

SOLDIERS' LETTERS.

FROM A FAIRLIE BOY.

The following is from Sapper William Wade (who left with the Australian Expeditionary Force) to his sister, Miss N. Wade, of Fairlie. Previous to his enlistment Sapper Wade followed the occupation of wireless operator, being in the service of the Union Steam Ship Coy., and was in Papeete a few days after its bombardment, by the German cruiser Emden. Who would have dreamt that I should ever be writing you from this part of the World? Anyhow, here's a few lines just to keep you from growing inquisitive as to where we may be. We left Melbourne on June 5th. and, after a three weeks' run through the Indian Ocean, we arrived at Colombo on Thursday afternoon June 24th. Our stay there was very short. We pulled in at 4 p.m. and left again at 8.30 p.m. for Bombay where we went ashore for a few days. I could write a book, I suppose, if I were permitted, to tell you all the different happenings since we left Sydney. I think these letters are all censored, so I'll have to be careful. After leaving Melbourne we struck heavy weather for over a week. Across the Australian Bight the old ship rolled till she must have tired. After that, however the sea grew calm and there was hardly a ripple on the water for the rest of the journey. We soon got into the routine on board ship. We slept in hammocks, swung to the deck above. "Revellie" [Reveille] went at 6 a.m. and we started work at 6.50 a.m. The horses stood the journey well. We had about 250 on board. Those which died were cut up and dumped overboard. When the hot weather set in, the horses had a trying time. They puffed and sweated, day and night, standing all the time, in a stall the size of a cow bail. The men fared well. I enjoyed the trip, even though the work was hard. We had such a good crowd of chaps to work with. In the stables of a morning, when the water hose was brought along, we would duck each other with water. This was fine sport in the hot weather, and we made the most of it. Another favourite pastime was to hit a chap with a wet sack when he least expected it. A bucket of water landing on your nut was not uncommon either. When we left Melbourne we expected that Aden was our next port of call. We were surprised to wake up one morning and find that our course had been changed. The rumour flew round like wild fire that we were making for Colombo. No one knew what we were going there for, but our stay was short. Bombay was our next port. This took us four days steaming and on Monday morning we sighted a lighthouse through the fog. The weather was very thick all the way along and the coast was only visible here and there. The sea was again rough and this was the worst part of our journey, so far as the weather was concerned. It rained cats and dogs all the time. This is the monsoon season in India, and rain pours down in bucketsful nearly all day. We had to unload our horses in this weather and put them in a shed. I had two horses, a riding one and a pack horse. The riding horse was a lovely tempered animal and I made him my favourite. After getting our horses off the boat, we had to put them on trucks to be entrained to the country somewhere. We said good-bye to them on the station and I don't suppose we shall see them again. As luck would have it, we struck a stone wall on the way, when coming through a narrow channel. The old ship hit it a lovely crack which shook her like an earthquake. The result is that we are ashore in barracks while she is being repaired. We do not know how long this will last, but we expect to go back to her and depart for "I don't know where." next Monday, July 5th. In the barracks where we are, there are garrisoned about 800 territorials from England. These are nearly all boys and there [their] average age is eighteen years. They expect to go to France in September. There are others here who have seen fighting in the Persian Gulf. One chap we met last night belonged to a regiment of Devons, one thousand

one hundred and fifty went out and only 150 returned. There are hospitals here with wounded from all parts—France, Belgium and Dardanelles. We were through a hospital yesterday afternoon which was full of Indian wounded—some with legs off and some of the most peculiar bullet wounds you could imagine. One we saw was particularly so. The bullet entered the chest, high upon the chest bone. It turned down to the right and pierced the lung, and then up again and down into the muscle of the arm. We also saw some wounded Turkish prisoners. These are interesting to see but I can write nothing about them. As far as the city of Bombay is concerned, I don't think I can tell you much. Niggers are here by the million and we have not seen many white people since our arrival. We are being treated well. The white people will do anything for us, and are always pleased to hear a yarn about Australia. New Zealand is unknown here; people know nothing about it. They can't make the Colonial out at all. The territorials here are half afraid of us and think we are all Bronko-Billies and Cowboys. We are all well; and I never felt better in my life, eating like a horse and sleeping like a top.

Timaru Herald. 16 March 1916 (page 4) [02/11/2013]

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.

A FAIRLIE REPRESENTATIVE.

The following are extracts from a letter written on January 2, by Sapper William Wade, to his sister, Miss E. Wade, of Fairlie:—

Sapper Wade, after describing the evacuation of Gallipoli, mentions that he was one of the last to leave the Peninsula. "On Christmas day some Christmas 'billies' were handed round to all, these having been sent out by the people of Australia. Each 'billy' had different contents, and a card with the name of the sender. In some cases there were letters. Mine was sent by an 'Old Sundowner of South Australia'. It contained a cherrywood pipe, a tin of tobacco, cigarettes, cigarette lighter, two tins of sardines, 3 tins of bloater paste, 2 packets of safety pins, some bachelors' buttons, and some nuts. These gifts were greatly appreciated, and the Christmas of 1915, and the kindness of the people will not be forgotten by the boys. . . .

We are waiting to get away to Egypt now, and expect to put off to-morrow. I would not like to spend the winter on Gallipoli. We had a touch of snow and frost at the end of November, and it was no joke. But if it had been left to the boys they would have stayed, for when you come to think of the numbers that have fallen, it seems a great pity that what they did has been done practically with no good result." Sapper Wade concludes by wishing to be remembered to all his friends at Fairlie.

Timaru Herald. 10 December 1917 (page 5) [02/11/2013]

ROLL OF HONOUR

Mrs T. Harnett, Fairlie, has received word that her eldest son, Sapper William Wade, died of wounds received in France on October 21st. Before enlisting Sapper Wade was engaged as wireless operator on the Wahine, after which he operated on the Levuka on a trip to the Fiji Islands. Later he sailed to San Francisco on the Tahiti and Maitai, the steamer being chased by the Emden on the last trip. He also saw the destruction caused by the Germans at Papeete.

He enlisted with the Australian Forces about three years ago, joining the 4th Signalling Company, Fourth Light Horse Brigade their destination being Egypt. He was then taken to Gallipoli and was torpedoed on the Southland. He was also one of the last boatload to leave the shore during the evacuation of Gallipoli. Sapper Wade finally landed in France and fortunately escaped wounds and illness until his supreme sacrifice, before which he was promoted to Corporal. Mrs Harnett has two other sons now in hospital in England. Sapper Wade was 24 years of age. Mrs Harnett has just received word that her son Edward Wade has been admitted to hospital in England with haemorrhage of the lung.

Timaru Herald. 4 February 1918 (page 11) [06/11/2013]

A FAIRLIE SOLDIER'S DEATH.

Mrs Harnett, of Fairlie, has received a long letter from Warrant Officer J. O'Brien, of the Australian Forces, dated Ypres, October 22, 1917, describing how her son, Sergeant William Harnett, lost his life on October 21st, struck by a shrapnel bullet that pierced his steel helmet and penetrated his head. He never regained consciousness and passed away just as he reached the Field Ambulance hospital. He was buried next day, with all honours, in a military cemetery on the Menin road, close to Ypres, by a Catholic priest. A cross of oak, from the destroyed Ypres Cathedral, was erected over the grave, and granite blocks were set up at the corners and wire cable run round them as railings. The writer promised to try and get a photograph to send. In the meantime he was sending the dead soldier's few souvenirs. W.O. O'Brien writes enthusiastically of Sergeant Harnett as a soldier and as a companion. "He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery and particularly good work in the Zonnebeke battle. He not only earned the decoration, but also the gratitude and thanks of the whole Division. He had just been made a Sergeant, and had he been spared would have won his commission in very short time. . . . He was more than a friend to me. We had been together ever since we enlisted. We have always lived in the same tent, same dug-out, and the same shell-hole, and up till a few days ago we always worked together. . . . He was a 'white man' to the core, bravest of the brave, the most capable boy in the Company at his work, and also the most popular. His death was a very great loss indeed. . . . All the officers and men that could be spared from the Company attended the funeral, and when the Last Post was sounded there was not a dry eye among them."

William Harnett should read William Wade.

Timaru Herald. 16 February 1918 [06/11/2013]

Word has been received by his mother that Private E. Wade, of Fairlie, is, at present ill in hospital in England. Private Wade was awarded the Military Medal recently for bravery in the field. A brother, Private J. Wade, is progressing well after having had a leg amputated. The late Signaller Sergeant Wade (recently erroneously reported as Wm. Harnett) was another brother, who, prior to being killed in action, received the Military Medal and D.C.M., so that the family's war record is an exceptionally brilliant one.