

Bert Henson 1917-1919 Diaries

First diary, written in pencil in notebook

Headed: J.H.H. Henson 7th Platoon B Coy 10/3292 NZEF 13 Nov. 1915

In this small book I had intended keeping a daily record of my experiences etc as from the time of my departure from NZ. However, having been unfortunate enough to be a sufferer from that dread complaint "mal de mer," I have to date not felt disposed to do any writing. Consequently my diary has been neglected. I will therefore now give a brief outline of events etc since leaving NZ and will in future endeavour to keep this posted more regularly and fully.
J.H.H. 23/11/15

Sat Nov 13th 1915: Entrained at Trentham for Wellington about 9 a.m. On arrival at Lampton Stn we (8th r'fts) were marched to wharf where the two transports were berthed. A, B, C and D Companies went aboard Troopship No 36, "Willochra," together with the artillery. The balance were accommodated on Troopship No 35, "Tofua." The bunks were then allotted, mine being situated in forehold. At 2.30 p.m. we assembled outside wharf entrance preparatory to march through streets. It was here I saw Uncle and Aunt H. Had time for a few minutes' chat. Then we commenced our tramp through the city streets which were lined with crowds of people. Returned to boat about 3.50 p.m. We were not allowed to get off boat again and mingle with crowd of next of kin and others who were then admitted to wharf. Somewhere about 4 p.m. the troopships drew away from wharf and final farewells were bid. Dropped anchor again in stream where we lay until about 6 p.m. Anchor was lifted about that time and we commenced the run to Lyttelton.

Sunday Nov 14th: After remarkable smooth passage arrived at Lyttelton Wharf about 8 a.m. About 10 a.m. we disembarked and were conveyed to Christchurch per train. From Christchurch Stn we marched through streets to Cranmer Square where a church parade was held. The public, however, came through the lines to see friends (old and new) and in all except the very front lines little attention was paid to the service. The Chch people were very enthusiastic, soldiers being given fruit, cigarettes, etc. During march back through streets my hand became quite tired through shaking the proffered hands of those lining the route. We were once more back on board ship at 2 p.m. A great crowd was on the wharf to farewell us when at about a quarter to four we drew out from our last NZ berth; the last for some time at least. Passing the Lyttelton Heads we turned south down the coast. The day has been exceptionally fine.

Monday 15: Still steaming south. Coast in sight all the way and sea calm. Passed Bluff about 4 p.m. Could see the Ocean Beach Freezing Works plainly. Upon entering Fouveaux Strait weather became perceptibly colder, windier and the sea rougher. That evening I saw the last of NZ's shore.

Tuesday 16th, Wed, 17th & Thurs 18th: Of these three days I have little to record, except that the weather was cold, gale strong, sea very rough, and that I became seasick. Despite these adverse conditions I didn't miss many meals and I kept up on deck as much

as possible during the day time. We were tossed about pretty much. The Tofua, being a smaller

boat, received a severe buffeting. She was unable to keep abreast of us and to enable her to do so the Willochra ran at a reduced speed. I might here say that after passing Bluff the allotment of berths was rearranged. This time I got into a Second Saloon cabin fitted up to accommodate nine men - a tight fit I can assure. It is tolerable if the port holes can be kept open but when they are closed it is somewhat stuffy. Suppose though one will get worse bunks yet. We ("B" Coy) mess in what used to be the First Saloon dining room. Of course the original luxurious fittings have been taken out, or are covered. The food served out is really very good. Fresh meat, vegetables, and we have had plum pudding which ...[three lines scribbled out]. During the first day or so a hair clipping crusade caused a deal of amusement. Anyone with hair a little long was taken in hand and very quickly robbed of his locks. I had my hair cut before leaving Wellington. On the way over a number of albatrosses were observed.

Friday 19th Sea still pretty rough. At about midday land was sighted at Cape Raoul, Tasmania. It acted like a tonic to the indisposed. We passed the lighthouse on the point and were soon in calmer water and sailing up storm bay towards Hobart. This visit was not expected by us. It was thought that Albany was the first land we would touch.

It was rumoured that the call was due to the Tofua having received a battering from the heavy weather and that some repairs were to be effected at Hobart. However everyone was pleased to see terra firma. It was pretty sailing up the bay and at about 4 p.m. we dropped anchor in the harbour, about a mile from shore. The weather here was beautiful and much warmer than what we had been experiencing. The country surrounding Hobart is very pretty. The hills are wooded (mostly), although some of the slopes are cultivated. My first impression was that it was a peaceful, pretty little place. The harbour seems to be a very good one. We could see some very picturesque residences on the slopes and near the waterfront. Shortly after coming to a stop, Major Ross and Captain Neville (Commander of Willochra) went ashore in a launch which came out for them. Meanwhile our band got together and gave us a bit of a concert. I stayed up on deck until after dark when it was time to get to bunk. That night I felt rather indisposed. An attack of influenza coming on. The Tofua did not arrive until about 9 o'clock.

Saturday 20th Nov 1915: Awoke about 4 a.m. to find that we were coming alongside wharf where we were soon berthed. The fellows left for a route march around Hobart about 10 a.m. Not feeling well enough I regretfully had to stay behind. About dinner time the boys returned triumphantly, flowers all over them.

The Hobart people were unaware of the arrival of the transports and I believe a great number of them received a great shock when they saw a big body of NZ soldiers marching through the streets. General leave was granted the men (B Coy) from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. At the last minute I was called back to go on guard. I got leave from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Had tea and also a good look round the town which is a fairly quiet little place. A large number of the

buildings are old fashioned. There are not many very imposing structures, the Post Office being about the chief. There is an electric tram service. Trams and trains are small and rather amusing to one who has seen better. Drinking saloons, most of them squalid little shows, are very plentiful. The chaps lost no time in sampling the "Cascade" ale. The people are very hospitable.

I went out to Newtown, about three miles out in the suburbs. Returned to the boat about 10 p.m. The weather was splendid all day.

Sunday Nov 21st: Left Hobart about 4 a.m. this morning and after leaving the bay turned down and all day followed down southern coast of Tasmania. We had entertained hope of remaining at Hobart until Monday [not] gratified in this respect.

Mon 22, Tues 23, Wed 24, Thurs 25: Of these four days I have nothing startling to record. The weather was good, the sea also behaving well and my touch of 'flu began to go away. I am now feeling pretty right again. At different times the "blows" of a number of whales were seen. One monster was, I am told, seen on the surface quite near the ship's side. Owing to the improved conditions (weather) we were able to carry out a little physical drill etc. We haven't been killing ourselves at it though. There isn't very much room on deck to carry out much drill. At 12 noon on Thursday closed the NZ mail, which will be sent back from Albany. The Tofua seems to be able to keep up better now that the weather is better. We also have done better time. That reminds me that each day it has been necessary to put back our watches about 20 minutes (since leaving NZ). Today, Thursday, we had our washing day. It was great sport. One bucket of fresh cold water to each man and four men to a tub. I did a good deal of rubbing and slightly improved the appearance of a few garments. Then suspended them on a rope above deck and watched them dry. Also wrote a couple of letters. Didn't do much else all day. Weather splendid.

Friday 26th Nov 1915: Reveille 5 a.m. Roll call 6.15 a.m. Breakfast 7.45, after which I came up on deck and have been busy entering notes of back days in this book. Ate about 8.30 a.m. land was sighted, I suppose somewhere near Albany. As I write, 10.30 a.m. it is gradually becoming more distinct. The weather is perfect. An hour or so ago passed a small "whaling" boat about a mile away. Saw it approach where a couple of "blows" had been noticed. It then evidently harpooned one of the whales for it turned around and made a zig zag course, I suppose following the whale on the end of the harpoon and rope. The little steamer was soon a smoky smudge on the horizon. Entering the harbour, up King George Sound, the land on either side looked very pretty. It was here for the first time in the voyage that I noticed porpoises playing about, although others have seen them shortly after leaving Lyttelton. We drew alongside wharf (or pier) at about noon. The harbour seemed to be very shallow as the propellers caused the water to become muddy. About one of the first [things] I noticed after we were berthed was a couple of men walking down the wharf, their backs absolutely covered with flies. This didn't give a very nice first impression. After dinner we were told that

there was a possibility of our getting leave. Right enough, at about 3 p.m. we paraded on the wharf and after considerable delay, started on our march in our respective companies, down to the town which is about a mile distant from the wharf. We marched through the principal streets and then dismissed near post office. Then, with Dave Woodhead, went up the street and purchased some cards etc, which I despatched back to NZ. Then had tea, took 2 spools of film to chemist to be developed and sent back to NZ. Luxury of luxuries! I then had a fresh water bath at one of the hotels. At 8.45 p.m. we reassembled near P.O. and marched back to the boat. I have omitted to say that the Tofua also berthed on the other side of the wharf, and her fellows were also on leave. Albany is only a small town (pop about 4500 I understand). Electric lights, no trams. Large rocks or boulders are seen all about. The soil (!?) is sandy and seems pretty burnt by

sun. Did not observe any signs of cultivation such as I saw at Hobart which of course is a very fertile place. The hills about here are covered with scrubby vegetation. No decent sized trees. The place is very shelter-less. The day was very warm and the flies were evident in millions. People would walk about with a hundred or so of these retainers (?) sunning themselves on their backs. Early in the afternoon a coal hulk came alongside and coaling operations were commenced. The Tofua drew out into the stream about 7 p.m. Most things I noticed are considerably dearer here than in NZ. Regarding the baths, I may here say that on board we have only been able to secure salt water for the purpose.

Saturday Nov 27th: The morning was chiefly occupied in drilling on the wharf. Fresh provisions were also taken on board. At about noon the siren was blown, hawsers cast loose and we drew out from the wharf, incidentally smashing the top of two or three piles and nearly pulling the end off the wharf. As we docked out we could see a party of our fellows hurrying along the wharf. They presented a disconsolate little crowd as they stood on the end of the pier watching us glide out. They were however later brought aboard by a launch - as we remained out in the stream for a while. The latecomers included the major, four captains and a number of the picket. The launch which brought them over then conveyed the members of the band across to the Tofua. At about 6 p.m., the tofua leading, we made our way out of the harbour. The weather had become decidedly cooler, windy, dull, and a little showery. Clearing the sound, we once more turned westward ho. Followed along the coast which here is very rocky. The sea made a pretty picture as it dashed into spray against the rocks. We quickly overhauled the Tofua. Two, if not three whaling boats were observed - little dots on the horizon to the south. Alex Gilmore is one who came over to take the place of the departed bandsmen.

Sunday Nov 28th: Upon getting up at about 6 a.m., the coast was still discernible. It was lost to sight early in the forenoon. At 9.30 a.m. a church service was held on the boat deck by the C.E. chaplain. A medical inspection took place at 3 p.m. A little later a large shoal of porpoises was observed disporting some little distance from the ship. Today for dinner there was roast

pork, potatoes, onions and plum pudding. For tea, bread, butter, jam and a liberal quantity of cake, the latter I expect a gift of NZ Patriotic Committee. If nothing else, I can eat and sleep well on this boat. The day has been a perfect one, not a cloud in the sky, and if anything a little warm. Sea very smooth.

Monday, 29th Nov: This morning was occupied in physical drill and a little boxing was also indulged in. After dinner, in the forward messroom, we were addressed by Major Wheeler and Captn Kemp (doctors) concerning diseases, sicknesses, etc which we would be liable to in Egypt and in the firing line. They told us best methods of preventing and combating same. A little more drill and the rest of the day was to ourselves. In the evening I was present at a very decent little concert on the boat deck.

The day was a perfect one - warm. After today will not be allowed fill water bottles with fresh water.

Tuesday 30th Nov 1915: My platoon (No 7) is on fatigue today. At 5 a.m. we reported for duty. We were occupied in washing down decks until near breakfast time. The rest of the morning was

taken up in putting up awnings on boat deck. We didn't work too hard, neither did we work all the time. After dinner, until about 3.45 p.m. had afternoon free. At the latter time we assembled on the boat deck and went through boat drill, that is as far as swinging out boats but not lowering them. I am among those who had not been allotted any particular boat. I merely put my lifebelt on and looked on. A fire or a shipwreck would be a very terrible catastrophe. Of course if anything happens there is the Tofua which would be able to render assistance. I sincerely trust nothing of this kind happens. Tonight there was brought into force the restriction that lights must be out by 7.45 p.m. or else the portholes screened so as to prevent any light being seen from outside. Weather today has been beautiful - warm, but a nice cool breeze compensating.

Wednesday Dec 1st: December's here! In the morning physical drill. In the afternoon my platoon received identification discs which are worn round the neck. The discs are of tin or zinc and on them is stamped NZ, one's name, number and church. A piece of string was also supplied, on which to suspend disc round neck. By this means the wounded or killed men on the battlefield are identified. We were then paid in gold the large sum of 1 each (privates), the same being the first money received since leaving NZ. While we were at Albany, and before that, many men were complaining about the delay. Some of them were running short of cash. Next we were marched along to the hospital and there vaccinated for smallpox. The operation did not take long and to it was attached very little pain - a pinprick (or three). The nurse who put a protective dressing over the little puncture, noticing I had not been vaccinated before, cheerfully informed me that I might expect to have a bad time. However this hasn't dismayed me, for personally I don't anticipate much trouble. After this, up on the boat deck, I enjoyed a little game of cricket. The ball, of course, is captured on a long cord. On the same deck, in the evening was held an enjoyable little concert. Weather still splendid. Warm with nice breeze.

Thursday Dec 2nd: In the small hours of the morning I was awakened by the sound of rushing, splashing water. The night being warm and the sea calm, the porthole had been left open. I suppose the boat must have given an extra heavy roll, with the result that there was a deluge of briny into cabins adjoining portholes with bunks opposite the same were absolutely drenched. There was great commotion. Great sport for those who didn't get wet. I'm sure Gordon and Leslie would have thought the incident a great joke! All night long the water was swishing about the floors, and later in the morning those whose jobs it was to clean up cabins had their work cut out. At 9.30 a.m. we paraded with dirty washing and were soon at work at the tubs. As I write now (noon) my things are hanging over a steam pipe near the stern drying. I must now go along and see if they are alright. Nothing to do this afternoon except keep an eye on the washing. Saw a number of flying fish, most of them very small, apparently about the size of large moths, an inch or two long. These I expect were young ones. The largest I saw was I suppose about nine inches in length. They skimmed along at about a foot or so above the water for distances of I should say up to fifty yards. The smaller ones were semitransparent green. The larger ones were darker, something like herrings with large fins or wings. It was quite fascinating to watch them. I understand that this afternoon we passed Capricorn and that we are now in the tropics. It certainly is pretty warm. A concert and sing-song on deck ended another beautiful day. A number of measles cases are reported in one of the other companies and a number of their men are quarantined.

Friday Dec 3rd 1915: Today was set aside as sports day. The main scene of activity (which

consisted of boxing, lazstick [?], pillow fighting, tug-of-war, obstacle races, etc) was on the boat deck. Considerable enthusiasm was displayed by the fellows. There were some good displays of boxing. In some of the bouts there was some pretty solid hitting. The winner of the heavyweights is now taking a rest in the hospital (Murphy). There was great excitement over the tug-of-war, each company putting in a team. The pillow fighting on a spar caused great merriment. Martin Smith, winner). The sports started shortly after 9 a.m. and occupied the whole of the day. I took several snapshots of different events. As I write (7 p.m.) tugs of war are still in progress. Others are playing quoits. This morning about 9 a.m. there was a light shower which however quickly cleared up, the remainder of the day being very fine and warm. A lot of the chaps are now coming out in shorts. Observed a lot more flying fish and numbers in shoals. This afternoon my arm where vaccinated is beginning to feel a little itchy. It might be interesting to record here that Captain McDonald, R.C. chaplain, refereed boxing contests, performing the duty well. From about 8 to 9 p.m. I spent a very pleasant hour listening to a gramophone, just below the bridge. The machine is the property of one of the officers and a splendid lot of records were put on; all lights were screened, the sky was clear and starry and as I lay on the deck on my back listening to the excellent music and to the soothing muffled sound of the water being churned aside by the ship, it was most pleasant to let my thoughts drift back to bygone times in little NZ. I seemed to be lifted above and to forget the

commonplace events of the present. The poet well describes the state of mind when he puts it as "that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts bring sad thoughts to the mind." I came back to earth when the music ceased and I realised it was time for me to get to bunk en route for the Land of Nod.

Saturday Dec 4th: At 9.30 a.m. for the first time since coming aboard No 7 Platoon paraded in full marching kit. This and a little drill occupied the morning. This afternoon there were more sports events on the boat deck. The day was very hot and I got in the shade of one of the starboard boats and dozed while sack races and tugs-of-war were progressing further along the deck. The sports events are not yet completed. I expect there will be more of this on Monday. B Company is at present leading in the points aggregate. Hooray for B! There was another little concert in the evening, after which I brought my mattress and blankets up on deck where I spent the night.

Sunday Dec 5th: I much appreciated sleeping up on deck and woke up in the morning feeling much fresher than I normally felt when down in the cabin. The night was very warm. Blankets are superfluous. I had to get up promptly at 5 a.m. as at that time the fatigue men were beginning to get busy washing down the decks. At 10 a.m. I attended church parade. In the afternoon did nothing much more than lie about the deck. Took one or two snapshots. Later in the evening attended a church service. About 8.30 p.m. I brought my blankets and mattress up onto the boat deck, retiring about half an hour later. I was just getting off to sleep when it commenced to rain, and while there were awnings overhead, the rain beat in at the sides. I lost no time in bundling my things up and getting down to the promenade deck where after a bit of fossicking I found a place to lay me down. The nights now being hot, the decks are simply covered with sleepers. We are now of course well in the tropics. The weather doesn't let one forget this warm fact. This morning I cut down my denim trousers, converting them into shorts. At present I am wearing only a shirt, shorts, shoes and sox, and in this light attire one perspires very freely even if only

sitting about. There is usually a gentle breeze blowing and this to a certain extent alleviates matters. At dinner time we now get lime-juice and water instead of tea. A few pieces of ice would also be acceptable. Today on notice board I saw a wireless (?) message from Father Neptune intimating his intention of paying a visit to HMNZT No 36 shortly.

Monday Dec 6th 1915: Up shortly after 5 a.m. and bundled my bedding back to the cabin. Paraded 9.30 a.m. drill order. Rifle inspection, also a little semaphore signalling practice. Today a number of the chaps, about 50 from each company, commenced shifting coal from the lower holds to the bunkers. Volunteers were called for this work and the recompense for the arduous toil is an additional two shillings per day. I'm not very keen on coal lumping so that extra 2/- won't be mine. In the afternoon the unfinished sports events were gone on with and on their completion the score aggregate showed "B" Coy a winner (by 5 points ahead of runner up "D" Coy). I again slept up on deck this night. Day very hot.

Tuesday, Dec 7th: Parade with full webb equipment 9.30 a.m. after which, there being insufficient volunteers for the coal shifting, men were selected for that work. We were examined by the doctor and those whose condition from the effects of vaccination had not rendered them unfit for the work, were sent below to toil. I had no pangs of regret when upon looking at my arm the doctor said "unfit." Little drill was done in afternoon. I have been hunting round trying to find some printing-out paper, toning and fixing solution in order that I might be able to mail some photographs back from Aden where we anticipate arriving today week. A friend, Slightholme, also got busy and managed to secure some paper while I as a last resort screwed up my courage and approached Captain Neville in quest of some toning and fixing solution. He received me very kindly, invited me into his sanction and there found me some tabloids [sic] for making toning solution. He also goes in for photography and showed me through his albums which contained scenes of most interesting views etc. He told me that if at any time I required assistance or materials in connection with the hobby, he, if able, would be most pleased to give me same. Very decent of him indeed. I am able to get film developed on board and had I known before leaving NZ, Hobart or Albany I would have brought the other necessary materials with me. However I think things will be OK now. Another sweltering day. The wind rose in the evening and there was a shower which helped to cool the air a little- not very much. Slept up on deck again.

Wednesday Dec 8th: Another hot day. I pity the poor unfortunates who are shifting coal below. No joke in the tropics. After a little signalling practice I went up to the hospital and had a fresh dressing put on my arm which is now giving me considerable discomfort. So much that I do not feel inclined for much activity. In the afternoon I did not do much more than print out a few photos. I again slept up on deck. I was nearly omitting to say that in afternoon I washed a few things. A great effort.

Thursday Dec 9th 1915: This morning, feeling pretty unwell, I attended sick parade (where I was given 3 little pills!). My indisposition is due to vaccination. I feel almost as if I had a bad attack of influenza minus the aching limbs. The sore arm easily makes up for that though. Our kits were put down in the hold today. Intended doing some writing this afternoon but felt too unwell. Couldn't settle down to it. Slightholme and I printed a few photos. Slept on promenade deck, the boat deck being now reserved after 8 p.m. for those who have been sleeping down in the forward

hold. Although very warm, yesterday and today have been a little cooler than preceding days. Cooler breeze.

Friday Dec 10th: Attended sick parade and had my arm re-dressed. Later in the morning did a little writing - Not much, as I felt too indisposed. That's putting it mildly. We crossed the line about 1 a.m. today. King Neptune "arrived" at 1.30 p.m. and the greater part of the afternoon was devoted to the holding of the court. The proceedings evoked great amusement. Most of the officers were dealt with. Early in the day the offenders against Neptune's laws were served with summonses requesting them to come up for trial at the court. Those who did not turn up were quickly hunted up by the king's willing retinue. Most absurd charges were

brought against the victim. Major Ross was fined 3 (one of his offences was letting his moustache grow too long), and a number of others were fined 1 and lesser amounts. Besides this they were given nasty medicine, lathered with a sticky paste and shaved with an absurdly large wooden razor. They were then tipped backwards into a big canvas tank which had been rigged up and vigorously ducked. I managed to get several snapshots of the proceedings. If they turn out alright they will convey more to you than I can here. I slept up on deck. Day very fine. Quite cool with a fair wind. Dave Woodhill went into hospital this morning.

Saturday Dec 11th: Attended sick parade again and had my arm re-dressed. Did nothing much in morning. In afternoon one of the sports events, cricket, which had not been completed, was gone on with. This evening it rained, but despite this I took my blankets up on to the promenade deck and settled down for the night in what I took to be quite a safe place. Unhappily this did not turn out to be the case as after I had settled down comfortably the wind seemed to rise and the rain came driving in heavily. I lost little time in bundling things up and getting below.

Sunday Dec 12th 1915: Church parade at 10.15 a.m. I. Was. there. Dinner today consisted of roast pork, potatoes, carrots, plum pudding. It wasn't bad. Did nothing much this afternoon. The day has been fine. A strong cool wind is blowing. It isn't unwelcome. In the evening I attended Captain Neville's service (the captain is a very devout old man and speaks well). Slept on deck. The day was very fine. Quite cool wind blowing.

Monday 13th Dec: A month today since we left Wellington! Time flies. This morning upon getting up, or I might say as soon as it was daylight, we were greeted with the sight of land. I think it was about 6.20 a.m when I first saw it. It was Cape Guadafia, north-eastern point of Africa, the first land we have seen for over a fortnight, and a very welcome sight it was. We saw 3 or 4 steamers during the morning. We are now in the Gulf of Aden and I suppose will see quite a lot of shipping. From Albany, and I suppose even from NZ, we have not kept to the usual trade route, and therefore missing the shipping. The sea this morning has been very calm, almost glassy. There is only a gentle breeze and the sun is strong. At about 10 a.m. we witnessed the passing of a great school of porpoises - many hundreds, perhaps thousands of them. It was a most remarkable sight. They were noticed a good way off on our port side. They were coming at right angles to our course, and the boat divided the school into two. One could see hundreds leaping out of the water together. I managed to secure a couple of snapshots of them. I trust the photos turn out well. Even if they don't, I don't think I'll forget the sight. Earlier in the morning I had seen a couple of sharks a few yards from the ship's side, also a lot of jellyfish floating in the

water. Shortly after dinner time (noon) the land finally faded out of sight. Several boats were seen during the afternoon. Slumbered on deck again. Weather fine and rather warm.

Tuesday Dec 14th 1915: This morning was No 7's washing day. While engaged in this direction, at about 10.30 a.m. I first saw Aden in the distance. We arrived at the anchorage there about an hour later, but did not even drop anchor. A tug came out and took off the mails, and in about three quarters of an hour's time we were again on our way to Suez. Aden is just rocks. Absolutely barren. We did not go near the town which was hidden from view. From where we were we could see a side of the place where a great many barracks for the soldiers had been erected. After leaving Aden, the shores of Arabia were in sight during the whole of the afternoon. About 8 p.m. we passed the island of Perim. For some time previously we could [see] its lighthouse. We passed fairly close to the island and could see a few other lights. As we sailed by, a concert was in progress on deck here. Weather fine and warm.

Wednesday 15th Dec, 1915: We are now in the Red Sea (of course still aboard the boat!). This morning I was supposed to be on fatigue, but the latter didn't eventuate. We passed numerous rocky barren islands, including the group known as The Twelve Apostles. There was little doing in the afternoon. A cricket match was played, during which time I had a sleep on deck. The afternoon was very warm. Just before tea I caught a large locust (about 2 1/2 or 3 inches long). It must have flown a long way as there was no land in sight. A few billions of these fellows in one's back garden would soon cause the greens to disappear. There was another concert in the evening. Weather very warm. Mustn't omit to say that today we were paid the princely sum of 1. Also received our "first field dressings."

Thursday Dec 16th: This morning rifle inspection. Gave our boots a coat of dubbin. We were notified that mails would close at 5 p.m. today instead of 9 a.m. Saturday as previously advised. This was rather awkward so had to get busy. Wrote a couple of letters. At 2 p.m. we attended a lecture regarding the use of the first field dressings, after which did more writing. During the day two or three dhows were visible on the horizon. Just a few minutes ago (5 p.m.) land (I presume the African coast) was sighted. This land was visible until nightfall. An enjoyable concert whiled away the evening. Most of the awnings were taken down today. Port isn't far off.

Friday Dec 17th: Up at 5 a.m. again this morning. There's no lying in when one sleeps on deck. The deck scrubbing squad are along promptly and if one doesn't make oneself scarce, he stands a good chance of a wetting from the hose. This morning came my turn for mess orderly. I am not very keen on the job, but one consolation - it will only be until we reach Suez, which is not very far off. Expect to arrive there tomorrow. Passed a few steamers today. A big four-masted boat which was near us yesterday is still with us. A small school of porpoises was seen a few yards out on the starboard side. These funny creatures seem to enjoy themselves in their leaping and diving. I scribble now at about 4 p.m. The day has been splendid with a most enjoyable cool breeze blowing. The chief officer (mate) has just informed me that the land we saw last night consisted of very high hills and were about 30 miles inland. At about 5 p.m. land was discernible on our port side. It would be the African mainland. We also passed a lighthouse situated on a reef. In the evening there was a farewell concert and dance held on the boat deck. I

was up there for only a few minutes, as, expecting to land at Suez on the morrow, I packed my

kit and got things ready. I slept on deck. The day was very fine. In the evening a fairly strong wind was experienced. It was rather cool, so much so that I was able to do with a second blanket.

Saturday Dec 18th: This morning land was visible on both sides. I was down in the mess room a little after 6 a.m. The land on both sides was a good distance away and was mostly rough and steep. We arrived and dropped anchor at the anchorage at Port Suez just a little after noon. We are about a mile from shore and the entrance to the canal. There is a good deal of shipping in the stream here and near the canal entrance. Near the latter are three warships. Shortly after we dropped anchor the Tofua and an Australian transport came up. The latter boat is the fourmaster I have mentioned as being with us previously. Immediately after finishing in the mess room (about 9 a.m.) I went to my cabin, changed into my uniform and after a deal of jumping, thumping and squeezing packed the balance of my belongings into my kit which I then took up on deck as it was expected we would land in the afternoon. However this expectation was not realised as at about 3 p.m. we were told to take our kit back to the cabins again. During the afternoon a number of boats came out of the canal. It might be interesting to note that one of these, evidently Spanish owned, bore its name, its port of registration (Barcelona) painted in large letters on its side. It also had its colours painted conspicuously. This is all as a precaution against its being attacked by the submarines of any of the belligerent nations. In the evening the lights of the shipping and those on shore presented a very pretty spectacle. I could see the lights of a big boat as she came down the canal. I watched her until she came right out into the stream near us, then went down to bunk. The day has been warm but tonight it is rather cool. Something like a cool evening in Wellington. I must not forget to mention that a few hours before arriving at Suez we passed a returning Indian transport. Cheers were exchanged.

Sunday Dec 19th 1915: I watched a very beautiful sunrise at about 6.45 a.m. this morning. I was down in the mess room from about 6.30 a.m. until 9 a.m. Two or three native boats came alongside this morning, their occupants selling cigarettes, fruit, etc to the fellows aboard. They were soon chased off by some of the officers. I watched a number of boats, including one of the warships go up the canal. They go very slowly and from here it appears just as if they were sailing through the sand. The Tofua went alongside the wharf this morning about 8 a.m. and I suppose they will now (11.30 a.m.) be disembarking. Have not yet heard when we are to follow suit. A rumour is rife that we will be in action within a fortnight against Dervishes and perhaps Turks near the canal. One doesn't know what tomorrow may bring forth, and what is more does [sic] worry much about it. We are all prepared to take things as they come. This morning there was an Indian transport anchored a few chains off to starboard. It must have arrived during the night. Tonight I was given to understand that we are to disembark tomorrow and entrain for Cairo. Hooray!

[That ends this diary. The following letter was found in the back of it:-

Aboard Willochra

In stream

Suez

19.12.15 Dear Mother, I am taking the opportunity of sending these few notes which, excepting at the commencement of the voyage, when I was sea sick, I have made from day to day. If I waited till I reached Cairo I perhaps would not be able to send them back without their being censored in parts: I am also sending one or two photos. These I have fixed very roughly, but they

may be of interest. Trust to be able to send you all I have taken (properly printed and toned) from Cairo. Please do not be too critical regarding writing and composition of notes. They were mostly scribbled down under rather adverse circumstances. No desk or other conveniences for writing. However I trust you will be able to decipher them and see what I have been doing etc since my departure from NZ. I would like to re-write them and improve composition and writing, but if I am to get them away now, time will not allow of this. Therefore kindly find excuse for scribble, errors, etc.

Bertie

It would perhaps be just as well not to let these notes become too public; at least for a while.