

25 October

My dear Hazel,

I had hoped to get a letter from you at Hobart. Our passage from Wellington was so slow that a steamer could easily have overtaken us, but *apparently there was not one - at any rate we got no mail.

Our short stay at Hobart was a delightful interlude, but now the time is beginning to drag. It seems like ages, instead of three days, since we left Hobart, but I have had a turn on guard, and that twenty-four hours always seems interminably long. We are heading due west so far, which course would not take us anywhere in particular, so we are still in the dark as to our next port of call. Some think we are making for Colombo direct, but it is more

likely that we will call at Albany, and perhaps rest the horses for some days. We are not looking forward to the prospect much. Albany is only a coaling port, a mere township with the desert behind. In any case we infantry are not likely to get ashore. There is only one wharf, so they will probably get the mounteds ashore, two or three boats at a time, and then get back into the stream with us infantry.

Our present course is simply to keep clear of the ordinary routes, and then turn north when we reach the longitude of Albany. We did the same coming from Wellington - at least we kept away south of the usual route. The idea of course is to avoid steamers which might give news of us. The fact that they are taking such

precautions makes me nearly certain that they will hold back the letters we post until we are safely on our way. We have only sighted one steamer, and that was the evening after we left Hobart. It was fine to see our cruisers steaming past like greyhounds to overhaul her.

Hobart is the finest place I have seen, surpassing even Nelson. Not that the town itself is imposing - there are many old and dirty buildings - but for natural advantages of position, beauty, surroundings, climate and facilities for out-of-door pleasures, I have not seen a town which suited my taste so well. It reminds me more of Dunedin than of any other place of my limited acquaintance, especially in the appearance of the town looking from the harbour. We

sighted land at daybreak on Wednesday, and soon entered the large bay which extends beyond the harbour. The coast is very rugged, but with sandy bays between the headlands. All we could see of the country was barren hills, covered with dreary, colourless bush. Even as we entered the harbour, there was not a sign of civilisation. It was all exactly as one expected from Clarke's terrible masterpiece, "For the Term of his Natural Life", and one could vividly imagine the flight of the cannibal convicts up that beach to the north.

After we passed the heads, we could see clearings and a few green crops in the distance, but still no sign of any considerable settlement. It must be twelve or fifteen miles up to the town, and several miles across - a magnificent natural harbour.

We finally dropped anchor in the port about eleven, the right line of transports going to the wharves to disembark immediately for a march, while we of the left line remained in the stream. It was a glorious day, and our first impressions of Australia were accordingly favourable. The sky was a blue that we seldom see, and the sun was blazing hot - whereat I rejoice exceedingly. It happened to be carnival week in Hobart - show, races etc - and the harbour was thronged with yachts and launches coming out to see us. The main feature of the landscape is the bush-covered mountain rising steep behind the town - you may have seen it on Tasmanian stamps.

In the evening we went to the wharves, replacing the right line who had "had their fling" ashore.

There was a great crowd on the wharf, and they gave us a royal welcome. We "fished" with fishing lines over the side, and got a good catch of cigarettes, apples etc. Next morning we had our jaunt ashore. We covered about nine miles, marching through the main streets, and right round the outskirts. The banks of the Derwent river, of which the harbour is really the estuary, are beautifully adorned with gardens, and the river itself is the largest and grandest I have seen. The best residential part is out that way, and the private gardens are lovely. We were simply pelted with apples and roses all the way, and altogether got a rousing reception. Their own Tasmanian troops, 1500 in number, had left two days before for an unknown destination.

3 We returned to the boats by dinner

time, and immediately rejoined the other ships out in the harbour, finally weighing anchor about three o'clock. Our stay was altogether delightful. The only blot was that the colonel took exception to some men breaking ranks on the march, in the scramble for fruit, and being unable to sort out the offenders, sentenced the whole ship to an hour's pack drill per day for a week. There was a strike next day when the hour came round, but it fizzled out, and the officers smoothed us down. The annoying part of the sentence is the necessity of changing from dungarees into uniform and back again, putting all accoutrements together daily and undoing them again to put away for the night. We will not be altogether happy till that sentence is expired and forgotten. Pack drill has been abolished

as a special punishment, being superseded by swabbing the decks, from four to six in the morning.

The weather has been wonderfully good up till now, but I was interrupted in my writing this afternoon by the news that it was raining, and I had to dash up to the top deck and rescue my washing. But alas! it had been quite dry and was now wet again. Washing is quite the horriddest job we have on board. There is only one tub for 1500 men, cold water, and poor soap. You have to snatch a chance in the evening, to get things washed, then every article has to be tied to the railings with string, and carefully watched against thieves.

Wed Tuesday.

It has just been announced that the mail closes at noon tomorrow. We reach Albany in the

afternoon, and only stay one day - then for Colombo. Our letters are not to be censored, but we are not allowed to wire.

We had an exceedingly hot day yesterday, but a wet one today, with a heavy sea. The remainder of the pack drill has been cancelled, as the colonel thinks we have learnt a lesson.

I think we are in for a long stay in England - till about March. We get a little stray war news by wireless, and from the way things seem to be going, our chances of seeing service are rather remote.

Now I will close this screed. It is already the longest I have ever been guilty of. Your exams. will probably be all over by the time you get it, but I am wishing you luck anyhow. My next letter will be addressed to Ashburton, where I hope you will be having a perfect holiday. With fondest love from Cecil.