

## DIARY OF EVENTS & FROM DATE ARMISTICE SIGNED,

### 11<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 1918.

We had been located at **EU** and had been in this town since my return from my last leave in Paris on October 15. It is a small, compact town, only 1½ miles from the coast, to which it is connected by tramway with the little sea-port of LE TRÉPORT. Eu has many historical associations. The château, which belongs to the Orléans family, was stormed and captured by William the Conqueror in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. William the Conqueror was later married in the Château d'Eu. The Hotel de Ville contains some very interesting old pictures of historical events connected with the town, among which are several showing the visit of Queen Victoria of England to Le Tréport in 1843, with a number of warships and the royal party partaking of a meal in the beautiful forest surrounding the Château d'Eu. The Château d'Eu is the home of the Duke of Orléans when he is in France, but I believe he spends most of his time in England. It is at present occupied by his younger brother, who is referred to variously as the Comte d'Eu and the Prince. When they first pointed him out to me I wouldn't believe it. He looked more like one of the stony-broke princes appearing on the stage of a pantomime. He was never seen in anything else but a green felt hat, a rather ancient suit, with riding-breeches, and tan boots somewhat down at heel. He has a black moustache, clipped short and florid complexion, and would easily pass for a second rate barman or racecourse "sport".

Eu possesses a fine old cathedral (said to have been built by the English): it certainly resembles more the old English style of cathedral than the French designs. The General Staff and most of the various other departments of Headquarters, were quartered in the Hôtel de Ville, whilst we had our rooms in an Annex to the Château, between the château and the cathedral.

I paid several visits to Le Tréport and another little town adjoining, called MERS, a little watering-place with a nice boulevard running along the seashore. Most of the inhabitants of Le Tréport seemed to be engaged in fishing, but there was accommodation for quite a number of vessels of a tonnage of up to about 2,000 tons. I had yarns with the crews of several schooners which had brought coal and pitch from London. They said they could reach Dover in 9

hours with a favourable wind. A large mansion was built on the high cliff at Le Tréport, by a German and this was turned into a Hospital. It had a small funicular railway running up to it and I went on this on several occasions.

One morning, a car was sent to ABBÉVILLE for supplies for the General's Mess and I took the trip in with this car. Abbeville is a fair-sized town with a beautiful old cathedral. A lot of the houses had been destroyed by bombs as the German aeroplanes used to visit the town almost nightly during the time when the frontline was so close to Amiens.

We got the news at Amiens that the Armistice had been signed and started off about 9.30 a.m. for LE CATEAU in motor lorries. I was placed in charge of 3 lorries, which were to travel together, and I got a seat in front of the lorry which contained our office gear. The weather was good and we travelled through Longpré-les Corps-saints, Picquigny, to Amiens where we stopped for about half an hour for refreshment. We then pushed on through Villers-Brettonneux to Péronne, arriving at the latter place about 6.30 p.m. It was then dark & we couldn't get either our acetylene or oil lamps to work so we decided to stay at Péronne for the night as the driver said that the roads ahead were in a shocking condition and he did not care to risk it without lights. I should here mention that my three lorries had kept fairly well together till between Amiens and Péronne, when the lorry I was riding on started back-firing very badly and as the gears wouldn't change properly we stuck for a while on every hill so that the other two lorries got way ahead of us. However, when we got to within four miles of Péronne we came upon one lorry stopped on the side of the road with one of the large rods near the front wheels broken. I suggested that we tow them but the driver said it was impossible to move the front wheels so we had to leave him there with the promise to send help back when we arrived at our destination. There was a Y.M.C.A. at PÉRONNE so we managed to get a drink of hot tea. We then stumbled across our other lorry, which had also pulled up for the night. We stopped both lorries in front of a building which had the front blown out of it. (As you know, the Germans in their retreat of February 1917 blew either the sides, front or roof off every building in Péronne) and the six men I had riding in the back of my lorry and one man from the front slept on the floor of this building, while the driver and I made ourselves comfortable on top of the gear

inside the lorry. As the other lorry contained the men's mess gear, we had plenty to eat and drink. Just as we were about to turn in we noticed a big blaze in the main square and, on going round to see what was happening, we discovered that the Tommies billeted in the town had erected an effigy of the Kaiser, with a German tin helmet on, and had this hanging from a large wooden gibbet in the middle of the square. They had surrounded the gibbet with a lot of wooden cases, soaked in oil, and set fire to the lot. It was a tremendous blaze and several hundred Tommies were all around it in a ring, singing the latest songs. There was a roar from everyone when the Kaiser fell into the fire and again when the old gallows tottered and fell. This was the only excitement I saw in connection with the signing of the Armistice, as, though most of the people were back in Amiens, there was no hilarity in the city, --- but plenty of flags about.

### **12<sup>th</sup> November 1918.**

We continued our journey in the morning, passing through Roisel and Bellicourt, the other lorry getting well ahead as ours began to leak somewhere in the petrol pipe and this delayed us half an hour while the driver effected repairs and just about exhausted his stock of swear words. Within a few miles of Le Cateau, however, we found the other lorry by the roadside, having had a collision with a lorry going in the opposite direction. We had to leave it there so after all we got to our destination first – about noon.

WE are located in the château at Le Cateau, a fine mansion which has only been hit by a couple of small shells. It was from this château that General French directed operations during the battle of Mons in 1914, and where General Smith-Dorrien made his historic stand. The previous occupant was Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria, Commander of the Northern Group of German Armies. He made it his headquarters after Smith-Dorrien evacuated Le Cateau and lived here right up to within a few weeks of our arrival. Ruprecht is now a fugitive like the Kaiser. In the château grounds the Germans have constructed a tremendous red cross of red tiles with a white tiled background. I suppose it measures about 90 feet in diameter. This was very shrewd on Ruprecht's part, protecting himself from attack from our aircraft by means of this red cross --- though the Germans did have a hospital a few yards away in a large factory. I

have my office in the library of the château, a fine, lofty room on the ground floor with a large bookcase all along one side containing about 600 well-bound volumes. The pictures of the château have been cut from their frames and stolen by the Germans; also the rubber and cloth from the billiard table. Some of the mirrors upstairs have apparently been used for revolver practice.

**LE CATEAU:        13<sup>th</sup> November, 1918.**

I had a look round the town today. It is in a terrible state. Practically every building has been hit by shells. I believe the enemy poured a murderous concentration of artillery fire into the place after evacuating it. Most of the damage seems to have been done by small shells at short range, the town having been apparently systematically shelled street by street. Le Câteau is, I should think, about the size of Geelong (without including, of course, the suburbs of the latter) and it has two tall towers, one belonging to the Hôtel de Ville and the other to the cathedral, both of which are very ancient buildings. The cathedral has been hit by about a dozen shells, and the Germans have removed the pipes from the organ. The railway bridge, and the bridge across the river in the centre of town have been blown up. The latter has been replaced by a temporary structure but the former has not yet been replaced.

As every window in the château has been broken by concussion, it is rather cold; but most of them have calico nailed on them as a substitute for glass, and as there is plenty of wood about, we are managing to keep warm.

**Un-numbered letter**

**13<sup>th</sup> November 1918**

My dear Frank,

Your splendid letter of Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> arrived this morning, together with the one you wrote on Aug. 26. One had been delayed 10 days and the other 20 days owing to the fact that you had unfortunately addressed them to France instead of to Florrie.

You must excuse a typewritten letter but I can do it thus in a quarter the

time, but if you knew how rushed I am, and how rushed I am going to be for the next week or so, you would understand.

As I have already written so much about dear old Harold, I will not refer to your letter of Sept.13 any further than to say that it was evidently the result of some very good thinking on your part and it comforted me considerably.

By the same mail I have received nice letters from Miss Busch, Toll, Esca and Ruby, and in case I have no time to answer them individually, please tell them for me that I greatly appreciated the kindly thoughts which prompted them to write to me. I also got a letter from Madge, addressed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Please remind her that her address is far behind the times, if you think of it, and that I would like her to address hers c/o Florrie. I believe I only gave her the Pontypridd address once so perhaps she has mislaid it.

Events have certainly been moving rapidly as far as the war is concerned and, I understand that censorship regulations have now been somewhat relaxed, I feel that I am in a position to write a little more freely.

The other day, we had a very long trip (120 miles) in motor-lorries, from the coast, where we had been resting for about a month, to a small town due East. We had several small engine troubles on the way and took 27 hours to do the journey. The people in the place where we are now have just been freed from 4 years under the dominion of the Germans and the town itself is more than half destroyed. We are located in the château, which is a very fine one and has apparently only been hit by about two shells as only a couple of the upstairs rooms have been spoiled. The furniture is still in it, except for the pictures, which the Germans have cut out of the frames and collared, and the cloth of the billiard table, which they removed. My office is in the library, a large room on the ground floor, containing a bookcase all along one side with about 500 volumes, well-bound. As every window in the place has been broken by concussion, you will realise that it is somewhat chilly and draughty. They have nailed some stuff like calico over the windows but it is a poor substitute. I am sleeping in a small room alongside this one (the library) and nearly froze there last night. However, I nailed calico all the window frames by means of small strips of wood, this afternoon, and I think it will be pretty decent tonight. The winter is coming on us alright.

No-one seems to be able to realise that the fighting is over. There is very little hilarity. I don't think it has dawned on the French people yet either. However, our fellows are firing off all the old German rockets which have been left about and when we were passing through Péronne on the journey here the Tommies had an effigy of the Kaiser, with an old German helmet on it, suspended from a gibbet in the main square of the ruined town. They surrounded the gallows with wooden cases and then set alight to the lot. When we arrived on the scene there were several hundred Tommies round the thing in a circle, singing and making sundry noises. This was about all the excitement I saw. There was nothing much doing in Amiens, although nearly all the civilians are back there again. I would have liked to see how they took it in Paris, though I'm inclined to think everyone seems to have just given a gasp of relief and nothing more. I can sing with old Popoff, "Thank the Lord the war is over," but I doubt I could join him in the words, "We're prepared for love and fun." I hate the thought of going into Germany, though I suppose we shall be pushing on and occupying some of the enemy territory for a while.

I suppose I should indeed be intensely grateful for having been brought without a scratch through nearly three years of "active service."

Thanks muchly for fixing up about those Accountancy papers with Mr Buck; I am expecting them to arrive any day. They are getting an education scheme going over here and the Education Officer asked me the other day if I would teach the book-keeping class --- 2 lessons a week of three quarters of an hour each. I practically agreed to do so, but my work has so increased daily that, though I had the General's consent to get the necessary time off, I feel that any spare time I may happen to get I should like to have for myself.

Thanks also for the words of "The Poet's Song." I think it is still my favourite: I am always whistling or singing bits of it. Have you heard the reply yet ("They call me Mimi")? It is very beautiful. I intend to buy a record of it when I come Home, if you have not already done so in the meantime. I will also get some from "La Tosca." There is a grand piano in this château but it is frightfully out of tune. The church – an extremely ancient one--- is all spoiled inside and all the big pipes have been stolen from the organ.

Do you know that I feel as homesick to-day as I ever have been. I suppose it is the thought that one wants to get right away Home out of it all now that it seems to be all over.

I am glad you liked the "Village Identities No. 2" ---- Esca also referred to it. I received a letter from Madame Blanche Dallongeville a little while ago but have not had a chance to reply to it. I'm afraid I'm losing interest in the French language again. She said in her letter that they had a large number of bombs dropped on their poor little village a week or so after we left it, and a couple of aeroplane sheds were completely wiped out. Several were dropped on that beautiful wood while we were there but no damage was done.

Well, Frank old chap, I had better finish off this rambling old letter and I hope you will find it interesting after a fashion.

Large quantities of my best love to Mother and Father and big supply for your own self, is the gift of

Your loving brother,

Bob.

P.S. Have rec'd a letter from the Editor of "Aussie", asking for contribution for a Xmas number but don't know what chance I have no time for that sort of thing.

**LE CATEAU:                      14<sup>th</sup> November 1918**

There is a grand piano in the château but, like most of the pianos I come across, it is somewhat out of tune. They have shifted into the room used for the G.O.C.'s Mess. Tonight, two members of the Anzac Coves' Concert Party (one a violinist and the other a pianist) came round to play some music for the officers' mess. I sat on a couch just outside the mess door and listened. The pianist was good but the violinist was glorious. The door was slightly ajar and after they had played a few selections, I heard General Monash ask, "Do you happen to know any of the first act of Picini's 'La Bohème?"; they said they didn't have any of the music with them, so I slipped into my room and unearthed my copy of "Mimi's Song" and gave it to the A.D.C. to take in and

they played it beautifully. I don't know how pleased the General was with it but I know I was delighted. They also played "Softly Awakes My Heart" from "Samson and Delilah".

As the Germans blew up the water supply, I have to get any water I want from the river, for washing and drinking. The river is about a hundred yards away and has all sorts of debris fallen in it at different places --- but soldiers will drink anything.

**LE CATEAU:                      16<sup>th</sup> November 1918.**

At midday, the General left for London on business, so I shall have some time to myself for a few days. I went for a stroll round the town with Les. Kennedy during the afternoon. We had another look in the cathedral and found the Germans had left behind some of the smaller pipes belonging to the organ, so I carried off one about 18 inches long for a souvenir, but I don't know how I'm going to get it home.

**LE CATEAU:                      17<sup>h</sup> November 1918.**

The Boche was kind (or thoughtless) enough to leave behind him a large patch of vegetables (mostly cabbages and carrots) so our cooks, needless to say, make daily pilgrimages to this Mecca.

There are still lots of refugees coming through the town. I purchased a few packets of biscuits at our canteen and distributed them. Among (the refugees) I found a man and a woman with a wheel-barrow load of furniture and an old pram with two lovely kiddies in it: such darlings they were, in spite of the dirt. The man told me they had come from Mauberge, where they had been prisoners and they were making for Coudry. I gave them some 'Oxo' cubes which I happened to have and the babies soon had biscuits in their grimy little hands. The proprietor of one of the chemist shops has come back --- an old joker of about 60. Quite a number of the bottles and things were still intact and as I passed the poor man was making a heroic effort to straighten things up.



The owner of the château—M. Seydoux—has been here on a number of occasions lately. He is a very decent sort and speaks English. I found two pairs of tiny cups and saucers and I asked if he would sell them to me as souvenirs. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, “I think you may have them my boy,” so I am posting them over to Florrie and will give her one and send the other one to Madge later, --- that is if they are not smashed up in transit.

One of the inhabitants informed me that, before the war, Monsieur Seydoux employed 3,000 workmen in his lace factories and woollen mills. It will take a long time to get these places going again because the Germans have stolen a portion of the machinery and destroyed the rest. In the meantime, what are the 3,000 going to do for a living?

We are well off as regards fuel, for there is a large dump of German coal left in the town and we have also had gangs of men at work sawing up the trees in the chateau grounds that have been struck by shells. Some of the German coal is shaped like bricks and some is shaped like eggs. These eggs throw out a splendid heat, retaining their shape till they have burnt right out, when they crumble to powder at the slightest touch of a poker. Quite a lot of small mines have been discovered in coal-dumps left behind by the Germans, so one has to be careful.

**LE CATEAU:                      19<sup>h</sup> November 1918.**

During the afternoon, I went with Cpl. Thomas to Montay, a village just outside Le Cateau, and we spent about an hour at the house of a table-oil manufacturer. His house and factory were left practically intact but all his machinery had been stolen. These people had stuck in the village all through the war and said that the Germans had taken every scrap of linen and bedding from them and stolen their fowls. A baker was staying in their house as his own home and bakery were a heap of ruins. He lost a large quantity of flour and as for his bread, the Germans used to steal it as fast as he made it. These people pointed out the railway embankment at the back of their house where a battle was fought which drove the Germans out of Le Cateau last month. This was the very same place where the Battle of Le Cateau was fought in 1914. These people had remained in cellars during an 8-days bombardment of

the town by the Germans. They said that the Kaiser had twice visited Le Câteau during the war: the first time, with great pomp, when all the civilians were ordered indoors, and the second time dressed as an ordinary soldier.

**LE CATEAU:                      30<sup>h</sup> November 1918.**

This morning Lieut. General Sir John Monash handed over command to Sir J.J. Talbot-Hobbs and proceeded to London to take up an appointment as Director- General of Demobilization and Repatriation of the whole of the Australian Imperial Force. General Monash said he had been well satisfied with my work and had recommended me to carry on in the same capacity for General Hobbs. On leaving he shook hands with me and said he hoped “to see me before long on the other side.” Whether he meant by this that he intended sending for me to work in London or not, I don’t know. I was rather sorry that my work with him had come to an end as I consider him the most able man I have ever come in contact with. I have never met a more methodical and systematic man and, though he kept everything and everyone round him always tuned up to ‘concert pitch’, it was a pleasure to work for him. There is no doubt that his vast knowledge of engineering was one of the secrets of his military success. The details of his battles were marvellously worked out, and the period from June 1918 to November 1918 (during which he commanded the Australian Corps) was one long series of successes.

**LE CATEAU:                      1<sup>st</sup> December 1918.**

At 9.30 a.m. we had all our gear packed on motor lorries and left Le Câteau for Avesnes, it was a bitterly cold day and we had a journey of 40 kilometres (25 miles). My thick overcoat kept out most of the cold but I had practically no feeling in my hands and feet when we arrived at noon in Avesnes. About half an hour after us King George and Prince Albert arrived in motor cars from Paris and dined at the Avesnes Château. Two officers and I were standing on a street corner and we got a salute to ourselves from the

King, in response to our salute. (Some swank!). This is the King's first visit to France since the signing of the Armistice.

The town of Avesnes is half as big again as Le Cateau and the houses are intact as only a few scattered fights with machine-guns took place here.

We are in a building opposite the château and I am sharing a room with the clerk to General Blamey (head of the General Staff). We are going to do some shivering here for there is no stove and no fireplace in the room.

About 4 o'clock I went round the town with Cpl. Sladden in search of a private billet. After trying one house without success, we entered what was once an Estaminet. The place looked very clean and contained the usual counter, with rows of glasses but of course no wine or beer to put in them. A man and woman were seated round the stove: the woman was smoking a cigarette but she looked pretty decent so I asked her if she had a spare room with a bed in it. She said she couldn't possibly put us up so we turned to go. At the door I got a brainwave and asked her if she would make us some tea if we brought along the tea and sugar. (The place was so warm and comfortable that I was anxious for any excuse to spend an hour or two there). She agreed to make the tea for us we returned about five with tea and sugar which I had received in a parcel from home, and spent a couple of hours there. By this time we had made ourselves so friendly that she admitted that she had a spare room with a bed and mattress but no bedclothes. The Germans had stolen the bedclothes. I asked her how much per week and she said 5 francs. I agreed readily and she said to her husband, "They say 'Yes, yes,' to whatever we ask." She then suggested we pay 7 francs per week. I said, "Cut it out madame, in another minute it'll be 10 francs; we are going to pay 5 francs." So she agreed to 5 francs.

This woman told us lots of things about happenings during the German occupation of Avesnes. One night, fifteen days before the Germans left, she was fined 100 marks for showing too much light. Her curtains were in exactly the same position as they had been for months and she declared that no light was visible outside. They reckoned 100 marks as equal to 126 francs so this latter amount had to be paid or her husband would have got 20 days in gaol.

Madame Deshayes (I found this was her name) also said that the French civilians were compelled to salute all German officers they passed in the street --- the men by lifting their caps and dropping them right to the knee, and the women by bowing. The penalty for failing to salute was a fine of 4 marks. Many civilians were fined for not saluting through forgetfulness or because they failed to notice a German officer passing.

The Germans were continually ringing the church-bells to celebrate some "victory" of theirs. Later on they removed all the church-bells but for one big one --- "Le grand bourdon qui gronde," as the French say. Madame Deshayes seems to have had considerable cheek as, according to her own statements, she was one day passing a German colonel in the street and he told her that the Germans were advancing and would soon have Paris, whereupon, she cried, "Paris? Jamais, jamais! Verdun, jamais, jamais."

That night, Sladden and I put our own blankets on the bed and managed to sleep comfortably in spite of the fact that that the bed was a bit on the narrow side for the two of us.

In the morning she told us that she had just received news that her daughter was returning from Paris and she would therefore require the room.

**AVESNES:                      2<sup>nd</sup> December 1918.**

We were sorry to have to give up this room as we thought it would be difficult to get another in the town. However, at midday we were gazing in the window of an enterprising shopkeeper, who had managed to scrape up a few things to offer for sale, when a civilian came up and asked if I could oblige him with a cigarette. I gave him one and promptly asked him if he knew where we could get a room with a bed. "Oui, oui monsieur, chez-moi," he answered, so I asked him to take us round to his house and show us the room.

The room proved to be a large one on the ground floor and it suited us admirably. There was only one bed, but Sladden said he knew of a chap with a German officer's folding bed which he could get a loan of: so everything was right. The house is a little different from the usual French domicile. It consists

merely of two large rooms on the ground level, with a small garret above them. They offered us the room for whatever we sum we liked to pay.

The family consists of three: Monsieur Ernest Sauvage, Madame Marie Sauvage, his wife, and their son, Gaston, a boy of sixteen. They are the most obliging French people I have yet come across, which is saying quite a lot.

We finished work at 7 o'clock that evening and when we got to the house, Madame had the beds all ready for us, with nice clean sheets and pillows even. We sat around the usual French stove, with the family, for a couple of hours before turning in. Monsieur, Madame and the garçon took it in turns to tell us all the happenings, little and big, during the German occupation.

The Germans gave each civilian a card showing thereon a complete and minute description of himself and even a photograph. These were stamped with a rubber stamp regularly every month and civilians had always to carry them. No civilians were allowed out of doors after 8 p.m. and no clocks of any kind were allowed to strike the hour. The German time was one hour ahead of the French time, and a man was fined 10 marks one day for having his watch set to French time. A number of girls and women fell in love with the Germans, and, when the latter fled, from the town in November, these girls voluntarily went with them. On the other hand, a number of women were removed by force from the town during the months of July and August, and forced to work for the Germans.

M. Sauvage was sent as a prisoner to Landrécies, where the Germans made him work. On several occasions, at the risk of a heavy penalty, he succeeded in journeying during the night to Avesnes (a distance of 14 miles) to see his wife.

Mme Sauvage was compelled to get rid of a favourite little dog because the Germans informed her that, otherwise, she would have to pay a tax of 60 francs for the right of keeping it.

These people tell some pitiful tales of the way the Germans treated the British prisoners. Our prisoners were practically starved and whipped to work.

As the German soldiers themselves had, during the latter months, insufficient to eat they made nightly raids on the vegetable gardens of the inhabitants. Quite a number of them were shot by their own men during these escapades. The people were absolutely without meat, milk or jam, and sometimes the soldiers would kill their calves and then try to sell the meat to the unfortunate civilians. They frequently had their houses invaded by German police and if soup was discovered cooking on the fire, it was carefully inspected to see if it contained any meat.

The Germans were tireless and systematic in their searches for the wine which the civilians had hidden away in gardens and behind false walls. On the least suspicion, homes were ransacked. Pianos and hanging lamps were all confiscated for the use of the officers. The people were deprived of any spare clothing they had, and all the linen and copper, and most of their bedding.

**AVESNES:                      3<sup>rd</sup> December 1918.**

M. Sauvage simply can't do enough for us. We protest, but it is quite useless. This morning, she had hot water ready for us to wash in, and actually offered us clean towels and soap. (The latter is not even provided in Paris hotels). However, we got our way in this and used our own towels and soap. We were not allowed to leave for work until we had partaken of a cup of coffee. She gave me the key of the front door so that we can go in any time should they happen to be out.

General Hobbs had a talk with me tonight. He said that Gen. Monash had told him that I had expressed a wish to be transferred to employment in London; and added that Gen. Monash had strongly recommended me to him as a thoroughly reliable man for confidential work. He said that the job I would be given in London would probably not be such an important one as I would have if I stayed with him. He wished me to stay and would do what he could for me here. He is the perfect gentleman and spoke to me in quite a fatherly way, asking if I had comfortable quarters in the town and saying that he wanted me to get as much time off as possible in order to get out of doors. I decided then to cancel all notions of getting transferred to London. Since

working for the new Corps Commander I have had very little to do and he tells me every night he won't require me after seven o'clock.

**AVESNES:                      4<sup>th</sup> December 1918.**

I purchased a copy of a little local newspaper that has been started in the town since the Germans left. It is quite the smallest newspaper I have ever seen, being only two pages about 12 inches by 6. It is called "Le Petit Avesnois."

Avesnes was evidently a prosperous little town before the war. It is very ancient and was originally surrounded by a wall and a moat. The little river Nelpé was evidently diverted to form part of the moat. At one end of the town there is still a portion of the wall and moat in existence, with an ancient roadway running, by means of a tunnel, through the wall. This is called the Porte de Mons and there is a stone bridge across the moat and the remains of a portcullis.

The church is a large one, with a big Flemish tower. The church organ at first sight appears to have about forty stops, but only thirteen of them will speak. I have played twice on the organ but did not get much satisfaction out of it as the mechanical stops are out of adjustment, and certain pipes persisted in speaking out of their turn, to the horror of the worthy citizens at prayer beneath.

The town contains a huge caserne or barracks, partly surrounded by an ancient fort, with a roofless building nearby bearing the legend, 'Magasin, 1648.'

On their departure, the Germans blew up all the bridges over the River Nelpé except the ancient stone bridge at the Porte de Mons, which they possibly overlooked, or else ignored as the old road across it had been long since closed and a factory built with one of its walls flush with the side of the moat and right across the bridge exit. However, as walls have ears, the wall at Porte de Mons must have been greatly surprised to hear British Tommies and Scotties knock a large hole in the factory blocking the other side of the bridge, and at their shouts as they drove their horses and mules and motor-lorries

over the moss-grown bridge, thus opening up once more the long-forgotten road over the river instead of having to wait for the army engineers to rebuild the town bridge.

**AVESNES:**                      **8<sup>th</sup> December 1918.**

Madame Sauvage is never happy unless she is feeding us up with something. The night before last, on arriving at the house in order to go to bed, we were compelled to eat a huge plateful each of red cabbage. I had weird dreams that night and wasn't quite myself the next morning even. Then last night we had a plateful of roast chip potatoes, and tonight we have just disposed of a large quantity of green cabbage. The cabbage was highly seasoned with thyme, sage and garlic. (I am glad that garlic is not too popular with English cooks.

**HAM-sur-Heure**                      **11<sup>th</sup> December 1918.**

We bade a reluctant farewell to the Sauvages in the morning and moved, with Headquarters, by motor-lorry via Beaumont, to HAM-sur-Heure, crossing the frontier into Belgium.

Ham is only a little town of about 2,000 inhabitants. We are located in the Château, which is a magnificent place and one of the finest I have ever seen. It had apparently been all renovated just prior to the outbreak of war.

The château is magnificently furnished on the ground and first floors. Sladden and myself picked out a room on the second floor, which we have managed to furnish after a fashion. It is fitted with electric light and, as the château has central heating throughout, we hope to be very comfortable here. Sladden has his usual portable bed and I have fished up a canvas affair. We have also collared two chairs and a strip of carpet from somewhere.



**Letter No. 167**

**Ham-sur-Heure, BELGIUM.  
13<sup>th</sup> December 1918.**

My dear Father & Mother,

Thanks muchly for the tip-top Xmas parcel which arrived safely the other day.

We moved from Avesnes (France) to Ham (Belgium) last Wednesday. This is not a bad little place (about 2,000 inhabitants) & we occupy the château, which is a magnificent building. I am sharing a comfortable little room with another fellow and as the château has central heating throughout we are nice & warm here.

I remember father once writing about the arrogance of 10/- notes in Australia. I am enclosing a few which will amuse him for ½d (halfpenny) and 1d. (a penny). Both of these were printed during the German occupation, as you will see by the dates on them. They are still in currency in this district as the people have practically no other small money.

I have received kind invitations from both Florrie & Aunt Maggie to spend Xmas with them, but unfortunately I will not be able to get any English leave till sometime in January 1919.

Thanks for the Accountancy papers, portion of which arrived with the Xmas parcel. I hope to make a start with them soon.

I am enclosing some diary notes which I have been keeping for the last few weeks & hope they will interest you.

Tons of love & hoping to see you all again before many months,

Your loving son,

Bob.

**Letter un-numbered**

**BELGIQUE  
21 – XII - 18**

My dear Father,

I have a song to sing-oh! But nothing much to sing about. ----

It's the song of a soldier-man lone & sad

His soul's not free & his heart's not glad

And he's miles away from his dear old dad

And he sighs for the love of his Home-oh!

Hey dee, Hey dee ---- Myserie me, ----- Lackaday dee

He wants no rations & he wants no pay

But he sighs for the love of his Home-oh!

Oh well Monsieur Mon Père we'll soon be shaking hands & having tea at the same table & I'll be asking you to pass the salt & you'll be asking me to pass the bread or some other such thing. Deary me. A lot of water has gone past the mill since I last saw you. However we must expand our minds & look at things in their true perspective. Seeing that we have season tickets in the life-stakes which don't expire i.e.--- we've got to live on forever, a thousand years equals one day & 3 years only  $3/1000$  of a day, or about 5 minutes.

Hey ho says Rolly.

I've got such a lot to tell you when I see you, in the meantime, I am,

Your devoted son,

Bob.