Written by Walter Otto Herbert Allen – France – 25 June 1918

This was included in the final letter written by Walter to his family. He died at the Somme 4 July 1918. It was written to be sent to be published in "The Review".

For the "Review"

With best wishes.

Thoughts from France

By W.O.H.A.

I am sitting in my "dugout", my pal is at my elbow writing a letter, and judging by the speed at which his pen is travelling he is trying to make the most of the few remaining hours of daylight.

The small "dugout", true to name, is an irregular, partially square, excavation in the western slope of one of the numerous chalk hills which abound in this part of France. Its dimensions are roughly seven feet square, and in height varying from 2 ft 6 ins at the "doorway" to 4ft 6 ins at the back and roofed over by two old doors and a strip of canvas, all "salvaged" from a shell torn village not far distant (No doubt those two old doors were opened many a time by hands which now grip a rifle – and by a hand which may be at this moment penning a letter to "someone" in the trenches!). Who knows? It is not a commodious dwelling place, but superior to many which I have lived in, whilst soldiering and we are comparatively "comfortable" – a Wide World magazine, a copy of Aussie and some writing material are neatly distributed over the floor, maxing beautifully with rifles, packs and other trinkets dear to soldiers. The rain has stopped, and the rays of the setting sun are streaming fitfully through the gap that serves as an entrance.

I am looking out upon a typical French scene – woods – church spires, streams and green hills – all that goes to make France beautiful in the way of Nature – But there is an air of desolation in the scene - what has shattered that tree? and torn up those bushes? demolished that building? wrecked that railway line? and made that road so rough; Railway – macadam roads; those true indications of modern industrial enterprise, and ambition, and civilization – arteries that feed the veins of traffic to Paris (that beautiful city of past and present historical fame – where art, literature and beauty is a password of those times, growing red with rust – twisted, torn and bent, seem to tender a silent protest against the awful forces which keep them and the flourishing districts through which they run – in a state of neglect and stagnation. Who can fathom the feelings of these brave, patient people of Northern France denied of homes and made wanderers (let us hope temporarily) on the fact of the earth; Ploughs and other agricultural implements left in the fields – partially covered by the crops and grass which have grown abundantly since their owners were compelled to leave them – Homes left; in some cases fully furnished to the tender mercies of high explosive shells. See that heap of bricks and mortar and wooden beams and roofing tiles – that was once a home and undoubtedly a happy one, for I stoop and pick up an object in the debris – it is a child's doll -- The irony of fate.

People of Australia – Thank God that you have never known such experiences – and I trust that you never will. There are still a few people, clinging devotedly to their homes in some of these villages behind the lines. Recently I noticed an aged woman sitting outside her cottage door, calmly knitting socks, while shells were bursting a few hundred yards away – truly a case of courage and devotion. Many such incidents could be told – and my heart, when I remember our fair free land of the sunny south, goes out to these stricken, but unbeaten brave and patient people of Northern France – and We Shall Win ------------------------

A whistle has sounded; duty calls and we must answer – so "Au Revoir" – with kindest regards from

Cpl Allen