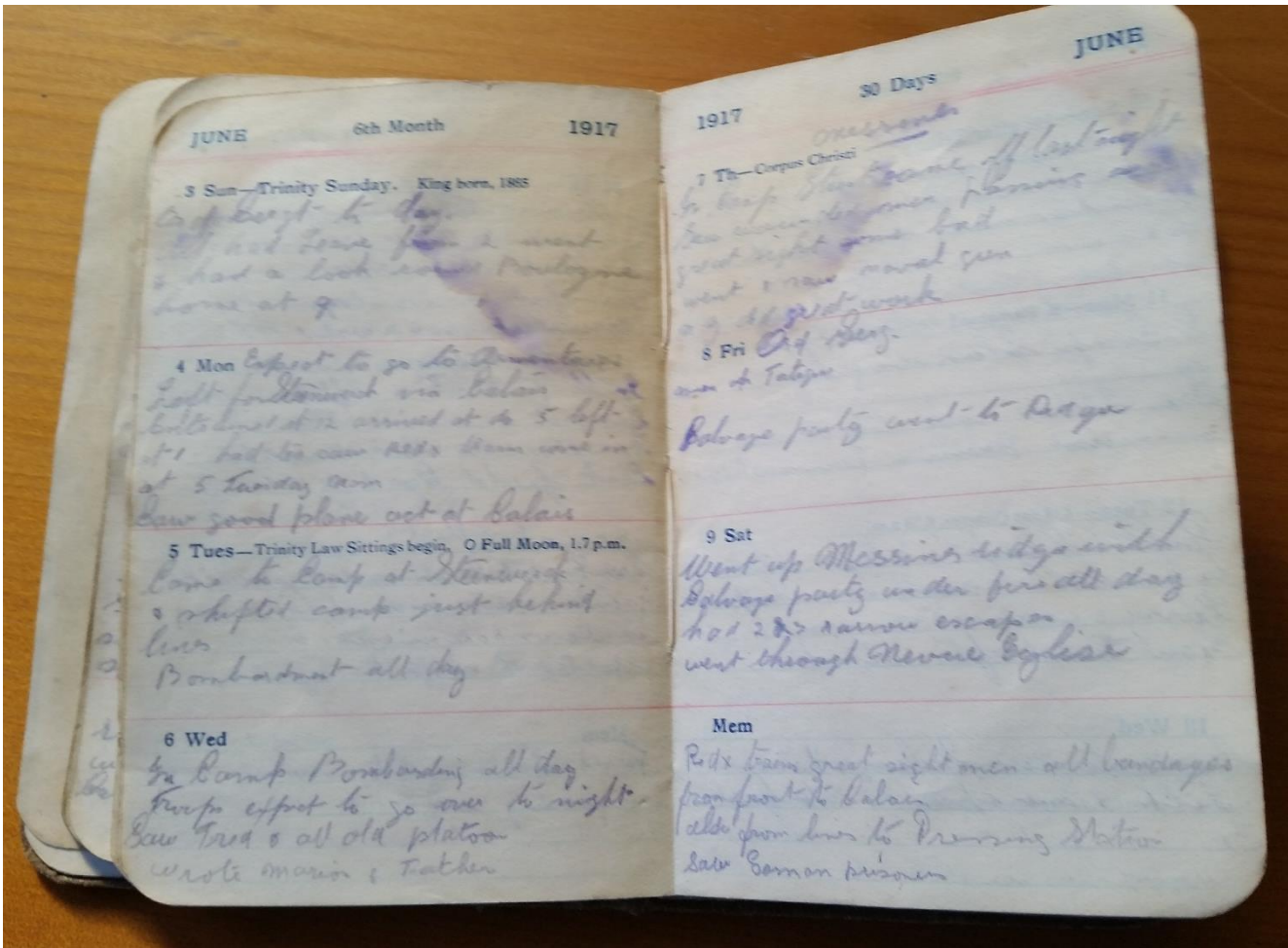


FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S DIARY – France 1917



**Sergeant Peter William Alfred Peterson**, Regimental Number 20935, left New Zealand from Wellington on 11 October 1916 of the New Zealand Divisional Employment Company on the *Tofua* after working as a builder in Dargaville. He arrived at Sling Camp, England on 29 December 1916. Known as Alf Peterson he was a carpenter/joiner, and at 35 years had already served in the Boer War before he married in 1905. He left his wife, my grandmother Marion and their four children at home – Colin (8), Marjorie (7), Jock (5) and Fred (11 months). *The photo was taken in 1912 before Fred was born.*



Grandpop's diary begins on 1<sup>st</sup> January and covers daily comments about training, time in hospital, leave time in Edinburgh, London. The excerpt below tells of the time he left England for France and his experience as part of the Salvage Party. Although the daily entries are short, we can definitely draw a picture of the war at Messines Ridge.

Many understated, eg. the 'stunt' on 7 June – this was when the NZ tunnellers bombs really blew!

... MAY 1917

- 27 Sun: Getting gear. Really raining. Gear branded. Wrote Father & Marion
- 28 Mon: On Parade. Raining. Wild rumours as to when going. Concert Y.M.C.A
- 29 Tues: On Parade, nothing doing. Hot day. Warned leaving for France
- 30 Wed: Had Inspection & left Codford for Folkestone at 9. Travelled all night
- 31 Thurs: Arrived Folkestone at 5am. Stopped at Barrick had breakfast at 8, left in Transport for Boulogne at 9, arrived at 11.30 & marched to Camp

JUNE

1 Fri: In Camp until 4. Left for other Camp at 4 arrived at 6.30 had tea. Not allowed in town. Sent field card to Marion  
2 Sat: Reveille at 5. Had Gas test in morning, marched 9 miles, kit inspection in afternoon. In town at night. Expected to shift tomorrow

Mem: French town very dirty, women all working in fields

3 Sun: Ord. Sergt [Orderly Sergeant] today. All had Leave from 2, went & had a look round Boulogne, home at 9

4 Mon: Expect to go to Armentieres. Left for Steenwerck [in France] via Calais. Continued at 12, arrived Calais 5 left at 1, had tea. Saw Red Cross train. Saw good plane act at Calais

5 Tues: Came to Camp at Steenwerck & shifted camp just behind lines. Bombardment all day

6 Wed: In Camp. Bombarding all day. Troops expect to go over tonight. Saw Fred\* [Alf/Grandpop's brother] & all old platoon. Wrote Marion & Father

7 Thurs: In Camp. Stunt came off last night. Saw wounded men passing, a great sight some bad. Went & saw naval gun. N.Z. did great work

8 Fri: Ord Serg. Men on fatigue. Salvage party went to Didqu [?]

9 Sat: Went up Messines Ridge with Salvage party under fire all day, had 2 or 3 narrow escapes. Went through Nevue Eglise

Mem: Red X train great sight men all bandages from front to Calais. Also from lines to Dressing Stations. Saw German prisoners

10 Sun: Again, went up with party to Messines, very hot with shrapnel sprinkled many times, motored up & down. Got photo of Mum & Dad & 2 letters from Marion & 1 from Lizzie

11 Mon: In Camp Standing by. Saw Aldred who told of men wounded. Robinson wounded, Dowman [Donavan?] killed

12 Tues: Shifted Camp & slept there. Big shell came over & upset Lorry & wounded 3 men. Saw Fred\* after stunt

13 Wed: Came to new Salvage Camp with 15 men picked marque

14 Thurs: Out on Salvage Nieppe Papua. Same in afternoon. Saw relief maps of position. Saw good plane. Corp [Arthur Irwin] Rea killed at Cath [?] Wrote to Marion & Taradale.

15 Fri: -

16 Sat: Salvaging. Nearly hit by shell in front of water tank. Played bridge with red cross men

Mem: have been under shell fire all week. Balloons up all the time Saw more 18th Totton wounded

17 Sun: Salvaging all day very hot. Shelling all day. Very heavy shelling at night. Wrote to Marion

18 Mon: Out at front trenches. Shelling all night. Had to leave bivvy at 11 too hot. Letter from Marion April 16

19 Tues: Out at front. Shelling early morning, killed one man at back of bivvy. Saw Fred\* in trenches

20 Wed: Saw balloon come down in flames. Salvage ammunition. Shelling very close, had to duck. Wrote to Lizzie

21 Thurs: Raining. Salvage. Dead & wounded going past. Saw Padre burying dead. Saw Wood in trenches from Napier

22 Fri: Raining. Out over no man's land saw mine crater & dead Aussies. Letter from Marion April 24<sup>th</sup>. Bivvy blown in next to us red x man. Shelling very heavy all round

23 Sat: Salvaging from no man's land. Saw 3 balloons burnt & 1 Hun plane bought down. Came to De Seuil to sleep. A lot of Gas about

Mem: great sight Balloons & plane bought down. Had feed of eggs ...

.. SEPTEMBER ...

9 Sun: Got leave & went to Boulogne & tried to find Fred & Percy [his brothers] Did not do so Fred is in the rest camp. Went out in Piers with 2 Maoris

10 Mon: In Canteen 2 new men came up, Wright & Priest to go back, stores came up

Gen Russell inspected Pioneers

11 Tues: In Canteen quiet day weather getting much colder

12 Wed: Canteen in morning. Got Classified in afternoon at Hemneveux. Got C with Morton, other two waiting to go back

*Page missing*

20 Thur: Dull day. Not feeling too well lately

21 Fri: Got paid 30-00. Bullen got drunk with Crawshaw. Good day in Canteen. Got letter from Fred

22 Sat: In Canteen. Feeling crook. Dogs in Stable

Mem: Women working carrying big loads of wood & working in fields, very hardy long hours. Calves get fed for veal

23 Sun: Quiet day went for walk, bought book (NZ at the front). Saw Nicholson of Napier in Engineers

24 Mon: In Canteen orders to be ready to shift at an hours' notice. Bullen left for Blighty. Bill Green came up with orders. Sold stuff to Frenchy at Estaminute

25 Tues: Batt. Shifting out. Took stock & packed up. Made up stock at estamint.

N.Z. expected to go into the Line. Saw Otago 4th Brigade pass

26 Wed: Ready to shift out all packed. Had breakfast at Estamint. Walked to Henneveux & saw Adam who knows nothing.

27 Thur: had breakfast at estamint fine day Stopped at Bouronville all day did nothing. Left for Neilles & stayed night hard bed.

28 Fri: At Neilles all day & night did nothing got slows really to shift tomorrow.

29 Sat: Left at 11 for Poperinge came through St. omer. Hazebrauck, Anques to Poperinge & came to bulk stores. Slept in Celfue [?] Fritz over worst night, everybody wind up saw houses where bombs fell 3 houses in the road dropped one in restaurant apponter [?]

Mem: dog wheels & churns butter. Horse in thrashing mill great work.

30 Sun: Came to ..... [blank] & opened Canteen. Saw Pioneers pass to Ypres Fritz shells this place. Saw Dine & Nicholson N.Z. going in & Aussies coming out. Almost full moon

## OCTOBER

1 Mon: Bombed last night very close. Had to get out. Troops passing all day & night. Good work in Canteen

2 Tues; Our troops gone in saw Sweet a Kelleher & others 4th Brgd. Expected to go over on Wednesday. Bombed like hell again last night. Went to Bulk store & bought stores. Guns going up

3 Wed: Raining. Letter & photo from Marion. Have been without tucker for 3 days. Went to dressing station & saw wounded from Ypres nad [?] night.

4 Thurs: Fritz shelled Poperinge last night. Gain went to dressing station & saw more dead & wounded NZ casualties. Heavy again, went for rations & saw shell holes. Got Fritz souvenirs

5 Fri: Shelled again last night. NZ division pulls out today for 3 days' spell, go in again then

Saw Plested & MacGregor & P Anderson

6 Sat: Shelled again last night

Mem: Greatest sight yet troops on the move, wounded men in motors bad wounds some die in motors awful night men gassed. Traffic day & night terrible roar [?]

\*Fred was his youngest brother, b 25-11-1895. Killed in action 27-3-1918. Buried in Colincamps, France.

Percy Alexander Peterson, 28 years, joined the Australian Army 28 January 1915. He was single and his sister E Brabant of Sydney, NSW, was noted as his next of kin.

Gunner Pte Peterson 1999 11 FAB Australia (brother Percy)

Alf returned to NZ after 18 months overseas embarked on Willocha 1st February 1918.

*Grandpop Alf returned from the war and my father Philip was born 5 March 1919 (woohoo for us!) ~ Lindsey Hargreaves*