

"Stinko Farm,"
FRANCE,
30/1/1918.

My daer Valerie,

Here goes for that promised letter. In spite of the many "furphies" which you get in Australia, PEACE has NOT been declared, at least not in our vicinity. Of course Russia has thrown in the towel but that only evens things up a bit. You know we want to spin this war out another few years yet, and it would not do to discourage old Fritz too much. We troops would feel so lonely without the whizz of the shells and the lovely mud! I say Val dear, aren't we fortunate to be away from such places as Sydney and Melbourne where you have those beastly dust storms?

Now I must tell you all about our doings. I have just returned from Blighty leave - of course you are not interested in what I did there. After going through a particular brand of Hades at Ypres, we pulled out on 22nd. Oct. and proceeded to our wagon lines, which were situated within cooee of the delapidated little village of Vlamertinghe. Speaking of this place reminds me that Fritz had the habit of visiting us each night with his "birds" and disturbing our rest by dropping "eggs." And you can take it from me those birds were never "broody."

On 23rd. Oct. the 7th. Brigade got up early and set out for fresh fields and pastures new. It happened to be a very wet and cold day, and the Comfords Fund woollens worked overtime. We travelled via Dickebusch, Kemmel Hill and Neuve Eglise to Ravelsburg, and settled down near by. We were only left in peace for a few days however, but during that time we pulled ourselves together a good deal. Wounds and sickness had thinned our ranks to an alarming degree whilst at Ypres, Footie matches were played and on half-holidays the troops were granted leave. Everybody headed for Bailleul, there to have a good feed of eggs and chips and to look at the post-card shops. My word Val, these Froggies print some daring post-cards!

On the evening of 8th. Nov; without any warning we were told to be ready to go into action at daybreak the following morning. So you see poor old 7th. came another "Gutser." Needless to say we didn't have breakfast in bed that day. The Batteries took up positions round about dear old "Plug St." (Ploegsteert is the proper name you know,) and the Le Bizet area and quite near the "possies" we occupied for that bally Messines stunt where we got a double issue of Hun gas last June. Our wagon lines moved in the direction of Steenwerck the following day. Here we stayed till about 20th. Dec. generally worrying Fritz, and doing our best to sidestep his return compliments. The Divvy football comp. was played during this period behind the line. Our Brigade was represented by the 26th. Battery who managed to pull off the final by defeating the D.A.C. and so getting a silver cup which was presented by Brig. General Grimwade. The scores were 23 to nil. For the Brigade Competition which the same Battery won, Lt. Colonel Macartney presented another cup.

On 20th. Dec. we pulled out but went into action again immediately. I bet you couldn't guess where! In Armentieres of all places. This was rather a coincidence because almost twelve months ago we were in this same town. It is not the same Armentieres now. The Huns have strafed it unmercifully and few undamaged houses remain. All the civies have cleared out - just put the mat inside and slammed the door.

Christmas and New Year were spent in action here, but really, we couldn't growl. The season was typical of France, snow all day and a bit on the cool side. Plenty of provender had been secured, such as sucking pigs and poultry. Champagne being very cheap in this country a goodly stock was obtained, and that, together with some "borrowed" red and white wines from the cellars in Armentieres which people had forgotten to lock up, kept us merry and bright. In addition each man was issued with a 1lb. allowance of plum duff. Both sides of the line were pretty quiet that day, evidently our enemies were celebrating too. Early in the New Year we pulled out of action for a little while. That is all I can tell you this time. Oh! I forgot to mention that our Christmas parcel mail did not reach us till quite recently. Still, better late than never. I got such a beauty from you.

Now I think I'll go over to the Y. Emma for a cup of tea. Did you know the 7th. has a Y.M.C.A. now? Rather! We have got a "gohanna" too and at night the boys give it gip.

Well old pal, au revoir,

Yours till the mud dries up, MACHONCHIE.