

Britain had declared war on Germany in respect to that nation savaging Belgium and Alsace Lorraine and attacking France. The New Zealand Government offered the British Government a voluntary force of army units to form an Expeditionary Force of Mounted and Infantry units to be mustered and trained at the four main centres and to be transported in ships to whatever war zone, where they were most needed. The declaration of War was early in August 1914 and men (*enlisted*), most of whom had been partially trained in the Compulsory Military Act, enforced some two or three years earlier.

I was working in the Morven district and the Sunday after the Government offer, I was given a week's notice as the work I was doing was nearly completed. On going to see my brother after breakfast, I learned that he was holding a clearing sale on the following Tuesday and on discussing what was he doing with himself after the sale we both decided to enlist. So after a snack and a tidy-up we mounted our bicycles and rode through to Timaru and reported at the Army Hall in High Street.

We were obliged to continue our ride to the Showgrounds at Smithfield where we were medically examined and passed as fit. We returned to the Drill Hall where we were issued with our uniforms and rifles, and cycled back to our homestead. We were to be in camp at Addington in Christchurch on Wednesday night. Well, the sale was held and as a neighbour had purchased the farm we were free to make our way to Waimate. We left our bikes here and also had our photos taken and from there to Studholme rode on the Waimate branch train. Although we had lived in the district all our lives we had never ridden in that train. Connecting with the express for the north, we were in camp at about 6 pm on 14 August, 1914.

In the morning we were paraded and found ourselves among quite a few chaps we had met in our own district and that was that. On the third week after church parade volunteers were called for to form a machine gun section and as I had not missed a fatigue during that time I was a bit fed up not being allowed to go on parade, so that when volunteers were called at Church Parade I stepped out and, in so doing, I was the first man from the 8th squadron to volunteer for the machine gun section. Most of the chaps who were with me came from the north of Christchurch, where the first Canterbury Squadron (*was*) known as the Canterbury Yeomanry Cavalry (CYC).

For a time, each man had 2 horses to look after and one night the horse that was given to me to look after went missing and as I was warned I got up early and located him munching grass in the sheep pens, and on bringing him back to the lines I discovered a loose sheet of iron quite handy for a get-away if I was not on duty. This happened to be in the corrugated iron fence line, the boundary of the A & P Association Showgrounds (*located in Addington*). The strong nor-west wind that blew that night was a real Godsend to a few of us later on. We were obliged to apply in writing for a pass if we needed night leave from 6:30 pm to 11 pm. Our applications were turned down very often. We gathered the reason as us down-country chaps were not in the joke, because we were not educated at Christ's College. The loose sheet of iron in the fence altered all of this and one of our tricks was to catch the southbound goods train at the Addington station and ride in the engine with the engine crew to the Middleton station where we were able to enjoy an evening with our friends.

As time went on, the Heads of the outfit considered that more space was needed as volunteers were coming in. A move was made to the training grounds at Sockburn. This altered things considerably and we were obliged to stay in camp and apply for a leave pass. When it came our way we went out the main gate and caught a tram for the city and met our friends in the Square.

By the second week in September it was learned that we were to embark on our transport and proceed overseas. Most of the Mounted men rode their horses to Lyttleton, but we entrained at Sockburn as we had quite a lot of gear namely: four G.I. wagons, two Maxim machine guns, 16 light draught horses as well as 20 other horses and the amount of saddlery pack saddles and containers for ammunition for the guns was considerable. I think every man enjoyed the ride in the train to Lyttleton. It was a new experience for all of us and we were all keyed up not to let anyone down. As our horses were to be stowed on the forward well deck, they had to be put in the horse box one at a time and winched into position on the well deck. It was a slow job, but done without accident.

My brother and I were allotted the stalls nearest the crew quarters and our horses were placed in them, nearest the forecastle head of No 4 Transport Tahiti. The M.G. (*machine gun section?*) horses were all on this deck – one stall extra was held empty to be used when doing stables. To clean the stalls we removed the two rails, asked the horse to step over and put the rails in place again, thus leaving the empty stall at the other end of the compartment for the next day's stables or fatigue. We used a hose to clean the stalls and took turns at the scuppers where the manure and water was worked through by the to and fro movement of a stable broom.

We disembarked at Wellington as we were to have an escort before going overseas. For the next fortnight or so we were camped at Lyall Bay and used to swim our horses in the surf and didn't they enjoy it. The residents of Lyall Bay were very good to us chaps as they realised that we were away from our homes. They used to invite a party into their homes. Several small groups were out every night and time passed quickly. We were sorry to leave Lyall Bay and I'm afraid I have to say that I have never been there since.

When the escort arrived, we embarked once more and by 16 October 1914 we were on the briny headed for the great adventure. One sad episode happened while at sea. Before we reached Hobart one of the soldiers from the North Island died quite suddenly and his body was committed to the deep the following day. All transports and escort slowed down, almost to nil during the burial service.

Our first port of call was Hobart in Tasmania and all hands enjoyed the route march that took place there. On our way again we sailed through the Great Australian Bight, finally coming to a full stop in the roadstead (*an area of safe anchorage for ships waiting to enter a port (or to form a convoy)*) at Albany. There we were joined by the Australian transports, some 26 in number, and with New Zealand's 10 transports we headed out to sea once more. This was a wonderful sight with 36 transports and an indefinite number in the escort, all belching smoke as coal was the chief fuel used. For nearly three weeks we went steadily onward at a moderate seven knots. Sharks were seen to be following our ship day after day. It meant a bad omen for someone, and that someone was yours truly. One of my team staked herself on a stake while exercising at Lyall Bay. I reported the mishap at once and treatment was given too, but the wound gradually got worse and although treatment was continued throughout the voyage it was only a matter of time that the poison would reach her heart and when this happened, my noble steed dropped dead. This was what happened and we were obliged to commit her to the deep and when this was done the sharks stayed with the bait. This incident had an effect on myself and I had to parade sick. The doctor diagnosed my complaint as pneumonia and I was exempt from duties for a while.

Our next port of call was Colombo in Ceylon (*now Sri Lanka*), where all transports were bunkered with coal. What a busy place, all done by manual labour, carrying the coal in

baskets and walking on planks. The coolies followed one another in an endless stream, around and around. Doors were opened in the side of the ship, planks were put down and then the coolies followed one another, in one door and out the other. We were soon on our way again, but I should mention here that we did have shore leave when at Colombo and saw the different parts and places of interest.

We jogged up the Red Sea and took our place in the column passing up the Suez Canal to Port Said. We mustered again and disembarked at Alexandria after being on the journey for seven weeks. After putting the horses on the train we climbed aboard and reached Cairo where we went under canvas and looked after the horses night and day. We led the horses for three weeks before we were allowed to ride them and then only for an hour at a time. This seemed a bit odd but paid dividends in later exercises. The New Zealand horses were superior to those of the Australian forces, but it was a well known fact that the Aussies were much harder on their horses than the New Zealand boys.

Well, we trained and when the infantry left to go to the Dardenelles most of us wondered what was going to happen. Before long volunteers were asked for, to go and reinforce the infantry, and off we went. Our machine gun section took the transport horses and limbers (*A limber is a two-wheeled cart designed to support the trail of an artillery piece*) but when we got there (*to Anzac Cove*) we disembarked without them. Men were detailed to go back with the horses to Zeitoun (Egypt), where we had been camped.

The main body of Mounted men landed on the Peninsula on 12 May but I did not land until the night of the 13th. It was then that we realised that we were at war. Water was scarce and the continuous use of dry rations, coupled with the heat and flies as well as bullets and shells, took their toll on our comrades and our numbers were considerably reduced. Our strength was built up with reinforcements and we attacked several times during the month of August. What ground we gained was held until December 1915, when the order was given to evacuate (*the Peninsula*).

I was hit on August 27th, during an attack on Knoll (Hill) 60 and after lying wounded for 19 hours I was lucky enough to be brought down to the Dressing Station and, in due course, found myself being hoisted aboard a hospital ship (*SS Maheno*). By this time I was very weak as I could not hold a cup of tea, although my arms were not affected. We put into Malta and picked up a lot of walking cases and then left for England, crossing the Bay of Biscay, which was as smooth as a duck pond. Eventually we put in at Southampton and all cot cases were placed in big sheds not far from the wharves. After some delay during which I had a good sleep us chaps were placed in a hospital train and before very long we were given food by the Nursing Division ladies, whose job it was to take care of us. I never learned how many cot cases to a carriage, but I think there must have been 20, with ten on either side.

We had a non-stop run to Warrington, where we were transferred to motor ambulances and taken to Lord Derby's War Hospital at Winwick in Lancashire, some six miles from the railway station. It is a long way to Warrington from Southampton and I was puzzled how the steam engine could take in the water for the journey. I learned later that a trough of water is situated between the rails and the engine crew let down a chute into the trough, while the speed of the train forces the water up the chute into the water tank car. This enabled the train to make a non-stop run of hundreds of miles.

Some of the loneliest hours of my life were spent in this hospital especially during the daylight hours during the week, but on a Sunday when visitors were allowed it was quite

different. In the ward I was in there were four rows of beds with 12 beds in each row and two more in a by-ward opposite the Sister's office. That meant 50 patients in this ward, called officially as Two Down West. Upstairs was called Two Up West. That was how the hospital was built – North, South, East and West – and some parts were three storeys high. On these parts the top floor was known as Upper, so as to distinguish the area from one to another.

Another unfortunate happening was the placing of a colonial in a ward away from his mates. I was on my own in Two Down West, while the chap who was hit by the same bomb as I was placed in Two Down East. Both of us were cot cases so it was weeks before we even saw one another. I found him one day when I was doing a jaunt around the wards in a wheel chair. I said goodbye to him when I left the hospital and I'm sorry to say that I never saw him again. His leg was broken and it set not quite straight. He was able to get back to New Zealand long before the war finished, while I was patched up and saw service for nearly three more years.

Before I said goodbye to John Clunies-Rees I got some mail which surprised and pleased me greatly. It happened like this. My brother, George, was wounded in the face three days before I got my issue and when my ship pulled into Malta to pick up the walking wounded another of our section walked on board and told me that George was in Malta, so I was a bit surprised to learn by letter that George was in hospital in England, at the New Zealand hospital at Walton on Thames. On receipt of this news I perked up a bit and started a query to be transferred to Walton on Thames as soon as I was able to travel.

This I was able to do after I had had an operation which, in turn, was delayed owing to my having symptoms of malaria fever. I was very weak also as I had dysentery. The operation was not successful for removal of shrapnel, which had entered between the rectum and vertebrae. It is still there, and for years I could not carry any heavy weight on my back. However, it certainly improved and as I write 50 years afterwards it has only made me more careful. Well, I eventually got down to Walton on Thames for Christmas, 1915 and shortly afterwards I was transferred to a convalescent camp at Woodcote Park, Epsom. I underwent some electrical treatment for 10 weeks as the wounds on my right leg and thigh would not heal. I was finally discharged and went on leave for four weeks.

In the meantime, I was able to contact a cousin who lived in Croydon and when I went to Cambridgeshire to see my only surviving aunt I took my cousin's eldest little boy with me to see his grandmother. That was a wonderful trip because I met a lot of people in Chatteris who remembered my parents before my folks emigrated to New Zealand. I also enjoyed a bike ride to March where my father came from. This place was eight miles from Chatteris, where I was staying with my aunt. I stayed here one whole week before I left to look up the friends I had made in the Midlands, namely Warrington and Manchester (and) a school ma'am at Leigh (*about 7 miles from Winwick, towards Wigan*). This lady had brothers who played football against the 1905 All Black team from New Zealand.

While I was at hospital at Winwick an elderly lady came in to the ward one day and after chatting to me for a while she said that she had a package in her bag to give to the loneliest boy in the hospital. The sender, she said, was a young lady and she asked me to accept the package, which I did. The package contained 250 cigarettes and as I did not smoke I gave them to a corporal who made himself useful by distributing the Egyptian cigarettes to the rest of the boys, who were all Imperial troops whose homes were in all the different counties in the United Kingdom. Before I left this hospital I met the donor of the cigarettes who turned out to be Miss Mary E. Hurst, a school teacher. A party who had missed the

boat as regards to romance, being in her late 30's and not very good looking. She was a genuine person though and I spent a few happy hours in her company, especially studying an atlas of the various countries I knew. At school I was rather keen on geography so we had very much in common in this respect.

When my leave was up I reported to the New Zealand base at Grey Towers, Hornchurch (*situated in East London*). Route marches were the order of the day, and we used to march 6 miles in the morning and ten miles in the afternoon. After three weeks of this, with the snow on the ground all the time, my right leg started to complain and I was obliged to parade sick and be examined. I contacted the officer in charge of the draft and he crossed my name off the list and I was conveyed by small truck back to Walton on Thames for an operation.

Easter holidays were coming on and the staff were all to have their holidays as they expected a push in France and, of course, more casualties. Well I was here seven weeks and I had a very enjoyable time until one day they pounced on me. How the medical jokers enjoyed seeing me at their mercy. I remember walking to the theatre but I don't know how I got back. Was I sore!! It even hurt to move an eyelid and for hours I could not make out what had happened. What made me so sore was they had to chisel a piece of bone that was adhering to the thigh bone and getting bigger, and the damage was done by a piece of shrapnel which was located nearby. Both these pieces of junk were tied in pink ribbon around my neck as a souvenir. When I was fully recovered from the effects of the ether I asked the nurse who was attending me what I had said, but she kindly would not give me away as she used to blush every time I mentioned it. I'm afraid I must have proposed to this party as she was very popular with us chaps in the ward. She came from Scotland, a native of Inverness.

Well, eventually I went out on leave again and this time for only three weeks. I looked up some more relatives both in London and in Essex and, of course, the aunt in Chatteris and another cousin at Bury St Edmonds (*east of Cambridge*). When I looked up this cousin, who was in service, I asked her Mistress if it would be possible to let Ada off for the weekend, as I was to see her father some 40 miles away. Luckily enough she was only too happy to oblige and when we reached her father's place at Ashley, near Newmarket, it was to find that her brother, Dan, and boyfriend, Albert, were all in the same village on leave. This was a great surprise for Ada and when we went for a stroll on the Sunday afternoon we were a novelty in that district, I can tell you.

Back at camp and once more doing fatigues and guard duty. A few weeks of this and we were once again classed as "fit B1 Codford" (*This was a 'hardening' depot, where soldiers were sent following convalescence to improve their fitness. B1 means that physical training, bayonet fighting and route marches of 6-8 miles were undertaken*). This place (*Codford*) is on the Salisbury plains and was the new base camp for training. Hornchurch was to be a convalescent depot only for those men who were not fit enough to play soldiers and those who would never be fit enough were boarded for New Zealand. Being a Mounted man they gathered up all men of Mounted Units and sent us over to Tidworth, where the Imperial forces were trained. While here I was mess orderly, or rather one of them, to look after the New Zealand boys.

From here we got our final leave and I went down to Devonshire to see Frank Fowler, who in years gone by had worked with my brother Alf at Harry Haymans. Frank served in the South African War and took his discharge in New Zealand, as he was an Imperial man. Frank Fowler remembered me and we had a great time together talking about old times.

He had a large orchard and used to make apple cider of various strengths. On coming away he drove me to the station named Cullompton (*near Exeter*) in a horse and gig. We were far too early at the station and yet it was not wise to leave same as the fog became thicker as the day wore on and Frank did not want me to miss my train. This old boy has gone now and we have not bothered to contact his widow.

Needless to say the train came in and I found myself on the way to Salisbury and to make things interesting I reported for duty 10½ hours late. Was duly up for overstaying leave and sentenced to three days C.B. and two days Royal Warrant, a matter of 12/- less army pay. The C.B. (Confined to Barracks) was carried out in continuous fatigue at the Sergeants' mess and then I went back to the soldiers' mess, where I had been before. A further week and were marched over to Sling camp (*about 65 miles away*), there to await a further three weeks while our numbers were increased by being joined by other drafts of Imperial men.

While at Sling six inches of snow fell and our quartermaster gave me a job to report to the camp padre, Mr Frank Dunnage. This was a new experience for me. I had to be up early and take in a cup of tea and biscuits to him, clean boots, polish buttons and brush his uniform. One other job was to take up the runner in the church hall, used on Sunday for Church Parade. I had the use of his bicycle to go to Bulford (*some 87 miles!!*), make purchases, post letters and interview other padres. He asked me to return all change as he said he allowed his batman an allowance. I can say that he kept his word but at the same time he threw his money around like a man with no arms. However, this little job lasted only three weeks. With another kit inspection and we were lined up for inspection and we were off to Southampton en route to where we were wanted, 20 April 1917.

To cross the channel, to France, we were piled into a little packet of a ship with a wide spiral staircase and we sat down on the steps so close we could hardly turn round with our rifles in a vertical position. We landed at Le Harve, and found ourselves not wanted by anyone as we were bound for the East. A day or two was spent here before we boarded a train for the South of France. What a journey. For three nights and days we carried on at times ever so slowly. We were able to buy some food, in fact we lived on wine and yards of bread. Our own rations were starvation rations.

Most of the troopers acted as train police, an unenviable job. The trains used to stop for water and all hands wanted to stretch their legs and, of course, would not be able to get on in time. At another stop no one was allowed off, as the French Express was being met. This train got its power from a rail running alongside the track and it was not safe to touch it. At this stop it was a terrible job to keep the men on the train and it was nothing short of a miracle that no one was injured or killed when the express tore through the station at high speed. We eventually reached our destination at Marseilles at a camp called Cassionaero.

On a route march next day we passed a working party of German war prisoners and they were kind enough to make remarks at us. We saw a large transport [*later identified as the Transylvania*] being loaded at the docks and little did we think that we would be on board when she sailed. This is what happened and we left the docks at 8 pm on May 3rd and headed out to sea. We picked up our escort en route, had breakfast [*the next day, May 4, 1917*] and were warned for roll call and boat stations at 10 am. It was while on parade that things began to happen.

For us New Zealanders it was rafts if anything should happen and while at ease standing on the deck aft we saw a white streak in the water coming towards us. It was a torpedo and could not miss as our transport was too big to miss. The torpedo seemed to come from

underneath a yawl, which seemed to be fishing or so it appeared. Our escorts were two Japanese destroyers, both leading with one on the left and the other on the right about 300 yards apart and about the same distance from the transport. The left one passed quite close to the yawl under which the submarine was lurking. When our ship was struck the yawl was blown out of the water by the rear gun of the destroyer, and then both destroyers cut around in circles trying to contact the submarine. Then one destroyer turned to come alongside. This it did and an order rang out "every man for himself", and here we were with three decks spilling out humanity to clamber on to the destroyer. We New Zealanders moved over to the ship's side and a good number of our party made the destroyer but others were not so lucky. I was going down a rope as number four on the same rope. Meanwhile, the sub fired another torpedo meant for the destroyer and as it missed the destroyer she did not wait for anything else. The rope I was sliding down was hitched to the destroyer and, of course, it broke and let me down into the Mediterranean, feet first. I fell from a good height; about 40 feet I estimate as I could see quite a bit of the deck I had vacated.

When I surfaced I found a felt hat floating beside me, when up came a white face and it was Harry Clark, a Wellington Mounted man. Harry had had enteric fever, caught on Gallipoli in 1915 and his legs would not work for him. I felt safer in the water and, keeping close to Harry, we scrambled into a lifeboat, which was floating nearby. I noticed that the block hook was still in the ring of the lifeboat and, undoing same, our boat drifted along the side of the transport and with an oar (*pushing*) against the ship I kept the boat clear of those who would not let go of the ropes that were hanging from the transport.

There were dozens of men in the water. I saw two lifeboats loaded with men tipped out and I think the boat that I had got into was one of them. When the second torpedo struck the transport the explosion wrecked another lifeboat, throwing members of the 29th division up into the air. That accounted for the large numbers of men seen in the water by our party.

We hauled a few out of the water but others would not give it a go. One lad called to me from the transport to pick up his mate. With the help of other chaps, we got him into our boat. His lifebelt had slipped down around his middle and he also had a broken leg. He was in a bad way as he was on the verge of being drowned. He eventually came around and I am pleased to say got back to England to his folks and I must give him credit as a letter of thanks came to me while up the line from his mother thanking me for saving her boy. Well, we drifted away eventually as the land breeze had got stronger and we were well out to sea.

The last man we picked up was a despatch rider astride a 20-foot ladder and travelling fast. He objected to being tipped off the ladder as I reached him with the only oar we had. The sea became rougher and then some of us realised that the transport had dispersed. Our boat was deep in the water and did not rise very readily in the big swells that were now breaking over us. Help was near, however, and it was only a matter of time before we would be picked up.

A large fishing trawler had come out from a port not far away. After a long time, which seemed years, we were picked up - a total of 13 were pulled over the bulwarks of the trawler. The time was now 2 pm, making our stay in the water 3½ hours and it was cold enough. It took us two more hours to get into port where we had to walk a plank to the wharf, as the tide was out.

We had landed at Savona, a naval base in Italy, and we were treated well. As we came off the plank we were given a small glass of red wine and bundled into cars, which were standing bumper to bumper on the wharf. As each car was filled the driver was told where to take his passengers and we headed for a hospital. When we got to the hospital we were high up on the side of a mountain. So steep was the road where they took us that the driver of our car drove into a corner, then reversed into another corner to change direction and then, with engine revving like mad, took off into another direction.

We were instructed to take off our wet clothes and wrapped in blankets we tumbled into bed and given some hot gruel, which made us very sleepy and we were soon asleep. Most of us woke suddenly and were convinced that we were still in the water, as when we realised what was up we were all pretty bare having tossed the bed clothes off in our efforts to save ourselves. Everyone was all mixed up for the greater part of the night and, next morning hearing voices speaking English, we sat up and took notice. "How are you?" "All right." "Well, you can get up." "What, with no clothes? Are they dry enough?" It took us a while to find our own stuff. I had marked mine with an indelible pencil and the hat I had hung onto as well as my boots. I knew what those English jokers are like. For four days we sweated in this stone built God forsaken place. We asked to go to the gateway every day and watch out for an English speaking soldier to walk by.

At last I spotted Sergeant Troup, who was chief Sergeant next to Gerald Lyons, our officer in charge of details. He had been looking for any missing details and he would have had to stay another night had I not seen him. With a guard on the gate with fixed bayonets, he thought our place of custody was an Italian turn out with no survivors installed. We were soon mustered and taken out and we walked back to the barracks where the Bersaglieri had given up their barracks for the benefit of the survivors – a mixture of NZ and Imperial men. There were four of us New Zealanders and we learnt that we had been posted as missing, so our effort was worthwhile. The following day we did a few exercises so as to keep us in trim for the work ahead.

We learned that the dead had to be identified and buried so with this in view we were marched to the cemetery. A few of us were asked to volunteer and help the padre, who would take charge of the party who were to work in the morgue. This was a fairly large building of concrete and fitted along each side were family vaults. The dimensions of the floor space must have been 40 ft by 40 ft and most of this space was covered by bodies, which we were to identify. As this was done the bodies were embalmed and a ticket tucked into the lid of the coffin giving the regimental number, name and regiment. The rest of our party were digging the graves. Some Italian soldiers were giving our men a helping hand and when this was done we were marched back to our billets.

The cemetery where our comrades are buried was really a beautiful one. The headstones mostly being angels all of different sizes, and the grounds being well kept, it seemed to set off the place. As we had done our duty to our unfortunate comrades we departed from Savona shortly afterwards but I must say that the C. C. nursing sisters who were with us and whose 2 lifeboats were the only ones safely launched. Those girls lost most of their possessions and were fitted out in civvies and it was rather amusing to meet a group of these girls who would most likely say or ask did we speak English. Most of those girls had to go back to England to be refitted out, but I never met any of those girls again although they might have been at the 27th General at Cairo later on. I learnt that most of them were on their way to Salonika when they first set out. For us, we boarded a train and went overland back to Marseilles where, in 3 weeks, we were fitted out with new gear and went through the performance of mug, plate, knife, fork, spoon and sign here on the dotted line.

About the 20th June we sailed for Alexandria once again and after being chased into the Straits of Messina by a submarine and, after sighting another one on our way, we arrived at Alexandria very relieved to find our feet on terra firma again. We trained to Moascar, where we were put through the Mounted drill and given a horse to look after. A few days here and we were sent up the line to act as reinforcements to the various squadrons to which we belonged. When we got to the railhead we tied our gear onto a horse and set off for the regiment. On our way, we met a camel caravan of 100 camels and the steed I was riding took off for and passed the camel train at a distance of half a mile. He sure covered a lot of extra distance and when we got to the headquarters most of us were quite content to walk the rest of the way. I sure was tired and sore as I hadn't sat on a horse since we left Egypt in 1915 ready for the Peninsula. The horse I rode from the railhead belonged to someone else and as horses were scarce I was obliged to look after a horse whose owner was to go on leave. This happened with 5 different jokers and by that time I was well and truly fed up so I spoke for a horse of my own. I still had to wait for a week or two longer but I eventually got a mount, which was a pack horse for the Canterbury Mounted Rifles (CMR) headquarters as that party was over-strength in horses. The troop that I was put in was the 4th troop, 8th squadron with CMR being B Squadron.

For a time, I was the victim of circumstances. The fact of being a Main Body man did not help me very much as since then I had been badly wounded and confined to hospital for a long period owing to the condition of my health. However, I eventually recovered and I had now to learn the art of soldiering all over again and I was nearly like a new chum. My experience of being shipwrecked did not help me at all and the conditions, in which we were obliged to live, did not make life any more pleasant. I was always reminded that I had had a great trip and in fact was much cause of jealousy, chiefly by chaps from my own district and who were NCOs or Non-Commissioned Officers.

As the Commander of all the forces had been changed, or perhaps I should say that the command had been taken over by a soldier who moved with his troops, the conditions improved somewhat and we all looked forward to a new horizon and we got deeper into Palestine and enjoyed more fruit and purer water.

We were continually on the go and enjoyed the moving about as we were pushing the enemy back in stages. We travelled some big distances on our horses and then those poor brutes were forced to retrace their steps for water and then link up with the other half of the squadron who were holding the line while the horses were being watered. It was nothing for the horses to have to go back for water a distance of 20 miles.

Going along the coast it was quite pleasant at times but when we were further inland it was quite different. The heat was terrific and at times we were drenched to the skin in less than 5 minutes and I remember still how the rain clouds came over and the water came down in sheets. This happened several times but one day we were soaked 3 times in 5 hours. The heat dried our clothes in between times and that was the cause of men catching malaria fever.

By this time we were well up in Palestine and at xmas time (*December 1917*) were in the vicinity of Jerusalem. We had camped at Bethlehem and after passing the Pools we set off across the country, which I think might pass for that area, called in the Bible, The Wilderness. We walked and led our horses along the goat tracks. The country was very steep with ridges and hilltops fairly high and the gullies were a long way down. We went for some miles like this and came out on the Jordan Valley at the head of the Dead Sea. We

also had a brush with the enemy before we reached the flat. Next day we were engaged and the heat was terrific - 125°F (52°C) – in the Jordan Valley. For a time we were content to stay here and went to other parts of the front to relieve other regiments. On one trip we went right back to Jaffa, on the coast. Later on, we went across the Jordan River on our horses as the engineers had secured some large pontoons. There were 3 crossings to my knowledge, there may have been others but did not see them as we crossed at night.

This time it was a big do, but had to be repeated later on as we got a bit of a hiding. We were in contact with the enemy 35 miles over the Jordan and it was here that I got wounded in the head and foot. I was able to ride my horse back from the advanced dressing station to the dressing station some distance back. I was very tired and sat on a box waiting my turn to be evacuated further. I woke up with a hypodermic needle in my arm and after being dressed again I was placed on a camel with another chap and we set off at a snail's pace. We eventually got to Es. Salt and was given a cup of tea and something to eat and early in the morning we set off in a G. S. limbers wagon to the foot of the range that marks the edge of the valley on Amman side. The road was practically non-existent, covered chiefly with loose boulders. It was a terrible ordeal. The Tommy driver drove over every boulder he could find to help brake the wagon. He reckoned the boulders acted as a brake. All he had to do was souple up his poler's harness a bit tighter and he would have had more control.

At this spot we had some refreshments and the doctor partially shaved my head with my own razor. My scalp was pitted with small fragments of shrapnel and he got a few pieces out. We were soon on our way again, this time in a South African wagon drawn by 5 mules. The Jordan Valley is 14 miles across, from hillside to hillside, and at Jericho we transferred to a motor ambulance and were taken to Jerusalem. Here we were placed in a Field Hospital, several large marques were in an enclosed area, probably a garden. The order was given out as we moved along the path, wounded to the left, sick men to the right.

We stayed here about 24 hours and our next move went to the railway station. Here we were placed in iron covered waggons, used mostly for carrying explosive or ammunition. For the rest of the night we clattered along until we reached Ramleh (*a district inside the city of Ramla*). This place was well laid out as a hospital and cot cases were left here until they had enough to make up a train load. Some of the slightly wounded chaps were kept here and sent up the line again. The majority of the chaps who were with me were loaded into a hospital train and we set off for the (*Suez*) canal to a placed called Kantara (*on the banks of the canal*). Here we were transferred by motor ambulance across the canal to another hospital train and headed for Cairo. Into a motor ambulance once again and we were in the 27th general hospital. When here we thought that we were safe from disturbance and let ourselves go. For my part, I was dead beat, what with the 9 months of activity and putting up with everything that one has to while on active service and the continuous moving, mostly at night, after being wounded.

Unable to walk without crutches and having a sore head as well, I was relieved to find myself in a place well away from everything that makes a soldier unable to relax. Here I relaxed and slept for the next 3 weeks, night and day. The sisters had to wake me up to dress my wounds twice a day and at midday for the midday meal. I believe had I not done this I would have lost my reason and when the first 3 weeks had passed I felt as if I might make a good recovery. I certainly felt as if I might be of use again. I received my wounds on 29 March 1918 and it was now near the end of April before I took notice and wrote to the folks, both in New Zealand and in England, and also I had 2 brothers in France. Time went merrily by and my head wound did not ache so much but the instep of my right foot was not

happy. I seemed to have lost the movement and I could feel the shrapnel in amongst the metatarsal bones. It improved, but walking on sand made me sit up. I was almost useless. I was sent to Aotea Home at Heliopolis (*Algeria*), staffed mostly by New Zealand girls. From here I went to Moascar where I was boarded for home.

From here I went to Port Said (*Egypt*) and left this port at a date in August. We boarded a freighter at Port Said and headed for Australia. Colombo (*Sri Lanka*) was our first port of call and as time permitted we had a stroll around. We could not buy very much as most of us had lined up for pay and one never knew what would turn up. We were allowed 10/- before we got to Sydney after leaving Colombo. It came in handy to get a few extras from the ship's canteen. My foot improved – it just had to as another chap and I were looking after the "Wingies" or one armed men. We sat 14 to a table with the 2 mess orderlies on the end next to the food and dishes of tea.

The New Zealanders were not allowed shore leave at Sydney as the troopship S. S. Moeraki was in port and was due to sail for Wellington towards the evening so we were trans-shipped to this boat and had a second class passage with no duties toward New Zealand. What a difference for 2 days, it seemed as if I had missed something. We had a nice time coming over and generally had a concert of our own, which the passengers joined in. Songs and recitations and hakas were the order of the day.

Our C.C. of the troops was Major Wain of Waimate and, on the final night aboard, we had a dinkum concert. We were all supposed to be in uniform but one of our number did not put on his tunic. This was a silly move as our C. C. did not take long to pick him out of the crowd. He was taken before the C.C. and charged with disobeying orders. The Red Caps came aboard at Wellington and took him away. He was an Auckland fellow and came on board feeling his way. A nice put on job if ever there was and he did not get much sympathy from the old hands.

We climbed aboard the Ferry and headed for Lyttelton, which we reached next day. Then to Christchurch, where after more refreshments we trained to our various destinations. We were joined at Wellington by some chaps who had disembarked at Auckland so the train was a Special. I decided to stay a day or two in Christchurch, as no one was around, but just before the train pulled out, my youngest brother came through the crowd on the platform. However, he saw that I was in no hurry so he let the rest of the folks know that I was alright and would be down in a day or two.

This is how I came home from the war. I made my home with Carrie and Will Prattley at Hilton. They looked after me well, but I could not keep a nice meal down. If I forced myself to eat, I would lose it and finish up with a slice of bread and butter. I travelled around on an old motorbike for weeks. I could not look at work or jobs. I did some hoeing, thinning turnips as a beginning, but when I ran against Sam Douglas, who owned a threshing mill, he offered me a job as Water Joey. Well, I hated the smell of a horse, so I took on forking. Strange to say that as soon as I got on to rough tucker I improved and, by the end of the season with a good cheque in my pocket, I felt like a new man.

This ends my story. I'm too sad to relate the rest of my history, it was one hell of a struggle. I should have learned a trade and feel sure that it would have made a difference.

Signed by Albert E. Peck

7 May 1967

(Bert's memoirs were written 50 years after the sinking of the Transylvania, which occurred on 4 May 1917)

<http://www.nzmr.org/canterbury.htm>

http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/general/SearchResults.aspx?dataset=Cenotaph&c_embarkingtransport_search=%22hmnzt++11%22&c_embarkingtransport_logic=or&Page=121

http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/general/TroopShips/9.detail?Ordinal=1&c_transport_search=%22hmnzt+11%22&c_transport_logic=or

Sailed on the Tahiti – 54 officers, 1259 men and 339 horses. Departed Lyttelton 16 October 1914, arrived Suez 3 December 1914.

Record number 1204 Peck – Albert Edward 7/100

Record number 1205 Peck – George Albain 7/101