

# Letters from the Battlefields

Letters home from those of the N.S.W. Central  
Coast who served in World War 1

Dr Richard G. Van Wirdum

The letters appears verbatim as written in *The Gosford Times* including all mistakes.

It is the soldier, not the Minister, who has given us freedom of religion.  
It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.  
It is the soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.  
It is the soldier, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote.  
It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag and whose  
coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag.

Charles M. Province.

## The Letters

<b>A</b>	
Ackland Elson Robert Private No.6216.....	1
Anderson William J. Private .....	1
Archibald Alex Private .....	3
Archibald W. Private .....	4
Atkins Frank Private .....	4
<b>B</b>	
Bailey Joseph No. 6552 Private .....	5
Beattie C. No. 6466 Private .....	7
Beresford Jack Private .....	7
Beveridge Arthur Engineer .....	11
Boulwood Sergeant.....	12
Brand Richard Trooper .....	13
Brewer Jack Corporal .....	13
Brown E. R. Private .....	14
Buie Robert Gunner .....	20
<b>C</b>	
Campbell Colin Private.....	21
Campbell Flem I. Captain .....	24
Campbell Hugh Trooper .....	25
Cassell H. L. Private .....	27
Cato Vincent Arthur Corporal No.2329	
Chandler Robert W. Private.....	30
Cochrane Private .....	30
Colman Roger Driver.....	30
Connell H. J. Captain .....	32
Compton Clarence Henry Transport Sergeant No.1011.....	33
Costello W. Private .....	34
Coull Sydney Archibald Private No.2151.....	35
Cox Clare .....	36
Crane Robert George Lance-Corporal No.2810.....	37
Crane W. J. Private .....	38
Cunningham George Private.....	39
<b>D</b>	
Daley Charles Sapper.....	39
Dalgleish Robert E. Private .....	42
Davis Harold Private.....	42
Dent Arthur E. Lieutenant .....	43
Dickenson Herbert Private.....	47
Dixon Len Private .....	48
Dwyer Thomas Private No.6729 .....	49
Duffy Edmund Gunner .....	50
<b>E</b>	
Edwardes W. H. Rev. Chaplain .....	51
Eley Samuel Thomas Private No.3513.....	52
Eley William Platoon Sergeant.....	53
<b>F</b>	
Felton Gunner .....	54
Frewin Victor Joseph Lieutenant.....	54
Frost Alfred C. Private.....	55
Frost Clive Harris Trooper No.2333.	56
Frost Kenneth Private .....	58
<b>G</b>	
Gardiner William Thomas Briggs Private No.222 .....	61
Gascoigne Tom .....	61
Gibson Edward Trooper.....	62
Gibson Frederick Crowdy Private No.5378.....	63
Glenister Sydney Private .....	63
Goldsmith Frank Henry Corporal No.3334.....	64
Graham Hercules Rae (Jack) Private	65
Graham W. A. Sergeant.....	68
Gribble Jack Private.....	70
Grigg Harry J. Trooper .....	72
Guerin Acland C. ....	73
<b>H</b>	
Hall Arthur T. Private .....	74
Hastings Henry Private .....	77
Hastings William George 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant .....	86
Hawker C. C. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.....	88

Henry Ernest R. Private .....	90
Hill F. W. Private .....	93
Hobbs N. H. Lieutenant .....	94
Hobbs Ronald Stanley (Roy) Lieutenant .....	95
Hopkins Stanley Sapper .....	97
Humphreys Les Driver .....	97
Humphreys Tom F. Lieutenant .....	98

## J

Jenkins Giles William Corporal .....	100
Johnson John Stobert Private 5118 .....	102
Johnston W. R. Sapper .....	103

## K

Keats H. E. Sapper .....	105
Keene F. A. Sergeant No. 1240 .....	107
Kelle Leonard Jean Private No.1542 .....	108
Kirkness James D. Quartermaster Sergeant .....	108

## L

Lawler C. Corporal .....	111
Lukeen George M. ....	112

## M

Manton W. Private .....	113
May Harold Private .....	113
Mason Lance Sergeant Bandmaster .....	114
McDonald Frank .....	114
McKay A. Driver .....	115
McLoughlan Douglas Driver .....	115
McQueen N. Sergeant .....	116
Melrose Harold Sapper .....	117
Methven Peter W. Gunner .....	119
Murphy A. ....	120

## N

Nancarrow Claude Eugene Private No.2366 .....	121
--	-----

## O

O'Toole Austin Stanley Private No.959 .....	122
O'Toole Cecil Private .....	123

## P

Parry J. V. Sergeant .....	124
Parsons Albert George H. Private No.857 .....	132
Peel Harry Private No.3433 .....	135
Phelps Reginald W. Private .....	136
Pinkstone Victor John Private No.964 .....	138
Piper James Engineer .....	143
Porritt Alexander Corporal No.2671 .....	143
Preston Leslie Private .....	145

## R

Redgate Edgar Harold Sapper No. 2160 .....	146
Redgate Hugh C. Private .....	146
Redgate William Henry Private No.2820 .....	147
Riley Claude Ernest Lance-Corporal No.2138 .....	150
Ross Lindsay Trooper .....	151

## S

Salmon Frank T. Lance-Corporal ...	153
Settree W. Private .....	153
Schubert Phillip Stanley Sergeant No.1342 .....	154
Sohier Norman H. Private* No. 1826 .....	155
Spillane Harris Trooper .....	156
Stacey W. J. Private .....	158

## T

Tarrant Jack Lance-Corporal .....	160
Tarrant Richard T. Captain .....	161
Tynan Leslie David Private No.2872 .....	162

## W

Walker Herbert Charles Private No.16476 .....	163
Wamsley Cecil "Curly" C. Private .....	166
Ward Bruce Trooper .....	167
Waters Harold Trooper .....	168

Waters Jack J. Private .....	169
Warmoll Frederick Sapper .....	169
Warmoll Nick Gunner.....	177
Watts Charles F. Private .....	179
Weeks Robert E. Trooper .....	179
Weston W. Private .....	183
White E. K. Lieutenant .....	184
White J. C. Private .....	186
Willis George Samuel Private No.5894.....	188
Wilson Joe Private .....	188
Woodbury Sydney J. Driver No.285.....	189

**Ackland Elson Robert Private No.6216**  
**D Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Mr A. Acland of Gosford received the following letter from France referring to the death of his son saying,

France,

28<sup>th</sup> May, 1917,

It is with regret that I write to sympathise with you in the loss of your son who was killed in action on the 5<sup>th</sup> May. He died at his post. I feel his loss very much and he will be hard to replace. You lose a son and I, a gallant soldier.

R. McMahon.

Lieutenant, D. Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

**Anderson William J. Private**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company**

Private Anderson from Gosford, who was with the 4<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company in France, wrote to *The Gosford Times* saying,

I have been in the big push on Messines Ridge and been wounded. We attacked the ridge on the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> June at 3.30 and commenced with a terrific mine explosion, followed by thundering artillery and screeching machine guns and rifle fire. The bombardment lasted for hours. As the dawn approached there was a lull by the big guns and we had captured the Ridge. We found the enemy trenches to be strewn with dead and wounded and captured many prisoners, also a large number of machine guns, trench mortars, artillery guns and rifles. Our casualties were comparatively light.

During the day things were quiet and we were hanging with grim death to our positions. As the night grew on the enemy counter attacked in mass formation, but by gallant work of our artillery men they were soon repulsed. I was wounded next morning, 10<sup>th</sup> June. I had just been relieved and was walking down the trench when three shrapnel shells

burst over my head. I escaped two of them by crouching up alongside the trench, but the third shell burst on top of the trench and a piece of shrapnel pierced my shoulder. I staggered for a while and clung to the side of the trench, but was not there long before our heroic stretcher bearers came to my rescue.

Within a few minutes I was in the dressing station and my shoulder attended to. From there I was admitted to hospital where I am doing splendidly and hope to be back soon with my Company boxing on again. There is plenty of fight left in me yet. I can see complete victory this year, for we are winning on all flanks. The Hun has lost his punch. They won't fight at close quarters, but throw up their hands and roar "mercy comrade, we no want to fight." But that tale was cut out long ago. There is no sympathy for them. I have met a few Gosford boys in France, including Lieutenant E. K. White, Sid Coull, Jack Edwards of Narara and I am in touch with Harold May and Fred Bromley. They all look the picture of health. With a little bit of luck I hope to be home for next Easter Monday's meeting at Gosford racecourse.<sup>1</sup>

Private Anderson was reported to have been killed in action in France on September 2, 1917. Since then however, letters have been received by relatives and friends from him, the following, dated November 15, 1917, being received by Mr Robert Ward this week said,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still in the land of the living. I have done a good deal of fighting since I have been in France and had the bad luck to get a crack in June last, but it was nothing serious and only meant a few weeks in hospital. I have just arrived in the hospital again from the Ypres front suffering from trench fever and I can tell you it is not a very pleasant complaint. The hospital is an American one and the Yanks are a splendid class of people. I was living in hopes of being back home for Christmas, but no such luck.

The end of the war is yet a long way off, though the Huns are fed up of the business. They won't fight at close quarters, up go their hands as soon as we get within reach of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, August, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W



them. The greater part of the German army today are mere boys. I have some fine souvenirs in the shape of watches and revolvers taken from the Germans and would like to be able to send them home. I had a letter from an old pal, and he said they had tacked on threepence to his beers at Gosford, well, I wish I had one of Giveny's long 'uns just now. The French beer we get here is 1½ pence a glass and is not worth drinking.

I suppose you know poor old Sid Coull has been killed. I was talking to him only three days before he met his death. I also met Dad May a few weeks ago after hunting for him six months and we had a great time together talking about the old days. Among other things, we decided to buy all the dogs we can get hold of when we get back to Gosford. It is 15 months since I left the old town and would like to be back there again. But there, remember me to all the boys.<sup>2</sup>

### **Archibald Alex Private Infantry**

Private Alex Archibald wrote from France to his parents at Erina saying,

Just a few lines to let you know that I have been wounded. It is a slight wound in the knee caused by shrapnel and a piece of lead is still embedded there, which has to be cut out. Cannot walk yet. Am in the hospital at the Australian Base, it is called Etaples. I think I will get a trip to England when I can walk. Heard that George got through the charge alright. I asked one of the sergeants, when he came to the hospital, had he seen George. He said he had seen him about 2 o'clock in the morning in the third line of the German trenches and he was sticking his bayonet into every German he came across.

The bombardment was terrific; the ground was trembling with the shock of the big shells bursting. It was just the same as if Hell burst out upon the earth. We captured the bush and the village that we wanted, but we had a lot of casualties. We never captured many prisoners, because the Germans fire on us when we are coming across to their

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<sup>2</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

trench. And as soon as we charge into the trenches they all cry for mercy. They got none from us however, but got the bayonet instead.<sup>3</sup>

In his next letter Private Archibald in writing to his mother on November 30, 1918. About his brother Private George Archibald said,

George had been under another operation and has had his arm off above the elbow, also has a very bad wound in the thigh. He is very weak, but out of danger. He has since been removed to Brighton, England and is getting on well.<sup>4</sup>

### **Archibald W. Private**

Private Archibald in a letter to his father-in-law, Mr C. Redgate said,

I went to hunt up bill and no doubt you have heard the sad news by this. I found that he was with the Brigade Staff assisting to clean up headquarters before leaving the lines. They had finished the lower portion and Willie went upstairs, when a shell came through the roof and poor Bill was killed instantly. It is gratifying to know that he had done his bit and that he had not experience any sufferings at the end. He was highly thought of by the Officers and men of his Battalion. I met a number of the Erina boys including Privates Bromley and Hubbard.<sup>5</sup>

### **Atkins Frank Private**

Private Atkins wrote from France to his parents saying,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still going strong. We have had a pretty rough time of it lately and many of our comrades have been killed and wounded, but I managed to come through alright. I have met a few of the Gosford district boys. Fred Bromley is here and I also saw Sid Martin, Harry Campbell and Don Mobbs. George

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<sup>3</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>4</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, February, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

<sup>5</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, July, 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

Archibald was wounded, but I think only slightly and Alex is away sick. He has been away a fair time now and was lucky to be out of the big stunt.

We have made two or three attacks on the Germans lately and have been successful so far. Our Divisional Commander congratulated the Australians on their good work. All hands are glad to be back away from the line for a while and I tell you I am not anxious to go in again until I have had a rest. Jack Gribble was wounded through the arm. I heard they were not sending anymore wounded over to England, but don't think it is true. Expect to be granted leave shortly and hope to go over to England.

Kind regards to all friends.<sup>6</sup>

**Bailey Joseph No. 6552 Private**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private Joe Bailey wrote from France under date September 21, 1916, saying,

You may be surprised to hear from me, but I was handed a copy of *The Gosford Times* dated 30<sup>th</sup> June and as it brought back old memories, I thought by writing to you, Mr Editor, it would let some of my friends know where I am and that I am getting on first rate. Am 13 stone six pounds now. In England we were treated like princes, same in this country. Had a glorious trip over here, only it was a bit too long. It took us 62 days and we were fed up of the sea by the time we landed. We came via the Cape and at every port of call people could not do enough for us.

We landed at Plymouth and came to Perham Downs by train through a country impossible for me to describe. It was simply beautiful. After a stay of five weeks in England we were sent to France. We are all in good heart knowing we have the upper hand of the square head at last. I cannot tell you where I am or what I am doing, but if I have the luck to get back I will be able to supply you with some very interesting reading. Tony Gillan of Gosford, is here with me, But I left George Lucre in England.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

If any of the boys want to write to me my address is No.5652. Private J. Bailey, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, A. I. F. On Active Service Abroad.<sup>7</sup>

In his next letter Private Bailey wrote to *The Gosford Times* from France saying,

By this time you will see that I am still going strong, but how it has happened I do not know, we have been in some of the hottest corners ever there has been in this war and how I came out of them it is more than I can tell. It is more than luck. I have been twice wounded and I am in hospital with trench fever, a very unpleasant complaint. There are a great number of us down with it; they mark us P. U. O., which represents pain of unknown origin. I think it is the effect of last winter, something similar to rheumatism.

Well Tony Gillan is still going strong. Lieut. E. K. White is adjutant of my Battalion. I suppose you hear about the few disputes we had with Fritz and I can tell you there was some fight. He pushed us back a bit one morning in April. We were about half strength, but when we got a few reinforcements we stacked him up like dead sheep. Nearly every shot was another doll over. A couple of thousands of them volunteered to come against us after that and what a horrible cropper they came too. Some of the prisoners we took told us they had a fortnight's special training for the stunt. I bet it makes the old Kaiser wonder what England's pups are made of.

But nevertheless after all our wins there is a lurking of sadness when we look and see how thin our lines are. This is where you make friends quick and loose them just as quickly. But how cheering it is for us to read, after a month's fighting, to what extremes you have to go to out there to get recruits, even to leading empty saddles about. What a hero the slacker will be when he stands on the corner waving a flag the day the boys come home. We are having a good spell now, but expect big things in the near future. If this business does not end next year there will not be many of us left to go home.

The winter was very severe last year and it is not very cheering to think we have to go through another one, but I suppose we will be there at the end. My address is No. 5652,

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<sup>7</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Private J. Bailey, B Coy, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion A. I. F., France. I have met young Harry Denning over here, he is still alright. Well, there is not much to write about over here only war topics and they will keep till some of us get back, so best wishes of good luck to you all from

J. BAILEY

P. S. The Froggies think we carry the Bank of England about with us and charge us accordingly for everything we get. It would give you all a shock to have a look at their price lists.<sup>8</sup>

**Beattie C. No. 6466 Private  
4<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Mrs J. Beattie of the Union Hotel, Gosford, received the following official message from Base Records, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, addressed to Mrs M. Beattie of Gosford saying,

9th January, 1918,

Dear Madam,

I beg to advise you that Private C. Beattie has been reported prisoner of war, Germany, officially and is interned at Gefangenenlager, Limburg. His postal address will be "British Prisoner of War, Germany, No. 6466, Private C. Beattie, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, c/o Australian Red Cross Commissioners, 54 Victoria Street, London" as Mrs Beattie has no relatives at the war named C. Beattie, the above message is not intended for her and the matter is published in the TIMES with the object of ascertaining to whom the letter should have been addressed.<sup>9</sup>

**Beresford Jack Private**

Writing to his mother from the troopship "Euripides" September 20<sup>th</sup>, Private Jack Beresford of Woy Woy said,

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<sup>8</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, September, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>9</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

We are still on the trackless waste, but rapidly nearing Durban. The sea so far has been very calm. I could not believe that the sea could be like this so far from land. We are a fair crowd of two thousand souls aboard. The food is excellent and plenty of it, but alas, the tea and coffee is undrinkable. We called into ----- and the Zephyr, a boat that was built at Blackwell about 10 years ago, came out to us with a crowd of sightseers. I never thought I would see that boat again.

Well we have arrived at Durban and marched two miles to the Y. M. C. A., where we were treated real good. A splendid cup of tea, which needless to say, was much appreciated and fruit, sandwiches, cakes ad lib, free rides on trams. I certainly should not like to rag with the ladies as their faces would scare you. It is a lovely place no doubt. We expect to be in England about the 20<sup>th</sup>. It is a great experience for a boy and I shall have lots to tell you when I come back. We passed "Port Sydney" some days ago with George Taylor and Roy aboard and we expect to be in England several days before them.

The parents of Private Jack Beresford received a cable announcing his safe arrival in England on the 29<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>10</sup>

In his next letter to his mother from Salisbury Plains under date December 9, 1917, he said,

We have just received warning of a move on, so in two days' time we will be en route for the once fair fields of France. Long before you get this I shall be in the trenches and shall know the reality of battle. It seems a very long time since I left Australia and by the looks of things it will be a long time before I get back. A man has to be knocked about pretty badly before he is sent back to N. S. W. I shall be really glad to leave England as frozen ground, mud, slush and rain do not agree with me. We arise in the chilly morn at 6, and have solid drill and lately musketry, so we were pretty sure we were to be soon off for action.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

English officers are very strict and also great pointers. They gave us four days leave to go to London and very kindly had us inoculated before we went. London is not a bad place, but give me Sydney. One of our chaps was sandbagged and robbed last night. I went in the Tube under the Thames. Buckingham Palace is very shabby looking from the outside. I saw one of the Horse Guards changing guards at the Palace and it was a very grand and impressive sight. George Davis's brother Tom is in the 16<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements of the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion. I have not seen any more Woy Woy boys yet, but I live in hope.

Always anxious to get news from Australia. Does the sun still shine, or is it dimmed by the brilliance of Billy Hughes? For my part I do not know how a boy can stay in New South Wales now. They are wanted here and badly too. It is very serious. What preponderance of No's there were. You ought to have heard the boys. Remember me to all good friends.<sup>11</sup>

In his next letter writing from France under date March 16, 1917, Private Beresford said,

I have just left the trenches after doing several days. It was snowing, and so got very sloppy. We lost two men in the night attack. It is very interesting to go through the German dug-outs. My word, Fritz must have thought he was there for keep's; staircases, mirrors on the wall and furnished with chairs and tables and iron bedsteads, 20 and 30 feet underground. But they were routed out of their rat holes. Dick Roberts is a stretcher bearer here, I saw him a couple of days ago. The road here are simply shell holes, my bike would be useless here. But I would like to be going to a hop somewhere over there tonight.

Instead of that I am sitting in a little hut somewhere in France. You see nothing but a scene of desolation wherever you look. But when Spring comes it will look somewhat better. There are miles and miles of trees along the roads. In winter they cut the centre

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<sup>11</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, February, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

of the trees out and then in Spring they grow again and look very green. This must have been a fair land indeed, before the cruel Hun laid it low. I expect by the time you get this it will be chilly over there. One of my pals Bill Brown has gone into hospital with trench feet. I have received none of my parcels, but am very lucky as regards letters and cards. A book you sent me seven months ago has just turned up. Remember me to all my friends.<sup>12</sup>

An interesting letter under date July 21, 1917, received from Private Beresford by his mother saying,

We were at Bapaume recently and had a good look around before we were marched straight through. So everywhere you see Australians hunting for souvenirs. They are inveterate souvenir hunters, but it is rather dangerous as there are so many hidden bombs. There is a cemetery here where France heroes of some previous war are buried. The Germans scrape their names off the headstones and painted the name of their own dead heroes thereon. They will do anything, those unspeakable brutes. Is it not awful the way they are bombing London? And they come over here, drop all the bombs they want to and then float home again. Then up come our airmen at a terrific bat and look for him. I tell you he is some Hun.

Next day he comes over in an observation balloon and looks to see where he'll drop some more and off he goes again. Our aircraft bang away at him, but don't do him much harm. We are in the lines again now and the shells are dropping and crashing only 400 yards away. He must have a very big navel gun on our front. Well, only let him shorted his range a little and they will drop on our camp and there will be some Blighty's. I have never seen Ossie Davis since. There is a boy in our Battalion who worked with Rockie Davis at Mort's Dock and I discovered he was a schoolmate of mine in Sydney.

I think the Australians are disappointed at the thoughts of another winter in France. For myself I must say I had all I wanted of it last winter and don't yearn for a repetition, but there seems no end in sight. It is a very slow war and Fritz is not beaten yet by a

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<sup>12</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 24. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



long way, I am sorry to say. You know the Australians like to be up and doing, they do not like inactivity. I received one parcel out of five, so evidently the age of miracles is not past. It was much appreciated. Have just received 30 letters and last week got 20, so I know I am not forgotten. Remember me to all kind friends at Woy Woy and Blackwell.<sup>13</sup>

### **Beveridge Arthur Engineer**

Extract from a letter written by Engineer Beveridge to his father at Erina saying,

In action, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1918,

What do you think of the war now? By the look of the map I have an idea that we will win this year under the generalship of Foch. I have great confidence in him after the efficient manner in which he won the battle of the Marne. In that battle there were few in the field and plenty in the reserves. Put two and two together and see how far I am out. Of course it is very disappointing for you to read of so many retreats on our side, but no one here is worrying. I know full well what you are thinking just now as you read the papers, but I venture to suggest that you are wrong and I tip that you will see where you are wrong before you receive this letter. That peace talk you speak of is merely a means of keeping the public mind at rest. Leave it to us and we'll give you the peace you want.<sup>14</sup>

In the next letter to Mr and Mrs Miles of Erina written in the field dated July 28, 1918, he said,

It must be pleasing for you both to know what a splendid stand our boys are making on the western front. They are always happy, both in action and out resting and are loved by the French for their fighting qualities as well as their cheerfulness. Erina had sent some splendid lads over and it is men such as these country bred chaps who are doing such good work. They are resourceful, able to think for themselves, full of courage and

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<sup>13</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, September, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>14</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

absolutely hated by the enemy. The wily Hun, no doubt, causes us a lot of trouble, but I can tell you we pay back all he gives us with double rate of interest.

I am with the artillery now and rather like the work. Our guns are rather noisy, but we have the satisfaction of knowing that when the lanyard is pulled the shell arrives at the rear of the German lines with a terrific explosion, which scatters death for a radius of a hundred yards and it sounds like the falling of a couple of very big trees in the bush behind your place. I can just picture Erina as I sit writing this. One comes across few views such as you can get when you stand up on the hill in front of Broadley's house and look down the gully towards your place, especially in the morning, when the mist hang low and the smoke rises from the chimneys like columns supporting the mist.

You don't get those scenes here and it makes one long to be back with the old folk. But it is no good my talking for there is a man's work to be done here and I mean to see it out if God spares me. I've been amongst some pretty rough stuff, but so far have been neither wounded, gassed, nor sick, so I consider myself favoured by good fortune. Now my dear old friends I must close with warmest regards to you both.<sup>15</sup>

### **Boulwood Sergeant**

Sergeant Boulwood wrote from Salisbury Plains, saying,

There is a hospital with German wounded not far from here. There are 36 of them with but 14 legs between them, while one fellow is as happy as can be with both legs and one arm off. Germany must be hard pressed for men as most of the prisoners here are boys. One is a youngster only 13 years and 4 months old. He is the sweetest faced kid too and it makes me realise what an awful thing war is, but we cannot afford to discuss the ethics of war, can we? We have wet canteens in the camp and their effects have made me a convert of me to a rabid temperance advocate. During the war strong drink should be cut out altogether. It is pitiful to see some of the boys, just youths, coming into camp at night, lads who perhaps never knew what the taste of strong drink was

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<sup>15</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, October, 31. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

before they left home. It is our soberest men who are the best in camp and I am told they are the best when it comes to fight.<sup>16</sup>

### **Brand Richard Trooper**

Trooper Brand wrote to his parents in Point Clare under date January 14, 1917, said,

It is just six months today since I sailed from home, but it seemed much longer than that. I have been in France nearly a month now and am attached to the 39<sup>th</sup> Battery Australian Field Artillery. This Battery is in action now and we are having a pretty hot time of it. I am not allowed to tell you just where I am. It is no fun dodging the shells and Fritz doesn't tell you where he is going to land them but so far I have been very lucky. You should see us with our metal helmets on and mud from head to foot. I met Lance Mason of Gosford the other day and he gave me a pair of gum boots. Lance is now Quarter-Master in this Battalion. Close by the gun pit a mate and I have built a dug-out, cosy, but unfortunately lousy.<sup>17</sup>

### **Brewer Jack Corporal**

Corporal Jack Brewer wrote from France saying,

I will try and give you an idea of what the Somme battlefield looks like today. Just imagine a great big pig yard after every inch had been rooted up to find yams and other luxuries. Well, that is what it is most like, but they would have to be giant pigs to make these holes. Then every hole is filled with water and mud. When you are walking out you have to be careful or you will drop into one anywhere from a foot to eight feet deep. By the time you will pull yourself out you look a sorry spectacle. But we are gradually making the conditions better by building duck walk paths to and from the line and putting them down in the lines.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>17</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

The trees, or what is left of them, stick out of the mud like black broken skeletons, others lie badly smashed and broken on the ground. Close to where I am now there is a tangled mass of broken iron. This was once a big and important sugar refinery, but is only a mass of ruins today. Looking around you see a big green object like a huge toad about to take a leap. This is a tank left where it stuck in the mud. Then further over, on a rise, there is another broken wreck. In that case an aeroplane shot down by France.

Everything moving, men, horses, vehicles and here and there a stray dog or two are covered from head to foot with the trade mark, mud. I pity the poor old horses really most of all, for they don't know what it is all for. This is a place where you really find out the good and bad in a man; it all comes out here at one time or another and you see into their whole souls. Some of the best and whitest men I ever wished to have met lay amongst this mud and ruins at Pozieres. Poor old mates, I hope they are in a better world.

This war is going to be the making of a lot of our chaps, but it will be the ruin of a lot too. Those who have the strength of mind to distinguish between the good and the bad will be the better for it all, but there are others who only see the bad side and they will be ruined by it, especially amongst the young boys. Many, I believe most of them, will come out better men for it, but the rest, well they have no home ties here to guide and help them and are left to their own devices. They go down.<sup>18</sup>

### **Brown E. R. Private**

Private Brown of Jilliby wrote to *The Gosford Times* from Salisbury Plains in England saying,

We have arrived in England at last and have settled down to the training, which is very solid, more so than at Liverpool and we are getting excellent food. Thus we are in the pink of condition. We had a fine trip over on the troopship, only having a few days' rough weather between Melbourne and Freemantle and it was between these two ports that I had my first experience of sea sickness. Fully 90 per cent of the boys were sick

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<sup>18</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

and it was very amusing to watch them lying on the deck in all sorts of positions. We were granted leave in Melbourne and Capetown and had a fine time at the later port.

We pick up our escort a few days from the Isle of St. Vincent and felt somewhat safe against a submarine attack. Devonport was reached on the 31<sup>st</sup> September (sic). Any amount of amusement on board, such as concerts, boxing tournaments, O'Grady drill and sports. Two deaths occurred on the voyage over and of course were buried at sea. We were very glad to set foot on land for it was close on a five weeks trip from Capetown.

On arrival here at the camp we were taken in hand by the English officers and although very severe with the discipline and training, which does not altogether agree with the average Australian. Still we are feeling the benefit of it and we are becoming dinkum soldiers. Having been granted four days leave I went to London and had a good look over the city. I was shown over most of the noted buildings and enjoyed myself thoroughly. The Australians are thought a lot of by the British people and we would be killed with kindness if we stayed very long. I was fortunate enough to see the Zeppelin fall to earth in flames on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> instant. It was a magnificent sight and a paper could be read with ease by the reflection. It fell about 11 p.m., the whole place was in complete darkness. All lights have to be out or covered by 10 p.m. The searchlights once they caught sight of the Zepp, kept it in full view for our airmen to put the finishing touch to it.

I met Bill Earl in London; he is looking well and is getting mud fat. He and I came home together and we had a walk of six miles from the station to the camp. Bill kept saying "I wish I had my old horse from Jilliby." The weather is very cold at present and the water is almost at freezing point. We can either have a warm or cold bath after the day's work and needless to say the former is the favourite. The watch is keeping excellent time and is very handy at night when we are on guard. I heard that a few more of the boys had enlisted from the district. They are all needed. Our boys over in France are doing fine work and we are getting the Germans on the run.

We are expecting to be leaving for France in a few weeks and will be very pleased as we have had enough military camp life to satisfy us till the end of our lives. I wish the

local boys good luck for the coming cricket season and hope all at Jilliby are in the best of health. I have put on 24lbs in weight since I left and am as fit as a fiddle.<sup>19</sup>

In his next letter, Private Brown of Jilliby wrote from somewhere in France under date August 30, 1917, saying,

Dear Friends,

We were highly delighted a few days ago at the arrival of a big Australian mail. We were wondering when we were going to receive some news from Aussie as a couple of mails were lost at sea and the last mail we received was on 5<sup>th</sup> May, so that three months had elapsed before we got any news from home. We have been out on a spell since the big Bullecourt stunt and there is no doubt the boys needed an earned the rest. However, we are all in the pink of condition and are expecting to go into the trenches again at any moment.

The land in the vicinity of Bapaume is very flat, so knowing we were going to be out for some time, we set to start a cricket competition and also to make a few wickets. Some of them turned out to be very good, whilst others were like that one at Wyong Creek. However, we soon had nine teams in the competition and after each team had been supplied with the necessary cricket material from the Comforts Fund our competition began in dead earnest about the end of May. There are some very good players in the Brigade and good scores were rattled up at times. We finished the final last week and am pleased to say we easily defeated the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion and are to receive a cup donated by the General.

Well, we had a glorious time for our spell. The weather has been perfect and we have been amongst the French civilians most of the time and they have treated us well. It is amusing to hear the boys trying to speak the French language. They begin well but finish their sentences in English. The civilians have picked up a lot of our favourite expressions, some being very much on the strong side and they rattle these of well-known Australian adjectives as good as the boys. But the funny part of it is they do not

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<sup>19</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

know the meaning of half of them, thence you will be talking to a Frenchman and he will let fly with some of our adjectives, which would just about get you two years in gaol in Australia.

France is an exceptionally pretty country in spring and summer time, but in winter it is about the most miserable place one could possibly be in. They have just about completed the harvesting and there were some excellent crops. The woman and young girls work very hard in the fields, as labour is very scarce over here. I am expecting my leave in about a month's time and will spend the greater part of it in Scotland. We get awoken from our sleep occasionally by Fritz dropping a few bombs from his big air machines. Last night one bomb burst as close as 20 yards from our billet.

Luckily no one was hurt, but if the boys could of got hold of that German airman, he would have been very much knocked about, as it did not altogether please us by awaking us on a cold night in such a boisterous manner. All the boys are in splendid health as I said before and are now waiting to return to the trenches to relieve our comrades of another Division, who have been a long time in them and must be in need of a spell. Hoping all are well in splendid health myself, best wishes

E. BROWN.<sup>20</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* from France under date February, 17, 1918, he asked them to publish the following,

Dear Friends,

At present we are enjoying a spell and we are billeted in a very quiet French village, the people of which have had troops billeted there since the outbreak of war. They can speak a little English and have become accustomed to the ways and sayings of the troops, especially the Aussies, who are noted wherever they go for their thirsty throats and high flown language. It is very amusing to hear the people using the words that a bullock driver makes use of when his wagon can just be seen sticking out of a bog hole.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, November, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Of course they do not know the meaning of some of the words which they have learnt and I'm afraid the womenfolk who are going to visit the battlefields of France after the war, will be a bit shocked if they come in contact with some of the French peasants where the troops have been billeted. We just finished playing a football match against our officers. Needless to say our boys won. The game provided the French people with plenty of amusement as owing to the recent heavy rains the ground was very muddy and whenever the players were tackled and fell in the mud, roars of laughter would come from the onlookers.

The French children have taken on with cricket and football and we found them very useful at one of the big towns scouting for us, when we used to practice of an afternoon. One evening's practice costs us 100 francs, about £3/10/-, as the ball went through someone's front window and smashed a big mirror. We were wishing Fritz would drop a bomb from his aeroplanes, as we could have laid the blame on the bomb. But no such luck and to make matters worse the civilian kept the ball.

Have not met any of the boys from Jilliby for a long time. However, there is plenty of time for us to meet one another, as about 1945 will see the finish of the war. Whilst on my furlough to Scotland I was asked a great many questions by the people as to whether the prickly pear orchards or kangaroo farming were paying concerns. Evidently the boys who had visited bonnie Scotland had been giving N. S. W. a great name and some of the questions asked by the people were highly amusing. Needless to say, I never spoilt the boy's little jokes and I can assure you I increased the number.

I had to laugh at one of the Sydney papers giving an account of the arrival of the English wives of our boys in Sydney. Evidently the boys were giving their wives some idea of their wealth and of course were disappointed at not going to a homestead or a sheep run at Woolloomooloo. Our boys are as good as the Yanks for telling tall yarns. We are having magnificent weather at present, just like the beautiful weather in Australia in September. There is no doubt France is a very pretty country in spring and summer time, but in winter I don't think there are too many who can give it a good word, especially after the awful winter of last year on the Somme. This winter has been very mild, been more like spring weather.



I read with disgust Mr McNeil's report of the Anti-Conscription meeting in Jilliby. Thank goodness there was one, viz; Mr C. B. Smith, a friend of mine, who quickly answered Mr McNeil's remarks, one of which highly amused the boys, Mr McNeil having the audacity to say that we came to war to have a good time. We all realised that on our departure from our dear parents and friends we were going to enter into a very serious problem and many brilliant and gallant lads have given up their lives willingly. Yet in the face of all this, McNeil calmly talks about a good time. It would do him the world of good to come to this picnic. Fritz will supply him with plenty of iron rations and sight-seeing. Hoping all are enjoying the best of health as same leaves myself. Kindest regards to all.

E. BROWN.<sup>21</sup>

In his next letter he wrote, he wrote from the hospital dated June 16, 1918 saying,

Dear Friends,

Since my last letter to you things have been very lively in France and the Germans have recaptured much of the ground where the Australians made such a great name for themselves, i.e., Pozieres, Bapaume and Bullecourt. However, it had not disheartened the boys in the least and they are as eager to take it off Fritz as they were in 1916. I was wounded whilst in the reserve trenches and was taken to the big hospital in France at Etaples and on a bright moonlight Sunday night the German airmen came over and bombed the hospital for two and a half hours, killing nurses, doctors and patients.

Needless to say, we are all lying on our beds, had the wind up as pieces of bomb and shrapnel came crashing through the roof and walls of the wards. It was bad enough lying in bed wounded and unable to move and when the eggs began to burst it made it a hundred times worse. I can assure you my mind was greatly relieved when I was placed in a bed on the hospital ship and bound for Blighty. I only received a deep flesh wound and after a month in the hospital I was sent to a convalescent home, where I have been having a ripping time. I had a few games of cricket against lads from other convalescent homes and have quite enjoyed myself with the bat and ball. Last Saturday I got eight wickets for six runs and the Saturday before nine wickets. I do not think

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<sup>21</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, April, 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

there will be much time for cricket in France this season, as Fritz has captured all our wickets and it will be more like playing with iron than with leather.

England is looking splendid at present as it is now spring time and everything is so fresh and green looking, walking through the big woods and parks and listening to the black birds, thrush, cuckoo, sky larks and others. Puts me in mind of the Australian bush, but, of cause they do not have the beautiful wild flowers and above all, the laughing jackass, which we often think of. I met a number of the boys from Wyong and they were all doing well. Hoping all are well as same leaves myself.

Yours truly,

E.S. <sup>22</sup>BROWN.

### **Buie Robert Gunner**

Gunner Buie, son of Mrs Buie of Hawkesbury River and a Sydney soldier were the men responsible for closing the career of the noted German airman, Baron Richchofen. The two soldiers were Lewis gunners and they were engaged in anti-aircraft work when the German airman became a victim of their fire. Writing to his mother on April 26 last Gunner Buie said.

Another gunner and myself did a bit of good shooting here on the 21<sup>st</sup>. We brought down an aeroplane containing one of Germany's best airmen. He was chasing one of our fellows and nearly had him when we opened up with our machine guns at about two hundred yards range and dropped him saving our man from disaster. All the heads were pleased and no one more pleased than our two selves. It was a good flying shot. He was doing about 120 miles per hour. Airmen tried to claim bringing him down, but it is no use, as all the other planes were about two miles away. On the disc was Captain Baron von Manfred Richshoften. We may be having a trip to England on the strength of it so soon as it is confirmed.

In a subsequent letter Gunner Buie, referring again to the downing of the German super-airman, said,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

It would have been his eightieth plane if we had not stopped him.<sup>23</sup>

### **Campbell Colin Private Engineers**

Private Colin Campbell of Wamberal, who enlisted with the Engineers and sailed about Easter last for the war, wrote while voyaging across the Indian Ocean said,

Since leaving Freemantle we have had lovely weather and a calm sea. The days are long and hot. There are only two troops ships of us now with a Japanese cruiser for escort, the remainder went off in another direction from Freemantle to England. There are 1,400 of us on board and we have to put up with a bit of rough life, card playing, singing and so on. There are three parsons with us, Catholic, Church of England and Presbyterian, also a representative of the Y. M. C. A., who is the best of all, supplying us with reading and writing material and so on. He is only an ordinary private individual, but the other three are Captains. We have five ex-policemen with us, including an old mate of mine and the six of us have been appointed ship police for the trip over. Many on board have severe colds and one would think there was a coughing and spitting competition at night when we get to bed.<sup>24</sup>

Private Campbell wrote from Egypt to his brother Mr Arch Campbell of Wamberal under date September 17, 1917 saying,

With others I have been having it pretty rough, been in the thunder and lighting and a crowd of us have been sent here (Desert Column Rest Camp, Port Said) for a ten day's spell. We were a ragged lot on arriving, have had but the one change of clothes for a long time as all our kits is carried in the saddle and we were only allowed to carry what was absolutely necessary. All my clothes are stored somewhere in Egypt. We are supplied with a new outfit here. It is all right to be in civilisation again, to see white people in civilian clothes and to get butter, cake and so on to eat.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>24</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Our camp is right on the sea beach and will accommodate thousands. As one lot marches out, another lot marches in. this is a big town somewhat similar to Sydney, beautiful buildings and you will see every nationality in the world here. As soon as you go into the town a dozen or more black boys and men rush around begging you to buy something from them and you have to boot them to get rid of the pest. I wonder when I will get into real civilisation.

It's a rough life here in the desert. We have no tents and camp for the night here, there, or anywhere, 36 hours perhaps in the saddle without a break, perishing at times for a drink. Everything is brought up to the front by camel from the rail head. Camels and mules do all the work here. Horses don't do well, they get filled with sand and die wholesale and they are all a bit mad. I suppose it is the sun, as they are standing in the sun all day, no such thing as shade. We get very little war news here.<sup>25</sup>

In his next letter from Palestine to his brother and sister-in-law, Mr and Mrs Arch Campbell in Wamberal he said,

On 11<sup>th</sup> April we go into action again, and it is going to be pretty tough. We are now seven miles off the front line and as I write this tonight I can feel the ground vibrate with the bursting shells and the roar of the guns is awful. It is rough, hilly country where the Turks are and on Thursday night a hundred of us field troop have to cut through the barb wire entanglements to let our infantry through to the enemy's trenches, everything is arranged. We see some very exciting air fights. Yesterday four Jacko planes flew across our lines. They were miles high, just discernible.

Three of our fighting planes had been out scouting and they had sighted the Jacko's, you could hear the machine guns going at the rate of a thousand to the minute. Then the fighters disappeared from view and presently came two Jacko planes, followed by two of ours pouring bullets into them. Both the Turkish pilots were wounded, but their planes were not much damaged, two battleplanes less for the Turks. Another one was

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<sup>25</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, November, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

brought down today and one last Saturday. As soon as a Turk's taube comes over it is often too high for the naked eye to see, a dozen anti-aircraft guns pour shells after him and in a few minutes you will see forty or fifty little white clouds up in the heavens where the shells have burst and then our planes are out like a nest of red hornets.

We have a balloon up all day with an observation man in it. He can see the Turk's planes as soon as they rise from their lines. Our planes chase Jacko right home again and then their guns are pouring the shells after our planes. It is fearfully exciting to watch them, but dangerous. The men aloft don't care where the bullets fall and great nose-caps two and three pounds in weight come off each shell that is fired and will hear them screeching down everywhere. Of course when we went through it we did not have much time for noticing things.

From Belah, where we are resting, to here is about a hundred miles, five day's ride and the whole of the way was the most beautiful country I have ever seen. On either side, as far as the eye could see, was lovely undulating country mostly under barley coming into ear, other parts beautiful green grass and the whole country one blazing mass of wild flowers of every colour and shape imaginable. Also, big healthy orchards of orange, lemon, almond and fig, also large vineyards. The orange and lemon trees are laden with last year's crops and are just white with bloom. All the oranges are seedless and egg shaped and they are as big as small pumpkins and so sweet. At the orchards you get them fresh off the trees fifty for a bob and to tell you the truth I am almost ashamed to look at an orange. With the war there was no get away for the crop and there are thousands of acres of them here.

We are just three miles from Jaff and today we had a look through that city, which is a big seaport about three miles long. The inhabitants there are all a black, brown and yellow race, of a most cut throat appearance. Not one quarter of it is inhabited since the war and some parts of it is wrecked from shell and bomb. You would smile if you saw some of the Bedouin and Arab plough teams; a full grown beast here weighs about two hundred pounds. You will see two of those little bullocks hitched to the plough, or two cows, or two donkeys, a cow and a donkey, a camel and a donkey and so forth. Their plough is just a crooked limb of a tree with an iron shoe on it. They guide the plough with one hand and with a long stick they urge and guide their team as there are no reins

used. If I had a camera on the trip up I could have made such an interesting collection of snapshots. It was the most pleasant trip I have had out here.

The whole division travelled together, twenty thousand men, twenty-six thousand horses and mules and about a thousand vehicles. The first squadron would get a move on at 7.30 a.m. and it should be 12 noon before the whole division got moving. I hope I will give a good account of ourselves during the next few weeks and give the Turks the same as we gave them last November and December. We hunted them so quick that we couldn't keep up with them.<sup>26</sup>

### **Campbell Flem I. Captain Infantry 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion**

Word was officially received that Captain Campbell was killed in action and a few days later a cable was received from Captain Campbell stating that he was alive and well. There had evidently been some painful mistake and as the Captain's name duly appeared in the official list of Dardanelles casualties, Mr Campbell cabled to the front for definite news. A reply was later received from Captain Dobson, Chaplain of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Expeditionary Force, Alexandria, Egypt who wrote,

At Sea-British India Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., T.S.S. Neuralia, June 6, 1915.

Dear Mr Campbell,

Your boy died of his wounds on June 2, while being taken to Malta and was buried at sea on the morning of June 3. He was hit with shrapnel in the leg while going up to see how things were with another man. He was fairly well when he came on board, but had a good deal of pain. I saw him several times and found him smoking cheerfully and trying to buck up another man who had been dangerously hit in the abdomen. But things went wrong and amputation became necessary. It was a question of whether he could stand it, so I told him what his chances were. He was not at all distress about it and asked me to write to his wife and parents and said "This is something that comes to all men, sometimes early, sometimes late." He was very patient and splendid. He rallied a

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<sup>26</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, July, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

little after the operation, but it was only spirit and he gradually sank and passed away quite peacefully.

I feel this is a bare way of telling you, but I am no good at platitudes. We buried him in the presence of the wounded and the ship's company. He had all that the Sisters could do for him and was quite serene. I sympathise with you, but you will be glad and proud of him. To us he was an unselfish, white man and such sacrifice has surely a place and meaning in the progress, towards that far-off Divine event towards which the whole creation moves. Will you please acknowledge this letter.

Very sincerely

CHARLES DOBSON Captain, Chaplain.<sup>27</sup>

### **Campbell Hugh Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Campbell who prior to enlisting was on the staff of *The Gosford Times* wrote from Egypt saying,

We are at present out in the desert and can't get leave to go anywhere, being isolated on account of mumps breaking out on board ship when we were coming over. We disembarked at Port Suez on 10<sup>th</sup> December and were then entrained in open trucks and brought to where we are now camped. It's not playing at soldiers here, very much different to the camps in N. S. W. It's dinkum all right. Up at 5.30 every morning with drill every day in the sand till 4. 30 p. m. You nearly get bogged in it. And when we knock off we don't feel inclined to doll out in out Sydney best I can assure you. I understand that we are to go into the firing line in about a month's time.<sup>28</sup>

In his next letter, Trooper Campbell wrote to the *Gosford Times* from somewhere in Egypt saying,

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<sup>27</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, July, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>28</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, February, 14. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Just a few lines to let you know that I receive the papers you send and am quite well. The weather experienced here lately has been bitterly cold and windy, with sand storms to no end. Our camp is not far from the Suez Canal and we go swimming there twice a week, it will not be long before I am sent up to the front, as we have nearly finished our training. We are about 200 miles from the firing line and nearly every day we see hospital trains conveying men from the front into Cairo. I had a few hours leave last night and went to have a look around the native town, which is about a mile from the camp. It is a pretty little place, with some nice buildings mostly occupied by French people. Special arrangements are made where soldiers can go for a meal. I went and it was the first decent feed I have had since I left home.<sup>29</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* Trooper Campbell wrote from Palestine saying,

Just a few lined to say that I am still keeping well and fit. We are up in the front line trenches now. The weather is getting too hot for fighting on a big scale. Both sides are constantly shelling each other. Our Regiment, the 1<sup>st</sup>, is camped on the side of a hill on the northern slope of which its trenches are. We look across a wide valley to the Turk's lines, their nearest point being about 1,700 yards distant. Two months ago the Turks attacked this position but were driven back with heavy losses by the Australian Camel Corps who were then holding the position.

Many bodies of Turks who were killed in that attack still remain unburied, three hundred yards from our lines. Evidently they were not all killed outright, as some of the bodies are in rows as if they had been wounded and were carried back a short distance out of fire by their mates and had died there. Not very far behind our trenches, below in a protected hollow, are a number of graves of cameliers who were killed when the Turks attacked. Little simple wooden crosses mark their last resting place, but they died facing the enemy

It is getting extremely hot here and fiery winds blow up from the dried-up and blistered-looking Jordan Valley, just like the fierce blast from a furnace. I believe that a big

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<sup>29</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, April, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



operation on a big scale are suspended until the cold weather returns, when I suppose we shall start to push Jacko back some more. We hear here that the tide had turned on the western front and that the Hun had shot his bolt. It is said here, too, that we are almost certain to make the Turk turn it in before this year is out. Today, June 21, has been frightfully hot the thermometer registering 125 degrees in the shade of our medical tent. Everything has been quite. I was going to say that we had not received a single shell from Jacko. But one has just burst about 200 yards downhill from where I am writing. This is the signal to get into our ice chests; I mean dug-outs, for the Turk generally sends a few shells over before he gets the tired fits. We get *The Gosford Times* and the other papers you regularly send and I can tell you they are appreciated.<sup>30</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* from the Jordan Valley in Palestine Trooper Campbell wrote,

I am right again after being in hospital with an attack of malarial fever. Gwen Freewin of Gosford is here with us and is doing well. He had a very lucky escape a couple of weeks ago. A piece of high explosive struck his rifle which he had slung across his back smashing the wood work and bending the barrel. If the rifle had not been there he would have received a nasty wound in the right shoulder. Three other chaps who were riding with him were badly wounded. I have been receiving papers from you nearly every mail and they are very acceptable. I saw Gerald Archbold of Narara the other day. He is in the A. M. C. and is in the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The weather is still very warm, but I suppose it will just be the opposite by the end of next month. There has been no rain here for six months and in most places the claylike dust is knee deep. You should see us after an all-night ride through it.<sup>31</sup>

### **Cassell H. L. Private**

Private H. L. Cassell, who was in France, wrote to his mother at Ourimbah under date 4 August, 1914, saying,

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<sup>30</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>31</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, November, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

We left Tel-el-Kebir in cattle trucks for Alexandria and reach there next morning, going straight on board White Star liner “Megantic” (15,000 tons.) At 11 a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup> we sailed for Marseilles. We were very fortunate to strike the finest transport we have been on yet. We had third class cabins to camp in, four beds to a cabin and good food, also revolving chairs to sit on at table. There were 2,000 troops aboard, but still plenty of room to lounge about. We were escorted by a cruiser all the way. I was a permanent mess orderly for the trip and did well for food. We had a series of sports aboard and the 18<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> got their share of the spoils.

We passed Malta on the 9<sup>th</sup> and reached Marseilles on the 11<sup>th</sup> at night. Next day we disembarked and at 12 noon we boarded French trains and started on our 50 hours journey to Havre on the coast. There are some pretty spots in N. S. W., but France is beautiful and I never saw a more beautiful place. From the time we left Marseilles to we got to Havre there was nothing but lovely vineyards and miles and miles of avenues of popular birch and silver laurel trees. The harvest was just ending and all the green fields were thronged with hundreds of woman, children and old men gathering in the crops.

The houses are quaint, old world buildings with thatched and single roofs and seemed to be perched in all the funniest positions imaginable. At every village and small town we passed through crowds of women and children and old men past military age, thronged round the train and wished us “bon voyage” and exchanged souvenirs with us. Talk about politeness. The average Frenchmen is a thorough gentlemen and the French soldier we passed on the journey shared everything they had among us, wine, and cigarettes and so on. One chap cut every button off his clothes as souvenirs.

Women are taking the place of men in many jobs, such as tram conductors, cart drivers, railway car cleaners and so on. The money got us at first, after the “Gypto” cash, but we managed fairly well. We brought bread at various stations at one franc per loaf that is ten pence for 4lbs. At every large station were French Red Cross Sisters and Boy Scouts with tea and cakes and drink like hot hop ale, very nice too, all of which was “baksheesh.” They made a great fuss of us in their own lingo.

We passed Paris about ten miles to our right and went through Lyons and Chalons and after passing through Rouen, where we saw a lot of Hun prisoners working we landed at Havre and boarded the “Arundel”, a small channel transport and escorted by two torpedo boats, at 10 p.m., August 14, we slipped across the channel, where only four days before five merchant ships were sunk. At 4 a.m. we passed the Isle of Wright where there is an internment of Hun prisoners. We then proceeded up the Solent to Southampton, where we landed and entrained for Amesbury, Salisbury Plains.<sup>32</sup>

**Cato Vincent Arthur Corporal No.23**  
**D Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry**

Corporal Cato who enlisted from Gosford at the beginning of the war wrote to *The Gosford Times* saying,

Mena Camp

Cairo, Egypt, February 21

Just a line from an old soldier. Things are not good here for the Expeditionary Force, but personally I am in the best of health. Up to date 164 deaths have occurred from various diseases including several cases of smallpox and we were all re-vaccinated, making the second time since I enlisted for the front. This country, so different from Australia, is full of interest. I have seen most of the sights about Cairo; have been on top and inside the Pyramids. We had a shower of rain the other day I asked a native what was the rainfall for the year. He answered me in good English “Well sir; you have seen what has fallen, that is all we have had so far.” It wasn’t enough to wet a pocket handkerchief.

The Museum was something wonderful, plenty of mummies and statues. We go out into the desert every day and sometimes stop out on outpost duty. My teeth are getting worn down through munching the desert sand that get mixed up in our food. I am forwarding a list of “Soldiers Don’ts” issued to each member of the force. I am also enclosing a notice re Emden. This was posted up on board our ship, the “Suffolk”; the

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<sup>32</sup>

morning after the German battleship was sunk. You will see what a narrow escape we had, as our ship was in the rear of the convoy.<sup>33</sup>

### **Chandler Robert W. Private**

Private Chandler from Wyong Creek wrote to his wife from Leeds Court Hospital in England saying,

No doubt you will be surprised to hear that I am in a hospital in England and I must tell you why I am here. While I was in hospital in France I volunteered to give blood to a chap who was bleeding to death and I underwent the ordeal on 11<sup>th</sup> April without the aid of gas or anything else. I was fairly fit at the time and didn't notice the pain much. The doctors cut two stitches in my right arm where the blood was taken from and I wanted to walk out when they had finished, so you can see that I wasn't too bad. However, they would not allow me to and I was carried out on a stretcher and have been in bed since. I was told that they had taken a pint and a half of blood from me. The nurses treat me as gently as they would a baby and I am being fed up on stout and port wine.<sup>34</sup>

### **Cochrane Private**

Extracts from one of the last letters written by the late Private Cochrane to his sister at Wyong was,

We are having a few days rest now and I expect to be in action again in a few days' time. Wish it was all over, as it is a cruel war and you have no idea what it is like.<sup>35</sup>

### **Colman Roger Driver**

Driver Roger Colman of Mangrove Mountain describes as aeroplane flight in France thus,

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<sup>33</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, April, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>34</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June , 20. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>35</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Being camped a few miles from a large aerodrome somewhere in France, the thought occurred to me that it would be a great experience to make a flight before returning to Australia. But the question was how to manage it, seeing that I knew no one in the Royal Flying Corps. There is an old saying that “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread” and no doubt some timid people would take me for one of the former for when passing one day, I made enquiries as to the possibility of my wish being granted. After sounding three of the boys I eventually found my way to the testing officer. I was introduced to him by the orderly room clerk as an Australian soldier who wishes to have a fly.

Evidently the word Australian carried some weight, for he was very good and said that if I happened to be there when there was a machine to test he would do what he could for me. That was better luck than I had anticipated and gave me heart to try again. The third time my perseverance was crowned with success and I found the machine, a monoplane, already for the ascent. I was soon seated behind the pilot and strapped in and then the mechanic set to work to get the engine going. After about five minutes work the engine started. The pilot then gave the word, the chocks were pulled away and we were off.

What were my sensations? Well, first of all, I clutched the iron framework of the plane, got a good grip with my feet and made quite sure that where the plane went I would follow. Next I glanced over the side at the earth we were rapidly leaving behind and the feeling came over me that I'd get dizzy and the best thing to do was to shut my eyes, hang tight and let the pilot do his worst. I conquered this, however, and set my eyes on the right side to view the scenery below. Ultimately I became accustomed to my position and began to take stock of my surroundings.

And what a view stretched out below me. In France the fields are white unto harvest. The matured crops of different shades of brown intermixed with patches of the green stuff looked like plots marked out with mathematical precision. A big town seemed a comparatively small place, whilst one could see dozens of villages scattered all over the landscape. The white roads were clearly defined and it was not difficult to pick out

the river winding its lazy course towards the sea. We ascended higher and higher and then the testing began.

First one one side and then on the other and for a change a spiral descent, the plane being on a very acute angle. As if this were not enough, we ascended again and did the staircase act on the other side. That part of the business being satisfactory, the pilot shut off the engine and volplaned towards the earth now a thousand or so feet below. It was just like sliding down some huge toboggan similar to the one they had at Manly some years ago, only on an immeasurably vaster scale and the certainty of a sudden death should anything go wrong.

My feelings were better imagined than described. However, my faith in the skill of the pilot was not misplaced, for he picked up the engine again and after performing a few more antics, alighted again on mother earth without the slightest jar. It was a wonderful experience and one that I never dreamed of having when I left Australia's shore. Would I go again? Yes, any time they want ballast I'll risk it.<sup>36</sup>

### **Connell H. J. Captain**

Mrs Connell gave the following extracts from a letter received from her husband Captain Connell to *The Gosford Times* dated May 19, 1918, which showed the happy side of life at the front saying,

The day has been hot and this afternoon we had a very successful swimming carnival. There were competitors from the whole Brigade and hundreds of onlookers, including the Brigadier and C. O's with bands in attendance. The baths, fresh water, were about forty yards long and a third the width and very deep. Outside men paddled about in small boats or punts, in all stages of undress, with all the enjoyment of youngsters of twelve. You could not imagine to see their pranks that probably a few days before they were fighting for dear life and that they had proved themselves easily better than the Hun's best every time they had met him. There was the inevitable fancy costume event, all the competitors being lined up near the water and then suddenly pushed in. three

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<sup>36</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

days ago I refereed the final of a football competition we had run, the 9<sup>th</sup> Coy Engineers won. At night there are always concerts, debates and so on, organised by the Y. M. C. A.<sup>37</sup>

**Compton Clarence Henry Transport Sergeant No.1011  
5<sup>th</sup> Light Horse 6<sup>th</sup> Army Service Corp**

Sergeant Compton adopted son of Mr and Mrs Cuthbert of Green Point who is a driver in the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Service Corps, now stationed in Egypt, wrote home from Ma'adi Camp under date March 7, 1915, saying

We were at Ismaliah the morning of the fight with the Turks about 750 of the enemy was taken prisoner and they are now camped about a mile from us. Although not exactly in the row, our ship was heavily barricaded and extra guards mounted. We were not allowed ashore until we reached Alexandria and then only to entrain to Cairo, which we eventually reached at about 4.30 in the morning. This is a rotten country, but wonderful all the same. It is not fit for a white man to live in, dust, sand, flies and disease. The general morality is shockingly low. In Cairo one sees buildings said to be over a thousand years old and alongside are houses erected not two years ago.

The principal buildings are wonderful to look at. I can't describe them, but when I tell you the finest of them are far and away ahead of anything in Sydney you will have an idea of the architectural beauty of the city in general. I hope the people of Australia will not believe any of the grossly exaggerated statements made concerning our troops. There is a big row going on about it, but people should only believe what is officially printed in the papers. With about one hundred others I am suffering from ulcerated throat caused by the dust caught in the thorax. Under the circumstances speech is difficult.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, July , 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>38</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, April, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

## **Costello W. Private Infantry**

The following is a letter from Private W. Costello of Woy Woy, who was wounded in an engagement at the Dardanelles:-

I was in action from 9 a.m. on Sunday, the 27<sup>th</sup> April, until Tuesday night, 29<sup>th</sup> April. We were under very heavy fire. When attacking we were shot down like rabbits, men were falling dead all round me. We advanced to the top of a hill and for three-quarters of a mile we were under very heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire. Shrapnel was continually bursting over our heads. Some of the battalions were almost wiped out of existence. There will be many broken hearts in Sydney when the roll of honour appears. Many were wounded.

At first I was very lucky. I was lying flat on the ground, killing Turks for all I was worth and never thought of getting shot myself. At last I got one in the heel of the right foot. It went right through the foot. I kept on shooting until my boot was full of blood. Then I ran for a trench where my wound was dressed. I was then sent to the beach and later was put aboard the "Derflinger." On the 30<sup>th</sup> April, we left for Alexandria, where we arrived on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. I was then placed on the Red Cross train and sent to Cairo to the hospital.

Over 600 wounded came by the same boat. On the way 41 died and were buried at sea. A mate of mine succumbed to his injuries on the way. We are splendidly treated in the hospital and English ladies visit us every day. I would like to be back again with the boys and get my revenge. I received new clothes today, having lost everything, even my rifle that accounted for many a Turk and German. We captured two Germans dressed in clothes which they had taken from the dead. They had Red Cross on their arms and were carrying a stretcher in which they declared was a wounded soldier. On examination we found they carried a machine gun. They paid dearly for their treachery. I am told that only 30 men were left in our battalion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, June, 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



**Coull Sydney Archibald Private No.2151**  
**B Coy 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Mrs Coull of Narara received the following letter from the battle front referring to the death of her youngest son who was killed in action on August 29, 1917 saying,

Codforth Wilts,  
No. 4 Camp, England  
September 28,

Dear Madam,

Just a few lines to let you know about your son. He was in my Section with B Coy, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion at the battle of Messines. A shell killed 20 and wounded 14 and your son was among the former. I regret having to break the news to you, but on account of knowing the man your son was I feel it is my duty to do so. He was killed outright and suffered no pain. We buried him after dark and I said a prayer over him God be merciful to his soul. I placed a little cross over his grave, I feel so sorry for your dear son, but he did his bit for his country. Should I ever get back to Australia I will call and see you personally. At present I am having a rest in England. We all hope that this cruel war will soon be over and that we will be able to get back home. Good night and God bless you.

From a dear friend of your son Sid, (God bless him too)

J. P. MURRAY (Sergeant).<sup>40</sup>

In another letter Mrs M. A. Coull of Narara received referring to the death of her son from the Chaplin, the letter said,

France,  
15<sup>th</sup> November, 1917,

Dear Mrs Coull,

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<sup>40</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, December, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I have just received your letter of 15<sup>th</sup> September and I feel very, very deeply for you in your sorrow for the death of your dear boy. Nothing saddens me so much as the loss of men whom I love so much, their piety, their devotion, bravery and patience touches my heart. But if I myself feel so grieved at the death of one of them, it helps me all the more to understand your sorrow. Alas! We have lost more than one lately. It will be a comfort for you to know that your son was well prepared for his end. A few days before they went into the front line I had all the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Mass and all received Holy Communion.

On that day I had a little parcel of medals of our Lady to give out after Mass. I was greatly impressed by the eagerness with which every man came to receive a blessed medal. The piety of the men at Mass and the devotion with which they approached the Alter Rails to receive Holy Communion was a most edifying example to others present. As I am obliged to look after three other Battalions, I was not present in the front line when your boy was buried. His death was instantaneous and he was buried at the spot where he was killed, in the presence of his officer, Captain Mosley. May God give him eternal rest. I offer Holy Mass continually for his soul and the other brave dead. In deep sympathy.

Yours very sincerely,

C. LONERAGAN, Catholic Chaplin.<sup>41</sup>

### **Cox Clare Infantry**

Private Cox from Gosford wrote from Belgium to the War Relief League saying,

I desire to heartily thank you for the parcel received on September 9. We have been on the move a lot lately and carry very little in the way of a change; we have to depend on a large extent on different comfort funds and parcels from home to supply our requirements in the way of socks, shirts and so on and I might here add that we manage

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<sup>41</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

well, thanks to noble workers for the cause. The fair sex of Gosford have a warm spot in the hearts of Gosford boys over this side of the world. I hope the time will not be long when we will be back again in dear old Gosford.<sup>42</sup>

**Crane Robert George Lance-Corporal No.2810**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion**

Mrs Crane of Wyong received the following letter referring to the death of her soldier son saying,

France,

April 24,

Mrs Crane,

Dear Madam,

Long before you receive this letter news of your son's death will have reached you and though the grief you feel cannot be effaced it will bring pride to your heart and alleviate your suffering to know he went out doing his duty he so bravely left Australia to accomplish. Even amongst us, daily expecting these events, the news brought regret to us all and now that we are back from the firing line again his cheery voice and manly ways are sadly missed. He was killed during the operations before the village on the night of April 11<sup>th</sup> and I regret I am unable to inform you of the exact circumstances, as personally I was not in the line but in reserve and the Brigade suffered such heavy casualties that in our Company few men returned, none of them able to let me know what actually occurred, except that amongst others he was seen lying in a shell hole killed.

I know this letter will not be much comfort to you, but we all thought it should be written out of respect and as a token of appreciation for him. It is a duty I never expected, nor hoped to perform and we all fully realise the intense grief you suffer, but bear up and always think of your gallant son as one, who, like many more of our brave Australians have done. Both on Gallipoli and those bloody fields of France, has made the great sacrifice for his people and country I have collect his few personal effects and

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<sup>42</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 9. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

posted them, although a small thing (a gold medal won in France as champion footballer in the unbeaten team of our Company) you would have prized greatly, he had with him. Please except the sympathy of all his mates,

Your sincere and sympathetic friend

L. D. CAMPBELL.<sup>43</sup>

### **Crane W. J. Private Infantry**

Writing on August 10, 1916, from France, Mr William J. Crane of Ourimbah saying,

We have had some hot stuff during the past five weeks and this is how our lads came out of it. Killed, Les Tynan and “Curly” Wamsley, also another chap from up the Creek. Tom is wounded and also Bill Young. Poor old Les was killed by concussion of a shell; he was not hit at all. “Curly” was killed the next night in the first charge that his battalion was engaged in. Tom was wounded about five days later and at time of writing I do not know if it is serious. The death of Les will be a sad blow to Mr and Mrs Tynan, but there is one thing, he went under doing his bit and doing it like a man.

The Germans are using all sorts of things against us here and as a result of the fearful concussions many of our lads are suffering from shell sock, which is worse than being wounded. A man suffering from shell shock fights day and night and very often has to be strapped down. John is taking his brother’s death like a true born soldier. When the Australians were first sent into the firing line they were ordered to take a village and they got it the first try. The Tommies were trying to capture it for months and it cost them about 40,000 men for nothing. So you will see what we are up against.

When we went in we had a ridge to take. We got it the first night, but had to fall back part of the way. It was in this charge that poor “Curly” Wamsley went under. We took the ridge five days later and captured a good many prisoners; most of them could speak good English. There is a lot of dissatisfaction among the Australian troops over

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<sup>43</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, August, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

clothing. When we came out of the trenches most of us were in rags, so they gave us a new rig out, but a lot of it belonged to the Tommies and most of the boys would rather keep their rags than change them for English clothing. A bit of Australian clothing turned up today, so we might get our own yet.<sup>44</sup>

**Cunningham George Private  
Army Medical Corps**

Mr Thomas Hall of Gosford, received the following letter from Private George Cunningham referring to the death of his brother Jim Cunningham. The letter was written from.

Somewhere in France

I suppose you have heard long before this about poor Jim's death. It appears that Jim with twelve others of the First Field Ambulance were seated in a dug-out awaiting their turn to carry patients to the dressing station when an enemy shell struck the dug-out resulting in the death of four and wounding four others, my brother being killed instantly. I last saw him alive a week or so before it happened when our lot relieved his. I had seen him several times before and was trying hard to get a transfer so that I would be with him. But I suppose it was just as well I did not succeed, as if I had done so I would most likely have been in the dug-out with him. Please remember me to all my friends. Trust that the Ambulance Corps is still going on in Gosford.<sup>45</sup>

**Daley Charles Sapper**

Sapper Daley of Woy Woy wrote to Mr W. E. Hadley of the Woy Woy Hotel saying,

France,

March 12, 1917,

Just a few lines to let you know I am in the best of health and spirits and trusting these few lines will find you and Mrs Hadley in good health. I am right in it now in the front

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<sup>44</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>45</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

line. The weather is getting good and things are looking well for us. I had one narrow squeak. The old adage says delays are dangerous and I still hold it is good. But I owe my life to a delay of half-a-minute. I cannot tell you of any news of what is going on at the front.

We get four days rest at a camp away from the firing lines every eight days and are served with rum, tobacco, cigarettes and matches. A hot bath and a change of clothes are also provided when we come to the rest camp. Have not seen any of the boys I knew since I arrived here. I don't think the war will last much longer now as old Fritz is pretty well wet and is on his dying kick. I count myself extraordinarily fortunate in having the chance of just seeing England and France at this wonderful time, but one realises the horrors of it all far more vividly than one did out in Australia.

I suppose it is only natural after all. But people are splendid and it's all tremendously inspiring. Still war is an awful business and one wonders and wonders from day to day how it can possibly go on at this terrible rate of loss of the best life of the nation. Anyway, I believe the Allies have a chance now, which they never had before of bringing home to the nation and empire a glorious victory and lasting peace. It is better to ride a war horse than to back a race horse and to kill your enemy in war than to cheat your enemy in peace.<sup>46</sup>

In his next letter Sapper Daley wrote to Mr W. S. Hadley from France under date October 14, 1917, saying,

Like Johnny Walker, I am at present going strong. Have not seen any of the boys from Woy Woy district, but I have seen the work done by the Australians at the battle front and splendid work it has been too. They have given the Hun a crashing blow this time, taking everything by storm and capturing thousands of prisoners. After the battle the enemy's dead bodies were piled up in heaps. Prisoners say the Australians strike terror into the hearts of the Germans, so irresistible are their charges. I am proud of the Unit

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<sup>46</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 24. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

to which I belong, for it played a prominent part in dislodging the enemy from his almost impregnable positions.

The Hun is well beaten on this front and he knows it. He also knows that France's contemptible little army has developed into a most formidable one. We have guns innumerable, of every calibre and ammunition in galore. Our artillery is perfect and nothing can live under the fearful barrage our guns send across. Prisoners told us they had had nothing to eat for five days; their reinforcements could not reach under our fire. The Germans are indeed getting a dose of their own physic and no matter how they attempt to hide, we find them with a pitiless fuselage of poison gas bombs.

We have the stern satisfaction afford by seeing the evil engineer hoisted on his own petard, the prisoners of inhumanity in modern warfare struck down by the weapons which they themselves forged. There is an added satisfaction in the fact that the British weapons are better than theirs. Our shells contain deadlier gasses; our men have more skilfully constructed gas masks for defence from the fumes of the enemy bombs. Theirs was the choice of weapons. We employed the chivalry which has always had a certain place in battle until forced to take logical reprisal against the modern barbarians who prostituted science to the wok of torture.

It is said of old that he who to takes up the sword shall perish by the sword. The employers of the poison bombs are dying of the fumes they created. This was planned by German diplomats. Its details were worked out in German laboratories. It was Germany who decided that it should be fought without pity and without scruple. The battered withering soldiers in the trenches are paying for the sins of their rulers. They have stamped into the blood of an innocent offspring an indelible stain that can never be obliterated.

Yes, they are steeled to barbarity, with the cries of widows and the orphans they have made. Notwithstanding all, the tide of victory is flowing in full swing to our shores and I hope before long that all the boys will be singing the good old song, "Sailing Merrily Home." To repeat the words of the late Lord Kitchener "the Hun is like a prize fighter staggering and dazed, another blow and he is down and out for good." Yes, Germany is trembling to its centre. By the time this letter reaches you it will be Christmas. Let

me express the hope that it will be happy one for you all and that the new year will bring peace and prosperity.<sup>47</sup>

### **Dalglish Robert E. Private Infantry**

Private Bob Dalglish, son of Gosford's Postmaster, wrote from Lemnos Island under date of 21 September. He was wounded at Gallipoli and invalided to England and had just arrived back at Lemnos.

Reached here O. K. and was disappointed at not finding many of the old hands left. Of those I knew only ten are left. It is thought that we will be here for about a month to enable the Corps to be reorganised and fixed up for another go. Came here from Anzac, Gallipoli, where things have greatly improved since I was last there. Some days hardly a shot is fired, but when any advance is made heavy losses are inevitable. I attended church service there, about half-way between the firing line and the beach. During the service scarcely a shot was heard and the only sound of battle was the boom of a ship's gun bombarding some distance from us. So you will understand how settled things have become and the waiting game that must be played during the intervals between severe fighting. We left Plymouth on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, and called at Malta. The Maltese people are very glad to have been able to help so much with the sick and wounded and they have grown fond of the Australians who have been sent to them. There are about 5,000 of them on the island, according to a late report.<sup>48</sup>

### **Davis Harold Private Infantry**

Private Harry Davis writes from somewhere in France to his mother Mrs Arthur Davis of Empire Bay saying,

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<sup>47</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 3. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>48</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 5. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



You will no doubt be surprise to hear that we have shifted our quarters as far as this. How glad we were to leave Egypt you cannot guest. It is simply heaven over here after being in that country. Without a doubt I think France is one of the prettiest countries under the sun. No wonder its people fight for its liberty and freedom. We are having a good time here and are billeted in the barns of the farm houses, which are most comfortable, plenty of lovely hay to sleep on. The people are very nice and exceedingly good to us. The only thing is we cannot understand their language. Camped quite close to me are Gus and Warren Adams, also Jack Virett and Clarence Hawker, who since I last wrote has been promoted to the rank of Captain. Greetings to all the people I know at the Bay.<sup>49</sup>

### **Dent Arthur E. Lieutenant Infantry**

Lieutenant Dent of Gosford, writing from the trenches under date September 4, wrote, I am at last right at the front and have been here about 18 days. Can't say I am enjoying it, but it is a wonderful experience. Will never forget being under fire for the first time and hearing the first sounds of battle. We were well within earshot of the fire and a few strays kept splashing round our ship and I suppose we would have had some direct fire had it been daylight and a few shells into the bargain. However, we landed safely and got into a sheltered spot for the time being and moved out at night.

As we advanced towards the enemy bullets whizzed pass so frequently that we were beginning to treat them with almost contempt, but a new experience was forthcoming. We were ordered to make another move, this time in daylight and we hadn't gone far before the enemy spotted us and had our range with his artillery and shrapnel began to fall. It was most exciting, I had but one narrow escape, but that was owing to bad marksmanship on account of the gunner. He got our range better latter on and the companies in the rear suffered loses.

It is a lovely uncertainty that we live in here. I enjoy siting close to a group of our lads listening to their talk. I never realised that an Australian had so much humour in him

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<sup>49</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

and to hear “Tommy” discuss the situation is very amusing too. We don’t get much news regarding the outside world and really don’t know what happens in our immediate vicinity. Rumours about different things are as thick as bullets in this part and some of them just as erratic. I would like to get *The Gosford Times* regularly.<sup>50</sup>

Writing from Gallipoli under date 24 September 1915, Lieutenant A. E. Dent says,

Just received first letter also *Gosford Times* dated 30 July and 6 August. They were very welcome indeed and it seems like old times to read of Gosford and surroundings. The account of Australia Day was good and I wish I could have seen that. Today I am out of the trenches for a rest and I hardly know myself. Was just about on my last legs and now even with a day’s rest, I am a different man. We are to have four days out. It’s simply murder on the officers, more so than the men and more so because we are short. Sorry I can’t tell you of things that go on here; just as well though as some of the things are indescribable on paper. However, there is only one end in this part of the globe and the Turks, as well as we, know it only too well. I think they would throw up the sponge tomorrow if they had their way.

In one place not far from here the opposing forces are only ten yards apart and frequently an exchange of cigarettes goes on. Once one of their packets fell on the bomb proof shelter above our trenches and they allowed one of our men to crawl up and get it without firing a shot. Of course, after this a bomb duel takes place. We live like rabbits. The organisations and preparations are very complete and characteristic of the British soldier and it makes one feel proud to be one. You should see our base on the beach. I gazed at different things in wonderment for a while and one would think it was a city in itself.

I mentioned in another letter of a promotion. It is verified today and I am to be the first lieutenant as soon as it came out in orders. If I can only keep my end up I should have

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<sup>50</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

three stars by the time things come to a close. I have been working jolly hard and I think I deserve something.<sup>51</sup>

Mr W. J. Dent of Gosford, received the following letter from the Australian Red Cross Society, N. S. W. Division saying,

Dear Sir,

We are glad to be able to send to you re-assuring news, as we have just received the following cable from our agents in London, dated 5<sup>th</sup> March, "Lieut. Dent, 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, prisoner of war at Parchim, gunshot wound, abdomen and foot, progressing favourably, letter received from him."

Lieutenant Dent was reported to have been killed in France the previous November.<sup>52</sup>

Miss D. Ward of Gosford received a letter from Lieutenant Dent saying,

Somewhere in France,

May 5, 1916

Dear Miss Ward,

I am writing to let you know that I received your valuable parcel from the Patriotic Society of Gosford and also to offer you my many thanks for its contents. I have heard of the great deal of the work of your Society, both from some of our Gosford lads here at the front and I never fail to see something of note in each week's issue of *The Gosford Times*, which comes along to me. You will all be pleased to hear that the parcels arrive safely and still more that such parcels as these gives us so much comfort here in the trenches.

Luxuries like you send along are so hard to obtain here, especially the tobacco. I think even the youngest soldier who left Australian shores has learned to smoke and you have no idea how we all appreciate your gifts and kindly thoughts. I hope it is pleasing to your Society to know that your work is bearing so much fruit and that you are helping

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<sup>51</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>52</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, arch, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

us so well to keep up our hearts and win our battles. Again I thank you all and send you my best wishes and kindest regards.

Yours sincerely,

A. E. Dent, Lieutenant.<sup>53</sup>

Lieutenant Dent was after all a prisoner in Germany. He wrote to his parents at Gosford under date February 24, 1917, saying,

I am at last out of bed for a few hours and am able to hobble around on crutches and feeling better generally. Don't trouble any more about me, as I shall be quite right in a few weeks.

Also on 9 March, 1917, he wrote saying,

I don't suppose it is much good writing you there letters and cards, as perhaps by the time they get to you we shall probably be on the way ourselves. I have been in this country for nearly three months and am feeling much better and am able to walk about on crutches, but am afraid it will be a long time before I can walk again. There is some complication or other, I had my foot X-rayed a day or two ago and that may disclose something. It is miserable not to be able to walk; still I have lots to be thankful for.<sup>54</sup>

On Tuesday, Lieutenant Dent's father received the following letter from the American Consular Service, Hamburg dated January 18, 1917, saying,

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that I visited your son at the Ep---dorfer Hospital yesterday and I know you will be glad to hear that he is recovering rapidly from the wounds received.

Very respectfully yours,

HENRY H. MORGAN,

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<sup>53</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>54</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

American Consul General.<sup>55</sup>

In the next letter, Mr W. J. Dent was in receipt of a letter dated April 5, 1917, from his son, Arthur, who at the time of writing, was still a prisoner in Germany, stating that he had just learned of his reported death. He further stated,

I am still in hospital, but can walk about and have improved wonderfully, the only thing that troubles me being my foot, which is all shot to bits and although healed, the nerves give me much trouble. I cannot walk far just yet and limp a little, but that will leave me soon. At time of writing I weighed ten stone instead of 14 stone. When I was wounded I was in first class condition and that pulled me through. Fancy having a bullet clean through the upper part of my body, going through the lung and liver and getting over it. Then on top of it three operations on my foot and one for appendicitis.

Since receiving this letter Mr Dent had heard from the Red Cross Society that his son had been removed to Lemberg.<sup>56</sup>

### **Dickenson Herbert Private**

Private Herb Dickenson, writing from Salisbury Plains, England to Miss Morton of Wyong Creek saying,

We embarked at Sydney on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and arrived at Devonport, England on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Devonport is a pretty little harbour and the town is dull looking on account of its age. The houses are crowded together and are all built of stone, with tile roofs and the streets are bare looking. There are hundreds of women about, but you never see a young man. They are all at war, or in training. Not like Australia, where there are thousands to be seen. The people in Australia do not seem to realise how serious things are. Very different to the people here, where almost every home has cause to mourn the loss of a soldier son, brother or father and it makes things very sad and quiet.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

<sup>56</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, October, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

The country here is beautiful, all sides bright and green, with ornamental trees everywhere and little streams of water wherever you look. The latter are full of fish. Villages are pretty, the building being so quaint and old. Some of the church buildings are hundreds of years old and the furniture fittings are of carved oak. The floors are set with headstones, graves being underneath, inscriptions on the tombstones being worn off owing to the ravages of time.

We get pretty well treated here. Plenty of drill, with good food and nice comfortable huts to live in. There are thousands of our boys here, Salisbury Plains being the base. The Light Horse remain in Egypt. The time here is ten hours behind Australian time. The sun does not set till 9.10 at night and it is twilight till nearly 11, with daylight again at 4 o'clock. So you see we have very little night.

Kind remembrances to all friends.<sup>57</sup>

### **Dixon Len Private Infantry**

Private Len Dixon of Gosford, who re-enlisted after his return from Rabaul, New Guinea, wrote to the *Gosford Times* saying,

Troopship, A.40

July 10, 1915

Just a few lines from our troopship A40, late "Ceramic". I suppose you are aware that I left with the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion of last month. N. Hobbs, I believe, is on the "Berrima" with the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Well, so far we have had a fair trip. Up to date three deaths on board. We are just running into the Red Sea and the heat is starting to play up with us. Arthur Dent is on board; he is a second lieutenant in the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion and seemed to be well liked. There is really no news of importance to relate. Things are just carried on in the usual routine way. When we land at our destination I shall write you and let you know of any important happenings. I am sending you three programmes of sport and concerts

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<sup>57</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

held here. Nothing more at present. Will let you have as much news as we are permitted to relate.<sup>58</sup>

**Dwyer Thomas Private No.6729**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion**

Regarding the death of the late Private Dwyer of Dooralong, who was killed in action the parents wrote to *The Gosford Times* saying,

The news of the death of our beloved son was indeed a heavy blow to us, but we are proud to know that he gave his life in defence of his King and Country. We can assure you Mr Editor, that we would much sooner hear of his death on the battlefield than have him a slacker and coward. Our poor lad did his duty and died a noble death and we are proud of him.<sup>59</sup>

Mr and Mrs Dwyer, late of Dooralong, received the following letter written by Lieutenant Mant, B Company regarding the death of their son killed in action in France. He wrote saying,

France,

October 17,

I am writing to ask you to accept my deepest sympathy in the loss of your son, Private T. Dwyer. All in one morning he had been doing excellent work as stretcher bearer, his whole soul being bent on getting as many wounded men away as possible. Then coming to another case he and his three comrades hoisted the white flag and started bandaging him up. Now it was understood that the Germans would not fire on the white flag as we had been respecting their white flags when they had been getting their wounded away.

But the cowardly hounds started sniping on this little band. Not a whit put out, they shouldered their stretcher and went out into the open. The Huns then started a machine

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<sup>58</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>59</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, November, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

gun on them, though our boys were holding the white flag and eventually wounded two. However, your son and his mated got the wounded man out of sight and on the way to the dressing station. But just then a shell came and your brave son quietly said “My foot’s off.” Then he lowered the stretcher. Two other men were put on the stretcher and got it away, while the other stretcher bearer bandaged your son up and started away with him.

But he hadn’t gone ten yards before another shell burst and a piece of shrapnel entered your son’s back killing him instantly. He was buried there in ground that had been held by the same cowardly race that had caused his death, but which had been taken from them by our troops. I have told you the story, because I think it was right that you should know what a brave man your son showed himself to be. I can’t say enough for his conduct, but what he did speaks for itself. He was a hero. I am most awfully sorry for you, one can only seek consolation in the fact that he died the noblest death man can die and that now he is at peace.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN F. MANT, Lieut.<sup>60</sup>

### **Duffy Edmund Gunner**

Gunner Edmund Duffy, Australian Field Artillery wrote from France to his father and brother at The Entrance.

Just a line to let you know I am all right. We have been supplied with gas helmets and when we are all lined up with them on we do present a comical sight. I expect to be up in the firing line by the time you get this and I will be glad when I am there for I’m tired of being in the Army doing nothing but drill. Besides, if I do not soon get a crack at the Germans I’m afraid it will be too late, judging by the reports we hear of the way the Russians are driving them back.

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<sup>60</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 3. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



It is cold here in mid-summer as in winter in New South Wales and in the middle of the day if it comes up cloudy you need an overcoat. Some are using their skin vests, but I am keeping mine till the real cold weather sets in. One needs all the knitted sox (*sic*) that his friends can send him. It must be a heavy expense for the Y. M. C. A. to supply every camp with paper and envelopes, tent, pianos and so on. In Egypt they build the sheds with material made by the natives, walls of it 6ft high and 20ft long, done up in bundles and unrolled like wallpaper when required for use.<sup>61</sup>

### **Edwardes W. H. Rev. Chaplain**

Rev. Edwardes, late of Gosford and Erina, who was appointed Chaplain to the British Expeditionary Forces, wrote to Mr M. C. Ogden from France dated April 26, 1917, saying,

I am with the B. E. F. and am at a Casualty Clearing Station where we get many Australians in. I came across Lieutenant Tom Humphreys and young Frost of Kincumber in Egypt some time in December, but have not met any from the Gosford district in France yet, but may do any day as there are many of the A. I. F. in this neighbourhood, which just now is rather a warm spot, especially for Fritz. We have had an unusually severe winter, which is rather unkind to the lads from sunny N. S. W.

The increasing roar of our artillery is almost incredible. The supply of shells is magnificent and if kept up must soon end this ghastly struggle. Hundreds of Germans are buried in their dug-outs. The whole country on their front is being turned over and trenches obliterated by our shells. I have had only one Australian paper since leaving, so feel quite ignorant of what is going on, excepting about the forthcoming elections. We shall be able to vote here and I hope the anarchists (the I. W. W., and so on) wolves in sheep's clothing will get kicked out by genuine democrats.

Australia should have an immense influx of population after the war. Hundreds of English soldiers (territorials) will be influenced by the information they have gleaned from their Australian brothers-in-arms. The Government should provide land and seed

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<sup>61</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, August, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

wheat to immigrant farmers on very easy terms and encourage the establishment of all kinds of factories. These in a new country should be started on up-to-date and congenial lines, nice surroundings and in some degree on co-operative principles, avoiding the injustices and cruelties which too often characterise factory life. Do away with baby bonus and subsidise the big family. Tax the bachelor and young widower. Do not know why I am pouring out my ideas, but I am anxious for my adopted country to lead the way, after this old-world upheaval.<sup>62</sup>

**Eley Samuel Thomas Private No.3513**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, Infantry**

Private Eley of Narara, wrote to the Gosford War Relief League from France, saying,

I want to sincerely thank you for the parcel. It is very thoughtful of the Gosford people to think of us over here. I am sorry to say Alick Archibald is wounded, but I think he is doing well, His brother George is well, They are in the same battalion as myself. Have not seen any other Gosford boys. My brother is in the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but have not seen him since he left Egypt. This is a beautiful country and it makes one's blood boil to see the awful devastation of war. Lonely churches all in ruins, the Huns seem to make them a special target. The French are a brave people, you see them working away in the fields just behind the firing line.<sup>63</sup>

In his next letter private Eley of Narara wrote to *The Gosford Times* from France under date January 19, 1917, saying,

I have several copies of *The Times* and thought I would like to drop you a few lines. I noticed where some voluntary workers had formed an association in Gosford and had made a start at my brother's and my place. I want to thank them all very much through your paper and hope to be able to thank them personally someday. It helps a man along when he knows that they think of him at home. We are present billeted in a fairly good place, just a bit of trouble with the rats. You may guess the size of them when I tell you

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<sup>62</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 5. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>63</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

that first night they started pulling the blankets off me and early in the morning I was awoken by them pulling at my hair. I have not seen my brother Will since I came to France, but had a letter from him to say that he was still going strong. We are having strong weather, plenty of snow, but it doesn't matter what we have to face the boys make fun of it. Alick and George Archibald of Erina are in the same Battalion as me. Alick has recovered from his wounds and looks well.<sup>64</sup>

### **Eley William Platoon Sergeant Infantry**

Sergeant Eley who is doing his bit in the trenches in France wrote saying,

Everyone is confident and cheerful here and all think we are nearing the end. France is a wonderful country. Except right in the trenches cultivation is carried on as usual by the old men, boys and woman. There are no men of a military fighting age to be seen. What an object lesson for some of our stay-at-homes if they could but see it.<sup>65</sup>

Mrs Eley of Narara received the following letter from Lieutenant Brown saying,

In Northern France,

January 13, 1917,

Dear Mrs Eley,

It is always a pleasure to send congratulations for honours gained by anyone in our Company, but in the case of Sergeant Eley it is doubly so, for not only is he one of our most reliable Sergeants, but also one of my best friends. It gives me the greatest pleasure to send you my congratulations on Sergeant Eley gaining the great honour of being mentioned in despatches. I trust he may soon return safely to the Australian home and the loved ones who are so dear to him.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>64</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>65</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Archie Brown, Lieutenant.<sup>66</sup>

### **Felton Gunner**

Writing to his father, Gunner Felton said,

This war is going to last a long time yet, though some of our people think that the Germans will throw in the towel very soon. I have seen a lot of prisoners captured by the Allies and they do not seem to be sorry to get away from the other side. They say the effect of our artillery going day and night, is awful and some of them were practically out of their minds when captured. No wonder soldiers go mad in this awful place, where death stares you in the face at every turn. Judging by the prisoners we capture, the Germans can't be short of food, for they look in good condition. But they say they are tired of the continual slaughter and will be glad when the war is over.<sup>67</sup>

### **Frewin Victor Joseph Lieutenant Infantry 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Mrs J. Frewin of Gosford received a letter from 8<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, France, dated May 16 saying,

Dear Mrs Frewin,

Your dear boy, Victor, is here in our hospital since 10<sup>th</sup> instant with a gunshot wound in right chest and arm. The bullet entered the chest and passing on, broke his arm. He is a dear good fellow and I much appreciate being able as Chaplain to try and help him. He will be leaving us in a day or so for the Base Hospital. He allows me to send all the sweet messages I would like my own wife to get from our boys in days to come and above all to be in eager that you should not worry about him. May God give you grace and all our brave wives, mothers and sweethearts at this fearful time.

Yours very truly,

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<sup>66</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>67</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

REV. ANTHONY F. FENN.<sup>68</sup>

In the next letter, Mrs J. J. Frewin received the following letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Murphy respecting the death of her gallant soldier son in France saying,

24<sup>th</sup> April, 1918,

Dear Mrs Frewin,

I am writing to express my deepest sympathy in the untimely death of your lad, Lieutenant V. J. Frewin. He was in command of an attack upon a position which both we and the French were anxious to capture. He did his work splendidly and held on in the face of odds which have been estimated at 10 to 1. He was shot some three hours later. His own men hung on until they were all killed or wounded and I am certain that your lad's example inspired his men to such a gallant resistance. The losses inflicted upon the enemy were extremely heavy. I am deeply grieved at the loss. Your lad had just become second in command of his Company and the additional responsibility seemed to have a wonderful effect upon him. I never met him in N. S. W. though we both served in the same Department. His effects are being sent to you. In deepest sympathy.

Yours sincerely,

GEO. MURPHY, Lieutenant-Colonel.<sup>69</sup>

### **Frost Alfred C. Private Infantry**

Private Alfred C. Frost wrote to his mother from France saying,

We had a terrible time of it last week. On the night of 19<sup>th</sup> July we were ordered to take German trenches. I shall never forget it and it is a miracle how we ever came out of it. The first line went over about 6 p.m. and they took the enemy trench in about 20 minutes. They simply walked in. We went across about 6.30 and our job was to dig a

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<sup>68</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>69</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

trench from our front line to the German front line, a distance of about 200 yards. We started at 7 o'clock and dug for about four hours in a continual hail of bullets and shrapnel.

After this we had to take ammunition and water across to the front lines and were kept hard at it until 3 o'clock in the morning when we were just about dead beat. The Germans did not put up much of a fight with the bayonet, but their artillery gave us hell. When you went at the Germans with the bayonet it was 10 to 1 that he wouldn't fight. He would throw down his rifle and put up his hands in surrender. We got a good many prisoners. The weather here is pretty cold even though it is midsummer and I do not know how we are going to get on when winter comes. I get *The Gosford Times* pretty regularly from Alf Kirkby.<sup>70</sup>

**Frost Clive Harris Trooper No.2333**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Brigade**

Trooper Clive Frost wrote to his parents at Kincumber saying,

Somewhere (where you don't get puddings).

A few lines to let you know I am doing O. K. Received your letters. It is lovely to get letters out here from home. It cheers you up and helps to keep you together. Well, it is a great day out here today, all the soldiers are having a vote re Conscription. Conscription! If the men that are left behind in Australia are not men enough to come out here and help us, well, let them stay behind.

By the time you get this we will be having a big fight with the Turks. We are going to attack them within four weeks. We have to take a town of theirs in ten weeks' time. It is their base and they have plenty of men there, so God knows how we will fare. We are all felling anxious and fit. Will send you a cable after it is over, if I get through alright. Enjoy yourselves at Xmas as much as you can and don't worry over me, as I will always be alright and look after myself and if I get killed I don't care. It will be dying a hero's death and a credit to my people and country. I am like the Chinaman, we

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<sup>70</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

don't care. Me die today, me die tomorrow, me die one year allee same, have to die sometime. That's right isn't it? But all the same I am longing for the day when I will see my dear home again.

A merry Xmas to all my friends

CLIVE<sup>71</sup>

In another letter Trooper Frost wrote to his parents from Egypt saying,

Hill 70,

October 10,

Am well and in the best of health and fit for another go at Mr Johnny Turk. I have had two bonser fights with him so far and am glad to say Mother dear I have done what I came over for and that is to fight. I don't care how soon we have a go at them again. Only for them I would never have had to leave my happy home. It is very sad indeed about poor Clarrie Wright isn't it. But over hear your heart gets so hard that when you hear of a death it doesn't seem to worry you much. You see so many dead and wounded that you take no notice of it. I have buried a few lately, also helped to bury a few Turks.

On the last stunt we were on, after we had been firing on them for a few hours, they evacuated as soon as night came on and we returned to our camp in the desert. Tom (Lieutenant Humphreys, who is wounded), is not going back to the dear land, Australia, after all and is returning to us in a week or so. This last few weeks I have starting smoking a little to pass the time away, so next parcel send me some cigarettes. I don't want you to worry over me as I will always live up to my promise. I think I can now call myself a man, not a boy, don't you?

Have had plenty of hardships to put up with since I landed in Egypt. I never knew what it was to be away from home, but I do now and it has made a man of me. We are here having a couple of weeks spell and giving our horses one too, as they need it bad enough. They have done a lot of work and some of them have sore backs. They got well fed and are on good water now. Hitherto they were only getting salt water to drink and

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<sup>71</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

plenty of sand. Poor brutes, they have just a hard a time as we have. I was for nine days and never had a decent wash, only in salt water, but now I can have a bosker wash in fresh water.

Wonder what Dad will think of his soldier son being a smoker. Good night and God bless you my dear mother and father and keep you from worrying over me as I am always thinking of you and looking after myself. God be with you till we meet again

Your loving son

CLIVE.<sup>72</sup>

### **Frost Kenneth Private Infantry**

Private Kenneth A. Frost wrote to his mother at Kincumber saying,

Just a few lines to let you know that I came through the big stunt alright after spending six days and seven nights in a place that was as hot as hell. It was not too bad in the charge as the positions we had to take were very easy. The Germans won't put up a fight when they are shifted out of their dug-outs; they throw down their rifles and cry for mercy and you can picture our chaps giving them mercy at the point of the bayonet. I am quite satisfied that I am doing my bit I have avenged some of my fallen comrades.

Poor Clarrie Wright was blown to pieces as a shell hit right on top of him. We went out to try and get his watch and rings to send home but we could find nothing. Ackie was hit in the arm just before the charge, so he was lucky to get out of it so well. Alex Archibald was hit in the leg. Neither of them were seriously hurt, but were sent to the hospital. All the rest of our boys got out of it well, although we had a rough time. I was buried three times and much of our time was taken up digging one another out and making fresh trenches. As fast as we could dig a trench the Germans would flatten it out with heavy artillery. We are out for a few days rest, but it won't be long before we

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<sup>72</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, December, 14. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



are back again. I hear that Alf's battalion is in the trenches somewhere in a quiet place. Kind regards to Kincumber friends.<sup>73</sup>

Private Ken Frost of Kincumber wrote to his father Mr W. G. Frost saying,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am in the best of health. We have come through the big stunt all right, but not without some narrow escapes. A piece of shrapnel put a hole in a metal helmet and I also had my foot cut. We have seen some inspiring sights. The Scotties went over with us in broad daylight to the German trenches and at night we also raided the enemy capturing prisoners. We have them easily beaten and they won't put up a fight at all. Poor old Kip was killed in the charge. Riley told me he had his head nearly blown off. Eli is still in the best of health and Stan and George and Archie has got over his wound. I see where the Girl (Ayr Girl) is getting beaten pretty often. She is developing her old habit of running seconds again. If this reaches you before the Epsom is run, put a pound on whatever is the best favourite, Lord Nagar or Panacre for me.<sup>74</sup>

In his next letter he wrote to his parents from France saying,

After taking part in the capture of Pozieres we were out of the trenches for 14 days, marching about the whole time and then we found ourselves opposite Monquet Farm and that is where I saw the biggest sight since I have been at the war. Terrific bombardments were taking place on our left and at three o'clock the Scotties hopped out of their trenches. It was like waves rolling on to the beach. We could see them rushing up the hill after Perrone, but they never quite got there as the Germans had too many machine guns for them. But the Scotchmen put up a great fight. We could see every shell as they lobbed amongst them.

The next day the Third Brigade which joined up on the end of our Company went over after Monquet Farm and met with better success. They got as far as they were required

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<sup>73</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>74</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

to, but it was no good to us as we had to hold to our part of the line and put up with all the shells that Fritz sent back. After staying in there three days longer than the rest of the Brigade we were relieved and marched for four days. We were entrained and found ourselves in Belgium. After five days training we were sent to the trenches at Ypres, one time the hottest part of the Allied line. The line we were holding surrounded the famous Hill Sixty. We remained there for 36 days and we were only bombarded once.

Ordered off again, our next stop was a siding at Calais and from there we were sent into the trenches in front of Fleurs. That is where three of the wonderful tanks came to grief. The crew inside one of them were roasted alive, being locked in with no chance of escape. Here we found ourselves in the front line and after three days were brought back into the reserves. On 5<sup>th</sup> November we marched back into the firing line and after lying in the rain for hours, our Company with D Company, hopped over the trenches to take a strong position held by the enemy. We had a bad time and then B Company was ordered to help us.

We made another attack, but with the same result and then we were ordered to make a third attempt. But we had to come back well beaten, the first time the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had to return without getting into the enemy's trenches. We were ordered to take a rest and during the spell we got a great talking to, especially the machine gunners of which I am one. We had to throw away our ammunition, the ground being too muddy to carry it. Our load was 500 rounds besides full equipment and a couple of bombs. We have started back in again and occupy little huts that have been put up since Mamety Wood was captured and expect to be in the firing line in a day or two and will be lucky if we get out for Christmas.

It is an awful place being up to our knees in mud with nine days' rain and snow and one day fine. The stretcher bearers very often cannot get the wounded out and you see wounded men trying to walk and get bogged. In one part of the communication trenches I have seen men standing up dead. They had been wounded and then became bogged,

dying as they stood. I am waiting now for a nice little wound that will get me to England where I can get a warm bed and also get rid of the lice for the rest of winter.<sup>75</sup>

### **Gardiner William Thomas Briggs Private No.222 7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Brigade**

On Wednesday last Rev. Arthur Renwick, Rector of Christ Church, Gosford, received the following telegram from Colonel Luscombe stating,

Officially reported that No. 222 Private William Thomas Briggs Gardiner, 7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse, died of wounds 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Please inform Mrs G. Gardiner, Wyoming Park, Gosford and convey deep regret and sympathy of their Majesties the King and Queen and Commonwealth Government in the loss that she and the Army have sustained by death of soldier.

Deceased "Tom" Gardiner was the only son of Mrs G. Gardiner and leaves one sister. He was 23 years of age and spent his last birthday in the trenches at Gallipoli on June 26. He was one of the first to enlist at his country's call and the first Gosford soldier to fall fighting for King and country. On December 20 last he sailed with the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse for service abroad and after some months spent in Egypt was sent on to the Dardanelles where he took part in the gallant charge at Gallipoli.<sup>76</sup>

### **Gascoigne Tom Navy**

Two of the wounded sailors from H. M. A. S. Sydney were passengers by the steamship "Medina" which, had arrived at Fremantle. One of the wounded was Tom Gascoigne of Wyong, who was on his way home. Interviewed at Fremantle, Gascoigne said,

When the action with the "Emden" commenced five of us were told off for duty on the after control of the rangefinder. We had been in action about 55 minutes when a shell

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<sup>75</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>76</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, September, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

struck us and four out of five was wounded. I received a number of wounds about the body and one eye, while the others received numerous injuries.

When asked what his feelings were during the battle, he said there were not the slightest signs of nervousness among the boys. He went on to say,

We were glad to be in action and every man and boy went about his work methodically. Captain Von Muller, after the capture, used to go around with our Captain and see the wounded. He appeared to be a fine chap and always used to enquire how we were getting on.

Gascoigne for whom a subscription had been opened at Wyong had to have his left eye removed at the hospital.<sup>77</sup>

### **Gibson Edward Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Edward Gibson wrote from Egypt to his parents Mr and Mrs Gibson from “Glenroy” Ourimbah saying,

I note that you say about wishing that Fred and I were at home now, but under present circumstances I think you will agree that we are doing much better for the country where we are, as every man is needed. There has been no sign of Abdul for some time and I don’t think he will come again. The last time the Turks came they lost about 4,000 men and a similar number were taken prisoners, the later including Austrians and Germans I was amongst it all and I can tell you it was hot while it lasted. The enemy attacked our camp at a range of about 500 yards at midnight on 2<sup>nd</sup> August. We advanced on them about daylight and I can’t describe the sensation caused by the whizzing of thousands of bullets. However, we succeeded in defeating the enemy with heavy losses and captured thousands of prisoners.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, February, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>78</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

**Gibson Frederick Crowdy Private No.5378**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private Gibson, eldest son of Mr E. Gibson, late of Ourimbah wrote from France saying,

Just a line to let you know I am still alright and in good nick. I received the two parcels of clothes mother sent, also tin of cakes. I can tell you the latter were very welcome and I was in the trenches when they came to hand. Les Cassell is here in the same Battalion. Harold May, Fred Bromley and the two Archibald brothers from Erina yesterday. I will be glad when this war is finished and I can get home again, for I am quite fed up with it. I told mother in my last letter that I had been recommended for a military medal.<sup>79</sup>

In his next letter Private Gibson writing to his parents said,

We had a go for the German trenches last Saturday night and did what we set out to do, capturing seventy prisoners. But my word we suffered losing a number of our boys. Seventeen of we stretcher bearers went in and seven came out, two being killed and the rest wounded. I escape without a scratch, thank God and consider myself very lucky. I have been recommended and think it is for a Military Medal. Young Cassell of Ourimbah is here in the same Battalion. Received your two parcels of clothing, which were very acceptable.<sup>80</sup>

**Glenister Sydney Private**

Private Glenister, son of Mr Philip Glenister of Woy Woy wrote home from somewhere in France saying,

I returned from London yesterday, having had ten days leave. I had a glorious time visiting Kempsford Gardens, the Tower of London, Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, Government Houses and dozens of other places of

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<sup>79</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>80</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 3. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

interest. I went through the King's stables seeing all the horses, State harness and coaches and so on. I am enclosing some of the hair out of the tail of the oldest horse in the stables, one of the State blacks. They make a great fuss over the Australians; the people can't do enough for you. Wherever you go you can hear dozens say "There goes an ANZAC."

The traffic in London is wonderful and you have to be very careful you are not run over. The underground railways are fine. I don't think it will be long now before I am back in Australia. We have Fritz well beaten I think. Anyhow, I am absolutely fed up of this game, as everyone else is. I have been to Egypt, Turkey, France, Belgium and England, but give me Australia. I never want to leave that country again. Am enclosing a menu of the dinner the Staff had on Christmas Day on the Somme under shell fire, also a couple of photographs I had taken in London.<sup>81</sup>

**Goldsmith Frank Henry Corporal No.3334**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Infantry**

Mr and Mrs A. T. Goldsmith of Gosford received the following letters referring to the death of their son killed in action in France on October 4, 1917, saying,

France,  
October 15, 1917,

Dear Mr Goldsmith,

I regret very much having to advise you of the death of your son, Frank H. Goldsmith, who was killed in action on 4<sup>th</sup> October last by a shell burst. As a comrade he was esteemed by all who knew him and as a soldier he was at once efficient, zealous and willing and as his Platoon Commander I personally felt his loss, knowing him to be one of the best soldiers in the Battalion. May I on my own behalf and that of his comrades extend you our deepest sympathy.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>81</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

F.C.MORTLOCK, Lieut. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion A. I. F.<sup>82</sup>

In the next letter it was written,

France,

October 18, 1917, Dear Mr Goldsmith,

It is with very sad feelings that I have to tell you that your son, No. 3334, Corporal F. H. Goldsmith, was killed in action on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant. The battle in which he fell was one of great importance. In that battle we dealt a very severe blow to the enemy and your son had a hand in it. He fell fighting for you, for his country and for our freedom from Prussian domination. Only those who have felt such a loss as yours can know what it is. God comfort you and bless you in your sorrow and loss. We can but look forward to the Resurrection when the battle field shall yield up our gallant comrades that have fallen. God grant you that comfort and consolation that can come from Him alone. You have my heartfelt sympathy.

I am yours very sincerely,

T. PROMOND, C. of E. Clergyman, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion.<sup>83</sup>

### **Graham Hercules Rae (Jack) Private Infantry**

The two letters following, written to his father, are from the young lad Graham, who used to carry the Wyong-Kanwal mail. At the time of writing he was not quite 18 years of age. He enlisted at 17 and although his father was glad that after he was first asked for permission, he talked the matter over for a fortnight he impressed upon him that he was in for a great gruelling and repeatedly gave him the opportunity to change his mind, yet, under the enormous urgency of the occasion and the great demand for men, he never for a moment regretted letting him go and would not do so no matter what happened. The boy was in the Gallipoli trenches five months before he was eighteen,

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<sup>82</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

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fought for eight weeks there and was laid up with frost bite and had now seen some five months fighting in France. The letters said,

Somewhere in France,

1<sup>st</sup> July,

We are back about six miles from the trenches and have been relieved by another brigade. I don't think we will see the same front again, but will be sent away to a warmer front after having a short rest. The last four days in were the hottest we have had in France and the artillery was going on both sides all the time and made things very unpleasant. You remember the young chap who had his photo taken with me in Cairo I sent it to Harry. Well, he was killed about a week ago by a shell and was buried out behind the trenches in a little British cemetery. I saw him shortly before he was killed. We had grown great chums and he and I were together in the same tent all the time I was in detail in Egypt. It is hard to lose your mates like this and he was only about my age and a very decent fellow.

Frank and I are well and still together. We have heard nothing about Sam for a long time and have no idea where he is. Will is now in France somewhere and I have been making enquiries about him but can't find out exactly where he is. Stan Hubbard is pretty close here too and I am going to look him up when I get time. Really, dad, it may seem strange to you, but it is very hard to get leave to get away to see anybody and although we are supposed to be resting we are getting drilled all day and now we are warned to go on fatigue tonight.

It is now about 5 p.m. and I am dashing this off before tea comes along. We are billeted now in an old farm house, which was built in 1667 and is still very strong and respectable. All the houses here are brick and all have the year they were built painted on the brick. This place is just like an old time castle and has a moat all round it. Yes, they must be keeping our mails back for something dad and I expect it is to keep our movements dark until most of the troops have been landed in France. I never put much in my letters about the trenches and what is happening in our little front, although I could write a good lot of things that have happened, but I would rather keep you a little in the dark than run a risk of having them destroyed and you not getting them at all.

Love to all at home



JACK.

In the next letter to his father he wrote,

August 10,

You will be wondering what on earth has become of me as it is such a time since I last wrote home. We have been right in the thick of the big push for the last fortnight and I had to let things slide till we came out for a spell. I saw the roughest fighting we have yet seen so far and it was just hell on earth. Frank Jones is away wounded and there are hardly any of my old mates left with me now. Frank was only slightly wounded about the face and you can tell Mrs Jones there is nothing to worry about. We took two lines of German trenches and held them for twenty-four hours until we were relieved.

The Huns put up a very poor fight and we took a good many prisoners. The taking of the trenches were simple enough, but it was holding them the next day under his artillery fire that was the trouble. He put every shell he could into us and I never want to go through anything like it again. We lost a lot of men, but old Fritz lost his trenches and I think he can say good bye to them for ever. I received a letter card from Will after he had been admitted to a hospital in England. It came as a great surprise to me. I was awfully lucky and like most of the fellows, had some narrow escapes.

In the charge I was hit twice with shrapnel and my tunic was badly ripped. One pellet went clean through my haversack and a tin of bully and then cut across my back. It made me jump some at the time, but I am O. K. now, except for a couple of scars. We are now back a little bit from the firing line to reorganise and I think will be in it again before long. *The Gosford Times* has come along regularly and I am also receiving a good few letters from home. Am feeling O. K. dad and hope you are all the same at Kenwal. Will in his letter from hospital said "how would you like to be chipping those orange trees now, Jack?" And when I read it, it made me think some, dad. Aunt Alice said Leonard and Marlie Chippendall had arrived in England and I will write to them soon.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

**Graham W. A. Sergeant**  
**“D” Company, 56<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Infantry**

Sergeant Graham, who was reported wounded a little while ago wrote from Napsbury Hospital near St. Albans, England and gave an account of him. Putting this into a form of connected narrative, his movements in France had been as follows,

From Marsellies we went north to a small village called Thiennes. Here we stopped a week and then marched a distance of about 18 miles to a place called Estaires, a few miles behind the firing line. We stayed here a day and then moved into the real stuff. Our sector is at Armentries. We did a few days in the trenches at a time, coming out for rest after each go into small villages behind the line. On Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, our division took the whole three lines of German trenches opposite. We held them all night and the next day, but was forced to retire early on Saturday night.

The order of attack was; front line, two battalions from 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, two, the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> from 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 22 from 15<sup>th</sup>. Three battalions were in support and three in reserve. We were in reserve on Wednesday night, but early on Thursday morning moved through a hail of German shells into support. The Germans had our range to a yard and shelled us unmercifully all day. The result was we could not get up to our mates, who were forced to come back into our lines. Our division suffered very heavily. We did wonderful work and were congratulated by our officers.

My Company was very lucky, losing only about 12 killed and 20 wounded. I was hit while we were moving into the trench to relieve a Tommy lot two days later. The bullet went in at the point of my left shoulder and I can now feel him about a foot from the shoulder, close to the surface, just below the shoulder blade. He is not giving me much trouble; still I will be glad when he is out. I was sent straight to Boulougne and from there to Dover, where I saw your grand cliffs, dad; and now that I have seen your old country at last and am very pleased with it. I have now, July 28<sup>th</sup>, been here some three days and got out of bed for the first time today. They are going to take the bullet out in a few days' time.

Writing later on August 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant Graham said,

They removed the bullet a few days ago. It had a great journey in my body and they gave me a tidy gash letting it out. I have had several trips to St. Albans on the motor buses and a very pretty place it is. They are all complaining of the heat and I have been wondering how they would like Wyong in the summer. Have never experienced better weather. The flowers and hedges here are grand and on very pretty picture cards of St. Albans on the 8<sup>th</sup> August, he says he expects very soon to be returning to duty.<sup>85</sup>

In his next letter he had been promoted to Sergeant-Major and wrote to his father Mr H. A. Graham of Kanwal, Wyong, from the First Southern General Hospital in Birmingham, England, saying,

What a nibbler I am. Not wounded this time, but with the usual Christmas complaint, trench feet. Both feet, although not as bad as last year, are about the size of pumpkins. Lots of mates this time, in fact I think nearly half my Company are down with the same complaint. We did very creditable work by sticking in the front line for five days and nights without once being relieved. This, in ordinary times, and in decent trenches is nothing at all, but on the Somme, where the trenches are mere gutters and knee deep in icy mud, it is a very decent performance. Lots of the boys had to leave before the five days had expired, but about half of us managed to see it through.

It's a bad policy having brothers together. A few days after going into the trenches this last time a young chap named Stork was sniped through the head. His brother, who was alongside him, was so broken up that we had to send him out. We, the infantry, are doing very little lately. We sit in our front lines and watch one another closely. Hardly a shot is fired as the rifles are caked with mud. Fritz tries his best to blow us into the air with his great high explosives and our guns treat his infantry in a similar manner.

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<sup>85</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

The men in the front line are relieved at night time. We must go over the top as the communication trenches and saps are full of water. This is the most ticklish part of the game, as Mr Hun is always on the lookout and at times, by means of his flares, catches sight of us and has wiped out whole Companies by means of his barrage with high explosives and machine gun fire. We were lucky in this respect. He put over a few big “coal boxes” while we were going in, but, beyond smothering us in mud, did no damage, I had a lucky escape on one occasion. A piece of shell as big as an egg came so close that it actually grazed my Balaclava cap. It is simply hell on earth when both sides open up with artillery. They go on all night and day at times, without cessation.<sup>86</sup>

### **Gribble Jack Private Infantry**

Private Jack Gribble of Gosford wrote to the editor of the *Gosford Times* saying,

“At the Front”

July 3, 1915

While I have the spare time I am going to tell you, in the shortest way I can, about some of my doings since I left Gosford. We left Sydney on 11<sup>TH</sup> February and our first port was Brisbane, where we picked up some Queensland troops, but only stayed a few hours or so. Our next port was Thursday Island, where we were allowed to go ashore for a few hours. Then we came to the third port of call, Columbo, where we had a route march of about six miles and stayed three days. I was very interested with the place especially with the natives and their fancy coloured dresses. Then we left for Suez and reached there on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March. The trip was glorious all the way. We were well cared for in every way.

From Suez we went by train to Cairo for the Canal was not safe on account of the Turks. We reached Cairo about midnight after a very weary journey; the distance is about 100 miles. We reached our camp (Obbessia) about two in the morning and that was our first taste of the sand. Cairo is a very interesting place, for its historic events and my time

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<sup>86</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, February, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

was taken up in visiting different places. The natives are very funny indeed. One thing they will never forget the Australians in a hurry. Of course I could write page after page about our doings in Egypt, but will leave that to the time when I come back to you all again, (God willing).

I was in Egypt for six weeks before we were ordered to the front. We left Egypt on the 1<sup>st</sup> May and on arrival at Gallipoli on the 7<sup>th</sup> May our brave comrades had made a path to land. One cannot imagine how it was possible for them to have landed and captured the place which we now hold. We landed ten days after they did. Of course we had seen something and realised that the real worse was over. But we are all here to do our duty. I cannot give you anything about our doings as we are not allowed to do so. I am now getting quite used to the shrapnel fire, for we all go in bathing while the Turks are throwing their “dirty fireworks” at us. We insist upon having our swim.

At present we are having a few days rest from the firing line and I must say that we miss those big shells coming over our heads, which we call “Jack Johnsons.” One thing we are always very happy, thank God. When a shell burst over our heads or somewhere near us, we make one dash for our dug-outs. After it is all over, we simply laugh at each other, as though it was something funny. But I may say it is no joke, although we do laugh. While I am on the subject, I must tell you what we mean by dug-outs. They are holes dug into the ground and these are our homes. It put one in mind of rabbits. As soon as we hear a shell coming there is a dash for the holes, or burrows. After it is all over, we are all outside again, waiting for another to come.

In conclusion let me say that we want ever so many men to come forward. We want them all. Gosford must come further forward, for we want you all right now. Let me urge upon you the seriousness of this great war. All must pray each day and ask God for peace and remember in your prayers those who are fighting for a good cause.

Your loving friend

Jack Gribble.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

## **Grigg Harry J. Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Harry Grigg of Ourimbah wrote from England saying,

We are all tea totallers now, as since 1<sup>st</sup> April beer has gone up to ten pence (and in some cases one shilling) a pint. By the time we buy a few fags and matches, a bit of writing paper and stamps to post letters there is not much left for beer.<sup>88</sup>

In his next let Trooper Grigg writing from Salisbury, England to Mr and Mrs Tom Hodson of Narara under date May 9, 1917, said,

I expect to be leaving here next week for France; my brother already received orders to cross the Channel. While on leave I visited Salisbury, the capital city of Wiltshire and one of the principle cathedral cities in England. Its cathedral is almost as large as St. Paul's in London and was built in the days of Oliver Cromwell. On Sunday I went to Fighel Dean (pronounced File Dean) on the river Avon. Here I saw the old village church, forge and chestnut tree that gave the poet Longfellow the inspiration when he wrote "The Village Blacksmith." Along the banks of the Avon the country is beautiful and three miles from Fighel Dean we came to the town of Nether Avon, near is which is the training school of the British flying men Here large numbers of men are being trained and our visit or inspection was wonderfully interesting.

The weather is now perfect, the most beautiful I have ever experienced. Three weeks ago it was all ice and snow and mud. It all disappeared in a single day as if by magic. In less than a week the fields changed from a colour of dazzling white to one of emerald green at first, but quickly mingled with white and gold, caused by the appearance of daisies and primroses. Trees and hedges which are all leafless in winter had in the same short time burst into foliage and bloom of all shades and colours. A mild breeze is always blowing and coming across fields with their fresh meadow growth develops a sweetness which I never before experienced. It is daylight up till 10 p.m. now and after tea parties of us often walk for miles across the fields or through country lanes and villages.

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<sup>88</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

What do you think of the war now? I hope the people of Australia realise a little how bad it is. I say "a little," because more of you will fully know how serious the present situation is. We have got to win quickly if we are going to win at all, for the German submarines are beginning to starve England. We have got to smash the enemy on the battle fronts and we want all the men available. I wish some of the men in Australia knew that there are nearly two million women in the British Army, 40,000 of them in or going to the firing line on active service. They are not intended for the trenches with rifle and bayonet, but for transport work, taking food and ammunition up to the trenches where they are under the fire of the big enemy guns. Something like a million women are engaged in munition factories, a very dangerous occupation in which hundreds have from time to time been blown to atoms.

The Army have also half a million women employed farming the land, replacing the men who have gone to the front and 100,000 are employed on the railways, tramways and so on. Then private firms employ hundreds or thousands more doing work originally performed by the men. When I see such conditions prevailing here it makes me sick to think of men I know afraid to come and take an active part in this fearful war. Jack Yates left Australia last week so I believe. I heard that Wilcox has also gone home unfit for further service.

Kind regards to all

HARRY GRIGG.<sup>89</sup>

**Guerin Acland C.  
Bombardier 1<sup>st</sup> Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade**

Writing to his parents, Mr and Mrs M. Guerin of Gosford by last mail from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Southern General Hospital, Oxford, England, Bombardier Guerin had been awarded the Military Medal for working his gun single handed after all his mates were killed, said about Oxford that he was,

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<sup>89</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Buried away down here in this old Varsity town amidst old-fashioned buildings, historic relics and white-hatted old professors, imbued with the very spirit that made England great. I have to rub my eyes to convince myself that Lewis Carroll hasn't taken me through the looking-glass, or that I am wandering through it led by one of the authors of Great School Boy Tales, But no! Australia has come from the bush to Olympus, to gaze on the Gods. But where have I seen those Gods before? Oh yes! In the bush too and embodying all the spirits of the playing fields here, at our public functions, our High Schools, our Empire Days and so on.

On out battlefield too, when the stress of battle would make the weak ones falter, I have heard that familiar drawl, that familiar sentiment to play the game and the Hun wonders why we are winning. So you see I have much to revere in Oxford. You will see too, that I am on the road to recovery to be able to get about and take notice. My leg wounds are entirely healed and all I am waiting for is a fractured humerus you see, a jagged piece of shell went through it obliquely shattering the bone and making wounds on either side of the arm about three inches long. I had five rubber disinfecting tubes for over a month to antidote sepsis. However, the wounds have almost healed now and the bones are knitting. I was the only one who escaped in the vicinity, but that is as it always been with me, some good angle has watched my interest. By the way I have a Military Medal awarded to me now.<sup>9091</sup>

### **Hall Arthur T. Private Infantry**

Mr Thomas Hall of Gosford received a letter from his son, Arthur, who was in the trenches in France, saying,

We had a go with the Germans the other day raiding their trenches. We reached their second line for several hours and I am glad to say I came through the scrap alright. There were plenty of shells and shrapnel flying everywhere and bursting a few yards from a man. I tell you I felt shaky for a few minutes, but I lost my head and I tore in.

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<sup>90</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 31. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>91</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 31. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



All the boys rushed in and made it unpleasant for the Hun with bayonet and bombs. I suppose we will get plenty of fighting before it is all finished. We are wondering how long it is going to last and have given up all hope of being home for Christmas.

It is a good life in the trenches and pretty quiet today. They say a notice was put up by the Germans: "You shoot high and I'll shoot high." But all the same, I would not like to put my head over the parapet for long, as their snipers might get a bull's eye. I help bring down rations to the trenches of a night and the enemy's bullets whistle tunes through the trees and grass as we walk along. Although they cannot see us owing to the darkness, they put them over on spec and sometimes they go pretty close. We call the machine guns type writers as they fire so fast and make a row just like one. Something like 500 a minute they can fire

France is a lovely country and well worth fighting for. The "Sieta's" used to say "Australia plenty money" and they will be saying the same thing before here before long. Things are much cheaper here than in Egypt. A franc is worth 8½ pence in English money and 10 pence in France money. We have been having some rain lately and it makes everything very miserable, plenty of mud, like Gosford after a week's rain and you know that is pretty bad. I think we have as many rats as we have men in the trenches. A little dog that we have with us killed 60 this morning. We dig them out with a pick and he gives them one bite and a shake and it is goodbye rat. He is a little beauty. We have cats here as well, but he beats all the cats. I often try to stick a rat with my bayonet as they run along the parapet but always miss them by a few inches. I have a possibility of getting to England very shortly now, as we are taking it in turns to go on leave. It is a certainty, which is if I don't stop one from Fritz, which I can assure you I will not try to do.<sup>92</sup>

In his next letter, Private Hall writing to his mother at Gosford from the County Middlesex Hospital on May 17, 1917, stated

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<sup>92</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

No doubt you have received word of my being wounded, but it is not a bad wound. A 59 howitzer shell burst in a dug-out and buried me in. I was hit on the head and right eye with a piece of wood and was unconscious for some time, but my mates dug me out and carried me to the dressing station. In two days I found myself in old England and the treatment we get in hospital is fine. It is a spell away from the noise of the guns, which is almost deafening. I was acting Company Clerk while the Sergeant was on leave, but only lasted two days at it when I stopped one.

They were giving Fritz hell while I was coming out of the line and he was putting a few back, including a number of gas shells, but thanks to our perfect gas respirators they did no harm. If things keep going as they are, the enemy cannot hold out much longer. The Germans have gone as far as to fire on our stretcher bearers carrying in the wounded. They chopped down fruit trees and poison the water in wells in the village they evacuated and did many other cruel things that a Britisher (sic) would never think of.

The doctor informs me that I will have my eyesight back properly in a few weeks. I received my wound near Bullecourt, where there has been plenty of fighting lately. I walked off in what I stood up in and did not have a hat. However, I have to thank the Red Cross people who called today and gave me a razor, brush, comb, saving soap and cigarettes of the Australian Comforts Fund. I suppose I will soon be back in muddy France.

You said in your letter that you wondered where I spent my birthday. Well, picture me sitting under two sheets of iron blown off a house and it pouring in torrents waiting for darkness to come when they all had to move on and take four kilometres of a village occupied by Germans and which was alive with machine guns. But they attacked from the rear and rushed the position which they took. Our side had few casualties and we were then sent out for a rest.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, August, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

In his next letter Private Hall wrote from France to his parents in Gosford to say he was employed as a runner, a very risky job when you have to take messages through a barrage of German shells. Writing on New Year's Day he said,

I hope that something practical will come of all the peace talk and I do hope to be with you for next Christmas. I saw Harold May yesterday and he looked quite well. I have met a lot of Gosford boys over here and often see George Lucre when I am on leave. I have received two parcels from the Gosford Patriotic Society for which I was thankful, as the contents were very acceptable. Tell Dad that the Railway and Ambulance men are doing good work over here. When some of our stretcher bearers approach they are often asked if they are N. S. W. Ambulance men, and, if they are, a facial or verbal expression of gratitude always welcome them. There has not been a case where their services were needed that discontented them and they have surprised many of the troops by readily improvising on the spot. We do not see the sun very often as it is always raining.<sup>94</sup>

**Hastings Henry Private**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Field Ambulance, Army Medical Corps**

Private Henry Hastings of Gosford, now with the Australian soldiers in Egypt, wrote to his parents Mr and Mrs William Hastings saying'

Suez Canal

December 3

We are told no censorship will be exercised over these letters, but even so, I cannot tell much for we have so little time before the mail closes. Cairo is to be our destination, so after all it is to be hot instead of cold weather, but so far, I have not found the heat as great as our Australian heat. We have just passed a French vessel going the opposite way. She greeted us with English cheers and our band played the *Marseillaise*. The Canal is just wide enough to allow two ships to pass. Each side seems to be endless stretches of sand, while every little way along are men on garrison duty, who are very much in evidence.

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<sup>94</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Our men are all well now. Ern Bailey, (formerly a school teacher at Gosford) is very well, though like the rest of us, the heat has thinned him a bit. So are Donald, Ken and Tom Robertson and Cecil Morris, the Sergeant's (of the Gosford Police) son. Their friends might be glad to know, if they do not happen to hear from them, and there are such hosts of letters, thousands in every mail, that no one knows whether many of them will ever reach their destination. Young Burns, whose place adjoins "Fraternus" on Mangrove Mountain is on this boat too and Mitchell who was in the Newcastle Scottish Rifles when George and I were there and several men too, whom I knew in Narrandera.

Alexandria

December 5

We arrived here yesterday, after 7½ weeks. Two companies of infantry went out of our ship today. The New Zealanders left their ships yesterday and with other troops have gone on to Cairo. We will leave tomorrow. Everything is in readiness and lights out has just sounded, so I must stop in a minute. Egyptian scenery so far seems to be entirely sand and rocks, but all the colour of the towns make them look like a bazaar or fancy fairs. The dirtiness of almost everything strikes one too. No Church today, every preparation being made for landing.

Mena Camp, Pyramids, Cairo

December 7

We arrived here at eight o'clock last night and we are camped right at the foot of the Pyramids, just about 10 miles out of Cairo. The British flag is to be hoisted in Cairo tomorrow. The mail closes at once and we are awfully busy, so I can't write any more now. The ticket enclosed is a Cairo tram ticket.

Loving greetings to you all and remember to all friends

HENRY<sup>95</sup>

Private Henry Hastings of Gosford wrote to his parents and sister under date September 19, 1915 from the "Rest Camp" on Lemnos Island, saying,

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<sup>95</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, January, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

However so many of us came through those storms of leaden hail from Turko-German guns is a mystery to me, best explained by the one Turkish word, “Kismet”. But here I am, as the above address announces. Rest for some weeks to come after one hundred and forty days of restless turmoil and strife incessant, and now I want to write of peace and rest, and this is really a rest. It’s Sunday and a perfect day. The harbour is a perfect picture with the innumerable shipping of every shape, size and build, and the beach and bit of paddock, with its many stands of vendors of light refreshments and their attendants dressed in many strange and fancy garbs gives the place quite a holiday atmosphere, while the village Greek-Orthodox Church bell pearls its peaceful invitation to devotion and worship.

This village is reached by a real country track leading through a stubble field just recently harvested. The township consists of eighty-six houses, pretty little cottages with red stone walls and dark red tiles. The windows and doors are of English pattern, with bars of wood instead of iron to protect the glass. The children are nice and clean (so different to the dirty ragged little youngsters of Cairo and its suburbs). Boys and girls playing together are neither shy nor yet rude, very courteous and well behaved when spoken to. The Village Green or Oval is of couch grass, much the same as are Australian lawns. It seems to be public property, for the poultry from adjoining cottages were running on it. Also geese (Touoin) and turkeys of the American bronzewing (sic) type. The fowls are a very mixed lot: - English barn door biddies, a few French frizzles, very pretty in plumage and markings and many pigeons.

Wild birds seem to be scarce. I have only seen a few little greyish brown doves similar to our Australian wild dove, but crested. The crow is rather different to ours, being black-headed and black-winged, but its back and breast is a bluish grey, almost of a colour known as French grey. It is very similar to the Egyptian crow. The English sparrow is here in its thousands. Bird life does not seem to be very plentiful either here or at Gallipoli. The grasses though are much the same as our Australian varieties. Each of the village cottages appears to have a garden plot attached to it, which produces much the same vegetables as we grow at home- French and broad beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, corn and sorghum, grammas and pumpkins, rock and water melons, mulberry

and figs and the blackberry is doing quite well. Popular and willow trees grow here as well.

I did enjoy my lunch yesterday of omelette, bread and butter-first butter for nearly six months- tea and a glass of milk at the “Liberty Bar”, which isn’t a bar at all. The only drinks obtainable is lemon squash-not even soft drinks, milk, tea and coffee, all at a penny a glass tumble full, could also be obtained at the dining tables. But their omelettes and bread and butter are delicious. I suppose the place is really an inn and grocer’s shop combined. Midday lunches are supplied, each article being paid for separately.

Eggs are sold at two for threepence, potatoes two for a penny, each separate vegetable a penny per portion; a chop is two pence; a kind of custard blanc mange a penny per small plate. Altogether one can have a splendid lunch for nine pence or ten pence. The shelves contain much the same articles as our growers stock, bread sixpence and threepence a loaf, eggs one shillings and four pence and one shilling and sixpence according to size, sardines five pence a tin (sixpence size at home), biscuits, chocolates, caramels, condensed milk, candles, matches, soap, writing paper and what took my fancy, sewing cotton in two sizes only, No. 20 and No. 40. The shopkeeper assured me that the village never used the finer 50 and 60 reals.

The pictures on the walls represent chiefly Grecian victories of ancient days, for the keeper of the inn-grocer-fruit shop is a Greek soldier with a stiff knee for life, the result of a Turkish bullet over two years ago. He is a good looking pleasant mannered young man of 24, speaking a little English. There are many pictures of animals as well as battle scenes. Round the village green too, are many other shops of the tradespeople who go to the making of a little township. The dogs are similar to the Egyptian half-wolf species, but sleek and clean and very healthy looking, probably being better fed and cared for. They tether their pigs as they do their cows and donkeys by one forefoot secured to pegs in the ground with green hide thongs.

Four carpenters were busy building a house, rather a mud-brick cottage opposite the inn. The bricks are sundried about the size and shape of turf sods we cut in Australia.

The roof is gabled laths nailed on to rafters and over a plaster of mud. Possibly they will put tiles on later. It looks a little cosier than my tent with thirty-two soldier mates.<sup>96</sup>

In his next letter Private Hastings wrote to his parents in Gosford saying,

France,

December 3, 1916,

I am writing this in a great big dug-out, ten men in it. This is our second night here and we are very comfortable and much warmer than in the tents or huts; two fires going and warm and dry, every man, too, is on a bunk two feet from the ground and we are just about shell and bomb proof I think and likely to stop here for some time to come. The rains keep off and there is no snow, but the frost lies around all day making it very cold outside. We had a lot of rain and the slippery mud was simply awful, about two feet everywhere you went.

This is a Reinforcement Camp, men coming and going incessantly. I see a good many men I know. I saw Mick Scaysbrook the other day. I think I told you I was in the Medical Unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Anzac Entrenching Battalion, in the Dressing Station. We are in the firing zone and shells fall about promiscuously, but the danger is not very great, though I have been pretty close two or three times in the last few weeks. I get a few nice trips round the country occasionally on motor wagons and lorries for rations, clothing, harness and gear of every kind, sometimes with laundry.

One day I was sent with 300 dirty shirts from a military baths to a military laundry, but we had all forgotten it was Sunday, so we had to cart it all back again, six miles, and take it back the next day. But it was a lovely trip, the day was perfect and the blackberry and other hedges were a fine sight and all the country beautiful. There were several haystacks in most of the fields and as soon as the crop is off ploughing is commenced at once. In many of the places there are signboards up that read "Wassching for Soldats," which tells us we can have our washing done at the farm house. I think every

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<sup>96</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

farm, cottage house and shop in that part of the country sells eggs, coffee and bread and the French bread is delicious.

One place where I was billeted was a fine country house (chateau) and once I was billeted in a stable. The flowers in some places are very beautiful. Only yesterday I saw some very fine white roses and Virginia creeper and a beautiful lawn, though it is really winter. Last night I had a pleasant little surprise. I was having a cup of coffee in a Y. M. C. A. tent, when I heard a voice saying "He's not too bad, but what a pity he took to drink." "Pity, too, isn't it?" said another voice and a third answered "Yes, I think Gosford races must have spoiled him." Of course Gosford made me look around and there were three of our old First Field Ambulance men discussing me (in fun, of course) as above. I slipped over to see a couple of old friends again for half an hour.

I told you of our useless trip with dirty clothes. You might like to hear of the laundries. Every large camp has a bathroom fitted up with either showers or plunge baths, sometimes as many as two dozen, with hot and cold water. The men come in by Battalions, have their baths, receive a clean shirt, socks and towel, leave their old ones to be washed and marched off again. Then these dirties are sent by cart or wagon to a central laundry to be washed and mended ready for re-issue to the next batch of men. The laundries are run by the military employing many women and girls.

December 11,

I've had a great mail, 38 letters within four days (before I had only four from Australia in three months) and a parcel from the Girls' Patriotic Club, I have written to thank them. It was so good of them to remember me and my dug-out mates thank them too and appreciate their kindness deeply. I have five men here whose work is to carry water, rations and other camp supplies up to the lines. My work is to attend Sick Parade daily and attend to patients, apply dressings and so on under direction of the Medical Officer. We are very comfortably settled and I will perhaps remain here all the winter, but I am hoping to be transferred back to my old Unit, that is what I most desire.

It's easier than you would think to lose the run of Sundays here, for fighting goes on just as on other days and so, for the most part, does civilian life. After church in the morning it's a case of everybody works but father. You will generally find him in a



neighbouring café with his chief cobbers. I do wish I could write freely, but just here censorship is very severe and there is little we may tell except trifles. Some of the signs are works of art. One simply says "Washing Eggs" and another "Butter and Special Beer." The boys say it is too, special bad. The Sunday we had to bring back the washing again, the landlady of my billet invited me to breakfast, boiled eggs and bread and butter especially good.

But the dahlias, Eighty-six of them standing in an enamel bowl on the floor, eighty-six extra-large, every colour imaginable. How I did wish you could see them. The variegated colours in one leaf were simply exquisite and the many coloured tile floor set them off beautifully. Please remember me very kindly to the many, many kind folk who sent me greetings. I do appreciate their remembrance. Good-bye for this time, I am fairly safe just now, but you know I am safe whatever happens; it is only reaching the sooner to the perfect day, if I should go west with such hosts of brave fellows and we will meet again in the morning.

With love to all

HENRY.<sup>97</sup>

Private Henry Hastings wrote to his parents in Gosford dated,

February 2, 1917

Somewhere in France

I've just been receiving long delayed Australian letters referring to the strike you told me of at Christmas. My! Things like that makes one's blood boil." Front Line Battle Fronts Here Away!" ought to be the answer to the unwarranted strikes now-a-days, I reckon instead of our bravest giving their lives for skunks. They should have a glimpse of what the people of this land have suffered. If they had a spark of manliness in them they couldn't help wanting to take a hand then. I would rather be writing about the wonders of Egypt than these scenes of endless destruction and wastage and dreary desolation.

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<sup>97</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, February, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Even these I would describe could I be sure of the censor's permission. In one wood, I saw some time ago, I do not think there was even one tree standing that had not been hit by shell fire and one village I passed through reminded me of scriptural desolation. Not one brick left upon another, almost literally. Sights and conditions and horrors are beyond my powers of description and utterly beyond exaggeration. Do not worry over me because of the cold. I have felt it far worst in Gundagai and Cowra and I really have everything I want and the snow and frost are far away better than the mud.

How you would enjoy this picture, tents and trees covered thick with heaps of snow. It is 8 inches deep now and still snowing hard, but when it stops for a while the weather is sunny and clear. Aeroplane fights have been of a daily occurrence. I am, and have been, since the beginning of December doing duty as Ambulance Orderly to a Camp of which I will tell you later. You can understand that my duties are many and varied. Quite an epidemic of cut fingers one day, seven in all, everyone in opening bully beef tins. One day a bomb accident made bad work for me and the others. And then there are many minor things from coughs and colds to hospital cases, some walking and some to be carried away on stretchers.

February 10,

Shells have been hurling around very freely for the last five days and the nights too have held their share of dangers from the air. Though I am a couple of miles behind the firing line just now, an aeroplane has just been dropping bombs. An aeroplane fight though is a daily occurrence lately. Falling pieces of our own as well as the enemy shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns occasionally hit somebody, a job for me, but considering how much of the bursting shells fall around it is wonderful that so few of us get hurt.

Casualties from the firing line, too, are few in comparison with what they were in August and September. I told you before of one of those times, 1,800 wounded in 20 hours. It's great to feel that you are British. How our English boys can fight! It does make you feel proud the way our Infantry endure and go on. And the Scotties! I saw them once charge together side by side and it was magnificent. The snow is still falling on the ground, frozen hard, but it is not quite as cold as it was. The tents, huts and

houses in the village nearby look very pretty with icicles hanging from them and little brown patches where the canvas or pieces of tile showing through the snow.

I have seen no Gosford fellows for a good while, except Nicholas Hobbs one day, but I was in a motor lorry and he did not see me and I could not stop. I'll have to stop now though. Please thank all the kind friends who sent me so many messages of remembrance. My thoughts are with them often.

With loving good wishes to all at home.

HENRY.<sup>98</sup>

After months in hospital and convalescent camps in England and a long leave among relatives, Private Henry Hastings had been counted fit for service again and wrote to his parents in Gosford saying,

Monte Video Camp, Weymouth,

June 6,

I expect that this will be the last scribble from England for 1,200 men go out to France at 1 o'clock tonight and I am one of them. It is great to feel so well and strong again, though I am a bit sick today, the result of inoculation against cholera. We've been inoculated against almost everything and will soon begin to think we are an insectarium. I think I might be useful yet to Mr Gallard, who used to be at Narara. I found a batch of 56 letters waiting for me when I got back here yesterday, some of them more than nine months old and of cause I have not time to answer any of them, I wish I could. Please thank everyone for their messages and good wishes

It is now 12.30 p.m. Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup> and the hut is full of men, all ready for the march into Weymouth. Every man is fully dressed and equipped. I am scribbling this in full harness and lying almost full length on the floor, men tramping all around me and obstructing the light. Twenty-eight men are leaving this hut (leaving only 3- behind) and it is a stirring sight. After 18 months of soldering I am fairly used to it, yet always

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<sup>98</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

one is thrilled when setting out on the great adventure. And always it is a most delightful sensation, don't know why.

But always in Gallipoli on the eve and in the heat of a fierce encounter the thrill of pleasure was most curious indeed and I feel as much as I did upon those occasions, now that I am setting out on the greatest adventure for Verdun is all compelling. Do not worry about me; I would not miss it for anything. I had the chance to change with a man for hospital work, but my own out in the open I would not change for anything at all. Did you know I saw the last of the cousins?

Tom arrived home the day before my leave ended and so just escaped the naval battle, for the "Ardent" moved away from the berth where she had just finished her overhaul, to make room for Tom's boat, and she was one of the lost ships. Tom could tell some thrilling tales of his experiences. They are very proud of having captured a U-boat in their net a few days before he got his leave. The net has bombs attached and when the submarine runs into the net it closes around her and gets entangled in the propeller and then the bombs explode and good bye to the submarine.

Wednesday morning. We left Weymouth at 2 a.m. and arrived here (Folkestone) at 10 a.m. We sail in half-an-hour and the weather promises a perfect trip across. Do not be troubled over the danger. I have seen so many brave men die that dying is nobility itself. Should I "go west" well, our light is not a candle shining dimly in a sepulchre but the light "shineth more and more unto the Perfect Day and the Perfect Day will unite us." Kindest remembrances to all friends and love to all at home

HENRY.<sup>99</sup>

Mr and Mrs Hastings of Gosford received the following letter from teir son, who had been on active service for over three years. He said,

**Hastings William George 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant  
11<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

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<sup>99</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Mr George Hastings, son of Mr and Mrs W, Hastings of Gosford writing to his parents Hospital (Palace Hotel), Heliopolis, Cairo, under date May 8, wrote,

Have been here a week today, was wounded Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> April, a machine gun open an enfilading fire on us. It was terrible to see the poor fellows falling over like flies. I caught it in the fourth round in the back of the right shoulder, but fortunately the bullet came out again, making a wound of five to six inches. The Field Ambulance doctored me up and stretched me to the beach. The Hospital ships were all crowded, so we came along in the captured "Gerffinger" and thus my first pillow since leaving Australia was branded N. D. L.

I did not get away till morning of Thursday, arriving at Alexandria at midday on Saturday and here at midnight. I am making great progress and will probably be back at the front soon after you get this. I was in the first boat to land at 4 a.m. on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> April and was of cause in the great charge. It was a fine piece of work, but even better was the way we held the ridge against three or four times our number for that and the next day. I had a narrow escape on Sunday afternoon. A bullet hit me in the right breast and I naturally thought my time had come. I pressed my hand to that part of my frame and assured the chap on my right that I was settled and cleared back to the rear.

I did not get any fainter or weaker and thinking myself of first field dressing, got it out, tore my tunic and shirt open and out from the flesh dropped a pellet and so there was only a good sized scratch. Could not understand it. Next day, on looking for my knife, came across my spectacle case in my right breast pocket with two bullet holes in it. This no doubt saved my life. Met Flem Campbell (for the first time since leaving home) twice in the firing line, on Sunday and again on Tuesday. He was doing fine work, is a good fighter and is thought a lot of by his men. Our meetings were quite dramatic, as in each case it was in a tight corner. We were not ten yards apart when I was hit. Heard Henry was safe on Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup>

With love,

GEORGE<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, June, 11. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

## **Hawker C. C. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Infantry**

Below are a few extracts from an interesting letter from Lieutenant Hawker late of Empire Bay.

Since I last wrote we have been up at the Dardanelles and are now returning to Alexandria as our transports cannot be used for some time and as the horses have been on the ship for over a month, they require a spell on shore. Besides, the Dardanelles is only three days run. We left Alexandria about three month ago for Lemnos, an island about forty miles from the Dardanelles. After a stay of a fortnight we proceeded to Gaba Tepe, half way along the peninsula of Gallipoli. The first of the Australians had landed there about five days before we arrived. They landed in a bay encircled with tall sandy cliffs, which were riddled with trenches and dotted with concealed guns.

First of all about ten men-of-war shelled the landing then the torpedo boat destroyers towed the boats in; boat load after boat load, as they neared the beach, were shot down, the survivors landed and carried part of the hill and remained entrenched till we arrived. The night after we arrived, the men-of-war shelled a ridge for over an hour. It was a wonderful sight to see the huge shells bursting every second and causing clouds of dust. At one point the Turks had a concealed gun, which the warships could not locate, so they blew the cliff away and the gun came tumbling down. The "Queen Elizabeth" fired one of her 15-inch shells at another gun blowing it and the top of the hill to pieces.

When the Australians landed they found 17 Turks and a German officer killed. We were anchored off the beach about two miles. The "Goeben" used to come down the straits to shell the transports with her heavy guns. It is not a pleasant sensation to be shelled while on the boat. Some of the shells burst thirty yards from us with a terrific explosion and pieces fell all over the place. One shell fell into a collier's hold and exploded. Killing two and wounding two, but did not damage the ship. An aeroplane tried to drop bombs on us, but they fell fifty yards behind us and exploded. It was a grand sight to see the warships shelling the trenches.

The English troops landed at Cape Hellas and some regiments were completely cut up, but the troops there have now got a good footing and are trying to join with those at Gaba Tepe. The French troops landed on the Asiatic side. Their black troops will not stand the heavy shell fire. I do not blame them in a way, as it is like hell let loose. Everyone says the Australians have done wonderfully well and have plenty of dash. I went on board two hospital ships with despatches just before leaving Gaba Tepe. Each had about 200 wounded on board. Some had terrible wounds, but I was surprised to see them so cheerful and all very anxious to get back to the firing line.

It is beastly to have to return to Alexandria without having landed, but there is no possible hope of using transports for some months. We may be sent into the trenches as they are sending the Light Horse and leaving their horses in Egypt. I hope they do. Much to my disgust I have been made Transport Officer, as well as Adjutant and Quartermaster. I would much sooner go back to my section. The transport officer's work is loading or unloading all our horses, wagons and stores, &c. from the ships and trains.<sup>101</sup>

He was later promoted to the rank of Captain and wrote from France to Miss Pointer, Secretary of the Girl's Realm in Woy Woy saying,

Have just received a pleasant surprise in the shape of a parcel of extremely useful articles from the Girl's Realm of Woy Woy and I will be much obliged if you will kindly convey my sincere thanks to all your members. I can assure you we greatly appreciate the good work done by the woman and girls of Australia who are trying their utmost to make life pleasant for us. I am very proud of the way the lads of the district have responded to the call and would like to see many of the shirkers join the colours instead of leaving others to fight for them.

We have a long hard way before us yet. I am sure they would come if only they could see the sights here of ruined towns and villages and hear the tales told of the way the Germans treat the inhabitants of conquered countries. I consider France to be one of the

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<sup>101</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, July, 9. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

finest countries I have ever seen. It is simply wonderful the amount of land under cultivation when you know the whole of the work has been done by the old men, woman and children. I have seen many women and girls working in the field from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. hoeing, digging potatoes, harvesting and even pulling the hay rake. The people of France gave the Australians a wonderful welcome and the three days journey from Marseilles was one triumphant procession. I have met a good number of Woy Woy and Empire Bay lads and they are doing splendidly, but we are all anxious for the war to end. Though this is a splendid country, there is no place like Australia.<sup>102</sup>

### **Henry Ernest R. Private**

Private Ernest Henry wrote to Councillor G. A. Palmer from Lemnos Island under date October 4 saying,

We have now been at Lemnos for three weeks and are feeling the benefit of our rest. I expect we will return to the firing line shortly. Before leaving the Peninsula our Brigade carried out what was described as a brilliant charge. We captured a line of Turkish trenches and subsequently held them against all attacks. The hand grenade fighting was very severe, our captured trenches of the enemy being only ten or fifteen yards apart in places. The trenches we captured were full of Turkish dead and the nature of the fighting did not permit of their speedy removal.

When you keep company for two or three days with Turkish dead, they caused you more worry than they possible could during the days of their activity and at times I have sincerely wished them alive and well. In cases where we did not have time to remove them from the parapet, it was a gruesome experience firing over their bodies at their still active brethren. When we charge, the Turks annoy our boys by not waiting for the steel, but they are great fighters. When we charge, after running the gauntlet of their machine gun and shrapnel fire and arrive at their firing line, they run back through our communication trenches and snipe at us from every possible angle and corner.

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<sup>102</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 9. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



When I remember their dark faces peering over the bags, their chins resting on the stock of their rifle, I feel that I am singularly fortunate in being able to write you these few lines. But I am still in the land of the living, assisting in keeping Wyong's end up. I am tired of bloodshed, but the stake is the precious gift of freedom and I would rather be here on foreign land than live to see the defeat of the Allies. Defeat means the German yoke for perhaps a century and one cannot calmly contemplate the domination of our land by any arrogant foe. Success means a guarantee from future attacks and if even at the expense of personal suffering and hardships, we pave the way for future peace and prosperity for an unborn generation our labours will not have been in vain.

Trusting that robust frame of yours still glows with the health it deserves and with kind remembrances to Mrs Palmer and family; I remain your sincere friend

Ernest Henry.<sup>103</sup>

In his next letter, Private Henry of Wyong Creek sent the following lines to *The Gosford Times* written by him in the trenches somewhere in France.

We charged the Hun at Armentriers  
With riflemen and Grenadiers,  
The Bombers foremost in the raid,  
Plied on the flanks their deadly trade;  
The thundering guns took up the cry,  
A pile of smoke obscured the sky,  
And mingled with the battle's roar  
Machine guns rattled by the score;  
Their streams of bullets flew like hail,  
And dead and wounded marked their trail.

We swept across the foeman's line,  
Their rifle bullets ceased to wine,  
For if they were to make a stand,

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<sup>103</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

They must engage us hand to hand.

Between the trench walls' narrow space,  
The surging conflict raged apace,  
The "Kamarade" business could not save,  
We asked no quarter, none we gave,  
It was no place for weaklings there,  
With grim death stalking everywhere,  
It takes the well thrust solid steel,  
To make a stubborn foeman reel.

Our second wave came in the fight,  
The remnant of the Huns took flight,  
The line was ours, 'twas not the end,  
The captured ground we must defend;  
We crouched amid the slaughtered Huns,  
To wait the vengeance of his guns.

He had the trench range to a hair,  
And mighty shell bursts rent the air,  
The trenches seemed to rock and reel,  
The senses grew too numb to feel,  
And dauntless hearts who all that day,  
Had held their own right through the fray,  
While holding on there true and staunch  
We're buried 'neath that avalanche.

The welcome respite came at last,  
When kindly night her shadows cast;  
There was no rest, the smoke dimmed eyes,  
Must guard against a foe's surprise.

The star shells shooting through the air,  
Lit up the scene with fittingly glare,

And distant guns boomed through the night,  
As seeming loth to stay the fight,  
And saddest, while the watcher waits,  
The death sobs of sore-stricken mates.

When grey dawn broke, we held the line,  
The rifle shots began to wine;  
And reinforced to bar the way,  
We roused to face another day.  
E. R. HENRY, France.<sup>104</sup>

### **Hill F. W. Private**

Private Hill of Yarramalong wrote to his sister Mrs A. Jennett of The Entrance, dated,

No. 10 Camp,  
Lark Hill,  
March 4, 1917,

Rube Dransfield came into this Camp yesterday, his brother is at Harcourt not very far away having come back from France three weeks ago. Tom Woodbury and Dick Sheldon came to Lark Hill Camp this week. I have met a good many of the Wyong lads, but none from Yarramalong. I am in splendid health better than I have been since I have left Australia. Accompanied by Rube Dransfield and Dave Clarke, I went out to Tigheledean, about four miles away, to get a piece of bark from the “spreading chestnut tree” to send to you, but we found a guard of two armed men and a barb wire fence around it. But I ran the risks and got a little piece of bark. All the old tree would be carried away in pieces if they didn’t guard it, it is half rung now with pocket knives and looks almost dead. The “village smithy” is still there, but I don’t know if he is related

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<sup>104</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, November, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

to the old chap we read about in our school books. I have met young Akers off the Mountain and also Frank Earl, Barney Jones and Allan Richards. I will be going to France very soon.<sup>105</sup>

**Hobbs N. H. Lieutenant**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

When he was a Sergeant- Major N. H. Hobbs of Gosford, wrote from Gallipoli saying,

Just a few lines to let you know that I'm in the best of health and having a good time considering that we are at war. We have been in the trenches for just a month and have lost a fair number. The first line of Turkish trenches is about 50 yards on an average from us, but in some places it is only 10 yards and both sides are continually pelting bombs into one another's trenches. Before we arrived here our men charged the trenches, but were driven back with slaughter. Then the Turks made a counter attack, but our machine guns mowed them down.

It was estimated that 4,000 Turks and several hundred of our men were lying dead on the 50 yards by a mile between the trenches. I've fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition, but mostly through loopholes or periscope rifles. Yesterday afternoon I went out about three miles along our right front to visit Tom Humphries. He had received quite a budget in his last mail. He gave me three copies of *The Gosford Times* which imparted some very interesting news to me.

Have had some very narrow escapes from both rifle and machine gun fire and have had shell burst within two and three yards several times, getting a crack on the boot with a lump of shrapnel and smothered with dirt dozens of times. Besides the Australians there are British, New Zealanders, Maoris, Ghurkhas and Italians all near. Saw Arthur Dent a few days ago and neither of us have received any mail since we arrived.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 31. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>106</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 5. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Lieutenant N. H. Hobbs, of Gosford received the following letter which he received from a French girl prior to being wounded somewhere in France saying,

“Long Live England” “Long Live Australia” Beloved soldiers who come and fight for us, we wish we might express the emotion which pervades our soul when we behold you marching along. We wish we might shriek out our admiration, our gratitude to you who left your families, your country, to come and help us in this struggle lasting for months. Whole France loves you for your generous coming into the fight, since you come to make us free as well as other lands suffering martyrdom. We are one soul with you and our own soldiers. Brave soldiers, our soul will follow you to the front lines. You have our hopes. We rely upon you and your gallantry and hope you’ll come back victorious. Let us pray together. May God protect and bless the whole of us and help you in your hardships.

A YOUNG AND GRATEFUL FRENCH GIRL.<sup>107</sup>

Lieutenant Hobbs writes from France to his brother Alf at Gosford saying,

Both Tom Humphreys and Arthur Dent are 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenants. Arthur got his promotion not long after mine, in fact all those who left Liverpool as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieuts. were given their second star about the same time. Tom got his about the time of the evacuation. In the Light Horse they gave everyone who had one star for three months on the Peninsular their second. The Light Horse, excepting a very few divisional mounted troops, have not come over here yet. I have been recommended by the Colonel for my second star. We have had plenty of bombardments lately. In the last two days our Company lost 4 killed, 5 wounded and 2 suffering from shell shock (2 killed and 2 wounded from my platoon). Yesterday afternoon we stopped about 300 shells in our Company’s trenches and over 100 the day before, so casualties are very small considering.<sup>108</sup>

**Hobbs Ronald Stanley (Roy) Lieutenant  
36<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

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<sup>107</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 14. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>108</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 14. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Mrs A. J. Hobbs of Gosford received the following letter referring to the death of her son which said,

Headquarters, 36<sup>th</sup> Battalion, A. I. F,  
8<sup>th</sup> April, 1918,

Dear Mrs Hobbs,

No officer ever won his way to our hearts quicker than did your son and few have proved themselves so quickly and so positively. Four months ago we did not know him. Today there is not an officer or man who does not personally mourn his loss and admire him for the splendid work he did. It is only since we have been ordered south to assist in stopping the Hun push that advice was received that your son had been awarded the Military Cross for gallantry and devotion to duty during a raid conducted on the enemy in the vicinity of Ploegsteert on the 4th March, 1918 and now precisely a month later, he was killed in a greater operation in which he conducted himself with no less distinction.

In the midst of a charge launched against an advancing enemy who was promptly routed, a rifle bullet passed through his body and he died whilst being conducted to the dressing station, very shortly after being wounded. He has been buried in the military cemetery in the Bois d'Aquenne on the main road from Villers Bretonneux to Amiens. There is little more I can say. I know you cannot but grieve at the loss of so fine a son, so gallant a soldier, we, his comrades, mourn his loss greatly, for he had endeared himself to us.

But I should like to feel that your pride in his brilliant achievements and in the estimation on which he is regarded by his comrades, will alleviate the pain and that you will be able to thank God that, if his career was short, it was doubly glorious. In fullest sympathy, which is shared by the entire Battalion,

Yours sincerely

J. A. MILNE Lieutenant-Colonel

Commanding 36<sup>th</sup> Battalion, A. I. F.<sup>109</sup>

### **Hopkins Stanley Sapper**

Sapper Stan Hopkins rote saying,

Somewhere in France

July 22,

I have been in the trenches a couple of weeks. We had a go a couple of days ago, but a little the worst for it. Fritz is in pretty strong ground. Plenty of work here is going on night and day. Have not done any fighting. But am in it all the same working in the trenches. Shells and lumps of iron flying around makes one duck a bit and if I stay here long I shall get to be like a Jack-in-the-box. We are not doing too bad, but I must expect some hardship. I have been in a big bombardment. It is the sight of a life time. I saw a few thousand shells bursting and tearing everything they met up with. Saw some awful sights too. But I hope to tell you this personally, which I hope will not be long now. The Germans don't want the war. The prisoners we capture say "War no good." They seem to be pleased to be taken." I see from *The Gosford Times* that Jack Dwyer is home. Hope he is O.K. Remember me to all.<sup>110</sup>

### **Humphreys Les Driver**

Driver Les Humphreys, adopted son of Mr W. M. Reid of "Avondale" Ourimbah and who is a driver in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, wrote home from the war saying,

Was glad to hear that ----- had enlisted and that ----- was to follow later. It is hard on the mothers, but they will be more proud then ever when all this strife is over. If the chaps still in Australia who haven't enlisted, or at least tried too, could only hear what they are called by the boys over here, they would get somewhere out of sight and stop there. One sees death and suffering in every form here and after the way our boys have

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<sup>109</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>110</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

fought and died it makes one inflamed to think of the able-bodied men still in Australia who won't come and do their bit.

As the happenings of each day go by the more pleased I am that I got away with the first contingent. I would not be in Australia at the present time on any account. It had been fairly lively here for the last week, but you can read enough of it without my filling letters. Suffice to say the Turks have not yet driven us into the sea. All I can say is the Turk is a great sticker and so far have played the game. Must ring off now, Best wishes to all at home

LES HUMPHREYS.<sup>111</sup>

### **Humphreys Tom F. Lieutenant Light Horse**

Tom Humphreys of Kincumber, who had been promoted to the rank of Regimental Quarter-Master Sergeant, writes to his mother from Gallipoli Peninsula under date 18 May 1915. Since writing Tom had been ill in the hospital and Mrs Humphreys received a cable stating that he was well again and would be returning to the firing line. The letter said,

We are now right in the thick of it. Got here nearly five weeks ago and so far I have escaped. We have lost a large number of men, mostly from shrapnel. We all live in dugouts, just burrow in the side of the hill and when shells start to burst everyone disappears. That is, of course, if he is near home, if not, he must take his chance. All the fighting is done in the trenches. Our line extends about four miles and the Turks are right along our front. In some places the trenches are not more than twenty yards apart so you can imagine we don't look over the top very often. Our point of observation is a small loophole. The soldiers throw bombs at each other. They are horrible things, blow one to pieces.

Our chaps made a great name for themselves here, but it has cost us dearly. The landing was one of the greatest feats of the war. It seems almost impossible for troops to have

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<sup>111</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, October, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



done what they did. I would like to get some photos of the place to show you when I get back home. I have met a lot of old friends and lost some too. They have passed out. Lance Mason is here and well. Flem Campbell was wounded and sent away about a fortnight ago. He was well liked by his men. I had a very bad hand and arm poisoned, but it is quite well now. The doctors say I am lucky, they feared I would lose my arm. I am now in the very best of health and spirits so don't worry about me. Can get all clothes, boots, &c., that I require and no shortage of "tucker". The climate is glorious, not too hot in the day and lovely at night.

Fresh water is scarce, but we can get a swim in the sea every day. I may not be able to write again for a long time, but send a post card each week. Remember me to all my old friends and I will let Mr Baker know I have had the *Gosford Times*. He sent about six papers so far and I appreciate them very much. I get my letters fairly regularly. My very best love to you all.<sup>112</sup>

Lieutenant Tom Humphries writes to Miss Mary Deasey from Gallipoli

I am pleased to think the Gosford girls don't forget the old buffer who is trying to do a little for the Empire. Your generous gifts (tobacco, cigarettes and other comforts sent by the Gosford Girls' patriotic Society) arrived safely and were much appreciated by myself and comrades. It is great to think we are not forgotten.

In an another letter to Mr M. Ward he wrote,

No.2. Hospital, Ghezireh Palace Hotel, Cairo, July 23.

Dear Mr Ward,

You will be surprise to get a letter from me here. I have managed so far to escape bullets and shells, but my share of sickness, septic poison, influenza and diarrhoea. Plenty hard work and no rest, only about three hours sleep in the 24 has all combined to knock me about. I was completely run down. Have only been here four days and feel a new man already. Another week will make me fit to face all the Turks on the Peninsular. The staff here are entirely Australian, but the only one I know is Dr Newmarch.

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<sup>112</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

They certainly look after the patients well, one never hears a complaint. This is a magnificent place, originally one of the Khedive's palaces and built at a cost of over four million, so you can imagine we have nothing like it in Gosford. I have not seen any of our boys except Lance Mason and Henry Hastings. Lance was a bit off colour when I saw him last, but Henry was in the best of health. It was sad about old Flem Campbell. His was not considered a bad wound, but gangrene set in and soon took him off. He did well at the front, all his men swore by him. Our boys are having a rough time and the man who goes through without being hit is lucky.

I would like to tell you a few tales, but the censor may get a hold of this, wait until I return. Tell Mr Baker I get *The Gosford Times* regularly and appreciate it. Remember me to all enquiring friends.

Your sincere friend

TOM.

Don't know if I told you I have been Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant since 15<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>113</sup>

### **Jenkins Giles William Corporal Infantry**

Corporal Jenkins wrote home to "Restella" in Davistown from England saying,

Another letter hoping it finds you well as it leaves me. I am quite over my illness now and could hardly tell I have been wounded. Well mother, I received a letter from you last week, the first I have had for some considerable time, but so far, I am sorry to say, the letter you have enclosed some money in to me, has not yet come to light. I received Nell's parcels of socks; they were so nice. So far I have been lucky in receiving her parcels. No doubt mother, you will be surprised and pleased to know I have been made Corporal and may be a Sergeant any day. I have been in charge of the Building Section practically ever since I came here, but being in a hospital and not belonging to the A. M. C., it is very hard to become promoted.

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<sup>113</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, September, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I get on very well with our Captain and also my men, so everything goes along splendidly. I think I told you in my previous letters that my work also is to look after the dead. At first when I came here they got their coffins ready made, but they found I could make them cheaper. Up to the present I have made about fourteen and am quite expert at the game now. Will be competent to start an undertaker's business when I return. They do not have the coffins covered over here as they do in Australia. They are made of elm and when stained and varnished, look very well and could well be mistaken for oak and of course they are not half the price.

We cannot do much building here on account of such scarcity of timber, but we are kept pretty busy on repair work. On my papers they have marked me "indispensable, permanently in charge of Building Section of the 1<sup>st</sup> A. A. H.," so I may not see any more fighting and I can assure you I am not pining for another trip over there just yet. I am still helping to win the war with the work I am doing, but still if they do see fit to send me back to France, I am prepared to take another risk. The air raids in London lately have been terrible. The last two weekends I have spent there. When the Zeppelins begin their awful work, the people make for the tubes, which are underground and are pretty safe there. In fact, on moonlight nights they sleep there.

It is fearful the way the Zeppelins are killing women and children, for that is all about they are doing. There is hardly any other damage of importance. The Australian people hardly realise the awfulness of it, but thank God they are safe. They little know the tragedy of it all as the English people do. Since I have left home I have had the usual lot of hardships that are part of the soldier's life, but, taking it all together, it has been a splendid trip and I have seen some great sights. We are just beginning to get winter here now and all ready it is very cold, I am afraid it will be another severe one. Last year it was frightful, but it was very beautiful sight when everything is covered in a white mantle of snow.

I have been in London now nearly sixteen months, so have been able to have a grand look around and have seen practically all the things of note. I am sure I should never have the chance of visiting England if I had waited till I could have come on a pleasure trip. I often wish I was back in dear old Woy Woy and on one of my favourite drifts such as Charlie and I used to do. There is no chance of going for a decent fish here like

you can over there. It's no place for a man to get a wife either. Haven't tasted what I call decent cooking since I have been here. I must say the French cooking is very nice though. If you are sending me a parcel, mother, ask Mag to make me one of her cakes so I can show them what cooking really is. Hope father's health is keeping quite alright and of course, your own too. Remember me to all and God bless you at home.

From your loving son.

GILES.<sup>114</sup>

### **Johnson John Stobert Private 5118 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Infantry**

The last letter written by the Late Private John Johnson to his parents in Gosford contained the following description of the battle of Lagnicourt, in which the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division took part, saying,

What happened at Lagnicourt yesterday is one of the bloodiest episodes in all the long tale of slaughter. At about half past 4, before daybreak, the enemy made a very heavy attack upon our lines when we were far beyond the old system of trenches and in real open warfare of the old style. The enemy's lines were protected with a new belt of barbed wire, but it was this which proved his undoing. His massed attack against the Australian troops had a brief success, battalions of Prussian Guards charging in waves broke through our forward posts and drove a deep wedge into our positions. Here they stayed a time, doing what damage they could, searching around for prisoners and waiting for reserves to renew the attack, but Australian Staff Officers were swift in preparing and delivering a counter-blow which fell upon the enemy at half past seven.

Companies of Australians swept forward in irresistible spirit, flung themselves upon the Prussians, forcing them to retreat. They fell back in oblique lines from their way of advance and were forced deliberately in the direction of the Australian attack. At the same time our field batteries open fire upon them with shrapnel as they ran, more and more panic stricken, towards their own lines. The greatest disaster befell them when they found themselves cut off by their own wire. What happened then was just appalling

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<sup>114</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, April, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

slaughter. The Australian Infantry used their rifles as never have rifles been used since the first weeks of the war when the old regulars of the First Expeditionary Force lay down at the Chateau on the way of their retreat and fired into the advancing lines of the Germans.

Yesterday, in that early hour of the morning the Australian riflemen fired into the same kind of target of massed men, so that each shot found its mark. The Prussians struggled fanatically to tear a way through the wire, to climb over it, or crawl under it. They cursed and screamed and ran up and down like rats in a trap until they fell dead. They fell so that dead bodies in long lines of mortality before and in the midst of that barbed wire. The cries of the wounded, long tragic wails, rose high above the roar of rifle fire and the burst of shrapnel and the Australian soldier, quiet and grim, shot on and on till each man had fired over 100 rounds, till more than 1,500 German corpses lay on the field at Lagnicourt.

The Prussian Guards have always suffered from British troops as by some dire fatality. Ay Ypes, at Contalmaison, in several of the Somme battles, they were cut to pieces, but this massacre at Lagnicourt is the worst episode in their history and will be remembered by the German people as a black and fearful thing.<sup>115</sup>

### **Johnston W. R. Sapper 13<sup>th</sup> Engineers**

Sapper W. R. Johnston wrote to *The Gosford Times* from Belgium under date October 10, 1916, saying,

Since my arrival in France, in the firing line I mean, I can assure your readers that the Australians have had a very rough time of it, but whatever they attempted they succeeded and to their honours list can be placed to their credit, the capture of Pozieres, Monquet Farm and a number of strong points. The taking of Monquet Farm was a tough fight, because we were under enfilade fire all the time, especially from the stronghold of Thiepval, which place held out for fourteen months against our fire. The capture of

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<sup>115</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, July, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Pozieres at the end of July was not as bad as Monquet Farm, but the bombardment was terrific, the roar of the big guns, "Jumping Gertie", "Rowdy Annie" and "Silent Billy" with all the other guns of the same calibre firing at the same time, was something never to forget in a hurry. Those who were back in town in billets state they could read a newspaper with the flashing of the guns.

After these successes, we were taken out for a spell, not in the minds of the men, having to march full pack for a number of miles on a hard road, cobblestoned most of the way. Well, for some of the experiences in the trenches. In the first place it puts a chap on his mettle or guard and when he sees his mate being taken along on a stretcher it puts a very nasty taste in your mouth, especially if he is knocked right out. The wounded are very happy. Soon as they receive a wound and get it attended to, nine cases out of ten ask for a fag and on the way down to the dressing station his friends call out "Eh, sport yer got a Blighty," and the reply one gets "Bet your life I have," and so the fighting goes on gaily.

To see some of the boys duck for cover when one of "Fritz's Ironfoundries" come over is very comical. Of course all duck for one hole and after the shell explodes, they come out to see and ask each other "where did that one go Bill?" and if it is close handy you ought to hear the lovely names given Fritz and the Australians can give a good many without any hesitation. I have met Eric Gribble and from him I get *The Gosford Times* to see the great progress the old town is making. Jack Gribble, Driver Mobbs and Hughie Kimberley from the Mountain,, who is in my Company as a Driver. All the above mentioned are O. K. in health and spirits. Eric's mater will see a great difference in him, especially in the cooking line; I paid him a visit to his hut on Sunday and saw his turning of jellies and custards. From my point of testing they were first-class, especially after stew and stew.

The winter is fast approaching and we have all been issued with warm clothing and last evening we received another lot of comforts and tobacco, much appreciated by all ranks. I must now close this letter as news has come through that we are to prepare for

the trenches, so must conclude, hoping this finds all friends in Gosford in the best of health as this leaves me.<sup>116</sup>

### **Keats H. E. Sapper**

Sapper Keats, son of Mr H. A. Keats, wrote of his trip through the Panama Canal saying,

We had a very long trip across the Pacific, twenty-four days without seeing land or steamer. One day from Panama Bay, on the starboard side, first land we saw since we left Melbourne. The island was Melville, which is half-a-mile wide, two miles round and eight hundred feet high. It was eight miles off when passing it. The island is composed of solid rock. Next day the American mainland came into sight. We passed a couple of steamers going and coming. On entering the Bay of Panama we passed whales and sharks by the dozen.

The Bay is dotted with small islands and we could also see the lights of the town itself. First thing in the morning we steamed towards the mouth of the Canal and could then see the town of Panama, which is composed of red roofed houses, with here and there a big factory. We also passed the Forts at the mouth. The houses are all built on piles, which seem to be fully eight feet high. The locks are called Faraiflores. The ship passes and the gates close behind it and water from the above Lock is then let in. the ship rises at a great rate and soon we are looking down on the American soldiers and others who stood on the wall dividing the two Locks

The length of the Canal is forty and a half miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The first sets of Locks are eight miles from the entrance. They are made double, one up and one down. Each Lock is a thousand feet long sidewalks are fifty-one feet wide and the dividing wall between the up and down Locks are eighty feet across. The gates are seven feet thick of solid steel, sixty-five feet wide and forty-seven feet to eighty-five feet high, weighing from three hundred to six hundred tons. After passing the first Lock the ship goes through a small lake fifteen miles long and at Pedro Miguel passes the third Lock.

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<sup>116</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 30. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Here thousands of American blacks rushed down the banks and there appeared to be millions of kiddies. These darkies have villages all along the Canal and they seem to do all the hard work. The whites appear to do nothing. A train passes us here. It had a big brass bell in front of the engine, which they ring when they come into town. This railway runs right along the Canal. In the first two Locks we rose fifty-five feet and in the third thirty feet, making a total of eighty-five feet rise. After leaving the Pedro Miguel Lock the ship passes through the Culebra Cut, a distance of nine miles. In the Lock the ship is taken by electric power, a contrivance like a tram with wire ropes from it to the ship.

After leaving the Culebra Cut the ship enters the Gatun Lake, 644 square miles, through which it travels for a distance of twenty-four miles. This lake was made by a fresh water river coming from South America. After passing through the Lake we came to Gatun Locks and descended there in one flight. After passing the Gatun Locks we journeyed through a passage seven miles long to Colan. The width of the Locks and Cuts are 110 feet. It cost three thousand pounds to take a ship through. Colan looks alright from a distance, that is as near as we got to it. I was on guard that night and it was jolly hard to look at the town after twenty-five days at sea and not be allowed to go on shore.

First thing in the morning we went into the Bay and lay there for three days. Destroyers and submarines were going up and down all day long. It is a fair stunner here, too hot for any man and I was not surprised to see that nearly everyone was black. Tugs came over nearly every day and put more water aboard. We also saw the big guns at the Forts firing on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March. We left here bound for Newport News. Life-belts supplied from Colan had to be worn day and night. On the 30<sup>th</sup> land was sighted on the port side. This was the island Jamaica, noted for its big range of mountains. You could see the clouds below them. A lighthouse stood on a long strip of land running out to sea.

Next morning low-lying islands were sighted on the starboard side and one had a red and white lighthouse on it. On Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, we entered Chesapeake Bay and saw a number of American men-of-war boats. As we were making our way down the



Bay a fog settled heavily and we had to drop anchor, but it soon lifted and we steamed on. We came to the mouth of the river and lay off Hampton Road, a nice little town it is, for one hour. We then went to Newport News, about six miles up the river. On our way we cheered the American sailors on the big Dreadnoughts and they cheered back.

Next day we pulled in at the coaling wharf at Newport News and about midday we marched through the city. I must say I was disappointed with the first American city, or so called city, I saw. A meal costs us forty-five cents, about one shilling and ten pence of our money and just one course at that. Next day we went ashore again and had a look at the quarters occupied by the blacks. It would make you feel crook to see how the poor beggars are treated. They are not allowed to ride in the same trams with the whites and the kiddies are clothed in rags. Twenty miles across the river from Newport News is a very fine place called Norforth, where the buildings are laid out in much the same way as in New York. The Americans and Australians get on splendidly together. You see them in camps all over the place and they have some of their biggest camps here.<sup>117</sup>

### **Keene F. A. Sergeant No. 1240 Infantry**

Mrs J. Kirby of Erina received the following letter from France, testifying to the bravery exhibited by her son, Private Alfred Kirkby saying,

Mrs J. Kirkby  
Erina, Gosford  
Dear Madam,

We are just writing a line to let you know of your son Alf, who was one of a party of four with us to carry ammunition across "No Man's Land" under heavy shell, machine gun and rifle fire. It was an awful trip, but Alf showed himself to be the very brave chap, just as he did when the next night he volunteered to come out with us to carry in wounded men under machine gun and rifle fire. We are proud of Alf. He is the boy of our section and we hope he comes home to you alright

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<sup>117</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, July, 11. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Yours

Sergt. F. Field (331)

J. B. McGowan (473)

H. Girevson (443)

Sergt. F. A. Keen (1240)

As one time Section Commander of Alf's I can say he is a lad to be proud of and no one was more pleased than I when he came safely out of "No Man's Land" on the morning of 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1916

Sergt. F.A.KEEN.<sup>118</sup>

**Kelle Leonard Jean Private No.1542  
Infantry 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion**

Mr Albert Kelle wrote to the *Herald* saying,

We received official reports about our son. He died at Lone Pine. We want no sympathy. He died a noble death and is better of than any of us. His mother and I concur that it is better as it is; we would sooner have it so now he is happy and safe. If he was walking about a shirker and a coward we would be ashamed of him. Now we are proud of him.<sup>119</sup>

**Kirkness James D. Quartermaster Sergeant  
Army Medical Corps**

Extracts from a letter written from Oxford, England by Quartermaster Sergeant Jim Kirkness to his parents at Gosford saying,

At last we have arrived in England, for which we are all thankful. A rest is all right, but six weeks is too much, especially when one has dropped everything to do a special job. However, we have our work cut out to equip and move our hospital to France within 21 days. But I must tell you first of the trip from Gibraltar. The Rock is a marvellous

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<sup>118</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>119</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

place. When you go ashore, it is just a huge cliff from the ship, but you find a large town built in terraces, one street level with the roofs of the lower houses, gardens of beauty and fortifications that make an Australian wonder, the whole being walled in and the gates guarded.

After leaving there, we went to the south of England, the last two days under a strong escort and landed at Plymouth and from there to Oxford. This is the University town of England, so I am sending postcards pictures of each of the Colleges. The people here are very good to us and treat us all as long loss brothers. Still, many of them have hazy ideas about Australia and wonder if all Australians were big strapping fellows like our 400, for the majority of our Company are on the big side. The scenery too, is a strong contrast to ours. No fences, just hedges and ditches and a landscape like a patchwork quilt.

We are just dividing up our Company till the equipment is ready. One lot goes to Devonport, Maidenhead, Cobham, Southampton and Netley, while my squad remain here. Our Company were exchanging experiences today, each being similar in one respect that the people here ask hundreds of questions about Australia. In fact, we seem to be immigration agents and I believe that many will go to Australia when the war is over. I am having the wish of my life, to see England, but Australia for me every time. I am off to London tomorrow, on business for the unit and I'll tell you what it's like in the next letter.

Kind regards to Gosford friends, Yours,

JIM.<sup>120</sup>

In the next letter from Quartermaster Sergeant Kirkness to home he wrote,

Since my last letter I have had the wish of my life. It was to see mighty London, the great city that to us is the throbbing heart of the Empire, where some of the greatest and best men in history have thought and controlled issues of world importance, where all the glory and glamour that surrounds the throne exists in our imagination, the home of

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<sup>120</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

those traditions which have inspired men to dare and do great things. You can appreciate my feelings when I tell you that my heart beat faster and I was very full of hope and expectation at least some of the marvellous sights of my boyhood dreams.

When the train steamed into London and I got out, I was out, really miles out, of all my beautiful dreams. I was simply tossed into a hive of human bees, all busy, some after honey, some to sting, but none seeming to care a “continental” for any other B in the mob. I believe that London is all that it is claimed for it, but my first impressions were that of absolute disappointment. Most of the streets are narrow and your chances of stopping to look at anything is equal to seeing our Sydney Show on a Good Friday. For beauty, comfort or cleanliness, it cannot be compared with either Sydney or Melbourne.

Then their Botanical Gardens are not a patch on ours. But knowing I could only stay a few days, I didn't stay looking for the aspects that was not pleasing. I got a military guide and went to see all the places of historic interest that I had read about and to go through them was very interesting for both the grandeur and horror of their association. I am very glad I saw all that I did. There will be much to tell you bye and bye if the submarines do not cop us. Now look here, this is a real joke. I had to do a bit of buying stuff for the Sergeant's Mess (crockery, cutlery and so on) while in London and though this stuff is carried to Australia and duties stacked on and charges for everybody that looks at it, still I could have bought equally as cheap at Hordern's in Sydney.

We have left Oxford for Southampton and our whole plans are changed, for instead of going to Boulogne, we are to be hurried away to Lemnos, an island 45 miles from the Dardanelles. We are all disappointed at the change, but we are here to serve not to dictate, so we will put our best into the job, one reason being that a large army is leaving here for Saros Gulf. You would like Southampton, it is a pretty place and the people are doing their best to make us like it. They come to the hospital, where our headquarters are and leave invitations for any Australians to visit them.

We are having a rattling time here, but our orders are to be off and our unit is entraining for Plymouth and thence to their destination. Five men and I stay behind to look after the stores, of which we have collected 987 tons to be loaded onto a tramp steamer and follow on. Tom and I had a few hours off and we went to the Tudor House and had a

good look over the old place and stood in the guard room of King John. We are off to Portsmouth now. Best love to all

Yours

JIM.<sup>121</sup>

### **Lawler C. Corporal** Infantry

Corporal Lawler of Wyong arrived with the wounded soldiers. He was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade and was not five yards away from Sergeant Larkin, the politician soldier when he fell. The letter said,

It must have been shrapnel that got him for we were charging under bursts of shrapnel and there was very little rifle fire. Teddy was well up in front, but I can't tell you any details, for we had all gone mad. I suppose you have read of the big Queenslander who bayoneted a Turk and threw him over his shoulder. It is quite true. The man I knew as big Montgomery, a Queensland footballer. Of course he did not actually lift him over his shoulder. He charged up a hill into a Turk, who in fright stumbled forward on to the bayonet. Montgomery was crouching and the impetus carried the Turk right over his head. It looked as if Montgomery had thrown him over.

Let me tell you one thing. I saw service in South Africa for two years and know what I am talking about. The fire discipline of the Australian troops was a revelation. I have never seen anything to beat it. It isn't the easiest thing in the world to get men to withhold their fire when the enemy is charging at you and the excitement is tremendous. But the Australians always let them get about 150 yards before they fired. Even if they had no officers, as was often the case, they would always hold their fire until the right moment. That speaks even greater volumes for their superb coolness than the fact that they would play cards in the trenches under shrapnel fire.

At bayonet work too they were fine. And how the Turks hate the bayonet. They squeal and run at the sight of it. I have seen hundreds of bayoneted Turks and not one of them

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<sup>121</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August 20. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

was bayoneted in front. They had turned to run when it got them. I have never seen the body of a bayoneted Australian. At close quarters the Turks are nowhere.<sup>122</sup>

**Lukeen George M.  
Private**

Private G. M. Lukeen of Woy Woy, who was a prisoner of war in Germany, wrote to Mr J. W. Browne of Patonga under date of 20 August, 1916, saying,

I suppose you will be surprised to hear that I am a prisoner of war in Germany. Well, it is the fortune of war. I have written to the Red Cross in London and other places for aid in plain food and stuff and trust they will send it along soon. Was taken prisoner on 20<sup>th</sup> July, without getting a mark. Will tell you more when we get back. Am quite well at present and hope this will find you the same.<sup>123</sup>

In his next letter Private Lukeen sent several photos of himself and his comrades to Mr J. W. Browne of "Patonga" together with the following letter.

Kriegsgfangenenlager Friedrichsfeld (bei Wesel),

March 2, 1917,

Dear Mr Browne,

You're most welcome letter of 7<sup>th</sup> November to hand. I am very glad to hear that you are all quite well, also glad to hear that the lads who names you mention have done the right thing. They will not regret it in time to come. I heard from Australia that part of a letter I wrote to you was published in the *Gosford Times* I hope it done some good. I have not heard from anyone else at Woy Woy. Walter Potter was made a prisoner with me, but I have not seen him for some time. I wrote to his people at Granville. It is very kind of you to send money to the Red Cross on my behalf. I have received one parcel from them, in addition to the usual weekly parcels, but they do not say who they are from, so I suppose it was on your account. The winter has been very bad in Germany and the cold intense. Am enclosing two photographs of myself and mates.

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<sup>122</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>123</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 9. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Kind regards to all.<sup>124</sup>

### **Manton W. Private**

Private W. Manton, who was one of the first to enlist when war broke out, wrote to *The Gosford Times* from the trenches in France saying,

Many thanks for the papers you send and which we eagerly look forward to. I have seen enough fighting to last me a life time and have been lucky in escaping so far with two small shrapnel wounds. The three weeks I spent in the hospital is the only time I have had a spell since we left the transports. I think this year will finish the war and if the Germans could only get out of it without losing prestige and without paying for their crimes, they would end it now. Wonderful preparations are being made by the Allies for an offensive movement that will stagger the world when it comes off.

We are certain as to the result and it may not be long before we are on the march through Germany. It was a shock to us when we heard that Conscription had been turned down in our native land, Australia. When we enlisted we thought our mates would follow to the last man. We never thought they would stay home and rat on us. The people of Australia do not realise what we are up against. Australians are not curs, but some evil spirit seemed to have entered their souls when they voted to help the Hun against their own flesh and blood. But there's time to repent and put on khaki Jack Weston and a young chap from Ourimbah were put out of action some time ago and I hear Bert Best and one of the Redgate's of Tumby have been invalided home.

Kind regards to Woy Woy and Gosford friends.<sup>125</sup>

### **May Harold Private Infantry**

Private Harold May wrote to his parents Mr and Mrs Jack May saying,

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<sup>124</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, June, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>125</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, February, 8. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Somewhere in France

I am camped in the same lines as Mack McDonald, who just comes out of hospital. Quite a number of Gosford district boys are camped just over the hill; E. K. White, Jack Riggelsford, Stan Hubbard, Jack Gribble, C. Frost and F. Bromley. Poor Austin O'Toole died in the hospital and I am going with Mack to see his grave and get a photo of it.<sup>126</sup>

### **Mason Lance Sergeant Bandmaster 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry**

Bandmaster-Sergeant Mason wrote to *The Gosford Times* from France saying,

We are having severe weather here at the present. I can tell you it is pretty rough and a chap has to be fit to stand in it. You would hardly credit it, but all tin goods are frozen and we have to put them over a fire to melt the contents. Only a few days ago I opened a tin of pineapple and the juice was frozen and I had to put it over a fire before I could partake. On another occasion, while we were having breakfast, one of the boys put a mug of tea down and before he had finished the tea was frozen. Even my tooth and shaving brush is like a piece of wood when I want to use them, and my towel, well, I can stand it up instead of hanging it up. The cold weather also plays with the motor engines. I have seen the drivers with a fire under their engines to get them in working order.<sup>127</sup>

### **McDonald Frank Private**

Private McDonald, son of Mr T. McDonald of Lisarow, wrote from France saying,

Never in my life have I been through anything like what we experienced since the German offensive began and we have been fighting for our lives. It is wonderful the way the German advance was stopped. After being in the front line for six days hard

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<sup>126</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, August, 11. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

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fighting the Australians were brought out into reserves and only had a day and night's spell when we were ordered back into the firing line. The Germans came over in mass formation and succeeded in breaking through. It was just hell what we had to endure, fighting our way through a torrent of bursting shells.

Later we succeeded in digging ourselves in and then went over the top and met Fritz in no man's land. We succeeded in re-capturing the ridge. It was an awful fight and a miracle that any of us came out of it alive. It must be all you people praying for me that keeps us safe, for I came through safe and sound. But I have lost all my mates. Five of us were together for months and now I am the only one left, the others being killed or wounded. Our casualties have been heavy, but we did our work well and now look forward to a spell. It is about sixteen days since I have had any clothes off. Still I mustn't grumble and should feel thankful that I am alive.<sup>128</sup>

### **McKay A. Driver**

The following is an extract from a letter written by Driver A. McKay to Miss D. Ward saying,

I also received a parcel from the Gosford Patriotic Society yesterday and shared the contents with my mates. I think you girls are real Britons the way you are working for us. We have been having awful weather here lately about 115 degrees in the shade, hot winds and sand storms into the bargain. There goes "lights out" so I will have to close this news less note (not one to Germany.) Oh, it was funny here the other day. An American boat was going through the Canal and all the boys were asking them if they had a ship load of notes for Germany, or if they wanted any writing paper they could lend them a few writing pads.<sup>129</sup>

### **McLoughlan Douglas Driver**

Driver McLoughlan of Tumbi Umbi wrote to Miss Ruff saying,

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<sup>128</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>129</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Just a line of thanks for the big parcel I received from you on behalf of the Tumbi-Wamberal War League. Everything arrived O.K. and it reminded me of old Tumbi and the good times I had at the old hall before I left for the war. I trust you will thank the members of the League for looking after we boys as they do. Edmund Duffy is with me and a few of the boys from Wyong and all are like myself, doing well. Also met Clem Dafter, who is longing to get back to the bush again. Things are very quiet on the front at the present, but I expect that by the time you receive this note we will be in the thick of it once more. We are living in hopes that the war will be soon over so that we can get back to the dear old land down under. Kind regards to friends.<sup>130</sup>

**McQueen N. Sergeant  
Army Medical Corps**

An old head on young shoulders was that of Sergeant McQueen, of the A. M. C. He was 21 years of age and had been in three camps. Writing to his brother Leslie, aged 19, who had just enlisted, he gave him the following advice saying,

The whole secret is to take things as they come and not to look for trouble in everything. I intended to just give you a few words of advice, as this is your first camp, whereas I am an old campaigner. Do not smoke, drink or play cards. I expect you will have plenty of opportunity to do so, as there are generally plenty in the camp who will do their utmost to persuade you. Do not take any notice of them. Do not look for work, but if you get it, do it willingly and thoroughly. If any of the fellows try to bluff you or impose on you, squash them on the spot. Enter into all jokes as long as they are harmless; also make yourself popular with officers and men alike. The sergeants are not despots, but just men like yourself, risen from the ranks and carry on their duty, which, at times, is very annoying to the men.

The more hide you have in camp the better you get on, so fight your own battles and do not tell tales unless absolutely necessary. Any of my kit you want you are quite welcome to, but take care of it and do not let it kick round. Keep everything in your kit

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<sup>130</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, April, 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

bag and you will know how to find things when you want them. If they have any N. C. O. exams, buck in and study like the devil. Be determined to come to the top. Look at the sergeants, the nice clean jobs they have, try to get one yourself.<sup>131</sup>

### **Melrose Harold Sapper**

Sapper Melrose who was a guard on one of the local trains prior to putting on khaki wrote to Mr F. J. Noble of Gosford to say that he had arrived in England after a trip of 55 days via Suez Canal where they remained for a week. Sapper Melrose reckoned it was the smelliest place he was ever in, but it was not determined whether the donkeys or the natives were responsible for it. It was a common sight to see a donkey and a cow harnessed together drawing an old wooden plough. He wrote,

At Alexandria we remained three days ashore and two more anchored in the harbour waiting to slip out. Alexandria is a fine city. We had a good look around visiting the catacombs, gardens and so on. We went aboard the troopship one morning and after the embarkation was complete she was towed out and there we remained for the two days. It was a dreadful tub of a boat and we were packed like sardines. The food left a lot to be desired being both scanty and distasteful. The meat, we have been unable to determine what it was, whether mummy, donkey or camel.

I think the later and you know they live to a great age, the one we were served with evidently died of senile decay. We afterwards learnt that this condition of affairs was due to the fact that the boat intended for us was sunk the previous week in harbour. Submarines had sunk the "Aragon" and a destroyer that week also. We were finally escorted by two destroyers and a couple of seaplanes. After four days we reached Taranto on the Gulf of the same name in Italy. We were landed from the old boat by lighters and, as we left her side we counted her out quite lustily and we were quite relieved when we put foot into Europe for the first time.

The camp was very prettily situated here, being in a large olive grove overlooking the harbour. We saw our first air-ship here. She looked very fine as she sped gracefully

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<sup>131</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

through the space, with her aluminium hull glistening in the sun. She appeared to have a crew of six men aboard. This was our fifth camp and, after three days we moved on again. Left Taranto at 7.30 p.m. on February 7<sup>th</sup> in a covered-in van, like our C van, with ten movable seats, 32 of us. We did not leave that old van until February 15<sup>th</sup>, seven days and seven nights, during which time we passed through Italy and France. The train consisted of 36 vehicles and weighed about 500 tons. At some stages of the journey we had two engines in front and one behind.

Italy was an eye-opener, so far as intense cultivation and rural industry is concerned. It must be indeed beautiful in the spring and summer, as almost every road and railway is hedge lined, also the cultivated fields. The roads are all white metalled and stand out very conspicuously as they wind in and out. Every hill and mountain is crowned with some old castle, village or monastery and these white winding roads wind their sinuous way up the hillside towards them. Where ploughing is going on, white bullocks were invariably used in the plough. I thought perhaps that there may be some superstition attached to this practice, but from one end of Italy to the other the white oxen was used.

We caught glimpse at intervals of the Apennines, with their snow-capped heads. The rivers we crossed were shallow, boulder strewn streams, which from appearances become raging torrents when the above mentioned snow melts. We finally crossed these same mountains the line winding along the edge of great gorges and passing through very long tunnels. We were hauled by an electric loco from Ronco to Genoa. From the latter place we coasted along the Gulf of Genoa and passed into France at Ventimigra. Then through Mentone. We were now in the famous tourist resort "The Riviere and passed through Nice, Monte Carlo, Cannes and so on.

Imagine Mosman magnified a thousand fold, with terraced gardens everywhere and you have it. When I saw this part I thought what great possibilities are before Gosford and district. Nothing in this great tourist district can compare in natural beauty with the country and water scenery around our own Gosford. Nature has certainly been assisted here, but I trust that our fair district in New South Wales will soon come into place she should occupy as a resort for the tourist of the world. Seeing these fine buildings shows beyond question that it pays to cater for this traffic.

We had a splendid trip along here and were delighted to see our own wattle and eucalypti trees in full bloom. There were hundreds of them too, the folk here evidently recognising the beautifying effect of our fine trees, so often neglected in our own country Cannes is the centre of the perfume distilling industry. There are flowers everywhere. The remainder of France is cultivated in much the same way as Italy, but the call on the manhood of France is evidenced in that many hundred fields are untilled. Finally we reached Cherbourg and aboard ships ready for the trips across the Chanel. This took us about five hours. We just remained and dozed where we happened to stop tween decks, with kits up and life belts on. The night we crossed, German destroyers made a dash out and sank some trawlers and drifters. But we got across without adventure.<sup>132</sup>

**Methven Peter W. Gunner**  
**Infantry**

Gunner P. W. Methven, who recently enlisted from Matcham wrote,

15<sup>th</sup> Battery, Field Artillery,

National Park,

11<sup>th</sup> October, 1915

To my friends at Matcham

Dear Friends,

I received your handsome present today by post. I can assure you the wind was taken out of my sails when I found what a splendid gift you had sent me. I consider it a very handsome present, also a very useful one, which I will always have with me whatever part of the world I may be in. I can assure you, I feel proud to think that my late Matcham friends thought fit to bestow such an appreciation of their esteem upon me. The only thing I regret is, that I was unable to be present to receive it, and thank you all personally.

I must also thank the ladies of the Red Cross for the woollen scarf, which I am sure I will have ample occasion to wear. We may be leaving next month, but if I can get off,

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<sup>132</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, May, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I will have a trip to Matcham, where I spent many and many a good time. Have tried to express as sincerely as I can my appreciation of your kindness and will always think of dear old Matcham and the folk who live there. Thanking you all once again

I am yours

P. C. METHVEN.<sup>133</sup>

**Murphy A.**  
Infantry

Mr “Ginty” Murphy wrote to Mr A. McCallum of Woy Woy under date 1 November 1915 from No. 2 Hospital, Heliopolis saying,

I did not get wounded but had to return to the hospital here suffering from gastritis. In another week or so I hope to be able to go back to Gallipoli. Things are getting a bit quieter over there, but what our men have gone through is indescribable. No wonder there is so much sickness. Flies are simply awful. As soon as open a tin of bully beef it is smothered with flies which have just swarmed in from the battlefield where hundreds of dead bodies have been lying about, some being there for weeks. The stench is dreadful. Some of the Light Horse chaps have been lying dead in front of our trenches for weeks, but it is impossible to shift hem as we dare not put our heads over the parapets.

It is only about forty hours run from this place to Gallipoli, so you can see we are handy. In my opinion the only way we will ever take the Dardanelles is to starve the Turks out. Why even now we are under fire from the beach where our men first landed. There is talk of sending detachments of Australians to Greece. This would suit us all to pieces, for we are heartily sick of Egypt. Once the historic sites have been seen Egypt seems to lose all its charm for our boys. The immorality and filth of Cairo well, if I tried to tell you about it, you would not believe my story. Harry Sparks and Charlie Watts are O. K. I have not seen Tom Humphries lately Billy Costello was well the last I heard of

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<sup>133</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, October, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

him. Billy May is here with me and is down with enteric fever. Remember me kindly to all old friends and wish them for me a merry Xmas in dear old Woy Woy.<sup>134</sup>

**Nancarrow Claude Eugene Private No.2366**  
**36<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private Nancarrow of Ourimbah, wrote to his wife from somewhere in France dated June 17, 1917, saying,

It is a couple of weeks since I wrote to you, but since then we have had a great battle, news of which I suppose you have had before now. I don't want to see anything like it again. No one except the poor chaps who were in it can tell what it was like. Our Battalion was cut up a good deal and we sustained a large number of casualties. Many of my mates who came over with me were either dead or wounded. We had seven days of it and it was hell on earth. I never expected to come out of it alive, yet I did not even get a scratch. Frank Earl was wounded a few days before the battle. Jack Krumin fell victim to shell shock, but is back from the hospital. I head that Bill Stacey is getting alone O. K.

We are now resting about five miles behind the firing line and it's a great relief to be away from the roar and battle of the guns. I only hope we don't have to go through any think like it again. I believe a man would go mad if he didn't get a spell out of it. Poor George Flemming (you will remember him going to the transport with us in Sydney) was killed. We had been friends since leaving Australia. At present we are billeted among the farms. 'Tis a peaceful scene and you would never think that there was a terrific war on.

The people here all try to give us a good time. I will be glad when the war is over and I am back with you and the children, but we are certain to have some big battles before the game is finished. So far I have been very fortunate, only meeting with narrow escapes. Would much sooner be on our side of the line and it is a mystery how Fritz stands up to it at all. It must simply be hell under out artillery bombardment. The

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<sup>134</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, December, 24. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Germans won't stand up and fight. If they can't get an opportunity to run away they throw up their hands and cry "Mercy comrade" But when we remember their hellish treatment of defenceless old men, woman and children and the despicable acts of treachery, is it any wonder that their cries for mercy are very often unheeded.<sup>135</sup>

**O'Toole Austin Stanley Private No.959**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Battalion Infantry**

Private O'Toole, late of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, son of Mr J. O'Toole of Narara, wrote to *The Gosford Times* from Lewisham saying,

I am a returned soldier. I enlisted on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1914 and embarked on 12th January for the front. I took part in the first landing at Gallipoli and was wounded, a bullet striking me on the left side of the head and was also struck by bullets in the left hip and in the leg, being unconscious for eight days and was invalided to England, where I remained for about ten months. While in the Hospital I underwent seven operations. Being invalided home I was admitted to Randwick Hospital for a leg operation and after two months there was sent to St. George Heights at Mosman, where I remained another two months and then received my discharge on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1917.

I then commence work at the G. P. O. in Sydney, but had to leave on account of my health. Recovering I went to Victoria Barracks to re-enlist, but was rejected. At Newtown Recruiting Office I was again rejected. Being quite well and strong, I feel keenly disappointed at not being allowed to return to the front. I lost one of my dear brothers in France and have two others over there fighting for King and Country and I don't feel as if I done my duty. My three brothers came over to help me and I want to go back and help them. Yet it doesn't seem fair.

Why should men go to the front and fight for the stay-at-homes who do nothing but parade the streets day and night living on other people's pockets and also on returned soldiers. I call them right-down loafers and shirkers, too frighten to leave their mother's

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<sup>135</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, September, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



and girl's apron strings. I know of two men who enlisted same day as myself and they have never yet left Australia. One is still in camp in Liverpool and the other at Milson's Island. As things seemed to be going, it will be left to the returned soldiers to go back and uphold Australia's name and help the nation win the war.<sup>136</sup>

In his next letter Private O'Toole wrote to *The Gosford Times* from Lewisham, but is going back to the front. He said,

I do not know how young eligible men can read letters from our lads in the trenches without feeling ashamed of themselves for staying at home. I am a returned soldier and recently received my discharge. Since then I have been to different recruiting offices trying to re-enlist, but was rejected until now, on my eighth attempt, I have been accepted and go into camp on Monday and hope to be leaving for the front at an early date to re-join and help my brothers. One is somewhere in France and the other was admitted to the hospital some time ago.

The young chaps in Australia don't seem to realise that a war is on. If there was not so much sporting for them to engage in perhaps they would give serious thought to what the Empire is up against. Boys, why not think it over and say "Let's all go over and knock the enemy right out, and let the sport wait till we come back?" I was talking to a young chap a few days ago and in the course of an argument he said "It is only the mugs that go to war to get wounded and knocked about." Now, if we were all to say that, where would we be and what would become of our country? We would be slaves of the earth working for about two or three shillings a day. Why doesn't the Government refuse to employ eligible young men and fill their positions with returned soldiers, instead of allowing the latter to walk around the streets looking for employment? The time has come when everyone should be made to do his duty.<sup>137</sup>

### **O'Toole Cecil Private Artillery**

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<sup>136</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>137</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Bombardier O'Toole in writing to his parents at Narara from France stated,

Just a few lines in hope of you being in the best of health as I am at present after spending an ideal furlough. I had one day in London, but don't like it so went to Scotland and had seven days there putting in a most enjoyable time. I like the Scotchmen, they are very nice people, more like Australians than any people I've met anywhere. It is a pleasure to them to be able to show us around the different sights. I had a look at the wonderful Forth Bridge, which is a mile long and built over water 40 fathoms deep.

Also saw the fleet the same day and had the different types of vessels described to me by a sailor. Next day I went to Portobello on the coast and had a day on the beach. The Scotch people have a great opinion of Australians whom they say are great sports. The Museum is intensely interesting, machinery all being worked at by an electric button. It would take over a week to thoroughly look through this place. Another place I visited was Edinburgh Castle, the old ancient armour and cannons and so on being very interesting relics.

Another day was spent at the Zoo, which wasn't much being a new one in course of establishment. I had a look at Holyrood Palace where Kings and Queens used to be imprisoned. The city of Edinburg is built on seven hills. Met Will Moase of Gosford one day and we had a nine mile tram trip out to Port Sefton right along the water all the way and same night left for London. Then after 15 day's furlough I re-joined my Unit after having had a thoroughly good time.<sup>138</sup>

**Parry J. V. Sergeant**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Battalion Infantry**

Sergeant J. V. Parry of Erina, who was recently wounded in France, wrote to his parents from the General Hospital, Leicester, England saying,

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<sup>138</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, October, 18. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Just to let you know I am in England once again. We landed at Dover from Bolougne and came direct to here, passing through London on the way. I supposed you have received the letter that I sent you from France. I will give you a little more information about my wound. The doctor's diagnosis it is, gunshot wound through the right side of the abdomen, with fracture of dorsum ilic. The bullet has gone in from the front and had fractured the top of the hip bone, then it had been deflected slightly from its course and made its exit through my back, just missing the spine by an inch. I might mention that I am progressing at a very satisfactory rate and they are in hopes of being able to get me out of bed into a wheelchair.

I think I told you I was out between the lines putting up wire entanglements when I got wounded. The trenches are about two hundred yards apart and I was about thirty yards from our trench at the time. We had been out all week without anything much occurring. A few stray shots lobbed in amongst us one night and another a machine gun swept through where we were working, but as soon as it opened fire we lay flat on the ground and the bullets passed over us. But this night it was bright moonlight, with just a faint haze or mist, very, very slight.

It does not get dark here until about 9 o'clock. It was about quarter to ten and we only started work about 15 minutes. The Germans were extremely nervy, sniping away and now and again a burst with a machine gun. You would hear the bullets buzzing over your head and hitting the parapet behind us. One of my men had screwed an iron anchor in the ground (they are a sort of auger arrangement to hold the wire in position). I did not approve of the place he had put it, so asked him if he would sift it further down.

I watch him replace it, then said "Now that's right, we will go to the next one." I was just in the act of moving when "bang" I fell forward on my face into some mud, with a ringing sensation in my ears and a terrible dull sort of pain at my side. I could feel the blood running down my leg. I immediately turned myself over on my back and said "I'm hit boys, will a couple of you pull me in over the parapet." The stretcher was soon on the spot and they then put me on it and got me in over the parapet and carried me down to the dressing shed a mile away.

There the doctor fixed me up, then they carried me a further couple of miles to the clearing station. From there I was taken to the main clearing station at Bailuel in a motor ambulance about 15 miles. Well I lay on the stretcher there for three days. I couldn't move one way or the other. You haven't any idea what an uncomfortable thing a stretcher is to lie on. I can count those three days as the most miserable ever I put in. Then they put me on a hospital train and sent me down to 26 General at Etaples. I was there nearly a fortnight, then started for England. More motor ambulance rides, train ride, hospital ship, train ride again, more motor ambulance and lastly A2 ward and a nice soft bed.

The part of the line we were at is just neat Armentries, which is not far from Ypres. I received *The Gosford Times* with the article I wrote about London and another bit taken from one of my letters. I am going to write another article to the *Times* about France. I have some interesting souvenirs to send home, pieces of shell, bullets and so on and a few gas helmets, also some photographs of my travels.<sup>139</sup>

Sergeant V. J. Parry's next letter he wrote to his parents was from No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield saying,

I am getting along famously and can hobble about on a pair of sticks. Have been transferred here from Leicester. I promised to tell you of our doings in France and will begin by giving a sort of diary as to our movements from the time we last left England. Leaving Weymouth Camp on February 21, we arrived at Alexandria on 4<sup>th</sup> March and left again on the 19<sup>th</sup>. On the 25<sup>th</sup> we reached Marseilles and next day left for the front (Armentries). We went into the trenches on 10<sup>th</sup> April and on 10<sup>th</sup> May I was wounded. Arrived back in Leicester, England on the 26<sup>th</sup> and at my present address on 12<sup>th</sup> June.

Though brief, my stay in France was full of interest. The train journey from Marseilles was through the valley of the Rhone River. On one side the river in flood, sometimes flowing through a stretch of level country, with little farms spread out on each side. Fruit trees were in flower, grape vines just bursting into leaf. Sometimes the river

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<sup>139</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

dashed through deep gorges with high cliffs towering above and miniature waterfalls everywhere. And all the time we were following it in the train, sometimes half-a-mile away and at the same time so close that a stone could have been thrown from the carriage into it.

On the other side we could see into the distance the mountains running from the Alps all covered in glistening white snow. This kind of scenery continued until we crossed the river at the quaint old French town of Lyons, where we received an enthusiastic welcome. As we travelled north the scenery became more like that of England. I must say that the scenery of Southern France and particularly that of the valley of the river Rhone, surpasses anything I have ever seen. The following day we struck the river Seine, on which the city of Paris is built and later in the day passed through the suburbs, having a good view of the Eiffel Tower and the Palace of the old French kings at Versailles.

Next morning we arrived at our destination, the little village of Thiennes, 20 miles from Calais and about 8 miles behind the firing line. We stayed there, billeted in a farm house, for nine days and then set out on a two days march to the section of the firing line allotted us, 30 miles away. We were reviewed by General Joffre and Sir Douglas Haig on the way. At the end of the second day's march we arrived at the village of Erquinhem and stayed there a day. The next night we moved up to the front line trenches at the village of Bois Grenier, near Armentries.

It rained all the time we were there and when not raining it was snowing. To make matters worse we could not get any food for the first two days, or any fuel to make a fire in the braziers, we were wet to the skin the whole time. We stayed in the trenches four days and had four days out and followed this order during the few weeks I was there. We had a gas scare about 11 p.m. We all had to stand to arms with gas helmets on, while our artillery shelled the Germans for about an hour. Anyhow, nothing happened. We didn't get the gas, but we got some tear shells; these make you cry like a baby and we were provided with a special kind of goggles to prevent the shells having any effect.

We had many exciting experiences. The 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion took turnabout with using the trenches. One day they had been stirring up the Germans with mortars and about 9 o'clock that night the Germans retaliated by shelling the trenches. Then our artillery started the ----- was awful. We had to move out along the emergency road, as the Huns were shelling all our other roads and communication trenches. We had to wade through a big ditch waist deep. Now and again a stray shell would burst and some poor fellow would stop some of the pieces. Eventually we got to our alarm position in the third line of trenches. We were not there long before word came through that the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been badly cut up by shell fire and that the Huns had come over and that they wanted help.

D Company was ordered up post haste, but we couldn't go by the communication trenches as they had been shelled and filled up, so we had to get out on top and go for our lives. When we got close to the front line we got into the enemy's machine gun fire. They were sending up flares by the thousands, illuminating the country for miles around. We succeeded in reaching the front line after running, crawling and scrambling through barbed wire, mud and water and so on. The trenches were all smashed in, dug-outs blown inside out and great holes everywhere. Dead bodies were lying all around some presenting ghastly appearances.

We had to set to immediately and get all the wounded down to the dressing station and then build up the broken trenches. It was about midnight when we commenced this and didn't our boys work. By daylight next morning we had the parapet well fixed up. The Germans took nine of the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion as prisoners. Of course after the shelling very few were left alive in the trenches to resist the Germans when they rushed, so they had an easy time. Nevertheless we managed to skittle a few of them as they were getting back to their own trench.

The next night we went and brought in the bodies, including one poor fellow who was still alive. One chap in the 20<sup>th</sup> had a fearful experience. He was lying wounded in a trench when the Huns came over. A big German officer finding him still alive picked him up by the belt with one hand and fired four shots out of his revolver into him with the other and then threw him into a shell hole full of water and mud. He pretended to be dead until the Huns had gone. We rescued him from the water hole and sent him

down to the dressing station and today he is in this very hospital practically none the worse for his experience, except for a stiff shoulder and hand, where two of the bullets went through.<sup>140</sup>

Sergeant Parry's next letter was written from the Casualty Clearing Station in France and dated,

2<sup>nd</sup> May,

Just to let you know that I am still here suffering from shell concussion and other slight injuries, but am progressing favourably. Spring is just coming in here and the weather this last week has been delightful, gloriously sunny, which brings recollections of such days spent on the beach at Terrigal amid the breakers and of watermelons and ice cream galore. It is only a fortnight since we were having snow and spent a rotten time all through March and April up in the front line. There were no branches with good dugouts like we had at Armentiers so that we could keep ourselves a bit dry.

Before we captured Bapaume we were living out in the open ground in shell-holes or bits of cuttings in the roads. We were constantly under shell fire, both day and night, having to do patrol work. One week when the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion were in the front line and we were in supports about a mile back, our job was to carry up food and ammunition during the night and take back the wounded. It was raining the whole time except when it was snowing and talk about misery! I had a party of 15 men every night armed only with two bombs and a gas respirator each and none of us are ever likely to forget the experience of those nocturnal excursions trudging along in the rain in mud up to your knees, falling into shell-holes and getting tangled up in barb wire and dodging the enemy's shells.

There is no man living who is not frightened of high explosive shells. Hearing one coming we would dive into the nearest shell-hole irrespective of whether half full of water or not. Then Swish! Bang! Crash! About 50 yards away, after which we would rush on till we heard the next one coming. A ton or so of mud would be heaved in the

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<sup>140</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, August, 18. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

air when the shell lodged. Then when nearing the front line we had to dodge machine gun fire and stray rifle bullets. Returning back, it was just the same and we were never out of the danger zone, covered head to foot with mud, glad later on to drop into a dugout for a little sleep.

The battlefield was strewn with material of every kind left behind by the enemy in his haste to get away. We salvaged thousands of pounds worth, including machine guns, belts, ammunition, stick bombs, egg and pineapple bombs, equipment and rifles, trench mortars, shovels and picks and thousands of coils of barbed wire, wire netting and army stores. The German dugouts were most elaborate constructions, 30 to 50 feet deep, with stairs leading to them, all boarded up and provided with a stove, table and chairs, bunks, kerosene lamps and so on. We lived in one for two days and it was just like living back home again. You couldn't hear the sound of a shell anywhere.

On the morning on which Bapaume fell we moved up through the town and took up a position about 1½ mile the other side near a village called Beifviller. We went through about daylight and it was snowing heavily, you could only see a few yards ahead. The town of Bapaume was deserted and practically a heap of ruins. All the houses had been destroyed by placing a string of dynamite round the base and attaching a time fuse. It continued to snow for nearly three days. Our position was in the middle of a field to the right of a cemetery, with no shelter whatever and there we dug a trench about 100 yards long and 4 feet deep.

In front was a wheat field that had been planted by French peasants, I suppose while it was still in German occupation, the wheat was about 6 inches high. On the right was a hollow with tall rush grass and willows growing in it and just at dusk numerous hares came out to feed on the wheat and during the three days we were there stewed hare figured largely on the menu list and was appreciated by everyone. When we went to the village of Beifviller we had a nice house to live in for a week. Second night we were there the Town Hall at Bapaume was blown up, having evidently been mined by the Germans before leaving and exploded by a time fuse. Some say it was the work of a spy left behind in the ruins and that he was captured the night following. The explosion occurred about midnight and as a number of our troops were sleeping in the building, there were many casualties. I was awoken at 1 a.m. and had to get a party of 100 men



from the Company and proceed to the scene of disaster. They were digging dead and mangled remains out for days after.

The following night another building was blown up and another rescue party was required. In Bapaume in the Central Square of the town is a gigantic marble column surrounded by iron railing. When the Germans first occupied the town, at the beginning of the war, there was on top of this column a figure erected in memory of the Frenchmen of that district who had fallen in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. When we went through the town we found instead of the figure a large length of stove piping rigged up like a cannon and pointing towards the British lines.

After all the excitement we were relieved and went back 10 miles for six weeks spell, so we were told. We enjoyed about eight days of undisturbed inactivity and then one afternoon we were suddenly ordered back to the firing line. The Division that had relieved us had been cut up during an attack on the Hindenburg Line and were unable to hold any longer. After an adventurous trip we arrived back at the old place and assisted in the relief of our comrades. At night we carried food and ammunition up to the men in the front line.

Next day was Sunday. About 4.30 a.m. the Germans made an attack on our positions sending over two Battalions for a start, to be followed by others as they progressed. They didn't progress very far though. They belonged to a Division of Prussian Guards that had been brought up from the rear that night especially for the attack. They rushed through our outposts overwhelming our men with their numbers and then charged on down the valley towards the village. They surrounded our first line Company in that section and killed, wounded or took them prisoner.

Then they continued their advanced down the valley towards our artillery positions. Our supporting Company put up a good fight, but had to retire before superior numbers. The retirement was carried out in an orderly manner and many casualties were inflicted on the grey-blue masses following. The artillery men on the attacked section had to run and leave their guns, as the attack was so sudden that they did not have the time to lower the elevation of the guns that they might use them at close range.

By this time the alarm had been given to neighbouring units and artillery in other sections. The artillery on the flank sections turned their guns around and threw into the advancing German ranks a terrific hail of shrapnel while the heavier guns and howitzers put over a barrage in their rear to cut off their retreat and also to prevent reinforcements from reaching them. Then we got to work with machine guns and rifles. Our reserve battalion then came up and immediately counter-attacked. It was a thrilling sight to see our fellows chasing the Germans back over the ground they had come.

Altogether we captured 650 unwounded prisoners; besides hundreds of wounded and over 1,000 were left dead on the field. I watched the prisoners being taken to the rear. Some were sullen, others smiling like Cheshire cats, calling out "Good morning Australia," as they passed along. Many of the prisoners were utilised to carry wounded to the dressing stations. That night it rained heavily and for a week blinding snow fell. The artillery fire on both sides was terrific day and night. We were being relieved on Friday night and it was then that I was blown up as you already know.<sup>141</sup>

### **Parsons Albert George H. Private No.857 36<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private Parsons of Penang wrote to Mr F. W. Allen from Salisbury Plains in England saying,

We arrived in England safe and sound after eight weeks on board the transport A72 "Beltana", about seven of which we were at sea. We did not, as I suppose we would, find our way to Egypt, but Capetown was our first stop four weeks after we left Sydney. During this time we had a bit of bad luck. Sea sickness was bad enough for a week or two, but was nothing to a bad outbreak of measles that occurred and we lost no less than seven men, six of whom were buried at sea. We had nearly a week at the Cape, but had only one day off.

We were taken out on a march the day after we got there, but next day, the seventh man dying, we were quarantined and this put a stop to any further leave. Another day we

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<sup>141</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, August, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

were taken off to allow the boat to be fumigated and kept under the eyes of the officials all day, still be under quarantine rules and not allowed to have anything to do with the people about the place, having to keep severely to ourselves. Leaving Capetown we had company for the rest of the journey. Three other troopships were with us and escorted by the “Kent”, one of the cruisers that engaged in the battle with the Germans near the Falkland Islands, when the German boats were smashed to pieces, our next stop was at a port in Portuguese West Africa, or at least I was told it was.

The French have a naval station there and we put in to get coal and water and anything we wanted. From there the “Kent” went back and the “Surftshire” brought us on until we were a day or so out of our destination, when four little torpedo destroyers came out and took us the rest of the way till we got safely into Plymouth and from there we trained to Salisbury Plains. What a difference between this part of the world and home.<sup>142</sup>

In his next letter which he writes from somewhere in France to a former resident saying,

I greet you with all good wishes for the Xmas now so near at hand. I know not if this may reach you before Xmas Day, but in any case it will serve as the real thing. I hope and trust the New Year will be a better one than the last one for us all. I have seen enough here to know that great sadness will be the lot of many thousands in this part of the world. Scenes that would turn the hardest of us to horror have come before us time and time again. It is easy to read of these things, but to realise them one must see and hear for himself the actual effects.

I have been over a good deal of the country where the fighting must have been fearful. For miles you see nothing but ruins where once stood towns and villages. Nothing now remains but heaps of bricks, stone and charred debris. Woods and forests have been reduced to a few dead trees and shattered stumps, with the ground pulverised by cannon shells. In the trenches we have seen soldiers die the deaths of heroes. So far I have come through all right, though I was struck by a small piece of broken shell the size of a

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<sup>142</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

shilling, but was not injured. We are up to our knees in mud and slush everywhere, except when we get to our rest camps where it is quite bad enough at its best.<sup>143</sup>

In his next letter in writing to a Gosford friend he said,

New Year's Day 1917! And your humble servant, far from home, sends back in mind many good wishes to dear old Australia and most of all, to the old town Gosford. Who would have thought of the likes of ME ever being here on such an expedition? I have now been "Somewhere in France" for three months and more than half that time have I been well in the danger of the usual sort in the battle field. The sensation is far from pleasant when one finds himself for the first time close to the big guns that never seem to cease firing.

Day and night it's just the same. And we have Fritz's shells bursting around us, but I got used to it, to a certain extent. From the front line I have seen the Germans themselves, now and then, walking about on top of the trenches when they have come out from their work. But this is not too often, you bet. I have not as yet fired a shot, but have been in the thick of the fighting many times. Have met some of the Gosford boys and it's quite a treat to see old faces out there. It's terrible work here and one has to see war and its effects to understand what the horror really is.

Still, I am by no means sorry I've come to do my bit and feel my work here is not yet done. We must keep pegging away and fight to the bitter end. Fight on, all ye true sons of the Empire and we'll win in the end, cost what it will. Conscription was defeated in Australia when put to the people, but we are still doing our best here for our country and the Empire and will carry on to victory or die in the cause of the just. We know that life is real is earnest and the grave is not its goal; dust thou art, to dust returnest, was NOT spoken of the soul. And with heart within and God o'erhead, we are the right side. Dear friends all, the best of good wishes for a brighter New Year, good bye and God be with you till we meet again

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<sup>143</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, February, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Private A. G. H. Parsons (No. A857) A Company, 54 Battalion, A. I. F. In France.<sup>144</sup>

In his next letter to a friend in Gosford he said,

Our one thought here is war and our one aim is war and that war is a war were out to win and if we can only keep our boys together we will. So keep the home fires burning. Australia and Gosford has done its share in both ways and we know all of you at home will keep your end up, so we fear nothing from you all in spite of strikes and so on. Keep things going Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and India. Carry on to a good finish and Great Britain will come out a greater Britain than ever and don't forget we are all part of that great Empire. So Cheero, So long as we all fear nothing beyond the will of God, which can only go against us on our own bad actions, when we show them, we will not lose much at the most and will gain much at the least and that's saying everything.<sup>145</sup>

**Peel Harry Private No.3433**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Pioneers Infantry**

Mrs Edith Johnson had received the following letters from friends of her brother Private Peel of Woy Woy, who was recently killed in France.

Somewhere in France,

December 20, 1916,

We missed Harry very much. I never got the chance to get anything belonging to him, it was all handed in. I have been in the hospital for a fortnight. Met Nick Warmoll there and we put in the time together. Also met Billy Costello in the ----- (censored) fight. I suppose you heard of that place in the papers. That's where poor old Harry was killed. Remember me to your dear old mother. Tell her to cheer up, as we have to keep hanging on till the end.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>144</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>145</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, May, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

ROY.<sup>146</sup>

December 20, 1916

I was very grieved to hear about poor Harry's death. He was a really good friend to Roy and myself and was one of the best in every respect. Although I was not in the same platoon as Harry and Roy, we three kept close together after duty hours and we miss him now. I was not with him the day he was wounded, but I can say that he did his duty and never shirked. They say the good die young and it is quite true in Harry's case. There are only Roy and myself left in the old group. We are all separated and I often wonder how many of us will return.

Yours truly,

CHAPLIN.<sup>147</sup>

### **Phelps Reginald W. Private**

Private Reg Phelps of Mangrove Mountain, who was in action at Gallipoli, wrote from Egypt saying;

3<sup>rd</sup> Auxiliary Hospital, Helopplolis, Egypt

September 24,

Dear Pal,

It's nearly up to me to write, but I always think it is a waste of time and labour (especially the later just now, with a shoulder and arm that have gone on strike), as they are months old when you get them, if you are so lucky. I'm getting on pretty well now and by the time this reaches you I will be back on the Peninsular in the thick of it again. Of cause, if my arm doesn't get alright (its jolly stiff from the shoulder to the elbow just now, but that may disappear when the wound is properly healed.)

I'm going to have a shot at a trip home, although I'm afraid it is a castle in the air. These trips home are very hard to get. You would be surprised at the number of schemes or schemers and malingerers, who are trying to work their passage, some of them have

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<sup>146</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>147</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

never been to the front. It's these rotters that spoil the chance of many poor devils, who deserve a trip home and instead have to go back to, I was going to say hell, but that doesn't convey much to the imagination (none of us having been there) but Gallipoli, especially to those who have been there, is much more expressive. It's a rotten live over there, even when you are not actually fighting (you are always under fire).

Talk about primitive, the pre-historic cave man isn't in it. You live under-ground like some weird animal and I've seen men whom to liken them to animals would be an insult to the animals. You spend a good deal of your time digging for your life in some old Turk's potato patch. Not for spuds. Not on your life, trenches or communication saps. This work is done principally at night for the simple reason if you tried it in daylight you would probably get wiped out. As it was, we used to lose two or three every night.

When not engaged in this amusing pastime, you crawl into your dug-out, where in spite of the flies, stink and heat; you sleep the sleep of the physically tired. I say sleep, but perhaps that is an exaggeration. The ordinary dug-out is really only safe from rifle fire (i.e., direct fire, not enfilading) and as a back kick from a shrapnel shell can get you in the legs, to say nothing of a bomb dropped from an aeroplane falling right in top of you in which case of course you don't trouble) your slumber is of a broken nature and the screaming of a shell mingled with the cry for stretcher-bearers is too often the cause of your awakening.

This is all before you have taken part in any fighting at all. I will try and describe the night we went into action. I must cut out the names of places and troops, also numbers of same. About 5 o'clock the orders came through for ----- Company to clean their rifles and get into their equipment. We were fairly well loaded up with ammunition, rations and in fact, all our possessions. We were sorry to leave our dug-outs, for we knew well that some of us would never see them again. The first part of our march, about a mile and a half, was through a communication trench, in places about 8 feet deep and just wide enough to squeeze through. Then, it would suddenly change and it would be 3 feet deep.

Here it was a case of duck as the bullets were coming uncomfortably close. Then we came on an open space. We extended out here and when they opened on us with

shrapnel we went at the double and luckily got through without any casualties into the shelter of Hill-----, across a fine field of oats, then more saps. We were getting close to the firing line now and the smell of dead bodies, well, they did hum. Another hundred yards and we were right in it. It was a rotten trench, not very deep (the Turks were only 20 yards away) and there were no loopholes to fire through. The bullets were thundering against the parapet like hail and bombs thrown by hand and when they burst amongst the dead bodies on the parapet the stench was awful.

We relieved some New Zealanders in this particular part of the trench. Just as we got there, the poor chap whose position I took was relieved of all his earthly troubles and lay under my feet with half his head blown off, but before I got hit (about one o'clock the same night) I became very familiar with such sights. After I was hit a Red Cross chap took me to the dressing station just behind the firing trench, then I had to go down to the beach by myself (they couldn't spare any of the Red Cross.) I lost my way and didn't know whether I was going towards the Turkish trenches or not. When I was just about done, I struck a Tommy officer who was very kind and took me to the Red Cross headquarters and there my troubles ended for I remember nothing till "Beachy Bill" (the Turks most deadly gun) started the day with a shell that fell pretty close to the Red Cross headquarters. My shoulder is beginning to assert its authority, so good bye and good luck.<sup>148</sup>

### **Pinkstone Victor John Private No.964 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion**

Private Victor Pinkstone, who was camped with the expeditionary Force near the Pyramids, Egypt wrote,

At the installation of the Sultan of Egypt, a body of Lancashire Fusiliers led the procession mounted on fine chestnut horses. Then came Egyptian soldiers on greys followed by Lancers on bays. These were the guard of honour. I must say they have

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<sup>148</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, November, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



some very fine horses here. The Governor's carriage was drawn by four big brown horses, the like of which I have never seen before.<sup>149</sup>

Private Victor Pinkstone of Mangrove Mountain wrote from Lunar Park Hospital, Heliopolis, under date May 5.

I am now lying in hospital in Egypt. We left Lemnos Island on Saturday night and arrived off our landing place very early on Sunday morning and woke to the tune of heavy gun fire, so, of course as quick as possible, I was on deck watching the fun. We were travelling at a very slow rate for the shore and all round us were troopships and warships, some of the later engaged in peppering parts of the shore line. We could see the flash from the ships and could see the shells bursting over a piece of land which jutted out into the bay a bit.

The enemy had a battery of heavy guns on this point which were covering our landing place and, of course, it was essential that they should be silenced. This little operation did not occupy our ships very long and our landing forces were not troubled from that direction. The landing site was a long narrow beach with a very and rugged ridge rising abruptly behind it there was only about 20 yards of beach before the climb commenced. Landing commenced about 4 a.m. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade landed first, followed in succession by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>.

We landed at about 8 a.m. The troopships steamed in about 3 miles from the shore and we were taken aboard torpedo boats which took us about a half or three-quarters of a mile and then we got into pulling boats which were towed in long lines by a pinnace from one of the warships. We were told a number of thrilling stories by Jack Tars on the torpedo boats who had taken some of the first lot ashore. The Turks were entrenched on the beach and our boys fixed bayonets while still in the boats and loosened their packs, and when the boats near shore they did not wait for orders, or for gang planks to be thrown over, but just jumped over the side up to the waist in water, waded ashore, dropped their packs and went into it with cheers and yells and they did not stop to fire

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<sup>149</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, February, 5. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

a shot until they were at the top of that ridge and in possession of three machine guns and two artillery field pieces.

Then they took advantage of what cover they could and put in the liveliest time ever they could be called upon to go through. Reinforcements were coming up all the time so they went, driving the enemy before them and thinking of nothing in the world but to get the best of them. By the time we got ashore the firing was well over the second ridge and our Brigade was held in reserve just over the first ridge to cover the retreat of the firing line if such were necessary. Whilst sitting concealed amongst the scrub there we had a good view of the far ridge with many shrapnel bursting over it from one end to the other and it seemed to me that there could not have been a living creature on this side of the ridge, but our boys were over the top and the shrapnel was to get any supports who may have been going up to help in the firing line.

Our second line was well under cover of the small ridges awaiting orders to advance. Spent bullets were flying around and over us as we lay there waiting and anxious to go forward and one went within an ace of getting the chap on my left, striking the butt of a tree immediately behind him. While we were there word was passed along that the scrub was all mined and to be careful when advancing to keep to the beaten tracks. About ten o'clock a message came back for reinforcements for the firing line and we moved forward. On account of having to keep to the tracks of course we had to go in Indian file, so it was necessary a very slow game. There were members of practically every unit mixed up together and as for keeping within our sections and companies it was impossible.

Most of our battalion went out on the left flank but I, amongst some others, got right out on the right flank and when we got up near the line the bullets were whizzing around us like hailstones, only heavier. It was tough work climbing over those hills and down gullies and by the time we arrived in the danger zone we were only too pleased to get down to it and have a spell for a bit. Well, we crawled up gradually in between the times while the shrapnel was not bursting over us and spreading its death dealers round us and at least got up pretty close. Here we had to lay low for some time.

I expected all the time to get one of the shrapnel bullets in me. Three shells burst very close to me and it nearly made me sick to hear the groans which went up after each one. Stretcher bearers were being called up all along the line, but there was not the slightest hope of stretcher bearers ever getting up there to their assistance. A piece of shell landed very close to my left ear and hit a small pebble which struck me on the temple. At first I thought I was shot, but when I felt it I found a lump had risen about the size of a marble and that brought me back to life again. I had given myself up for dead before that.

For the left, reinforcements were being called, so we made a move in that direction and came at last upon a trench in which a machine gun section had taken up a strong position. There was a Major of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion here and he ordered us to go behind the trench and lay down until nightfall. It was now about 1 o'clock. We settled ourselves down and I found I could hardly keep awake, in spite of bursting shells, &c. I was gradually getting to sleep when a Major came back from the firing line and asked us could we fight. I answered that we could and that there were none of us wounded.

I had hardly got the words out of my mouth when, whack! I felt a trickle down my leg and a funny sort of pain, so I rolled over and slithered down the gully and made my way along a rough track, which reminded me very much of some of the climbing I used to do at Mangrove and eventually reached the dressing station and had my leg bandaged up. I was very much relieved when the A.M.C. chap told me that the bullet had gone right through. The thought of having a bullet probed out did not appeal to me at all!

Two New Zealanders assisted me down to the beach and with numerous others I was towed to the Seang Choon. Aboard were 600 wounded and only three doctors and ten A.M.C. orderlies, so you can imagine what short of a job the doctors had. They worked like Trojans. Some of the cases were pitiable. One chap had a shrapnel bullet passed behind both eyes and was blind. Others had numerous wounds in the face and body. When I saw how things were I felt that there was absolutely nothing wrong with me and I wanted to go back again. However, that could not be done and here I am.

One thing I would like to say is that I was never more proud of being an Australian than I was when I saw them fighting out there and then again when we were coming back wounded. The doctors expressed their surprise at the cheerfulness of our boys. And really to hear them, you'd think they were discussing some game of football or cricket only they cracked more jokes about this lot than either of the two games could give material for. I would like to have had the man who dubbed us "Joe Cook's Tourists," and let him see when they were asked to; and I think they have completely wiped out the bad name which was so cruelly given them by our war correspondent. It is up to him to write such an article now as he never dreamed he would be able to—that is, if he had been lucky enough to dodge the enemy's bullets and shells.<sup>150</sup>

In another letter Private Victor Pinkstone wrote from Zietoun saying,

I have been discharged from Helouan Convalescent Camp and have landed in about the last place that the Creator started to make. I feel positively certain that it was never finished. The place itself is bad enough, but the treatment we get is ten times worst. One would imagine it was a crime to get wounded by the way we are treated here. There are guards everywhere and woe betides him who is five minutes late into camp at night. One fellow was sentenced to 168 hours' detention for being an hour and a half late the other night; he was quite sober too and offered no resistance or anything like that. I reckon it is a rank injustice. Don't you?

I spent a very pleasant six days at Helouan, with nothing to do and more than enough to eat. I could hardly realise that I was a soldier while I was there. It seemed like an ordinary hotel, with me as one of the boarders. It is very hard to realise that we are under the same administration here as at Helouan. A number of names were taken yesterday of chaps who wanted to go back to the front next Tuesday, so I put mine in to save me from going off my head out in this place. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Expeditionary Force had arrived here and they seem to have got a very peculiar idea of what sort of time we got at Gallipoli. One of them went to one of the hospitals with a tent mate of mine yesterday and when he got inside and saw the number of beds occupied, he went white to the gills

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<sup>150</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, June, 18. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

and almost fainted. There were 3,000 men in that hospital and when he was told that there were more than twenty such hospitals in Egypt it was too much for him. Of course the patients are not all Australians.<sup>151</sup>

### **Piper James Engineer Light Horse**

Engineer James Piper writing to *The Gosford Times* from somewhere on the Tigris, Mesopotamia under date 20 August, 1918, said,

I am seeking for sufficient space in your paper to enable me to say a few words concerning the good work that is being carried on by the Red Cross over here. Everywhere along the river I have found great quantities of stores which are being supplied to the different hospitals for the comforts of the sick and wounded. At the various convalescents camps I found that most of their recreations are being kept up by this grand Society. And when you come to realise that most of these comforts are from Australia and New Zealand, you cannot say too much in praise of the Red Cross workers at home. It is through them and them only that such is being maintained and all I say to them are those old words carry on.

At the present time I have been appointed to the motor launch "T. L. Standiland," and my work consists in taking the doctors to various steamers and disembarking of the sick to the hospitals. You will notice that I have omitted mentioning any names of places, as the censorship of this country does not permit. I also take the opportunity of thanking all who were at the send-off on the eve of my departure from Australia and to all who have sent letters and papers, the latter of which most of the Australians join with me in showing their appreciation.<sup>152</sup>

### **Porritt Alexander Corporal No.2671 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion**

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<sup>151</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>152</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, November, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Captain W. L. Young, 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote from France to Mrs Porritt, Gosford in connection with the recent death of her soldier son saying,

Dear Mrs Porritt,

I thought you would probably like to hear a few particulars of your gallant son's death. We were getting back to aggressive warfare while the ground was frozen and just as the thaw set in our turn came for the line. There were still a few hundred yards of trench on our new line held by the Germans and our job was to clear them out. The condition of the trenches were appalling. Mud was thigh deep and very sticky, so that to move up and down the line was indeed a fatiguing task. The men required to ensure the success of such an attack had necessarily to be the strongest and best in the Battalion.

Your son was one of the chosen, in fact the section he was in charge of led the way. They scattered the Germans in all directions as they bombed their way up the trench held by the enemy. The attack was a huge success. Your son was badly wounded by a piece of bomb and we got him down to the dressing station as soon as possible, a tremendous job when one considers the awful mud and the heavy weight he was. The doctor was afraid he would have a bad time and had him sent straight to a field hospital where he died a couple of days later.

I was Corporal Porritt's original officer in this Battalion, so I speak very feelingly when I say what a fine soldier he was. One of the boys rightly described him when he said he was quite but white all through. He had been with me in several nasty places and always proved absolutely fearless, I remember saying in Egypt "if I had an army of Alec Porritt's I would soon take Berlin." Mrs Porritt, I cannot do any good by writing on and on, but I can say this, your son was one of Australia's best. You have our deepest sympathy. Our loss is great, but we recognise that yours is greater.<sup>153</sup>

Mrs E. Porritt of Gosford received the following letter and Military Medal won by her son, who was wounded in France on February 21, 1917 and died on February 27, 1917,

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<sup>153</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

with sixteen shrapnel wounds in one of his lungs. The medal is inscribed and read “For Bravery in the Field.” The letter said,

Commonwealth of Australia,  
Department of Defence,  
Melbourne,  
1<sup>st</sup> January, 1918.

Dear Madam,

It is with feelings of admiration at the gallantry of a brave Australian soldier, who nobly laid down his life in the service of our King and Country, that I am directed by the Hon. The Minister to forward to you, as the next of kin of the late No. 2671 Temporary Corporal A. Porritt, 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, the Military Medal which His Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to award to that gallant soldier for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty while serving with the Australian Imperial Force. I am also to ask you to accept his deep personal sympathy in the loss which, not only you, but the Australian army has sustained by the death of Temporary Corporal Porritt, whose magnificent conduct on the field of battle helped to earn for our Australian soldiers a fame which will endure as long as memory lasts.

Yours Faithfully,

J. W. LEAN, Major, Officer-in-Charge Base Records.<sup>154</sup>

### **Preston Leslie Private**

Private Preston of Tuggerah wrote to *The Gosford Times* from somewhere in France saying,

Just a line to ask you Mr Editor to shake up some of the young fellows who are loitering about Gosford and other towns. Make them see that it is their duty to come over here and help us to assist the Allies to win this mighty war. We want all the men we can get and if only our mates would put on khaki instead of pleasuring and going to the races

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<sup>154</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

and so on, the Germans would be beaten to their knees. Reinforcements are needed badly to give the boys in the trenches a spell. Some of our lads have been in the trenches for three and four months without a break. No eight hour a day for them and they don't go on strike for higher wages.

Apparently some men in Australia think of nothing but having a good time and chasing around after the girls. But, thank God 3000,000 have placed country first and went across the sea to fight for the Empire. A third of them figure in the casualty list, but what matters that to say the stay-at-homes who would never be done crying if the Allies lost the war and they were placed under German rule. What is wanted is conscription in Australia. Those who won't fight for their country voluntarily should be compelled to do so. I hear there are a lot of men out of work in Sydney. Tell them there is plenty of it over here and they will receive a hearty welcome from our boys who refuse to think that they have been deserted by their mates at home.<sup>155</sup>

### **Redgate Edgar Harold Sapper No. 2160 2<sup>nd</sup> Pioneers**

Sapper redgate, writing from the front to his parents in Tumbi Umbi said,

I am now on the spot where Hughie was wounded I received parcels sent from home in January and one from the Tumbi Umbi and Wamberal War League. Please thank them for me. The parcels came in good order. Am well and have gained in weight. Kind regards to all in Tumbi.<sup>156</sup>

### **Redgate Hugh C. Private**

Private Redgate wrote saying,

July 31, 1916,

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<sup>155</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, November, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>156</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



We had a big go at the enemy. Bill was in the charge and Alex and George Archibald. Bill came through without a scratch. I was not in the charge, as my platoon was engaged carrying ammunition and water to the firing line. Though shells were flying in all directions I came out all right. Alex was the only one of our lot to be wounded, but he will be alright again. I expect the battle on this line to be soon over, for the Allies seem to have the Germans on the run. (*The paper noted that Private Redgate had since been wounded.*)<sup>157</sup>

**Redgate William Henry Private No.2820**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

The following letter was received from Private William Redgate and also on behalf of his brother Private Redgate, addressed to the Secretary of Tumbi Umbi War League saying,

France,

July 15,

Dear Friends,

Just a few lines to let you know we both received the parcels alright. I cannot tell you how thankfully they were received, as it was just what we needed, as we cannot carry much with us. The smokes had hardly seen daylight before they were all gone as funds had been low for a while, but still we could not buy much even if we had the money. We've had a fairly good time in France. There's some lovely country, only it's slightly knocked about. Lovely wheat crops as level as a chess board, but there's a fair bit of rust on account of so much wet weather.

We've had a taste of old Fritz, but there was not much doing. His shells don't do much harm, we had them flying around a few times but you could always laugh at them. Things look pretty good for an early ending now, so we hope to see all ole Tumbi friends very soon. Well, I'll ring off by asking you to accept our sincerest thanks and thank all

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<sup>157</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

kind friends of your League for their generous forethought in looking after our comfort.<sup>158</sup>

In his next letter Private Redgate wrote to his parents at Tumbi Umbi from somewhere in France saying,

I was with a comrade carrying a plank in the front line when a highly explosive shell lodged between us and buried itself in the mud before it exploded. I was hit in the shoulder blade by a piece of shrapnel. At time of writing I have been out of bed for a couple of weeks. We are well looked after here and it makes a great treat to get between the sheets again after the months spent in the mud and slush. I saw Goldsmith of Wyong, he was on leave and states that Clem Dafter will be sent home and that it will be a long time before Clem recovers the use of his foot. I hope to be soon back in the trenches to have another go at old Fritz.

Kind regards to all.<sup>159</sup>

In his next letter, which he wrote from London saying,

I am fully recovered from my wounds and have had fourteen days leave. I had five days in Scotland and spent them with some friends of a comrade. They gave me a good time. I was also admitted to the Royal Gallery at the opening of Parliament. By the time you receive this I shall be back with my mates in the front doing some more bombing. I cannot tell you anything about the war as when I am doing my bit with the grenades. I have no time to look around as I am too busy getting my own back from Fritz. A chap that is fighting cannot tell you much of the fight. Only lookers can describe the fighting and other matters.<sup>160</sup>

In his next letter from France to the Tumbi-Wamberal North War League, he said,

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<sup>158</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>159</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>160</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Just a line to let you know that I received your splendid parcel yesterday and it could not have come at a better time. We do not do too badly for rations, but a change is very acceptable. There are eight of us in the dug-out and happening to have a table we had a right royal spread. Only one thing was needed to make it a success, I leave you to guess what. It was a case of all boys round the table. From our elegantly fashion mansion we have a magnificent view of the country. It has been a mild winter so far, no worse than the cold sometimes experienced in Australia and we have none of the mud that we had to slosh through last winter. It has been a picnic compared with last year. I ask you to convey my sincere thanks to the League members for the bosker parcel.<sup>161</sup>

In the previous letter Private Redgate thanked a lady member of the War League for the parcel sent. Private Redgate was killed in action on April 14, 1918 and the sad news was conveyed to the family by Rev. Father Kelly on Tuesday. Private Redgate who enlisted with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a son of the grand old warrior Mr Charles Redgate of Tumbi Umbi, who had three sons at the front. Is father wrote saying,

The sad news of our boy's death come as a great shock to us, but of course it was only to be expected. So many brave Australians have made the supreme sacrifice and died a hero's death. Our boy gave his life and could do no more. I am proud to say there is not a shirker among my sons, even the youngest, 15 years of age, has tried to go, but was rejected. The lad who has been killed was a good son and always stood by us. But now he has gone and we are proud to know that he died fighting the enemies of his country.<sup>162</sup>

Mr C. Redgate received the following letter from the Chaplain of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, dated April 25, 1918, saying,

Dear Mr Redgate

By the time you receive this you will have received the sad news of your son's death. Still, I want to convey to you in the name of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as well as my own, our

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<sup>161</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, May, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

<sup>162</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, May, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

deep sympathy in this heavy loss. May God comfort you and yours. Your brave boy met his death while accompanying an officer doing the duty that lay to his hand. Thus he died doing his duty and to know that he fell in the performance of the work which lay to his hand will be some consolation. To die nobly is surely akin to living nobly. He lies in a soldier's grave near the village of Strazeele, where the Hun was held once again by the lads from under the Southern Cross. Quite a number of his comrades lay there also, gallant men, who sold their lives dearly. If I can serve you in any way I shall gladly do so. Commending you to the God of all comfort, I remain yours in sympathy,

ROBERT T. HENRY, Chaplain, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>163</sup>

**Riley Claude Ernest Lance-Corporal No.2138  
35<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private W. J. Earl of Wyong in writing home regarding the death of Lance-Corporal Riley, who was killed on June 27, 1918 said,

Ernie was an old school mate of mine and we have always been like brothers to each other. We have fought side by side ever since the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion came to France. He was a good soldier and man and was well respected by all who knew him. We buried him in an Australian cemetery in a little village a good distance behind the firing line, our Chaplain reading the burial service. We erected a cross with his regimental number and rank on it and place some artificial flowers and green violets on his grave. Since then a few of us Wyong boys have clubbed together and bought a very nice artificial cross composed of all coloured beads and erected same on his last resting place.

In another letter to Mrs Lurvey from the Chaplain saying,

France,

July 4, 1918

Dear Mrs Lurvey,

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<sup>163</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I expect that you will have already heard before you get this letter that your son, Lance-Corporal E. Reilly fell in action a few days ago near Villers-Bretonneux. He was in the front line when he was shot by machine gun fire and death must have been instantaneous. The Colonel wishes to assure you of his deep sympathy with you in your great loss and I trust and pray that God will give you comfort and strength to bear it. Your son's body was buried in a military cemetery near the line and I read the burial service at the grave side.

With kind regards, I am sincerely,

J. E. NORMAN OSBORN, Chaplain, C. E.<sup>164</sup>

### **Ross Lindsay Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Lindsay Ross wrote to his father Mr W. Ross of Wyong, from the Greek Hospital at Alexandria saying,

After a lot of wandering I have landed at last in the above hospital. I supposed all the others are filled and this one will be also in a few days. There are many Australians and English troops here. Great numbers have been sent to Malta and England. As I am one of the crack rifle shots I had special permission from Mayor Vernon to snipe the Turks. The day before my trouble, a bullet through the foot, I was sniping all day and used a long New Zealand rifle, as I could do far better work with a long rifle than with the short new one. I do not know how many Turks I have accounted for but there are a few in the hospital, that is, if they are still alive. All the wounded are first taken to Lemnos Island.

While there I set to work on one leg and with borrowed carpenter's tools, I made a pair of crutches so that I could hop about like an old man kangaroo. After a couple of days we were called out and the more seriously wounded placed aboard the hospital ship "Sicilia" and taken to Alexandria. I was then sent in a motor ambulance to the Greek Hospital, which is a large place. The country where we were fighting is very rough; in fact, in some places we have ropes up the side of the hills by which we scramble hand

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<sup>164</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, October, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

over hand to reach our trenches on the top. We had dugouts behind the trenches in which we slept and cooked our food so as to escape the shrapnel shells, which are always bursting overhead.

The other day a shrapnel bullet went through the back of my coat making holes where it went in and out, but as long as they don't knock a hole in the top of your head you are alright. The Turks attacked our trenches and left over three thousand dead and had about seven thousand wounded, but we had thirteen killed and thirty wounded. They have no hope of shifting the Australians. We have not enough troops to extend our line of trenches further inland, so are just going to hang on to what we have until the English and French troops shake things up a bit. Some of the French are from the front in France. They were a dark blue uniform which is much too conspicuous as a target and is a long way behind ours.

The French infantry and seamen think a lot of we Australians and fasten on to us, but they are a good kind of chaps and if it was not for their speech you could hardly tell them from the British. My idea of how a man feels under fire has changed a great deal since coming to Gallipoli. It did not affect me much more than walking up Hunter Street in Newcastle. In fact, I was quite pleased to know that at last I could hear the bullets buzzing about like angry hornets and hear the boom whistle and bang of the shrapnel shells bursting around.

All Australians were the same and walked about amongst it all as if they were at home. Even if one of your mates gets his head blown off a few yards from you, you only say, "There's poor old Jack gone" and after filling your magazine with a fresh supply of cartridges set your teeth and shoot as never shot before. There were hundreds of dead lying in the open between the opposing forces, but as the breeze is nearly always blowing away from us, the enemy experienced an awful time. It is very strange that you got so used to seeing dead and wounded that you take no notice. In this hospital the doctors and nurses are Greek, but they speak fairly good English.

We are well looked after and I consider myself lucky at being sent here, as this is considered the best hospital for wounded in Egypt. The Greek doctors and surgeons are exceedingly clever, while the nurses are the wives of wealthy Greeks living in

Alexandria and are very well educated being able to speak several languages. They are very kind and cannot do enough for us. My nurse is Madame Salvago. Her husband holds a very high position, while her father is Lord Mayor of Venice. She has two children and when I am well, I aim to visit their home. My injured foot is healing up well. The nurses bring us daily papers and well as books and magazines, chocolates and sweets. The moment they think you want anything they bring it. I asked for pen and ink and Madame Salvago gave me a solid silver pencil holder to hang on my watch chain, also a fountain pen.<sup>165</sup>

### **Salmon Frank T. Lance-Corporal**

Lance-Corporal Frank T. Salmon of Wyong Creek, wrote from France saying,

Arrived safe and well after a pleasant journey. We do have some fun trying to talk to the French. The money puzzles us a bit. Fruit is plentiful and fairly cheap, apples, pears, grapes, bananas and lollies are brought into the camp by the peasants, also along the road when we are on a route march. I like the country which is similar to England also modes of cultivation. We are camped overlooking the water (Selpate). I took my stripe of before leaving England so I would not be separated from my mates. Tell the Creek folk the watch is still ticking and keeps good time. Sorry I cannot tell you more.<sup>166</sup>

### **Settree W. Private Infantry**

Private W. (Hardy) Settree of Davistown wrote from France saying,

We arrived here safely after a splendid voyage over. It is a very pretty country France. I don't think you can find anything prettier if travelled the world over. I have seen a good many places since we landed, but I am not able to tell any names of the towns and so on. All I can say is it is on a big farm, nothing but beautiful green wheat and oats wherever you look and fruits of all kinds and grapes in abundance. We met with a warm

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<sup>165</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, July, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>166</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

welcome when we arrived. Wherever we went there were crowds of people to greet us and the girls and women came out to the trains with armful of flowers for us.

He is where you see the woman working. On nearly every farm you see the woman doing the work. There are no men left, only those too old for service and cripples. There are no young fellows walking about here, only those on leave from the front. They come up and shake nearly everyone's hand off, so please are they to see us come to do our bit. If those who are walking about in Australia could only picture what we have seen, they would not stop behind, but come and give a helping hand to win this war. Nearly every woman you see is in mourning. We are just behind the firing line at present and can hear the guns booming out in the distance and our turn will come presently to again take our places in the trenches.<sup>167</sup>

**Schubert Phillip Stanley Sergeant No.1342  
34<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Mr J. Schubert of Gosford received a letter from France dated February 1, 1918, saying,

On behalf of the officers, N. C. O's and men of this Battalion, I would like to express our sincere sympathy in the loss of your very gallant son, Sergeant Phillip Schubert, who made the supreme sacrifice in the third battle of Ypres for the Heights of Passchendaele on October 13, 1917. The attack was made under the very worst climatic conditions and it was entirely due to the superb determination and bravery of men like your son that the operation was a success. Sympathy is difficult to express on paper, but we would like you to feel how greatly we appreciated your son as a comrade and a soldier. Such men the Regiment and nation as a whole can ill afford to lose.

Yours sincerely

W. LEVY FRY, MAJOR, 34<sup>TH</sup> Battalion.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

<sup>168</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, April, 25. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



**Sohier Norman H. Private\* No. 1826**  
**Infantry**

Lieutenant N. H. Hobbs, of Gosford writes as follows to Mr Jules Sohier of Narara.

Dear Mr Sohier

Yesterday afternoon, while going round to the right front to see Tom Humphries, of Gosford district, I noticed the name of Sohier on a grave and at once thought of your brave son who was killed. The grave was very neatly covered and had a row of large pebbles around it and also fine gravel. At the head was a wooden cross, on which was the following inscription:

In loving memory of No. 2826, Pte W. H. Sohier, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, A. I. F. Killed in action 13/7/15. R. I. P. The grave is one of hundreds in a big military Cemetery in "Shrapnel Gully", which is quite close to Anzac Cove, where the Australians first landed in Gallipoli. You will know for certain by the Regimental No. whether it is your son's grave and if so, you can rest assured that he, at least, had a decent burial. Please accept my deepest sympathy in your bereavement. Although it must be hard for you to lose your son so early in his career, still you have the consolation that he died nobly. Must close now, with kindest regards

Yours sincerely

N. H. Hobbs

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut.<sup>169</sup>

On Australia Day, Rev. Father Kelly received the following urgent wire from Colonel Luscombe of Victoria Barracks saying,

"Officially reported that No. 1826, Private N. H. Sohier, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, killed in action on 13 July. Please inform Mr J. F. Sohier, Post Office, Narara and convey deep regret and sympathy of the Majesties King and Queen and Commonwealth Government in loss that he and Army have sustained by the death of soldier."

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<sup>169</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, December, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Norman Sohier was the son of Mr and Mrs Jules Sohier, old and respected residents of the Penang, Narara. His father served right through the Franco-Prussian war and carries several battle and bullet scars. Young Sohier was educated at Narara Public School and gave early promise of a bright future, but he heard the clarion call and with unmistakable bravery natural to the Franco-Australian youth he answered "Here I am, send me". And he has fallen at Gallipoli where so many of our brave lads have given their lives to protect us and the noble ideals that the Allies are fighting for "The golden evening brightens in the West". Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest."<sup>170</sup>

### **Spillane Harris Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Harry Spillane writing to Mr D. Jenkins at Narara saying,

The Turks are good strong fighters and when they surrender they stand amongst us smoking our cigarettes and drink from our bottles. But the German officers wave the white flag on their rifles and still fire on our men as they go to take them prisoners.<sup>171</sup>

Trooper Spillane wrote from Egypt to Mr Hope Smith saying,

My brother and I are alright Things have been very lively here, but have quietened down. The heat and sand is very severe on men and horses. We have had several battles with the Turks and probably you read my report of some of them in *The Gosford Times*. Bruce Ward and Bob Weeks are near me in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Saw Tom Humphries the other day, he was wounded in the arm. The country for miles and miles has been bitterly fought for. Shelter places are few and far between and the only way was to dig holes in the desert everywhere and there is not a foot of ground anywhere but what is covered with boot or horse tracks. The Turks lost heavily and the Australian lads proved their superiors. The fly pest is simply frightful. We have to set poison in our camps and sweep them up in thousands. The country we fought on is much the same as the top of

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<sup>170</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1915, August, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>171</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

the Penang Mt., Gosford only pure sand. There is no timber, only a small patch of date palms every few miles or so.<sup>172</sup>

In another letter Trooper Spillane wrote,

We had a scrape with the Germans and Turks on 4<sup>th</sup> August and it was rough and ready for a while, for they fairly poured the shrapnel in, to say nothing of shells, bombs and aeroplanes above us all day. The machine gun fire was solid and their rifles cracked in thousands, the hum of the bullets eventually becoming monotonous. On the 5<sup>th</sup> at daylight the Horse Regiment surrounded the enemy and the Infantry held them in front. Good stuff the later, plenty of “Scotties” and they played the pipes right into the trenches amidst a terrific fire.

Our cavalry got into action before the Turks had time to get properly into position, otherwise there might have been a different tale to tell. Most of our lads had but their flannels on and had no breakfast. Riderless horses galloped in all directions and there was activity everywhere with ammunition wagons, artillery columns, Red Cross slides and ambulances, each dashing for their various positions. Tom Humphries of Kincumber was wounded in the arm yesterday (10<sup>th</sup>). He was about a hundred yards from me. Tom is an O. C. man now in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, having won his commission. Kind regards to all.<sup>173</sup>

In another letter Trooper Spillane wrote to the *Gosford Times* from Egypt where he had taken part in several recent engagements with the Turks. He wrote saying,

Just a line to thank you for the papers you kindly sent along. My brother was to come out of hospital on 18<sup>th</sup> December and will go to Detail Camp until his foot is alright. It rained here on Christmas Day and has been showery ever since. It is bitterly cold. We are camped on the spot where the Turkish patrol was cut up in October (you mentioned it in your November issue.) Camels and mules, Turks or the remnants of them are there

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<sup>172</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>173</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

now where the sand has blown away. There has been heavy fighting just ahead of us, 1,300 prisoners being taken and some guns.

It was a tough struggle. They used the bayonet to take the positions, which were concreted. Our turn will perhaps come any day, as we are in a position on the main route and cannot leave until we are relieved. I am grooming for Captain Tooth at present and have three horses to look after. Have not seen any of the Gosford boys lately. We are all separated for the present. Sorry to hear that Fred Allen was a prisoner of war in Germany. Some of the people in Australia must have thought Conscription was going to be easily bluffed when they voted no.<sup>174</sup>

### **Stacey W. J. Private Infantry**

Private W. J. Stacey wrote from England to the editor of *The Gosford Times* saying,

You will see by the address given (not for publication) that we have arrived at our training camp. We had a good trip, calling at Capetown and Dakar. The Mayor and Alderman of the former place gave us a good reception in the City Hall. In fact they could not have treated us better had we been returning from the front instead of only going. There are some beautiful residences in the suburb. It was hard to realise that we are not in Australia, as nearly every place has gum trees in the front and along the streets.

We were met at Capetown by a cruiser that made a name for itself in the Falkland battle and escorted to Dakar; from there to abreast the Bay of Biscay by a battle cruiser and from there to our port we were accompanied in turn by some of the Mosquito Fleet destroyers. One has to come to England to thoroughly grasp the system of the British Navy for the protection of her shipping. Each ship or fleet has its regular beat, mine-sweepers, destroyers, cruisers and airships patrolling backwards and forwards day and night. It must be the greatest fluke in the world if an enemy craft breaks through the cordon.

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<sup>174</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March 1, Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

The camps in Australia are mere pigmies compared to those here. Mile after mile of green sided, red roofed huts. Everything up to date. Large mess rooms, with tables and crockery. And nothing is wasted, all scraps and slops are sold to farmers for their pigs and the bones, meat and fat go to the military authorities to be used for munitions. The scenery is beautiful, but the weather is dull and cloudy. We have not seen the sun for more than an hour since we have been here. All the boys are well, but as irrepressible as ever. Joe had a severe cold, but is alright now. As for myself I never felt better. I would like to know how the championship shoot went off and who won. Hoping you and all Gosford friends are well.<sup>175</sup>

Private Stacey, who left with Carmichael's Rifles, wrote to Mr M. Ward and sent four leaves from "The Spreading Chestnut Tree" of Blacksmith fame. At time of writing he was located at Salisbury Plains, but expected to be in the trenches before the latter reached Gosford. Private Stacey wrote saying,

England is a picture just now. It would do your eyes good to see some of the horses and cattle. We are camped close to several historical places, Stonehenge and Strafford-on-Avon, where Shakespeare was born. I will send you some views of the principal places. There are some beautiful old churches and abbeys, one in particular (where the famed Blacksmith's daughter used to sing in the choir) built in 1180 A.D. The people here cannot do enough for us. They call us all Anzacs and the papers instead of putting "Australian News" use the heading "Anzac News". Anyway, our country wanted advertising.

One old lady told me she had a nephew out at Sydney at a place called Gisborne. When I told her that was in New Zealand, she could not understand it. All the local boys are well. Abe Parsons had a rough time on the boat with measles. Joe Hammond is as good as gold. The other lads have taken a tumble to him and now when he starts talking they

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<sup>175</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

say “Oh, shut up and whistle Joe.” As to myself, I never felt better. I hope to go back and see all the old faces I remember so well. <sup>176</sup>

In his next letter having been wounded and was undergoing treatment at Randwick Military Hospital, wrote to Miss Deasey, Secretary of the Girls’ Patriotic Society saying,

I have much pleasure in thanking you for receipt of medal presented to me by you on behalf of the citizens of Gosford. I have been in hopes of being able to get up there long before this, but if I keep on improving as I have done since the last operation it will be not very long before I shall be able to see Gosford and all my old friends. I would also like to take this opportunity to compliment the ladies of Gosford for their splendid efforts in parcels and comforts sent to all local boys and myself whilst on active service. <sup>177</sup>

### **Tarrant Jack Lance-Corporal Infantry**

Corporal Jack Tarrant of Wyong, wrote saying,

I have been in the firing line again, after a short stay in the hospital and managed to get through unscathed. You know that piece in *The Gosford Times* about me looking well. Well, the Sergeant who wrote that was wounded a few days later. The other chap he mentioned, Billy Young, was also wounded two days afterwards. <sup>178</sup>

In another letter Corporal Tarrant wrote from France saying,

I have run across a number of Wyong and Wyong Creek boys. I met Billy Le Frank in a Convalescent Camp where he was recuperating after an illness. I was there trying to pull myself together after attempting to catch one of Fritz’s shells. In the same

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<sup>176</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>177</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, November, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>178</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Convalescent Camp was Jack Codd of Wyong Creek, who had been wounded in the arm and hand. A few days later I met Billy Watts and Frank Kiernan of Wyong and young Graham of Kanwal; also Sid Goldsmith, Alex Thoday and Albert Sharp of Wyong Creek. The latter had been appointed to the rank of Corporal. We have all come to the decision that Wyong and district is better than France and the only good Hun is the one you have just finished off.<sup>179</sup>

L. G. Tarrant who had been promoted to Sergeant had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and twenty-five pounds went with it. This is how the official notification read,

During the operations at Mon St. Quentin, N. E. of Perone on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1918, Sergt. J. G. Tarrant, N. C. O., located a strong post of the enemy, which was firing on our left flank. He immediately worked along an embankment, bombed and charged the strong point, single handed, putting two enemy machine guns out of action and killing and capturing the crews.

Signed CHARLES ROSENTHAL, Major-General, Commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division.<sup>180</sup>

### **Tarrant Richard T. Captain Infantry**

Captain Richard Tarrant of Wyong, writing to Miss Ruby Uren of Gosford saying,

Many thanks for *The Gosford Times*. It is a treat to get a paper over here in France. In some of the places we stop at (we are in one of them at present) it is impossible to get an English paper. Please send along *The Gosford Times* occasionally.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>180</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1919, January, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>181</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

**Tynan Leslie David Private No.2872**  
**Distinguish Conduct Medal (M. I. D.)**

**“B” Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Infantry**

Private Les Tynan was killed in action at Pozieres, France in July last. His brother, Jack C. Tynan, was attached to the same Company and both are mentioned in the despatches for bravery. Mr J. Tynan received the following letters referring to the boys written by the Officer Commanding “B” Company saying,

France,

August 8,

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Officers, N. C. O's., and men of B Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, allow me to offer you our deepest sympathy in the loss of your gallant son, Private L. D. Tynan. At the time of his death he was acting as stretcher bearer of his Company and the work of the stretcher bearers during the attack on Pozieres was quite equal to anything they have done during our time at the Dardanelles or France. These men have shown a marvellous contempt for death and only anxious at all times to get the wounded away out of the firing line.

Your son was always to the fore in this human work, not only with our own Company but with other parts of the line and I hope it will be some small consolation to you to know that the work of your son was so important and so faithfully done. It was unfortunate that after performing his work, under the most dangerous conditions, that he had just completed it and we were waiting to be relieved when he, together with most of the other stretcher bearers was killed.

Fortunately he was killed outright and was spared any pain or suffering. I had much pleasure in bringing under notice the work of your late son, together with that of his brother and take this opportunity of congratulating you on behalf of the father of two boys so worthy. With hopes of a speedy peace and reunion with your other brave boy, believe me,

Sincerely yours

Captain B Company.



Copy of Battalion Order, August 11, 1916,

Congratulatory,

The Commanding Officer is please to place on record the names of Privates L. D. Tynan (killed) and J. C. Tynan for the exceptionally fine work which they did in the recent operations at Pozieres on July 22.<sup>27</sup>

CAPTAIN W.T. McDONALD.<sup>182</sup>

**Walker Herbert Charles Private No.16476  
6th Field Company of Engineers**

Mrs John Walker of “Lochness” Ourimbah Creek received the following letter referring to the death of her son who died from wounds sustained in battle on May 19, 1918. The letter said,

France,

21<sup>st</sup> May, 1918,

My Dear Mrs Walker,

Almost by now you will have received news of your son's death on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> instant early. He was in my section and I was close by him when he was hit. We had a rather dangerous job to carry out, right against the Hun. I picked a party of eight to do the job with me and he was one. He behaved splendidly through the show, as he has always done, proving himself a true man, though cheerful and willing and was a good soldier. The Hun located us at our job and turned machine guns on to us. Your son and I was lying close together and a bullet got him and one other of my boys. We got them out and along to the dressing station.

A motor ambulance took them back to the rear dressing station, but your son died en route. Besides all our personal feelings for you and ourselves over our big loss of so good a pal, I feel that our whole Company is greatly deprived and we can only ask you to try and look on this thing as calmly as possible and accept our thanks for so brave a

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<sup>182</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 13. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

gift as Johnnie in the first place. He was buried yesterday at 2 p.m. by a party at the military cemetery at Queerieu. His only personal belongings which I have here I am sending you today. What was with him at death should be forwarded you through the Base in England.

Sincerely yours E. H. DAVIES, Lieutenant.<sup>183</sup>

Mr John Walker of “Lochness” in Ourimbah Creek received the following letter in connection with the death of his son, who was killed in action in France on May 19, 1918 saying,

Somewhere in France,  
July 9, 1918,

Dear Mr Walker,

I am very sorry that so many weeks should have elapsed since the death of your gallant son on May 19<sup>th</sup>, without my having an opportunity of writing to express my sympathy and that of the Company. However, I know that Lieutenant Davies wrote a few days afterwards and that he gave you all the particulars which you would be most anxious to have. Your son's death was a great blow to us all, because he was such a splendid chap in every desirable way and tremendously popular with the Company. The job in which he received his fatal wound was the throwing of some light bridges across the Ancre and was a particularly dangerous one as the enemy were holding the other side of the river. However, the bridges were of great assistance early the following morning in our attack on Ville sur Ancre.

No doubt Lieutenant Davies has already assured you that no time was lost in getting your son back to the dressing station, but unfortunately his wounds were too severe and I understand he died in the motor ambulance on his way back to the C. C. S. I saw his grave several days ago. It is in a little Australian cemetery near Querrieo and is marked by a cross made by his Section. With deepest sympathy,

Yours very sincerely,

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<sup>183</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 15. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

NORMAN O. HARRIS, Major, O. C. 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company, A. E.<sup>184</sup>

In the next letter Mr John Walker received the following letter in connection with his son's death.

At sea,  
August 18,

Dear Mr Walker,

Doubtless long ere this reaches you, you will have received the very sad news concerning your son, Sapper H. C. Walker, 16475, 6<sup>th</sup> A. F. A. Engineers. I would have written to you sooner but was unfortunately evacuated sick and did not have opportunity earlier. I am now on my way to Australia on duty and I hope to return to boys ere long. Your son was wounded at the Norlaneourt sector on 19<sup>th</sup> May and was taken with all speed to where he could receive every possible medical care. Unfortunately, however, in spite of all that was done, his wounds proved too severe, he had a bad shell wound in the left side and he died early the same day.

You can rest assured that everything that could possibly be done for him was done and every effort made to save his life. His remains were laid to rest in a military cemetery at Querrien and a wooden cross had been erected over his grave to mark his last resting place. I read our beautiful church service at the grave and thus we leave him until the Resurrection Morn. I know just how sad all this now is, but I am sure that the Great Sacrifice which your son and so many others have made will not be in vain and will yet yield an abundant of Peace and Victory. You can be proud to know that your son died in honour bravely facing the foe and that he has given his life in the great cause of Truth and Liberty, fighting for his God, his King, his Country and for you.

In assuring you of my deep sympathy with you in your great loss, I commend you to the unfailing care and keeping of our Heavenly Father Who alone can comfort and

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<sup>184</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, September, 26. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

console those who have been bereaved of their dear ones. He will not fail nor forsake you. With true sympathy, I am,

Yours truly,

THOS C. ROBINSON, Chaplain, 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion

P.S. I hope you will have received a disc, wound stripe and button which I sent you in May last, also knife pouch and purse which were sent to you through the military authorities.<sup>185</sup>

### **Wamsley Cecil “Curly” C. Private Infantry**

Private C. C. Wamsley of Ourimbah writing to the *Gosford Times* from Anzac, Gallipoli under date 19 October 1915, said,

Just a line to thank you for your welcome paper the *Gosford Times*, we have been in the trenches for seven weeks and are feeling O. K. A few of the 20<sup>th</sup> have gone under, but the wounds of the others only seem to make the boys more determined than ever.<sup>186</sup>

Though Private “Curly” Wamsley, son of Mr and Mrs A. E. Wamsley of Ourimbah was reported missing in France on July 26, 1916, no official notification of his death had been received from the military authorities. Private letters however, were forwarded from his comrades who were eye witnesses to his death on the battlefield. Private Walsh, who belonged to the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion with “Curly” was wounded in the same bayonet charge and had been invalided home. He made the following report to the Australian Red Cross Society saying,

I knew “Curly” Wamsley in Egypt and Gallipoli. He transferred while in Egypt into the 20<sup>th</sup> Transport Service and re-joined my Company about a week before 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1916. I was with him for a week after the attack at Pozieres. We charged together about 2 a.m. on the 26<sup>th</sup>. I was wounded early in the charge in the first line of German trenches. At

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<sup>185</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, October, 10. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>186</sup>

the finish of the charge, about 7 or 8 a.m., I was returning to our lines to be attended to, when I met Wamsley, who was wounded in the chest or arm. I stopped in a shell hole and he went on. I moved on later and took shelter in another shell hole where I found Wamsley. He had been badly wounded by a machine gun and had about eight bullet wounds. I cut off his trousers and bound him up, but whilst doing so he died in my arms. He could not speak when I met him the second time, but was semi-conscious. I laid him down dead and made my way back to our lines.<sup>187</sup>

### **Ward Bruce Trooper Light Horse, 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment**

Trooper Bruce Ward wrote to the Editor, *The Gosford Times* from Egypt saying,

The Australian mail arrived here O. K. last night and I received a fair mail, also a batch of papers, including *The Gosford Times* you sent along to us and I am taking the liberty to write and thank you very much for sending them. We get very little news from Australia and always look forward to the mail days here. We have been having very wet weather here. Since Christmas Day it has rained nearly every day. We have no tents and the only shelter that we can get is date palm leaves and a few old bags so you can guess that these shanties are hardly waterproof or airtight and it is not too nice a feeling when you are wet to the skin to crawl in between a couple of wet blankets. And the poor horses are worst off then we are, as they are tied up in lines with no shelter only a blanket thrown over them.

We were out on outpost the other night when two shots were fired in quick succession. We stood to arms and then the flying patrols (mounted men) came in and reported that a couple of pack camels had broken loose. One of our sentries called halt and receiving no answer he banged away at them but missed. Well, about half an hour after this the look-out challenged a chap on a horse and this is what we heard. The lookout, "Halt who goes there?" The chap, "friend." The look-out "You're no friend of mine." The chap, "I am officer of the day." The look-out "Then what the hell are you doing out in

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<sup>187</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, April, 5. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

the night; dismount and come to be recognised.” So you see things are pretty strict around here just at present.

I was over and saw Lieutenant Tom Humphries in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment and he is O. K. Tom had a chance of being returned as his arm is all knots where the bullet went through it and cut the sinews and he cannot quite use his right arm yet. I asked him why he did not take a trip home and he replied that he would stop and see it out now. I think he’s right too, as he has been here since the first. I also saw St. Clare Lowe; he is a sergeant in the 7<sup>th</sup>. Clive Frost was there too, quite a gathering of Gosford boys. We had a very quiet Christmas here.

All the boys were issued with a billy-can packed by the different Societies in the States and it’s funny that no N. S. W. boys got any N. S. W. billy-cans. We got South Australian stuff last Christmas and Victorian cans this trip and my word the boys appreciated these gifts. They, the boys, were just like a lot of school lads out for a holiday. Besides the billies we were given a plum pudding between every two men, also a tin of condensed milk and a tin of fruit, so were well of for Christmas fare. Remember me to all Gosford friends.<sup>188</sup>

### **Waters Harold Trooper Light Horse**

Trooper Harry Waters wrote from Egypt to his mother Mrs J. E. Waters at Yarramalong saying,

I have been in a battle at last and a pretty rough one too while it lasted. We are not allowed to describe same, for what reason I don’t know, as we had a great victory and it will all be published in the papers. The fight is still going on but the Turks are still retreating and fighting a rear-guard action. We have driven them back about seventeen miles. It will surprise you when you know the thousands of prisoners and booty we got. Of course we have been scrapping with the Turks for some time now, but nothing big until about a week ago. I suppose you see it all in the papers now. Percy Hayes got

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<sup>188</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, March, 1. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

wounded yesterday, but nothing serious, a bit of shrapnel got him in the cheek. I was talking to him this morning; he was just going away to hospital. The Turks got a great set back; they were told that they would take our positions within two hours. Their aeroplanes reported that we had a lot of dummy tents (no one in them) they found them very much full.<sup>189</sup>

### **Waters Jack J. Private**

The following letter had been received by Miss Ward from Private Waters of Gosford dated from Hardcott in England saying,

Dear Miss Ward,

Just a few lines hoping you and your people are in the best of health as this leaves me pretty fair just at present. I have been in hospital for a time with trench fever, but I am feeling myself again now. I wish to thank you personally for your kindness and also all the ladies connected with the Gosford Patriotic Society. It is a fine thing for us boys to think that we have such fine people in good old Gosford who have a kind thought of us while going through this terrible struggle. The parcel was very nice and I can assure you my mates and I enjoyed it very much, especially the cigarettes. Well, Miss Ward, there is not much news for us to tell you as we do not have the chance to visit any of the big cities, so I will finish my short note. Remember me to your dad and also your brothers as they know me pretty well.<sup>190</sup>

### **Warmoll Frederick Sapper**

Sapper Warmoll of Gosford who had recently sailed for the war wrote saying,

Ar Sea,

Will stop today for the first time in 26 days. Long time between drinks, this ship is dry. The Panama Canal is a wonderful engineering feat, the greatest man has ever performed, connecting as it does ocean to ocean. The French started this Canal and after

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<sup>189</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>190</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, October 17, Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W

spending about £80,000,000 they turned it up owing to the ravages of fever. The United States of America gave France £5,000,000 for their rights and started to work fighting disease by spending unlimited money. They pumped 250,000 gallons of oils into the water and cleaned the jungle for about five miles both sides of the Canal Zone.

At the Culebra Cut, which is nine miles long, with a bottom width of 300 feet, 90 million cubic yards of earth was taken from the cut that goes right through the mountain crossing the Isthmus. To give you an idea of this engineering feat, this ship loaded would weigh fully 40,000 tons and we are lifted 55 feet in five minutes. The Yanks are not skitters. They do things. The bridge across the Chagres is marked "Danger 44,000 volts." Everything is worked by electricity and the waters do it for nothing.

Each town is a blaze of light. No labour troubles here. White men get between £30 and £40 per month. The military do the work and won't stand any fuss. We loaded 2,000 tons of coal at Christobal (Colon) in five hours. The machinery is wonderful, huge steel derricks 100 foot high, trucks carrying 10 tons of coal on overhead railway lines, no men to drive them. They come on full of coal, empty out and return for more, all done by some fellow pulling a lever or pressing a button. Our Federal member, Mr Fleming, is on board this ship in charge of the A. S. C. and is very well liked. I often see Alf, May and Dick Tucker.<sup>191</sup>

In his next letter Sapper Warmoll wrote to *The Gosford Times* saying

After leaving Colon, which is on the Atlantic side and is an artificially made harbour, formed by two breakwaters, one on each side running out about 1,000 yards, made of 15 cwt cement blocks, the concrete is about 200 yards wide, patrolled in day time by submarines, night time a huge steel net is placed across charged with electricity, we head north for Jamaica, the home of good rum. I thought of Jackaranda, Jackbeetie and others. One could not help noticing the difference between the placid waters of the Pacific to the wild tumultuous waters of the Atlantic.

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<sup>191</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, January, 3. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



Ask Bill Hadley does he think that's Mick speaking? After six days run we arrived at another place known as Trinidad, the city Port of Spain. The people just went mad. The racecourse was given over to the "great Australian soldiers." This is the first transport that has ever been here. From the jetty to the course thousands of people with flags on both sides of road showered fruit and so on at the boys as they marched past each day for four days. There were 4,000 to 5,000 peeled oranges, 10,000 unpeeled, thousands of bunches of bananas, thousands of bottles of iced beer (Bass's), thousands of packets of cigarettes, lollies, cakes, post cards by the thousand.

Business men gave as much as £60 other people gave from £5 to £50 and motor cars. The Australian soldiers had anything they liked to make the stay a treat. The population is 330,000. Industries consist of sugar, coffee, cocoa, copra, tobacco, timber, fruits, oil and pitch. There is a whole lake of pitch here. It's wonderful, no end to it. Erina Shire could do with it for a few years, the woman are, when young, very pretty and are of American, English and Spanish blood. They dance and sing anytime, but the old ones look narks. Just the place for Colonel F. and General H. M. They would be happy here. Remember me to all hands at Woy Woy and Gosford. With tons of good wishes from Dick Tucker, Alf May and self.

FRED WARMOLL.<sup>192</sup>

In his next letter he wrote to *The Gosford Times* from Parkhouse Camp, England, under date December 30, 1917 saying,

After passing (*censored*) life belts were worn day and night and we were ordered to sleep with our clothes on. Submarine guards, about 200, were posted, each with a rifle and 15 rounds. We all wanted rough weather, for the U boats can't operate so well. 200 miles from (*censored*) British destroyers were signalled with full speed up. It was our first glimpse of the British Navy and they darted east, west, north and south at from 30 to 40 miles an hour. We passed the wreckage of a transport that had been sunk a few hours before and 220 lives lost. She was sunk at 3 o'clock on Christmas morning and

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<sup>192</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, February, 28. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

at Church parade our chaps looked solemn when they realise that the victims might easily have been us. Swimming would be of little avail, as the water was icy cold.

We arrived at Devonport on Christmas night and on Boxing Day seven trains conveyed us to different camps. Our Federal member, Mr Flemming, was in charge. After 160 miles by train through beautiful country and old-fashioned towns (no fences in the fields, all hedges and little farm houses) we arrived at Tidsworth. At midnight we marched for an hour through snow, it was bitterly cold and we were hungry and tired. All the land here, including what were once flower gardens, is cultivated for food stuffs, adequate supplies of which are causing grave anxiety. I am attached to the Sergeant's Mess and here is the food list per day; 12ozs meat per man, 14ozs bread, 2oz sugar, ½oz tea, ¼oz salt. Bones and peelings and swill are all used up, some for fats, others for munitions making purposes. Even tea leaves for paper wads.

The Aviation School is four miles from here and hundreds are learning to fly. The price of beer is 4 pence to 8 pence a glass, whisky 6 pence to 1 shilling a glass, 9 shillings to 15 shillings per bottle. Women are working at all classes of men's work and are earning big wages. I am going to Scotland and Ireland when I get leave in a few weeks' time and then the real thing in France. Remember me to all friends.

FRED WARMOLL.<sup>193</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* he wrote,

The Huns gave Russia and Roumania a bad time. They seem to be able to do what they like in the East, but on the Western front the boys are the old bulldog breed that they have to meet and it's a different tale to tell. Business is going to be big this summer and our chaps are quite ready and calm. This is no stage secret. The British have their guns with the wheels almost touching each other. The front line is right-oh, with supports real good and the back line, well, a sand fly couldn't get through, even if he was on rations for a month. The Hun has never taken on the Australians with the bayonet since Pozieres, where our lads gave them an awful beating. The German doesn't like the cold steel, and no one else that I know of.

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<sup>193</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, March, 7. Printed and published by

When you see Mr Mick Kinnane tell him I've got a good idea. I'll wise him up to it when I get back. It is for St Hubert's Island, Woy Woy. British politics are much the same as the Commonwealth, too much talk and no dinkum action. I am afraid there is too much party strife just when the Empire needs the concentrated brain of our best men. Our Federal member, Mr W. H. Fleming is still attached to the Army Service Corps and I feel sure he will be a good man no matter where he is placed. The Y. M. C. A., Salvation Army, War Chest, Anzac Buffet all treat the boys as well as possible. Hope to be with you all again when this box on is over.<sup>194</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* he wrote from somewhere in France under date July 13, 1918 saying,

Your welcome letter of 25<sup>th</sup> April to hand. I note contents and quite agree with you re Captain Carmichael as compared with skirting politicians we know of, at present we are enjoying a few days' rest. Your papers will have told you of the Australian success on the morning of 4<sup>th</sup> July. A few Yanks put on our coats and so on and went over the top. They are very anxious to have a go at Fritz. I feel sure they will prove real good fighters. They say "You dig 'em out Aussie and we'll chase 'em." They are a fine lot of fellows to talk to. I like them and hope our statesmen will see the benefit to Australia of a Monroe Doctrine for the Pacific. M. Clemenceau came from Paris and thanked the Aussies. He said "France knew you were good, but you are greater than we though." The old gentleman seemed to be very touched.

Our boys have great faith in the artillery. No doubt they put up a beautiful barrage. I'm hanged if I know how a sand fly could live in it. Fritz prisoners are a mixed lot, some big fellows, others quite young. They seem to be pleased to be out of it. I don't wonder either. Go on doing your best for reinforcements. It would never do for Australia to slip back now. The Huns rate us the best troops among the Allies and he seems to know that we can beat him too. I was pleased to notice that the Federal Government had made

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<sup>194</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, May, 23. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

arrangements for buildings ships. This will have to be done with energy and plenty of it.

Our country is wonderful and we didn't know it. The world wants our raw products and we badly want ships. Australia can and will be a manufacturing country too. Now is the time. German goods off the world markets, a large number of French factories gone to the pack, England in want of raw material. Business men, not politicians of Aussie should be consulted on these matters.<sup>195</sup>

In his next letter to *The Gosford Times* under date July 24, 1918, he said,

Since last I wrote Fritz has had one continual beating. He is getting a rotten time; American weight is beginning to be felt. The general conditions in Australia seem to be awfully bad, together with the Italians fighting well. With the extreme food shortage and winter approaching the lot of the Austrian officials must be very trying. I often meet the boys from different parts of Brisbane Water. They are going well and strong. We had a fine day's sports last Saturday and on Monday a race meeting. I was granted a bookmaker's licence and finished up the day winning over two thousand francs.

The Officers of the A. I. F. are great in everything, there is no wonder that our boys fight so well. Competing at the races were some fair class horses. The programme provided for three donkey races over hurdles. Betting was real good and I won six hundred and fifty francs on one donk. Ten events comprised the day's racing. Unfortunately two officers were killed riding in the first race. It was rotten luck, and cast a gloom over the whole day. I see by the paper that the Wowsers want to stop racing and close hotels in Australia. I wonder if ever, in their narrow minds, they remember that us fellows in France should have a say in regard to liberties and pleasures of Australia. The boys in the trenches have no time for killjoys. We have a lot of faith in our different Governments and trust they won't stand those sheep interfering.

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<sup>195</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, September, 12. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I have not seen Mr Phil Glenister's son yet, but those who are with him tell me he is a dinkum good soldier, one of the gamest. In everything, Woy Woy's G. O. M. has won a great name. My Company has been enjoying twelve days' spell. There is an Irishman in my Section. We were working together near the front. Fritz was sending over plenty of big shells. Paddy said "I read about this war years ago." Someone replied "New Testament Paddy." Pat said "New Testament, be blowed, there was no New Testament in my time; I am over thirty."<sup>196</sup>

In his next letter writing to *The Gosford Times* from France he said,

The Yanks, French and British troops are giving the Huns a hot time of it in general. The Aussies are always at him, more or less. A Paris newspaper speaks of the lads as "the indefatigable Australians" I don't know much about the war, but it looks to me as if the Germans have come a big cropper. His objectives are further off than ever and he hasn't much to show for his millions of casualties. The Yanks are still arriving in tens of thousands and the Allies are confident of complete victory. I notice by a copy of *The Gosford Times* just to hand that Mr Donald Fraser (Jimmy Pannikin) had gone west. The school children of N. S. W. have thus lost a good friend. He was fine company, so very interesting, a great lover of nature. His idea of planting trees along roads and so on, was a splendid one.

All the French roads are avenues of trees. The Amiens-Paris road before the war was the finest road in the world, with fine trees growing on either side. The Hun love to cut down and destroy the fruit and other trees and generally break things up. The Yanks, like our fellows, won't stand for that kind of stuff and are very bitter. Of late it's been a case of kill or be killed. The American army is also like ours inasmuch as they are civilian soldiers recruited from all classes, trades, professions and so on, a democratic lot and no mistake. Their ideas are as much as the average Aussie. They love babies, woman, flowers and racehorses. The only thing we differ on is music, the Yanks stands for rag time.

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<sup>196</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, September, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Billy Anderson of Gosford wishes to be remembered to all hands. Some wise man back in 1914 said the war would be won by the people who could keep going the longest. Well, we are sure to be the right ones. Another year at the most will, I think prove to Fritz that his dream of world power is over. Every day his chance of winning gets worse.<sup>197</sup>

Sapper Warmoll writing to *The Gosford Times* from the western front under date August 14, 1918, said

Cables to the Aussie papers will inform you people of the great battles that have been fought over the last six days, the greatest of the whole war. In less than four weeks the Hun has loss upwards of one hundred thousand men in prisoners alone and his casualties in dead and wounded must have been something frightful. We were made wise to the big plan of action a few days ago before the 8<sup>th</sup>. We were all supplied with special maps so that in case of an unforeseen happening we would know each road, each village, hall and the different windings of the Somme River.

The spirit of the Aussie troops was very high. They had been told that this was not to be a limited objective. No small bite this time, go your best. On the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> our little party played poker waiting for zero time. 4.17 a.m. Then the barrage opened, it was some barrage too, the Australians in the centre, Australians and Canadians on the right flank and the British on the left, supported by tanks, whippet tanks, little fast ones, armoured motor cars, and sixty fighting aeroplanes to drop ammunitions as the roads would be heavily shelled.

Our first objective was won forty minutes ahead of time and the second objective an hour ahead. The right flank was also well ahead and kept time with the centre, but the left flank had a very tough job and couldn't keep up. Two batteries of Aussies raced their guns into action ahead of the Huns, but were knocked out by two direct hits from Fritz at point blank range. Our section was in the same gully. Fritz tried two more, but

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<sup>197</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, October, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

missed us, the shells exploding over our heads. We lost no time in seeking shelter in shell holes and so on.

That day's result was a gain of from eight to ten thousand yards and six thousand prisoners on the centre sections. The right flank did equally well which commenced about 5 o'clock on the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>. The left flank or British section had been held up after the advance of about four thousand yards had been made. American troops reinforced the Tommies and after thirty minutes barrage the Yanks and Tommies hopped over. My position was to the right and in front of the Hun and with field glasses, taken the previous day from a German, I watched the battle till dark

The woods were full of machine guns. Fritz fought well and soon both woods and slopes were covered with dead and wounded. Two of our chaps were sniped while watching the fight. It was an awful night, but the success means much to us. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Fritz developed a counter attack to enable him to get back guns and stores. Our lads met and cut them up, carrying another twelve hundred prisoners besides killed and wounded. Our losses, all things considered, are not high. My section pulled back to rest on the 11<sup>th</sup>. First time I had my pants off for days. Spent half an hour looking for chats and got plenty. Met one of the Singleton's going up that night with the guns. He is a Woy Woy boy and looked well. Met my cousin C. Moxham also going into section, quite happy. A Yankee transport driver made me laugh. He asked a Hun prisoner who would win the war, Fritz said "We will, Gott is with us" and the Yankee said "Wake up, the Aussies are with us."<sup>198</sup>

### **Warmoll Nick Gunner**

Gunner Warmoll writing to his brother Fred at Woy Woy from Tooting Hospital in London said,

I am still in Blighty and intend to make the best of it. We have a right royal time with concerts, theatres and so on, about four a week and I have just arrived back from the stadium where we had free seats and I saw some good boxing. That Referendum vote

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<sup>198</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, November, 14. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

in Australia will hurt the lads. The work they are doing in France needed reinforcements, any German stronghold in a new push that has to be broken up, out go the Australians. They break up the enemy alright, but it means heavy casualties. The Imperial regiments follow up and the victory is counted to them instead of to the Australians.

Many of the Tommies are narrow-minded and selfish. They never recognise that our boys had to do the hard fighting in front of them. The only time the Australians get the credit of his victory is when, later on, they meet the Tommy in the small estaminet (*beer shop*) and the Tommy starts to talk of how he did this and he did that. The Australian always win the argument that follows. Two of our lads arrived here yesterday wounded. They say our Division went over at Bapaume. The Germans couldn't stop them. Our lads broke the strongholds, but suffered heavy losses in doing so.

I often wish I was back again in the land of the gum tree and free life. I am not a coward and I am not afraid of anything that Fritz can throw at me, but it's the mud. If a man stops one he is likely to be buried in it before assistance comes. There seems to be millions of men here in khaki. Some have been in camp 18 months and have not yet hit the front. Australia without conscription has, I think averaged as many recruits as England with conscription. They are dodging it all ways. Expect to be convalescent in a few weeks' time.

Went through my pay book yesterday, have nineteen pounds seven shillings and four pence not too bad on one shilling a day. Things are rough here in London for the housewife. She has to buy six shillings worth of groceries before she is allowed to take a pound of sugar. Mutton is one shilling and threepence per pound. Hotels have only two sessions a day, two hours at dinner time and from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. No spirits to be sold after midday session. No lights are to be used at night and the policeman is the only one, he uses a small electric bulb fixed to the top of his helmet.

The traffic in London at 6 p.m. would amaze you. That munitions explosion was terrific; we were over 9 miles from the factory yet felt the concussion. It flatten houses, factories and so on within a mile radius and you won't know the extent of the casualties until the war is all over, the censor will see to that.



Kind regards to all friends

NICK.<sup>199</sup>

### **Watts Charles F. Private Infantry**

While in the trenches he wrote to Miss Eva Murphy thanking the girls of Woy Woy for the parcels sent. He recorded how the towns and villages in France had been reduced to ruins and added,

It is surprising to see what the woman of France can do. They plod the land and sow the crops and also cart wood for miles. It made me sad when I saw two old woman engaged harrowing. They were about 60 or 70 years of age and instead of driving horses they were pulling the harrows along with ropes. I have seen little girls digging out weeds. We see some awful sights here. I have been camping in a shell hole for six days with my horses just a mile from the front line. We have to draw water or take food to the men in the trenches. That is our work and we will be lucky if we ever see our homes again if this war keeps on for much longer.<sup>200</sup>

### **Weeks Robert E. Trooper Light Horse**

A letter was sent to Master T. Grigg from Trooper R. E. Weeks saying,

All you young Australian men who cheer us lads at war should put your minds together and do a little more. Don't let your courage falter, enlist and be a man; we rather than cheer us, bring all you can with Dick and Dan. We lads who came do not regret, we fought and often fell; we hope the lads who are left behind will come and fight as well. Suppose you do not enlist, don't obey your country's call; then you're shirking on your mates at war and the Empire, it may fall. Just go and think it over and you'll see I am right; we want you to come at once in Freedom's cause to fight.

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<sup>199</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 2. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

Our strength you know can't always last, each one has done his best; we want more men to take our place, while worn-outs seek some rest. And then we will come back fresh and strong, with plenty of life and go; with our rifles cleaned and bayonets fixed to charge the Turkish foe. So do not delay in coming, our need of you is sincere; we want to wipe the enemy out, and then we'll have the cheer.<sup>201</sup>

Writing from Egypt, Trooper Bob Weeks, one time butcher boy, describes the fight the Australians had with the Turks. Bob was mates with another Gosford lad, Trooper Bruce Ward and Bruce writing home to his father said that the Captain reckoned that Bob Weeks was the "coolest cuss" he had ever seen under fire for the first time. Trooper Weeks wrote to Mr M. Ward saying,

No doubt you have read of a report of the scrap we had with the Turks, but I will tell you what it is like to be in it. We were expecting them the night before and so slept in our clothes ready for an attack. At 12 o'clock we were aroused and told to saddle up and stand by our horses. The first shot was fired at 1 a.m., 4<sup>th</sup> August and there was not a break in the firing till 8 a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup>, when the Turks chucked up the sponge and cleared. We captured between 3,000 and 4,000 prisoners. About daylight on the 4<sup>th</sup>, four Taubes appeared and at once commenced to drop bombs, some of which were too close to be pleasant.

At the same time the Turks also opened up with artillery. It was not long before our guns got to work and I can tell you they put in some good work too. Being on the desert there was not much cover and my job did not allow of much protection. I had to take orders from the O. C. of the Machines Guns to his Lieutenants and to gallop back and load a wagon with ammunition and bring it up to the guns. I was going till 12 that night, when I piled up some sand bags and dozed off behind them, waking just before daylight and starting again.

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<sup>201</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, July, 7. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

I expected every minute to stop a bullet, but I don't know how it was that I was not frightened. I think it was because I had my mind occupied. At 9 o'clock there was nothing to be seen on the Turks and we came in and had some breakfast and expected a sleep. But we had only been in an hour when we were ordered to saddle up again as we were going to attack them at Katia. Well the 5<sup>th</sup> proved to be a repetition of the 4<sup>th</sup>, with more shrapnel flying about than on the previous day. We had a couple of days spell and then went out about 25 miles and attacked the Turks at a place called Bir-el-abd on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

The 9<sup>th</sup> proved to be worse than the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, as the enemy used high explosive shells which did a bit of damage amongst our horses. I was lucky all through, as not even my horse was hit. I will not speak of close shaves as everybody had their share of them, but I can assure you those three days are days that will never be forgotten by me all my life. Tom Humphries got a slight wound in the arm on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but I never heard whether anybody else from Gosford was wounded. Bruce and myself are feeling pretty good; only we made ourselves a bit bilious after receiving seven parcels between the two of us. Kindest regards to all at home.<sup>202</sup>

In another letter, Weeks, who had been promoted to the rank of Corporal, had sent the following from Palestine. Amongst the gifts stuff, which had recently arrived in Egypt, was a parcel from a girl in Queensland. A chap in the Light Horse received it and on opening it he discovered a note from the sender saying,

Dear Soldier Boy,  
I do hope that my parcel goes to one of our brave boys in the trenches in France and not to one of the cold-footed squibs in Egypt.

The grateful soldier replied,  
My Dear Miss-----,  
I wish to thank you for your parcel which was much appreciated here where anything in the way of comforts is practically unprocurable. I too, regret that one of our dear

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<sup>202</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, September, 29. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

brave boys in France did not receive it, though of cause they CAN go to a canteen there and also occasionally even get leave. I enclose a photo of some of the graves of the "cold-footed squibs in Egypt." They are lonely graves and perhaps not bright with flowers, but-----.

Yours sincerely,

C. F. Squib

----th Light Horse Regiment.

In the next letter Mrs Dermody of the Boy's Industrial Home at Gosford received a letter from Lance-Corporal Weeks saying,

I must thank you for sending me the parcel and also the *Gosford Times* which I receive regularly. I am working in the Base Post Office now and it is a real job. Alf Nesbitt has been in the hospital, but I have been very lucky, having had no sickness whatever, but ten months ago was thrown from a horse and had my face cut and some teeth knocked out.

Kind regards to all friends.<sup>203</sup>

Trooper Robert Weeks wrote to Mr M. Ward from the Holy City where the Turks and Germans were recently utterly routed out saying,

We moved out from Ludd after dark on the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> September to Jaffa, where we were well concealed from enemy aeroplanes by gum trees. The good old gum tree seems to be an ornamental tree over here and there are a good few of them. The attack was made on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> and turned out better than we expected. We left Jaffa on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> and travelled day and night until the 21<sup>st</sup>, when we pulled at El Lejjan after crossing the hills. We were in the rear of the enemy then and that day the Aussies brought in about 15,000 or 20,000 prisoners, Turks and Germans, who were retreating and reckoned they were safe except for pursuing troops and were thunderstruck when they saw our lads in front of them.

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<sup>203</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, January, 18. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we moved on to a railway junction called Tel el Fule, on the plain of Esdraalon, where our chaps had captured the railway station and an aerodrome. 25<sup>th</sup>, on again through Nazareth to Kefr Kenus where we are told Christ performed the miracle of turning water into wine in the old days. We hit Nazareth at dusk and moved out at 10 p.m. so I didn't see much of it. On the 26<sup>th</sup> we pushed on to Tiberius on the shore of the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberius, which reminds me very much of Brisbane Water and dear old Gosford town. That's where Christ walked on the water. Moved out on the 27<sup>th</sup> and pulled up at Maaune for a spell and on again to Jise Benat Yakub on the banks of the Jordan near Lake Baheira el Hule,

The Turks blew a span out of the bridge of Jacob's daughters which cross the Jordan here, but the engineers didn't take long to repair it and we crossed it on the 29<sup>th</sup> and pushed on to a village called Kuneitra. Moved forward again on the 30<sup>th</sup> and pulled up on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October on the outskirts of Damascus, where we are now getting in some lost sleep o' nights. Damascus is a big place with a large population and boasting of electric trams in the streets. It was in a very dirty condition but is being cleaned up fast. It takes some time to collect the prisoners out of the towns and villages and they do a bit of sniping before being caught. There is nothing so interesting as riding over newly taken country. Kindest regards to self and all ay home and all friends in Gosford.<sup>204</sup>

### **Weston W. Private**

Private W. Weston writes to *The Gosford Times* saying,

I have travelled a good deal over France since I arrived. To see the little villages wrapped in peace and quietness one would never think the greatest war in history was being waged. When you get in the battle area, what a different scene. Most of the places are flattened out and in ruins, churches shattered to pieces, nothing but charred debris and stacks of broken bricks. You couldn't imagine what the effect of artillery fire are unless you saw the ground after a big engagement. The earth is pulverised with great holes everywhere, cause by the big shells exploding.

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<sup>204</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, December, 19. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

The roar of the cannons on either side is something terrific and the wonder is the casualties are not a thousand times heavier. I remember when I was a boy reading about Balaclava, Inkerman, Waterloo and other battles, little dreaming that later on I would be ‘one of the soldiers of the King.’ I am glad that I volunteered and it is grand to feel that one is doing his duty. The life we are leading is full of danger and discomfit, but when we think of the sufferings of the poor Belgium women, children and old people we feel that we haven’t much to grumble about. The only thing I wish is that we could have a straight-out fight with the Germans man to man. I have no doubt as to who would win and win quickly.<sup>205</sup>

**White E. K. Lieutenant**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Infantry**

Lieutenant White of Gosford writing to *The Gosford Times* from France, dated Christmas Day said,

So far I have not acknowledged many copies of the TIMES which I have received from you, but please accept my best thanks now and an assurance that the delay was not lack of appreciation, but due to the busy life a poor unfortunate Adjutant leads and a natural disinclination for letter writing. What has happened to the spirit of the Australian public? The news that Australia had turned down Conscription for the second time comes as a great shock, for while due allowance was made for the feelings displayed by your recent enormous strikes, it was still difficult to see that they would turn around and cold bloodedly say “We won’t send you any reinforcements and you can go on reducing your divisions and reinforcing one with the others. For this is tantamount of what it means, as the voluntary enlistments are not more than sufficient for one division.

Why, here we are a people who have just set up as a colony and never dreamed of fighting, with the whole world at our feet only too willing to grant Australians the first place as fighting troops and we find that the remaining people of the country, for which we fight and have earned the primary place as fighting troops, turns its troops down and says “carry on till the war is finished.” One reads a lot of rot in the English papers and

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<sup>205</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, November, 16. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

doubtless in the Australian papers, about the doings of the Australians, yet few clearly describe that they are solid good fighters, cool and determined.

They prefer to tell of how he wears his hat, or some other idiosyncrasy. Is this right? His qualities are vouched for by the enemy, who always moves his troops so that only the best are disposed against the Australians. Coming from the land, I of course forfeit all right to eulogy on their behalf, but one reads so much balderdash and the Australian public seems to appreciate the quality of its representatives so little, that I feel in duty bound to say something on our behalf. In the middle of my attempt at letter writing, let me wish you A Merry Xmas, for Christmas Day it is, as you will see by looking at the date.

Outside the snow is coming down in huge flakes and by morning I will have difficulty in getting out of my palatial mansion, composed of sandbags, but as the French would say “c’est la guerre,” and so one must be prepared to take things as they come. You must not laugh at my efforts at French, for I have been assured by quite a number of the French farm people, with whom we are billeted from time to time when out of the line, that I have quite a good accent and speak quite well, but of course they don’t know that they are the same old phrases which I have worked off month after month. Well, life these times is extremely uncertain, both to its location and continuance and while I was writing to you we received orders to move to another part of the line, where our General thinks things look a bit dangerous, so we pack up our happy home and in a few minutes are on the move.<sup>206</sup>

In the next letter, Lieutenant White, son of Mr and Mrs White of Gosford and who prior to sailing for the front married Miss Pauline Mason was recently awarded the Military Cross in recognition of which he received the following letter from General Birdwood saying,

Headquarters,  
Australian Imperial Force,

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<sup>206</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, February, 21. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

B. E. F.,  
8<sup>th</sup> June, 1918,

Dear White,

I am so glad to have this opportunity of congratulating you most heartily on the award of the Military Cross which you have so fully deserved for your conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in the operations at Strazeeie from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Throughout this period your work was of a very high order, while on the 14<sup>th</sup> you rendered particularly valuable service in making a personal reconnaissance of the position under very heavy fire on receipt of information that the right flank of the Battalion on your left had given way.

As a result of your gallant action, you were able to advise your Battalion Headquarters as to the exact situation and to the effect that the line was intact. Again on the 17<sup>th</sup> April you made a daring reconnaissance and established liaison with the Unit on your left where the situation had been somewhat obscure. Thank you so much for your excellent services and with kind regards,

Yours sincerely

W. BIRDWOOD.<sup>207</sup>

### **White J. C. Private**

Private White, who enlisted from Narara, wrote to *The Gosford Times* saying,

Freetown is at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River and is called the “White Man’s Grave” because of the awful climate. The air is hot and dense and if you do not get sunstroke, malarial or blackwater fever attacks you. The hills which lie in the background rise to a good height and at the foot of them is the town facing the bay. Everything looks beautifully green; plenty of coconut palms and dense tropical trees. The town contains about 300 white people, the rest being mostly Negroes who were liberated originally from America.

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<sup>207</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, August, 22. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.



The Europeans only stop eight months out of the year and then hurriedly depart and never wish to return. No horses are visible in the streets and only one narrow railroad, used for the transport of native productions, palm oil, copra, gold and ivory. Fruits, such as bananas, pineapples, mangoes and paw-paw are plentiful. The town is rather dilapidated. Some of the public buildings do not look bad, but most of the others are dirty and neglected. The niggers paddle out to the ships in long double pointed canoes, using large spoon shaped paddles.

They dive for coins, springing out of their boats and clambering back again without upsetting them, something an unpractised person could not do. They are well-made strong looking men and swim and dive well. They come to the surface with the coin in their teeth and with a smile eight inches wide, but the expression is not at all encouraging when they discover a tobacco tag. There was a wedding in the church, a black clergyman, surplus, cassock, nasal intonation, all complete. The bride was dressed in blue blouse, red skirt and black hat, trimmed with scraps left over from the blouse. One shop had up for a sign "Breakfast from 8 a.m. till 9 p.m.," and another "The Sympathetic Undertaker." The niggers who visit the ship are fully dressed in an old hat.

It is a fine sight to see two rows of ships, five deep, with battleships and destroyers escorting them. Sometimes a cruiser tows a target and all the ships fire at it as it comes within range. First you see a flash, then a huge column of water near the target, then you hear a loud deep bang. When we fired a lot of the men below thought the ship had been struck and were all on alert for the bugle to sound the alarm. Coming out of Melbourne Heads the searchlights playing across the waves was a beautiful sight. They looked like large breakers of quick-silver.

The bands on all the boats always play on leaving and entering a port and we all line up and sing. Many of us when leaving Australia were like Mr Rose when he imitated the man with a lump in his throat. The only submarine on record was an empty meat box floating majestically half a mile off, which we promptly bulleted into matchwood. As we are now within a few days sail of England, a submarine guard has been posted, one hour on, two hours off. Nothing goes pass unobserved, porpoise, whales, boxes, barrels; all receive a hail of bullets. My place is on the bridge and it is my delight to

sight everything first, report it and then watch the hurry, scurry and bustle, I pity the submarine that attacks us. Please remember me to all my friends.<sup>208</sup>

**Willis George Samuel Private No.5894**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Battalion**

Private Willis wrote to his mother at Narara from somewhere in France dated March 14, 1917, saying,

I am still writing at every opportunity and hope you are getting some of the letters. I have only two letters from Australia so far. Received a parcel from the Narara Red Cross containing socks and a cap, comforter and cigarettes and Cousin Maggie sent me a parcel of mufflers so I am not doing too bad. I have already had my baptism of fire and came through with nothing worse than a piece torn out of the back of my overcoat by a fragment of shell. The continual boom of guns gets on one's nerves a bit and if you happen to be alongside of a battery of heavy guns you think your head is gone. I hope you are keeping well and not worrying too much about me as I am enjoying the best of health. It is still very cold over here, in fact I think it is all winter in this part of the world.<sup>209</sup>

**Wilson Joe Private**  
**Infantry**

Private Joe Wilson, who enlisted from Wamberal nearly a year previously wrote from France to his sister, Mrs M. Brown of Gosford saying,

I have been in France some time now and like it better than Egypt. Have travelled nearly all over it and the scenery is lovely. But you get tired of it after a while and begin to feel that there is no place like home in Australia It is a pity to see the destruction that this terrible war has caused, lovely villages destroyed and in ruins and people

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<sup>208</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, October, 4. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>209</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1917, May, 17. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

everywhere in mourning. I have been in the thick of it for about four or five months, but have escaped injury so far except for a few knocks not worth mentioning.

Some of the trenches we captured from the Germans are right up to date, great dug-outs 30 feet deep with flights of stairs leading down to underground rooms and passages which are six and eight feet wide, with paper on the walls and carpet on the floors, good beds and in a lot of them electric lights. Evidently they had no idea of advancing or retiring. They were going to keep what they had gained and it is a wonder we ever shifted them. But we did. Some wonderful aeroplane feats have been witnessed and the Allies seem to be superior to Fritz, who generally refuse to fight and clears for home when he sights our battleplanes.<sup>210</sup>

**Woodbury Sydney J. Driver No.285**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion**

From the late Driver Sydney Woodbury of Mangrove written from somewhere in France saying,

I received your welcome letter a few days ago and was very pleased to see by your letter that you had heard from your brother and am now waiting for his address. I suppose he is over here in France somewhere by now. I shall do my best to see him. Had the great pleasure of meeting my brother Harold the other day for an hour or so; he is looking well and said he feels quite alright. Both Harold and I am just due for leave in England and hope we can get over together. There is a terrible battle raging over here at the present and think by the time it is over it will be the greatest battle ever fought.

Just got word that all leave has been cancelled for the present, but never mind, shall have to wait a bit longer, that's all. I feel ashamed of those big Mangroveites, to think that they will let boys like W. Watkins and J. White to come away and also a boy like your only brother (Signaller Vivian Gardner, who was gassed and died on April 19) and none of them offer themselves. But I feel so proud of you girls to think that you are so independent as to not dance with them. But then some people have no sense of pride or

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<sup>210</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1916, October, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

duty about them. Keep it up girls of Mangrove Creek and shame on the shirkers. We boys at the front are proud of you all, Ernie Starkey, Harold and myself.<sup>211</sup>

Mr E. J. Woodbury of "Mount Carmel," Lower Mangrove received the following letters referring to the death of his son, Driver Woodbury who was killed in action over in France saying,

France,

17<sup>th</sup> April, 1918,

Dear Mr Woodbury,

Long e'er this letter reaches you; you will have learned the sad news of your son's death, so I am writing on behalf of his many friends to offer our heartfelt condolence in your irrevocable loss. Your son, Sidbury as he was affectionately called was greatly respected by all and was above all a staunch comrade and a true soldier. We deeply and sincerely mourn his loss and will do all in our power to make his last resting place a permanent monument to his memory. I am sure you will be anxious to know how Sid met his death, so I will do what I can to describe just what happened. On the night of 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1918, Sid was returning from the trenches with his ration limber when he and his two horses were killed by shrapnel, one piece of shrapnel passed through his back and penetrated his heart. Poor Sid suffered no pain, as death was instantaneous. Directly we heard the sad news we rushed to his assistance, only to find poor Sid was past all earthly aid and had passed to the great unknown. May God have mercy on his soul and grant him eternal peace.<sup>212</sup>

Dear Mr Woodbury,

I am forwarding on to you as much of his personal property as I can find, with the exception of a pair of spurs which he was wearing and a revolver. These I intend to hand over to his brother at the first opportunity. Trusting this letter will find you consoled in your sad bereavement and sincerely hoping you will find some little

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<sup>211</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 6. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

<sup>212</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.

consolation in the fact that your son sacrificed his all for a cause that is right and just. I  
remain yours very sincerely,  
GEORGE A. BRUSTER.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Robert James Baker, *The Gosford Times*, 1918, June, 27. Printed and published by proprietor at his Registered Machine Printing Office, Mann Street, Gosford in the State Of N.S.W.