

The journal of A.Cpl. John Murray #133

April - June 1915

C Coy. 4th Batt.

Mon. 29 Mar. - Sun. 4 April 1915  
At Mena Camp and Port Alexandria

Tonight (Sunday) we are settled aboard H.M.A.T. A8, 'SS Lake Michigan', alongside dock at Alexandria, and all about us ships are alive. The docks swarm with men, horses, wagons and trucks as we prepare for departure. Our destination is a mystery but spirits are high. The Batt. is packed into every space and there is little room other than to sit with my typewriter on my lap and my back to a bulkhead.

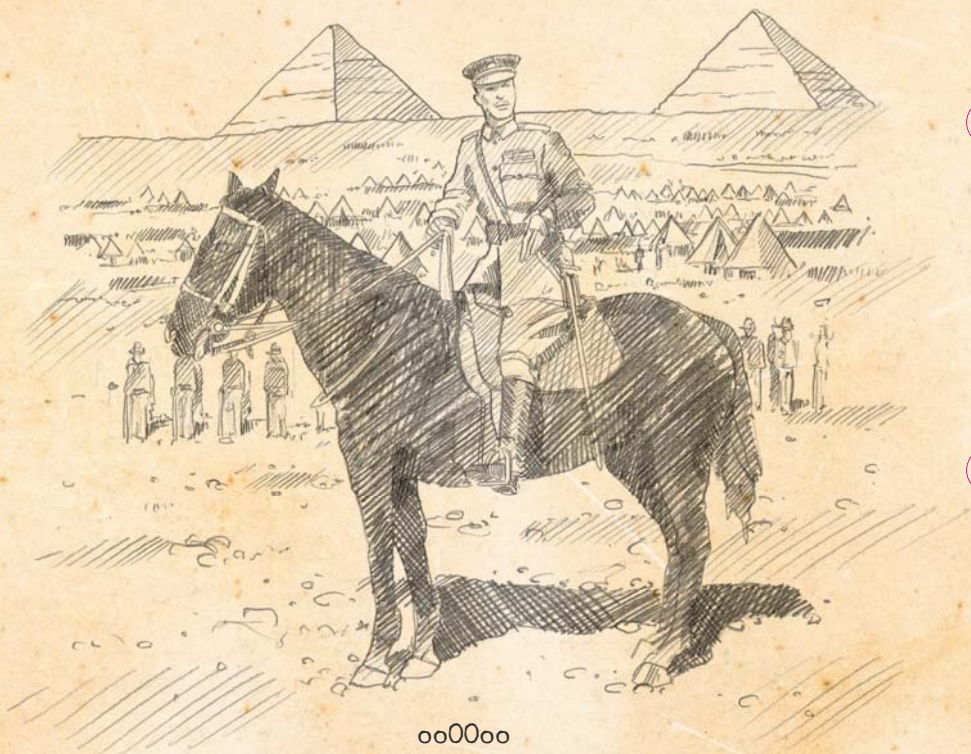
We received embarkation orders with delight. After Church Parade on Good Friday we were told we would break camp on Saturday, ready to march to Cairo for entrainment to Alexandria. We took no time dismantling the tents in the morning, leaving only the huts and a few Bells standing. Half of C Coy. marched out in the late afternoon while the rest of us remained cleaning camp, and then departed at 10 o'clock last night.

On Monday the whole Div. paraded for inspection by the General Officer Commanding, Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton. He is a slight fellow, and his left arm seemed limp and in need of support. He must be every day of 60 years, yet carried himself with great presence. I am proud to say the 4th presented superbly.

On the matter with the police officer last week, it seems there is no consequence for my actions.

As I write whistles are sounding and we have been ordered to our stations, I assume for lifeboat drill or lecture.





Mon. 5 - Sun. 11 April 1915  
At Lemnos

This week we lay off the Greek island of Lemnos. We are only 50 miles to the east of the Dardanelles and the narrow strait separating us from Constantinople. Our warships have bombarded Turkish fortifications along the strait relentlessly, yet it seems the passage remains well protected with mines and mobile guns. Five ships were lost to the Turk guns and mines.

It is evident that we are preparing for a major landing. Each day more ships arrive in Mudros Bay and this glorious natural harbour is filled with French, Russian, British and Australian ships of all classes. This must be the biggest flotilla ever gathered, more than 200 ships -- troopships; hospital ships; light cruisers; and heavy warships, as well as hundreds of small tenders rushing about with supplies. The ships fill the bay such that two or three are tied together at each anchor; ours being tied alongside H.M.A.T.



A9 'SS City of Benares' and her cargo of the Field Ambulance and the 1st Brig. H.Q..

For the most we remain aboard, although we are given liberty to swim and this allows those with a good stroke to swim to shore to explore the beaches on the west bank. The locals go about their days tending their plots and animals as if we are not here. Fishing boats are beached along the shore and the old men and women sit and make repairs to fishing nets endlessly.

Those men who cannot swim have opportunity to step ashore when we drill in the ships' boats. We are readying ourselves for the landing and the training is done with full kit and rifles. Once in the boats those of us at an oar practice oarsmanship while the others enjoy our efforts. A Navy midshipman takes the tiller. Our boat is big and heavy in the water and even an oar is a challenge for one man. She carries 30 men but others hold more and others less. It was no time before the boats were racing. The Berwick boys, having been associated with surf lifesaving at Coogee, called the stroke. The smaller boats with only a dozen men aboard are not unlike those used for the first surf lifesaving boat race at Manly in 1908. Little Coogee won that event and in keeping with a fine tradition, Charlie and Pete saw to it we did as well as one could against the smaller boats.

We generally drill in the boats for about two hours before making land and forming into ranks for a route march. Getting back on board the ship is as challenging as getting off.

Australia's remaining submarine, 'AE2' is here and as she weaved through the flotilla the echo of every Australian cheering filled the harbour. She was towed most the way from Australia behind a troopship with the second contingent.

Each man was issued 200 rounds while at sea. I turned 21 on Saturday and thought much about Mother and the family. I am now eligible to cast my vote at the next election.

We heard stories of great riots at the seedy Wazza district of Cairo on Good Friday evening.

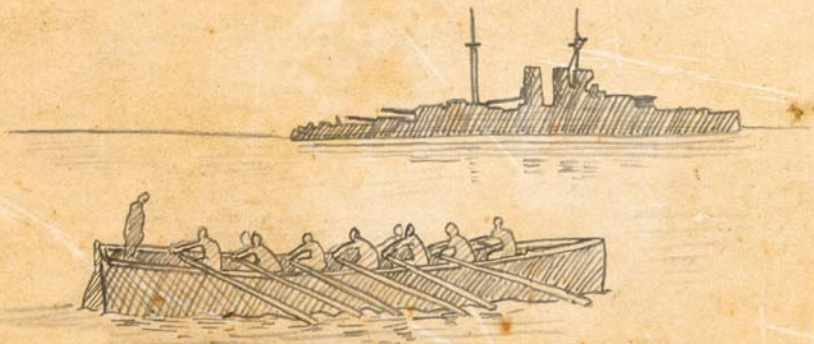


Some say it was an uprising against rising costs of "entertainment"; some because of the diseases passed to men, and yet others say it was to save the virtue of an English lass enslaved in the district. There were by accounts buildings burned; mounted charges; locals and British troops locked in street battles; Australians and N.Z.ers looting and throwing furniture from buildings; and dead laying in the streets. I expect whatever the truth of the "Wazzar Riots" it will give way to the better storytellers.

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Mon. 12 - Sun. 18 April 1915

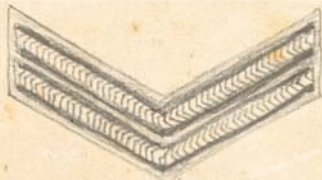
We have spent much time ashore this week, on route marches, Batt. exercises and enjoying the beaches. One of the Officers in 3rd Batt. organised boat races using six of the smaller boats with 13 man crews. Men from all Batts. lined up to take their turn at pulling and it was a scene and atmosphere reminiscent of the beaches at home. The course was set from the beach near the hospital pier on the western shore and covered 3000yds; boats rounded HMS 'Queen Elizabeth' and dashed to the beach to the cheers of men waving hats and shirts. Even the British bluejackets cheered as we rounded their ship.



The rest of the week was given to boat practice. It is a hard task to balance the weight of the pack as you descend the net and you can easily snag your rifle or webbing. We are instructed where each sits; who will pull the oars; where gear is stowed and who has charge; the order of disembarkation; and how to undo our kits should we fall into the water. We practiced



landing on the beach and charging forward, something we imagine we will be doing for real in no time, for speculation is now that we will land on the peninsular, behind the Turkish fortifications.



By no action or desire I was made acting corporal on Thursday and immediately took the Section on a route march up past the No. 3 Australian General Hospital. We rested at the hospital and talked to the nurses. Once the fighting starts they will treat "light cases" -- men who will be ready to fight again within the month, while the more serious wounded will be transported to Egypt. The hospital is not yet ready for service and those attending with minor ills or training wounds are resting on cots out in the open. The nurses are a good sort though, and Gilly is professing his love for a young lass from Adelaide.

Mon. 19 - Sat. 24 April

I take the opportunity to update my diary tonight, as tomorrow I cannot be certain I will have opportunity or inclination. We sailed out of Mudros Harbour in a spectacular procession led by the mighty battleship H.M.S. 'Queen Elizabeth' at about 2 o'clock and now move slowly north in the open waters between the island and the Dardanelles Peninsula.

Lieut. Barrett, our new Platoon C.O., says we will land on the peninsular at a place called Gaba Tepe in the morrow. Gen. Hamilton will command our operation from 'Q. Elizabeth'. I will lead my Section in the battle.

The 4000 men of 3rd Brig. will take the lead tomorrow. They have been at Lemnos since leaving Egypt in March and are well prepared to secure the beach and push back the Turks. We expect the Turks will have strong entrenchments and a resolve to defend what is their homeland. The 3rd will be followed by the 2nd Brig., while we in the 1st will come up in the third wave and rally at the beach to join the push to secure Turkish positions inland where needed.