



South Australians at war – transcript – PRG 244/9

Letters from Len Hussey

Letters written by Len Hussey to his friend Wally Dodd between September 1 1915 and May 1918. They describe his training at Morphettville Army Camp, his service on the Western Front and his convalescence in England.

Transcription of selected text

Transcribed by Susie van der Sluys, January 2002

Military Camp Heliopolis Egypt

Feb 18th 1916

Dear old Wally

I have just been wondering how you are getting on & it reminded me that I have not written to you since leaving Australia. I hope before you get this that you will have seen the diary letter that I sent to George with instructions re my aunt (Mrs Beeley) letting you read it. I thought perhaps it would interest you a bit. Any letters that I send you must be excused as far as the writing is concerned as we have not the facilities for writing that we had at home it is mostly done in a squatting position with the pad upon our knees as I have it now. You will understand that I am not able to tell you much or anything about what we are doing with regard to the war, but I might possibly make some letters interesting with an account of my private life. Egypt is a great contrast to dear old South Australia. The only English people we see are Nurses & Soldiers the other part of the population is decidedly Cosmopolitan, Arabs, Egyptians, French, Nubians, & all the dirt & scum of other nations. The niggers are very funny in many ways they get hold of some of our sayings. I would like to tell you some but could not very well put it in a letter. I saw on a restaurant the other day "Dinkum Eatup" & a menu paper in another (This joint is dinkum special prices for the Glorious Soldiers. The journey from Port Suege to Cairo is very similar to that from Quorn to Hergot Springs. It is about a ten hours trip. Last Sunday I went for a lovely trip about 125 of us went for an excursion trip to the Nile we had 25 cabs & a guide, we visited several very old mosques & saw some wonderful tombs of ancient Kings & Sultans then we went into the Coptic Church, here it is supposed that Joseph & Mary hid with Jesus when they fled into Egypt from Herod we also saw the place where Abraham was supposed to have offered (?). Then we went into a Jewish Synagogue where we saw a service in progress it is presumed that Moses & Aaran worshipped in this Church then we drove on to the Rive



Nile & saw the place where Moses was supposed to have been found in the rushes, a red tower marks the place, we also saw Pharoah's palace. Then we had a lovely drive back to Cairo on the way we saw the Khedire's palace it is a beautiful place all surrounded with Guards & two mounted Guards at the entrance gates, they looked superb, we also saw the French Consul out driving in his carriage with a footman dressed in gold livery of course not real gold, but gilt, it was a grand sight. We saw two Arab funerals & one weddingóthey were very different from those one sees in South Australia. We had a very good trip in the boat, but it got very monotonous towards the end we were one day short of four weeks. After we left Western Australia we did not see land for about 16 days it seemed a long time. I have just been talking to a fellow who worked on Narrung his name is Perce Bennetts. I asked him if he knew you & he said he remembered you as a footballer. Do you remember him? All my poor old pals have just gone on a long route march with full pack up 60 æ lbs to carry. I have just missed it by having been appointed hut policeman. It is a duty that we have to take in turns week about or until we are relieved. The hut policeman is in charge of a certain hut & is responsible for all articles left during the absence of men on parade. Please remember me very kindly to Mrs Dodd & Alfie also Mr Keen & any friends. I should like to hear very soon that you have quite recovered & when I get back hope to see you tearing along on your bike again. I saw Bob Sladdin the other evening have not run across Vic Lugwell yet. Try & drop me a line sometimes I shall be delighted to get a letter. I hope I am spared to get back & see you all again & then I can tell you some of my experiences. I must close now old chap with best wishes from
your old pal Len Hussey

Military Camp 2-3 16

Tel-el-Keber, Egypt

Dear Wally-

I was delighted to get your letter yesterday, & also to know that you are getting along so nicely as far as your health is concerned. Why old chap, we might see you over here yet before the war is finished. It is grand that you are able to go up to the "Sluke" & do a bit, it will help the time to go much better for you. It was jolly hard luck about your cow, but good of the (?) to "Come to light" as they did but after all old man as you say there is a lot of good if only one looks for it. & I am sure the people down there would do their bit willingly.



I hope you will have better luck this time. Fancy your policeman catching those two chaps it is surprising what fellows will come to, but you should just see Cairo. If I am spared to get back I shall be able to tell you something that will open your eyes. I saw Vic Lugwell the other day, he looked very well indeed. I also saw Bob Sladdin he also looked well. I am afraid that after now my letters will be very short for we are getting further away from civilization. Only I am not able to tell you much about our doings, I should not be surprised if our next move is (?) the (?). My Aunt (Mrs Beeley) sent me one of those letterettes with views of Port Elliot by last mail. I could almost feel the salt air, here we can see very little but sand & niggers. Albert Knott told me that he knew you, he used to have a barber's shop at Mount Barker. Well Wally old man I must close now. Please remember me kindly to Mrs Dodd & Alfie also Mr Kent & any other of my old Port Elliot pals. I am lying flat out on my stomach in my tent writing this & suppose you are well in bed it is now 4.30 P.M which would make it about 12.30 or one AM at Port Elliot. we are situated about ~~three~~ three hundred yards from a railway so we are frequently seeing trains several go by each hour. The railway runs between Suege & Cairo. Well old man good bye & good luck & I shall just look forward to the time when I get out of the train at the old home again & see you all once more

Your old pal
Len Hussey

Address France, instead of Egypt

My dear Wally.

Let me tell you first of all how very sorry I am that at last the authorities have had to report the death of poor old Howard I deeply sympathise with you & will you please convey same to the rest of the family. Well dear old lad as you say we can just mourn his loss & then face the reality of things & go on doing our bit, you in your small corner & I in mine. I am so glad Wally that you have so far improved even to be able to walk around the table that is a marked improvement since I last saw you. I often feel as if I would like to write miles of news to you old boy but one has to consider the poor censor & it is hard to know just how far one can go. Anyhow I do not think there can be any harm in telling you about our trip from Egypt to here. The first thing I was sent in charge of some baggage in our little military train from our camp to a railway stn about six miles that was on a Saturday



morning, on the Sunday the rest of our section turned up with the horses, (twelve all told.) at about midnight we entrained, & travelled through the night arriving at Alexandria at 9.15 Am where our boats were awaiting us of course there were more than just our Transport Section & their horses We steamed out of Alexandria that evening & reached Marseilles after eight days of suspense thinking that any minute we might be torpedoed but we went under escort. Now about Marseilles, it is a beautiful place, the harbour is magnificent could not possibly describe it on paper. we were taken to a rest camp for a couple of days during which time we were able to have a look around the city & indeed it was a wonderful treat after being so many months in Egypt. It was grand to see white people again & really Wally the city is most beautiful & all the shops looked so nice & clean & I think I saw just about all the kinds of fruit that grow beautiful strawberries that compare very favourably with ~~to~~ those in Australia, grapes, oranges & all very fine, the city itself is beautifully laid out & one can walk through streets of Avenues of lovely trees. Well after a couple of days we got on board a train again, of course we always travel on specials) & we started for a four days trip & I can tell you Wally it surpassed anything that I have ever seen. We started through mountainous country one engine in front & one behind one tunnel took us seven minutes to go through & I suppose we were travelling at about 20 miles per hour. Well we had four days & three nights of that then we pulled up at a big town where we stayed for several days then we were supplied with more horses & a lot of mules & started off, in our lot alone there were about 90 horses & mules besides the other sections we came along the most beautiful country imaginable had about 5 days per road camping out at nights with the sky above us & the girls to love us?) on Sunday week we arrived here after nearly three weeks continual move & now here we are old chap well within sound of shot & shell & I can tell you sometimes I think of the dear old office in North Terrace, but I really do not think I could be happy there while there are so many dear old chaps laying down ther lives for the homeland. I hope you will excuse this writing old lad but I am doing it with a public pen & you know what they are like. It must have been very disappointing to poor old Bill Barrett to be rejected but I am afraid he is hardly the stamp of fellow that would be useful out here. Your news that Alec K.B. is likely to enlist nearly took my breath away but perhaps it will make a man of him, as you say he ought to make a good sniper. That little race meeting at H.V. must have been tip top. Stan was lucky to win the Cup, what horse won it for him? Well old chap I must close now, Kind Regards to Mrs Dodd & Alfie please remember me kindly to any enquirers. Best wishes



Wally & I hope that long before I get back you will be able to walk far more than around the table. GoodBye old lad

Yours &c Len Hussey.

France 14-2-17

Dear Wally.

Thank you very much for your last nice long letter I always find your letters interesting you have a good chatty way of writing & seem to dig up a decent bit of news. I saw you very plainly last night Wal in fact I think as plainly as I have ever seen you, you were driving a jersey cow along by Cliff House & you were walking quite upright but had a stick & Alphonse was with you but he was only a very little chap. It was a very vivid dream I only hope it is true about you being able to walk without the aid of your crutches. Well lad I have very little news as usual only that I am in hospital suffering from frozen feet which is very painful we are having a pretty hard time as the cold is intense & for the last six weeks one could see nothing but ice & snow. I feel very sorry about poor old Tom (?). I shall miss him, if ever I go to Port Elliot again, for he was associated with my life ever since I was quite a young boy. We often speculate as to whether we will be home by Xmas. It will be jolly good if we do. Well Wally old pal I must ring off for my fingers are just like icicles & my feet are giving me what O, Kind Regards to Mrs Dodd & Alf & also any of my old friends at Elliot.

Your old pal

Len

Belgium, 3-6-17

My dear Wally

I am sorry that I have not answered your last letter but I know that you will excuse me for really at times it is very hard to make up news. Of course I could write a book to you of happenings but the next day I suppose I would be in the guard tent with an armed guard keeping watch over me for we are unable to say much about the war & there is absolutely nothing else only that I am quite well & how are you? Thank Alf very much for sending me the books they have not yet arrived but no doubt they will in due course & I know that I will appreciate them for reading matter is very scarce here. I saw Gill Snell yesterday his



camp is only a few yards from ours ñ he looks very well after having seven months in England he was wounded in the arm ñ Fritz gave us a very warm time the other night & I began to wonder if I would ever see any of you again, but you see I am still intact. I hope it is true that Howard is only a prisoner, that is bad enough but not so bad as the supreme sacrifice, he may be spared to you yet. God grant that it may be so. This is an awful business, Wal, a horribly barbarous way of settling an argument. We have left our former front & had 3 small marches & a night in the train to here - & I can tell you it is a little different from a S.S picnic in Welches paddock wouldn't I love to be there now? Well Wally I must ring off now, thanks for all your letters &c I do look forward to them. Love to you all. from
Len

Ships that pass in the night
A soldier lay on the battle field
Of Belgiums war torn land
No comrade heard his dying word
As they ran, in a mighty band
Across the bridge they took the ridge
And dug in fast and hard
But no one knew that in mud like glue
Lay then true and faithful "Pard"
He lay for hours through the dark cold night
And yet he felt no pain
But the ground was met with bloody sweat
And soaked with a deep red stain.
A vision he saw through an open door
Of a river, and "wonderful sight"
For floating along in an endless throng
Were ships that pass in the night
There were ships of love and ships of hate
And ships of sorrow and joy
But no one saw through the open door



The dying soldier boy.

But at last there came, like a golden flame

The ship whose name is grace

And the Captain saw through the open door

The brave young hero's face

He pointed his hand towards the land

And beckoned the lad on board

And so there passed, time to the last

A soul, to his sure reward

L Hussey

France 18-10-17

Written in memory of some of my dear old pals who fell in the world's great war

Abroad 2-11-17

Dear old Wally

I have been debating in my mind whether I ought to write to you or not today. For I am not very well & feeling a bit down, then I feel ashamed when I think of your great affliction & the cheerful letters that you write to me I am really glad that Harry has been able to get back home and sincerely hope that his wound is not serious enough to incapacitate him for life. Poor old chap he has seen a bit of Hell & I suppose some of us will have to go low for a while yet. I for one would be sorry to give in until we have crushed Germany so that she will be unable to rise again, God help us all Wally if Kaiserdom wins. I saw a horrible sight a week or two ago one of our planes brought down a Fritz and long before the plane got to the ground the observed fell out then the pilot was crushed under the plane I only saw this hand & arm but the observer looked awful. One shell killed my O.C. 2 drivers 6 mules, & wounded a Corporal & driver. So you can tell what things are like here. We are having a nice rest for a few weeks but it only seems like feeding a rooster up before you pot him. Tomorrow is my birthday, the third in the army & second in France I hope the next will be in Australia or Heaven, I notice that you ask if I have had my leave to England I expect by now you will have received my letter telling you all about it. I had a lovely time. I did get a very nice parcel from you all. I wrote to you (?) it, perhaps it went to the bottom (the letter I mean) Mrs Dodd must be doing A1 with her dairy & I am very pleased. I should like to be



near & have some cream I had some beautiful Devonshire cream while in England & the Raspberries were ripe so you can tell how I enjoyed them. You seem to have had a wonderful amount of rain but I do not think it can beat France. I think it is just wonderful how Port Elliot supports all the funds that are going, but I felt so sorry that so much money is being spent on Belgium for they are a rotten crowd. I have known them take the handles off their pumps so that we should not have a drink & other things I could tell you but would not be allowed to. The French people are different they are very kind & cannot do enough for us. The Belgians are so closely related to Germany they have intermarried a great deal Well Wally old lad I must close this I hope it has not been too dismal for you. We a Please give my Kind Regards to Mrs Dodd, Alf & all friends who may enquire. Your sister hit on one of the best funds for the troops of her social. We get many little luxuries at times that we would never get but for the comforts fund. Dear old Wal I feel that I would love to be talking to you & there is such a big lump in my throat & my eyes are not as dry as they might be. Good Bye dear old pal

love from

Yours Len

13.5.18

no 1 A.A. troops

Harefield

Middlesex

England

My dear Wally

I have to answer quite a number of letters from you it is really good of you to write so often, but I almost feel ashamed now that I have a good job in England but I have been congratulated by all ranks from officers to privates & they all acknowledge that I deserve the change & I can be of use to the poor old wounded boys here, whereas if they kept me over there much longer I don't think you would have had the pleasure of welcoming me back to dear old Port Elliot for if Fritz did not get me conditions would have, so one would be just as bad as the other anyhow if I do have to go back now it will be for hospital work & I will not have to carry ninety pounds weight of equipment about. I got a bundle of letters on Saturday amongst them from you Feb 13 much earlier than others that I had got weeks



ago. They evidently have been chasing me around, in it was a photo of W.J.D. & his motor. I think the record to waterport was wonderful. I wonder if you would like to come to London with me tomorrow we could parade the Strand in great style. I say Wal please excuse this writing I am not drunk but got a B of a pen beast of a pen you know what sort. My word fancy you boiling over there in February & we were nearly crying with the cold but we have been getting some lovely days lately something like October days in Aussie. I am writing this in the afternoon here & if you are a good boy you must be comfy in bed for it would be about 11.30 Pm with you. Thanks very much for Letterette of P.E. news it took my mind back to the dear old days & place I would love to wheel you around by Green Bay at this moment. I am very pleased to have a time in England it will be something to talk about to you all when I get back for really Wal it is simply beautiful here & the flowers & birds make everything so bright, no guns to disturb. We seldom saw many birds in France where we were for they were mostly frightened away except crows & they were there for no good but of here the cuckoos & thrushes & other birds are beautiful & the wild flowers are fine also the gardens. It does seem a great pity that there are so many fellows in Australia who will not come over & lend a hand but you are doing your bit old boy dont worry if you did nothing else but just write a few letters occasionally to those who are there you would be surprised how they are appreciated but you have done far more. Alfie must be getting along wonderfully well I am very pleased for you all it must be a great comfort to you & Mrs Dodd. Is he going to get into the P.O. Department? he must have been proud of his first salary. I am so glad that you are able to manipulate your tricycle so well you must feel quite independent I do hope you will keep well during the winter. I would like to have sat down to that rooster with you we would have made it look silly, they are a luxury over here old hens for killing 17/6 each eggs 5/- per (?) & rabbits 10/6 each. Isn't it frightful well I am not a big eater but I had to go to three places in London to get a feed & when I had finished my meal it cost me 3/7. One place I got about an ounce of cold meat & some pickles at another, two small sausages with an egg, at the last one sausage & egg, had some stewed fruit & custard equal to one good dinner when my dear old mother was alive, but fancy 3/7. One cannot buy what one likes, only what ~~they~~ one is allowed. I got a 1/4lb of chocolates the other day as a favour because I was a soldier 10(?) per Quarter, the woman told me she was only allowed to sell ten Quarters per day, & one cannot get sugar for love nor money. It is very funny to see the people who have sugar tickets they go out to afternnon tea & when it is served they pull their little tin of sugar out of their pockets & put



a tiny bit in their tea. If you want bread you have to ask for it & it is charged (?) at the rate of about 1/8 per loaf but you are only allowed one fair slice which is 2(?). So you can just imagine what living is like in England. Well Wal old boy I must close now. Hope you will see my general letter to P.E. friends about Harefield & my work. I always tell George to let you see them. I think it is a better way than writing the same to all. Please remember me very kindly to Mrs Dodd & Alfie, also your father & mother & other dear old friends. Accept best wishes dear old chap & many thanks for letters &c. Did Alfie get a book that I sent him from London? Your old pal

Len Hussey