

Transcript of Leonard Leader Brereton's diary by Anne Chappel, his great-niece with additional pictures and notes. Any further publication or commercial use should be cleared with Anne Chappel of Australia.

Leonard Leader Brereton. 1895-1917 & Diary 1917 till his death in Gaza, Palestine. 1st WW

Leonard Leader Brereton was born 12 Feb 1895 in Pietermaritzburg, Natal. His father, a Civil Engineer from Cheshire, died relatively young and Leonard and his 3 younger siblings were taken back to the England for their education. His mother was a Hamilton and their family came from Fintra House, Killybegs, Co. Donegal, Ireland. Leonard went to High School at Bedford Grammar and was an outstanding student and athlete.

He won the mile trophy two years running and we have a photo of him in the winning sculling fours. I gather that he then went back to Africa for training as an engineer. He worked for the Natal Railways. We next find him fighting against the Germans in German South West Africa. The campaign ended with their capitulation in 1915. In March 1916 he travelled to England to enrol there. He spent a frustrating few months waiting to take part in the war effort. In November he received orders for Egypt arriving there late January. He died 3 months later, aged 22, and is buried in the Cairo Military Cemetery. After his death his colleagues in Natal, South Africa, named a Railway tunnel after him.

This diary was the property of LL Brereton's family, notably, Anne Chappel of Adelaide, Australia (his great niece). Now sent to the Bedfordshire Archives, UK.

Diary of Leonard Leader Brereton 1917

2nd Lt. 3/5 Bedford Regiment, 7th Middlesex Regt. Officers Mess, 11 Calverley Park Gardens, Tunbridge Wells

Civil Engineer in South Africa.

Through German SWA Campaign 21 April 1915 – 7 August 1915

Feb 19 1916 left Kaged (?) Gorge Camp, SA en route for England.

Mar 11 sailed from Cape Town for England on RMS Garka

April 5 1916, arrived Plymouth and travelled to Bedford

June 29 gazetted 2nd Lieutenant in 3/5th Bedford Regiment at Halton Camp. North Tring Buckinghamshire.

Sept 19 orders for France, while at Elstow, cancelled

Nov 4 1916, order for Egypt, cancelled.

Nov 22 1916 order for France, cancelled.

Nov 24 1916 orders for Egypt.

To join 7th Middlesex Regiment at Tunbridge Wells with the 7th Middlesex.

Dec 11 1916 <*message in Greek*>

Dec 23 1916 at Tunbridge Wells.

Monday, January 1st 1917:

The first day of the New Year. I, 2nd Lt. L.L.Brereton of the 5th Bedfordshire Regt. am at Tunbridge Wells, Kent attached to the Middlesex Regt but having no duties to perform am waiting to take a draft of Middlesex to Egypt and from there to join my own Battalion at Suez. The morning I spent once more in the High St. and at the Tudor. A life of enforced idleness is surely a punishment for greater than some people think. I sent a few appropriate remarks on woman to P. with that hope that she will learn by them.

In the evening to pictures – Even they almost fail to interest me. I must be getting in a queer state. I would give a good deal for the sun and freedom of Africa.

Tuesday, January 2nd

The whole day with nothing to do as before. I have never been able to make friends quickly but the loneliness of this town passes belief. In all the wide spaces in Natal when quite alone, I have never felt like this. For all that, I will not make friends with these chaps. We are widely separated. Some offend me by their vulgarity and appalling lack of ordinary manners. They ape the Gentleman so that it becomes ludicrous rather than amusing. The CO and Adams are real good sorts but the latter has his own attractions in the town. Guest Night.

Wed, January 3rd.

Today passed as the others before it. I actually had a companion, one Burrage, this P.'s prophecy as to the use of the *Antipon*¹. In the evening I went to the Opera House. Among other turns was a sweet little elfin girl of 15, she could not have been more. Of all commonplace things she played the concertina through she did it well. I remember hoping she would smile but she never did. And so, as Pepys would say, to bed with a mind content but a soul of loneliness.

Thurs, January 4th, 1917.

No change whatsoever in the dull routine. Holts inform me that I am 6 pounds overdrawn. I can easily understand how it has come about. I have spent over or nearly 10 pounds on these absurd journeys on which I can claim no compensation. The morning I spent in the Town and in the evening went to the Pictures. This is the first I have heard of it as the mails are all overdue. The Durham ²must be lost.



Durham Castle

Fri, January 5th.

¹ Ed: *Antiphon?* (ed. drug for losing weight?).

² **DURHAM CASTLE**, Union Castle Mailship, was built in 1904 by Fairfield Ship Building & Engineering Co. at Glasgow, with a service speed of 14 knots. Sister of the Dover Castle she was initially deployed as an Intermediate steamship but was transferred to the Cape - Mombasa run in 1910. During the First World War she remained on commercial service but often acted as a troopship on the northbound passage.. In 1931 she was deployed on the East Africa via the Suez Canal service and in 1939 was put up for disposal after being replaced by the Pretoria Castle and was acquired by the Admiralty for war service. On 26th January 1940, while being towed to Scapa Flow for use as a base accommodation ship, she was mined off Cromarty. The German U-boat U-57 claimed her as her victim and as the Durham Castle was clear of the British mine fields the claim is probably correct. (Photo: UCPSC 16/139)

Tunbridge Wells and the same dull daily round. I am getting very hard up for something to do. Stokes tells me that my claim for the 10% reduction in my fare (Gaika³) will not be allowable having already received the Civil Servant Reduction. Its rotten luck as I was counting on it very much. Things being in their present state.



Union Castle Line – steamship, Gaika.

Sat, January 6th.

Tunbridge Wells yet again. This eternal solitude and loneliness is the limit. However like the Parrot, I think the more. I have bought Compton Mackenzie's "*Sinister Street*". It describes the forming of a boy's character from babyhood upward very well. I think I must perforce make some girlfriend in the town although Tunbridge Wells seems a home for the aged and inform only. The Opera House again to-night to relive the monotony. "*Courage Camarade le diable est mort*".

Sun, January 7.

Time hung very heavily today. Morning Johnstone and I went for a long walk. Afternoon it rained so stayed in Mess and read. I found myself longing for a friend to whom I could talk intimately. I have never yet unburdened myself to a soul and I would give a good deal for a friend with whom I have everything in common. I would prefer a friend of the other sex: one, whose mind is fashioned after my own apology for one.

Mon, January 8.

The daily round without the accompanying task. Was in the town in the morning and evening. Rumanian seems just about done in now, Braila has gone. That means that war lasting another two years at least and being in khaki if alive, for about another tour.

I am curious to know what I'll do afterwards; I shall write to Mr Mason and find out what chances there'll be in East Africa. I'm afraid its going to be a wanderer's life for me if I'm not careful. I should like a civil post somewhere in the new places.

Tues, January 9, 1917

Today I went down town as usual and at about 12, I met the Adjutant who told me that the Draft is to go tomorrow at 9.30pm. So at last I shift from this place and glad I am to go. At 3.30 I went with CO and inspected the Draft.

19 men, 1 sergeant and 1 Sergeant Major – Sergeant Major White of C Coy. The presence of the last named will make things a thousand times easier. In orders Parade at 7.30 pm in Great Hall. 120 rounds to each man. 6 days pay in advance and ammt due to each man.

Wed, January 10

³ **GAIKA** steamship was built in 1897 by Harland & Wolff at Belfast with a tonnage of 6287grt, and a service speed of 12.5 knots. She remained defensively armed on the Africa service but under Government control, her accommodation being used mainly by Civil Servants. She returned to the Intermediate service in 1919 where she remained until 1926 when she was laid up at Netley in Southampton Water before being broken up by Thos. W. Ward in 1928.

Spent morning in Tunbridge Wells. Paraded at Great Hall 7.30pm. For a wonder most of the men were sober but Sergt. Rushbrooke was very happy. Marched men down to LB & SCR at 8.15 and train left for Paddington at 8.55. After a noisy departure we arrived at Victoria 10.30 and went by Tube to Paddington. Here we obtained tea and refreshments which all were needing fairly badly. At midnight our train went off for Devonport. It was a miserable night and I hardly slept a wink. From other officers were in with me of the Royal West Surreys and two others (Northampton?) whom I forgot. And so sleeping in train: (Capt. Brackett, Lt Thomas, Lt Partridge, and Lt Williams.

Thur, January 11.

We reached Exeter at 4am and managed to get hot tea. My boys are behaving very well and seem a decent crowd, they are all young. Eventually very tired and unshaven and dirty we made Plymouth at 7oclock and got on board the Ceramic⁴, a White Star Liner, Australian service I should think. By midday 2000 troops were on board all ostensibly for Egypt, at 1.30 we were towed out in to the Sound and are now at anchor 5pm. The ship's adjutant has taken ten of my men for Orderly Room Guard, ten from twenty is absurd. Four in my cabin inoculated for Cholera.



Ceramic – white star liner.

Fri, January 12.

Sailed at 8am during breakfast. T.B. 60 as our escort and another transport with escort behind. There are over 2000 men on board and they are horribly cramped down below. Towards midday the weather became cold and choppy, all my men were sick and the conditions between decks were disgusting. For myself, beyond a headache, I was quite alright. My stable companions are 2nd Lts. Boddington, Thomas and Vyvian. Thomas is a South African. The presence of TBD 60 is very comforting but I hear she will leave us after a time. We have one gun on board and that right astern. I went to be feeling very fed up and unwashed. The accommodation is bad.

Sat, January 13.

Today dawned much calmer but this boat rolls badly having no cargo. TBD 60 left us at 10am so that comfort has gone. Parade at 10.30 until 12; simply standing about the deck, no boat station has been allotted to us. I have seldom seen worse management than on this boat. I hear that the Adjutant has never been on a boat before in his life, and so with many of the others. If we are attacked I tremble to think of the confusion that will follow.

A glorious evening but sea still rather choppy. Should reach Gibraltar about Monday. We have taken a large detour to the west.

4 Ceramic – white star liner. 18,481 tons gross.. Bridge Deck 371 feet long. She had one funnel, 4 masts, 3 decks and 2 partial decks. 4 tiers of beams. Was fitted with electric light, refrigerating machinery, submarine signaling device and wireless. She had triple screws and triple expansion engines with 8 cylinders. She had one low pressure steam turbine. She had a speed of 15 knots. Accommodation for 600-3rd class passengers. She was launched for the White Star Line's Australian service on 11th Dec. 1912. Her maiden voyage 24th Jul. 1913 when she left Liverpool for Capetown, Albany, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Taken over in 1914 as a troop transport and carried the Australian Expeditionary Force. She had a couple of encounters with U-boats but survived the war. In 1936 she was rebuilt to 18,713 tons, modernized and given a speed of 16 knots. Again taken over for trooping in 1940, she left Liverpool on 23rd Nov. 1942 with 378 passengers and 278 crew and passengers. Torpedoed by the German submarine U.515 off the Azores, one survivor was taken prisoner for interrogation purposes and all the rest were lost.

Sun, January 14.

A miserable uninteresting day. In the morning the usual parade at 10.30 and at about 12 a submarine alarm. In the afternoon, I was in the saloon censoring letters when a terrify row from our 6" gun. Rushed on deck with wind up badly; alarm went and we went to our stations, only a little gun practice and boat drill. Judging from the confusion it will be a bad day for us if a torpedo does come. I sleep well in my cabin but we are too crowded and the air is foul in the morning. I always have a bad headache on waking up. Very sunny all day.

Mon, January 15.

Another very fine day and perceptibly warmer. Blue sky, sea and a blazing warm sun, what can equal that. Censored men's letters and wrote to Mother and P.. Two sub alarms in the morning, the confusion is giving way gradually to some kind of order but God help us if a torpedo does come. 3000 men and 78 officers and about 300 of the crew helps disorder. We should reach Gibraltar tonight and hear that we will get an escort from there on.

Tues, January 16,

Sighted land early in morning, north coast of Africa and arrived at Gibraltar at 11am. Rather cold and raining. Gibraltar is not the imposing sight I expected. It is not like a Table Mountain. The harbour was full of ships and others were continually arriving and departing. Later the weather cleared and we were able to gain a good view. We lay in the Bay all afternoon and left late at night. As an Empire post, Gibraltar is a magnificent example and give one the impression of strength bluing hid, there is no rugged magnificence.

Wed, January 17.**Catalonia**

Came on deck this morning to see a fine view of the Spanish coast, we are within a mile of the shore, rugged snow capped mountains in the background and steep hills and cliffs at the waters edge. Dotted along the coast are white square houses with flat and coloured roofs. Little hamlets here and there connected always by magnificent roads, some betraying Engineering triumphs in bridging and grading. Vines cover the lower slopes of the hills but away from the house the country is desolate and without vegetation. We followed the coast thus until nightfall.

Thurs, January 18.

This morning we were off the N coast of Africa about five miles out, the country seems well wooded cultivated and populous. In the distance are huge snow topped mountains while the sea coast is rocky and formed of undulating hills. Houses, village, towns everywhere and the presence of good European civilisation. The houses are white faced with red roofs and look very pretty and neat. Passed Algiers at 10am. A very large modern town with big houses after American style, the scenery very beautiful along here and reminiscent of South African Coast with krantzies etc. In sight of coast all day.

Fri, January 19.

Still off the coast of Africa but now about 6 miles out. The country is bleaker less hilly and sparsely inhabited. We passed Tunis Bay about midday and then but for a few small islands passed out of sight of land. In the afternoon we overtook two French transports escorted by a petrol patrol launch. We should be at Malta early tomorrow morning. I was O.O today with very few duties to perform. We are now in the worst submarine danger spot. I hear we will stay at Alexandria for several days perhaps. I hope so as I want to see something of Egypt. A dull day, cloudy with intermittent rain.

Sat, January 20.

Outside Malta early this morning. We had to wait until the channel was swept of mines and consequently did not reach our moorings till midday. We were kept on the boat all day for some unknown reason. Malta is a small island and Valetta the main port a large and very interesting town the houses are built one on top of the other in tiers. Numbers of large and exceedingly old forts surround the entrances to the

harbour. The houses are square with roof balconies and one built of a white yellow stone; the whole is very picturesque. The harbour consists of a number of deep inlets able to hold a great deal of shipping. We are at Somerset Wharf the naval dockyard and ...

Sun, January 21.

Malta.

I went ashore at 11.30 in one of the quant gondola boats and had a fairly good time. Valetta is a surprisingly large town and very picturesque. The streets are narrow but clean, the houses large and well built. The people are olive complexioned and not bad looking, some of the women are pretty. Some of the buildings are very pretty and of historical interest stretching as far back as the Egyptians in 2000 BC. Roman, Moorish and Norman buildings figure largely. We took the place in 1800. Went to the Westminster Hotel for meals. To the Opera at night and saw Madame Butterfly and was disappointed. Back by 12pm.

Mon, January 22.

Malta.

Went ashore at 12pm and had lunch at Westminster. In afternoon went to English tea rooms where it was a real treat to hear crisp English spoken by English girls. Afterward by cab (or Gharri) to Hypogeum's⁵ or Catacombs of the pre Phoenicians period and dated at 3000BC. They consist of an underground temple and Holy of Holies granaries tomb and a well. They are hewn out of solid rock (sandstone) by flint implements, the marks of which can be seen on the walls. The ceilings are painted in two of the chambers and the paint is still fresh, dinner at the Westminster and back to Ceramic at 10pm.

Tues, January 23.

Malta.

On board all morning reading OC. Went ashore at 5pm. Met Williams & O.C.N.N.G. and to Marichs and there heard interesting news of Salonica. These Maltese speak a language all their own sounding rather like Italian but derived for the most part from Arabic. Nevertheless one and all speak English and it is really a wonder that the others have not fallen into disuse. Strolled up and down Strada Reale (Kings Way) until 9pm when I went aboard once more.

Wed, January 24.

Malta.

Went ashore at 11.30 saw museum, very interesting – full of Egyptian relics. Megalithic relics also very abundant. They possess remains of every period including Roman, Greek, Norman, Saracen, Phoenician, Carthaginians and Templar. I spent a very interesting morning. Back at 2.30 and at 3pm tugs arrived and commenced to take us off so we are going at last. Leaving at 3.20. Cashed cheque for 5 pounds at Anglo Egyptian Bank. Clear of harbour at 10 minutes to 4. T.B.D's 69 and ? are our escort. The sea a bit choppy and very stuffy down below owing to closed ports. And now for Egypt. Sent Post cards to P. and Mother.

Thur, January 25.

A beautiful sunny day with sea and sky a deep blue dotted with milk white clouds, our tow escorts are still with us. Paid Beesley 2/6 for acting Batman while Brain in hospital. My partner Elder and I in the Quoit tournament have a very good chance and are in for the semi-final. At night we changed escorts for

⁵ **Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.** The Hypogeum, or underground cavity of burial chambers, is a unique monument and a splendid example of architecture in the negative. It was discovered accidentally in 1902 by a stone mason who was laying the foundations of some houses. The Hypogeum consists of halls, chambers and passages hewn out of the living rock and covering some 500m². The rock-cut chambers are of a diverse shapes and sizes and finished to different standards of workmanship. The complex is grouped in three levels – the upper level (3600-3300 BC), the middle level (3300-3000 BC), and the lower level (3150 -2500 BC). The deepest room in the lower level is 10.6 metres under road surface. The middle level consists of various chambers very smoothly finished, which give the impression of built masonry. The workmanship is all the more impressive when one considers that the chambers were meticulously carved using only flint and stone tools. Curvilinear and spiral paintings in red ochre are still visible in some areas.

a light cruiser and she succeeded in nearly getting herself run down. Our siren went and everybody rushed for lifebelts, quite exciting while it lasted.

Fri, January 26

A beautiful day but I felt so ill that it was quite spoilt, Elder and I managed to be runners up in the quoit tournament thereby winning 6 shillings each. Comes in useful these days. They say we should reach Alexandria tonight or early tomorrow morning. However, we are not out of danger yet. Slept on deck tonight and last night. The stench and air down below is too horrible.

Sat, January 27

In sight of land at 8am later it proved to be Alexandria so I have come to Egypt at last. We were in dock by 11am. Had lunch on board and marched for Egyptians Base Depot Mustapha. Got the men and self in tents by 6pm. Am sharing a tent with Elder. No news as to when we move on but it should be very shortly. Alexandria is a very large but dirty and uninteresting town. The people are mixed French, Arabs, Copts, Jews and all manner of diverse races. The poor are a pest and the buildings unpretentious.

Sun, January 28

Church Parade at 9.15am. C.O.'s inspection and parade at 11.15 until 1pm. We have to obtain a number of deficiencies oc(?) for the men(?). In afternoon went into Alexandria with Elder. Not knowing the place we were rather lost but walked around and saw the town. Beyond a few fairly fine buildings it can boast of nothing. The people are disgusting in their mixture of East and West. Saw some fine Egyptians but the majority do not appear at all well to the Western eye. I have heard that Alex was this kind of town.

Mon, January 29

Heard today that I am to be sent off to my unit on Wednesday. Bother as I had hoped for a week in this place. Alexandria improves greatly on acquaintance though there is still a lot to be desired. Stayed at Mustapha all morning and went into town early with Elder, Cree, Russel and Lines. Went to Union Club Ordnance and divers shops in town. Bought Egyptian curios, Crux Ansata⁶. Afterwards to French cinema. Hear that we leave from Sidi Gaber⁷ and that the unit is at Suez.

Tues, January 30

Into town in morning with Robson (mdx⁸) and wired for extension of leave. Got my kit all ready, as much as I have, by 4pm when I went to town with Elder. Spent a lot of time in Bazaars and divers interesting shops. There is a lot to be seen if one looks for it. I still regret that I have not been to the Museum so will try tomorrow. Boddington and Mackay are going with me. I wish and hope my leave will come in time as I want to see more of Alex, besides my kit is not complete. Wrote to Mother, P., R., B., JA.

Wed, January 31

The Adjutant brought me before the C.O. for sending that wire without consulting him. I was ticked off badly although I sent the damn thing without knowing it had to go through those channels. At all events the 3rd echelon have given me three days in which to obtain my kit and I have practically everything by this evening. It is a rotten shame as I would have liked to have gone off with the others. Went into town in afternoon and managed to rake in most of my belongings. To "Church Mission" meeting in evening.

Thur, February 1.

As my kit is ready today I informed the Adjutant and he tells me I may be off tomorrow. Well I hope so as after my row, an unusual thing to happen to me; I have been very wild and anxious to get my own back which spoils blissful peace. Afternoon I helped shift my men into new tents; from the way the Adj. issued

⁶ **CRUX ANSATA**, The ankh was the Egyptian hieroglyphic character that stood for the word which means life. Egyptian gods may carry it by the loop, or bear one in each hand crossed over their breast. Latinists interpreted the symbol as a crux ansata, "cross with a handle".

⁷ **SIDI GABER** - Train station in Alexandria

⁸ **Steve Fuller note:** Robson: [was an Officer in the Middlesex unit he had been attached to.](#)

orders to the officers attached to me I conclude I am no longer I/C of my draft. They are a decent lot of fellows and I am sorry to say goodbye. In evening to Alex with Robson and had a very good time. To skating rink and home later. Here's to my departure tomorrow and the old life of sand.

Fri, February 2.

Saw the Adjutant this morning and he says as I am ready I may go tonight, apparently to el Kantara⁹. I am to take up 56 men who I believe are details; that is rotten luck it is always an unenviable job. To town in morning and bought a few necessaries, I believe I have everything I now want. Its rotten leaving civilisation again as I know exactly what I am going to and I don't fancy it, particularly the sand. I parade at 8pm and off at 9pm. Met Guise wearing GSWA ribbon. Should arrive Kantara 6am.

Sat, February 3.

Awoke to see Suez Canal on our right. We arrived at Kantara at 8am. A large collection of tents a few houses and the inevitable Church Army huts. I marched my men to Detail camp, reported to Administrative Commandant and got orders to join my unit at once. Of course, this is sandy desert with a little scrub and palm trees at the oases. Got ESR train at 12.50am and shared my carriage with a lot of Australians. Reached Romani at 4pm and found Battalion. Met Yarde, James Ferguson, New, Keith, Waterton, smith (W.E. and R.L.) Mander and Lt. Col Brighton. The C.O. seems alright. Bivouacked for night.

Sun, February 4.

Romani

Woke with my things damp with dew. Brekker at 7.30am and Church Parade at 9.45am the rest of the day I spent fixing up a dugout and getting comfortable generally. The desert is very sandy but with undulating hills. There are wire netting roads for marching but the sand makes very heavy going. The Battalion is 850 strong and seems a fairly hardy crowd. Hucklesby turned up today. 30lbs of our kit is to go by camel (valise) and the remainder goes to Detail Base Camp. The officers seem a cheery crowd but this is not roughing it by any means and is a picnic to GSWA. Cold at night and in morning.

Mon, February 5.

Romani

Battalion with exception of 25% went over to sea (4 miles) to bathe. I stayed behind with Mander, Keith and some other officers, but we are to go on tomorrow. I am in C Company under James. J. T. Yarde is Adjutant. It is quite like coming home to meet all these fellows again. Hucklesby, Maner, Keith, Jolowizo and I were left in camp and had nothing to do all day. This military railway is very well laid and graded for this desert and was laid by the Royal Engineers. It is a 4'8" gauge and ESR Rolling Stock, Battalion returned at 4.30. Well its good to be back at the old life although this is luxury in comparison.

Tues, February 6.

Romani

Today those of us who stayed behind yesterday marched 5 miles to Mohamadiel and had glorious bathe. The beach as all sandy without rocks but the surf too calm to be really enjoyable. We spent the best part of the day there happy as sandboys and marched off back at 3.30. the march in the sand was rather trying. We found tents erected for us when we got back. I am in with Ferguson and Hucklesby; we are very comfortable and things going well. Hear that things at El Arish are very quiet. The country is more fertile and we are likely to be comfortable. Got a mail today. P. engaged to Vic Quarry.

Wed, February 7.

Romani

⁹ El Kantara - Qantarah esh Sharqiya town, NE Egypt, on the east bank of the Suez Canal. It is on the ancient military road between Egypt and Syria. Qantarah esh Sharqiya is the terminus of a railroad to Palestine constructed during World War I, when the British Expeditionary Force in Egypt was based there. The town was formerly known as El Kantara or Al Qantarah.

Early morning parade at 6.30. We are moved out of tents and back into bivouacks so I am again with Beckett. This ink is changing colour for some reason, probably to do with the heat. I don't know what to think about the Bedford news. It is rather like the end of everything as far as some things are concerned. It seemed to me to be likely but hardly possible. At all events, I am back to the old life with lots to take up ones time. I have a presentiment it will not last but who knows – wrote to Mother, Jean P., Slater and K Prendergast. Will keep to the old saying of when I come back as it has been between us.

Thur, February 8.

Romani

Early Parade at 6.30. Marched out at 10am with Coy, and practiced Aeroplane alarm while on the march. A very useful move and effective. In afternoon wrote to P. and B. and received letters from P. and L.C. that is a curious person and hardly worth answering. Hear we are moving on tomorrow, but only an advance of about 6 miles. The advance seems to be taken slowly although we have a long way to go to El Arish. I hope I'm going see something in this country, I want lots to do. What on earth is going to happen to me after this war?

Fri, February 9.

11km March Katia

After breakfast we started striking camp and were all ready by 10am. Hear we are to move off at 2pm and have only a 6 ½ mile journey to make. My valise goes by camel but my pack is a godless weight, another casualty by the wayside perhaps. XXXXXXX (Greek). A brass band playing down near Romani Station sounds very well. Battalion moved off at 14.08: my pack was the devil of a weight and for the first hour I suffered somewhat but afterwards save for shoulder worry was OK. We marched 9 kilos and in shirt sleeves owing to heat. Bivouacked for night by Rly at 50 km (katice) We are to move off at 8.25.

Sat, February 10.

KIRBAH 12.5 km March

Left last camp at 8.28 ad after a very stiff march of 12.5 kms over wire road arrived at Kirbah at 12.00. I myself was dead beat and all the men were tired. I gave my mouth organ to Gains and he played us tunes right up to the finish; I could hardly talk yet he kept going like nothing on earth. From beginning to end the men kept up their jokes and songs (unprintable for the most part). And all the while grouching like the good chaps they are. We bivouacked at Kirbah and Woodman managed to get me some chocolate and tin pineapple at the EEF Canteen. My pack is a dead weight but I think I will stick it. Paid Woodman, my batman, 12.5 piasties.

Sun, February 11.

El Abd 10 kms

Rained like hell last night and many of the chaps were soaked through. My sleeping bag kept the wet out but I managed to empty a pool in which had gathered outside. It seems out of place to have heavy rain in the midst of the desert. The remarks of some of the men at 1400 were rather humourous. At 0810 we set out again on a 10lm march to El Abd. The going was easier and the men in better spirits owing to the rain I suppose. El Abd just the usual desert station with EEF Canteen where I obtained chocolate and pineapple. Took a photo of C. Company Bivouack. The country is more covered with bushes and palm trees more frequent. Hear the wire road ends here!

Mon, February 12.

Salmanah 10kms

My 22nd birthday. Last night it rained heavily again but my good old kit valise kept me dry. A very uneventful birthday. The wire road still runs along and thank heaven and the Royal Engineers for it. Met walker of B.S (Shooting 8) (Bedford school?). we bivvied on a slight hill and managed to get a bath in my rubber portable and felt much refreshed for it. Had a tiff with Capt. Cronin the fault lying with him and the cause throwing weight about re: position of bivouacks. Beyond this 1 am getting on well with the chaps here, my platoon (no 9.) are a decent enough lot, altogether things are going to the good.

Tues, February 13.**Tilut 13.5kms.**

Rained a little last night but again kept dry. We had a colossal march today of eleven miles; a great part of it was alongside a large salt pan which seemed to stretch to the sea. I find later that it is a large inland lake. We had no wire road today and whenever we left the lake bed the going was heavy. We reached our bivouack by 12.30 and it became very hot. I am orderly officer today but the duties are not very strenuous. Bushes are studded everywhere and there are mountains to the South. Feeling fit as a fiddle and enjoying the marching after a fashion. Flies are becoming troublesome. Killed a snake.

Wed, February 14.**Bir El. Mazar.**

Had a dry night for a change. Tilut is the ideal camping spot. Moved on 10 miles to Bir El Mazar. The going was fairly easy but all were done up as the pace was heavy. Arrived at Bir El Mazar at 11.30 and it had turned very hot. We are camped on the bare desert about 1 mile from the station; hear we may remain here some time, sniping is said to take place and Bde. has provided 2 coys for outpost. Obtained chocolate and fruit at Canteen. Received letter from R.. We are to receive tents but sleeping in open tonight. I suppose we are destined to hold a line of blockhouses; we cant push with the men we have; and so to sleep.

Thurs, February 15.**Bir El Mazar**

Camped here and likely to be so for several days. Tomorrow night C Coy is on Camp Outpost. Just my luck. Had a mail letter from Mother and KP. Mother tells me LC2¹⁰ is abolished and poor old V. broken hearted over it. C. is surely mad to do things of this kind. How can one send one's sons to a place that is being turned up so. I never will. So here is another worry for Mother. She talks of (his) leaving at the end of this term of V. taking a post in London till he can join an O.T.C. I feel for the kid, it must be like the end all to him and Mother will feel with him. Damm C.

Fri, February 16

Inspection of kit ammunition etc, men managed to get a bath, self ditto. Tomorrow A & C Coys are to go out and hold an outpost line. Myself with ½ my platoon to hold no. 1. Picquet. From examination of map I notice that there are a great number of ruins in this part of the world. I.e.: north of Sinai Peninsula, I suppose they are Roman, Egyptian, Arab. This is an ancient trade route and must have been well guarded. We move out of camp at 1700 and I reached my position by 1800 and pitch dark. A miserable night as it rained from time to time and was very cold. V's troubles worry me.

Sat, February 17

Got back to camp early this morning very damp and tired. No parades for us thank the Lord. Today I am off the mark it is probably acclimatising. Rested and read all day. Am sharing a tent with Waterton and R.L.Smith. we do our best to make ourselves perfectly ill on sweets etc. My batman, Woodman, is an ex footman of the Duke of Bedford. He is a very worthy and intelligent chap and we get on well together. Paid him 12 pt for the week ended. We have now been given tents for all the men so I think our stay should be a long one. The sea is 10 miles away with a bad swamp in between. My ink is running dry and I can get no more.

Sun, February 18.

Church Parade for Brigade at 9.15. After lunch rode on mules with Waterton to sea to try and find the ruins of the buried town. After a jolly ride we got to the lake edge but could not locate the city. Rode back J.E.W. (Waterton) having a lot of trouble with his mule all begin very humorous to me. Wrote to V. in

¹⁰ Ed. The LC may be a reference to a Local Cadet school Victor was in, as most of the schools had their own mini unit of some kind. Victor was determined to enlist, although too young, and left school before completion.

evening. Poor kid, he is in a hell of a position and C. is an utter BF. The best he can do is to get a post and join an O.T.C.¹¹ and get a Commission from there. I wish I could help financially but I can't. However I pray and hope things go well for him. I will help all I can.

¹¹ **Ed.** OTC – Officer Training Corps, where those chosen to become Officers go for their physical and tactical training.

Mon, February 19.**Bir El Marza**

NCOs and officers went out due South with C.O. and had lecture on Outposts; all result of Brigadiers strafe over same. Apparently we were the only Battalion to do thing correctly. Afternoon I spent in camp reclining at ease in tent. I can quite understand all that is written about the fascination of the desert; there is something so grim and silently massive about it that quite stops ones breath at times. The early mornings are beautiful, cool and the sunrise glorious. Added to this is the open air life and the great mystery which surrounds this ancient highway. I am contented. Sing song with divisional band.

Tues, February 20.

Received orders to strike camp and stand-by early this morning. Later hear we are moving off tomorrow for El Arish, a three day journey. Hucklesby and H.W.E.Smith are off to Cairo on a general course so handed two rolls of U.P.K (film) to former to have developed and sent on. Also gave him a cheque for Pounds 1-10 to pay for above. The balance to be handed to me. Had a glorious bath. Our tents were down by 11am and we bivouacked for the night; we move off tomorrow at 8.22 on a 11 km march. Great arguments as to the possibility of push for Jerusalem. I think it is impossible myself. And that we are merely going to the frontiers to worry the Turk and keep him occupied.

Wed, February 21**El Mandaana**

March of 8 ½ miles kilometre 125. left Bir El Mazar at 8.22 and after a good march reached El Mandaana at 11.30. We had wire road all the way though much cut up, probably by Australians. However, the going was good though the day hot. Put up a bivvy with Fergusson as Hucklesby has left for Cairo. We are now two days march off El Arish. I hear that a picked body of 100 men are going to march to Kantara and back to prove that the journey can be made without men falling out. For my part I think that idea is damm nonsense. Woodhouse is quoted as going.

Thur, February 22**Bardawil 11 miles**

Marched off at 07.53 and after a long march reached Bardawil. Part of the journey was made on wire road and part on the bed of a dry salt pan. We are bivvied on a dune with the sea in sight and less than two miles away. Tate was bitten by a large centipede last night and has been sent to hospital at Kantara. He is pretty bad and I hear that several of other battalions are in the same way. A sand storm was blowing when we arrived which made things very uncomfortable. However it died down towards nightfall. We are in sight of the sea and hear that our camp at El Arish is going to be near it. I hope so as we will then keep cleaner. Killed a centipede which was crawling on Waterton.

Fri, February 23**El Arish¹² 13 miles.**

Had a hell of a march today and felt very tired after it. Praise be to glory we had a wire road, but the heat was tiring and the packs lead. The wire road ran parallel to the sea all the way and the breeze was very pleasant. There were several large aerodromes and Palm groves by the road side. El Arish town is 1 ½ miles from the sea and looks very uninteresting. Beyond the Mosque the buildings are only of baked mud. The inhabitants are descendents of the Philistines, are fair and good looking. Our camp is over 2 miles from the sea at Hill 16 beyond the town. Orderly officer today. Sharing a tent with R.L.Smith and Waterton.

¹² El Arish is capital of North Sinai, is 214 miles East of Cairo,

Sat, February 24
El Arish



German Taube.

Had to attend a court of Enquiry today on Fire at the administrative Commandants tent. Whole morning thereby wasted. About 0915 a Taube came over and was strafed by our Archies without doing any damage. Battalion went for a bathe in the sea this morning so I had a fresh water bath this afternoon and now feel pounds lighter. Nicholas and V.G. Smythe paid the Battalion a visit at Mess. Mail in; letters from P., Mother and B.. Train Echelon arrived. El Arish a fair size. The buildings with few exceptions are square with flat roof and of baked mud. Large palm groves near the sea.

Sun, February 25
El Arish

Instead of church, Parade the Battalion was set on to clean out the inner line trenches. The result was a big moan; they are to be inspected by General Sir Archibald Murray. After lunch Mudford of the Northants turned up and we are going to try and get up a rugger match v. a Scotch regiment that is here. In the evening wrote letters to HT, Mother, P., B., KP and R. The view from the top of the sand dunes towards El Arish and the sea is very fine; there is a large Palm Grove in the Waddy and parts of the ground are under cultivation. The sun is getting hotter daily so we should be in helmets soon.

Mon, February 26
El Arish

The early part of the morning the Battalion was cleaning up inner line of trenches but later went bathing etc. went with Armstrong in the afternoon to the town well of El Arish. Photographed panorama of town also a very sweet little Philistine girl who was drawing water. She was quite fair, pretty and very shy. Was surrounded by a number of brats shrieking for Baksheesh. These people are quite interesting and I would like to get inside the town and see them at close quarters. Tate and Douglas returned from hospital.

Tues, February 27.
El Arish

This morning attended the Lewis Gun class under Bass and found I knew more about the weapon than my instructor. An order form B.H.Q. came round and we all went to gas lecture there. Later went with Pendered to Northants Mess and had some excellent beer. Arranged with Mudford for rugger match V H.L.I tomorrow afternoon. Beckett, Wilkins, Fergusson, New, Nicholas and self are playing. We shall be wiped off the earth most probably, we have moved our Mess to a marquee tent just inside El Arish town; it is better than messing in the open but rather far from our lines.

Wed, February 28.
El Arish

Had to attend Court of Inquiry again, held this time in Northants lines. In the afternoon we played our Rucker Match v 157th Brigade. We had a jolly good game but got beaten 23-3 after a good tussle. We will try a return match and also one v Northants Regt. The C.O. proposes an officers match v Northants in which he himself will play. A Taube was over again this morning and got heavily shelled and went back. From what I can gather things point to a move forward against the Turk very shortly but I don't suppose it will be on a large scale.

Thurs, March 1

El Arish

With Lewis Gun class in morning until 11.30 when we had a scrum practice in which the C.O. took part. He is a good sportsman, knows the game and has evidently been a good player. Major Daniel turned out, he is an awfully nice fellow. Felt so still after yesterdays match that I slept all afternoon, I hate to change a fixed opinion but matters lately have been veering round and many things point to a big advance towards Jerusalem. Until we start I shall keep on to the old idea. In any case we are to hold lines of communication and I believe but hope to blaze not.

Fri, March 2

El Arish

Orderly officer. Manned trenches in morning at No 7. Post. A bad sandstorm started and we came back to camp to find everything smothered and a number of tents down. The Wadi El Arish was completely hidden in the sand clouds. All our light possessions were blown away and our beds etc in a frightful mess, in the afternoon we all attended another gas lecture at Bde. H.Q. with the usual dull rigmarole. Turned out Horse picquets at 0200 and 0400, a rotten job. We are getting a fairly easy time here but next week promises to be more strenuous. Cash Mustapha Allowance cheque to Cronin. Pounds 1-16-9. Mess Bill 8-1-10.

Sat, March 3

El Arish

News of the advance on the Ancre and in Mesopotamia. From fairly reliable rumours I hear that our advanced posts are now beyond Rafa and the railway only five miles away. The Desert column is to make the advance while the 54th Div (Eastern Force) is to follow on behind and consolidate. Just our luck but we may get a show in before everything is over. The 42nd Division has gone to France; I wonder if they are really going to land at Gaza. Battalion parade in morning and Lewis Gun instructions afterwards. Next week we are to start digging and commence Route marches so things are not going to be easy.

Sun, March 4

El Arish

Church Parade. In afternoon inspection by A.I.A. of bad rifles. In the afternoon having noticed curious mounds on Hill 16, I began to dig at likely spots and uncovered remains of buildings of cut stone. I found mortar, tiles, glass, and pottery. The walls were well made and cemented with mortar or clay. The whole covered a considerable area and are without doubt foundations of a fort probably ancient Egyptian from their style. The place is very near the ancient frontier so these are evidently one of a chain of forts. The remains of a round tower are very interesting.

Mon, March 5

El Arish

Went for a Route march with A and B Coys towards Rafah and along the wire road. I hear on good report that the country at and beyond Rafah is hard and that the desert gives place to rolling downs covered sparsely with grass trees and flowers. May we soon get there; the sight of even a green palm tree is refreshing. Strong rumours are floating that we move forward very shortly and that Rafah will soon be ours in real earnest. The natives here seem to regard us very favourable and to have no fear of us; the women are even rather careless about their veils. Letter from E. in Stanhope Gardens.

Tues, March 6**El Arish**

Morning with Lewis Gun class. Hear that the Turks have abandoned their fortified positions at Sheloufa. We are moving on the 8th so it looks like confirmation. After all the position had its right flank exposed and was therefore untenable. Our troops should occupy Rafah in the course of a day or so. The questions is will the Turk hold any position or keep on falling back? Perhaps the line outside Beersheba will be his main position. This is great talk of our using gas in the near future. The Railway is now just outside Rafah. We (54th) are moving out before the 52nd Division and perhaps we will now be Desert Column.

Wed, March 7**El Arish**

Lewis Gun in morn. I reported at 1.30 to R.T.O. and arranged Train Echelon dumps for 162nd Bde; I was kept working from 13.30 to 18.30 and was pretty fed up with it. Had a cold bath after Mess much to the surprise and amusement of the others. Tomorrow we move on to El Burge, a journey of a bout 10 miles. I believe too that we will stay there or at the next half for some time. No news as to whether Rafah is taken or Sheloufa finally abandoned. We move tomorrow at 0754 and brekker for some reason is at 0615. Sleeping in open again.

Thurs, March 8**El Burge**

Left El Arish early this morning and after a march of a bout 10 miles reached this place. We are to stay here several days. As we came in a Turk aeroplane passed over and was shelled by El Arish Archies without result. A canteen here but nothing very much to get. My photos from Cairo arrived and are all very good only one failing. Very hot again and half the Batt. Have helmets; C Coy of course are without so I still carry mine on my back. This marching has not knocked me up in the slightest.

Fri, March 9**El Burge**

Dug ourselves in and made bomb proof shelters, very curious to see men's heads bobbing up all over the earth. In the morning went down to the sea with my platoon and had a glorious bathe. The sea bottom is level and shallow far out and there is a little surf. Sturguell (?) and the Padre turned up and brought divers rumours. The Turks seem to be falling back at our advance and I should not be surprised if we reach Beersheba without much trouble. We will reach fairly fertile country a few miles further on, already it is changing.

Sat, March 10**El Burge. Orderly Officer**

Lewis Gun in morning. Last night a terrific sandstorm which covered me inches deep in sand. Made my dug-out sand-tight in morning and very fortunately as storm came on worse at 12am. Kept snug and very warm but had to keep shifting sand from roof to prevent a collapse. Had to take weaklings for Route March in midst of storm. My dug-out is 6' 4" and 2' deep. Roofed over with my waterproof and spare blanket. Hear that Baghdad is on the point of falling and that the Russians have made a move in the Caucasus.

Sun, March 11**El Burge**

Terrible sandstorm all day and all night. My dugout is the only one left standing in the Battalion. The sand blew along in terrific clouds, the entrance to my dugout was filled in, I had to continually clear sand from the roof but for all that it streamed in at the doorway. All parades were cancelled and we spent our time keeping our homes intact. My entrance was screened with pyjamas, shirts, flynets and handkerchiefs which kept the sand out more or less. Received a mail from Mother, R. and KP. Wrote to Mother and KP. Managed to keep going in spite of all thought the food was really awful.

Mon, March 12**EI Burge**

Sandstorm kept on all day and made things perfectly miserable. I abandoned my dugout as the storm seems likely to continue and it seems like trumpeting Providence to stay in. I now have a fairly good bivouack on top which is comfortable and which with luck may last out; the sand comes in but I have my head to the wind with strong wind breakers to protect it so hope for the best. Some say that these storms continue off and on for two months. A rumour is going round that Rafah and Beersheba have been taken but I doubt the latter. Baghdad is now in our hands so we may not be in Egypt long. The wind blowing a perfect gale and the sand -----!

Tues, March 13**EI Burge**

The wind died down last night and today was blissfully quiet in comparison. Lewis Gun class in morning. Hear that the Railway has reached Rafah and that traffic will be running there in a day or so. It is reported that we move on to Sheik Zuweiyde on Thursday. Woodcock, James servant came back from Romani today bringing with him my drill tunic and shorts from my Base Kit. Yesterday the C.O. went on to Rafah and beyond to go over the country. Tomorrow Lewis Gun scheme which I have to attend. Hope I am not made L.G. Officer of Coy or Battalion. Dream of E. last night.

Wed, March 14**EI Burge**

In the morning, out with Lewis Gun on stint. In aft. With Wodehouse and C Coy. To sea to bathe. The sea is choppy with a slight surf after the wind. A very lively night with Hobbs as merry as any. Thank the Lord that the wind has gone. Hear on good or accurate report that Rafah and that Beersheba is still in Turkish hands though only thinly held. It is rumoured that the 42nd Div. has landed at Jaffa though I find it hard to believe myself. As I'm certain they have gone to France. The Turk seems in a bad way and does not seem to be going to give us much trouble.

Thur, March 15**EI Burge**

L. G. Class. Another sandstorm this morning. As my bivouack was so uncomfortable I abandoned it and built another dug-out. It partially collapsed in the building but in the end Woodman and I managed to rig up quite a serviceable abode. Baghdad occupied by British. I must arrange with Holts to send M. a monthly cheque of pounds 1-10 to relieve the pressure at home. I hope they do not decide to leave Bedford, London does not seem like home. V. has left school and I am terribly sorry that he has done so. He is only 17 and should stay on till at least 19. it will be a big handicap to him through life.

Fri, March 16**EI Burge**

L.G. Field firing near the sea. Saw a very interesting exhibition of firing at two Tabues that came over which was not attended with any success unfortunately. My dugout is small but comfortable and allows me to sit up and shave in the morning which is the great thing. The heads popping out of the dugouts early in the morning is an amusing sight. The C.O. came back from his little tour up in front today and brought some interesting news. The Railway is being constructed by 3 Coys R.E. which are made up of recruits from the LNWR and GWR. So they know their job. At any rate the results are very good. Wrote to Mother, R. and PA.

Sat, March 17**EI Burge**

Lewis Gun Field firing near the sea. Had a bathe afterwards quite the hottest day we've had yet. Upon examining some large slab rocks near the sea, I came to the conclusion that they were nothing else but the remains of some old buildings. Pieces of pottery were embedded in the actual rocks which showed

traces of cutting for buildings. I removed a large slab and underneath it I dug out a large piece of burnt white clay. Further up the beach were some similar slabs which were evidently building stones. The type of stone here was identical with the remains of stone at El Arish. Good mortar was clinging to the larger slabs up the beach. The slabs are conglomerations of sand, seashell, mortar and pieces of pottery and stone.

Sun, March 18.

El Burge

Morning with Lewis Gun Company.

At field firing near sea. Very hot but had a glorious bath before returning to camp. This afternoon, HWE Smith and Hucklesby returned from the course at Zertoum Cairo. They appear to have had a very good time but to have spent a terrific amount of money. I imagine that Waterton and I will be the next pair to go and if so, I must clutch the cash like any Scotchman. Although I am holding tight, I must be overdrawn about 10 pounds even now if not more. Tomorrow we move out on an Outpost scheme. We take up our position in the morning and are to sleep out. I seem to have clicked by being Picquet Commander(?).

Mon, March 19.

El Burge

Moved out to our Outpost position at 0700. I was in command No 5 Picquet. In the afternoon the Brigadier came round and managed to trip me up over several matters. Later it came round that we have advanced 10 miles deep on a 45 mile front in France; our cavalry is in close touch with their rear guard and about 121 villages have been taken. Peronne and Bapaurne have fallen. The men were greatly excited and fondly imagined the war would soon be over, even greater excitement when we heard that "operations were suspended" but that merely means we are moving on tomorrow to Sheikh Zuweyde. Later: hear we move on at 1700.

Tues, March 20.

El Burge.

Marched in early at 0600. Macnoon(?) camel chased Price while loading and nearly got him. We move on to Sheikh Zuweyde at 1700. C.O. lectured us on yesterday's operations and on the whole seemed fairly satisfied. Very hot.

Marched off at 1700 and kept on till 2000. Bivvied for the night and next morning woke to find ourselves in quite a good position. Official news states that the advance in France still continues. Our cavalry are being extensively used and are in constant touch with the enemy's rearguard.

Wed, March 21

Sheikh Zuweyde.

Our camp is on the slopes of a cultivated hill and beneath us is a large shallow salt lake of several hundred acres. In the lake bed, plain to be seen (is) one of the ruins of some old village. In many cases these are above water but the foundations of countless others can be seen. Although a few buildings are of stone, the majority are of mud brick and the whole must be comparatively recent, at any rate within the last 100 years. There are many palm groves and barley fields but not half so much vegetation as I expected to see. The water in the lake is salt and smells badly. We move on tomorrow night I hear.

Thur, March 22

Sheikh Zuweyde.

Bathing parade in morning. Hostile aircraft over, there was some good shooting by our Archies but nothing came of it. In the afternoon Wilkin and I waded out to the so called buried town and after investigating found it to be no more than a large system of irrigated gardens. From all accounts we move on to Rafah tomorrow evening. There seems to be a likelihood of our operating on the right flank towards Beersheba. I had rather hoped we would keep to the sea that is on the left flank. It will be very uncomfortable advancing right away from supplies etc on the right.

Fri, March 23
Sheikh Zuweryde.

Lewis Gun Class by lake side. After lunch heard from C.O. that there had been a check to our forces somewhere beyond Rafah. In consequence of this we are moving on either tonight or early tomorrow morning and may possibly be in touch with the Turk in a day or so. The march to Rafah will be very heavy and it is possible we will move on immediately afterwards. Very good shooting at two Taubes today; they were driven out to sea. Barnes went down to El Arish and promised to get me candles. I am without. Sgt. Brown has left my camera in Trn Echelon (?). Took photos of lake with J.W.'s camera.

Sat, March 24
Rafah. 10 miles.

After a very slow and tedious march we arrived here at 1400 and then heard that we were to move out on Outpost at 1620; just our luck. As we entered Rafah, the country changed to flat undulating grassy plains dotted everywhere and there with huts, clumps of trees and large patches of cultivation, barley, wheat etc. the men were very cheery at the sight of the green and it really as most pleasant. It reminded my very much of the country around Dundee and the Southern Transvaal. Had miserable night and moved off from outpost at 03.30. Hear we may be wetting our bayonets in a few days.

Sun, March 25
Karin Yunis, 6 miles

Left Rafa at 0500 and arrived here at 0745. Consists of a number of fields enclosed by mud walls and aloe hedges. A number of scattered huts among trees make up the community. The surrounding country is gently undulating and grassy with clumps of trees and cultivated patches here and there. Water from wells. At 1600 we move on to In-Serat to 54th Division. After 2400 we move on to support 163 Bde which takes up a Picquet line at Sheikh Abbas, the 53rd Divn and 2nd Mtd Divn attack Gaza at dawn and I think the 1st Mtd Divn. (Australians) attack Beersheba at the same time. Tomorrow morning therefore we may be scrapping like hell and I don't think the Turk will be able to stand. They hold Gaza-Beersheba line.

Mon, March 26.
Battle of Gaza.

Moved up to In-Serat at 16.20 and arrived there at 20.30. Moved on again at 0630 to Shartar. As we moved up we heard artillery in action about 5 miles away and as we moved up the action grew bigger. Arrived Shartar 10.30 when a battle was raging 3-5 miles away which grew more and more intense as the day wore on. The 53rd Divn. are attacking Gaza and are meeting with greater opposition than was expected, as the ideas was to take Gaza today but now 1800 we are told we will stay here tonight. The Turks position was concealed and they are in greater force that was expected. A Turkish force is reported moving down from N.E. Australians 2nd Mtd Divn are reported N and N.E. of Gaza.

Tues, March 27.
Battle of Gaza.

Took up an outpost position last night close to enemy. Wilkin very nearly got cut off on Picquet but managed to save his Lewis Guns. My platoon was digging trenches when we came under fire. At 0900 large bodies of Turks approached from the NE and we fell back to straighten line. We all came under very heavy shrapnel and lyddite¹³ fire and I nearly copped it. There were several casualties. Later we moved off under heavy shell fire and took shelter in dongas. Gaza at 1700 is reported on the point of

¹³ **Lyddite** was a form of high explosive widely used during both the Boer War and First World War, most notably during the latter by the British. Named after the area in southern England in which the substance's initial trials were performed so as to maintain secrecy, Lyddite was actually composed of molten and cast picric acid. First tested in 1888 Lyddite was considered a relatively 'insensitive' explosive, which meant that it lent itself moderately well to armour piercing shells, given that the substance was less liable to detonate immediately upon impact but would instead be triggered by an impact fuse. In practice however Lyddite shells would detonate while in the process of tearing through armour.

falling and I think the Turk left will fall back on Beersheba. Several units had heavy casualties attacking Gaza. Some 20%.

Wed, March 28.

In-Serat.

Last night the whole force withdrew to In-Serat owing to want of water and provisions. We (Beds), had to abandon our ammunitions and 20 Fantassies¹⁴ and carried all our L.G. equipment by hand. Apparently we held Gaza and had badly smashed the Turk who is reported to have fallen back 10 miles. We captured 1000 prisoners. G.O.C. 53rd Divn and Commdt. of Gaza. Turkish losses were very great and ours by no means small. Reported that Gaza has been evacuated – 52nd Divn and Australians are going to make reconnaissance in force. Bivvied in same place as on 26th. Shaw & Smythe missing. Btn goes on Outpost tonight.

Thur, March 29.

In Serat

I/C No ! Picquet. Divers alarms during night. Captured 4 Bedouins at 0700. Shaw has returned, no news of Smythe. Cant make out what is going to happen but expect we'll be in next attack 10.30. Smythe turned up later and seems to have had a very exciting time. Poor Braddell has been killed. It turns out that we only used 1/5th of our artillery at Gaza and had underestimated the Turks strength. 2 Divns of Turks. Infantry and 1 Divn of Cavalry are reported due East of us near Beersheba. I think we we'll be moving up very shortly as we are landing stores from the sea.

Fri, March 30

In Serat

Took armed parties out to the wells for washing in morning and went on digging trenches. When we next move forward things should be very different and all being well we should have the Turk well in hand. My boots that I was so very proud of are giving out and showing signs of it. Hear we may be moving tonight and I imagine towards Gaza once more. If we attack this time I hope all goes well and we win things for ourselves. This at 5.45pm. I hope however that this rumour is false and that we get a good sleep tonight.

Sat, March 31.

In Serat

On fatigue all day until 1530 putting up a telephone wire. Hear that Zeebrugge and Lille have been taken and that we are driving the enemy in German territory. Also that Mons is captured together with 250,000 German prisoners. The first is correct but it the latter should be modified slightly, I think. This is a rumour that we move forward tomorrow and that the 52nd and 54th Divisions will attack so we are in for it. The railway is now very close behind us and the Tanks are with us I believe. The Turk should receive a very hot reception. Well good luck to us if we go forward tomorrow.

Sun, April 1.

In Serat

Church Parade 8.50. Padre nearly broke down though I don't believe many noticed it. In the afternoon our artillery and M. Guns opened a heavy fire on a hostile aeroplane. The shrapnel poured down on to us and with our usual luck no-one was hit. Later a draft of 150 men and 2 officers arrived. I don't know as yet to what coys they are going to. No news as yet of a move though I hear that Australians and 52nd Division have moved on a bit. I have decided to leave this diary in my sleeping bag if we go forward.

¹⁴ Fantassies - a 10-gallon tank of water, used in pairs on mules

Mon, April 2.**In Serat.**

(We have all xxxxxx¹⁵ and hear that we have plenty of xxxxxx)

Went out digging roads most of the day much to the disgust of the men. We had a beautiful view of Gaza from our working spot; it looks so close and so easy to take! This evening I heard that I am transferred to Don Company as Lewis Gun Officer. I am very sorry as C. Coy is essentially an O.B. Coy and Sergt.

Moore is a really fine fellow as are all my Platoon, I am busy persuading him to accept a Commission but I have my doubts whether he will accept. Large mail in from Mother, V. E., K., P., R.F.M.. Hear the XXX have arrived.

Tues, April 3.**In-Serat.**

Started by running over L.G. equipment of Don Coy. About 7.30 a heavy reciprocal bombardment commenced, troops are in readiness though there is little or no rifle fire. I take it to be simply an exchange of civilities. 0900.

Later the fire became very heavy and I hear we are shelling Turkish working parties etc. all ceased about 1600. at 1700 Don Coy moved out to protect the RE in Wadi George (sp?) and I held a picquet in the Wadi on the right. A Turk patrol came on us and there was a very lively 5 minutes. Out L.G. sent them packing. Got back to camp at 0200.

Wed April 4.**In-Serat.**

Spent the whole day in camp and read a good deal. It is good to get ones mind off approaching events for whatever happens its dead certain to be a pretty big thing. I rather wish it would hurry up and come off as I am getting very tired and apprehensive as time goes on. The men too are getting jumpy through their moral is excellent; in fact couldn't be better. Tomorrow, I hear, we go out to lay a cable and I hope we will not have to wander too near Gaza. Well everything is in the lap of the Gods. I am wearing the "*Crux Ansata*" for luck.

Thur, April 5**In-Serat.**

Out at hill 310 all day doing work with the R.E.. it is very difficult to pick up the threads on being transferred to another Coy. I was getting on so well with my old No 9. Platoon and am very sorry to leave them. There were several Taubes over as usual and as usual our Archies could do nothing to them. I hope if anything happens to me that this diary will reach your hands, Mother, you will then see more or less what we have been through. We are not supposed to keep one so it may be stopped. Will you pass it on to P. A. as well for her to read.

Fri, April 6**In-Serat.**

Capt. Miskin returned. Church Parade at 0850 and strafe by CO afterwards for lack of knowledge in ceremonial. He is a jolly good fellow and knows how to keep things at normal. Most of us were possessed with the idea that Ceremonial is left in the Barracks, but one might as well do the same with discipline if that were so. Lt. Col. Brighton, I admire you for a jolly good soldier though you rather lack the personal touch. D Coy moved out at 5.30 to help the RE's. we got back early owing to some hitch with the working party.

Sat, April 7**In-Serat.**

Rest in camp. Hear that the bombardment will start tomorrow . well it be as well to get the thing over. Our Bde is to go on the XXXXX while XXXX. Well here's the best of luck to us and I hope that the others and

¹⁵ Notes in Greek

self will come through it all safely and with some share of the glory. I hope too that XXXXXXXX. Here's the very best to Mother, V., R. and E. and may things work out happily for them all and this time of bad fortune to finish. This at 1620 – wrote to Mother, K. and RWB.

Sun, April 8

In-Serat.

Church parade in which we had three very little known hymn tunes, the result being rather a farce. After parade we went out on digging fatigue until 1500. got back to camp and had a very satisfactory bath in about 3" of water. CF Buck turned up while we were out; he is much the same as ever. All sorts of divers rumours as to the date of the move but it cant be long delayed now. Turk cavalry patrols are getting quite active in front. Could see the Turks in their positions on the far ridges. Hear that we dropped bombs on *Ramleh* last night. That accounts for the explosions I heard.

Mon, April 9

In-Serat.

Training in camp all day with Lewis Gunners. Very restful day in which I read the "mysteries of Fu Manchu" a highly fantastic and peculiar detective novel. Anything is a good thing to read nowadays. Hear that America has come in and is sending 10,000 men as a start, to Europe; also that pro German riots have broken out in USA which were easily quelled by military. The large German population will be a problem. I think that end of the war is very much in sight and it cannot be otherwise than victory for us. I only hope it will not be long now. A rumour that we move on April 14th.

Tues, April 10

In-Serat.

In camp all day training my Lewis Gun teams etc. at 1730 we moved out as covering party to Res and had the bad luck to be out all night. Had a mail in, letters from Mother, P., P.S., B. and H.. V. is now on a farm in Norfolk and seems to be getting on quite well. Poor old chap, I only hope he does well and has a good times, also that this infernal war is over before he is old enough to join in. he must see Schreiner and get a commission if he does come in. Preferably cavalry or Artillery.

Wed, April 11

In-Serat.

Rest in camp all day. Hear that we have captured 11,000 men 235 officers 100 guns in France that that in two days. Hobbs told us this evening that we are to attack Sheikh Abbas and Mansura Ridge when attack comes off, this may be at any moment. Don and A coys make the actual assault on a difficult position which if strongly held will be a colossal task. So here I am in the front line of an assault on a large scale. I hope I acquit myself as an English gentleman and that we all come through all right. I am all ready and at peach with all I hope.

Thur, April 12

In-Serat.

In camp all day. Went with Don Coy officers to point 310 to observe the ground over which we are to advance. Saw the Turks on the skyline about 3 miles away. Good news again from France; it seems that the "Great Push" is beginning at last. I thought we were to go forward tonight but now (at 1700) there seems to be no sign, perhaps tomorrow, in any case it can't be long now. Waiting waiting was ever a rotten game and this particularly so. Interesting talk with Major Dayrell and Shaw on South Africa. The officers to stay behind in this scrap are Capt. Spurting, Lieut. Wodehouse, 2/Ltd Coate, 2/Ltd H.W.E. Smithy and Major Dayrell.

Fri, April 13

In-Serat.

In camp all day today and I had expected to be hearing the ZZZZ Crump betokening the modern battle. I carried on with Lewis Gun drill. Then wrote to Mother and J.. I had an interesting and long talk with Yarde¹⁶ on many subjects. If Christ never existed how do we account for the extraordinary fervour (often misplaced) and belief of St. Paul and other Disciples? There is no evidence for doubt that someone named Christ existed. But, was he of Divine origin or of mortal birth? There are no substantial proofs of this, on the other hand he was seen dead and afterwards in his mortal shape after death. Those that saw this were illiterate and uneducated and in a state of great mental excitement. It would be beautiful if true but O for some proof.

Sat, April 14

In-Serat.

Just about breakfast Abdul began bombarding the Railway, Dump and Camel Bde. Lines. Several shells pitched into the hospital which was fortunately more or less empty. They were 8" shells oat the least but cased but few casualties. The move is imminent now and all signs point towards its being tomorrow night, however one never knows. Mother, if you get this and I am O-U-T please write and thank 2/Lt H.W.E Smith for he is or would be instrumental in sending on my kit to you. There are several undeveloped films in my valise which I would like you to develop (2000). More good news from France.

Sun, April 15

In-Serat.

News at last. On Monday (tomorrow) we move out at midnight to take up our position and attack at dawn on Tuesday. So, it's come at last and I hope we get through and are entirely successful. I am in command the Company's Lewis Guns but I believe that all of us are working under Capt Maier who takes up the covering line. It will be a very big job if Abdul decided to hold it in strength, but I believe he will be forced to fall back owing to pressure on right and left. It is a difficult job and will need all our powers.

Mon, April 16

In-Serat

The day before the battle! Had a mail in; letters from Mother, K. and V., also Sunday Pictorials. A mail at a time like this makes an extraordinary difference. At home they will think this a small affair; it is but with all the horrors of modern war crowded into it. We should be successful but it will cost many many fine fellows their lives. Our preparations have been very thorough and I am very confident in our C.O. and Brigadier. Well heres to our success and I hope we all come through safely for the sake of those at home. The scrap will last at least two days. Our Gas and tanks should make a difference, not to mention our artillery. We move out tonight.

No more.

Anne Chappel transcribed September 2006

¹⁶ Steve Fuller note: Yarde was a superb Officer and was to become a Priest after the war but was an open minded, sensible man who would have relished the debate.