but hear that things were not sufficiently advanced in the Dardanelles. I'll tell you all the current rumours – that 200,000 German troops are now in Constantinople – the French are congregating in Cyprus – that our 3<sup>rd</sup> Bgde has not yet landed owing to Greece not having declared

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23. Amateur Athletics

war and our not having Lemnos Island – that British troops are arriving in Alexandria and that we are to form part of an Army of 1,000,000 to invade Austria, after of course clearing out the Dardanelles and the Turks. We are promised plenty of fighting, though, and that is one comfort but we might not be away for a month.

There is apparently something big on, and I should say a good deal depended on the success of the ships at the Dardanelles. It was a pity we have lost those three boats with two others out of action. It must have been a very determined attack yesterday.

We have been on no trips this week, not out of camp. It is getting very hot now – the sand throws it up. We have spent the last two days as we did at Broadmeadows filling up trenches. That is about all the news. Of course we may go any day and I'll try and send you a cable when we do, as you suggested in your letter.

We may get another mail tonight but as I'll be on Guard tonight I won't have time to answer you by this mail.

We are all well and happy tho' today is very warm. I'm afraid I must buy a drill uniform, it will do when I come back too.

Well Mum if we get any news I will add it this afternoon so goodbye for the present.

Your affectionate son  
Alan

*From Rupert about training manoeuvres, company problems and family feelings – 12 pages with “a bad stilo and a rotten pen”:*

Mena Camp 27.3.15

Dear Mum and Dad

This week has been I think one of the hardest we have put in in all our training. On Monday we were away early in the morning and constructed trenches, wire entanglements, trip wires etc in a defensive position; on Tuesday morning we completed a few of the trenches. At 4pm that afternoon we moved out again and occupied the position and defended it against the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. We and the 5<sup>th</sup> (*Battalion*) were in Reserve at the commencement of operations but were ordered to relieve the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in the trenches during the night. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade advanced to within 200 yards of the obstacles and there dug in. They succeeded in cutting the wires of some of our flare lights which would have enabled them to dig in without heavy loss but through faulty reconnaissance the position in which they dug was not good and they probably would have been driven out by fire in the morning. Operations ceased at dawn, troops marching in before breakfast. Needless to say there was very few minutes sleep that night.

Well at 10am that morning all mounted officers were out on a reconnaissance of the ground for an attack upon the position ourselves that night. We did not get back to camp till 1pm and left again at 4pm and carried out the

same operation on the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade but with more success. We approached the entanglements, dug in in a fairly good position right forward and in a very strong position 200 or 300 yards in rear. This to enable us to hold on next day and support the forward trenches who would probably suffer heavily during the day as of course they only had moderate cover, the digging by them being done with the small entrenching tool and only performed lying down. I had some 200 yards of deep fine trenches to construct (with pick and shovel) and did some between 11pm and 2am. We rested from 2am to 5am returning to camp again for breakfast.

This Thursday was our whole holiday and very little we felt inclined for after two nights without sleep. I tried to rest in the morning a bit but it was no go, too many interruptions, so Conder and I, just for a change of surroundings, went into Cairo late in the afternoon and had dinner at Shepherd's and went to the Kursaal for a while afterwards. We saw a very decent programme indeed.

Well Thursday night brought orders for another full night's work on Friday. Mounted officers were again sent for in the morning, plan discussed for a night assault, reconnaissance made etc. All plans and information had to be passed on to men and a lecture was called in the afternoon. We moved out at 6pm, bivouacked from 8pm till 12.30am and from then on were on our feet till we arrived in camp at 6am. The operations were entirely successful and the General said it was the best night work he had seen in Egypt but it was very hard to keep the men awake.

They had had a good rest during the day but daylight rest does not make up for the loss of two nights' rest, and a third night on top of all does not tend to make the men fresher.

The men have been resting all today but this morning we received another call to Brigade Headquarters to discuss matters and this meant no rest for awhile again. However this afternoon I managed to get a good long sleep but I am still very tired tonight. Tomorrow, Sunday, though is an easy day.

Capt McKenna has had a week in bed with Muscular Rheumatism, he feels it very much across his back. He has a batman like you, Mum, he puts as much energy in rubbing his master's back that it is very near raw, and now he is up again the friction of his clothes shakes him up some.

There has been an epidemic of influenza through the camp, all of us have had a turn and both Fat and myself have had a bit of a cough and cold. I would have cut some of this night work if McKenna had not been ill and I had not had two other officers away on special duties.

There is another thing on the cards to worry us all, unfortunately it is one of my men, my Quartermaster Sergeant who is causing the trouble. He is a man who was strongly recommended to me by the Quartermaster, by the Regimental Sgt Major and others as being just the man for this position and I appointed him when the new companies were formed.

He has now come out in his true light; he stole my official cheque book and wrote out a number of cheques to pay accounts with. He did not actually forge a signature, he wrote Major McNichol's name on them with the wrong

initial and wrongly spelt.

The cheques were considerably in excess of the amount of the a/cs he tried to pay and he has eloped with something like £150 in change and in money from the Sergeants' Mess which he has also stolen and for which he was for some time Secretary .

There is another thing; his accounts for the company were always apparently correct, clearly set out and, in fact, everything right. These were always checked by Major McNicholl and paid by cheque handed to the QMS. These are all correct but what he has been doing is to order stuff in the name of the Company in excess of our allowance. These accounts he has suppressed and has apparently disposed of the stuff elsewhere. If he has signed delivery chits for this I expect we will have to pay it. The a/cs amount to about £43.

He has done the Sergeants' Mess for something like the same amount – he has also obtained £3 on a cheque signed J McKenna, of course the wrong initial and the name wrongly spelt.

It is impossible to say what chances there are of catching him, he got twelve hours start.

Well we are all well and happy, we know that the time for our departure is actually approaching, and that General Sir Ian Hamilton arrived in Cairo yesterday. It looks as though there were a good deal of foundation for the rumour that an Army was to be pushed up through Austria.

This will be a grand move if it comes off. Russia is apparently more than getting her own back.

*(continued)* Sunday 28.3.15

General Sir Ian Hamilton is to inspect the troops out here tomorrow. What form the inspection will take we do not know.

Today it is blowing like the very devil, and we are full of and covered with sand. I think it is the worst day we have had yet. I wonder if you have heard in Melbourne yet of the concentration at Alexandria of British and French troops.

We were rather startled to see a notice in one of the local rags that Australian troops had landed in England, thinking that our 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade had gone there, but we have since seen that it is only one Motor Transport and Ammunition Supply Column, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade we believe are at Alexandria.

So Darby is going into the School of Instruction; he is not really fit for service in the infantry but a Light Horse job would suit him. He will worry a good deal if he does not go, I expect.

You say that his sister wants to marry this year, young Stevens is only a reporter on some cable station and his prospects are very medium indeed. Why can't these people hang off marrying for a while, there seems to be quite a lot of it going on.

My word you have had a dose of family all right. Aunt Mad is suffering from absolute loneliness and want of a change. I'm afraid it would take a terrible lot of shaking up to change her at all. I am glad to see Baby is still

“livening things up”, her latest episode with the Powder book shows she has not changed a scrap. It will be a terrible shame if she grows up, I expect even in this short time she has altered a good deal. Her letters do not show any great progress at school. Peg is going to be a real pretty girl and may take a bit of careful guiding just to make her look at things in the right light. It will not do to keep too tight a rein on her. Fritz is a grand chap and as you say perfectly frank and natural, but it is also natural that old Peg should like it. The only trouble is she knows she’s pretty and too much beauty and attention at an early age is conducive to light-headedness.

Prof told me in his letter that the “bhoys” had been playing tricks at Helen’s and said that he and Charl were rather disgusted. You are right – they will grow younger bye and bye.

How is Baby and her music; I am glad Dad says Peg is progressing famously, he is a hard man to please in the music line.

Mona must have had a good long stay with you. The trouble is she is not particularly good in company and there is always a spar going on between her and someone else in the house.

So they are fighting the old question of the Wet Canteen; it is rather hard to say what is best, if you asked me I would say do away with it. Our men can work well without it, they have done so more than once and it undoubtedly has a very bad effect indeed in a great many. These men of course suffer and cannot do their work and in service would probably be left behind. Now they may only be a few but every rifle counts in this game and I think it is one of the cases in which the many should suffer for the few. For twelve days we were without it at Ismailia and the health and spirits of the men after that short rest improved 50%. Even the man who has lived on it can and does get on well without it.

You talk, Dad, about doing humdrum things at home. It is real good to hear of things being done and doing at Home. A fellow does not realise really what his home actually means to him and what it stand for till he comes away from it especially on a job like this.

It is not the lack of bodily comforts by any means, for that a man gets used to and takes all in a day’s work but it is a feeling which it is impossible to explain or express. Our home to us is a sort of paradise, to us it is a place where our whole interests and ambitions are centred and the remembrance of which will influence the whole of his actions and his lives.

The man without a home seems like the man without a God and he who has a home like ours has the comfort and help of both.

Well Mum and Dad there is not much news in what I have written.

With regards to the £43 of foodstuffs which I mentioned before as having been ordered, supposedly on my company’s authority, this I have found out is all bunkum and nothing has been ordered in this way that has not been squared up, so this is one worry gone: for the rest I have nothing to do with them.



I have just heard some more good news. It is probable that Mason and I will be promoted to Major after all. Mason is pretty sure but the CO states that the Brigadier is frightened of my age. He has recommended me and told him that he thinks I am fit to carry it all right, but it is really more than I can expect. When I think that I was quite prepared to come into this Battalion as junior Captain and find myself third Senior Company Commander and CO of a double company. However please Heaven if I do get it I will be able to work up to it.

We hear today that there are over 40 transports at Alexandria, all ready for sea. I suppose they are for us but we do not expect to move for a couple of weeks all the same.

You have said in one or two letters that you are getting letters from Alan and sometimes missing letters from me, this I cannot understand. I do not think I have missed more than twice in all; we write every Sunday or any how once a week, whether there is a mail or not. Your letters to us arrive in lumps, I am sure we miss one or two occasionally and certainly do not get all the letters that are written to us, I think most of the papers come and are very interesting indeed to us. Mail day is very much looked forward to and we count up the days from one to another. Don't you be afraid that your letters are stale and uninteresting or say that nothing has happened of interest etc, any little detail no matter how trivial as long as it concerns you all at home is of very great moment to us, write them all.

Billy Hughes will get to the Light Horse I think; they are working a scheme by which he will become Orderly Officer on his uncle's staff. You must not mention this yet as of course it may not come off. Ussher is getting on splendidly, you would scarcely know the same Neville. He is twice as strong as he was. The CO is getting a tremendous size. Colonel Semmens has not been well for a day or so, I am afraid he is not really strong enough for this work.

I am getting a few more snaps together for you. I am sorry that we do not figure in them ourselves but nevertheless I think they will interest you.

We all wear our regimental colours now in a small band on the arm about 1½ inches from the shoulder. We have one color for the Brigade, Red, and each Regiment has one color of its own in addition which is worn over the Brigade colors. Ours is rather pretty, chocolate and red. The Transport wagons etc. of each Battalion also have small flags on them; this assists identification very much.

Well Mum and Dad I can give you no more news, remember us to all our friends and to all who ask after us, and to Maggie give our very best wishes. Heaps of love to you both and to Peg and Baby. God bless and keep you all safe and sound and happy.

From your affectionate son,  
Rupert

*F*rom Alan at the same time:

Mena 28.3.15<sup>24</sup>

Dear Mum and Dad

I will answer your letters of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February and then tell you the little news there is.

Two papers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Feb have arrived, a *Punch* and a *Herald*, but the *Herald* with your photo has not come to hand nor *The Argus* with your letter in. They will come next mail I expect. . .

Where did you get the stories of our rumoured move to France? We were to have gone to the Dardanelles, as I said, last week and will eventually go there but France never seemed so very much on the cards. I'll tell you what the position seems now. Ian Hamilton arrived yesterday to take command of the Allied force that is soon to move North, against the Turks and up thro' Austria. It also looks as if Italy is coming in but that will not affect us directly. Bulgaria and Rumania will be at one another and Bulgaria against the Turks.

Apparently after clearing up the Turks a large force will invade Austria, who it is thought will then come to terms and let us run up to the German frontier. That is in short another of my fairy-tales. The ship this friend of Darby's is in is at Alexandria with orders to convey troops thence to the Dardanelles. When the movement will start I don't know. Ian Hamilton inspects the Division tomorrow. How many of us out at Lilydale thought we would see him again in such a place under such circumstances as this. He is a smart soldier and should do well. I suppose the move will come in the next few weeks and depends on the bombardment and the other nations coming in.

We now wear Web Equipment – one cannot tell an officer from a man now more than 20yds away, and we have got rid of our swords at last and carry a revolver only. It is much more convenient and comfortable as you can carry more clothes and rations just the same as the men.

Our work has been very good lately. Some fine Brigade schemes at night which have been very successful indeed. Also our entrenchments have been very good. We have been out three nights in the last week – it is all Brigade or Divisional work now and very interesting. The night work saves us the heat of the day. I had the misfortune to be captured by an enemy patrol while on reconaissance the other night.

We all wear colours now on the arm near the shoulder our colours are red and chocolate. If I get any more I'll send you home a bit to wear. Red is the colour of the Bgde while each of the four Battns wears a different colour with it. It consists of two bands about 3 x 1 inches with the chocolate on the top.

It does not seem fair to think the Germans or Austrians treat their prisoners any worse than the Allies; from what we hear they are just the same. Besides an Officer is an Officer always so don't get anxious.

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24. Dated 28.4.15, an obvious error.

I omitted to tell you that Frank Henderson<sup>25</sup> came up last week. He is a quiet country chap with a moustache and almost ginger – a very decent chap too. His two brothers, the twins, are doing very well in Perth, one as an architect the other as a leading dentist. Victor seems a different type from his description, very tall and very dark. He helps on the farm tho' he has other ambitions. He studies all naval manuals and all matters of defence very keenly. Frank reckons he should be a soldier as he has such a power of command. He is Secretary of the Progress League, is working himself up and intends to be a Politician. Frank married against his father's wish but his wife died 18 months after marriage. He is now back with his father working on the farm and says with a good season or two they should be alright.

I hear there has been some serious rioting in Singapore – have you heard from Elliott at all – there were four officers and over 100 casualties.

I'm glad to hear Peg and Baby are doing well at Music, they must be growing up, it is six months since we saw them last. Give them our love.

Mother seems to be working terribly hard – don't overdo it and if you are one of the heads distribute the work evenly and keep the subordinates up to scratch. Hughes has been talking of transferring to the Light Horse – he would be very silly. Rupert will tell you his final decision. Neville is doing well and is a big strapping chap now. He and Hughes with Gibbs and West are Rupert's platoon sergeants – fine chaps – he needs them as his is a country company and therefore short of non-coms.<sup>26</sup>

Ken seems very happy and contented with his life, also with the prospects for the year. With a year or two more at Grammar he should be fitted for big positions though he must not be too anxious. Does Dad know Heron of the Commercial Bank? His son is a subaltern with me tho' junior. He is a very decent fellow and is doing well. We get on well together.

I thought I saw Jules Heneric in a Captain's uniform in Cairo the other night. It was only a glance in a crowd but as he was a Capt at Sydney Grammar he may be away with a Sydney Battn. I must find out. Rex would know if you see him.

I have not seen Willie Kerr or the Cranes again tho' I intend to if possible have dinner with the latter.

Today is a typical summer or advanced spring day – sand everywhere – a strong hot southerly straight off the desert – it always gives me a bit of a headache.

Everyone here is well and happy. We settle down and peg along now not troubling as to when we clear away these days as we did in Broadmeadows. It is peculiar how this training does that – a soldier gets into the habit of never being surprised – just does what he is told with a few growls and swears and does not think anything more about it. It is a good life and the discipline and command ought to do me a good deal of good.

Things are quiet now. The men have steadied into a normal stride and there is nothing to worry about in Australia. As it is the pantomime only lasted a month.

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25. His cousin

26. Non-commissioned Officers

There is no more news to tell you. Rupert is writing too. We must repeat ourselves very monotonously.

Goodbye with love to all.  
Your very affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson Lieut  
7<sup>th</sup> AIF

*The beginning of April sees movement and both write briefly with intent to reassure their parents:*

Mena Camp 2.4.15<sup>27</sup>

Dearest Mum and Dad,

We are actually off at last, our destination we do not know, but we hear that we will be on the boat for three days; this means I expect the Dardanelles.

We have been told that before two weeks are out we will be fighting, our objective is we expect Constantinople.

Well we have come upon Easter time practically without knowing it, what I mean is without quite realising the season of the year, practically no difference has been made in our lives for us. Yesterday, Good Friday, we spent quietly in camp but the day was marked by a riot in Cairo, started by the Maori reinforcements and the New Zealanders and helped on by them. One man was shot dead and three or four more were wounded by a picquet that lost its head.

I have not time to tell you of this, the postman has just got his orders to close his mailbag with what letters he has and is coming here in five minutes for mine.

Well, little Mum, for a while I expect it must be postcards, but these are only written for speediness in delivery. Letters are allowed but are held up by the censors, you can be sure that we will write every possible chance.

Well all I can say is Goodbye and God bless and take care of you all, your magnificent faith in Him is of great comfort to us as it is to you and I know that He will answer all your prayers and return us safely to you.

He has given us such a Home that it has been the lot of few men to enjoy and for this and all that it means to us we must thank Him day by day and ask for strength to live up to the standards which you have set for us.

God bless and keep you all safe and sound for us to return to. All the love and kisses which I can give you Mum, Dad, Peg, Baby, Ken and all,

from Rupert

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27. Dated 2.4. 14 in error

*A*lan writes two notes the next day:

Mena 3.4.15

Dearest Mum

Just a line to say we may leave tomorrow for a destination you will have guessed or learnt long before this reaches home. Rupert and I are both well and fit.

The Generals reckon the Division ready to meet anything. I must not say anything more. Goodbye and God bless you and Dad, Peg, Baby, Ken and everyone else at home, with best love.

Your affectionate son, Alan

Mena Camp Egypt 3.4.15

Dearest Mum and Dad,

Have just heard that we move tomorrow to Alexandria to embark. We are promised plenty of fighting as soon as we land, within a fortnight, so the Brig says though whether we call at Lemnos first we do not know. Our Regiment has been honoured again, very highly honoured indeed, we provide the landing party and it is expected we will be opposed at once. Don't let this worry you, a few hours more or less makes no difference, while the honour of belonging to the Regmt first at it more than balances it. We are both well and very fit; our Generals consider the Division is fit to meet anything we may be required to run up against. Again don't let rumours or reports worry you in the least, wait for official facts. I can't say any more. With best love and kisses to Peg and Baby, to everyone else, Dad, Ken and yourself – God bless you all at home.

Your very affectionate son,  
Alan D Henderson

*There follow two cablegrams with "Both well love" and "all splendid kind regards". These were lodged 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> April and received in Melbourne on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Alan writes by postcards on 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April:*

6.4.15

Dear Mother,

Am in port – don't know when we sail. Well and happy. No more news. Rup on another boat.

Your affectionate son  
Goodbye  
Alan D Henderson  
Lieut 7 AIF

8.4.15

Dear Mother and Dad,

Just a note to let you know I am well. I cannot give you any news, but you will have learnt all about us long before this reaches you. Everything in general, men etc is satisfactory and all very happy. Give my love to Peg and Baby and everyone else and make them all write regularly as they have up to now. Have just read your (Dad's) letter of 9<sup>th</sup> March and Baby's – the rest of the mail has not arrived yet, I am very glad to know you are all right at home. So long for the present with best love.

Your very affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson Lt  
Rup also well and fit.

*T*here are two letters from Rupert dated 12.4.15, one on Union Castle Line letterhead and incomplete, possibly interrupted:

Dear Mum and Dad

A good many things have happened since my last letter and Cablegram. We have sailed from Alexandria and are now lying at Lemnos Island and awaiting the arrival of about 50 more transports. There are all ready some 30 or 40 here.

When or where we move it is impossible to say, but we expect within the next few days.

*(unsigned)*

*T*he second gives a more complete account of their movements. It bears the stamp of the Censor:

12.4.15

How? When? Where?

Dear Mum and Dad

Just before we left I got your letter of 9<sup>th</sup> March and passed it on to Alan. We have left Cairo and Alexandria and are now anchored waiting the arrival of the rest of the transports. From my previous letters you can gather where we are and probably what we will be doing in a few days' time. Most likely by the time you get this our whereabouts will have been announced in the papers.

At Alexandria we had an opportunity of seeing some types of French soldiers, from coal black "Senegalese" in pale blue uniforms to "Zouaves" in blue coats and baggy red trousers and the French Foreign Legion in short jackets and loose red trousers, also Artillery in brown corduroy and cavalry in dark blue. We used to think that these uniforms were exaggerated in the pantomime but really they are not. General d'Amade the French General wears a very large red plume in his cap and his staff wear decorations to match.

It is rather funny their censoring all our letters from Alexandria. There was a neutral warship in the bay, the USS 'Tennessee', chock full of Germans. This ship you will remember was at Alexandria when we arrived there. We saw her steam in from the Quarantine Station.

There are a number of Germans or pro-Germans in the 'Tennessee' crew. One night about 80 of them were lauding the Kaiser and slinging off at the British and the King in a restaurant in Alexandria. Our fellows sent the whole lot back to the 'Tennessee' stark naked.

Another time one of the firemen from our own ship laid out five of them who were drinking the Kaiser's health. What is the good of censoring our letters with this sort of thing in the very centre of all our movements.

We moved from Cairo by night. We started from Mena at 9.50pm and marched to Cairo Station, arriving about 1.30am. Our train had to be loaded with all our ammunition and baggage wagons and all our kits which are to be left at our base in Alexandria. I don't know when we will see this stuff again, however we have quite enough to get along with in our valises.

The CO has been pretty crook with influenza the last few days and I had charge of the moving and en training the "left" half of the Battalion, Major Blezard taking the "right" half. Their train went some hours before ours.

We started to en train at 2.50am and had everything finished and most of the men asleep in the carriages by 3.30; the train was not scheduled to leave till 5am.

We reached Alexandria at 10am and got the men and wagons on board without any trouble. The horses are in another ship. Alan's Company, "A" Coy, is also travelling separately from us.

The Officers are exceptionally comfortable here and the men are well-fed but have not the same troop decks as in the 'Hororata'. We are just as overcrowded.

They have just called for the mail to be collected and a tug is waiting for our share. Also this letter has to be censored. So goodbye and God bless you all, from

Rupert

*A*lan writes apparently from Lemnos, but undated, in pencil:

In Harbour Sunday

Dear Mother and Dad,

At last we have left Egypt behind and after a few days' pleasant trip are now in harbour, waiting for orders. I can't say what harbour but you will have learnt that long before you get this. A great deal happens in one month these times. We've had a beautiful trip and are enjoying beautiful weather at present, sunny and cool. The Mediterranean deserves its name for the wonderful blues

it shows. From the darkest of deep to a remarkable light blue, it always is the same colour and never seems to change into green like other oceans. I'm afraid my descriptions are not very vivid so I won't bother you any further.

Dad's letter reached us in Egypt. Letters from Mother, Lucy, Mrs Ramsay and Rowan were delivered here today with two *Age's* and a *Herald* with Mother's photo (and not a half-bad one at that) and a *Punch* sent by Darb showing him as successful in Accountancy. Rowan tells me of his appointment – I suppose his people are worried but they ought to have resigned themselves long ago. He seems in the highest spirits.

Mrs Ramsay discourses on things in general – tell her we were very grateful for the papers and I'll write if I get time. She says Helen is worried, as Alec thinks he ought to enlist. What is the latest betting?

Lucy has nothing particular to say only jokes about the family etc, a jolly, cheerful sort of letter. Is the war affecting the Captain?<sup>28</sup> In one letter she thought he might go on Active Service.

I don't think I have to answer anything in your own letter except to warn you again against rumours – if anything happens you will hear through official channels pretty quickly, and you can soon find the truth or what is untrue from a certain source. Don't overdo things in that Benevolent Society line, it will only wear you out and you ought to take a little relaxation – if you can't stand theatres and amusement of that kind make a point of a few quiet trips for weekends with Dad, say to the seaside or for a quiet drive.

Good for you against that Vida Goldstein-Pankhurst crowd<sup>29</sup>. I hope you put the stopper on their humbug. They must love you for putting up that fight against their damned selfish scheming. They are only out for booty right enough.

Baby's present was very amusing – was it very difficult to explain? That little nipper must be growing up fast and certainly looks as if she were going to be pretty smart. That little square chin like Rupert's will get her on all right. Has she sparred with Betty lately?

I hear Peg is getting prettier every day. I'm very glad for her sake because it will help her to have a much better time... Is Fritz still very friendly?

Dad says he has lent the photos to Uncle Ned. He is very silly to part with them at all – for one thing they might very easily be photos of troop transports etc. for which we might get into serious trouble for sending to you. You must keep them with you, we don't want any pinched as they could very easily be, and if the staff in Melbourne heard or saw them it might not mean an open row but all the same is all kept against you at Head Qtrs. Of course this is a side that you and Dad would never think of, not knowing the deep and silent ways of Military things. The same, more or less, applies to our letters.

Has Ken surmounted the difficulty of the "pram" yet? It certainly must be rather trying but it's very funny all the same. Give them both our love and

---

28. Fred Tickell RAN (retired), father of Sharley and Lucy.

29. Goldstein and Pankhurst were early Feminists and Pacifists.



wish them luck.

I can't say much else. We are both in excellent health and spirits, in fact everyone is, the change has been most refreshing and we are all like a lot of schoolboys. Give all our relations and friends our love, with heaps to you and Dad and the nippers.

Your very affectionate son  
Alan D Henderson Lieut 7<sup>th</sup> AIF

*T*here follow two short notes to his young sisters, aged 6 and 14:

Dear Baby,

Thankyou very much for your letter. It was bonza. Your sums are splendid, so is your writing. I am so glad you liked the panto. Best love and kisses. Tooty fruity, chin-chin, your kisses went bonza! Your loving brother

Fat  
0000  
xxxx

Give Mum and Dad and Peg a few and Ken and Sharl one each.

Dear Peg,

Just a line to say how glad I am you like Fintona again and are doing so well in your music. Does Fritz still run you about in the motor-car? He is a real fine chap. Remember me to him. Don't forget to write to us regularly. Your loving brother

Alan

Thursday  
15.4.15

Dear Mum and Dad

Still in harbour and well and happy but very little to tell you. As you can imagine, our surroundings are very varied and interesting. We expect our final move in the next few days then you will hear all about it in the newspapers if you have not heard already. The shore looks fertile, beautiful green grass with a barren steep ridge a couple of miles inland. Little villages here and there and plenty of sheep and cattle grazing around. I hope to have a trip ashore tomorrow and a look around.

We received a fine mail last Sunday – Ramsays, Tickells, Looslis, Stillmans, Colin and Rowan which we managed to swap round so we have both seen them all. We shifted our mooring two days ago so I have not seen Rup since. Johnston, the senior sub is laid up with a septic throat and I'm afraid he will be out of things for a week or two. Heron showed me a cutting in the *Bulletin* which said Q'Loughlin had bought Goathlands, his home of course. I

knew it was a misprint but will not tell him till we are away from here as Dad said it was confidential.

The papers were very interesting. Life on board ship is just the same. I'm afraid that's all I can tell you, but you said to send anything if only a word. I hope Prof and Sharl are still comfortable and leading the light and joyful lives of most "newlyweds". I just hear that this is the same mail as my previous letter of last Sunday but as it is five days later you will appreciate it all the same. Well Goodbye and God bless you all at home with best love to you all and Peg and Baby.

Your affectionate son, Alan

This may be our last mail for a few weeks. I'm sending off a few short notes to payoff all our debts. Tell Dad to let Uncle Harry know the news now and then; he asked me to tell him to write to him as he did not think we would have the time. Let Stotty know we got her letter and give her our love – also Gwen and remember us to Auntie Julie, Auntie May and all.

These messages might soften down their expectations for letters.

Fat

*Writing materials must have been in short supply. Alan's next letter is written a week later and in pencil on a folding letter form.*

Thursday 22.4.15

Dear Mother,

We are still waiting here in harbour but expecting to move any hour. Life on board this old tramp is quiet and humdrum. We spent the last few days preparing our maps and colouring them up. They are very good and well prepared. We have been given only a very general idea of the operations but I can tell you that the Australians will have plenty to do and a great opportunity of making a name for themselves. We get no news at all but a rumour comes through of another attack on Egypt. That was only to be expected but the Indian troops there will be much too strong for them.

A transport was attacked by a torpedo boat the other day. The torpedo boat gave them ten minutes to get into the boats and instead of keeping it off with rifle fire, as you can a torpedo boat, and bolting, the captain of the ship ordered the boats to be lowered. The 'falls' of one boat gave way and about 60 men were lost. Two of our destroyers came up then and chased her away – she fired three torpedos at the transport, all missing and was run ashore by the destroyers. The troops were either British or NZ – it was a great pity to have so many lives carelessly thrown away.

That's all the news and I must hurry to catch the boat. I hear Rup is well and so am I.

Your affectionate son  
Alan



Dearest Mum & Dad

First and foremost I am strong and well. Alan was wounded on the day we landed, during the afternoon. I was quite close to him just a few moments before and moved down the line to see how another part of it was getting along. When I returned he had been taken to the rear. Shot in the right side but not seriously. I have since heard from him that he was getting on all right.

We effected our landing under heavy fire and against heavy odds. I am hoping for a chance to write and tell you all about it. I was in command of the Battalion during the first five days of our fighting. The Colonel was wounded on the Sunday and the next session so it was up to me. We are only about half our effective strength and have been given a new Colonel. Col. Garter side sent Col. Elliott is well. We had two days, Sunday and Monday, of I should think as heavy fighting as this war has ever seen and our troops have by now earned a name and have a reputation to uphold. We have absolutely established ourselves and are strongly entrenched and ready for a

Rupert's final postcard

*The final words from Alan are written the next day in pencil on six Greek postcards, one each to his sisters and four to his parents, all exceeding difficult to read. To the six-year-old sister:*

23.4.15

Dear old Bubs,

Or should I say Lynette – you seem to be growing up so with your beautiful handwriting. Thanks so much for your love and kisses. Give my love to all at Fintona and everyone at home – also Mo. Have you put your hair up yet? It's nearly time isn't it?

Your loving brother  
Fat

*To the pretty young 14-year-old:*

23.4.15

Dear old Peg,

Am so glad you are so happy at Fintona and wish you every luck in your work and games. I hope you got your blazer – remember me to Fritz and Kath. All the news is in Mother's postcards.

Well, best love old girl.

Your affecte brother Alan

*For his parents:*

Dear Mum and Dad,

Rowed over to Rup's ship last night for our Coy's mails amongst which were Dad's letter, yours and Ken's, Sharl's and Ken's of same date. They were most acceptable as all mails are. Rup looks well, as do all. We don't know when we move but sometime very soon. The Colonel and all are well. You will have learnt that poor Col Semmens' health gave way – most of us expected it from the time we were on the 'Hororata' with him. Our second Maj MacNicol has been promoted Lt Col and put in charge of the Regiment. He is a smart soldier... I had a fine row with a crew of sailors, half of them naval men and I had mess with them all.

Ken and Sharl seem settling down very happily and you seem to be up to your neck in work at present and as Ken says "suddenly blossomed into greatness". I hope you go on sweeping the floor with the Goldstein-Pankhurst crowd. You ought to be able to run your depôt on our clothes alone. I don't think I'll be able to get into any of mine again. I've "swelled visibly". Have only had time to run thro' your letters and am so glad the nippers are happy at school. Did Peg get the blazer? You must encourage her sport.

Baby must be growing up very fast now and as Dad says wonderment is also expressed at this end at some of those coming away. The talk about Col

Wanliss is quite unjustified from what I have heard of him. Your satisfaction at being with the 7<sup>th</sup> is quite right – its discipline and military work is far above the rest of the Bgde. What is this tale of Auntie Julia's about Carrie being involved in a land case or bad cash – but I suppose I'll hear next mail.

That seems to be all the news Mother except that we often talk and always think of you at home. There is no place like it. The sea is a great place to think on at night. Don't let Dad work too hard and make him play plenty of golf. There goes Mason rousing on Heron for not being up. He says "When you're as old as I am you'll need all the sleep you can get", having just woken up himself. His great age is just 35. He is an awfully good fellow tho' and trains his subs very well indeed. He got the Majority rendered vacant by MacNicol's going. Rup was also recommended but the Brig said he was too young and he has already given our Regmt three, one more than any other Regmt. He is a man of fairly extensive experience, being on Methuen's staff in Africa and has travelled a good deal.

That is all the news now so I will say Goodbye. Give my love to all with best love to you and Dad and the nippers.

Your affectionate son,  
Alan  
Love to Maggie

*In these letters there is no further word from Alan, but the Australian War Memorial hold the letter he wrote to his parents on the eve of the landing:*

At last we make our final move and very soon we will have started to do what we came away for and have waited so long to do. While you are in church tomorrow thinking of us, we may be needing all your prayers as it is either going to be a hard fight or an easy walk in, but everything is ready and everyone quietly confident of success. It is going to be Australia's chance and she makes a tradition out of this that she must always look back on. God grant it will be a great one. The importance of this alone seems stupendous to Australia while the effect of success on the war itself will be even greater. The Battalion (7<sup>th</sup>) is up in the front again with an important job before it, and there seems no reason why it should not do well.

...I will be the senior sub.

Rupert's ship is close by, and need have no fear of his success, he is pretty thorough and careful in everything he does...

P.S. This censorship seems peculiar. There is a Sydney mail on board in which it is stated where we were coming, and giving the General's name and a number of particulars.

*The 7<sup>th</sup> Battn came under very heavy fire at the landing on April 25<sup>th</sup> and he was mortally wounded by a shot to the stomach. He was evacuated to the hospital ship 'Seang Choon' and died it seems next day – the exact date seems uncertain. He was buried at sea and his name is recorded on the memorial wall at Lone Pine Cemetery.*

*Rupert survived the landing and the fierce and confused fighting of the first fourteen days, seeing his senior officers succumb one by one to death in action or serious wounding. He finally found time for a rushed and crowded note in pencil on an Army-issue card. He has lost track of the date. It was his final message.*

On Active Service in Gallipoli.

*Received AIF postage 21<sup>st</sup> June*

Dear Mum and Dad

First and foremost I am strong and well. Alan was wounded on the day we landed during the afternoon. I was quite close to him just a few moments before and moved down the line to see how another part of it was getting along. When I returned he had been taken to the rear, shot in the right side but not seriously. I have since heard from him that he was getting on alright.

We effected our landing under heavy fire and against heavy odds; I am hoping for a chance to write and tell you all about it. I was in command of the Battalion during the first five days of our fighting; the Colonel was wounded on the Sunday (the day of the Landing) and likewise the next seniors so it was up to me. We are only about half our expected strength, and have been given a new CO, Col Gartside, until Col Elliott is well. I am 2<sup>nd</sup> in command. We had two days, Sunday and Monday, of I should think as heavy fighting as this war has ever seen and our troops have by now earned a name and have a reputation to uphold. We have absolutely established ourselves and are strongly entrenched and ready for a forward movement.

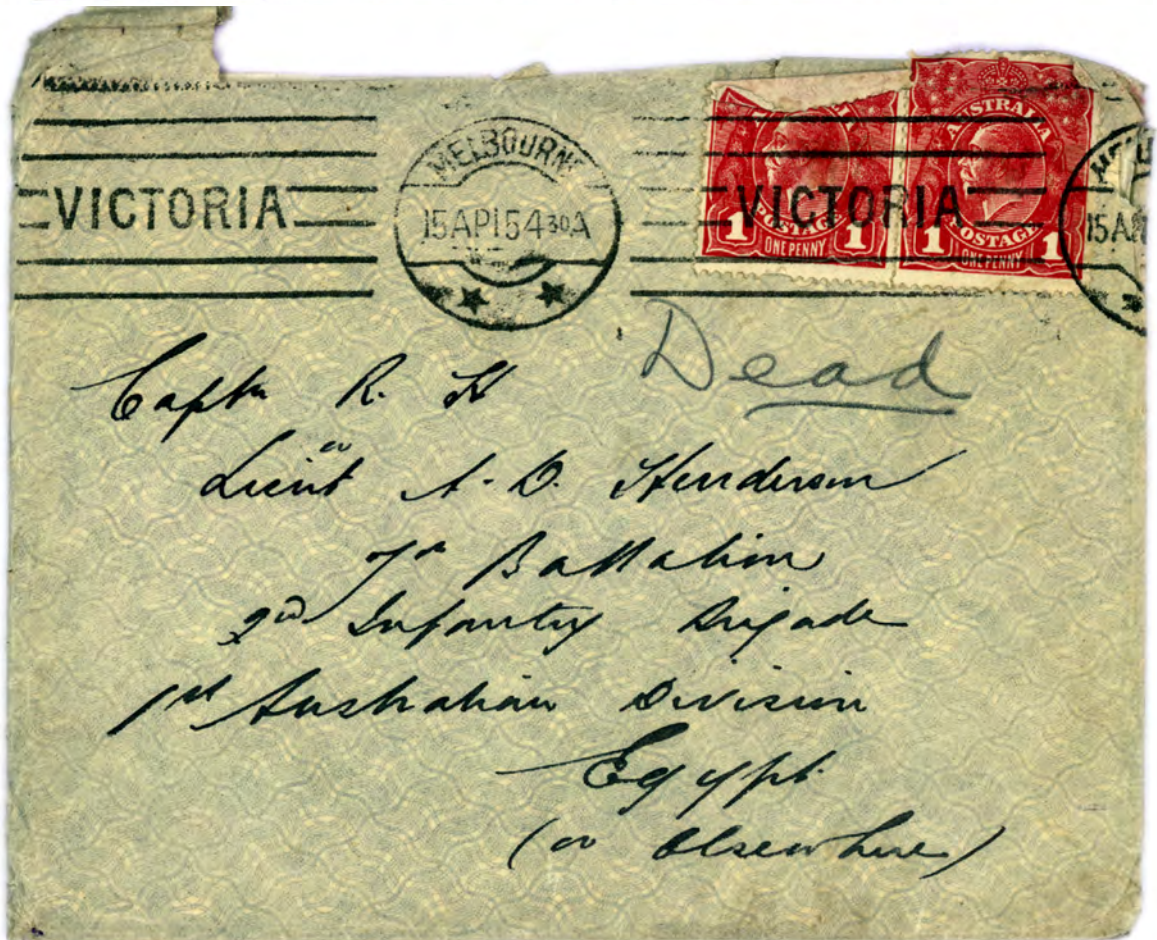
Our men were very much scattered and those I could concentrate were not a large number to handle. They are fine chaps and stuck to me in a couple of very tight corners on the Sunday and especially on the Monday. Fire was particularly severe and gruelling in a key position and a mad fool who considered a position untenable ordered his men to retire leaving part of our right centre exposed and unprotected. The retirement upset part of the men who retired too quickly (not men of 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade). It was hard work rallying these men and getting others to go forward however we did it alright.

Well I must stop now Mum,

Thank God I am alright. Alan, I am sure, is absolutely safe. Heaps of love.  
Goodbye and God bless you all

Rupert Henderson

*Rupert was killed at Cape Helles on May 8<sup>th</sup> by a sniper's shot to the chest. He died within minutes and his grave is in the Redoubt Cemetery.*



Letters returned to their parents from the Dead Letter Office.

## Postscript

Rupert took command of the Battalion for about a week before the appointment of Colonel Gartside, and again after that officer was killed in action. Two weeks after the landing, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, he himself was shot in the chest and died within a few minutes. His grave is in the Redoubt Cemetery on Cape Helles.

From the letters written to their parents by Colonel "Pompey" Elliott we learn more of the action and of the deaths of Alan and Rupert. His first letter is written after Alan's wounding and evacuation on the 'Seang Choon', and before he knew of Rupert's death.

Heliopolis Hospital Egypt  
11.5.15

Dear Mr Henderson,

Please allow me to express my deepest sympathy to yourself and Mrs Henderson and family in regard to poor Allan's death. As I was amongst one of the earliest wounded myself I had little opportunity to observe him personally but as I lay on the Beach waiting to be taken off to the ship a number of his men were laid beside me and on my asking how things were going with him they all remarked on his coolness and intrepidity. They were lying on the crest of a ridge swept on the front by rifle and machine gun fire and from the right front and left by shrapnel. To the latter it was impossible to make any reply as our artillery had not yet landed and in the scrub it was impossible to see the Turks in front and to effectively reply to their fire. He continually impressed his men not to yield a foot. "Remember you are Britons, men," he said again and again. "We must not retreat whatever happens." He firmly restrained all unwounded men from assisting wounded men to go to the dressing station, a tendency which as the fighting became hotter began to be rather marked and so reduced the firing line considerably. But Allan would not allow this on any consideration and those who could not walk back had to lie there and await the stretcher-bearers.

I am not sure as to the nature of his wound but I am told he was shot through the chest later in the afternoon. He was taken aboard a transport for removal here but died on his way across and was buried at sea. Poor gallant boy. It is a sad and early end to such a promising career and I feel a deep responsibility in that I had so much to do in bringing him away. God comfort you all.

Early in the day he saved the life of a Turk sniper who was suspected of having shot Major Blezard who fell dangerously wounded a few moments before. This man suddenly started up from the bushes in which he had been lurking. Someone fired and struck him in the arm. Three of our men rushed him and were about to bayonet him when Allan interfered, the man having thrown down his rifle on being hit and thrown up his arms. "We are not going to be as bad as the Turks, men," he said, "and kill wounded prisoners".



He sent the man back to Headquarters.

Rupert was in command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion when last I heard, all senior to him, myself, Major Blezard, Major Jackson and Major Mason having been disabled. I hope to soon return, but he must get his Majority out of it. All reports indicate that he has been utterly indifferent to his own safety and has had most miraculous escapes from death. Lieut Conder who was with him and is now here with three bullet wounds, and is also suffering from concussion from the bursting of a shell, is full of admiration for him.

He was close by Rupert all this time and in addition to his wounds had his clothes pierced no less than 16 times. Rupert went through the same hail of bullets from the machine guns and shrapnel and was not touched and throughout was as cool as on parade.

You have every reason to be proud of your sons and the work they are doing for their country.

I may add that all the officers of the 7<sup>th</sup> have given me every satisfaction by their bearing in the field and the men were magnificent. Unfortunately our losses have been very great. I myself do not know how many as no official reports have reached me, in addition to Lieut Conder who will be some time before he is fit for duty I fear however that Capt McKenna and Lieut Blick of Rupert's Company are dead and that Lieut Rogers is severely wounded. He is in Alexandria. Most of the other Coys are in a like state and I estimate that half of the men have been killed or wounded.

I am writing this as best I can in bed in this hospital. My wound is practically healed but I shall be lame for a while until the muscles get strong again. I hope to rejoin the front next week.

Yours very sincerely  
H E Elliott

Colonel Elliott's next letter was written six weeks later, again in pencil on an 'A' form for Messages or Signals. It is postmarked Field PO:

26.6.15

Dear Mr Henderson,

Your letter of 19<sup>th</sup> May has just reached me. You will have by this time received my first letter to you regarding Allan's death, written from the hospital in Cairo. I can add no more to what I then said. He was wounded on the day of the landing and as far as I can ascertain about 2 or 3pm. He was in the firing line the whole time from the landing, encouraging the men to advance and holding them to it when their losses counselled retreat. "No retreat, remember you are Britons, men" were his words as some of his men told me. He was shot in the stomach and his case was hopeless from the first. He lingered for two or three days but died before reaching Alexandria and was buried at sea on 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>29</sup> Rupert first learnt of his death before leaving the Kata Tepe landing place for Cape Helles. He was informed of Allan's death by Lieut Johnston who had not landed in the first

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<sup>29</sup>. Actually the 26<sup>th</sup> according to a letter from Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Laver.

instance here owing to illness but had gone to Alexandria with wounded, and returned in time to take part in the great charge near Krithea which has rendered the name of the Victorian Brigade, and in particular the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Battalions, famous throughout the Army here, in which both he and Rupert fell.

I have felt the death of these two more than all the others and they are many, for the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion at present is little more than a name. Both Johnston and Rupert came in a peculiar degree under my instruction in the 5<sup>th</sup> AIR and both had they been spared would have earned a great name. I asked both personally to join me in the 7<sup>th</sup> before they had decided to volunteer and I never had the slightest reason to doubt my judgement but every day confirmed it more and more. No one could have proved more loyal and trustworthy than they – and indeed all my officers – have proved. But I feel peculiarly responsible for their deaths, and though there is no doubt that they would have come in any case, I cannot forget the fact that it was by my invitation they came.

Rupert lived right through the charge at Krithea on the Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May last, although he exposed himself throughout in the most recklessly courageous manner, but was struck in the centre of the chest by a bullet as he stood watching the men entrench themselves in front of the enemy who had fallen back. He lived only a few minutes I hear. He is buried not far from where he fell. Krithea is a small village about 2 or 3 miles from Cape Helles and he is buried at a spot between the two. I cannot describe the spot more nearly. I have already told you how brilliantly Rupert behaved here when all officers senior to himself being wounded he commanded the Battalion for nearly a week with great success. Had he lived another day he would have got his Majority. I have also written that I am very hopeful of getting the posthumous grant of a DSO for his service here. I enclose a scrap of paper which you may treasure. It is the last message I received from Rupert. I was wounded a few minutes afterwards and of course did not receive any later messages. Paper and ink is quite unobtainable here at present.

A good number of the wounded are now returning and I am endeavouring to build up the Regiment again. I wish I had officers like your poor boys to help me. Geoff MacCrae has returned. He was the next junior after Rupert and he has received the vacant majority. With deepest sympathy to you and Mrs Henderson and family,

Yours very sincerely  
H E Elliott

PS I am quite well again now.

PPS With regard to Capt Hodgson. He was wounded in the head by a spent bullet which just penetrated the skull. He was taken in the same ship as Allan – the ‘Sheong Soon’ I think – and also Lieut Chapman of my regiment who also died. The bullet had been extracted by a Sergeant of Hodgson’s regiment with a pen-knife and the wound bandaged. For two days the wound appeared only a slight one and Capt Hodgson was of great assistance to the doctors helping with the wounded. Unfortunately however the wound became septic and delirium and death followed almost immediately. These particulars

I obtained from Capt (now Major) J C Stewart, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion who was wounded and on the same boat as Allan and Hodgson.

HEE

**E**lliott wrote further in August, again handwritten in pencil, from his dugout in the trenches:

Gallipoli Peninsular 23.8.15

Dear Mr Henderson

Your letter of 24<sup>th</sup> June duly reached me. I have made enquiries of all whom I could find who could throw any light on Allan's death.

First I saw Dr Jas Black, 6<sup>th</sup> Battn, who examined his wound shortly after it was received. It was through the abdomen and as Allan was suffering considerable pain he injected morphia to give relief. In Dr Black's opinion the case was absolutely hopeless from the start. I also saw Major J C Stewart, 5<sup>th</sup> Battn. He states that he himself was wounded on the Sunday and taken on board the 'Seang Choon', a transport. Late in the evening of the same day Allan and several hundred others were brought on board. Allan was then either unconscious or asleep under morphia and as far as he knows never regained consciousness. He says he is certain Allan died on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April before the ship actually started for Alexandria from her anchorage at the little Bay we now call ANZAC COVE where we landed. His body with others was placed on a trawler and carried a little distance out to sea to deep water and there buried in the usual manner.

Owing to the fact that we have now practically none of the old mess of Allan's Coy with us and none who were with him when wounded I regret that I have found it impossible to obtain any information as to whether he sent any message to you. I would say however that it is not possible as he would fall asleep under morphia shortly after Dr Black saw him and in view of the nature of his injury he would be mercifully kept under the influence of the drug until the end came. As you know, abdominal injuries are those which almost invariably cause agonizing pain and the first thing done by the surgeons is to administer morphia.

In regard to Rupert's death also you have been entirely misinformed as to date. He was killed at the conclusion of the brilliant charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade near Krithea which was led by Colonel McCoy, of which the papers which reached me by the same mail as your letter, viz about the middle to the end of June, had a full account. The Brigade made a great name for itself on that day, the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1915, and the 7<sup>th</sup> lost very heavily indeed. Col Gartside and the two next senior officers, viz Rupert and Capt Hunter, were killed, and the next senior Capt Finlayson with 14 other officers were wounded, and some 230 out of the 400 of the old Regiment that were then left were killed and wounded. It was then joined by Capt Permezel with 150 recruits. It was gradually reinforced by wounded men returned and new men until we were about 900 strong. We then lost Capt Permezel and about 180 men while we were in the trenches from shell fire which was the most trying experience of all. We were reduced to a little over 500 men and were then sent to hold a position which had just been taken from the Turks.

The Turks made a tremendous counter attack with some 3000 men but we managed to withstand it although we lost no less than 344 men, and I myself, my signaling officer and one other officer of the Battalion were the only unwounded officers left. Later we were joined by four other officers returned wounded and of these one was struck down almost immediately. I am glad to say only one officer and about 100 men were killed the rest being more or less seriously wounded. Two officers and two corporals of the 7<sup>th</sup> have been recommended for the VC in connection with this defence and I think there is hardly any doubt they will receive it. One of the corporals was killed and the other seriously wounded while one of the officers was twice hit, but the other was untouched.

You will judge of the desperate nature of the fighting when I tell you that it lasted from about 2pm on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> inst to 12.30pm on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> with hardly any intermission and during that period we were subjected to shelling by field guns firing high explosive and shrapnel by 6 inch howitzers while the whole place was swept by machine gun fire from flanking positions. Under cover of the fire the Turks crept up to the very parapets and threw hundreds of hand grenades and we suffered most of our losses from these.

Three times the Turks charged up to the trenches and were beaten back every time as when they got right up their machine guns and artillery had to stop and we got to work on them with our rifles and hand bombs. We were at that time very short of Hand Bombs, a want which has since been made good and we are now ready to meet their attacks by a shower of Bombs. Only six Turks actually came over the parapet and they were very dead when they reached the bottom. We were just about at our last gasp when we received the reinforcement of 200 men which served to dishearten the enemy. In addition to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion losses these men also had some losses, I cannot say how many however.

The trenches were a fearful sight when the fight was over. It was hopeless to attempt to remove such a large number as they would have had to be carried back over the space between the captured trenches and our old line. So we merely deepened certain of the trenches and threw the bodies in covered with lime and a little earth. But there are still many dead both in front of our present line (Turks) and to the rear of it i.e. between our old line and these (our men who fell in the attack). Hence the smell is at times awful. It is impossible to go out for them as the whole space is swept with fire and we have a tunnel about 100 yards long joining our old line to these along which all our supplies have to be brought. It is still a very lovely place. I had just got to the top of this page when a high-explosive shell fell just outside the dugout I am occupying and smothered me and the pages with dust and stunned a man who was in the trench. Knocked over a heap of ammunition boxes but did no further injury fortunately. The jar and shock gives one a headache which is most unpleasant even apart from being hit but our men stand it very well.

I forgot to say that Rupert went right through the charge and it was after it was all over and the men were fortifying the position won that he was killed. Always reckless he stood up and looked over the parapet and was instantly killed by a shot through the chest which went right through his identity disk. Capt Permezel took charge of this but I cannot say if he forwarded it

to you. Major Cass says he several times warned Rupert about the danger of exposing himself as he was doing.

I would prefer that you did not publish this letter. It is contrary to regulations to communicate even indirectly matter for the press and owing to the responsible position I occupy in the forces it is not regarded with favour. I have intimated the same to my wife. Kindest regards to Mrs Henderson and family

Yours sincerely  
H E Elliott Lt Col CO 7<sup>th</sup> Battn

**O**f the very many letters received by their parents two remain with this correspondence – one from a close friend and fellow officer and one later in the year from Alan's batman.

*From Major C C Mason:*

Alexandria Egypt 13<sup>th</sup> June 1915

Dear Mr Henderson

I have been trying to bring myself to write to you and Mrs Henderson and express my sympathy for you both in your terrible loss. I was wounded at the Dardanelles on 25<sup>th</sup> April and came out of hospital on Sunday last – my hand is a little unsteady. If I were to write reams to you I could not tell you how much I admired Rupert and Alan. Rupert I formed a friendship with on the Transport coming from Australia, as he was a cabin mate. Alan had been one of my officers since the beginning of the year. My Company landed splendidly and I was with Alan up until somewhere about 11am. I was with Rupert as well. I could not say which was the cooler of the two. Alan worked his platoon as though at peace manoeuvres. I myself was hit about 4pm and I think it a miracle how so many of us got out with our lives, so heavy was the firing all that day. Rupert lost his life, I understand, at a subsequent date. I assure you I can hardly bring myself to think of the losses of so many of my comrades.

I tender to you and Mrs Henderson my very great sorrow. Please do not reply.

Yours sincerely  
C C Mason, 7<sup>th</sup> Battn

32 Villamante St Geelong West  
18/11/15

To

Mr Geo G Henderson Equitable Buildings

Dear Sir,

Your letter to hand 17/11/15, inquiring about your son's effects, such things as belonged to the Government, Tunics, pants and flannels were taken out of the Valise by myself and were handed around to the rank and file who were badly in need of clothing at that time as we had all lost our packs on the landing, but the private property such as books, photos, rugs etc I packed away again in the Valise and I seen them carried off to Div Headquarters in charge of QM Hopkinson Sgt of the 7<sup>th</sup>, that is all I know of it. I heard that they were all to be sent to Australia, there were about 8 or 10 in numbers. I have one of the tunics taken out of the Valise and as the Government has informed us that we may keep our uniform so as soon as I am discharged if you would like to have the tunic you may have it, with pleasure. The only thing I am sorry for is that you have not received the rest. Re your other son's (R Henderson) effects I know nothing...

Trusting I have given you all the information you require, and hoping to see you the first time I am in town.

I am Sir,  
Yours respectfully  
Pte CA Ruffin 263  
A Coy 7<sup>th</sup> Battn  
1<sup>st</sup> AIF

**E**xtract from letter received from W G Laver, Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant, dated the 30<sup>th</sup> August:

“The information I gave you about Allan Henderson was correct – he was brought aboard the ‘Seangchoon’ on the evening of Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup> April – I did not know he was aboard until after he had died, but was informed by a Corporal of the Army Medical Corps that he had died the same night – this Corporal had taken charge of his personal effects – no doubt they will reach his family in the usual way, if they have not already done so. Of this I am certain that he was buried from the ship lying at anchor on the next night Monday the 26<sup>th</sup> April, the burial service being read by Captain Gillison. I cannot get any further particulars for Captain Gillison had died.”

**E**xtract from letter of Brigadier General McKay CB to a relative – dated 31.1.16:

“I have your letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> about Rupert Henderson.

What happened was this. Young as he was he became senior officer of his Battalion at the beginning of the fighting and was in command of it for nearly a week till a senior officer was appointed from another Unit. His work was so good that I recommended him both for promotion to Major and for some distinction (e.g. Military Cross). I have no doubt he would have received both but most unfortunately he was killed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May.

The boy was a splendid soldier and died bravely and nothing can alter or diminish that.”



*Redoubt Cemetery Cape Helles*

## **Captain Rupert Howard Henderson "C" Company 7th Battalion 2nd Infantry Brigade 1st AIF**

Born 10<sup>th</sup> December 1892 at Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia  
Second son of George G Henderson  
Brother of Reverend K T Henderson MA Dip Ed Assistant Chaplain and  
Master at Church of England Grammar School, Melbourne.  
Educated at Trinity Grammar School, Kew, Victoria  
Junior and Senior Public Examinations

### **Military Career**

Lieutenant 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Senior Cadets 1911 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion  
5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry, was made Signalling Officer and specially commended  
for the efficiency of his command – made Captain 1912 at the age of 20.

Fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) Regiment was disbanded and he then acted as Company  
Commander of 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Then transferred to 48<sup>th</sup> Regiment  
(Kooyong) in which he acted as 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command.

Passed preliminary exam for Major with average of 84% shortly before war  
broke out. Immediately on outbreak of hostilities enlisted under Colonel H  
E Elliott in 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and received Commission as Captain and was given  
command of a company in Egypt. Was twice recommended for promotion to  
Major before landing at Gallipoli but was refused on account of his youth.

At the landing at Gallipoli on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1915 through the loss or  
disablement of all his senior officers the command of the battalion devolved  
upon him for about a week when Colonel Gartside took Colonel Elliott's  
place and Captain Henderson accompanying him as 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command to  
Cape Helles.

Colonel Gartside was killed and the command again devolved on Captain  
Henderson who met his fate in the renowned fight at Krithia on the 8<sup>th</sup> of  
May – a bullet through the head killing him whilst leading his men.

After the above actions the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was reduced to between 30 to 40  
effective.

Captain Henderson was again recommended for promotion and for  
distinctions and was mentioned in Despatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton.

His superior officers have spoken of him as being an officer of exceptional  
ability and bravery and much loved and respected by the men under his  
command.

### **Decorations and Orders**

Mentioned in Despatches and recommended for Distinction but death in  
action intervened.

### **General**

Was a good all round athlete and crack shot.



AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

RECORD OF OFFICERS' SERVICES.

Rank and Name Captain R. H. Henderson

Staff or Unit 7 Battalion

Date of Appointment and Gazette 25.9.14 78/14

Promotion (date and Gazette) \_\_\_\_\_

Left Australia in Transport A.20 "Hororakon" 19-10-1914

Record subsequent to embarkation:—

Special mention in despatches General Sir Ian Hamilton  
*m.o. 670/15 B*  
*memo/Am 30c*  
*D.H.G. 24.8.16*  
*89 29251*  
Extract from Army Corps Routine Order conspicuous Galatry  
*160 570/16*

Returned to Australia (Date, Transport, and any other details):—

Gazetted from A.I.F. \_\_\_\_\_

D.697/10.15.—C.15380.

Record of Rupert's Mention in Despatches

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*Captain Rupert H Henderson's Memorial at Redoubt Cemetery*



*Lieutenant Alan Henderson's Memorial at Lone Pine. He is remembered together with Lieut LC Blick, 2nd Lieut EHS Chapman, C Sergt Major ATG Cummings, 2nd Lieut CBT Davey, 2nd Lieut NJ Greig, 2nd Lieut R Miller, Cpt CH Permezel, QM Sergt Sayers, 2nd Lieut KL Walker*