

Still the Stream Glides



By Evan Evans

For Gerald....

Now and then



*Cover: Poppies and view of Redcamp from Hospital Paddock towards shearing shed
and 'Old House', circa 1900. Family photograph, photographer unknown.*

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Authors Foreword

This the story of my journey in search of echo's. The key question explored is how do we remember them and do their lives still resonate today?

My style in writing this novel is somewhat similar to that of a “hip-hop” artist. That is, I have “sampled” music, literature and the letters that my great uncles, Capt. D. Gerald Evans MC and Pte Francis (Ken) Evans wrote home from France and Flanders during the First World War. In part I present as the “DJ”, although in the most part I am performing as the “MC”. This is because certain pieces of music are integral to setting the scenes and moods that form the landscape of this book. It is also my intention that the music specified could be listened to in conjunction with the reading of this story.

I believe this book is a quintessential Australian story of remembrance of the fallen, from the First World War, within a contemporary context that I hope that you will appreciate.

Chapter 1

“Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide”

*“I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide;
The form remains, the function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, who in our morn of youth defied”*

Extract from “After-thought” by William Wordsworth, 1820

Let me tell you a story.

Let me take you on a journey.

It's a journey taken through the very prism of my family.

And what better music to start a journey than Bach's “Goldberg Variations”, “Aria da capo” played by the Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould. The “Aria da capo” starts with the hesitancy which most journeys begin. I also find that juxtaposition between a German composer, a Canadian pianist to begin what is essentially an Australian story, appealing to my sense of ascetics given the path of this journey. If you like, a *ménage et trois* on spatial and temporal grounds.

Music 1: Bach's “Goldberg Variations” BWV 988, “Aria da capo” (1955), Glenn Gould
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I95v2Gi1fms>

This story is actually of two journeys that are separated by nearly 100 years and three generations of my family. They are of my great uncles, Capt. Gerald Evans MC and Pte Francis (Ken) Evans from Australia to the battlefields of France in the Great War and more latterly, my own journey to revisit those fields. This is a journey in search of echoes, primarily guided by the letters home to Australia from Gerald and Ken during this period.

All journeys need to have a beginning. For this journey, that beginning was on my families ‘crick’¹.

My family settled in the North East of Victoria in 1853 to a largely pastoral existence. The Whitefield Run lease was bordered by the King River and Fifteen Mile Creek, with its geographic centre being the Boggy Creek. The annual lease, for just under 60,000 acres, was signed over for the princely sum of ‘one pound, into the hands of the Colonial Treasurer in Melbourne’, by Governor C.J. Latrobe in January 1853.

Prior to this time the scion of the family, another John Evans, commenced his journey from he Parish of Llangadog in Wales. First, starting as a tenant farmer before graduating on to being the publican of the Plough Inn in Llangadog, Dyfed in 1839 (approximately 25 miles North of Swansea, Wales). This included being the maltster of the establishment. No mention was made if he was also the brewer. Perhaps the brewing of beer was the domain of his wife Elinor, as was oft the division of labour in those times?

To me these origins have a rather circular ring about them in their nature given my own professional field of enquiry, that being the scientific study of barley malt for making beer. In this, my pursuit was to help the Australian barley industry develop new varieties that make superior malt to make better quality beer and more of it! A form of national service, if you like?

¹ Crick: ‘on the crick’ is an old Australian colloquialism for a child being nursed in the crook of its parents arm. It is also an expression that can be used as a synom for a cradle.

Over the decades the Whitefield lease was frittered away by errant adventure, dilutive inheritance, and dare I say it, gambling. Thoroughbred horse racing seems to have been a particular weakness of the family. However, the number of photos and silver cups that have made it down through the generations within the family, indicate that there was at least some successes to encourage this pursuit.

By anecdote, it was the adventure to Conoble station, near Hillston in South West NSW in the 1880's that resulted in one of the larger contractions of the Whitefield run. Part of the Whitefield run was sold off to finance the families grand new adventure. The venture was in partnership with members of such other notable pioneering families as the Elders', Whitty's, Ridgway's and the Wintle's.

Conoble Station ended in disaster and near bankruptcy for the family. Years of droughts, plagues of rabbits and wild dogs did the damage. David Elder of course went on to found the successful Elders pastoral group. Interestingly, that company too got into beer for a while, but this was at a much later time.

Members of the Whitty family continued their association with our family in their horse racing pursuits and also in marriage. Eleanor Whitty became John Evans' wife.

The fragmentation of the Whitefield run was also induced through the series of *Crown Lands Alienation Acts* and *Crown Lands Occupation Acts* from the 1860s to the 1880s. These political devices were aimed at breaking up the large land holdings of the 'squattocracy'² to provide a more egalitarian land distribution in the colonies of Australia. Besides being an early example of the politics of class warfare in Australia, an additional motive was to shift land use from extensive grazing for wool production to a more intensive agriculture. In particular, the growing of crops such as wheat was required to feed and provide food security for the growing city dwelling colonial populations of Australia. That some of this land was not sustainable for crop production was typical of the political myopathy that transcends the generations in Australia.

Out of this progression, the Whitefield run was broken up into a cluster of smaller allotments independently operated and owned by various family members or within the eponymous partnership known as Evans Bros. In the main these properties were located in the fertile Boggy Creek and Fifteen Mile Creek valleys that were west of the larger and more forceful King River.

As such, by the 1890's the primary family landholding of the old Whitefield run was known as 'Redcamp'. Appropriately named given the rich, deep red soils that can grow almost anything.

One latter day family cropping adventure was to grow 'spuds'³. These spuds my father (David) has always considered, being a spud connoisseur, were '*the best tasting spuds he had ever eaten.*' Just as well, for the family business made little profit from his efforts. This was a fairly typical outcome for Evans Bros.

But I get ahead of myself as I need to properly lay out my family's ancestral dynamic.

In all, my great grandfather John and great grandmother Eleanor (nee Whitty) had eleven children. My grandfather Evan Evans was born in April 1887. He was the second youngest child in the family, being born after Francis (Ken) in October 1884 but before the baby of the family, (David) Gerald who was born in December 1889. By all accounts, Gerald was the 'darling' of the family, in particular of his mother.

² Squatter: In Australian history, a squatter was typically a man, either a free settler or ex-convict, who occupied a large tract of Crown land in order to graze livestock. Eventually, the term Squattocracy, a play on "aristocracy", developed to refer to some of these more wealthy squatters.

³ Spuds: colloquial name for potatoes.

The oldest child was Elinor who was born in November 1870. As was often the fate in those days, Elinor died at Redcamp on the 9th of August 1873, at the age of two years and eight months. Presumably a victim of that cold child killer, diphtheria. The family legend has it that her father John carried her tiny body on horseback over the hill, for burial in the Whitefield cemetery at Hyem. Her grave is one of the three original graves that predate the proclamation of the Whitefield Cemetery, which is up stream of Edi in the King River valley.

Infant mortality was a heavy burden, that we parent's in these days of modern medicines and vaccines rarely have to bear. Today we perhaps have little practical comprehension of the fragility of the life prospects of children in those days. In fact, life for all in those times, was shorter and more prone to premature expiration. That was of course without the assistance of one of the Reverend Thomas Malthus's favoured four horsemen of the Apocalypse, war.

The remainder of John and Eleanor's children were born either at Redcamp or near Wangaratta. The oldest boy was John Edwin (Jack) born in May 1873, followed by Julia (Minnie) in September 1874. They were followed by Hubert (Bertie) in June 1875, Albert in January 1877, Charles in March 1878, Henry (Harry) born in July 1880 and Alan in August 1882. That only one succumbed to childhood malady is testament to my great grandparent's skill, luck and more to the point a clean, rural lifestyle. Redcamp was obviously a good cradle.

My great grandparents also had the annoying habit of changing their minds with regards to names selected at birth. Later they would use a different name all together (Francis for Ken) or use the second Christian name in preference to the first (Gerald instead of David).

The Evans' being of good farming stock were loath to throw anything away. The adage to the fore was, '*you never know when you might need it?*' A prime example of such a 'resource' that was the pile of junk, wire and cast offs of agricultural equipment that lay beside the machinery shed. In a similar vein, many papers, diary's, bills, receipts and the like were retrained to be read by later generations. Some of this material I was able to rediscover in the loft of the original Redcamp homestead, appropriately called the 'Old House', when I was a young lad.

I also exhumed a further treasure trove of family writings from above the garage of the 'New House' that was built by grandfather Evan and my grandmother, Con (Gran) in the late 1940's. Unfortunately, the family were also somewhat careless, so that rats, silverfish and other vermin indiscriminately destroyed some of these resources.

One case in point were many of the papers contained within a ribbed brown Steamer trunk, inscribed with large white stencilled letters, Capt. D.G. Evans. This had been deposited in the loft above the afore mentioned garage next to the new house. Presumably the trunk included letters from the family to Gerald during his posting overseas. All lost to silverfish and rat gnawing's.

Fortunately, a plain sterling silver frame containing a photograph of Gerald avoided the vermin's attention. It is this frame, my mother Bunty placed the dried flowers picked from the fields of France that sits with the dedication of this book.

Incidentally a little research, combined with the letters date, indicates that these flowers were picked at Fleurbaix, near the infamous town of Fromelles. This was the quiet section of the Western Front in WWI where the new Australian troops were introduced to trench warfare. Disastrously so for the Australian 5th Division in the Battle of Fromelles on 19–20 July 1916 which was the first occasion on which the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was ineptly fed in a mass attack onto the barbed wire and machine guns of the Western Front. The earlier Gallipoli campaign, of course, was yet another story of such senseless waste and folly.

As it has been remarked, I in my earlier years resembled Gerald and had inherited the same crooked little fingers. His picture in that silver frame has sat in honour on my bedroom chest of draws for most of my adult years, quietly observing my life.

By better management many of the letters by Gerald and Ken from Egypt and France written between 1915 and 1917 were stored in a safer place, a black ‘cash-box’. But I will come back to these later as they offer the spine of this story.

Importantly, the rediscovered writings from the Old House provide an unambiguous documentation that chronicle the doings and roundabouts of the family for well over a century. In the case of the letters and diary’s, the observations and asides are in the words of the participants. These chronicle horse races won or lost, plagues of rabbits and wild dogs, and of course a litany of good and bad seasons, floods and drought. Combined with anecdotal folklore and family legends, a reasonable understanding can be gained into the character and the deeds of the various family members.

The most glamorous stories perhaps were the family’s interactions with the bushrangers Dan Morgan and later Ned Kelly. Oddly enough both of these contacts revolved around horses, but were very different in character. Morgan, in more recent times, has been given the laconic title of ‘*Mad Dog*’ which appears to be an accurate summary of his general disposition. Morgan stole a prized horse from the Evans family in 1862. My great, great uncle Evan Evans and a neighbour, Edmond Bond, tracked Morgan down to his camp. Morgan escaped but with a cartridge of shotgun pellets peppered in his arse and a grievous grudge against Evan Evans and Edmond Bond. It was this grudge that brought Morgan back to hold up Redcamp on April 7th, 1865, looking for Evan. Finding him not at home, Morgan took his frustration out on the family by burning a few hay stacks. For Morgan these relationships with the Evans family had a most unfavourable outcome with the bushranger being shot and killed at Peechelba on the next day.

The relationship with Ned Kelly and his gang could not have been different. Family legend has it the Ned worked at Redcamp from time to time during his youth. Certainly, his brother Dan and Joe Burns were employed at Redcamp as their signatures in an old payroll book testify. Ned and his gang also had somewhat of an arrangement of convenience with my great grandfather, John, perhaps relating to his Irish Catholic wife Eleanor. Given that the Banksdale portion of Redcamp backed onto the Kelly’s home turf of Greta and Hansonville, Ned had the privilege of spelling his horses and taking fresh horses, courtesy of the Evans family. Given the families interest in breeding race horses, perhaps this was one of the reasons why the Kelly gang were very difficult for the authorities to catch. They had a superior ride.

Like all families they were a mixture of charmers, “scally-wags”, nether-do-wells and perhaps even saints. The oldest son Jack, by all accounts, belonged to the charmer/scally-wag classification. As agricultural times were prosperous when Jack was of school age, he was given the chance at the age of fifteen of being sent off to boarding school at the Church of England Grammar School in Melbourne. Anecdotally, Jack is said to have regularly visited the Caulfield racetrack and stables while at school. Here he had talked his way into riding various racehorses at work. This included the famous Carbine who won the Melbourne Cup in 1890. His brother Albert was also a jockey and ended up making a career out of riding racehorses.

Jack ended up having 10 children in all. Inconveniently, not all were with his wife Ellen, nor were all born in wedlock. This must have caused somewhat of a scandal at that time in the narrow confines of the Fifteen Mile Creek valley. I fondly remember one of them, Clive, who quietly never seemed to get over the hurdle of his unsanctioned birth. This is not to say that he was not himself an upright and highly regarded member of the Fifteen Mile Creek community.

Perhaps the most acerbic judgement of Jack was by his son Austin who often stated that, ‘*Father was not a good manager.*’ Austin was strongly opinionated in the typical Evans manner, and did not mince his words. A straight shooter, so to speak. He was the other side of the coin to his

quietly spoken half-brother Clive in this respect. That is not to say that both were not enthusiastic contributors to the local community and were both well regarded as a result.

I remember one year hop training during the mid-1980's for Austin during my University holidays over on his Fifteen Mile Creek property, Manarrhee.

Training hops is an arduous undertaking. Before training the hop plant looks somewhat like an oversized cord mop into which three strings are anchored into the middle of the plant, from wires five to six metres above. Training involves selecting three sturdy bines from the mass and winding them clockwise around each string, then stripping the lower leaves from the bines to prevent other bines also climbing the strings. This process is typically performed by the trainer bending over or kneeling, bending over being the most efficient but more tiring. Strong back muscles are required.

The other down-side of hop training are the hop bines themselves, which are very abrasive due to small spinules that decorate the bine. It follows that the handling and stripping of the trained bines wears away the skin on one's hands very quickly. That is unless one covers their fingers with rings of plastic electrical tape that generally are abraded off after only half a day of training. Some old hands, however, have such tough skin on their hands that they are seemingly impervious to hop bine wear. Fellow hop trainers such as John Delaney's hands were such, stained a slightly yellowish green by the hop sap. In his firm handshake his skin felt like velvet leather from constant abrasion by the spinules.

One of Austin's other notable characteristics was his tact or rather lack thereof. One hot afternoon during a day training his hops, he took exception to my gate, likening it to that of, "*an old tart*".

My retort was that, "*He too would walk with an awkward gate after bending over his bloody hops all day!*"

I was an Evans too!

Austin perhaps did have a point as my walking style was commented on, and even included in a club ditty during my football playing days for the Melbourne University Reds. However, this was more than it advertised my ownership of the field play rather than hawking for business.

Minnie and Harry on the other hand never really left Redcamp. Although also attending school in Melbourne, Minnie returned home to live what appears to have been a rather sad life. She never married and was very much under the thumb of her mother. I suppose in those days with no social security nor pensions, one of the daughters was always likely to draw this short straw.

Harry also seems to have spent his whole life at Redcamp. His surviving diaries give a good account of the day-to-day activities at Redcamp, including taking his sister to dances in Wangaratta. He was by all reports a shy man, who in later years rode constantly at a jog-trot. He was said, when told his meal was ready, would often get on his horse and go out to inspect the sheep. He was a partner to brother Evan in the firm of Evans Bros, Redcamp until his death from a heart attack in June 1944. He never married.

Others such as Bertie became pillars of society. Bertie left Redcamp and headed out west to make his fortune as a Stock and Station agent. During his superintendency of Messrs Dalgety and Co's Western Australian stock department he was renowned as having "*wide experience with stock and having an exceptionally sound judgment*". Once he had acquired the wherewithal, he embarked on a highly successful business career as a principle of the firm of Evans, Mawley and Sims, owner of a number of large pastoral runs from Geraldton to the Kimberleys in Western Australia. These runs included Noonkanbah, Waratea, Yeeda, Nookawarra, Asburton Downs, Tamala and Murchison House. A number of these properties, such as Noonkanbah, ended up being transferred back into Aboriginal ownership in the 1970's. Bertie and his wife Caroline had no children.

Like brother Bertie, Charles became an auctioneer in Wangaratta, and then moved to Albury in 1910. He was considered an outstanding auctioneer, and in the words of a man who knew him well he was '*the top man in Albury*,' and '*kept it together.*' Both his sons, James (Jim) and John, also became auctioneers.

Every family has its no hoper. This appears to have been Allan. Very slow moving and deliberate, he at one time had a drinking problem. Although initially a 'ladies man', he later married Eleanor (Pearlie) Brougham, but they had no children. From the tone of some of Gerald's letters, it was obvious that Alan was the butt of many family jokes.

The younger Evans boys of that generation were excellent sportsmen. Ken attended the Melbourne Grammar School in 1902/03 and rowed in the 1st VIII in 1903. His younger brother Evan attended the school from 1903 to 1906 and was reputedly an outstanding footballer, cricketer and tennis player. His school blazer that still resides in my mother's camphor wood box, indicates that Evan was at the very least in the first VIII for tennis. Finally, there was Gerald who also attended the school from 1905 to 1907. Another outstanding sportsman he played for the school's football 1st XVIII and rowed in the 1st VIII.

Times must have been prosperous for the Evans family during the first decade after Australian Federation. A proper education was somewhat expensive back in those times.

It was said that when the Evans boys came home from school they formed the backbone of the local Moyhu football team. This team was Ovens and King Association premiers from 1909 to 1911. A sepia "footy" photo of the 1909-10 premiership side includes Gerald, Evan and Harry. In this picture Harry is seated on the left side of the centre row. Gerald is in centre of the back row in a long sleeved jumper with a diagonal sash next to his brother Evan, who is to his left. Gerald sports a pugnacious, '*'don't fuck with me'* expression.



Photo 1: 'Footy photo' of the Moyhu 1909-10 Premiership team.

The Evans Bros family partnership certainly through up its challenges. Particularly as some of the members were fond of bending the elbow. One particularly colourful epitome of this weakness was my father's cousin Jim (son of Charles). Back in the mid to late 1940's Jim was a constant trial for the family partnership in that he would go off on a drinking binge and buy stock on behalf of Evans Bros.

The first the family would know of such activity was a message from the Benalla, Glenrowan or Wangaratta saleyards or railheads. These were requests for instructions for delivery of stock Jim had brought at auction on Evans Bros behalf.

In a later family foray into the pedigree horse world, I once brought our champion appaloosa stallion, 'Might Bright Spark' into Wangaratta to be shod by a local farrier, 'Lachie' Richins. Lachie was a colourful old character who was never short of a story while he worked.

"*Lad.*" He said. "*You know your family has had a long involvement with horses*".

"*Yeah, so I have heard.*" I said.

"*You of course know Jim Evans?*"

"*Uncle Jim? Yeah, sure.*"

"*Well, I will tell you a little story that you probably have never been told. Back in the 40's when Jim went on a drinking binge, he would often buy stock at auction. Usually the most useless and mongrel stock that you could find in the yards.*"

"*One day, Redcamp was contacted to say that there were two horses in the rail yards in Glenrowan, that required transport.*"

"*Oh, not again!*" Was the most likely response.

"*As it happened, this pair of horses later turned out to be pretty bloody good racehorses. One called Gainsbrough was one of the better country race horses of the day. The other, Golden Doubles, came second in the Caulfield Cup and was a favourite for the Melbourne Cup at the time.*"

"*Not bad, huh.*" He said looking up from his work with a quizzical eye.

"*My only wish was that I was as good a judge of horses as Jim.... when I was pissed!*"

It turned out that there were further implications from this story. Not only was Golden Doubles a bloody good race horse but he was also what is commonly known as a 'rigg'. That was when he was gelded, the job was not done properly so that a little, productive bit was left behind. As the story goes, he sired a filly who was the dam of my father's faithful stock horse 'Trudie'. In turn, Trudie was the dam of my appaloosa stock horse 'Spud', so named for her one blue eye.

Jim's drinking also connected with another family failing, that of a bad temper. After another such drinking bout, my grandfather Evan apparently blew up at Jim and later suffered a serious stroke in December, 1946. Evan remained seriously affected by this stroke until another finally and mercifully sent him to his grave in March 1953.

Jim later straightened himself out with the help of alcoholics anonymous. By the time I got to know him he was a respected elder of the family. No one in my family, least of all my father, thought ill of him, in fact quite the reverse.

Many years later, while visiting the family allotment in the Whitefield Cemetery in the King River Valley, I was looking at Jim's grave and noticed the rising sun insignia of the Australian army on his headstone. It seems that during the Second World War that Jim had been an anti-tank gunner up against Rommel's Afrika Korps Panzers in North Africa. Given that '*when enemy tank was in range, you are also in range,*' it is likely Jim was involved in a number of operations where he was literally 'shit scared'.

Strange, nobody mentioned that Jim had been in a war. Only Gerald and Ken's involvement in the First World War was ever mentioned. I suppose this was hard to avoid given the two large granite obelisks that stood shoulder to shoulder in the family's section of the Whitefield cemetery. Jim certainly did not speak about his war service. Perhaps that explains a lot of things and his drinking?

So there you have it, a rough guide to my family and its Australian centre of diversity.

It was to this place, and lineage that I was born, a child of the Sixties.

Chapter 2

Sympathy, loss of Gerald, Mother brave

During a journey, I like to navigate by using landmarks.

When you live in a valley, the best way to gain this perspective is to climb a hill or mountain to obtain a better view.

At Redcamp the most suitable mountain or rather hill, is Mt Bellevue. This was a high point that the Australian explorers Hume and Hovell climbed when they passed through the valley on their 1824 expedition from Sydney to Geelong.

They reported. *"Halfway up this mountain the stone is of the worst quality, but on the top the stone has a portion of lime in it. The soil is of excellent quality and the grass and herbage is equal to any in the Murrumbidgee."* (Hume and Hovell, 1824).



Photo 2: The view from the house (New) at Redcamp to Mt Bellevue in the flush of Spring

It was in this excellent soil that my father grew his spuds, with minimal irrigation. He also produced many a fine bale of lucerne hay off a lower levels of this country, called Banksdale, after the original owner from the 1850's. These heavy hay bales were roundly cursed by all the hay carters that shifted the bales into the protection of the haysheds. In more recent times, much of the area was purchased by Brown Bros of Milawa, who now produce cool climate grapes on this land for their wines. Some fine cool climate Shiraz and Cabinet Sauvignon wines have resulted. Fertile and versatile indeed!

Mt Bellevue is also equally visible from the shearing shed that has occupied the same position, in two iterations, for well over 150 years. Shearers work hard, require good wholesome food and enjoy a good or even malicious practical joke.

As a child I would hang around the shearing shed after school to 'help' dad. It was as good a way as any to learn about farming. It was also an excellent place to gain a practical education.

Being the boss's son, was always an incitement for a bit of good natured fun from the shearers. The classic ploy was to wrap a small 'dag'⁴ up in a lolly wrapper and proffer it to me as a 'black Minty.' Even at the age of five or six, I had not come down in the last shower!

The shearers were also always good for a story. One such shed legend was of that of a joke played on a half-witted shed hand around Gerald and Ken's era. The shearers of the time pointed to Bellevue, upon which was running some of the sheep that had been shorn in the previous week, and said that there were some fine mushrooms to be had there. These mushrooms were so bloody large that you could see them from the shed. In fact, on bright, sunny August days, I can remember that it almost seems like you can touch Bellevue from the shearing shed. The air is so clear that it magnifies in the Boggy Creek valley.

The half-wit was placed on a horse, given a flour bag, and told to go and collect some mushrooms for the shearers dinner. The horse was not just any old horse, but 'Old Safety' who had been a more than useful steeple chaser in his earlier days. A whack on the horse's rump sealed the fate of the half-wit, as Safety did not stop for gate nor fence, clearing the lot until he got up the 'Wagon Track' to the top of Banksdale. The farm hands who finally rescued the half wit, reported that he was as white as one of the 'mushrooms' he had been sent to fetch.

The acronym, OH and S had yet to become known in those days.

Banksdale was where the 'Wagon Track' wound its way to about two thirds of the way up to Mt Bellevue. It was just a 'hop, skip and a jump' to find one's way to a good place to look out from Mt Bellevue.

From Bellevue past reflections and future visions are unerringly provided. Looking out over the mountains of the Great Dividing Range one observes a water-colourists gauche braid. The mountains and foot hills seemingly recede into the past and the onward to the future. Mountains such as Mt Buffalo, The Cobbler, Stirling, Feathertop and The Razor are easily identified. In the opposite direction, the hills peter out past Glenrowan and on to the drier cropping plains towards Shepparton.

Gran always said that she liked the golden, and the bleached blue and yellow summer colours the best. This was with the benefit of a water-colourists eyes. As a child I spent many hours collecting native flowers from Mother's Hill for her to paint. I would watch Gran paint and listen to her stories as she painted her native flower cards and coasters. It was this art that bought the cigarettes that would finally collapse her lungs and ultimately complete her life. Emphysema is a real drag that way.

Gran however was a ballsy woman. In her younger days she had been studying for her degree in Botany at Sydney University in the late twenties or early thirties. The great depression of the time probably put paid to the completion of her degree. How she met my grandfather, Evan, I am not sure. Apparently, my father David was born rather suspiciously close to nine months after Evan and Gran married.

Other farm companions in my younger days were of course the dogs. Sheep dogs in name, but dad was not really much of a sheep dog man. They were kept through necessity rather than any talent for their use on his behalf. His interactions with the dogs were, however, a good way to learn the finer points of the Australian language.

I was, of course, a very receptive student!

⁴ **Dag:** a lock of wool matted with dung hanging from the hindquarters of a sheep. But also, a colloquialism for an entertainingly eccentric person; a character.

Blue heelers or their crosses are typically a good sheep dog breed. Heelers have that bit of mongrel in them that is needed now and again to give a nip on the hock to sheep that needed that little extra bit of persuasion. It is kind of their attitude towards all legged animals.

One of dad's dogs and a heeler cross was called "Spotty". He liked to nip too. As my mother Bunty tells the story, when Spotty first came to Redcamp he tried to nip me. Being undeterred, I apparently got Spotty in a head-lock and punched him in the nose each time he tried to nip me. After that episode Spotty was my dog and boon companion.

Once to the annoyance of my uncle John, also known as 'Killer,' I copied the dogs and conscientiously pissed on each wheel of his car. As you do. John apparently flew into a rage and wanted to kick my small arse for the insult. Dad's reaction was go right ahead ... that is if he could catch me. I of course had caught the drift of the situation and disappeared under the house with the dogs!

Living on a farm is like that. As the eldest child there are few others of your age to play with. You make your own fun, and fruitfully or otherwise occupy your time.

In retrospect, this time spent with older people was for the most part valuable and memorable. Their insights, asides and even sometimes wisdom, that they took the time to pass on to a child are not readily forgotten. Certainly not in my case, and less so now as I reflect on those times.

There was old "Forgie" for whom you could judge how old and pissed he was by how slowly he drove his old Holden FJ ute home from the Moyhu pub. The consensus of opinion was that once he reached 100 he would not get beyond the door of the pub. The old fella nearly made it too.

Forgie was one of the old guys who had remarked that I looked like Gerald. Looking back on it he was probably a veteran of Gerald's Victorian 8th Battalion. Perhaps that again explained quite a few other things in retrospect.

Warracknabeal lad Neville Wright, was a rough diamond but as generous as the sun. In his younger days, working on Redcamp, Neville used his welding skills to make a billy cart for me with the wheels seconded from an old Victor lawn mower, a metal seat from a plough and various other scraps of wood and metal. The machinery shed scrap pile was a handy source of parts to make such a kids chariot.

It was on this billy cart that my mate Mick Shanley and I rode down a hill into a pile of mainly dry cow pats, like the stuntmen from movies, '*Evil Dung-Knievel*'. It was a pity about the sly wet one, which skidded down Mick's side after falling off on one such run. This was much to the chagrin of his mum.

Another notable character was Mr John Wilson. He too had been in the war, but I now figure along way from the main action. He was very talkative about his 'war' experiences. Mostly his stories were about his time driving various people around 'Toc' (Tocumwal, NSW) during WWII. This service gained him the right of entry into the RSL. This badge he proudly wore on trips to the Wangaratta RSL club. On the way home, his slightly reddened and bemused face indicated that his spirit was content.

Conversely, my mother was not sure whether to approve or disapprove of Mr Wilson's drinking. Her father had been a heavy drinker. Mr Wilson however always seemed to be able to charm her round to avoid more than just gentle disapproval. A gentle and well meaning scallywag.

Eddie Wulfe was another gentle soul. He came to work on Redcamp as a confirmed and middle aged bachelor. A favoured work day was one on which it was gently raining, so it could be spent pottering around the machinery shed. These easy days he called 'soft days' in his mellowed Irish brogue.

During his time on Redcamp he lived in the ‘Flat’, which was an extension tacked onto the house at Redcamp. The flat had a bit of a reputation to up hold. Most people that lived in the flat, including my parents, ended up having their first children conceived in it. I suppose the lack of insulation in either the walls or roof during Winter also played its part.

For some like Neville and Lyn it was of the ‘shot-gun’ variety, while for Jim Papworth it was a premature baby boy with girlfriend Sally whose cycle was somewhat irregular and should never have conceived at all. Sally unexpectedly went into labour in the seventh month of gestation. An early morning trip to the Wangaratta Base Hospital, with the careful mouth to mouth of a local nursing sister saw this journey successfully accomplished. The baby survived to grow into a strapping lad by all accounts.

For Eddy who was in his mid fifties, it was Judy, who turned up ripe for marriage and my parents surprise. A young baby duly appeared less than 9 months later much to the delight of my sisters Elinor and Julie. Such was the spell of the Flat.

In fact, the Boggy Creek valley was very fertile.

This perspective is reinforced when you look down from Mt Bellevue. One can see the ramshackle ruins of the old house, the old chestnut trees at its front and the green ‘lawns’ around the new house. The shearing shed is there too, just up the track beyond the Dragline Hole dam. The new shearing shed contrasting with the dilapidated original shed behind. Munari’s and Moorhead’s farms frame the upper and lower boundaries, respectively, of the Redcamp property in the Boggy Creek valley.

Even with the rich red soil, the grass quickly dried on Bellevue in the Summer. In its waning days a gentle wind would often caress and tinkle the ‘Redcamp roses’. These were rich patches of variegated thistle that grow as high as a man on a horse on the fertile Redcamp soils. There were also the more prickly saffron thistles on the steeper and thinner ground. The shearers used to curse them as their long and hardened thorns would lodge in the wool to inflict repeated damage on the shearers lanolin softened hands.

Looking down on our family’s crick, I have a yearning to be able to fly to the valley below. A hang glider would be perfect foil for the carrying winds wafting up the hillside. Such a flight would free my sight and transport the essence of my soul.

Ah, to ride those currents! I would ride them to the Adagio movement of Elgar’s Cello Concerto in E minor, with a young Jacqueline Du Pre playing out her soul on that marvellous baritone ‘Davidov’ Stradivarius cello she played. It was Elgar’s last major work and an ode to the loss of youth and innocence incurred during the Great War.

Music 2: ‘Cello Concerto E minor, Adagio: Moderato’, Edward Elgar, Jacqueline Du Pré.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk1fgvLH2Uc>

The opening recitative of abrupt, rapid and guttural bow strokes evokes the initial run to gain speed to take flight, heart racing in trepidation and expectation.

After the gut pulling swoop of launch, as it transitions into the glide, the music takes on gentle swirls and circles in soaring movement. Wedge tail eagles bend the sky in this way. For, far up in this windy loft, the sky holds no answers. Where contrails trace jet white vapours of journeys not yet completed.

Gentle circles yaw and pitch with the deflected wind. The Redcamp house is steady, a rock, an intension. The bush however swirls more quickly under one’s feet, while ones shadow pours over branch and trunk. This is how my journey would descend into the valley below. A temporal journey back to a not too distant time.

Redcamp recommends sanctuary. Back then Gerald's silver frame sat on the piano in the lounge room. In the frame my mother had placed three letters, a lock of his hair, and some grass and flowers collected from the fields of France.

I remember on one particular day, we were visited by my eventual wife's brother John, and his new wife Ade. John was a military man, tanks. In this he had plateaued at the rank of major. Kathy's family had presumably sent John on this mission to check my family and I out.

Given John's profession, Gerald's Military Cross was soon dug out and proudly shown.

John's laddish but reverential comment was that Gerald must have done something 'stupid' to earn this citation. Based on current army dogma, if the action had proceeded as planned, no soldier needed to do any thing 'stupid' or undergo any excessive risk to achieve the actions objectives. It was this sort of 'stupid' behaviour that had apparently endeared Gerald to his men.

Gerald had apparently been 'stupid' on a number of occasions during his 18 months in Northern France and Belgium during the First World War. He was mentioned in dispatches at least twice and recommended for decoration several times. He survived *Pozières*, *Bullecourt* and a number of the other battles before being mortally wounded by a German SOS ('shoot on sight') salvo leading his company of the 8th Battalion, AIF through Clapham Junction in the area near Glencourse Wood on the way to the notorious Polygon Wood in Flanders. That was on September 20th 1917 in the move up preparations for the start of the 3rd Battle of *Ypres*, on the *Menin Rd*.

At this show of John's interest, Gerald's photo was retrieved from the top of the piano. There we were, sitting around the kitchen table of Redcamp. The back of the frame was opened, and a letter still in its envelope, was extracted.

The letter was addressed to Pte F Evans of the 51st Battalion, AIF. It had been firstly labelled 'on active service', then demoted to the 'Returned Letter Office.' Someone, presumably in the Battalion headquarters had scribbled, Killed in action 13-10-17. An impersonal and imperfect red stamp marking 'DECEASED' capped off the envelope.

It was my sister Elinor, 15 years of age at the time, who opened and read the letter. Her innocent and halting reading style echoed the double tragedy that had befallen my family all those years ago. I still remember the restrained emotion of that time, even though I had read the letter many times before and since.

*Redcamp
Moyhu
Victoria,*

Australia

3rd October 1917.

My dear Ken,

*We sent you a cable last week, reading "Sympathy, loss of Gerald,
Mother brave".*

In case the cable may not reach you we propose to send another to same effect, and make it reply paid as I think it may ensure a quicker answer. The cable informing us that our darling Gerald had died of wounds on the 20th Sept. was sent by Canon Cue to Bertie on 25th. Bertie and Carrie came here the same evening. I was at Charlies' house Albury. The Griffith boys came with Charlie to break the terrible news to Grace & me. When I saw Charlie's face I asked had it come? Yes it has come he replied. In my mind I was sure that both Gerald and you would be in the battles then raging.

The Griffith boys were most kind & sympathetic and arranged that a car would be ready at 6 am next morning to take Charlie and me home. We did start but floods were so high that we had to go back and catch the express at Wodonga. When we arrived at Wangaratta, Bertie had just got back from Redcamp. He and Mrs Langlands met us and arranged for Tommy Harris to go back with us to Redcamp.

All here were terribly broken up. None of us could quite realise the blow that had fallen upon us. I feel that none of us will ever again be as we were. We will understand each other better than we did, and be more kind and sympathetic to each other. In short more like Gerald.

I have prayed that you two boys might be spared to come back to us & that God might bring us all to know our duty to Him and teach us how to serve Him. May & Edie who are both here feel the loss of Gerald very deeply. Katie wanted to come up here and I think your aunt is coming from Sydney. Your Mother bears up well & puts a brave face on for the sake of the rest of us but suffers much in silence.

We have had a great number of telegrams and letters of sympathy. Our calamity seems to bring our friends closer to us.

Your Mother is standing by me and saying tell him I wish I could have my arms around him and love him & tell him to bear-up & come back to us. We will pray for you.

*With dearest love
Your Father
John Evans*

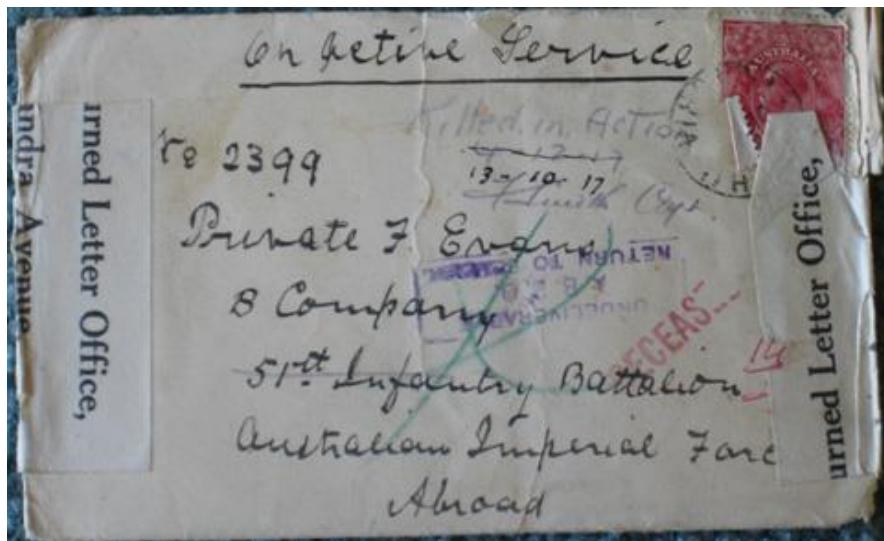


Photo 3: Original envelope that John Evans sent the letter and was then returned

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Time? Time it quietly passes, as for cloud shadows eddying on the land. Rolling time, making time, my time it passed through engagement, study, marriage, international relocation and return. That current which is content to inexorably drift, echo's with gently waning voices. Time in my case eventually flowed to Adelaide in South Australia.

Chapter 3

I know Mother will not approve.

"Killingworth"

Friday February 20th 1915

My dear Minnie -

You will be pleased to hear that I am going to the war. I volunteered last Monday & went down the next Monday evening 15th and reported myself the next day.

There is only one reason I am not in Egypt now and that is Mother. I know Mother will not approve, but when volunteers are getting scarcer she will be glad I am going.

Am writing this from Killingworth - We were given two days leave on the Monday & I am going back tonight. The mud should be a bit better now. I see by the paper that it is still raining at Redcamp, you must be rather tired of it by now & should have a bit of mud with you too.

I will send Father a pair of gum boots on Monday, they are very good in the mud, I have some. This place looks nice & green & should have some nice sheep feed on it soon.

Your loving brother

Gerald

(The Australian War Memorial records show that Gerald enlisted in Wangaratta on the 8th of February 1915, where he presented for medical examination by Doctor Wyatt Docker, who considered him 'fit for active service.' Gerald was 24 years and 2 months old. He was a 'Collingwood 6 footer' at 5 foot 11 inches (180.5 cm) in height and weighed in at 13 st 4 lbs (85 kg), hazel eyes and light brown hair).

The trick before starting any journey is to prepare well. Just like putting on gum boots for the mud. This includes the practicalities of course of selecting dates, booking flights, accommodation and most importantly deciding which places one will visit.

Arrangements whereby a traveller can catch up and potentially stay with family, old friends or acquaintances substantially enriches the trip while at the same time keeping the costs down. This is a very Australian way to travel.

My preparations for this journey were three fold.

Firstly, it was to be combined with the attendance of a professional conference. The conference selected was the European Brewing Convention Congress that was held in the Belgian capital of Brussels. A very convivial destination with respect to the focus on beer, with Belgium arguably being the centre of beer style diversity for the world.

For this a detailed abstract was prepared on some of my research work on barley malt proteins that enhance the stability of beer foam, which is desirable in most beer cultures. It is the foam head on a beer, poured into a glass, that is one of the first clues that a drinker observes with respect to the likely quality of the beer they are being served. This of course was very topical in Belgium where beer drinkers very much like to have a stable and generous head of foam on their beer.

The other attraction of Brussels as a destination is that it is also, of course, a relatively short train journey away from the Flanders fields where my two great uncles had fought and died in the First World War.

Belgium and France for that matter are foreign countries whose primary languages are not English, nor the Australian variant of that language. As Flemish is a rather localised vernacular, French was the obvious language to learn to prepare for a trip to these lands. French is also relatively easily learned as a portion of the English language is based on it, even if the French pronunciation of those words is somewhat equivocal.

In Australia, the opportunity to learn French, with its travel, wine and cuisine connotations, is relatively easy. Most bodies offering adult education provide introductory courses in French for travellers in particular. At this time, I lived in Adelaide in South Australia and the appropriate opportunity to learn some travellers French was through the local CAE's (Council of Adult Education) Introduction to French course.

Each Wednesday evening at 7.00pm for eight weeks, I would dutifully pedal my bike in to Angus St in central Adelaide to try to learn enough travellers French to get by in France. Although the riding was on relatively quiet streets, one always had to be careful to avoid being 'doored'⁵, or by unthinking car drivers that cause frights and accidents by just not being bike aware. Unfortunately, there is of course the small minority of drivers that just do not like cyclists, who will go out of their way to scare and potentially injure them. Bloody morons!

Similar to many other fellow travellers, the French course provided a limited basis in the French language to enable minimal communication and above all to be polite.

Lessons in travellers French started with the very obvious and polite way to begin talking with someone:

'G'Day.'

Bonjour.'

Which of course could be quickly followed by:

'Do you speak English?'

'Ne vous parler Anglais?'

This was of course more politely proceeded with:

'Je parle de Français, petit.'

I speak a little French.'

Particularly when looking to strike up some sort of rudimentary conversation.

For the more adept, conversation can of course be also be continued with the eponymous.

⁵ Doored: cyclist vernacular for a car door being opened immediately in front of them causing a crash.

‘Comment ça va.’ Or. ‘How’s it going?’

‘Ok.’ Of course!

A rather bland but useful accompaniment to this discourse was of course, ‘*I live in Adelaide, Australia*,’ which translates into something like, ‘*J’habite à Adelaide l’Australie*.’ The masculine and feminine angles of the French language were another thing to contend with.

In practice one was often just hoping to purchase something. Of course in France, the most basic purchase was something to eat. Thus a rudimentary knowledge of the French numbers was very useful, such as.

‘*One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twenty, one hundred, and one thousand.*’

‘*Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, sis, sept, huit, neuf, dis, onze, vingt, cent, et mille.*’

Then all that was then needed was the name of the appropriate item required, such as.

‘*Chocolate croissant, bread stick, strawberry tart, dark chocolate icecream, a beer, cheese and so on.*’

‘*Pain au chocolat, baguette, tarte aux fraises, glacée chocolat noir, la bière et du fromage.*’

In addition, a tentative asking of, ‘*how much?*’ Or. ‘*Combien?*’ Though potentially daunting, the answer would usually prove revelatory if the speaker had some English or wrote the price down on a piece of paper. One of course learns to become creative to overcome one’s limitations. In this, a blank look usually did the trick.

The alternative of course was to point to the desired item with a series of confirmative, ‘*oui*,’ or in the negative, ‘*non*,’ ended with the universal, ‘*Ok*,’ which was often found to be effective in practice. This was particularly useful when selecting a particular cheese from a cabinet containing an array of exotic and generally very tasty selection. The proprietors knife is then poised over the cheese block to cut a portion with positioning before the final cut by a series of, ‘*oui’s et non’s*’.

Fortunately, when in France I found that ordering something by weight or a number of items, that a printed out ticket or a digital register screen was typically available in most shops to indicate the required cash to complete the translation. In the local markets where better value and quality was often available, one just needed to make do, but then this was all part of the experience.

These requests must of course be followed by a polite, ‘*please*,’ or rather, ‘*s’il vous plaît*.’

After the receiving the goods and hopefully the correct change, a ‘*thank you*,’ or, ‘*merci*’ was of course required.

If in a more generous mood or on the receipt of excellent assistance, ‘*merci beaucoup*,’ or, ‘*thank you, very much*,’ was often in order and when the experience or item was excellent, a ‘*très bonne*,’ or, ‘*very good*,’ was normally appreciated.

The next set of French words that needed to be mastered were of a directional nature. This starts with the basic ‘*North, South, East and West*,’ ‘*Nord, Sud, Est et Ouest*,’ and of course, ‘*left and right*,’ or rather, ‘*gauche et á droite*.’

The key phrase is, ‘*where is?*’ Or rather, ‘*où est?*’ The classic classroom phrase being, ‘*Where is the church?*’ Or, ‘*où est l'église?*’ Why looking for the church seems to have the highest primacy in learning French I am not quite sure? Perhaps it is because churches are typically in the, ‘*centre of town*,’ or, ‘*centre de ville*,’ or possibly it is because all of us English speaking travellers are in need of repenting our English speaking sins?

Of more value is, ‘*where is the toilet?*’ ‘*Où sont les toilettes?*’ However, practical experience in France soon teaches one that the question really should be, where is the nearest McDonalds. It is cheap and clean, although you really do not want to eat there, particularly in France! Other important, ‘*where is’s,*’ include train station, ‘*la gare*’, ‘bus station,’ ‘*gare routière*,’ and the market. ‘*le marché*.’

On the road, things seem somewhat simpler. One soon learns that, ‘*Auto route*,’ means freeway and very fast transit, even if it efficiently lightens your bank account by being, ‘*péage*’ which means the payment of a toll. The auto routes are a lot of fun with the legal speed limit being 130 km/hr under dry conditions but in practice 140-150 km/hr does not seem to attract the attention of the local, ‘*gendarme*’ or policeman.’ Of course one also needs to be able to get off the auto route so that the appropriate, ‘*sortie*,’ or, ‘*exit*’ is worth looking out for.

More gentle travel is on the national roads or, ‘*route nationale*,’ or the even more sedate, ‘*départemental*’ routes.

Experience later taught me that the basic polite phrases, such as *bonjour*, *merci* and *s'il vous plaît* were most useful of all. A certain Australian twang when murdering of the French language also generally induced the person that you were conversing with to be sufficiently comfortable to use their small but typically sufficient English vocabulary with you. One could always strike it lucky talk with someone with good English or a student who was looking to practice their English skills with an indigenous speaker. That, and perhaps a Gallic sense of superiority through having better language skills but in this ‘*beggars can't be choosers*’.

The third and final journey preparation was to read and type out Gerald and Ken’s letters written from 1915 to 1917. This had a number of valuable outcomes. Gerald and Ken’s letters are fragile one-offs of which only a selection have survived to the present time. Some were not returned by family members, kept by the same or lost in transit on mail carrying boats that were also sometimes casualties of that war (submarines).

Typing out of the letters also allowed an easy ordering and cataloguing of the letters, of which there are over one hundred. These letters reside in an old black metal cash box while others were deposited in a small wooden fruit crate. Most of the earlier letters were written on letter paper emblazoned with the legend, ‘Australian Imperial Force, Reinforcements, mostly in blue or grey leaded pencil.

Once deciphered, typed out and ordered, multiple copies of the letters could then be printed and distributed to interested family members. The vagaries of fire and tempest could now strike to destroy the originals, but at least the words and thoughts of my two great uncles were better protected.

An artefact of the typing and cataloguing was that the letters could be read and understood in chronological order. They could also be put into context and the places from which they were written researched.

Chapter 4

The sand is the very devil to walk in

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE REINFORCEMENTS

7th November 1915

My dear Mother -

As this is Sunday morning I think I may as well write to you.

We have arrived in Egypt at last. We got to Suez at 6 yesterday morning & left there about midday arriving at Zeitoun at 6.30. Zeitoun is about 10 miles from Cairo & very near Heliopolis.

The trip from Suez was the most wonderful sight I have ever seen, right up the valley of the Nile & through the Irrigation Area. The place is swarming with natives working or pretending to. The ploughs look about 2000 years old & are drawn by two cows or bullocks that look like they come out of the old Bible pictures. The funniest thing is to see the little donkeys getting along with great loads, and sometimes a nigger or two. There are quite the quaintest old water wheels among the green crops. The weather is pretty hot in the day & cool at night & the sand is the very devil to walk in.

Last Sunday half a dozen of us went out to the Pyramids & had a pretty good time. We went all around on camels & finished up by having a race on donkeys down to the Bena Station.

I was on picket duty at the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks last Monday, these barracks were built by Napoleon and we were camped just in front of where he lived, they are now occupied by the Devon Regiment. I went through the Museum last week, they have plenty of Mummys there, lots of them thousands of years old, also some Alabaster statues.

They have some beautiful Mosques but I haven't been through them yet. Some of the ladies don't look bad over here but they have their faces half covered by a veil. Don't know what they are like after it is removed.

I have been allotted to the 8th Battalion in this here organisation & am very glad to have a settled unit at last. Alex Campbell & Jack Hogg who I have been with all the time since Broadmeadows are also in this unit. I am getting together quite a fluent vocabulary in Arabic & can swear with the best of them.

There are thousands of horses over here doing nothing!

Love to all & Good bye

Your loving son

Gerald Evans

(written from Zeitoun, Egypt)

My trip to Europe started on the 'grounds' of the Australian Autumn to find Europe in the full flush of Spring.

Travel to Europe these days is so simple and safe. One boards a plane and gets on the Kangaroo route to find our selves somewhere important in Europe on the next morning.

Largely gone too are the emotional family farewells at the airport. They are not necessary as you will be back. It is more like catching a big bus using an expensive ticket.

For the traveller though, there is still that sense of expectancy for what arrival at one's destination will bring. For such a journey, the quiet expectation from the cheerful flow of Howard Blake's "Walking on the air" seems most appropriate.

Music 3: 'Walking in the air', Howard Blake, played by William Chen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Za2WZIudePI>

The comparison with the journey that Gerald would have taken could not have been more stark. He disembarked from Melbourne on the 29th of September 1915, on RMS Osterley, with stops in Adelaide and Perth with the eventual destination being Cairo via the Suez Canal.

Sure there would have been the excitement of all those young Australians taking a trip into an overseas adventure. Most could never have dreamed of making such a trip on their own devices. As yet, the cold and hard math of modern warfare had yet to dawn on these naïve expeditioners despite the disturbing reports that must have been coming in from the Gallipoli campaign. No doubt duty and propaganda quelled the sharpness of the press of the time, as much as it soothed the niggling doubts of our would be soldiers.

As with current day jet flight, boredom and the need for recurrent exercise would have been a problem. They did not have our music players, in flight cinema, nor the comfort of air conditioning. And we complain about the dehydrating effect of flying. Soft!

No, they would have been exposed to the extremes of temperature which would have increased proportionately as they sailed towards the Equator and Egypt. For a North Eastern Victorian farm boy of that time, these temperatures would have been endured without too much comment I expect.

The travails of the journey would quickly have been forgotten once Gerald reached Egypt just under a month later. The Suez Canal, pyramids and the biblical references would have held Gerald and his comrades wide-eyed. This was not a journey that many could have hoped to experience in those times.

Taking the jet out of Melbourne is a luxurious breeze. The initial restraint of seat belts and take off soon soothes into a resonate rhythm. Out the window, the distracting view of crops and pasture gives way into a more extensive agriculture before that too diminishes. Eventually even the red of the outback desert is devoured by clawing shadows as night falls somewhere out beyond Alice Springs and Ayers rock.

Even the lonely lights of some outback outpost become less sociable until one approaches Asia and Singapore. Here humanity surges while the decent magnifies the constructs of mankind. Definitely clean modernity and efficiency is the byword for Singapore. Dare I say it, but a certain empty soullessness is also encountered.

This is despite Singapore airport being located on the site of the infamous Second World War Changi allied prisoner of war camp. The sanitized and industrious confines of the airport complex buffers these unsavoury reminders of mankind's potential to callously treat others of the same species.

Singapore is a fleeting blur of refuelling, creeping fatigue and changing of planes. The duty free shops with their duty free alcohol, tobacco, cosmetics and gizmos that have a world weary 4 star sameness about them. What more of modern efficiency could one expect?

From Singapore the longest flight sector is commenced with London being the oft destination. The flight path broadly takes one over a substantial portion of the world's seething humanity. Out of

Asia and on over India, the multitude of lights conjures a sense of the vast mass of people being flown over. Broadly, so too, are the wonders of the cradles of Western Civilization in Iran (Persia), Egypt, Turkey and Mediterranean Europe.

One just watches the world go by without much thought if sleep evades. It is just so easy if you want to turn the world around these days.

My preference is for a consciousness preserving sleep. Much is missed but how much at night from 40,000 feet? These are destinations for possible future journeys.

The lurking dawn brings a decent through the clouds to the prosperous green fields awaking from winters fallow and the City of London. One could, on the first journey, perhaps be forgiven for bursting out into song with the Hymn '*Jerusalem*' from the preface to '*Milton a Poem*' by William Blake and music by Sir Hubert Parry. Like the Aussie 'diggers,'⁶ sobering thoughts of the '*dark Satanic mills*' are pushed towards the back of the mind.

Music 4: '*Jerusalem*', The last night of the Proms Collection, Barry Wordsworth, BBC Concert Orchestra and The Royal Choral Society. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO8xMFq8U10>

*"And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountain green?
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!"*

Unfortunately, one eventually comes back to earth and reality. Your arrival in old England is greeted with the three star 'Bogan'⁷ sameness of London's Heathrow airport. It is fortunately but a brief hop and a skip onwards to my final destination, Marseille where the fair fields of France beckon.

⁶ Digger: is a military slang term for soldiers from Australia and New Zealand.

⁷ Bogan: an uncouth or unsophisticated person, regarded as being of low social status.

Chapter 5

The Captain never left the bridge

Australian Imperial Force

April 1st, 1916

My dear Mother,

I wrote to father and posted it last night in Marseillaise so you should get both of these letters together.

We arrived quite safely last night. I managed to dodge the Torpedoes, the Captain never left the bridge all the way from Alexandria. We left on Monday and arrived here on Friday.

This is the prettiest port I have seen yet. We got in about 4 pm and passed the Notre Dame de Armeniers right up on a hill & as we came into the harbour, passed within 50 yards of the Chateau d'If where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned, it is a very small island right in the mouth of the harbour with a very old stone building on it.

All the troops but two corps went on by train, I stayed and we had to march about a mile and a half to this camp getting here at 11 pm. The country around the bay is very hilly and rocky and our camp is in a small basin with old houses & vineyards and orchards all around it & quite close.

We had a bonzer⁸ trip over and I was a little bit off one day but otherwise all correct.

Excuse the pencil and writing. I wish you could see this place. You had better come over to London & when the war is over we will do a trip, they call the Australians six bob a day tourists now and other things. Will ring off now with love to all.

Address	Your loving son
8th Battalion	Gerald
2nd Brigade, A.I.F	
(written from Marseille, France)	

Marseille too was Gerald's safe entry point into France and Europe.

These days the aircraft will often fly into Marseille across the Mediterranean, past the Chateau d'If and into the airport. An interesting parallel, even if on a higher plane.

France at last! Well almost. Firstly, the luggage needed to be collected from the carousel. In this I am in luck as my blue hiking backpack dutifully emerges and is intact. It is then on to embarkation through French passport control and customs. This bureaucratic process takes time, but with the odd polite "bonjour" and some hand waving it is easily negotiated. A little stamp is just reward. These days the border guards are bored and are reasonably relaxed about entry of visitors, particularly English speaking tourists into Provence. This area of course has had a rich history of visitors across the millennia.

More, polite but weary "bonjour's," are followed by a "Ne vous parler Anglais?" and then a "merci" at the hire car counter. Rental agreements are tricky enough to work through in one's native language, let alone in a language one has little mastery of. Fortunately, all appears in order and it seems unlikely that I will not be stung for any additional charges on the car that I booked.

⁸ Bonzer: Australian slang for excellent or first-rate.

I am now in charge of a small but very adequate white Renault Clio as my passport to explore *la belle France* for a few days while I recover from my plane journey. The manual car is not an issue as I have driven many such in my time. The remembrance of driving on the right side of the road compared to the Australian left, also returns to me relatively quickly. Those two years driving on the right in America when I worked in Indiana, return more quickly than I could have hoped.

The first driving hurdle to negotiate is getting around the airport car park without coming to grief.

“*Bloody windscreen wipers!*”

The wipers are on the right side of the steering wheel in Europe, whereas in most Australian cars the indicator is on the right. A distraction to be sure, but only a minor skill to reacquire in the greater scheme of things. More challenging is finding the “*sortie*” or way out of the airport and then following the signs ‘*Toutes les directions*’ to find the access to the A7 Auto-route that leads North-West towards Avignon.

Waiting in Avignon is my friend from Purdue University in Indiana, Jean-Marc. Avignon recommends sanctuary, recovery from unfamiliar elements and the wearing journey.

The route is simple as the A7 passes close to the airport. All that is required is to take the A7 ‘*Nord*’ direction. Jean-Marc is right, it is easy and I am soon cruising up the A7 in the direction of Avignon.

The freedom of the Auto-route is reviving after being couped up in the confines of an aluminium tube for a day. Cruising at the Auto-route speed of 130 km/hr also has its attractions. It will make driving at 100 km/hr back in Australia seem very sedate in deed. Although tired, it feels like you are getting places quickly.

The urban sprawl of Marseille, soon gives way to more agricultural pursuits. I too note the dry and chalky hills that hem Marseille. Strangely attractive in their foreignness.

After a brief line of hills are cut through, the countryside opens out once more from olive groves, into vineyards till finally the rich alluvial plains of the Rhône River are entered. They initially support intensive horticultural crops that subsequently give way to similarly rich but more extensive cereal crops further from town.

Onwards towards *Salon-de-Provence*, white chalky-faced foothills once more emerge from the plain. Again the sequence goes from vineyards into olive groves before rocky grazing country is cut through. These hills are breached to finally bring the Auto-route along the Rhône River that will be followed all the way to Avignon.

Jean-Marc’s directions direct a sortie from the A7 at exit “*24 Avignon-Sud*” and then to follow the N7 in the direction of *Centre de Ville*. Unfortunately, I turned ‘*au gauche*’ one round-about too early and end up in a large shopping centre mall or “*Centre Commercial*”.

Time to activate plan B. I had Jean-Marc’s phone number, so it was just a simple matter of finding a pay phone, dialling and pleading for a short rescue trip from my friend. This should have worked but for one minor detail. The pay phones only accepted phone cards.

Nearby there were a group of young people. A girl of around eighteen and several male companions.

Time to try out my travellers French.

“*Bonjour.*”

Several of the group look at me with bemused expressions. Obviously my accent was a dead give away that I was not from these parts.

“*Le téléphone, le carte?*” Indicating with a fist and bi-directional two-fingered salute, in the form of the universal sign for telephone.

They talk amongst themselves. The girl emerges. She is relatively short, with pleasant face and curly hair.

She reciprocates the telephone salute and suggests “*Tabac*”.

Understanding, I wander towards the Centre Commercial. Moments later the girl calls to me and announces that the Tabac is “*fermée*”. Motioning to her watch, which displays a time after 5.30pm. It appears that the Tabac closes at this time.

Shit! Or rather *merde*. What do I do now?

Time to ask for assistance.

I ask the girl, “*Je parle de Français, petit.*”

“*Oui.*”

“*Ne vous parler Anglais?*” I continue doggedly

“*Yes, a little bit.*” Is her timid answer.

“*Merci!*” It seemed like my luck was going to improve.

“*I am trying to visit my friend who lives on Rue Albert Camus. Could you please help me by calling him?*” I asked slowly.

To this the girl gave a shy smile and answered. “*Ok, you take my telephone card.*”

“*Merci, Mademoiselle! Merci beaucoup!*”

Taking the card, I proceeded to the nearby telephone box and called Jean-Marc.

“*Bonjour, Jean-Marc! I have made it to Avignon but I am a little lost.*”

“*Ok, where are you?*”

“*I am at the large shopping centre on Rue Pierre Seghers.*”

“*Ok, that is not far. I will come and get you.*”

“*I am driving a white Renault Clio and I will stand by the car till you arrive.*”

“Ok, I will be there in about 5 min.”

“Merci!”

Replacing the phone, I then returned the telephone card to the girl. Again, I presented my gratitude for her assistance.

“Merci, Mademoiselle! Merci beaucoup!”

I then contributed. *“J’habite à Adelaide l’Australie.”*

“Ok, so you a long way from home.”

“Oui.” I said.

“Au revoir,” and another, *“merci beaucoup,”* for good measure and I walked away to wait for Jean-Marc by my car. The girl smiled at my parting with an air of self satisfaction as she re-joined her companions. Well, I think she deserved that for being so generous in helping me out.

It was a short wait before Jean-Marc and his four year old daughter, Lisa, turned up in their car.

“Bonjour, Evan. Bienvenue en Avignon!”

“Bonjour, Jean-Marc! Thank you for coming to get me.”

“It was not too far, you nearly got to my apartment. This is my daughter, Lisa”

Lisa was a cute young child of about three years with medium length blond locks. She stared at me suspiciously, with one hand clasped on Jean-Marc’s jeans.

And so it was. A short car journey carefully tailing Jean-Marc’s car found me quickly at his apartment. Safe at last, and in the company of a friend.

Chapter 6

La belle France knocks poor old Australia into a cocked hat for beauty

REINFORCEMENTS

13th April 1916

My dear Minnie,

I wrote to Mother a couple of days ago and though there is very little to write about. Today we took the whole Company up to the baths and they had a hot bath and clean clothes. The men are looked after much better here than Gallipoli and we should have a fair time as they get plenty of spells from the trenches, but the shells are pretty big. We hear them all night and generally the troops are billeted in farm houses, barns etc and it is a great change from Egypt. Some of the girls are pretty and they have bonzer complexions but I like the Australian girls the best.

It has been jolly cold here & wet for the last few days & we feel it a bit after Egypt and a lot of men have colds. I am going up to the trenches tomorrow to have a look at them for three or four days. It should be very interesting and it is hoped that I don't stop one but don't think there is much chance. You will soon have Winter now, you have no idea how pretty this place is, parts of it are like beautiful gardens.

I picked some daisies and will send one home in the letter, there is plenty of spear grass which reminded me of home. Everything is beautifully green with the Spring just coming on and I am afraid La belle France knocks poor old Australia into a cocked hat for beauty.

The Australians have made a very favourable impression here both among the English army and the French people.

Address	Will ring off now
8 th Battalion,	With love to all
2 nd Brigade,	Your affectionate brother
1 st Division	Gerald
A.I.F	

(Written from near Fleurbaix, Northern France)

So began my first night in France, in a small apartment in Avignon.

Jean-Marc and I chatted and caught up on our news from the last three years since we had been at Purdue University. Unfortunately, Jean-Marc and his wife Nicole had recently split up. I suppose these things happen. It was not something to dwell on.

We of course discussed the course of our careers since leaving Purdue. Jean-Marc was much amused by my switch from researching soybeans and tofu, to now researching barley and beer.

“Bloody beer drinker!” Was his amused and repeated refrain.

My jocular counter was, “Much better than making slimy tofu for bloody vegetarians!”

I suppose this was deserved given that I was definitely in wine country and the area from near where the famous, *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* was made. The rub was that France is also a substantial malting barley producer and exporter. So much so that France produces more barley than Australia, much of which is destined for malt and subsequent beer production.

Jean-Marc and I had a small meal with a little wine. A local cheese variant of course followed up this minor degustation. Very convivial!

Jean-Marc was very fond of those little aged, round goats cheeses and in particular the *Picodon du Dauphiné*. This was also a sly test of the openness of my mind and palate as it is a very strong and mature *chevre*. It was delicious! So I passed the test.

Plans were then discussed for the following day. Being a Friday, Jean-Marc had some meetings at work at INRA, so I would be left to my own devices. This was not a drama for me because there is much to survey in Provence.

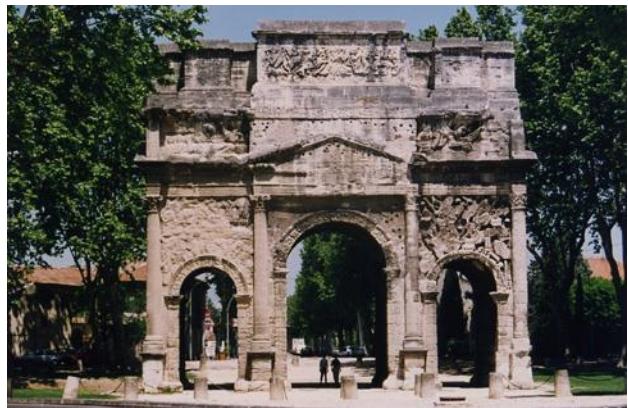
Given the significant interactions with the Roman Empire around two thousand years ago, there are many significant reminders lingering in Provence of that era. The area of Provence was Julius Caesar's safe base to which he came, surveyed and later conquered all of Gaul more than 50 years before the birth of Christ. The great Caesar was of course not the first visitor. The seafaring Greeks and Phoenicians came to Provence many centuries before.

My guide book suggested that the city of Orange, which was approximately 40km up river from Avignon, was a good place to start considering the Roman history of Provence. Getting there required travel though further rich agricultural land that had recently been planted with the Summers crops. The historic vineyards on the poorer country around Châteauneuf-du-Pape were also of note. Interestingly, the vines were rather small and stunted compared to what I was used to in Australia. The trellis' were just sticks in the stony ground. Then again, high production and quality are often inversely related. Otherwise, the full flush of Spring was upon this land and it was hard not to agree with Gerald's observations with regard to Australia in comparison to "*la belle France*".

In Orange, the primary ancient attraction is the *Théâtre antique d'Orange*. This relic of the 1st Century AD was constructed during the reign of the Emperor Augustus. It is reputedly the best preserved of the remaining ancient Roman amphitheatres. Most particularly and acoustically important is the theatre wall or frieze. The theatre is impressively large with the capacity of around 10,000 patrons. Most important for the status conscious Romans, the audience was allocated to particular seating areas in strict accordance with rank and status. Of course the nearer the stage and the centre, the more important you were in civic or military life. So the theatre was designed to ensure that the elites did not need to rub shoulders with those of humbler means by an ingenious stratification of tunnels that channelled the audience to their seats.



Photo 4: Théâtre antique, Orange



Caesars Arch, Orange

Striding this stage, one wonders who else had sat in those seats. How many idiots have fretted their time on it, their words reverberating off the theatre frieze in sound and fury? These stones are old and have endured much. But to what avail, in comparison to ones inconsequential and transient existence in this world?

The Romans certainly built things to last. Strolling through town, picking up a fresh baguette for a snack, it takes little time to reach the other side of town where Caesar's Triumphal arch proudly stands. Although careworn by the ages and the deprivations of renovation, it proclaims a Latin dominance of the world and time without regret.

Departing Orange, an eastward arc via Carpentras seeks a more recent time. My sights are set on St Remy where Vincent van Gogh convalesced. The streets of the old town of St Remy are tight and claustrophobic. No wonder Vincent was seeking the twisted light and space of the fields.

Unfortunately, the celebrity status of Vincent makes the cloistered St Remy rather touristic. Still, being a warm day, it is worth gaining a snack to keep one going till dinner.

“Bonjour.”

“Bonjour, monsieur.”

“Un boule, glacée chocolate noir, s'il vous plaît?”

“Merci, beaucoup.” I greet the receipt of the requested icecream. But, it is time now to lick my way to return to my car to seek less confined fields.

Just a little way down the road is the ancient city of Glanum. Before its gates there is a memorial tower, reputedly a Mausoleum, that was erected around 30 BC as a memorial to the grandsons of Augustus. This tower is freely accessed as it is outside the gates of the Glanum ruins. It is impressive with respect to the preservation of the memorial.



*Photo 5: Mausoleum of the Julii,
Glanum*



Shepherd near Glanum

Beyond the memorial, a timeless scene unfolds as an elderly shepherd shifts his sheep across the pasture of this common space. The sheep are in fine fettle which is again testimony to the nurturing quality of the land in these parts. This sequence observes biblical undertones that are never far from the timeless surface of rural France.

Time is however marching on and the light is starting to wane for the day.

It is time to retreat back to Avignon and Jean-Marc's apartment.

With Jean-Marc I discourse the day's trek. He is impressed with my independence to travel in an unfamiliar land. But now it is time to rest and sleep.

“Tomorrow, we shall visit Avignon,” he recommends.

The morning breaking of the fast observes a quaint variation on a traditional American or Australian breakfast. Instead of serving one's breakfast cereal with milk, a small tub of yogurt substitutes. This choice seems curious, but I resolve to try it. When in Rome....

The yogurt is marvellous, not the overtly sweetened variety standard in Australia but '*au naturel*'. Mixed with a local cornflake variant from the Carrefour Super Marche, it makes for a delicious and crunchy dish. This breakfast variant is complemented by a large, bowl like, cup of good filtered coffee. "*Très bonne!*"

As today is a Saturday, Jean-Marc has Lisa for the day. Thus the first job for the day is to collect Lisa from her mother's apartment. A short errand, while I clean up after breakfast.

Upon his return, we take short drive finds us on the periphery of the old town in a free parking lot. Across the road is a billabong⁹ on the mighty Rhône river.

The bustle of the Saturday morning market is upon the old town. Down the narrow streets we pass all variety of vendors. Lisa ensures that this progress is at a sedate and observant rate.

An ice cream shop beckons the inner child in us all. Lisa's insistence makes the visit all the more pleasant and acceptable. The scooped '*glacée*' of purveyed in France is of outstanding quality to this Australians taste. I select the *fraise*, which is essentially a sorbet of ripe strawberries, while Lisa's favourite is *citron* and Jean-Marc's is *pistache*. Perhaps this is a taste that he acquired while in America?

So onward we contentedly loll through the old town streets of Avignon towards its centre. A gnarly knoll supports the grand papal fortresses known as the '*Palais des Papes*'.

These regal fortresses dominate the town. They were established in 1309 by Pope Clement V in search of security and in disgust at the corruption that had infused Rome. This Catholic semi-schism officially endured in Avignon for 70 years. After which the papacy returned to its traditional nest in Rome.

The *Palais des Papes* today stand proudly on guard of this time. An impressive transplant from the outside, but essentially barren on the inside, they were quickly stripped of their movable internal splendour when the Popes departed.

As we wandered the court yards of the *Palais*, our final turn directed us towards the *Petite Palais* which also contained a museum of sorts. After departing this museum, I was given a rare treat. Looking back towards the Rhône river, the *Pont Saint Bénezet* swings into view. This is the bridge about which the famous French nursery rhyme addresses.

With a small amount of encouragement, Jean-Marc was able to audition Lisa into singing this famous song. And so I was treated to this rendition at the front courtyard of the *Palais des Papes* by a three year old French girl. It was enough to make your heart want children of your own.

⁹ Billabong: a branch of a river forming a backwater or stagnant pool, made by water flowing from the main stream during a flood.

The lyrics of '*Sur le pont d'Avignon*' ('On the bridge of Avignon'), begin as follows:

*"Sur le pont d'Avignon
L'on y danse, l'on y danse
Sur le pont d'Avignon
L'on y danse tous en rond
Les beaux messieurs font comm' ça
Et puis encore comm' ça"*

Music 5: '*Sur le pont d'Avignon*' by Comptines et chansons
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJKfxtYAt0s>



Photo 6: Lisa at the Palais de Papes with the Pont d'Avignon in the left back ground

Chapter 7

Beautiful just like the Spring in Australia

Australian Imperial Force

Saturday April 29th, 1916

My dear Mother,

We have had quite an eventful time since I last wrote to you.

This week the weather has been beautiful just like the Spring in Australia, in fine weather the aeroplanes are always very active and this week especially so. On Sunday morning a German plane was brought down, one within half a mile of our billet; we saw it fall quite clearly just like a shot bird, it was a direct hit the shell passing clean through the engine, both the men in it were killed.

It is the custom with the Aviators that when one of the enemy is brought down behind our lines, they collect all his personal belongings and clothes and take them over the German lines & drop them. So last evening about 6 o'clock a German plane flew over our billet and dropped a wreath and a note thanking our men for having done this.

The German planes are faster and superior to ours but our men make up for this by extra daring. Our men counted 450 shells fired at one British Major in one flight over the German lines, not counting machine gun fire. They call this chap the "Mad Major" he has all his planes perforated with bullets and shrapnel.

Last Tuesday we were inspected by General Walker C.O. 1st Australian Division and on Thursday by Sir Douglas Haig the C in C and yesterday a Major General inspected our billets so there are plenty of tin hats here. Will ring off now.

Have new Address

8th Battalion

2nd Infantry Brigade

Your loving son

1st Division

Gerald

A.I.F

(Written from near Fleurbaix, Northern France)

By arrangement with Nicole, Jean-Marc was free to roam on Sunday.

The plan was to do a walk up the iconic *Mount Ventoux* which was about 70km North East of Avignon. For this ramble Jean-Marc had consulted a hikers book which recommended starting in a lane just beyond the lavender fields near the town of Aurel.

As Lisa had stayed with Nicole the previous night, Jean-Marc and I got underway early in the morning. This was assisted by my still trying to shake the lingering effects of jet-lag. In essence waking up early in the morning with the sun and the birds.

The early departure argued for a caffeine and a starchy top up in the picturesque town of *Sault*. There were a generous range of convivial choices and we soon selected a small café whose outside tables that gave a prime view of our objective, *Mount Ventoux*.



Photo 7: View towards Mount Ventoux

“Bonjour.”

“Bonjour, monsieur’s”.

“Café espresso, s'il-vous-plaît,” automatically slipped from Jean-Marc’s lips.

“Café au-lait, s'il-vous-plaît,” was also my refrain. I liked a little moo in my coffee while the “au-lait,” essentially pronounced ‘ole,’ appealed to my masculine sense for drama at this time of day.

A fresh baguette and some strong coffee hit the spot while we surveyed our goal from our table. A bald pinnacle with a topping of whipped cream clouds. It did not seem like it would be that long a walk, particularly as the day was fine.

A subsequent series of brief forays into a *boulangerie*, a combined *fromagerie-charcuterie* and finally a *magasin de fruits* were all that was needed to efficiently secure a sumptuous picnic lunch. My sweet tooth was of course not able to by-pass the *patisserie*.

A short wander out of town in the car found the prerequisite lane that was our starting point. A couple of small backpacks hefted, a picnic and some water, and we were away on the trail. Trail? Well more like an underused goat track.

The walk wound its way through some small ‘scrub,’¹⁰ or at least the French equivalent. After traversing a few small gullies,¹¹ we comfortably found our way onto a spur that appeared more travelled. From time to time we walked over some low herbage that released a pungent smell not unlike *bouquet garney*. In the main this was because the grass was intermingled with some low growing thyme. Even the *Provençal* landscape emanated cuisine!

¹⁰ Scrub: area covered in bush, trees, shrubs; or area in the country where there are mainly short trees

¹¹ Gully: a ravine formed by the action of water.

The spur climbed on till we crested the main ridge leading to *Mount Ventoux*. There the forest transited into conifers that were more gently spaced. There were now many openings through the trees so that the main peak, stood tolerantly off in the distance. The problem being that this distance did not look too much different compared to when we had started at around 9.00am. It was now 12.00pm and it seemed that our efforts had gained rather small in roads in relation to our planned target. *Mount Ventoux* was after all, a real mountain.

Still the journey, after cresting the main ridge, was worthwhile as the Alps were visible in the hazy distance. Under these circumstances you do what comes naturally for the French. You find a comfortable seat, bring out your *pain, fromage, saucisson* and a handy pocket knife, and have lunch.

You have to hand it to the French, they have most situations pretty well worked out. I mean, if presented with any small difficulty, resort to your cuisine. And when your cuisine has a noble and long history, it is hard for one to go too far wrong or to fault this logic. All that was missing was the espresso or perhaps a beer. A bit of a tall order when you are beside a trail on a mountain side. Besides the sun was now nicely balanced with a gentle breeze which made our picnic spot very temperate.

Several other small groups passed us by, always with a polite “*bonjour*”, to which we cordially reciprocated. Jean-Marc chatted with one or two of the hikers, particularly those on the way down from Mount Ventoux. He was looking to gain intelligence into what lay ahead on our hike.

“Well Jean-Marc, what do you reckon we should do now?” I asked with a quizzical eye from beneath my faded hat.

“It is still a little way, I suppose.” He replied cautiously.

“Does your guide book indicate how long this walk should take?”

“Oui.”

“Sounds like discretion maybe the better part of valour, then. Let’s turn back?” I said, picking up the drift of Jean-Marc’s intensions.

And so, with the sun pushing our backs, we wheeled around and beat a grateful retreat from the summit of *Mount Ventoux*. For us it would remain without our conquering its summit.

We soon found a sealed road that took us in pretty much the direction that we required. Accordingly, our rate of progress increased. At an appropriate point we separated from the road and made our way towards the car, still dutifully parked on the lane in which we had left it.

The arrival at the car at around 3.00 pm presented a dilemma.

“So Jean-Marc, is there anything else interesting and close by?” I asked.

“The countryside through the Plateau d’Albion in the Vaucluse is interesting,” he replied tentatively.

Getting out and unfolding a map, I noticed that this direction also took us in the direction of *Roussillon*. I had heard somewhere that this ancient ochre town was worth visiting.

“Ok, what about if we go this direction and end up in Roussillon?”

Jean-Marc's shrug of the shoulders response was not greatly enthusiastic but it seemed like a plan to me and I was the driver. So it was that we headed off in this direction.

The area was undulating though mainly forested valleys with the roads remarkably well made and formed. It turned out that the state of the roads should have been expected as this plateau in the Vaucluse region was a crick with a more sinister purpose.

Some way down the road we encountered a small meticulously groomed but stoutly fenced area. This was France's modern version of the Maginot line. For hidden away among the bowling green lawns were the silos that contained a portion of France's nuclear arsenal.

I looked across at Jean-Marc and he seemed uncomfortable. I suppose he was unsure whether to be proud of his homelands ingenuity and self-sufficiency, or to be distressed with what his nation had resorted to in the name of maintaining the peace.

Still, this area quickly receded in the cars rear-view mirror.

Although the distance from *Sault* to *Roussillon* was only around 40km, our arrival time drifted out towards 4.00pm. The main parking lot in *Roussillon* was large, uncomfortably large. I now understood why Jean-Marc had been somewhat ambivalent about visiting the town. The large parking lot, with many spaces for buses, screamed tourist town/trap!

Still the parking lot, being later in the day and it being early in the season, was surprisingly empty, particularly of the large tourist coaches.

Our first sortie was towards the ancient ochre cliffs. A suitably radiant orange path lights the way. These ochre deposits had first been 'commercialised' by the Phoenicians and later by the Greeks and Romans. In fact, *Roussillon* had been the principle source of ochre for Europe up until WWII.

The path that lead on into a terracotta canyon, later becomes more rich in colour as the light of the day wanes. It was time to wind our way back into town and to perhaps find something to eat.

The *centre de ville* of *Roussillon* was also pleasingly empty. Most of the touristic shops were in the process of packing up for the day. The tourist busses had drifted away to their multi star accommodations, leaving the streets tranquil and pleasant.

"Well my 'worms are biting',¹² Jean-Marc."

Having caught up with my 'Australianisms' once again, Jean-Marc agreed.

"Yes, we could take something to eat." He confirmed.

We cast around for a suitable place, taking the wise precaution of straying away from the central square. Up one winding and cobbled street, a bistro with a suitable *al fresco* outlook presented itself. Perfect credentials, as it was a barmy Spring evening. The *plat de la maison* being *salade Niçoise* also looked enticing.

The other attraction was a contented-looking cat that had taken up lazy residence in a planter tub on the parapet of the dining area. If it was a good place for the cat, it would most likely be a good place for us. Yes, this would be a very convivial place to take *déjeuner*.

¹² Worms are biting: Australian slang for, hungry.

I selected the *plat de jour* of *salade Niçoise* while Jean-Marc selected a trio of regional dips with a crusty bread. The addition of a bottle of local *sémillon*, rounded out our selection.

Interestingly, walking into the main area of this restaurant required the passing of the cellar which was in a small alcove in a very old stone arch. In this cellar, complete with its iron gate, a series of wine bottles, covered in very thick dust could be spied. I wondered how old this restaurant really was?

Later, once the plates for the meal had been wiped with bread, Jean-Marc enquired with the owner or manager what the origins of the restaurant building were. Jean-Marc translated reply was that the main part of the restaurant dated back about 800 years, while the cellars arch was even older, perhaps even dating back to Phoenician times. This may have been somewhat of a far fetched tale, but our restaurant was certainly very old. But then that was France and particularly Provence, scratch the surface and you unerringly found something with ancient roots. Not much like buildings in Australia where one is impressed by anything over 100 years old.

After settling *le addition* and in the dimming light of the day, we set off back to Avignon. It had been a very satisfying day. Even Jean-Marc's opinion of *Roussillon* had been substantially re-evaluated, much to his surprise.

His comment was, "*I must come back to Roussillon soon with Lisa, but late in the day when the tourists have departed*".

One can not get a much better recommendation than that.

Chapter 8

This is not a bad war

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

Thursday 25th May 1916

My dear Minnie -

I have been going to write to you for a long time & am down to it now.

This is not a bad war if one can dodge the few chances of getting cracked that are going, we live fairly well, even here in the front line, we have a cook who is an excellent forager & last night had cold roast beef with three vegetables & salad with dressing & spring onions all complete, & we topped it off with stewed rhubarb & whipped cream. Tullett my batman is still going strong. They are both old soldiers & know their way about.

The work is fairly strenuous here but they take us out for a spell when we have been here for a while, so it is very different to Gallipoli where they had to stay in the trenches for months on end on bad food, the food is good here.

It was funny the night we came in; the trenches here are very close to the villages & as we came in through the homes the Hawthorn hedges were quite white with blossom. There are plenty of quail, pheasants and partridges about the trenches but I have not shot any yet. There is a full moon & it shows things up well.

We had a big bombardment a few nights before we came in, but it didn't do much harm.

Will ring off now

Love to all

Gerald

(Written from near Fleurbaix, Northern France, presumably after time in the line near Fromelles)

It was time to leave Avignon and independently make my way. Avignon had enabled me to come to terms with the pace of *la belle Française* and set my feet solidly on the ground.

My last stop in Provence was to be to the time defying *Pont du Gard*. It is a short 30 minute drive West of Avignon. This nearly 2000 year old Roman aqueduct served in ancient times to bring water from the *Fontaine de eau* in Uzès a winding 30 miles to the *Cisterna* in Nimes. In Roman times, Nimes was one of the largest population centres in ancient Europe.

Finding the way to the *Pont du Gard* is simple as would be expected of such a widely known and well visited monument. In the end, the main navigational challenge was to negotiate its vast car park which was befitting of such a famous attraction.

The first view of the *Pont du Gard* from the left bank of the River Gardon is breathtaking. Three layers of arches rise out of the gorge and above the Gardon River. Back when I visited, OH&S practices were yet to fully bite, so a discordant stream of tourists dot the cap-stone layer of the old aqueduct, while the odd car still traversed the lower layer. Moving further up stream towards the *Pont du Gard*, it further impresses with its scale on one's consciousness.



Photo 8:

Top: View of Pont du Gard. Left: Inside the aqueduct. Right: Walking the cap-stone causeway.

Climbing onto the top of the *Pont du Gard* to traverse to the right bank of the River Gardon was something my inner child could not resist. A short but winding path lead up and away from the river to a flight of stairs which ended upon a relatively narrow channel through which the *eau* once flowed. For the first twenty or thirty metres the cap stone of the aqueduct is missing providing a secure path towards the other side of the gorge. Once the first of the cap-stone series is encountered, a decision must be made. Choose absolute safety and duck one's head to continue to progress through where the water once flowed. Or take the more, risky alternative which is to climb up on the cap-stones and walk unhindered across the relatively wide causeway.

Like many, my initial course was to choose safety and push against the metaphorical flow of the ancient water. This course, however, did not need to be maintained. Ample opportunity to change course was provided intermittently by the absence of one or more of the cap-stones. One only needed to climb out and onto the cap-stone causeway, into the fresh air and the invigorating view presented. Fifty meters below the River Gardon patiently awaits a miss-step.

Once on the cap-stone causeway it is interesting to watch others making similar delayed choices. More concerning is the machismo of some couples, where the male would assist his female counterpart out of the channel onto the causeway. In practice, the male *derrière* often points out over the river in this process. One slip or failed grip could result in a disastrous fall. Still getting out of the channel and on top makes for an exhilarating stroll across and then back over the river. The feat of the ancient Roman architects and craftsmen is awe-inspiring.

Still, tempting as the *Pont du Gard* and its views are, the day is young and there are other sights to see. The aqueduct soon falls over your shoulder and the car park is again renegotiated to recommence travel.

A short drive retracing one's route finds the *péage* of the A9 Auto Route and the heart of the *Languedoc* beckons onward. The A9 unerringly pulses past *Nîmes*, then *Montpellier*, before I finally exit around the Southern side of *Bézier*. I take the route via *Capestang* towards the ancient Cathar hide-out of *Minerve*.

It was in the small village of *Capestang* that I sought sustenance in the form of picnic supplies before the punctual lunch time closure of the shops at 12.00pm. The addition of a fresh baguette, a piece of cured sausage and a couple of small pieces of cheese, augmented the lunch supplies I already had.

The Cathar's were a 'Christian' sect that was established in reaction to the sale of Papal indulgences by the Roman centred Church and other capitalistic based perversions of the Christian religion. The Popes of course reciprocated by labelling the Cathar's as heretics.

The Cathar's flourished between the 11th and 13th Centuries in the *Languedoc* and *Midi Pyrénées* regions, and were roughly centred around the town of *Albi*. This challenge to Papal authority was so unpalatable to the papacy that it eventually unleashed the *Albigensian Crusades* that plumbed the depths of persecution and massacre to finally lead to the annihilation of the Cathar's. Those who would not repent their Cathar heresies were burnt alive at the stake.

Even the protection of a series of mighty hill top towns and grand Chateaux's that topped an array of pinnacles in the *Pyrénées* could not save the Cathar's. The religious fervour and brutality that could drive people into these places is hard to contemplate. That these seemingly impregnable fortresses could not ultimately provide sanctuary serves to further illustrate the dark destructive potential in mankind.

In my case, *Minerve* served as the start of my pilgrimage along the *Pays de Cathares*. *Minerve* was settled and fortified during the series of Catholic schisms that finally lead to the papacy moving to *Avignon* in 1309. A group of this heretically deemed sect sought refuge in this village in 1210 after the massacre at *Béziers* during the *Albigensian Crusades*.

Minerve sits on the southern edge of the vast forested area of the *Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Languedoc*. *Minerve* is a naturally defendable island amid a deep canyon gouged by the river below. These days its terracotta topped, stonewalled buildings sit tranquilly above the split arms of the river below. All but resident's cars are excluded from the narrow streets of the village, which recommends it as a prime place to find a perch, with suitable vista, to enjoy a picnic lunch. Later I descended down a narrow path to this river to enjoy the secluded coolness that its flow recommended.

Revival from this scenically induced stupor is simply achieved in one of *Minerve*'s sleepy cafes. The café is entered via a suitably stoic stone doorway, to provide an opportunity to top up my caffeine levels.

"*Bonjour.*"

“*Bonjour, monsieur,*” comes the automatic response. “*Que voulez-vous?*”

I replied back with. “*Café au-lait, s'il-vous-plaît.*”

I was still to get into the French habit of ordering café espresso. Perhaps I just did not drink a large enough volume of coffee in a day?

The later arrival of the said *café au-lait* had the desired effect of priming me for the next drive along narrow winding roads to *Carcassonne*.

Carcassonne is an entirely different construct compared to *Minerve* and the *Pont du Gard*. It looks, for all intensive purposes like a medieval walled city that dates back over 800 years. However, its fortifications were delightfully updated during the mid 1800's to produce that centuries ‘Disneyfied’ aesthetic of what medieval ramparts and fortifications looked like. As such, these edifices are in near mint condition. With such a recommendation and a dominating position above the surrounding new city, it is of course a tourist trap, but one that I can be excused for giving in to for its exterior charm.

So it was that I arrived at *Carcassonne* and into one of its expected vast car parks. Passing through the impressively fortified Narbonne gate I headed up the hill to the only affordable lodging, the *Auberge de Jeunesse* youth hostel. Checking in for a nights lodging and dumping my blue backpack left me free to explore *Carcassonne*.

An exploration of the walls was the order of the late afternoon and the opportunity to play medieval knight. Being early May, the town was almost deserted by its standards. This enabled a nearly unencumbered exploration in the waning part of the afternoon.

There are in fact two walls, an inner and outer, both complete with battlements, arrow slits and wooden walk ways. To this end I headed from the centre of town towards the South West end beyond the *St Nazaire* church to the amphitheatre and the *St Nazaire* tower. Walking though this tower leads to the most impressive views of both walls, interrupted only by two twenty something girls, obviously fellow travellers.

Interestingly, their voices had a familiar twang to them. It was the first time in about a week I had heard English spoken by native speakers. Not only English but that with an Australian accent. Being on my own, there was no other course of action but to introduce myself.

“*G'Day, so where are you two from?*” I enquired.

“*What the heck? We're from Brisbane.*” The more senior of the two replied.

“*What about yourself?*”

“*I am from Adelaide. My name is Evan.*”

The more senior girl replied, “Well my name is Sarah, and this is my sister Alexi”.

We spent the next few minutes recounting how long we had been in France, where we had been and where we hoping to further explore.

I said. “*These walls are very impressive, with many walk ways to tour.*”

And so we formed alliance to explore the ramparts of *Carcassonne* together. It turned out that Alexi had just completed high school and big sister Sarah was leading her on both their first trips to Europe.

Flitting between the inner and outer walls by way of the ‘upper lices’ we meandered our way towards the Narbonne gate. In this pursuit we were essentially alone, giving the exploration of the

walk ways a somewhat eerie ambience. In this I think we were all pleased to have some extra company as we immersed ourselves.

Once we had reached the Narbonne gate, the officially sanctioned wall walk ended in a door and some lazily applied barbed wire. Being young Australians, and in the absence of the eye of officialdom, these were not obstacles to be balked by.

My farm background provided me with a certain familiarity with getting around or over barbed wire. In any case, the ramparts beyond the Narbonne Gate, if anything looked more interesting than those we had just enjoyed.

I proposed, “*There is nobody around, and this bit of wire looks like it can be easily got around. Let's keep on going?*”

Alexi gave a daring nod consistent with her youth, while the more careful Sarah asked, “*Are you sure?*”

“*Yeah, there will be no drama. I mean, what is they worst they could do, yell at us, and then kick us out?*”

So it was decided, so that we continued to explore our way along walls. In this precinct the inner and outer walls came closer together so that continued passage relied on flitting between both walls, using the towers to make forward and sometimes upward and downward progress.

After a further 30 minutes of this exploring, the light was starting to diminish as the time ticked on towards 6pm.

“*I don't know about you two, but my ‘worms are starting to bite’?*” I commented.

“*Yeah, I reckon I've just about seen enough too.*” Chimed in Alexi, while Sarah provided an affirming nod.



Photo 9: The walls of Carcassonne from an unofficial vantage point

So at the next opportunity, after taking a quick look to ensure no one of authority was observing us, we clambered around another small barb wire barricade to drop back onto the street.

It was now just a case of finding a likely place for dinner. In this town, finding an establishment that provided good value in a less travelled area of the town was just not going to happen. The choice of restaurant basically came down to finding a posted tourist menu that fitted our respective tastes and budgets.

During the search for a dinner place, we passed many souvenir shops containing various nick knacks, tea towels emblazoned with the legend of Carcassonne and post cards. Intriguingly there were a number of larger photographs of the *Châteauxs* of the *Hautes Corbières*. These *châteauxs* were first established by the Cathar's. After the defeat of the Cathar's, these very same *châteauxs* were taken over by the French kings to form a medieval Maginot line, as a barrier against the Spanish, in the scenic foothills of the *Pyrénées*.

For me one picture in particular caught my imagination. It was a Winter shot of the *Châteaux de Peyrepertuse* just before dusk with a fall of snow highlighting the ruins against a dark blue backdrop. This was a place I was just going to have to go to. Tomorrow.

We soon found what looked to be an acceptable place for dinner. The meal was, well acceptable, and it did 'fill a hole'. I suppose we could not realistically expect the heights of French cuisine on a budget and in a tourist town like *Carcassonne*.

After customarily mopping our plates dry with some torn baguette, it was time to return to our accommodations. As it turned out Sarah and Alexi were also staying at the *Auberge de Jeunesse*. I waxed lyrical about my plans to visit the *Châteauxs* of the *Hautes Corbières* and the *Châteaux de Peyrepertuse* in particular, to Sarah and Alexi.

"I have a car and if you like you are welcome to come with me," I invited. *"Although I must drop the car off and catch a train in Montpellier, you should would have little difficulty in catching a bus back to Carcassonne from Peyrepertuse or Narbonne."* I qualified.

Alexi seemed interested and Sarah said, "They would consider it".

"Ok," I said, "I will leave at 7.30am, if you are down in the kitchen area at that time and are still interested you can hitch a ride."

At this we said our good nights and drifted off to our dorm rooms.

By 7.30am neither Alexi or Sarah had appeared, so I was to go it alone towards *Peyrepertuse*. Perhaps Sarah thought my adherence to the road rules might be somewhat like my observance of out of bounds areas? Maybe they just slept in?

'*Comme ci, comme ça.*'

The first part of the drive was relatively straight forward. I just headed out of *Carcassonne*, up a relatively wide valley to the town of Limoux. There had been a little rain overnight, so the road was still wet and a light mist was melting onto the valley sides.

Several *Châteauxs* recommended themselves by sign, reputation and skyline vista along this route, but I had my sights firmly set on *Peyrepertuse*. I drove on doggedly. All the time the valleys became narrower and more tight. The roads lost their white centre lines. The country however was magnificent! Steep craggy sides with patches of forest on the floor and the lower valley sides, with bald crowns.

I had of course decided to take the scenic route, resulting in rather slow but rewarding progress. Closer to *Peyrepertuse* I drove through a gorge appropriately known as the *Gorges de Galamus*. In

this rocky gorge the road clings to the walls until its single lane melds into the gorges walls altogether. Appropriately slow, it was possible to take in the view and drive at the same time. Sparsely spaced small parking places were also available for stopping to take photos and less stressful passing.

Once out of this gorge my speed picked up. Firstly, over a low alpine pass, then a gently meandering road which hugged a ridgeline for some time. Eventually on the far side of the valley *Châteaux de Peyrepertuse* prominently came into view. It was an eagle's eyrie stuck to the top of a rocky crag that jutted into the valley like an accusing finger.

To physically reach *Châteaux de Peyrepertuse*, I had to circumnavigate the top end of the valley as the châteaux overhung a steep and rocky gorge. Once through the attendant hamlet of *Duikhac-sous-Peyrepertuse*, a narrow dirt road wound its way up to the châteaux's car park complete with a lonely kiosk that sold tickets for entry into the *châteaux*.

After an ineffectual iron turn-style, a narrow, snaking path lead beyond the car park to the châteaux's ruins. Most of the châteaux's outer walls were relatively complete, so entry was unexpectedly via a narrow stairway which lead into the heart of the châteaux. The outer walls may have been in attendance but the roof and internal flooring was long gone. The various sections of the châteaux were accessed via door ways with stairs conveniently added in more recent times. Looking out through the battlements, over the cliffs it seemed incredible that such defences could have been overcome, at least in medieval times. With these imposing views and the *châteaux*'s sorry history, one feels small and isolated in this majestic country.



Photo 10: Overview of the Château de Peyrepertuse

Moving through the ruins into the *haute châteaux*, enables a view that affords the full layout of the châteaux and its surrounds. The châteaux is at peace and rests tranquilly on its crick. Alone with myself, I feel the yearning to be as an eagle on its perch. A single stretch of wings would acquire soaring flight that again would bend the sky above this tangled terrain. Alas this sky is unyielding, but still my soul claws at my chest for freedom.

In this my mind drifts to the pathos of Peggy Glanville-Hicks' 'Gymnopedie No. 1' in which the solo oboe wafts my fugitive souls passage into and then through the sky. In lazy circles it pitches and yaws to the vagaries in the wind currents. Enveloping yet being influenced by the lands topography.

Music 6: 'Gymnopedie No. 1,' Peggy Glanville-Hicks Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Myer Freedman, Conductor. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja3ywvd-3s8>

The nearby *Châteaux de Queribus* can also be spied. Its solitary rounded keep continues to give its potential assailants a bold one fingered salute. *Queribus*, not *Châteaux de Peyrepertuse*, was the last Cathar castle to fall.

Still time moves onward and I have a train awaiting in *Montpellier*. So I at last retreat from this fortresses' ruins. Regaining my car my thoughts are still attendant to the air currents that fluctuate and timelessly caress the châteaux's walls.

The road gradually relaxes from dirt, to pavement, and finally back to pavement with a dividing line. The road slowly winds its way away from *Peyrepertuse* towards the *Portal-des-Corbie*s and the awaiting A9 Auto Route. This proposes a faster rate of progress, but that is confronted by a strong headwind of *Mistral* proportions. The small Renault Clio is not really powerful enough to go more than 120 km/hr into this force while I have to return the car and catch a train. I push on relentlessly into this wind with *Montpellier* the objective.

Châteaux's being faithfully gained, the car refuelled and returned, all in time to catch my TGV train to Paris. Safely on this sterling chariot, *Nîmes*, *Avignon*, *Orange* and *Lyon* smoothly pass by as the galloping click-clack of the train surges me towards Paris.

Chapter 9

I would like to take up a run here for bullocks, but not just now

REINFORCEMENTS.

Sunday 11th June 1916

Dear Father

Since writing to you last we have come out of the front line and now have a nice little place to look after. Trench life has agreed with me & my health has never been better.

It is very nice to get a good sleep again as one goes a bit short. Further on, even now, we always must sleep in our clothes, ready to hop out at a moments notice. There is plenty of water out here so I can keep clean which is a blessing.

Mother's last letter says Ken is in camp. I would like to know where he is & what Battalion as soon as possible. I advised him in the event of enlisting to go to Victoria, where he would always know somebody - but don't suppose he has done this - The Hancock's must be aggressive, six of them going.

I'm glad you got through the season without having a bush fire, they would have been very hard to stop this year. The grass among these trenches is wonderful, prairie & cocksfoot mixed with self sown stuff of all kinds, three foot high. I would like to take up a run here for bullocks, but not just now.

I hear that Prince Bardolph won the Sydney Cup, a bit of luck for Mark Whitty.

Hope you and Mother are very well.

Give my love to all

Your loving son

Gerald

(written from near Sailly-sur-la-Lys, Northern France, close to Fleurbaix. Australian War Memorial records show that on enlistment Ken (Francis) was 32 years and 4 months old when he passed his medical examination at Blackboy Hill in Perth on March 3rd 1916, being 5 ft 9½ inches (176.5 cm) tall, tanned complexion, brown eyes and brown hair, and weighed 12 st 2 lbs (77 kilos).

Arrival by train is the time honoured method for arriving into Paris, the city of light. The terminal stop for the TGV is the cavernous Gare de Lyon SCNF station. Light filters through the glass cased superstructure to dapple the concourse. It is into this play, where fellow travellers busily make their way, and is where I alight from my silver steed to tread my own path.

Joining into this throng, I follow the classic red encased, wrought iron signs towards the Métro. This leads me underground and into the stations bowels in search of the Métro entrance. It is a 'rabbit warren,' in anybody's language.

Before entering, the detail of buying a ticket must first be negotiated. Prominently positioned ticket vending machines provide the most simple option for this necessary purchase. Fortunately, these ticket machines have a button to be pressed for English instructions. After a few simple taps and the insertion of the appropriate note produces a *carnet* of ten train tickets and change, that are duly spat out into the dispenser.

One of the dispensed *carnet* is then inserted into the automatic turn-style, followed by a short shimmy to enable the passage of my backpack through the turn-style, collection of the ticket and

then I am through. The prominently displayed Métro maps suggests the first step is taking the egg-yolk yellow coded *La Défence/Chateau de Vincennes* line in the direction *La Défence* to station *Concorde*. A train quickly arrives, bow-wave air dustily displacing me with its approach. I close my eyes against this irritant. Alighting the train, I am efficiently transported across Paris.

At station *Concorde* I disembark. As the train departs into its tunnel, this time the air is noisily drawn after it. Such is the flow of Paris' Métro arteries. Switching trains requires some climbing of stairs and walking of passage ways until I locate the purple coded *Balard/Créteil* line coming down on the side of direction *Balard*. Another boarding and a further three stops gets me to my anticipated destination stop of *Ecole Militaire*. To *souterrain*, I again reinsert my ticket into the automatic turn-style. This time the ticket is not returned.

A short passage walk and ascension on an escalator provides my grand entrance from subterranean Paris into the *7th Arrondissement*. The *Avenue de la Motte-Picquet* sweeps by with the staccato hum of traffic, interrupted by the odd horn beep. Turning right I am greeted by the purple awning and sumptuous windows of the *haute-cuisine* take out shop, *Lenôtre*. Of Paris, of course! The five star take away delights lavishly presented in the window are eye catching but my backpack is also heavy and getting wearisome. So I move on.

At *rue Cler* I turn left as well as turning my back on the traffic. The cobbles underfoot lead down the street past bountiful stores proffering wine, bread from *boulangeries*, cheese from *fromageries* and several cafés that voluptuously slide onto the pavement. The cafés patrons sit either serenely or in animated conversation with their friends, lovers or spouses. All watching, and wanting to be watched.

Being around 7.30 pm on a barmy evening, various glasses, cups of café espresso and snacks are arrayed on their small tables. Elegant Leffe beer chalices look particularly appealing and inviting to this traveller.

However, my primary objective is the *Grand Hôtel Lévéque*. Its front door is relatively discretely lodged between an alluring wine shop and a small café. Through the door and down a short hallway finds reception.

“*Bonsoir, mon nom est Evans.*” I wearily greet the young monsieur on duty.

“*Bonsoir monsieur Evans, bienvenue le Grand Hôtel Lévéque.*” He replied politely. “*Vous avez avez eu un bon voyage?*”

Accordingly, I replied. “*Ça va, bien.*”

He was casually dressed in jeans with a mop of deceptively unruly yet curly fair hair, looking like a typical University student. I might then be in luck that he would be able to speak English, and also be willing to speak it.

Now the niceties had been progressed I looked to expedite the checking into my room.

“*Ne vous parler Anglais?*”

“Yes, I speak some English,” he replied with a small rise of his brows.

“Please present me with your passport and fill in the form.”

After a flash of the photocopier on my opened passport and some lazy scribbling's on the form, he presented me with my room key.

"Your room is 305. Take the lift up to the third floor. Turn left, then your room is on your right."

"*Merci, monsieur,*" I reply as I turn and squeeze into the lift. It is only just big enough for me to fit into with my pack on. But not much more! A tap of a button and then a slow bounce results in the upward progress of the lift. Another small bounce and a metallic clack signals arrival at the third floor. I have to back out of the lift, as it is too narrow for me to turn with pack on.

As the monsieur at reception predicted, room 305 was *à gauche* and then *à droite*. The room greeted me with the welcome opportunity to wearily shed my backpack. This small but adequate room overlooked the busy rue Cler. Opening the window enables a clandestine view along the street. *À gauche*, I see the well patronised cafés and am reminded of the bountifully cold beer that I had previously spied.

A reversed route soon sees me back on *rue Cler* and moving purposefully in a beer-ward direction. *Le Café Central* beckoned with a forward facing seats and its small glossy black tables.

Taking a seat, the waiter efficiently approaches. With a coordinated flourish of a cloth on the table, he greets me with the expected, "*Bonsoir, monsieur*".

"*Bonsoir.*" I again automatically reply.

This I follow with. "*Un grand verre de Leffe blonde, s'il vous plait.*"

The waiter replies. "*Merci monsieur.*" He then smartly departs in the direction of the bar.

I now settle to anticipate the arrival of my chalice of amber nectar. Leffe blonde is brewed in the 'traditional abbaye' style, although it is unlikely that pious monks have anything more than a supervisory role in its production these days. It is now professionally made by the Interbrew company, which is one of the giants of world brewing.

Still the swooping arrival of this classic beer is a performance worthy of its heritage. In its handsome chalice glass, complete with faux stain glass logo. The lively beading beer is topped with a generous mousse or foam. A small bowl of peanuts and some small olives complete the performance. It is a classical work of art.

"*Merci, très bon.*" I gratefully reply.

I settle down to appreciatively savour my beer while watching the passing's on the street stage in front of me. The day gently subsides in unison with the level of the beer in my glass, leaving a delicate laced pattern on the side. A classic beer, well poured into a clean glass.

The weary travel day draws to its close. The last rites are to seek sustenance. Not for today a more formal restaurant meal. One course will suffice, with the *Créperie Ulysée en Gaule* just down the street looking particularly recommending for the budget conscious.

"*Bonsoir monsieur, un crêpe jambon, champignon et oeuf, s'il vous plait.*" I request now with almost automatic ease. I feel that I am really getting the hang of communication in Français.

"*Merci, monsieur.*" Is supplied as the equally day weary reply of the proprietor.

Onto the round hot plate goes some oil, onions and a little garlic. They sizzle enchantingly before some bacon and mushrooms follow onto the plate. Once they are nearly cooked, some egg is added to the neat row of ingredients to bind them as they are scraped to one side of the hot plate. At the same time a circle of crêpe mixture is added to efficiently form a light and enriched crêpe into which the other cooked components are neatly ensconced. This mesmerising culinary performance is expertly wrapped in tin foil and a serviette. The ritual reminds me of that of a simplified Japanese Hibachi BBQ performance.

“Accomplissez monsieur, s'il vous plaît.”

“Merci, monsieur, très bon.” I reply gratefully, paying my provider and receiving the package.

Taking a seat on the allied trestle table, I consume the wrapped and tasty contents as my first night in Paris draws to a close. At the other end of the makeshift table, an older couple are doing likewise. The fraternity of the foil.

Pushing back my seat, I shuffle tiredly across *rue Cler* through the door into the *Grand Hôtel Lévéque*. A polite, “*bonne nuit*,” to the assumed student distractedly supervising the reception while making progress with his studies. I defer the claustrophobic lift and ascend the stairs for the short climb to the third floor and my welcoming bed.

I awaken to the clatter of wheels on the cobbles and the scrape of trestle tables on the same pavement. It is around 5.30am. Occasional muted voices organise the assembly of the street for the coming morning. Fruit is being laid out on the trestle tables, along with the produce and wares of all the other shops on the street. The incessant beep, beep of reversing lorries and vans is also heard intermittently. This is the one down side of having a room overlooking *rue Cler*. Still it adds a colourful distraction as I continue to doze, awaiting the warming sun on those very same cobbles.

As the light of day gently intrudes its way through my windows willowy curtains, it is time to get activated for the day. A quick shower and then into a fresh set of clothes accomplishes the prerequisites for an expedition.

Characteristically, the hotel breakfast provided is an easy and uncomplicated way to begin the day. It is however expensive and shields one from what you have come to experience, life in Paris.

After a bright exchange of *bonjour*'s with the person on the hotel reception, I exited out onto the street, with my trusty daypack in place. Turning to the right I immerse myself into early meanderings of the local residents, school children, people heading for work, and the odd fellow tourist. The first café option next to the Hotel again looks too easy and touristic. However, a little way down *rue Cler* and just around the corner the *Le Roussillon* bar is worn with faithful patronage and appears a more appropriate prospect.

I bypass the higher priced ‘*salle*’ tables, to slip anonymously into a stool at the bar. Australians still channel the ‘*6 bob a day tourist*’ ethic of yesteryear.

“Bonjour, monsieur.” I am greeted as soon as my bum has aligned itself with the seat.

“Bonjour Monsieur, un café grand creme, s'il vous plaît,” slides off my lips with impending relish.

The barman continues his routine with unhurried efficiency. He chats with one or two of his regulars, laughs presumably about last night's soccer game or over some salacious gossip in the newspaper, while simultaneously removing the finished cups and plates from now departed patrons.

My eye distractedly roves around the smoke stained interior of the bar. Dark wood and mirrors interplay against bottles of spirits, club colours, the odd empty table, and a range of women and men beginning their daily regimen. In the main, these ordinary people are on their way to work or about their local business. One old gent sits with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and a beer on the bar. Most sit with easy familiarity.

The espresso machines grinder whines grinding my beans. An expert couple of thumps, a firming of the grounds and the twisted clack of the portafilter being positioned in the machine. This is followed by the staccato pump of the hot water through the coffee bed and dribble of rich coffee into my cup. A twist of a knob releases steam into the stainless steel milk jug, squirting heated steam into the milk. A quick flourish of milk into the coffee and the entertainment proceeds to the indulgence stage.

“*Merci.*” My coffee arrives accompanied by another plate with a serviette sitting on top of it. The barman also dutifully pushes a small basket of croissants in my direction with anticipated expectation.

Well, I may as well satiate my morning hunger with a croissant to mellow the strong coffee. My sweet tooth dictates a *pain de chocolat*, which handily sits in the basket begging to be selected. It is superb which is to be expected for the bar to maintain its local reputation.

After completion, a polite “*le addition?*”, cash exchange and “*merci*”, and I am ready to spend my first day in Paris.

Being still relatively early in the morning, before most of the museums open, the best strategy to maximise the touristic value of the day is to first visit a church. In Paris, the most obvious direction is to visit Notre Dame which is on the *Île de la Cité*, an island in the Seine and in the centre of Paris.

This strategy recommends again utilising the Métro. Entry into *Ecole Militaire* Métro station is once more achieved by another of my *carnet* of train tickets. On this journey I head via station *la Motte Picquet Grenelle* to emerge at *Odéon* in the Latin quarter. From the *Odéon* station it is a short walk down *Boulevard St Germain* to take a left onto *Boulevard Saint Michael* to proceed towards the *Île de la Cité*. As the proximity of the *Île de la Cité* and Seine become closer, so too does the density of sidewalk hungry cafes intensify, particularly on the prominent corners.

The river is crossed by the *Pont St Michael*, followed by a right turn to proceed along the river towards the Notre Dame. My walking pace picks up in expectation as the façade of the Notre Dame slowly revolves in to view. Building anticipation, I continue through the small gates to the right of the cathedral into its gardens. Being Spring, white roses are in full bloom and the foliage is fresh to greet the new growing year. Progress in this direction highlights the buttresses, flying buttresses and pinnacles that maintain the integrity of this awe-inspiring creation of Parisians past. Continuing to circumnavigate the Notre Dame in an anti-clock wise direction enables the full appreciation of its size and glory.

In the street beyond, I see a small group of gendarmes discussing the day with some burly dark suited men. They are supervising the removal of a presumably illegally parked car from the street. The tow truck has a derrick arm with sling that elegantly picks the car up and deposits it on its tray. Quite a performance that will be an unwelcome discovery for some over enthusiastic pilgrim.

After watching the completion of this piece of street theatre, I round back in front of the façade in the *Place du Parvis* to watch the sun descending the twin towers. The fresh morning light slowly enhances the rich and symbolic carvings. There is ample time to patiently watch this spectacle as the line into the right portal already stretches back more than 100m, even at this early hour. A veritable conga line of pilgrims.

The eventual entry is accompanied by a short stepped, shoulder to shoulder shuffle through a dark, virtual vacuum into the cathedral proper. As one's eyes adapt to the dim medieval light, they are drawn towards the relatively small stain glass windows that space the walls. First moving into the central nave, my eyes are drawn up towards the lofty heavens of the intersecting stone beams above. The sides of the nave present an ethereal forest of supporting columns interspersed by stain glass windows that are dimmed with age and holy smoke. The most impressive of these beacons are presented at the ends of the nave, none more so than the impressive rose-shaped window that peers over my left shoulder.

Going with the flow of the pious crowd, I shift towards the side aisle. At regular intervals, wrought iron enclosures present chapels dedicated to worthy saints and influential patrons. With my rudimentary French and Parisian history most of the pious have little resonance. The Kings and Queens of France were buried at St Denis, which is north of the centre of the city. That was until their bones were tossed out during the revolution. The tide of the crowd flows on past a transept inviting confession and forgiveness for contemporary sinners.

More light entices the throng forward around the rear of the alter and choir. Joan of Arc devoutly looks on at all that pass to the left side of the cathedral. Dark portrayals of various saints, angels and scenes from the life of the Son of God bear witness to our passing. Their unending stare is fixed into the beyond. All the while there is a delicate hum of humanity that gently vibrates the air. Finally, the exit portal beckons and spills the pilgrim back into the near blinding daylight.

Turning immediately to the right, it is time to gain a higher perspective on the city of Paris. Another line is encountered. It leads to a small door and series of steps that deliver you to a ticket counter for the privilege of climbing further steps up to the towers of the Notre Dame. It is your chance to emulate Quasimodo. It is here that I purchase and validate a three day Museum and Monuments pass. This natty little queue jumper provides unlimited entry into most of the major museums and monuments in and around Paris.

After awaiting for my ascension aliquot, a long and ever increasing series of claustrophobic stairs are climbed, around and around to attain the heights of the cathedral. Again bursting into light and gasping for fresh air the initial stairs end on the bridge at the base of the two towers. Here you first come eye to eye with the famous gargoyles and chimeras. These mutantly grotesque beasts pagonally serve both to ward off evil spirits and to channel spouts of water from the structure during rain. Broodingly anti-Wenderian,¹³ they stare out over a Paris of grey slated roof tops and buildings. Are they protecting the building, the city or do they have malevolent intentions?

After inspecting one of the grand bells, further stairs permit the final ascent to the top of the right tower. These stairs are even narrower than those previous. The steps are well worn and polished by shoe leather and rubber while the iron railing is encased with a greasy coat of rust and clammy condensation.

This time, entry into the light and fresh air presents a narrow turreted walk providing a 360° panorama of Paris. In the immediate foreground are the spine and roof of the cathedral. Green

¹³ As in Wim Wenders, and his brooding film on Berlin, '*Wings of Desire*. '

washed statues climb the ridge to a central and airy spire. Down below in the *Place du Parvis*, lines of people snake out and course the foreground. Others mill with tour groups or there are those conveyed by religious orders. In the distance the purity of *Sacre-Coeur* shimmers over Montmartre while one's eyes swivel over the Louvre and up the *Champs de Elysees*, first to the *Arc de Triomphe* and finally to the sky-piercing spire of the Eiffel Tower. This is truly Paris!

In the foreground, almost directly ahead sits another, fragile spire. This pin points Saint Chappelle. Its sight taps out an internal mantra.

Find your heart and you will see your soul.
Find my heart and your soul will follow.
Find my soul in Saint Chappelle.
It will infuse your soul with gold and royal colour.

Gaining entry to Saint Chappelle, first requires passing through a metal detector and security screening. This is not so much to protect the church but rather due to the church's location, essentially in the court yard for the French Supreme Courts or '*Palais de Justice*'. Once through this minor hurdle, the courtyard is crossed passing the muscular exterior of buttresses that heft the stone roof and suspend its stain glass windows.

Saint Chappelle is entered via its basement. The first impression is, "what is all the fuss about?" Although the basement is a lavishly blue coloured, gilded, star and *fleur-de-lis* patterned chapel, it is rather compressed with its low ceilings, thick walls and sparse stained glass windows. The overall feeling is one of weight and oppression rather than exaltation.

At the rear of this chapel, beside the entrance, there are two slim stairways. Other visitors are quietly drawn into it. One staircase for descent and on the other, one for ascension on the right. The exiting stair disgorges forth a stream of people with reflective expressions.

Entering the ascending stair my mind turns towards Elgar's 'Enigma Variations, Nimrod,' in building anticipation of what must await above. The limestone stairs, of barely a shoulder width, tightly wind their way to the next level.

Music 7: 'Enigma variations, Nimrod, Edward Elgar,' Daniel Barenboim, Conductor
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUgoBb8m1eE>

Seemingly as the Nimrod Variation climaxes, the next level is attained in triumph. Exiting from the restrictions of the stairwell and the confines of the lower chapel, you enter a world of exultant stain glass walls like none other on this earth. In times gone by this must have been akin to some kind of medieval psychedelic trip.

It is like being in a boat on a river. The narrow roof towers overhead, trickling rivers of gold. Through the royal blue and red glass, as fragile as cellophane, the sun filters your eyes. Tangerine and green flowers decorate the lead light panes which are a kaleidoscope that spins you away.

Suddenly my vision returns to the floor. Although others stumble about with their heads seemingly surrounded by clouds, a girl stands quite still by the turn-style. Also observing and being mesmerized by the symphony of glass.

She must be a Parisian girl. Immaculately and classically dressed, it is as though the Venus de Milo has been awakened from her trans-millennial slumber. Not of pure white stone but transformed marble so that not a blemish interrupts her stylishly embellished feminine curves. Typical demure restraint in a classic pleated dress, which drapes to emphasize her slender legs and crème shoes.



Photo 11: Saint Chappelle, a wall of glass in Paris.

A young man, suitably stylishly dressed, who takes her hand with sober familiarity, and breaks her spell. They smile at each other, twirl on the spot, pass through the turn-style and descend to return to the real world outside.

I am left to contemplate Saint Chappelle's gold veined cage, royal cobalt starred ceilings with intervening glass that seek to recount biblical stories. King Louis IX of France built Saint Chappelle in about 1239 to house his collection of '*passion relics*', including one reputed to be Christ's Crown of Thorns.

Having had my soul filled by this wonder of medieval man's creation, it is now also time to re-enter the real world.

As the sun sees its approaching zenith, it is time to immerse in the culinary dimensions of Paris. One sees, hears, and tastes France. In this pursuit, the Latin Quarter, into which I earlier emerged from the Métro seems the most sensible place to search for an appropriate meal. As such, I make my way South East back down the *Île*, past Notre Dame, through its gardens to be detained by a further monument.

The *Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation* that tips the *Île* beckons me inwards. Its stark entry via a narrow stairway between monumental block walls of white granite are suitably oppressive. The stairway leads down into a small, triangular and monolithic courtyard that is dominated by an iron grilled window and sculpture seemingly representing a fragment of abstracted barbwire.

A further passage, between two granite blocks, leads back, by way of a twisting narrow corridor, into an increasingly claustrophobic space till finally a barred crypt confronts. Through the bars, the wall is lined by a series of 200,000 gold lighted crystals that dimly shine in memory of the 200,000

individuals deported from France to Nazi concentration camps with the complicity of the Vichy Government during World War II.

So many tears. Looking to the far end, past a plinth with a simple bronze vase with white lily flowers, hovers a door with a single eye. Is this the eye of God or simply just the final acceptance of destiny.

The epitaph of the memorial, "*Pardonne, n'oublie pas...*" meaning "Forgive and don't forget," imprints itself on one's soul.

Contemplatively the deportation monument is exited.

I pass over the *Pont de l'Archevêché* to finally access the Latin Quarter. Moving onto and along the *Boulevard Saint-Germain* in search of a place to rest, reflect and gain sustenance. This grand Boulevard contains a number of establishments that suggest culinary fulfilment, but which are likely to disappoint. In addition, to my feet beginning to become a little weary, some light drizzle is also beginning to fall.

A small lane skewers off to the right indicating the prospect of finding a promising backdoor restaurant to have lunch. Down this narrowing lane, under the cover of a fly over bridge, sits a small restaurant simply called '*Le 24.*' The sign announces that its specialities are that of the Périgord and Languedoc regions that are in essence, South Western France.

At just after 12.30pm, the blackboards advertising the day's fare have just been put on the pavement. Staring in through the windows, the first customers of the day had yet to have been seated. There were a small number of simple tables in front of the bar where a white T-shirted waiter busily preparing for the lunch time customers. This was exactly the sort of establishment I was looking for.

"*Bonjour.*" I said announcing my presence and interest.

"*Bonjour, monsieur.*" Is his polite reply.

"*Un pour le déjeuner, ok?*" I asked hopefully.

"*Ça va.*" Came the grinned reply from the waiter.

I would be the first customer for the day. So I selected a small table looking towards the bar and also looking out onto the laneway. Perfect for watching the comings and goings on the lane.

"*So where do you come from good sir?*" The waiter advances without prompting.

Somewhat taken aback by this quick transfer into English, I am happy to oblige.

"*I come from Adelaide in Australia.*"

"*Ok, I thought you may have been.*" He nods with satisfaction at his correct hunch. "*Australia is a destination that I would like to visit one day.*"

"*So where do you come from in France?*" I politely enquire.

"*Ah, I am from Montpellier in Southern Français.*"

"*Yes, I was down in that region a couple of days ago. Very impressive country,*" I commend.

"*Well, do you take wine?*" He politely proceeds.

"*Oui,*" I reply affirmatively.

"In that case, I recommend the rosé. It is from a producer not far from my village. It is made with the Mourvedre grape. Do you know it?" He enquired.

"Yes, I have heard of it. There is a little now grown in Australia, but it is a relatively new variety for my country."

"Then you will enjoy it, it captures some of the terroir of my home." He says as he shifts behind the bar to source a bottle from his cold cabinet.

After wristing the bottle to remove the foil before popping the cork, he comes around the bar to pour a glass. He also brings a small plate with three pieces of sliced baguette.

"Merci," I say and then extend my hand. *"My name is Evan."*

"Good to meet you, my name is Didier." He says as we shake hands.

"So, are you just visiting Paris or will you see more of Français?" He enquires.

"My main motive is to attend a brewing – 'la biere' – convention in Brussels in about four days time. I am also looking to visit the graves of two of my great uncles that were killed in the first world war. They are buried up near Ypres in Belgium."

"Hmm, that was a bad war. My family also lost a number of members, including my great grandfather." He nods and responds solemnly. *"It is right to remember our families".*

At this point a couple enters the restaurant, looking for a table and shelter from the rain that is now falling more generously.

I turn my attention to the menu. With the stated region of speciality for the establishment the choice of the cassoulet seemed most appropriate.

Once Didier had seated the couple, I again attracted his attention.

"Didier, may I order the cassoulet, s'il vous plait?"

"Another good choice, my friend. The chef here prepares this well." He says before disappearing into another part of the restaurant to make good my order.

I thus settle in, sipping the refreshing and excellent rosé. In it I can feel the kiss of the foothills that protect the landward side of Montpellier before the forests of the *Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Languedoc*. Still more patrons come in so that my opportunity to converse further with Didier is restricted. Still watching the passing traffic, other patrons and Didier's efficient service of the small restaurant is entertaining. He beats a well worn path that I am sure he could do without looking.

Being first to order for the day, Didier soon brings the cassoulet in a terracotta ramekin to my table. A small saucer of shaved parmesan cheese accompanies the dish.

"Bon appetit"

"Merci, Didier!" I reply as my attention turns towards my meal.

I am now quite hungry and eagerly begin on my meal. Cassoulet is a rich stew of white beans, duck (*sans liver*) and sausage. It fits well with the Languedoc tradition of hearty peasant cooking and a '*waste not, want not*' ethic. The duck is presumably the 'offal' remaining after the liver is removed to make the expensive delicacy, *foie gras*. The cassoulet was delicious and warming after the morning's exertions. The entrails were customarily mopped up with some pieces of bread.

“So how did you like the cassoulet?” enquired Didier already knowing the answer based on the clean ramekin in front of me.

“Très bien!” I replied enthusiastically.

“So would you like to take something further?”

I had already spied a cabinet of ‘glacée’ café in at the front window. Ice cream, particularly the French version was something I am very partial to. It would also nicely round out my lunch.

“Can I please have a trois boules de glacée, chocolat, citron et nougat avec noix, and an espresso, s'il vous plaît,” I replied.

The arrival of the ‘glacée’ enabled a light refreshing cleansing of my palate.

After paying the ‘le addition’ it was time to depart ‘Le 24’. I bid Didier, ‘au revoir’ and to tell him that I hoped his desire to one day visit Australia would eventuate.

His final words, with a wave were of course, “bon voyage!”

It was now time to depart this culinary refuge, I was refreshed and ready to tackle another of Paris’ wonders. The next stop would be the *Musée d'Orsay*. This too was on the left side of the river, so I decided to navigate by ‘following my nose’ through the back streets to get there. Fortunately, the rain had stopped and the sun was again shining. The rain had washed the streets clean and now they glistened with its residue.

It was not a long walk to *Musée d'Orsay*, about 20 minutes, but one enriched by an interesting array of buildings, local residents going about their business, children returning home from school and the odd shop selling a variety of wares.

The *Musée d'Orsay* was a colourful and reassuring revisiting of the artistic trail to impressionism and beyond. The entrée was the plein air works of the ordinary such as Jean-Francois Millet’s ‘*The Gleaners*’ which led into Edouard Manet’s historically punk ‘*Olympia*’ and ‘*Luncheon on the Grass*’. The *plat de la resistance* was the long halls of the main impressionists that were at a higher level. The delicate dancers of Edgar Degas, the elegant al fresco dining of Auguste Renior, the street scapes of Camille Pissaro and the varied impressions of Claude Monet’s vision, from haystacks, to landscapes, train stations, cathedral facades and finally views of his garden at Giverny.

These colourful themes morphed into later extensions of the post impressionists. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec with his caricature inspired posters of dancers and actors, the pointillism of Georges Seurat and the homely patch-worked colour studies of Paul Cézanne that enticed the viewing of further walls.

The climax for me was naturally the extreme blends of colour that flew forth from Vincent van Gogh’s palate. From self portraits to skies that brightly blazed over fields of amber grain. Weathered faces, as if lined with clay, reflected by the artists penetrating blue eyes, holding flaming flowers in their place. Many of the more fervently coloured scenes had seen their genesis in fair fields of Provence, particularly those that surrounded Arles and St Rémy. Given my recent connection into this region, I had now filled my capacity to absorb beauty and ‘Arlent’ thoughts. It was now time to depart, now satiated both in eye and stomach.

The recommended path back to rue Cler lead back past the Hôtel des Invalides. In selecting this route, the *Musée Rodin* was a temptingly intercept. Auguste Rodin was a contemporary of the impressionists although his oeuvre was in marble, clay and bronze. Inspired no doubt by the great Michelangelo and the ‘*Venus de Milo*’, his sculpture laden house and gardens offer a contemplative refuge from the hustle and bustle of the big Parisian museums and the city of Paris itself.

Rodin's gardens are dominated by muscular bronzes, thoughtful statues finalised with a vision of '*The Gates to Hell*'. Some statues seem consumed by the responsibility of the position of their subjects as with the '*Burghers of Calais*'. However, the piece that most attracted my attention was the white marble creation called '*The Hand of God*' where the struggling figures of Adam and Eve tumble entwined from a clod of earth both sifted and moulded by a divine hand. The contrast between the rough-hewn and highly polished marble surfaces envisages the care and sensuality of the sculptor's touch and vision. It is an apt counterpoint to the other eternal visions experienced earlier during my day's journey.



Photo 12: Auguste Rodin's 'The Hand of God'

Exiting the tranquillity of Rodin, I have to skirt around the *Hôtel des Invalides* to reach sanctuary in *rue Cler*. While passing the impressive gilt dome of the church, I decide on a quick visit while passing. Inside, a central stone ballasted colonnade surrounds Emperor Napoleon's tomb. In the centre well he lies regally in a red porphyry tomb, serenely passing the ages. At his flanks, lies his son and the victorious French marshals Vauban and Foch.

Enough, it is time to recuperate and recover from this day in the *Grand Hôtel Lévéque*.

Chapter 10

The German is a wily bird

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE REINFORCEMENTS.

Sunday 25th June 1916

Dear Mother

I got a letter from you yesterday dated 20th Feb, so it was written a long time ago, however it is the latest one I have had from home, so was very pleased to get it, it had been addressed to Zeitoun Egypt.

The harvest had just been finished when you last wrote but you only mentioned the yield of one paddock. I have been expecting to hear from some of the boys about crops and anything or everything that concerns the place.

I have been in the trenches for a good while, and am out for a while now resting.

We have just heard of the fight in the North Sea. The British fleet appears to have been knocked about but it may do them good to get a bit of a drubbing. The British fleet is wonderful; the people in Australia cannot realise its worth, but the German fleet will be dangerous if underrated; they will come out, when it suits them; the German is a wily bird.

The French have been very good at Verdun.

I will look Bill Usherwood up at the first opportunity. The people at home cannot write too much as the very smallest things interest me. Lately I have been reduced to reading old letters over.

Hope you and Father are very well.

Give my love to all

Your loving son

Gerald

(written from near Sailly-sur-la-Lys, Northern France, close to Fleurbaix)

The morning is again awakened by street clatter. After this intrusion is drifted through, I work towards assuming my local persona at *Le Roussillon* bar to be caffeinated and munch on a tasty croissant

After paying the *Roussillon* addition and a polite ‘bonjour,’ I am out on the street once more. My next mission is to assemble a picnic lunch. My first port of call is a *boulangerie* for a fresh baguette, conveniently halved to better fit in my daypack. I also can not resist buying a further *pain de chocolat*, as a lunch time sweet treat.

One of the *fromageries* spied on my first walk on *rue Cler* is my next visit will be a good place to find the ideal cheese. Walking into this shop is intoxicating with its bouquet of smells developed from the regions. There is a bewildering array of cheeses from soft to hard, cow to sheep to goat. Toward the entrance an enticingly arranged stack of small *brie* wheels excuses caution. While assessing these an older lady sidles up pokes one of two of the *brie* packages and selects one.

At my quizzical look at her practice, she utters a polite. “*Bonjour.*”

“*Bonjour.*” I reply, immediately giving away my English heritage.

“American or New Zealander?” she asks in good English.

“Australian, actually”, I reply.

“*You are a long way from home.*” She confidently states having identified my origin.

Helpfully she adds, “*Just push your finger into the brie. If it is still soft, it will not be too ripe*”.

On this advice, I poke into the packages of a couple of small brie’s finding one that is sufficiently pliable, to take to the counter.

“*Merci, Madame.*” I acknowledge my benefactor.

She nods with generous satisfaction and wishes me a good day.

In addition to the *brie*, I also select a generous wedge of *Compte* cheese and a small piece of *Roquefort* cheese, suitably mottled with its green-blue mould. These three purchases will see me right for cheese for the next couple of days in taste heaven.

The cheese selection and transaction completed, I round out my lunch with a small portion of ‘*pâté*’ and ham from the *charcuterie* just up the street. The purchases are finalised by a couple of bananas from *Top Halles* Fruits and vegetables. I am now properly prepared for a day exploring Paris.

To beat the suffocating crowds my plan is to visit the Louvre at opening. So again one more of my *carnet* is expended to access the Métro, this time exiting at the appropriately named *Palais Royal Musée du Louvre* station. *Sortie* onto the *Rue de Rivoli* soon succeeds in a route through the *Passage Richelieu* into the Pyramid court yard of the *Louvre*. This linear assemblages of glass are centrally juxta-positioned with the French Renaissance architectural style of the Bourbon Palace that surrounds it.

The grand entrance via the main Pyramid descends into the light pointed hall below. The ticket queue is bypassed and entry is efficiently gained with my Museum and Monuments pass.

Given the museum’s peerless catalogue of ancient statues, the logical place to begin the tour is with the 2nd Century BC Greek ‘*Venus de Milo (Aphrodite)*’ marble statue. This goddess is on her pedestal. When discovered in the 19th Century, was considered to be the classical vision of the perfect women. She is not scrawny modern day model, but a properly apportioned size 14 woman. She is confident and at one with herself while tranquilly staring out at her audience as they pay her homage. Her lacking of arms apparently added to her allure. She presumably inspired Rodin towards his reinventing in the classical ideals of renaissance sculpture.

Moving on one comes to a series of Salles filled with noble warts and all statues and busts of the Roman emperors. The Caesars are portrayed with lasting vision. These include several stridently soldierly manifestations of an imperious Augustus. Such statues were the projection of Augustus’ propaganda and authority to the provinces. In essence, the political posters of their time.

The ‘*Winged Victory of Samothrace*’ explosively strides forward to honour the goddess, Nike but also to commemorate victory in a long ago navel battle. Her active forward thrust leaves her drapery billowing behind her, with wings trailing in her wake. Standing high on a series of stairs, it is hard not to applaud her audacity. Victory is hers to keep.

The statutory tour is completed with a more recent reincarnation of the sculptor's skill, the '*Slaves*' of Michelangelo. The '*Dying Slave*' seemingly twists from the stone and against his bonds but with eyes closed accepting his fate with resignation. Not so the muscular '*Rebellious Slave*' whose very sinews strain against his restraints. What an elevating pair.

Having been overwhelmed by the marble, it is now time to find '*La Joconde*' herself. On this well trodden pilgrimage one goes forth from the piously two dimensional alter pieces that proceeded the Italian Renaissance into its beginnings with Giotto's '*St Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*' to its full flowering in the work from Raphael, Titian, Veronese and of course Leonardo da Vinci's geometrically posed musings. This climaxes in the '*Mona Lisa*', Leonardo's reworked *sfumato* style providing an introverted enigma, that is perhaps as much a reflection of the painter as the sitter? Her relatively small frame sits with her mysterious smile, on her own roped off wall, surrounded by acolytes.

The final glorious take on this formal style finds its niche in the broad canvases of the French neoclassical style. Here the works such as David's '*The coronation of Emperor Napoleon*' are balanced by the serene portraits of Ingres such as the modest reclining babe in the '*Grande Odalisque*'. Onward the grandiose frames of the French Romanticism seek to glorify and spirit the proletariat with works such as Gericault's '*The raft of the Medusa*' and Delacroix's bare breasted '*Liberty leading the people*'. These grand attempts at domination would not be released until the advent of the impressionists, almost a century later.

Enough! I have absorbed enough high art, it is time for lunch. Quickly seeking the sortie, the grand pyramid is once again breached. I head towards the gravelled space of the *Tuileries* Gardens. Once through the *Arc de Triomphe du Carousel* the blue of the sky beckons and a seat under a shady tree destines lunch.

Extracting my picnic lunch from my backpack, I balance the various components on their wrapping on the seat. Several small birds congregate in anticipation of a slip or generosity. With my trusty two-bladed pocket knife, I pare small slices of cheese and '*paté*' onto torn baguette and munch with satisfaction. The artisanal baguette is crusty and tasty. They say that the best baguettes in France are made in Paris. Something to do with the atmosphere and its humidity? The picnic is completed with the *pain du chocolat*.

Moving off down the *Tuileries*, the garden has several small outdoor cafés. It is time to recaffienate. Another *café grande crème* is ordered and summarily savoured. It barely seems to touch the sides.

Towards the end of the *Tuileries*, just before the *Place du Concorde*, is situated the *Musée à l'Orangerie*. The bright up stairs galleries have a generous selection of canvas's beginning with impressionist works by Renoir and Cézanne leading through the primitive style of Rousseau progressing through Modigliani, Picasso and Matisse.

The primary claim to fame of the *Orangerie*, however, was downstairs in two oval rooms. This was where Monet, almost blind with age, completed his waterlilies studies as a gift to the people of France. Each of the two oval rooms contain just four expansive 6 foot high canvases that embrace each room. These curved panels focus on Monet's beloved Giverney gardens and featuring views over the Japanese gardens pond with its waterlilies. The octet feature the pond from various angles, at different times of the day so as to meditate on and echo the effects of light. The colour studies range from evening purples and blues, to the oranges, yellows and white lily flowers that feature during spring at midday.

Between the two oval rooms there was a small alcove in which a pay phone is conveniently positioned. Taking advantage of this convenience, I am inspired to give a late call home. Retrieving my calling card, dialling in the required numbers and password provides a long distant link. The familiar breip... breip, pause, breip... breip of the Australian dial tone distantly responds till the phone is picked up.

“Hello?” A distant voice responds.

“G’day Kath, how are you going?” I enquire.

“Evan! You always seem to know the best time to call. We are having a French party here in your honour.” She reports.

“You are not going to believe where I am calling from. I am in between two grand and remarkable oval rooms on which eight panels of Monet’s waterlilies are hung.”

“Wow, sounds fantastic! My mother would be green with envy.” She answers enviously.

We continue our discussion and catch up on our marital bases before I am passed over to some of our friends who are in good spirits with the party that is well underway. But like all good things, the end comes to the call and after a final reflective sweep around the waterlilies I depart the *Orangerie*.

The walk up the *Champs-Élysées*, reputedly the most beautiful avenue in the world, is the next mission. Its name in French alludes to the place of the blessed dead in Greek mythology, *Elysian Fields*. Firstly crossing the busy *Place de la Concorde*, a giant round about which is centred with the gold tipped Obelisk of Luxor, is required. In the centre a stands a 23m high Egyptian Obelisk that was a piece of ‘tribute’ to the French government in 1833. Along with its twin which still remains in place, it once stood beside Ramses II Temple of Luxor for three millennia.

One has to be careful in this crossing so as not to prematurely end up in those *Elysian fields*. The four lanes of traffic will stop for no mortal.

Walking up this broad avenue seeks out the dominating *Arc de Triomphe* at its terminus. The sides of the *Champs-Élysées* are carpeted with café after café interspersed intermittently by the golden arches McDonalds. There are also many variants for expensive shopping with the likes of Louis Vuitton and Dior occupying the higher extremes. The upward gradient is steady and there seems to be masses of people constantly undertaking France’s version of ‘*la dolce vita*’. It is along this thorough-fare that the *Tour de France* bike race survivors will circuit on the tours final stage in July.

Arriving at the base of the *Arc de Triomphe*, the tomb of the unknown soldier at its base is garlanded with wreaths. A guard of honour stands sentry duty within the roped-off area. This is because my visit is only a few days after the WWII Victory Day commemorations (*Fête de la Victoire 1945*) on May 8th.

The arc was originally commissioned by Napoleon to commemorate his victory at *Austerlitz* where he defeated the larger Russian and Austrian armies in 1805. Its purposeful propaganda harkens back to that of Caesar’s arch in Orange.

Entry inside the Arc ensures more steps to ascend to the top. Once outside but on top, the radiating pattern of avenues from its base circle becomes clear. These showcase Paris at your feet. Look one

way and the *Arche de la Défense* rises within a series of modern buildings. Back in the other direction, retracing the *Champs-Élysées*, the Obelisk in the *Place de la Concorde* points the *Louvre* and *Notre Dame* at its rear. The most impressive view is that of the *Eiffel* tower that rises to be silhouetted against the sky.

The final point of my Parisian triangulation, the *Eiffel* Tower, was now dialled in as my next visit. As my feet were quite tired from the day's progress so far, I entered the *Charles de Gaulle Étoile* Métro station and took the direction *Nation* to towards the *Trocadéro* station. A free seat was available towards the centre of the carriage. To get to this seat, with its welcome rest, I first had to negotiate the legs of an elegantly dressed middle-aged lady.

“*Bonjour, Madame, pardon.*” I said to gain access to the seat.

She gracefully moves her legs sideways so I could sit down. While looking me up and down.

“*Bonjour, monsieur. Vous visitez Paris?*” she replied.

“*Oui.*”

“*You speak English?*” she enquired.

Again my accent had given me away.

“*Yes, I am Australian.*”

“*You like Paris?*” she proceeded further.

“*Yes, I am seeing and tasting France, magnifique!*” I replied.

“*So, where have you visited so far in my Paris?*” She enquired.

“*Well, I have visited many of the main art museums including the Louvre, D'Orsay, Orangerie and the Musée Rodin.*”

“*You favour which the most?*” She continued her line of questioning.

“*I liked part of them very much. The sculptures in the Louvre and Rodin, and the colourful impressionists in the D'Orsay and the Orangerie.*” I informed her.

“*And have you visited the églises?*”

“*Only two so far. Obviously the Notre Dame and I climbed up to the top of the towers for a great view. However, the best was Saint Chappelle with its magnifique walls of glass with red and blue.*”

“*Then you have visited my favourite église too. Saint Chappelle is all air and light compared to the musty dark of the Notre Dame.*” She commented wistfully on my preference in church visits.

“*My next visit is to the Eiffel Tower.*”

“*Ah, you will find spectacular views from le Tour!*”

By this time we were almost at the *Trocadéro* stop.

“Ah! J’ai manqué mon arrêt.” She exclaimed in mild annoyance, and she proceeded to get up.

I assumed that in talking to me and concentrating on her English, she had missed her intended stop.

“Madame désolée.” I contributed in understanding her mistake of going past her intended stop.

“Ça va, bon voyage.” She replied with a relative air of indifference, as we both exited the train at the *Trocadéro*, I to visit the *Eiffel* Tower and she to catch the return train. At that we separated in our separate directions.

Once out of the Métro, a wide plaza was presented before me, with the *Eiffel* Tower framed by the *Trocadero Palais* buildings at its side. Walking ever closer to the tower slowly amplified its size. Walking across the plaza a series of steps are presented with a series of median fountains that highlight the effect of my approach towards the Seine and the tower.

The closer I got, the more intensified and dominating became the *Eiffel* Tower. So too did the crowds who congregate to worship at its feet to its structure. Of course there was a line for the privilege of climbing the stairs. I selected to go as far as the second stage.

Finally, through the turn-styles, the slow climb to a higher plane ensued. At least this climb was not claustrophobic but open to the air and a view on one’s progress through the steel superstructure. All the while the lifts whizzed those who declined to climb by their own means.

Looking up through the steel superstructure, seemingly it whirled around my head. The tower, the Seine, the *Champs du Mars* and Paris. A crazy blend of buildings, steel and light. Here the walls held no glass, just Parisian air but with colours that were still intense. In this my mind focussed on Michael Nyman’s ‘*An eye for optical theory*’. The Purcell inspired and throbbing sax seemed to best suit the jazz infused and syncopated rhythms of Paris through the prism of the *Eiffel* Tower.

Music 8: ‘An eye for optical theory’ by Michael Nyman Band, *The Draughtsman’s Contract*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u2YZi8xPp8>

The first stage presented a view of similar height to the *Arc de Triomphe*. Having tapped out a climbing rhythm, I paused briefly to enable a circumnavigation of this level. Then it was on upwards once more. The smaller second stage presented an unparalleled view across Paris, except there was something missing from the skyline. The *Eiffel* tower.

Still as the day drew to a close, a lush orange light began to carpet the city. As the saying goes, ‘*red sky in morning, shepherds warning; red sky at night, shepherds delight*’. Tomorrow was likely to be another sunny day – ‘*ensoleillé*’.

Chapter 11

Souvenirs

France

July 17th 1916

My dear Evan -

Have a letter from you dated 28-5-16 and was very pleased to hear from you.

Since writing last I have knocked about a bit and now attending an Engineering School learning to dig trenches etc. It is rather hard work as I have not done much of the pick and shovel work lately - just watch others doing the work. Will be going back to the line pretty soon. I bought this writing pad at a French village, the small towns here are just like the pictures of them - they are very pretty and all the hedges and trees have leaves on them now - I have bought a couple of broaches and a brass ash tray as souvenirs & are sending them home per post to Minnie -

There are a lot of wheat crops around here also potatoes and acres of French beans, peas etc. The men ineligible for Military Service and women do all the work and do it very well.

Have had plenty of walking about lately and quite enjoy it, I never thought I could walk so far -

Alec Campbell is still with this Battalion & Jack Hogg is with the Brigade Machine Gun Company, they are both very nice fellows.

Am sorry to hear the Doctor would not pass your leg which is bad luck but perhaps just as well - you will be able to settle down to it better now.

You must just do what you think best with my money and will be pleased if you have a flutter in sheep or anything, it doesn't matter much -

Good-bye

Your affec. brother

Gerald Evans

(written from near Albert, The Somme, France, just before the battle for Pozières)

The dawning of the next day suggested a sojourn outside Paris. This farm boy had tired of the big city crowds and air. The idea of visiting a proper French Château was also appealing.

Rather than the famously over-crowded *Château Versailles*, I opted for *Château Fontainebleau* which is about one hour's train journey, South East of Paris. This required once again seeking one of the *Grande Ligne* tracks from Paris. This line again commenced from *Gare de Lyon*, requiring a retracing of my route on my first night in Paris.

The train slinks off from *Gare de Lyon* and is soon into the light, rattling though the Parisian suburbs. Many people live here in the functional *Le Corbusian* modernity of high rise apartment blocks. These trail behind as the building density decreases and the French countryside resumes its ascendancy.

The town of *Fontainebleau* is an incursion into a large forested area. It is for this reason that the Châteaux and it forest has been preserved and favoured by every king, queen and emperor since the

Châteaux was established by Francois I in the sixteen century. The tranquil surrounds and hunting were the primary drawcards.

Alighting the train, a walk through the town is required before the Château looms. Entering through the gates, a magnificent geometric courtyard is presented which draws towards the Château's famous horseshoe-shaped staircase. It is from the pinnacle of these '*return steps*' that the Emperor Napoleon gave a stirring abdication speech to his troops and acolytes to finally exchange his rule of France for exile to Elba in 1814.

Entry to the Château is via the right of the return steps via an appropriately mortal door. Here not the snaking lines of tourists as at *Versailles*, but a more personal and tranquil tour of the essence of a French Château. The parquetry floors lead down sumptuously decorated and tapestried halls to once important rooms.

As this was Napoleon's last ruling seat, there is much remaining that preserves and presents his heritage. The long library hall is dominated by a large globe of the world where Napoleon presumably contemplated his megalomania for domination of Europe and the world. In contrast to the grand halls, imperious paintings and busts, the simplicity of his tent and metal campaign bed seemingly provide contact with the man behind the portrait images. This was apparently his favoured bed.

Outside the opulent but dark halls, the garden's luxuriance invites. Here the air is cleansed by the trees and the lakes reflect the sky. The majestic arboreal avenues present a path forwards.

It is time to hire a bike and explore the forests surrounding *Fontainebleau*. Their oxygen will further cleanse my lungs of the last few days of city air.

While passing through the *Centre de Ville* of *Fontainebleau*, I augment my picnic supplies and hire a mountain bike for the afternoon. This steely steed provides me with the means to explore the forests many paths and roads. Most roads soon provide entry into the forest as it is the town which is an inclusion. Like the Kings and Emperors of old, I leave the town of *Fontainebleau* peacefully behind. Once properly in the forest, I look to get myself lost by following unpaved paths in a direction that an overview map indicates will find *les Rochers*.

Quietly riding down one of these dirt tracks, I come across an officially crested tray vehicle. A relatively young woman, strongly built with mousey fair hair, in rangers uniform puts up her hand and motions me to stop.

"*Excusez-moi monsieur, vous savent là est un certain danger des branches en baisse sur ce chemin,*" she tries to communicate.

"*Pardonnez, je parle de Français, petit.*" I plead not really understanding what she had just said, but comprehending enough that she was perhaps trying to communicate some important information.

I quickly followed with. "*Vous parlez Anglais, s'il vous plaît?*"

"*Yes, I speak some English.*" She replied.

"*Merci.*"

"*What were you trying to warn me of just before?*" I enquired.

“You need to be careful. This forest is very old, the most ancient in Français. There has recently been some strong ‘vent,’ how do you say it, winds. Therefore, there is some possibility of branches falling or being on the track.” She explained.

“Ok, I understand. I am used to the Australian bush or rather forest that is always dropping branches, thus we are always careful when we are in the forest by nature.” I responded.

"Ah, you have come from Australia?" She responds with a wave of interest brushing over her face.

“Yes. So are you a park ranger?” I press to continue the conversation.

“No, I am a forester.” She replies.

“Ok, when I was at University I studied agriculture and there was also a number of foresters in our course.” I informed her.

“Then you will understand the forest somewhat then. Our forests are very managed and have been for many centuries. As part of the forest management and renewal, wood is harvested.” She informs me.

“Yes, I have seen evidence of wood cutting and stacks of logs while I have been riding.”

“This forest is very popular with bike and horse riders. The terrain gives some views and if you continue in this direction there are some very impressive rocks to be seen. These rocks and cliffs are very popular with climbers.”

"Ok, that is interesting, then I am going in a good direction?" I nod in agreement.

"I am sorry, but I must return to the office, it is almost time to take lunch." She apologises.

“Yes, I am starting to feel hungry too. I have a picnic for lunch.” I reply.

"It is good that you are prepared. Bon voyage, please be careful." She says as she readies to get back into her vehicle.

“Merci, madam, au revoir.” I say as I remount my bike and then continue to pedal off down the track.

As the forester forecast, the track soon became more hilly with a few decent climbs. Soon, I was into an area with some large rocky cliffs that interrupted the cover of the trees. One outcrop of rocks provided a pleasant aspect from where to have my picnic.

A bucolic afternoon of sunshine, a light breeze, dappled paths and roads ridden through the forest followed. But alas my time in Fontainebleau forest was running out. It became time to return the hire bike and catch the train back to Paris, somewhat tired, but spiritually cleansed and refreshed.

My final morning in Paris began with the early morning doze through the scrape, clatter and beep of the *rue Cler* street market set up. I efficiently repacked my belongings into my backpack in readiness for departure.

It was time for my last installation as a local at the *Le Roussillion* bar. I had become accustomed to their rich coffee and crusty croissants. After completing my breakfast, paying *le addition* I wished the now familiar barman *au revoir*, and returned to *le Grand Hôtel Lévéque*.

Returning with my backpack, I presented at the reception.

After waiting for another guest to settle their account, I commenced dealings with the girl on reception with, “*Bonjour.*” Announcing my readiness to also settle my account.

“*Bonjour, monsieur.*” She responded indicating her readiness to assist.

“*Please may I pay my account, I was in room 305.*” I replied.

With the provision of the required sum of cash, the addition was efficiently completed. The *Grand Hôtel Lévéque* does not take carte bleu to keep prices down or profits up.

“*So where are you travelling to today?*” She asked politely.

“*I will travel by train to Albert which is East of Amiens.*”

“Ok, *bon voyage, monsieur.*” She replied as she readied to assist the next group of guests who had now appeared down the stairs.

“*Au revoir.*” I replied in kind, as I turned and walked down the hall to exit left onto *rue Cler*.

On *rue Cler*, the mornings commerce was well underway. People were walking over its pedestrian friendly cobbles to visit this or that vendor. Further up the street, others were soaking up the coming warmth of the day with espresso’s and grande crème’s. Red lipstick decorating the rims of many cups.

It seemed a shame to have to leave this industrious and friendly street, but my journey needed to be continued. The last look at the *7th Arrondissement* was as I descended into the *Ecole Militaire* Métro station. The direction *Crétiel* to the *République* station was taken. Here lines were traded to proceed to *Gare Du Nord* on the orange *Bobigny Pablo Picasso* line. The *Gare Du Nord* RER station enabled the boarding of a train to Amiens, then an interchange to catch a local train to Albert.

Overall, the train trip to Albert was uneventful with the journey passing through forest and verdant agricultural land. The cereal crops were just out of the ‘boot’ stage, presumably being a mixture of wheat and barley. Some further advanced cereal crops were already in head, presumably Winter barley and wheat as opposed to the more popular Spring variants. These were interspersed with broad-leaved crops that were presumably canola. This was rich land, that was hard not to be impressed as Gerald had been, as he had described in his letters.

Albert is located on the River Ancre, which is a tributary of the Somme. It is the Somme river and its marshes for which the area became infamous during the First World War. As in 1916, Albert’s position made it the most suitable location to visit *Pozières* and other Somme battle fields where Gerald had fought in 1916-17. His letters home mostly described his walks and observations of the country side behind the front line.

Alighting the train in Albert, is typical of many provincial train stations in France, except that it looked somewhat newer than most. It is red brick with crème brick highlights, with a roof of slate.

Its relatively pristine state is historically linked to the First World War during which Albert was razed and then subsequently rebuilt in its former style after the 11th hour.

Exiting the station presents an open place and turning circle. Down the road, and directly in front, hovers a golden statue capped dome over the *Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebières*. Here my hiking backpack came to the fore as an excellent baggage choice. When presented with a decent walk or stairs, a backpack rules supreme for utility.

Before the war the dome of the Notre Dame held aloft a statue of Mary and the baby Jesus which was dubbed the ‘*Golden Virgin*’. In January 1915 a German shell hit the Notre Dame and that caused the statue to slump to an almost horizontal position, thus to become known as the ‘*Leaning Virgin*.’ As such, it became a familiar sight to the British and Australian soldiers who passed through Albert on the way to the front. Around it developed a number of legends, including a German one that forecast that whoever caused the statue to fall would loose the war. In 1918, the British shelled the tower causing the statue to fall and be destroyed. This just shows that myths and legends can not always be relied upon to come true.

Using the resurrected dome as a guiding landmark, I moved towards it until I came to a round-about at which I turned right. Several hundred meters down the road a small street, *rue de Corbie* meandered away to the right. A short distance up this street I came to the accommodation that I had booked for the next two nights, the *Au Vintage* Bed and Breakfast. The red brick exterior looked like it could easily have been a model for Johannes Vermeer’s painting, ‘*The little street*.’

This B&B had suitably been an old brewery that the hosts, Evelyne and Jacky had carefully converted into their *Chambre d’Hôtes*. Jacky had been employed by the French Railways until he was forced to retire after 30 years of service at the ripe age of 48. *Au Vintage* provided a suitable project for his passion for building and to meet new people.

Ringing the door bell and entering the reception hall, I was greeted by Evelyne. She was a slim, middle-aged lady with flowing braids of fair hair and a welcoming smile.

“*Bonjour monsieur, bienvenue. Bon voyage?*” She gaily welcomed me.

“*Ça va, bien.*” I replied. “*J’ai une réservation pour Evans?*”

“*Oui. You are from Australia?*”

“*Yes, from Adelaide in South Australia.*”

“*Yes, we see many Australians here.*” Then she confidently stated. “*You have come to visit the war battlefields.*”

“*Yes, I had a great uncle who fought in the battles at Pozières and Bullecourt in 1916 and 1917. My family has quite a number of letters from him. He talked little of the war but did affectionately describe the countryside that he visited and the people he met when he was not fighting.*” I informed her.

“*Did he survive the war?*” She enquired politely.

“*No, unfortunately not. He and his brother were killed in the battles around Ypres in Belgium in the Autumn of 1917.*” I answered.

“Yes, it is sad, this is a very common story for visitors here. Do you know where they are buried?” she persisted in her enquires.

“Yes, Gerald is buried near Poperinge, while his older brother Ken is buried near Passchendaele, both in Belgium”.

“You are then fortunate to know where they are then.” She replied enigmatically.

“Yes, I suppose so?”

“You will visit the battlefields?”

“Yes, that is my plan for tomorrow. As I said, Gerald wrote many letters describing his impressions of the countryside, particularly that around Albert, so I am interested to see what this area looks like.”

“Will you also visit Villers-Bretonneux?” She enquired helpfully. *“They particularly like Australians there.”*

“No, unfortunately I only have one day to explore and I am looking to visit Pozières and Bullecourt if I can.”

“Do you have any maps?”

“Yes, I have the Michelin map for this area”.

“Then I would suggest you also visit the Musée Somme 1916. It is next to the Notre Dame and in the Centre de Ville which is only 5 minutes walk from here. It will provide you with some idea of what that area looked like back then. They also have the ‘Major and Mrs Holt’s Battle Map of the Somme’ which will show you where all the important sites were.” She advised.

“Ok, that sounds a good plan for the rest of the day. Is there a place where I can hire a bicycle to travel around?” I enquired.

“Yes, we have a bicycle that you may borrow. It is a good choice to ride a bicycle around this area, fast enough to see much, but not so fast that you miss too much.” She generously agreed.

“Excellent, très bien!” I replied

“In that case, I had better take you to your room, you will need a good rest for tomorrow. We have given you the Chambre Rubis, I hope that you will find it comfortable?”

With that, I followed her out of the reception lounge, up a short flight of stairs to a very generously sized room, decorated in white, with a double bed and an attention to detail.

“This will be most suitable, merci.” I said to Evelyne, gently dropping my backpack in a convenient location in the room.

“Petit déjeuner is between 7.30 and 9.30am. What time would you like to have it?” She enquired.

“I have a big day of riding, so 7.30am would be perfect.” I responded.

At this point, Evelyne left me to settle in and organise myself for my stay. After scratching around in the room for a while, unpacking to a functional extent, I was soon ready to start exploring modern Albert.

Again following the golden dome landmark, I headed for the *Centre de Ville*. Albert was a very tidy and clean town with the main square in front of the Notre Dame containing many flower boxes and small trees to break up the intermittent parking. Following Evelyne's recommendation, I visited the Somme Museum with its many dioramas, near century old bric-a-brac and artefacts from the war. I also purchased a copy of Major and Mrs Holts map both for the Somme and also for Flanders which I intended to visit about a week later.

I spent the next hour or so wandering around the main area of the town centre. The *Jardin Public Arboretum* provided a welcome diversion in this survey.

These tasks being accomplished it was time to forage some dinner. There appeared not to be any obvious restaurants, at least none that were not also associated with more up market Hotels, so I decided to go more local. Here there were many alternatives in the form of bars which were as plentiful as cafés in Paris.

Sliding up to the bar, I first surveyed the beers on tap, “*la bière pression*” and then those by the bottle. Having seen many billboards for the Pelforth Pelican around the town, I decided that this was a good place to start. I like where ever possible to follow the German brewers proverb of ‘*drinking the beer that is made in the town you are in*’ or at least nearby. It is a good policy to follow as it is most likely to be fresh beer and served from clean lines. Fresh beer from clean lines tastes best! Brands such as Kronengbourg 1664, Leffe and Heineken were also very present but seemed a little too international for my initial exploratory inclinations.

“*Bonjour Madame, un grand verre de Pelforth blonde, s'il vous plait.*” Now confidently slipped off my lips.

Dutifully, a bountiful and lively draught beer appeared in its appropriately branded glass, on the bar in front of me, shortly after with quiet and efficient service.

“*Merci, madam.*”

The Pelforth blonde beer had a nice tight, fine head with good carbonation and a simple balance between the hop charge and malt characteristics. In essence a thirst quenching on a hot day beer. An appropriate and ‘sessionable’¹⁴ first choice for this traveller.

The next decision, was what to eat. It quickly became obvious that ‘*frites*’ or fries accompanied almost every menu option. Looking across at some of my fellow dinners indicated that mussels or ‘*moules*’ were popular, therefore likely to be a good choice. In the bars of northern France, mussels and chips are the local equivalent of an Australian pubs fish and chips on the menu, a staple. At this point the lady behind the bar approached me again.

“*Vous aimez commander monsieur.*” She enquired.

“*Oui, moules Albert et pommes frites, s'il vous plait.*” I responded.

The cognem ‘*Albert*’ was presumably a reference to the local white wine in which the mussels were poached.

Sipping on my beer, I considered the bar and its patrons. The furnishings were relatively austere with several mirrors deployed to give an illusion of extra space. Of the patrons, most were older people on their way home from work or a day in town. There was also a couple with young

¹⁴ Sessionable: beer industry parlance for beer that does not tire the palate and is easily drunk.

children. Most were smoking which was different as all Australian venues where food was served were now smoke free. By and large it was just a typical bar in a French country town.

At this point, my dinner arrived. A large ‘*billie*’ bucket of moules, accompanied with a pile of fries. It was time to dig in and go local.

“*Merci.*”

As the Pelforth had barely slaked my thirst, I went a conventional and ordered, “*Un grand verre de Kronenbourg 1664, s'il vous plaît.*”

With this meal there is nothing else to do but dig in with your hands. An empty mussel shell was conscripted as a handy implement to dig the mussels from their shells and into one’s mouth. They were damned tasty and perfectly complimented by the fries and beer. This simple meal with beer was delicious and satisfying. It is no wonder that this is a staple of bar menus across northern France and in Belgium.

After completing my beer, mussels and paying “*le addition*”, I wandered back to the *Au Vintage* to obtain a well earned night’s rest. This was very necessary as I had a substantive itinerary for my bike ride on the next day.

Chapter 12

The shell fire passes all imagination

France

July 31st 1916

My dear Mother -

I have not written for some time as we have been rather busy & have not had an opportunity - but I was lucky enough to get out of it with a slight crack on the ribs & did not leave the Company.

Charlie McCardel came through the stunt alright but young Wilcox, Goodland and Edwards of Wangaratta did not, I hear Brown of Milawa is missing - Alec Campbell got a nasty crack but is getting along well.

I am trying hard to write something but it is hard with the censor to contend with, you will probably know all about our stunt before this as they are sure to write it up a lot in the Australian papers. Our Battalion has done remarkably & my Company was furthest ahead of the lot. I don't know what I will get out of it - but hope a promotion anyhow - I have been long enough getting my second stan.

I was inoculated for tetanus yesterday because of my wound, I got it on the first day but managed to stick it right out, it is pretty right now, but instead of having to march they give me a horse to ride. I will write and account of this scrap when I get a chance to get it through

The shell fire passes all imagination.

*Will stop now, with love to all
your loving son
Gerald*

(written after 1st Australian attack on Pozières, from near Albert)

The morning arose with tranquil comfort. A quick shower and it was down to see what breakfast awaited with Evelyne and Jacky.

“*Bonjour, Jacky.*” I greeted my host brightly.

Jacky was short and relatively stocky with a dense shock of grey hair. The years of work renovating the *Chambre d'hôte* was well suited to his sturdy stature.

“*Bonjour, monsieur Evans.*” He replied. “*Vous avez eu un bon repos?*”

“*Oui, très bien!*” I replied enthusiastically.

“*Bon, café?*”

“*Oui, s'il vous plaît!*”

At this Jacky disappeared through the door to fetch the coffee. He reappeared sometime later with a petite pot of coffee, several lengths of fresh, crusty baguette and a croissant. These were matched by an array of local conserves of strawberry, apricot and I think red currant. The coffee and its accompaniments were in keeping with the quality of the establishment, a veritable feast.

After washing down the last of the baguette and jam with the rich white coffee, it was time to commence my journey for the day. About this time, Evelyne appeared from the kitchen.

“*Bonjour, Evelyne.*”

“*Bonjour, Evans. The breakfast was good?*”

“*Oui, tres bein!*” I replied with gusto.

“*I have a long day of riding. I wonder if I could have the bike now?*” I enquired hopefully.

“*Jacky? Pourrait vous s'il vous plait montrer à monsieur Evans le vélo.*” She directed her husband.

“*Please come this way.*” He motioned.

I picked up my daypack with water, maps and other requirements for the day and followed Jacky out into the courtyard. Here was waiting a sturdy bike that had seven gears and stout tyres that would be perfect for the days touring.

“*Merci, Jacky.*” I thanked my host and benefactor.

Throwing my backpack over my shoulders and my leg over the bike seat, it was time to leave Albert and go in the direction of *Bapaume*. I quickly rounded out into the street and up past the Notre Dame in the early morning. The brick cobbles soon made way for smoother bitumen, and in next to no time the density of houses decreased until the edge of town, where the fields resumed their dominance.

The day was perfect for such a ride. The road was dry, the sky clear but with a few clouds and the morning slightly crisp. Something to warm up into.

Striking out on the *Bapaume Rd*, it might have seemed like I was going backwards, but I was really going forward.

Once through the last round-about at the edge of town, the route *Bapaume* was a significant road. It hummed regularly with the passing of busy cars and frequent lorries. I noticed that lorry and car alike were very careful to slow down as they approached me from behind and without exception, made sure they gave me a wide berth to pass and only when it was safe to do so. A very different cycling experience to that I had become accustomed to in Australia. Perhaps it was something to do with the high proportion of residents who rode bicycles or maybe drivers were just plain courteous? Then again, this was the nation of the *Tour de France*! I was not sure which was the explanation, but I was most appreciative. It would make the day a pleasant ride, particularly as my planned route required around 70 km of pedalling.

After a relatively short distance beyond a round about, I proceeded right at *la Boisselle* in the direction of *Contralmaison*.

Before reaching *Contralmaison* the road dipped into a low valley once known as ‘*Sausage Valley*’. A small lane with a poorly defined track headed up this valley. This I also followed because I knew that it was once called ‘*Dead Men’s Road*’ by the Australian soldiers. It is by this route that Gerald and his battalion would have moved up to the front line in *Pozières* on the 23rd of July, 1916.

Cycling the Somme

Albert - Baupame - Bullecourt

(70.5km, 230m climbing)



Photo 13: Cycling route in the Somme, Albert, Pozières, Baupame, Bullecourt and Longueval return

<http://www.mapmyride.com/routes/fullscreen/192599632/>

Moving up this track through the fields, the shallow valley did not seem daunting. After around 500m the road surface suddenly improved to that of a regularly graded farm track. To the right a flat excavated area ended in a rock wall. This was the area known as the ‘Chalk Pit’ of Pozières. When Gerald was moving up through here before midnight the German shelling was quite intense, but it was nothing compared to what was to come later.

Later the Australian soldiers referenced the intensity of shellfire in terms of the question, ‘*better than or as bad as Pozières?*’ At that time and by definition, shellfire could not possibly be worse than that experienced at *Pozières*.¹⁵ Little were they to know!

At the Chalk Pit, Gerald was lightly wounded by a piece of shrapnel that grazed his chest and ribs. He endeared himself to his company by quickly getting the wound dressed and then returning to fray to continue on with his company.

Today the Chalk Pit is little more than a dump for unwanted farm refuse and a place to make silage. It did not seem such an intimidating a place. A light breeze brushed the leaves and grass blades, that was brightened by the occasional twitter of birds. What a difference a century makes.

Beyond the Chalk Pit, the track moves into a groove that was once an old Roman road. The mounds on either side would presumably provided some cover from observation but concentrated the shellfire. Just before *Pozières*, the left hand side opened into a freshly ploughed field with a gentle incline, crested by a colonnaded wall with a central arch. This I was soon to find was *Pozières* New British Cemetery.

The track finally hit the *Bapaume Rd*, across which was a simple monument and a small copse of trees stood. Carefully crossing the busy road, to avoid being hit by traffic, the presence of the trees was explained as the site of the notorious German bunker known as ‘*Gibraltar*’. On the first night of the *Pozières* attack it had been full of defending troops with numerous loops containing well-fed machine guns.

The 23 m high obelisk was the memorial to the First Australian Division, Gerald’s Division. The memorial site was selected as this was the 1st Divisions first major attack in France and had cost it many casualties. Here between July and September 1916 the fighting was intense and the casualty rate high, with 68% of casualties being killed as a result of the fighting or more likely, the shelling.



Photo 14: Australian 1st Division monument at *Pozières*, looking towards *Theipval*

¹⁵ In ‘*Pozières*,’ by Scott Bennett

Back towards Albert, the *Pozières* New British Cemetery beckoned eerily. An invisible magnet was pulling me towards it. The bike essentially turned and rolled in the right direction of its own accord. Stopping at the central arch, I leaned the bike against the wall, walked up the steps and through the heavy iron gate. On one side the gate was open, on the other closed.

The first time one enters one of these war cemeteries is both humbling and despairing. On the one hand they are extremely well cared for and maintained. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission do an exemplary job of maintaining the cemeteries under their care.

Yet they are war cemeteries. There are thousands of young men buried here. They are dead.

In this my mind turned to Allegri's '*Miserere Mei*' as the only music that was suitable for contemplation of this place.

Music 9: '*Miserere Mei, Allegri*' by Kings College Choir, Cambridge, Sir David Willcocks, conductor, 1963. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XND3XXqt76Y> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNk4AiaPn8>

It is a powerful lyrical English translation of Psalm 51 whose first verse in which the purity of a boy soprano wafts across the accompanying music to guide the choir as follows:

*Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness
According to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences.
Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.*

The scene confronting me was that of a central aisle which runs to a cross that features an up turned sword on a white cement cross. This, the cross of sacrifice, is the central feature of all Commonwealth War Grave Commission cemeteries. On either side of the immaculately kept grass aisle are arranged simple rounded white Portland head stones positioned row by row. So many.

Embossed into the top of the egalitarian head stones, above a simple Latin cross, sits the crest of the regiment of the fallen soldier. Many are of the Midlands regiments but all too numerous are those with the rising sun insignia of the Australian Imperial Force. Beneath the crest is the rank, the soldiers name, the date he died and his age. Too many of these record ages of soldiers in their teens or early twenties. Finally, beneath the cross of the identified often sits an epithet contributed by the family such as 'The Lord gave, The Lord hath taken away'. These were the lucky ones.

Of the over 2700 graves in the cemetery almost half of the burials are unidentified. These head stones in some cases may have a regimental crest or nationality inferred, but all too often they are just listed as '*Soldier of the Great War*' quietly followed by the epithet, '*Known Unto God*.' From where their bodies or parts thereof were recovered, or what they were recovered with, they were presumed to belong to the British Imperial forces. I now started to practically comprehend Evelyn's comment from the preceding day about being lucky in knowing where our family members were buried.

Forget your thoughts of glory, for there is nothing glorious about lying in an anonymous grave, in a foreign land, far from family. Your guts just roil and chest tightens in anger at the wonton waste of once vibrant young lives.

Time to move on. I slowly walked back to and through the arch to reclaim my bike. After mounting and then starting pedalling back towards *Pozières*, the slow pedalling tempo gradually drained the numbness from my chest with fresh blood.

Again reaching the edge of Pozières, I veered left past the 1st Division Monument, by passing the town and down a narrow road that leads towards the infamous *Mouquet Farm*.

The road gently grades down until a long left-handed bend. At its apex, a small monument with one of Australian dentist, Ross Bastiaan's, bronze battlefield relief maps indicates that this site over looks *Mouquet Farm*. The memorial, framed by two leafy, medium sized trees, looks down then up a gentle slope to the farm. These days a series of trees cap the ridge, protecting a farm shed that is nearly full of large round bales of hay. In the fore-ground further round bales are laid out neatly in rows with a range of red farm equipment waiting in readiness for this years planting and harvest. Today the farm looks very prosperous and agricultural, and not one-bit daunting.

The Australian soldiers quaintly referred to the farm as '*Moo Cow Farm*'. It was also a colloquial attempt at the French pronunciation of the localities name. It also belied the cost of the month of fighting between 8th of August and 3rd of September 1916 that cost three Australian Divisions over 11,000 casualties without requitement.

Further on up the road to the West, the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* beckons. Its ochre spire loiters in the near distance, a red brick structure, capped with white stone, that hovers over a small wood on the next crest. Inscribed in its walls are '*recorded the names of 72,191 officers and men of the British Imperial Armies who fell on the Somme battlefields between July 1915 and February 1918, but to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death.*'

As '*fortune*' would have it, this was not the fate of our families fallen. As such, I was able to turn my bike around and pedal back towards *Pozières* so as to attempt reaching out to *Bullecourt* that was still around 30km of solid riding away.

On the rebound from *Mouquet* farm, a slight climb up soon invited the outskirts of *Pozières*. *Pozières* too now had buildings constructed in the same red-earthen bricks that also characterised many of the buildings in *Albert*. This is not surprising as *Pozières* was completely flattened by some of the heaviest shelling during the war.

I soon came up upon the *Bapaume Rd* to face '*Le Tommy*' bar on the other side of the road. It had clearly seen more prosperous times. There were just not as many old soldiers left these days to reminisce and commiserate about the other time in *Pozières*.

Turning left, I pedalled in the direction of *Bapaume* along an essentially flat road. Again reaching the city limits of *Pozières* another memorial presented itself in a small reserve on the left of the road. Here a causeway of large pavers drew one's vision towards two flag poles, the right carrying a French flag and the one to the left holding aloft an Australian flag. Between the flags was a closely cropped grassy mound. On closer inspection, small pieces of concrete rubble protruded through the grass. Beyond the mound were a series of relatively flat fields, many cultivated to receive the seasons seed.

This was the site of the area the Australian soldiers had known as '*The Windmill*'. It was to around about this area that Gerald's company had fought their way to the point where his '*Company was furthest ahead of the lot*' between 23rd and 27th of July 1916. In this I coolly wonder if Gerald had made it to this patch of ground? In this I was sure he would not have been able to survey the peaceful view as I was doing.

The pavers stopped at a large '*bench*' beyond which was another of Ross Bastiaan's bronze memorial plaques commemorating significant battlefields on the Western front. The bench was not

Still the Stream Glides

for resting one's body but rather resting one's eyes. On it was inscribed a quote from Charles Bean, Australia's official and dedicated wartime historian, who stated that '*Pozières Ridge marked a site more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth*'.

Mentioned in Dispatches Recommendation 6/9/1916:

Lieutenant DG Evans, 8th Battalion, March to September, 1916

As a platoon Commander of "D" Coy, this officer has done consistently good work. In the attack on Pozières on 25/7/16 he showed great courage and initiative. His platoon led the attack and under heavy fire from M. guns and artillery. He has the credentials for leadership, and is coolness and calm courage have given the men under him great confidence.

***Major General N.M. Smyth on behalf of Major General HB Walker
Commanding 1st Australian Division***

Chapter 13

One of the boys did a couple of rounds on the binder to keep his hand in

France

3rd August 1916

My dear Evan -

I had a letter from you tonight and I must answer it at once because the mail closes in the morning.

I am pleased to hear you've had a good Autumn & are having a good time, have you disposed of the wheat? 3000 bags must of taken a bit of harvesting - I am glad to hear you are having a good year & getting good prices for stock. I believe horses are very cheap but if there are any of mine are fit for sale, it would be better to sell them.

Have you got many sheep to shear? It is dead funny to see them shearing here, they round them up in the paddock, stick a couple of hurdles round them & get busy. Most of them will eat out of your hand-

The weather has been great lately, just a few showers. They are harvesting now and have a funny old way of driving it. Reapers and binders are very scarce, but one day during a march we halted near where one was working & one of the boys did a couple of rounds on the binder to keep his hand in. He looked a trick going around with his pack on -

We have had an easy off the last few days & the boys are celebrating it in great style; they deserve it too. If anyone says anything to the detriment of the Australian Soldier, give him one for me -

Ken could not possibly get back from the West to go home. I wanted him to enlist in Vic but evidently he scorned my advice; as a matter of fact, I have a shrewd suspicion that he intended to enlist when he went to the West --

Glad to hear the bank a/c is looking healthy.

I must stop now as I have some work to do

Love to all

Your Affate brother

Gerald

(written after 1st Australian attack on Pozières, from near Albert)

On the air-brushed agrarian scene beyond *The Windmill*, I spray with my eyes. For kneaded into this rich earth were the meat lumps of war. I can look no more, for the tears that blind me.

Retreating back along the flagstone causeway, from the edge of the advance, was akin to walking a tight-rope wire and trying not to fall off.

All to do now was to mount my bicycle and negotiate the traffic. The flat road towards *Bapaume*, bordered by verdant fields of wheat, that seemed to slip by as in some kind of bountiful stupor. Only the buffeting passing of a lorry or truck seemed to temporarily jolt me out of this near-trance.

I suppose this would have been a similar sort of incongruity that Gerald and his mates would have felt in the Spring of 1917. The traverse of these relatively untainted fields would have been comparatively easy compared to that of the preceding year where every inch of progress was hard fought and won. But this expedition was to be a false progress. The German army had retreated tactically to shorten their lines, preparing even better defended positions for the Australians to test

their fibre against. I knew, but did they know, that *Bullecourt* and the Hindenberg Line awaited menacingly in the distance?

The outskirts of *Bapaume* are announced by a large round-about, still yet in the fields. Beyond awaits what is now a prosperous town. The houses are neat and well tended. The roads are in good repair. Towards the *Centre de Ville*, the houses and buildings are garlanded with flower baskets, flush with the rites of Spring. The people go about their business and itinerantly settle in cafés sipping espresso with bleary eyes. All is in order, and as it should be. But the atmosphere of the town feels in some way subdued by the dead hand of a melancholy whose touch you can feel but not put a finger on.

Being the penultimate hour before the noon closing, I decided to enhance my picnic supplies. This included that prerogative stop at a *boulangerie* for a crusty baguette that I was yet to tire of. I also nipped into a combined *fromagerie-charcuterie* for a knob of sausage and a corner of the attractively shaped *Coeur d'Arras* cheese. The taster slice of this cheese, offered by the proprietor, had a strong flavour and a density that melted slowly and heavily on the tongue, leaving a distinct sweet and lingering aftertaste to saviour. The last stop was a *magasin de fruits* that provided a healthy banana and an apple. I was set and all correct to sustain my cycling tour.

My goal, *Bullecourt*, was yet another 12 km approximately North as the crow flies. In *Bapaume*'s centre square I steered my bike left off *Rue d'ares* onto *Rue de Douai* that would lead to this destination. The urban interlude of *Bapaume* slowly returned to the agrarian idyll after another large round-about and then a substantial bridge over the A1 Paris-Brussels Auto Route that marked its final frontier.

Just before the hamlet of *Écoust-Saint-Mein*, the rhythm of the gently passing grain fields is imposed upon by the H.A.C Cemetery *Écoust-Saint-Mein*. Poplars guard its periphery, along with the Cross of Sacrifice, which all protrude skyward from the fields. It passes patiently by as I cycle towards the hamlet of *Écoust-Saint-Mein* where the road doglegs first to the right and then to the left. More of that red-earth brick as in *Albert* and *Pozières*, but pleasingly there are a number of mature oak trees that provide shade for the weary traveller.

A brief interlude of more fields saw *Bullecourt* tread its way into contention. A sedate pedal through *Bullecourt* quickly works towards its centre, first passing the red-earth brick *Le Canberra* bar emblazoned with a red kangaroo and the beer legend of Stella Artois. Next in view comes the immaculately cared fore *Marie* (Town hall), complete with first world war memorial monument, front and centre. On the left stands an impressive but obviously rebuilt church with another monument to the First World War. With this monument the French flag, is attended at its right side by an Australian and left by a British flag. A small wreath of ubiquitous cloth poppies and some smaller individual offerings decorate the monuments steps. Its steps are topped with a bronze slouch hat. This monument is known as the 'Slouch Hat' memorial to the Australians.

Proceeding further down the street a small, dark green sign with white writing points the way to the *Bullecourt* Australian Memorial. Most appropriately the memorial is down the *Rue des Australiens*. A short distance down this narrow road the monument is set on the right hand side.

Indented into a field, a rectangular refuge, holds the cairn that supports a lone bronze Australian soldier, replete with pack, rifle and slouch hat. Forever gazing across the fields, for this was as far as the Australian diggers got as they doggedly fought their way into the Hindenburg line in May of 1917. The monument commemorates the 10,000 casualties that were suffered by the Australians in the two battles of *Bullecourt* in May 1917.

It would have been somewhere near here that Gerald and his Company captured a 200 yard section of the OG trench and held it against repeated counter attacks. This action would eventually result in Gerald being awarded the Military Cross for his actions. The fighting by both sides was particularly ferocious in these parts.

At this point it was time to pause and reflect. Suitably my mind turns to Arvo Pärt's '*Für Alina*' to chip gently away at the tension that had built within my soul during the day's journey.

Music 10: 'Für Alina,' Arvo Pärt, Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmBrepbZji0>

To conclude this contemplation, a conveniently shady tree recommended the most suitable position to break out my picnic and recover my resolve. Out of my backpack came the various ingredients from baguette, cheese and sausage to convene my lunch on a handy plastic plate. My attendant pocket knife was then sprung into action to distribute the ingredients into manageable proportions.

A good pocket knife is a valuable tool that all farm lads appreciate. It does not have to be fancy or too big, just two good blades that can hold an edge. Its applications start with cutting hay bale twine, to opening cans with the small blade, use as a screw driver and for the quick removal of thistles among many other uses. For picnics a pocket knife is *par excellence*. The correct proportions of the various ingredients can be quickly and easily allocated.

Lunch complete, it was now time to retreat. Like the Australian diggers, this was as far as I would go. It was time to start heading back towards *Albert*. I retraced my route back to the centre of *Bullecourt*.

My father during his time elected to the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Council had once met the Mayor of *Bullecourt* during his visit to Melbourne in the early 1990's. From my father's description, Jean Letraille was a sturdily built man who was very passionate about recognizing how the Australian forces had liberated *Bullecourt* during the First World War. Letraille was most impressed to learn from my father that one of our family had fought at *Bullecourt* in 1917 and had been decorated for his actions during this fighting.

On my father's recommendation, I decided to see if Monsieur Jean Letraille was home. Although I had not called ahead to schedule an appointment, I was prepared to take my chances. After passing the *Centre de Ville*, I pedalled right into *Rue d'Arras*, looking for number 1 which was the Mayor's home and location the "*Bullecourt museum*". The house was a short way up the street and on the right.

I knocked crisply on the door. From within I could hear some movement from within the house as the resident shuffled to the door.

"*Bonjour.*"

"*Bonjour, Monsieur.*"

"*Monsieur Latraille?*" I enquired politely.

"*Oui.*"

"*Je vous présente mon auto, Evan Evans, de l'Australie*".

Australia was the magic word!

“*Australie, oui, please come in, come in.*” He gestured enthusiastically.

“*You have come to view the Bullecourt collection of battlefield artefacts?*” He asked, more as a statement of expectation rather than question.

It looked like I was again in luck. Particularly in that his English was far superior to my travellers French.

“*Yes, please if I have not arrived at an inconvenient time?*”

“*Très bien.*” He replied with a generous smile.

I explained to Jean, that I was visiting him on the recommendation of my father who he had briefly met in Melbourne a couple of years before.

Jean was very pleased with this extra Australian association, and it brought an even wider smile to his face.

Jean said. “*That was the greatest voyage of my life, to see la maison from where all those brave young men came from.*”

I continued. “*As my father would have told you, one of my great Uncles, Gerald Evans, 8th Battalion, 1st Division of the AIF, was one of those young men who fought during the second battle of Bullecourt in May 1917. He was lucky, he was not killed here.*”

“*Yes, that was the battle that liberated my Bullecourt for the first time, but so many brave lives lost.*” He replied with a slight tear in his left eye.

The house was neatly arranged and cared for. It appeared that his wife Denise, however, was out on some errand.

We moved down the hall past a number of photographs with other visitors at the house and around *Bullecourt*, Australian flags of all sizes being conspicuously prominent. The museum had just that year outgrown the space in the *Marie* and had recently been shifted to Jean’s barn and stables at the rear of the house.

The museum was a collection of rusted weapons, machinery and other war relics left behind in the nearby fields by the Australian, British and German soldiers during the War. These had been collected on Jean’s farm or from those of others in the district.

These relics were ploughed under by shellfire, and then resurfaced by ploughing to prepare for the new seasons crops. A more than willing accomplice in this pursuit were Claude and Colette Durand who lived in the nearby hamlet of *Hendracourt*, two kilometres down the road past the turn off to the Australian monument.

Jean shifted a heavy barn door and there was the museum sprawled in front of us. The artefacts were arranged on the floor, either at the sides or in the middle, for the heavier items. The collection included tank tracks, cogs and turrets, shells and other components that were associated with these prototype tanks. One turret even had the name of the commanding officer, “Lt Davies, Tank 799”

painted on its side with white paint. Lt Davies was the commander of one of few of these primitive tanks that did not let the Australian infantry down and actually made it into battle in *Bullecourt*.

Other items were hung from the walls or even the rafters. There were rifles, hand guns, parts of machine guns, bullets, bayonets, shovels, barbed wire, wire cutting tools, and more disconcertingly helmets, many with the tops or sides smashed out of them. All in some state of disrepair or damaged for the part they played. Many of the items were rusty and were still coated with some of the soil from which the relic had been lifted.

In the stables there were a number of tables that rested buttons, buckles and insignia. Among this collection there was an alarming number of rising sun hat pins and other relics that had belonged to the Australian forces. Jean specifically pointed out one that had come from a soldier of the Australian 8th Battalion, Gerald's Battalion. There were also some fading black and white photos that showed the moonscape that *Bullecourt* had become once the fighting had finished. *Bullecourt* had paid a heavy price for its involuntary part in the war.

As we walked around the museum, Jean gave a broken commentary and anecdotes as to the objects significance and where they had been found.

However, the day was waning now. I would need to literally need to get on my bike to get back to *Albert* at a reasonable time. *Albert* was still more than 30km retreat from *Bullecourt*.

I apologised to Jean. “*Thank you for the informative tour of the Bullecourt Museum. I must now go as I have around a 30km ride to get back to Albert.*”

“*Ah, that is a good ride on a velo, you must be very strong.*” He replied.

“*Perhaps you might ride the Tour de France, one year?*” He continued, perhaps somewhat mischievously.

“*I wish I could, but I am not as strong as those warriors.*” I smiled, and said wistfully.

We walked once more back through the house to the street. I refilled my water bottle from a kitchen tap before getting on my bike. I also gave Jean a small donation towards the maintenance of the museum.

“*Au revoir, merci beaucoup.*” I said, shaking Jean’s hand.

“*Au revoir et bon voyage, Monsieur Evans.*” Jean called after me as I mounted the bike and began to ride down the street.

I continued on down *Rue d’Arras* turning left to proceed in on an alternate route back to *Écoust-Saint-Mein*. The fields passed reflectively by as I retraced my route back to *Bapaume*. I decided to take a slightly longer route back from *Bapaume* to *Albert*, so as to avoid the busy commerce of the *Bapaume-Albert* Rd. The alternative route also allowed me to take in the town of *Longueval* after passing through the quiet hamlets of *Thilloy* and *Flers*. This route also enabled a brief visit to the forebodingly named, *Delville Wood*.

On the northern side of *Longueval*, a lush and well manicured wood announces the entrance into the town. Passing through the town, again with that ever present red-earth brick buildings, mostly of the same vintage. Following the dark green signs towards the *Mémorial Sud Africain*, I first called in to the *Longueval* visitor centre.

“*Bonjour monsieur.*” I politely said to the man behind the counter.

A nonchalant, “*Bonjour.*” Was returned with little interest in my arrival.

Inside the visitor centre was the typical array of postcards, maps, books and photos on the wall. One photo was of particular interest. It was of the only surviving tree in the wood, a hornbeam, from the fighting or more precisely, shelling in 1916.

I also spied a supply of the small and simple wooden crosses with a cloth red poppy attached to their centre. I had seen these placed attentively on some of the graves at the *Pozières New British Cemetery* when I had visited earlier in the day. I picked up two of these and placed an appropriate donation into the tin sitting beside them.

With this strategic purchase I departed the visitor centre with a polite, “*Au revoir.*” To the attendant. He was preoccupied and did not bother to acknowledge my exit. Well, at least I had politely fulfilled my obligations.

A short roll further down the road brought the entrance to the wood and the South African Monument. This is across the road from the large *Longueval Cemetery* that holds over 1900 souls.

Entering *Delville Wood* is like entering a well maintained and manicured park. Row upon row of neatly planted oaks lines the way up the Central avenue to the main entrance to the memorial arch which designates the monument to the South Africans. It is crowned with a bronze sculpture of a horse being led by the two mythological Greco-Roman figures of Castor and Pollux, twins who had two different fathers with differing mortality, which made Castor mortal and Pollux immortal.

Further down the Avenue, a museum to the South African forces sits. It was however not open when I visited.

Appropriately, I turned to the west to look for the last remaining tree of *Delville Wood*. Given the savagery of the shelling it was not surprising that the South African’s abbreviated the name of the wood to Devil Wood. The wood was almost completely destroyed by shelling and was replanted in the 1920s with young oak trees grown from acorns from a tree in South Africa in the 1920s. The source of the acorns was a tree which had been planted in South Africa in 1688 by a French Huguenot settler called Monsieur Jean Gardiol.

The original rides or paths through the wood were laid out by the British between 1914-1918 and are preserved as wide grassed corridors through the wood. At the intersection of the rides prominent marker stones have been planted with their faces identifying the rides. The rides were commonly named with the names of streets that were well known to the soldiers such as Princess St or Regent St.

The last surviving tree, a hornbeam, had miraculously survived the shelling. Its trunk was gnarled and carved by the shards of shrapnel from the shells during its youth but it was still growing vigorously. Some of these shards were undoubtedly still encased within the tree. The ultimate survivor.

Having made my objective, I turned and made my way back towards the entrance. Turning for a last time, I watched this last hornbeam glitter in the growing darkness of the wood at this *Tannhäuser Gate*.

Although I was now weary from cycling, the return 12 km journey back to *Albert* was a relatively easy ride, mainly down a gentle incline. Within around 40 minutes I was back at Evelyn and Jacky's *Chambre d'Hotes, Au Vintage*. The return of the bike and some simple dinner saw me ready to have an early night. I did not feel like talking very much, and my hosts quickly picked up on and respected this mood.

Perhaps they were expecting it?

Chapter 14

He is not a very good correspondent

France

10th September 1916

My dear Minnie-

I received two letters from you dated 17th & 23rd July. Tell Mother that two of the best soldiers & hardest cases I have struck yet are named Dwyer & Reilly. They are both wounded now. Your last letter was written on the day that I was wounded, we were having a very warm time then -

I have not heard from Ken since he first enlisted, he is not a very good correspondent. I will not write to him till he gets over here, he might go straight to England and should have a fairly good time if he does.

The Germans have a bomb called the "Minnewerfer" (Minnie for short). It holds about a gallon of scrap iron, bits of shell etc, anything that will hurt. You can see them coming through the air quite plainly in the day time. They have sent a lot over here, but have not caught anybody yet; but they make a Dickens of a noise -

11-9-16

Received a parcel from Grace today containing sox, cigarettes etc, very acceptable.

Love to all

Your loving brother

Gerald

(written from Poperinge, Belgium, after further time in line at Pozières)

Albert and the Somme were but a staging post for the main objectives of my expedition, Belgium and more particularly Flanders.

As the sun rose in the East, I arose for breakfast for the last time in Albert.

“*Bonjour, Evelyne*”

“*Bonjour, Monsieur Evans.*” Was the polite reply from my host Evelyne. “*You sleep well?*”

“*Yes, I was very tired after yesterdays ride.*”

“*So where did you voyage yesterday?*” She asked as she quietly laid café, baguette and jam on my table.

“*Merci.*”

“*I rode out along the Albert to Bapaume Rd, first to Pozières, then through Bapaume to Bullecourt, then back through Bapaume via Longueval to Albert.*” I replied.

“*That is a very long velo ride. I hope our velo was suitable?*” Evelyne exclaimed.

“*Oh, yes it was around 70 km, but your bike was perfect and very comfortable. Merci.*”

"There was some very rich farming country that I passed through. My great Uncle often wrote about the richness and beauty of the agricultural country around France in his letters. He wrote of 'la Belle France' in comparison with our dry Australia."

“These days however, the country side is interrupted by some very sad sights and memorials from the war.” I added.

“Yes, this is so.” She wistfully added walking from the room to attend to the needs of another guest.

I quietly finished up the remnants of my breakfast, and returned to my room to repack my bag for the next phase of my journey.

Returning to the reception area of the establishment, I efficiently settled with Evelyne for my accommodation.

“Merci, Monsieur Evans.” Evelyne replied with the completion of the transaction.

“Merci beaucoup, Evelyne. Thank you and Jacky for your generous hospitality. Au revoir.” I replied.

“Bon voyage, monsieur.” She finally contributed as I passed out the front door with my hiking pack on my back, ready for the day’s travel.

I retraced my route from two days before back to the train station.

“Bonjour”

“Bonjour, monsieur.” Replied the attendant selling tickets.

“Parlez-vous anglais?” I asked with the hope of a favourable reply.

“Oui, a little.” Was the reply, accompanied by a slight raise of one eyebrow.

“Merci. Could I please purchase a ticket to the Brussels Central station?” I asked slowly and as clearly as I could manage.

“Yes, there is a train at 9am. You will need to change trains in Lille, also at Brussels Midi.” He replied.

I purchased the ticket and with a polite. “*Merci, beaucoup.*” I exited out on to the platform to await the train which would arrive in approximately 10 minutes.

The train journey was simple and relaxing. The country side that rocked past was very similar to that which I had rode through on the day before. Rich and growing rapidly after the Winters fallow. Towards the city of *Lille* a number of large slag heaps, some with associated headgears, interrupted the country side. These were presumably remnants from the coal mining past of the area. *Lille* these days is quite an industrial city in terms of its base in mechanical engineering, textile and food manufacture.

The port on the River *Deûle* also makes *Lille* the third largest port in France. It is thus the reason that the Lesaffre group had a large barley malting plant in the town, which complimented their yeast production activities.

The train station in *Lille* was quite straightforward to navigate. My train to Brussels was waiting on the next platform, easy. The remaining train travel through to Brussels was relatively similar to France bar the higher population density and that the number of towns appeared to increase.

Arriving at the main *Gare de Bruxelles-Midi* station precipitated the last change of train to a smaller Metro train. The Metro completed the short distance to *Gare de Bruxelles-Central*. From this Metro station, my map of the centre of Brussels suggested it would be relatively straightforward to reach my accommodation, the Hotel Pacific which was on the opposite side of the Brussels Grand Place to the station and about 1km away.

Exiting the station and out from the underground Metro into the air of Brussels was refreshing. Immediately, I spotted a tourist sign pointing in the direction of the Grand Place. Walking in this direction, I left the station surrounds and was introduced to a greater density of cafés and bars. All was very neat and ordered, everything in its proper place. As I closed in on the Grand place, the shops became more extravagant, with shops selling Belgian chocolate and lace becoming more apparent.

The Belgians, along with the Swiss are arguably the supreme chocolatiers of Europe. The Dutch, of course, would argue with this assessment. But then again, the Dutch by reputation are also the monarchs of argument.

Entering the Grand Place for the first time, particularly on a Sunday in Spring is a sight to behold. Your eye is first drawn to the display of flowers in the centre of the square, artfully designed into decorative patterns of colour. The display is indispersed and surrounded by a number of vendors with large umbrellas or temporary marquees selling the flowers and plants. The square is surrounded by opulent guild halls, the *Hôtel de Ville* (Town Hall) and other ornately decorated buildings.

Reputedly, owing to the destruction of the Grand Place in 1695 by French bombardment, the Grand Place was subsequently rebuilt with a relatively harmonious mixture of Gothic, Baroque and Louis XIV style buildings. The ornate stone work on many of these buildings is enhanced with gold leaf highlight paint work. Among the cloisters of some of the buildings are found high end café's, bars, shops and restaurants complete with *al fresco* dining. Not a McDonalds or Starbucks in sight!

Brussels all at once seems formally and neatly ordered, but all is not quite as it seems. The Belgians are not as bland as their reputation for bureaucracy would have them seem. They love the absurd and irreverence such as that signified by the famous *Manequin Pis*, the little boy pissing fountain, which is just a few blocks from the Grand Place.

These juxtapositions in the national tempo, along with my head twirling around the fabulous buildings of the Grand Place attracts my mind to Michael Nyman's '*Chasing sheep is best left to shepherds*,' as the perfect theme music for Brussels, Belgium and particularly the Grand Place. It has the flippant optimism that complements the ambiance of the Grand Place and Brussels as a whole.

Music 11: 'Chasing sheep is best left to shepherds,' Michael Nyman, The Draughtsman's Contract, Michael Nyman Band. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP10QYGVtAU>

Drifting down the right hand side of this brick-cobbled square, it is hard not to be impressed by the aptly name Grand Place. But my destination is Hotel Pacific for the more mundane requirements of stowing my pack and checking into my room. The Grand Place will have to wait for a more detailed exploration at a later time.

I exited the Grand Place at the far right hand end, slipping through *Rue au Beurre* which also contains further sumptuous shops and alimentary delights, both solid and liquid. This street ends at the Brussels Bourse, requiring a minor deviation around this street-blocking building to access *Rue Auguste Orts*. This street leads directly onto *Rue Antoine Dansaert* where the narrow Hotel Pacific is nestled between a women's clothing store and a Thai restaurant.

Pushing through the Hotel Pacific's front door I moved up the narrow corridor towards the staircase, then left into the reception and bar area. The bar consists of a heavy piece of marble, supported by a dark wood panelled base. Hovering above the bar hangs an elaborate golden chandelier. Behind the bar, a large tanned skin of a zebra hangs on the wall. Beside this were two small portraits of the heads of an African man and woman. The lower anchor for the Zebra hide are two shields advertising DeKonicks and Juliper beer. These I can see are stocked for sale in the small bar fridge behind the counter. The walls are covered with an attractively elegant, patterned wall paper.

I rang the bell on the counter to summon the proprietor.

Paul Powells quietly shuffled through a curtained doorway behind the counter. He is fifty something and neatly wearing a blue woollen jumper. It is immediately evident that he is a gentle man and is softly spoken.

As quickly as I size up Paul, he sizes me up. Taking a quick look at me, complete with loaded backpack, Paul is quick to guess who I am.

Before I can summon up my routine travellers French greeting, Paul says, “*You must be Mr Evans from Australia?*” In very good English.

The Belgians, being in a small country in the midst of a number of more assertive countries, have generally adapted to speaking a number of languages. The official languages of Belgium are French, German and Flemish which is type of Dutch dialect. Internally, there is a linguistic as well as political divide between the Flemish speaking northern Flanderian region and the southern French speaking Wallonian regions which meet slightly south of Brussels. Quite simply, the northern Flanderian are relatively conservative and prosperous, while the southern Wallonian are socialistic and less well to do. This state of events led one pundit to offer the following insightful comment. *“There is no national narrative in Belgium, rather two opposing stories told in Flemish or French. The result is a dialogue of the deaf.”*¹⁶

As a result, the Belgians do not seem to have any expectations that visitors will know their language and many speak very good English. This is very convenient for this Australian traveller.

“*Yes, you are quite correct. My name is Evan.*” I replied.

“*Welcome to the Hotel Pacific, I am Paul.*” He continues, “*Could you also please fill in this form and please give me your passport so I can retain a copy?*” At this point he slides the form and a pen across the bar to me.

I am fascinated by the zebra hide and its origins.

On finishing the paper work, I pass it to Paul and ask.

¹⁶ Ian Traynor, *The Guardian*, May 2010



Photo 15: Paul Powell's, Hotel Pacific, Brussels

“Paul, where did your zebra hide come from?”

“My uncle shot it when he was living in the Congo. I think it looks very fine.” He answers.

I nod my head in agreement. This must go back to the days when Belgium was one of the colonial powers. Not perhaps a period to be dwelt on, as Belgium’s conduct during this period was not one of the proudest moments in the nations history. Although, all the colonial powers have multiple blots in their copy books in this regard.

“Your room is on the third floor, room 308. Just use the elevator around the corner. That will take you and your luggage to your room.” Paul dutifully explains.

He continues. *“Your room has a basin but no bathroom. You will have to go down the hall for the bathroom and shower. I hope that is ok?”*

“Yes, thank you I reply. That was the arrangement for my booking.”

Not having a toilet or shower is a small inconvenience when I am paying less than a quarter of what other delegates are paying for their slightly more up market accommodations. The days of the Australian ‘six bob a day tourist’ lives on!

“Also, breakfast is served here at the bar from 7.00am to 9.30am. Would you like a cooked breakfast, and at what time?” Paul stated off-handedly.

I am an early riser, so I reply, *“7.00am and a cooked breakfast would be great, thank you.”*



Eat your heart out Jackson!

Having breakfast included was an extra bonus.

Finally, I ask Paul, “*Has my colleague Dr Wallwork arrived at the hotel?*”

“*Ah, yes she has and her room is on the 2nd floor. I think she goes out about an hour ago.*” Paul replies.

“*Ok, I will catch up with her later then.*”

With business concluded, I turn about, exit left through the door and into the elevator. With my pack on I could just fit in. It is very narrow, just like the Hotel Pacific itself. It has a kind of *tree house et camp* ascetic that is reminiscent of one’s childhood pursuits.

With a clack, the elevator arrives at the third floor. I turn the internal handle over and push the gate up with a leather strap. The outer doors are then opened by flicking another handle over and sliding the doors apart to provide access to a landing. To my right is my room, 308.

Beside room 308 is the toilet. The door is decorated with a ‘*Jack the dripper*’ (Jackson Pollock, American Expressionist) inspired, brightly coloured drips, splashes and swirls of paint on textured white wallpaper. These door paintings were regularly dispersed about the Hotel Pacific. Hmm, impressive, Paul must have artistic friends, I thought to myself.

Taking out the key, the lock is turned, door opened for my grand entry. The room is narrow, but clean with a window looking down onto *Rue Antoine Dansaert*. Plonking my backpack down, I then sit on the bed. Not bad. The Hotel Pacific was not only a bargain to stay at but it would also be comfortable.

Faffing around, I dig out the required items of gear from my bag. This included pyjamas for under the pillow, toiletries to hang next to the basin and hanging out my navy reefer jacket, tie and trousers for the convention.

I settle in for quick afternoon nap to massage away the day’s travel and get ready for the long days that brewing conventions enviably bring.

A light knock on my door, shivers me out of my light slumber.

“*Just a moment.*” I respond in a slightly groggy demeanour.

Opening the door, I see my Australian colleague, Meredith Wallwork.

“*Good afternoon.*” I say with a drowsy smile.

“*Have you been in Brussels long?*” I enquire.

“*I arrived in this morning from London. Hugh, the girls and I had been visiting with his parents in Sussex for a couple of weeks.*” Meredith explains. “*He and my girls are now on their way back to Australia.*”

“*Ah, that will explain why you look so relaxed and fresh.*” I respond.

“*What about yourself, Evan, when did you arrive?*” She enquired in turn.

"I have just come up from Albert a couple of hours ago. Before that I was in Paris, Provence and the Languadoc."

"Well you have been busy then." Meredith commented.

"Did you enjoy Paris?"

"Yes, it was great. I stayed in the 7th District, not far from the Eiffel Tower. I had a great time visiting the great churches and the amazing collections of art in the Louvre, D'Orsay and the other museums."

"What have you seen in Brussels so far?" I enquired in return.

"I have been looking in some of the shops, they seem to have some nice clothes. They are a bit expensive, however, so I have not bought anything just yet."

"I suppose you can't expect much less given we are in a public service town and one of the great bureaucratic cities of the world." I commented.

"Have you been through the Grand Place yet?" I asked.

"Yes, it has very impressive buildings. The flower and plant display is also very pretty." Meredith replied. *"I wish I could have bought some plants to take back for our garden in Adelaide."*

"So what are your plans for the rest of the afternoon?" She enquired.

"I suppose we should go up to the convention centre, register and put up our posters." I replied.

"Yes, I think that would be wise. How about I meet you down in the hotel's bar in 15min?"

"Sounds like a grand plan, I will see you then." I replied as Meredith went out through the door and went down the stairs to her room.

I used this time toneaten up my attire and collect together my poster components and other requirements into my backpack to inaugurate my first large brewing convention.

Rather than use the rickety lift, I decided that the stairs were a better option. Waiting for me in the bar was Meredith.

"Ready to go." I enquired.

With a nod of her head, we proceeded out onto the street. Essentially we followed a similar path to which I had taken to get to the Hotel Pacific. This had the advantage of allowing another traverse of the Grand Place.

The Brussels Square Meeting Centre was only a short distance from the *Gare de Bruxelles-Central* station that I had entered Brussels. The meeting centre was underground and had a proper looking avenue of plain trees and garden on its roof.

Entering we followed the signs advertising European Brewery Convention Congress (EBC), then EBC registration.

After registering, for want of gaining a practically useless convention satchel and our name badge with lanyard. It did however contain the important convention handbook detailing the schedule, lecture times, poster titles and other useful information. Meredith and I proceeded into the poster hall to assemble the parts of our posters on our designated poster boards.

The poster hall was huge, but as you would expect for a hall that would contain over 100 posters. The poster boards were lined up in eight rows. Once finding the assigned poster space, it takes around an hour to apply the ‘sticky-dots’ and position each panel of the poster neatly into its designated position.

Meredith and I completed our task at around the same time. We decided that as the welcome reception would start in around an hour, there was little point returning to our hotel.

Of a like mind was Sandy MacGregor from Winnipeg in Canada. Meredith had spent four months working in his lab in the previous year. Sandy was not a Canadian by origin but a genial Scot with a lively intellect and a propensity to collaborate where possible. I could not have been more fortunate both personally and professionally with this introduction.

We settled down at one of the sumptuous cafés that populated the square. The sipping of our way over the coffee cup enabled us to introduce ourselves and establish our credentials and interests. After the best part of an hour had slipped past, we were sufficiently invigorated to commence the welcome mixer back in the Meeting Centre.

Entering the dimmed hall for the welcome reception, I was immediately struck by the coloured lighting that illuminated each of the bars surrounding the walls. Only brewers that produced beer in the host country, in this case Belgium, are permitted to have the privilege of dispensing their beers at an EBC Congress. In Belgium, this was not a problem. Belgium then had the greatest number of brewers per head of population of any country in the world. Again fortune was favouring me with my choice of first international brewing convention.

The lighting colour schemes of each dispense bar were linked to that of the brewer. For instance, in front of the green lights were for Affligem and its parent, Heineken’s beer, an orange glow identified the Interbrew beers including Stella Artois, Leffe, Hoegaarden and Bellevue Kriek, the blue light the smaller Belgian breweries including Delirium Tremens from the Brewery Huyghe beer range, magenta for Abbaye Beers including Triple Karmeliet and Maredsous, and finally under yellow light the Trappiste brews including the famous Chimay, Duvel, Orval, Rochefort, Westmalle and Westvleteren beers. Literally there was more beer on tap than a drinker could ever hope to ‘poke a stick at’.

The Belgians could also be considered to be a major, if not the major, centre of beer diversity in the world. As far it goes, the Belgian brewers are the wizards and alchemists of the brewing world. Their famous beers start with ales and lagers and quickly move to sessionable wit beer (white, wheat), high yeasting beers (e.g., ‘dubbels,’ ‘triples’), lambic (e.g., gueuze and fruit lambic), Abbaye and Trappiste beers. They deviate from the dominant beer seasoning of hops, to include spices such as coriander, cloves, star anise, orange peel to name but a few.

The combination of these spices with the conventional yeast, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, in addition to the barnyard *Brettanomyces* species and enteric bacterial species, enables the artful creation of a myriad of potential flavours. Brewing practices such as adding extra yeast fermentable sugar or wort result in ‘doppel’ and ‘triple’ style beers. As such, many of these beers start with alcohol contents of around 6% and top out at around 12%. These are sipping beers, not for big drinking sessions.

One particularly well named beer is Delirium Tremens whose bottle features a green crocodile, orange octopus and the famous pink elephants. At 8.5% alcohol, it has a decent kick to it! The legend is that after drinking the first beer you feel like a confident crocodile and after the second the tipsy octopus. Thereafter you start seeing pink elephants. My take on this was that on the next morning, those bloody elephants will be stomping on your head!

Taken as a whole the setting for the welcome mixer, underground, was a veritable '*Tolkeinian Middle Earth*' of convivial brewing peoples. Most obvious are the Germans who truly love their beer and revel in the tasty brews produced by other nations. I was later to learn that their beer drinking culture made them equivalent to inverted '*Hobbits*', in that they are generally a big people. Those of the brewing fraternity drink beer at breakfast, second breakfast, for elevenses, luncheon, afternoon tea, dinner, supper and beyond.

If they are outside of Germany, beer does not have to be produced according to the strictures of *Reinheitsgesbot* or the German purity law of 1516. This is perhaps the only example of a tax law that has perhaps been of some service to beer quality, although there are some prominent dissenters to this conclusion. One has to admire their tolerance of foreign styles and their focussed dedication on to all things beer.

The British are the '*dwarves*' of the brewing kingdom. They have a love of malt beer, particularly if it is not overly carbonated or hopped, and a little warm. The French on the other hand appear like the proud people of '*Gondor*'. Proud and self reliant but fallible. Their culture is split between that of haut wine and champagne, and that of the more egalitarian beer. Interestingly, France being a large and fertile country, not only produces a prodigious amount of grapes for wine but also an equally remarkable amount of malting barley for beer. So much so that France is the major malting barley supplier for much of Europe.

The next major division within the gathering are the peoples of Scandinavia. These must truly be the elves. The Danes with their strong beer culture dating back to the Vikings, here would have to be the '*Woodland elves*'. While the Finns, largely with blond hair and women who can generally be identified by their strikingly fashionable, angular eye wear are like the '*Silvan elves of Lothlórien*'. Their distinctive eye wear makes me think not of Paul Simon's '*Diamonds on the souls of her shoes*' but rather the variation '*Diamonds on the eyes of her soul*'. I suppose given that the '*eyes are the window to our souls*' this extra light is desirable in Finland with their long Arctic infused Winters.

Music 12: 'Diamonds on the souls of her shoes.' Paul Simon and Lady Blacksmith Black Mambo. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf4YyXVoWeA>

In contrast another tribe of '*high elves*' would include the Dutch. Based in their small lowland kingdom of '*Rivendell*' on the edge of the mountains, they stand as a bastion of tolerance against the tide of conformity and control that emanates out of the bureaucratic heart of the European Union.

This leaves the remainder, the few people that have travelled from all corners of the globe. We worldly folk must by logic be the '*Dúnedain or rangers*'. Considered to be wild folk, perhaps even dangerous and uncultured by some in our thinking by most of the established brewing world. People that ceaselessly range over the earth. Wild folk are however self reliant, dependable and largely '*Elf-friends*'.

Surprisingly, among this throng who were in fine fettle, and mostly in deep and animated discussion, there did not appear to be any of the '*enslaved peoples*'. The presence of '*orcs, nazgul or the Dark Lord*' was not obvious.

Chapter 15

I am quite content to bump along

France

10th October 1916

My dear Mother -

It is a good while since I have written to anyone at home but I missed the last mail - hope you will not be imagining all sorts of things about me.

There was a little matter of a raid that I happened to be in charge of, and I did not feel inclined to write till it was over. However, it went off very successfully, and now can tell you all about it, it was very well done, & they have all said very nice things about me, and what you will probably like much better, I will not feel it is my turn to take part in a raid for a long time to come.

I have had lots of letters from everybody saying how pleased they were I was wounded because I would be away from the firing line for a while, the funny part is I have not been away from the Battalion for a day.

You will be sorry to hear that my batman Tullett has gone, he is 56 years & sleeping on the wet ground & so on was playing up with him, so I got the Doc to send him back to Australia. He was a fine old chap as honest as the sun, & did not like leaving me. I have had him with me for 15 months and kept him out of all the rough business.

Captain Hurrey who was in the same Company as I for a long time has gone to England sick, he was always very decent to me - Dickson is now a Captain, all the fellows who went to new battalions got their promotion quickly, I was just due for mine but lately five original officers of this battalion have come back, so suppose I will be in the cold, these officers have been away 16 months, & most of them have seen practically no fighting, I will have to wait for another Pozières, they are the stunts to make promotion. However, I am quite content to bump along as I am - Hope the next time I write will be from London.

Must stop now, with love to all

Your loving son

Gerald

(written Branhoek, Belgium, which is between Poperinge and Ypres)

Groggily I awoke on the following morning in Brussels from its welcome the night before. The benefits of a shower and the good sense of Paul's cooked breakfast were soon made apparent. The eggs were cooked to my personal standards of perfection, lightly 'sunny-side' up, with runny yolks to soak the attendant toast with plenty of 'play.'

Meredith and I collected our gear for the day and retraced our picturesque route back to the Congress centre. The foyer was buzzing as we arrived. A low cacophony of voices in a myriad of different languages filled the hall. We decided it would be prudent to shift into the convention hall so as to get a ring side seat. Our sensible move paid dividends as the hall rapidly filled with the other 1200 delegates.

The first address and welcome was from the reigning President of the EBC, Paul van Eerde. This was long on ceremony and inclusiveness. In essence it was a European 'Welcome to Country' or rather 'Welcome to Brewing Region' ceremony.

The formalities being properly and fairly covered, it was time to move on to consideration of the major issues facing the brewing industry and were presented in the plenary lectures.

The first presentation was on alcohol policy in the European Union as it applied to advertising of the product and taxation. A veil fell over the lights and subdued the audience. Well should the audience be mulled by this ominous shadow. It was clear that the dark lord was out there and had gathered his forces of bureaucrats, ‘wowsers,’ nay-sayers, fun police, do-gooders, ‘*orcs*’, post modernists, sophisticates and of course the ‘*Nazgul*’. To hell with them all!

The next presentation took a more positive outlook for the brewing industry. It was presented by Ray Anderson of the Carlsberg-Tetley group, who outlined the impact that the association between the brewing industry and Louis Pasteur. It was the study of industrial fermentations by Pasteur and the linkage with of the progression of the fermentation with yeast, that guided Pasteur’s establishment of the connection between micro-organisms in causing disease or spoilage.

One of Pasteur’s legacies to the brewing industry was to stimulate Jensen at Carlsberg to ensure the refinement of the purity of yeast cultures which resulted in more consistent beer fermentations and flavour. That and the understanding that spoilage and off flavours were associated with undesirable micro-organisms gave the brewing and the food industries in general the beneficial food manufacturing step that will forever bear his name, “*pasteurisation*”.

My favourite lecture of the day and convention, required the donning of the head phones that were associated with each seat. These headphones enabled the presentation to be translated into the three official languages of the EBC; English, German and French.

Prof Freddy Delvaux, from Belgium’s Catholic University Leuven, gave his talk in French, translated into English, on the appropriate selection of glassware to enhance the pleasure of beer drinking experience. At first glance such a topic would seem not to be that interesting. On the contrary, it was fascinating and the lecture riveting! It was a fusion of chemistry, physics, human physiology, psychology and glass architecture.

It turns out that the various shapes, thicknesses and sizes of beer glasses in the local bars were not just determined on the whims and fancies of the breweries marketing department. The important elements of a glass are its thickness that determines the rate at which the beer warms up and also retains its foam stability, the thicker the slower on both counts. In turn, the head-space in the glass, particularly if the glass is narrower at the top than the middle, will tend to concentrate the aromas, like a brandy balloon, as the beer is poured and the foam collapses. The final basic design parameter is the diameter of the glass, where narrower glasses accentuate the colour and clarity of the beer.

By intelligent design, the Delvaux glass lecture was the last before the first poster session and the afternoon break. This meant that Meredith and I were required to meet and greet by our posters while the other delegates roamed the poster hall, with glass or bottle in hand, considering the proceeding lecture.

After an hour and a half of discussing, exchanging business cards and of course drinking beer it was time for happy hour. In the hospitality suite, jokingly named by some as the ‘*hostility suite*’ (quite the reverse), more beer from the almost inexhaustible range available in Belgium could be continued to be sampled in mixed and convivial company. Catching up with old friends, getting to know new friends and colleagues was the ulterior motive or at least excuse to drink more beer.

Such activities surprisingly soak up a considerable amount of time in the day. Quite unexpectedly the time was quickly working towards dinner time. Consumption was required to move from the liquid to at least include some more solid components. Meredith and I being the only Australians coalesced in with a group containing a few Finns, a Brit called Paul and our Canadian mate Sandy. The order of the night was to find a beer bar with a suitably wide range of Belgian beers and good food. One of the knowledgeable Finns, Katharina, announced that she knew of such a place she had observed not far from her hotel and the Grand Place. I was beginning to learn that these Finnish scientists were consummate professionals and that one could do far worse than to follow their lead.

Our newly formed group exited the convention venue and headed towards the promised venue. We were not disappointed. Walking in we were confronted with a dark wood bar above which were racks of glasses to suit each of the beers the establishment had on draught or in bottle. This was the place, alright. They also had black boards presenting a sumptuous array of mussels, waterzooi (rich stew of fish or chicken, vegetables, cream and egg), game, pork and beef cuts, all served with pommes frites. Very hearty, as well as authentic!

Finding a suitable table for our group, the first round of beers, were duly ordered. I choose a De Koninck amber which comes in a heavy goblet style glass replete with the breweries logo. This glass style is colloquially called a '*bolleke*' or rather, 'a full glass', which is rather similar to a high sided chalice style glasses used by the monks. The beer, well it was the nectar of the gods, rich and malty, and balanced with an appropriate dose of peppery Saaz hops, finished with a syrupy, almost velvety smooth mouth-feel.

At this point, the token '*Pom*' in the group perks up and declares, with some bravado, that he will, "*drink anybody under the table*" who is game enough to accept his challenge. All but one declines the invitation, and that a petite Finnish woman, Ansku. At face value this does not look a fair match, but looks can be deceiving. Paul did not know it, but he was in mortal danger.

My attention returned to the lines of glasses rack above the bar. This with the knowledge of the afternoons glass lecture. So many great looking glasses, many emblazoned with legendary marks, but which to choose?

In Australia we have a rather utilitarian range of beer glasses whose shape is based on a cylinder and the quantity of the beer being served. An English pint style glass is about as exciting as beer glasses go in Australia. This is because the cylindrical shape of glass is classically associated with the delivery of the pils, pilsner or lager beers that are the dominant style of brew conventionally served in Australia.

In contrast, the Belgian's have taken the art of pouring a beer into a glass to a much more sophisticated level. Correctly, the Belgians have observed that glass shape is very important to the appreciation of the beer by the drinker. This is because the foam acts as a conduit of beer aromas to the drinker's primary olfactory organ, the nose. In particular, the foam tends to concentrate and pitch attractive hoppy aromas to this organ as the beers carbonation is slowly released via the head. Even the lip of the glass is designed to direct the beer to the part of the pallet best able to appreciate the key characteristics of the beer.

In Belgium each beer brand has its corresponding beer glass, replete with the attractive branding of the beer displayed. No right minded Belgian beer drinker would accept a beer not served in its appropriate glass! A visit to a Belgian pub reveals three basic styles of glass.

The cylindrical style glass is generally associated with the bitter German pils style beers. They are generally tall in shape but typically smaller in volume to deliver a relatively high surface to volume

ratio. These are beers where the glass is intended to be drained more quickly so that beer does not warm up too much. The long-tall shape accentuates the colour of the beer as well as its clarity and foam. In the case of the deliciously hazy wheat beers such as the German hefeweizen, the fine haze, foam stability and lacing are highlighted. This is accentuated with a beer glass that has a slightly bulbous head. For the famous Weihenstephaner weiss beers, the glass has a shallow spiral fluting that creates an impressive lacing pattern that is reminiscent of the legs on a glass of wine.

The second glass shape style is the chalice or cup-shaped glass that is the distinctive mark of the Belgian Abbaye and Trappiste beers. This is perhaps a case of the beer style evolving to fit the glass, rather than the reverse. The monks who brew these beers would presumably have had plenty of these communion style vessels on hand. This glass style would presumably give the beer a greater spiritual imprimatur. The open chalice shape enables the foam to collapse relatively quickly to accentuate the release of the rich and exotic malt flavours in these beers. Brand names such as the Westmalle and Rochefort Abbeyes are synonymous with these glasses and styles of beer. Chalice glasses are generally thick, and the surface to volume ratio low, so that the beer warms slowly. With their typically high alcohol contents, these are beers for slow sipping!

The final style of glass is the tulip- and thistle-shaped glasses that are generally associated with the Belgian high yeasting beers. The distinctive glasses of this style include the widely known Duvel glass and the beautifully presented Karmeliet Triple glass which has a '*fleur-de-lys*' etched onto the glass. These glasses have bulbous bases with narrowed brims that concentrate the aromas and directs them towards the drinker's nose. On drinking, the flow of beer back to the base of the glass would result in a release of CO₂ that refreshed the foam and augmented the aroma. They are the brandy balloons of the beer glass pantheon. Again these, like most Belgian beers are for sipping as high yeasting is code for high alcohol.

It was these high yeasting beers that nailed Paul. While Ansku departed the evening happily under her own steam, Paul could have done with the assistance of a wheel barrow. Here in lay the moral of the day, do not under any circumstances challenge Finnish ladies to drinking competitions!

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In many ways attending a convention is like playing a game of Australian rules football. If you do not take a break on the interchange bench, most players will not be effective in the second half. In practice this means some sessions of lesser interest are best passed up. For me, with my interests in malt biochemistry this tended to suggest that sessions on brewery engineering, packaging and disinfection were of relatively low interest. Such sessions were opportunities to study other posters, have conversations with colleagues or even to get a little fresh air.

The second session before lunch on the second day of the convention was just one session to dodge. Conveniently close to the convention centre was the *Musée Roux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* which exhibited a comprehensive range of art from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Particularly impressive was their collection of surrealist paintings which concentrated on the paintings of René Magritte with many of his famous works that challenge the observers preconditioned perceptions of reality within the arrangements of ordinary objects. The collection also has some prime Salvador Dalí works, and the beautifully painted but sinister works of Paul Delvaux where female nudes are surrounded by clothed figures or skeletons in scenes often lit by moonlit to give a hallucinatory effect. Chagall with his naïve but colourful post surrealistic peasant scenes also made a significant appearance in these galleries.

The older works of the gallery are dominated by those from the Bruegal family. Peiter I Bruegel contributed the small but dazzling '*Yawning man*'. His oeuvre and that of his descendants includes the 'postcard' snowy village scenes such as '*The Hunters in the Snow*' that appear veiled in their

imagery and themes. Closer inspection indicates that the bright snowy scenes were somewhat darker than what first impressions indicate. Pieter I turned this tranquil idyll on its head with the proto-surrealistic “*The fall of the rebel angels*” which features sword wielding and armoured good angels coolly fighting down into hell a melange of evil angels, grubs and grotesques. This was a pretty impressive imagination for a guy back in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Presumably they had a good supply of high yeasting dubbel and triple beers back then too.

The convention waxed and waned in content and pitch, winding to a conclusion with a gala farewell dinner in the impressive Brussels Air Museum. In amongst three ages of military aircraft, the last beers for the meeting were consumed. As 11.30 pm struck the congress slowly began to evaporate for another year.

On the ensuing day of trade visits, I elected to visit a malting's and a brewery that were in Antwerp. The rational sequence was of course to first visit the malt house then the brewery for lunch. The Boortmalt plant, in Antwerp was an impressive installation. It steeped barley into a massive 370t batch rotating floor, germination vessel with a similarly sized pair of kilns below. This was engineering on a scale that even the Germans would get excited over. Overall this plant was able to produce 180,000 tonnes of malt each year. This was roughly one third of total Australian malt production at one site, at that time.

A short bus trip neatly delivered our technical tour group at the DeKonick City Brewery in downtown Antwerp. This city was not only famous for the diamond trade but also for beer. As such, this was a visit I had been savouring since tasting the De Koninck ales in Brussels. I was not disappointed, as the van den Bogaert brothers owned and controlled the brewery. One of the brothers, reverentially known as "Dr Bernard" by the Belgians, was in the process of modernizing the brewery.

The brew house had already been converted from the traditional tuns into gleaming meticulously clean, stainless steel vessels. On the floor of the brewery was a brand spanking new Meura 2001 mash filter. The latest word in mash separation technology. As yet a sizable proportion of the fermenters were still the old fashioned tiled, open topped vats of yesteryear. Even these had their days numbered. Until then the brewery staff would continue to crop yeast and paddle the foam off the tops of these vats. The hard work of visiting a malting's and the brewery was rewarded with yet more beer and plush lunch with the brewery owners and the President of the EBC, Paul van Eerde. I had definitely selected the right technical tour, more by luck than good management. Not surprisingly, a number of the Finns were also on this tour, including Katharina. I had made a smart choice.

Meredith and I had decided the next day would see an expedition to Bruges. With the tag-line, '*Venice of the North*,' this old Hanseatic league town had to be an appealing place to visit. It was also convenient with trains going backwards and forth at least once an hour. We selected the 9.00 am train from Bruxelles du Midi that arrived in Bruges at a very reasonable 10.00 am.

The new and outer suburbs of Bruges were tidy, but not really anything to write home about. The train deposits visitors on the outside of the old city. Exiting the train station, a short walk and the crossing of a narrow bridge opens the old town up. A different world is entered with the narrow streets being cobbled with bricks. This gives an '*olde worlde*' feel and later sore feet. Passing over the cities 'moat' a restaurant that backs on the canal recommended itself for lunch later on.

Our initial touring ambitions are to visit Bruges' two museums that are renowned for their distinctive Medieval Flemish art work. The route requires a series of zigzags and doglegs through the haphazardly laid but historic streets. Certainly with, light to no wind, the small canals reflected on the chocolate box architecture. Bruges was living up to its billing as the *Venice of the North*. It is rare that touristic advertising is so closely in sync with reality.

The Saint John's Hospital label was somewhat of a misnomer. This museum appeared more like a stable with some stained glass windows than a hospital. Still entering for the vividly painted and detailed 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish master, Hans Memling was a treat. Although painted over 500 years past, the rich reds, greens and purples of his palette were as if they had been painted yesterday. The key work in this was The St John Altarpiece that was a triptych filled with colourfully detailed saints and biblical scenes.

En route between the Saint John's Hospital and the Groeningemuseum we passed the Church of our Lady that contained the only sculpture by Michelangelo that had left Italy during the artist's life time. The Madonna and Child was a well executed work but small and relatively minor in the great man's canon. Perhaps more impressive, with less lofty intentions, was the tomb sculpture of one of the church's bishops. His reclining sculpture, with head propped up by one arm, sat on a plinth that appeared to make the statue float above the tops of the pew chairs.

The Groeningemuseum contained more vibrant and meticulous Flemish painting starting with 15<sup>th</sup> century Jan van Eyck and Hieronymus Bosch through Gerard David, Nicolaes Maes to René Magritte. In the main most of the works were religious iconography and story telling with a tendency towards apocalyptic imagery. I suppose, given that the plague was ravaging Europe during this time, it is not surprising that the artists would look for salvation and seriously consider the end of times.

At this point, Meredith and I had had our fill of great and detailed Flemish art for the day. It was time to find lunch. The moat restaurant that I had spotted on crossing into the old city was where we headed. Being a fine day, a table overlooking the canal was well recommended. From here we could watch the passing's of other visitors and residents on the path on the opposite side and ducks meandering about their ways on the water.

The first order of the day was to choose a beer. Being Belgium, this was a task that required thoughtful contemplation of the ample beer menu. It was similar in length and volume to the wine list in a good restaurant. We both selected sipping beers, both bottles were provided with the appropriate *bolleke* glass to pour the beers into. Meredith selected a legendary Bruges beer called '*Straffe Hendrik*' or '*Strong Hendrick*' beer which had an ABV of 9.0%. Its iconic green label with a faced, crescent moon was a very good choice.

As my eye wandered over the beer menu, I was struck by a beer called '*Nunne Bier*' or '*Nuns beer*' with a more modest ABV of 7.2%. This I had to try! This beer came from the same fine Poperinge stable as Poperings Hommel beer. Perhaps the most hop driven beer made in Belgium? I was rewarded with a treat. The bottle and glass were pure gold with the cheesiest smiling nun that you are ever likely to view on a bottle of beer or glass. The beer itself was tasty with its strong bitterness slightly cut the amber malt sweetness. We had come to the right place for lunch.



Photo 16: Nuns Beer



Nuns beer with meal

Meredith was also most impressed by the labelling of my beer.

“Cheers.” We said in unison.

After savouring our first mouthfuls of beer it was time for reflection. It was also time to share a taste of a mouthful of each others beers to broaden out palates as fully as possible. Straffe Hendrik was a triple. The 9.0% ABV was a bit of a give away. Its pour was golden making it a blonde ale with a very rich head coming from lively carbonation. The aroma is yeasty with hints of fruit and slight musk. The flavour is relatively simple of malt, yeast, spiciness and a slight herbal hop finish. Overall very tasty, refreshing and dangerous. Dangerous in that more than one or two and you too would need the assistance of Paul’s wheel barrow.

Drinking at lunch time without food at lunch time is particularly dangerous. I noticed one of the other patron’s meals which was a mix of salad, potatoes and cold meats. This is what I ordered, a sort of Belgian ploughman’s lunch. Meredith figured that moules and frites would work well with strong Hendrik, so this informed her order. Her logic was hard to fault. We both sipped our beers, so they lasted the luncheon distance.

Our lunch completed and paid for, we departed to further explore Bruges. A route that loosely followed the main canal into town looked to be a sensible path. I set my street compass on ‘follow your nose’ mode as we shadowed the canal and its many enticing canal vistas towards the centre of town.

The centre of town is the market. In France this is called the *centre de ville*, whereas in Flanders this is called the ‘*Grote Markt*.’ We finally weened ourselves off the canal at *Wallestraat* to proceed to the Grote Markt. The market had finished for the day leaving a wide open cobbled space surrounded by busy green umbrella festooned restaurants and cafés busily plying their day’s trade. In many respects the square was similar to the Grand Place in Brussels but without the golden opulence of a capital.

On one of the corners I spied a dark painted shop elegantly embossed with the chocolate legend that is Godiva.

On a whim of fancy, I said to Meredith, “*This is a place that I must visit*”.

Meredith’s enthusiastic reply was, “*Ditto!*”

The store was artfully laid with its wares and various visages of the Godiva symbol. Once one walked inside you are trapped. The luxurious chocolate perfume of the store is intoxicating. The only viable choice is what to buy, one of the pre-packaged selections or an individual selection of the chocolates laid out in trays and elevated platters under a glass counter-cabinet.

“So what do you fancy?” I asked Meredith.

“*I do not think I can decide, so I think I will get one of the gold boxed selections for my girls and Hugh.*” Meredith replied wide-eyed and intoxicated.

“*Well I am up for it and I think I will make my own selection. That I think will be a bit more personal for Kathy.*”

I decided to try and fill one of the medium ‘*ballotine*’ boxes. These I was advised by the courteous staff would hold around 20-25 chocolates. The famous white ballotine box had ‘sall wire’ handles to aid carrying. One brilliant advantage of selecting your own was that the staff member slipped on a white cotton glove to gently transfer the selected chocolate on to a white plate.

In selecting chocolates one has to be decisive. There was an extensive array of crèmes, pralinés, fruits, truffles, ganaches, caramels and liquors. Enticing shapes like cherries, tops sprinkled with bright red raspberry seeds, colours inviting café and classic chocolate swirls were all there. With increasing momentum my personal selections were deposited for me on to the white crockery plate. It is just a matter of directing the white gloved hand to your fancies which then transferred them to a plate for weighing before packaging into the ballotine. Making a selection was almost as good as eating them yourself. Meredith watched transfixed as I moved through my selections with single minded concentration.

Paying for this experience did not seem difficult at all. Just weigh, transfer to ballotine and pay. There was also the anticipation of Kathy’s delight of receiving this exotic treat when I got home.

Finally, we drew ourselves out of the rarefied atmosphere of the Godiva shop and into the fresh air. We drew deeply in the air to winnow the intoxication of the shop.

The day was still fine and essentially windless. The shadows were now starting to stretch across the square. Walking diagonally across the square the shadows started licking our ankles down.

We headed in the direction of the tower known as the Burg, as its tip could be seen from the square. Beyond this direction, the church known as the Basilica of the Holy Blood (*Basiliek van Het Heilig Bloed*) could also be found. The burg was a tower through which you could pass through and could climb for an extortionate fee. We by-passed the climb.

The Basilica of the Holy Blood was more interesting by half. Its primary claim to fame was a piece of cloth housed in a golden reliquary in the church. As the story goes, Joseph of Arimathea preserved this piece of cloth collared by the precious blood after he had washed the dead body of

Christ. It is a good story even though these days it is considered that the fabric may well be an elaborate medieval fake. Still that does not deter those of faith.

Entering the Church, though its heavy oaken doors, we quickly bypassed the lower 12<sup>th</sup> Century but rather austere barrel vaulted Romanesque church to climb the expansive renaissance staircase up into the Gothic inspired upper chapel built in renaissance times. Not quite Saint Chappelle, but still impressive all the same.

Again we were in the light divined by gothic inspired stain glass windows that worked their way down the chapels sides. The alter is backed by an elaborate golden tabernacle while the vaulted ceiling and walls are richly painted with decorations and scenes from Christ's final days.

Walking down the middle of the central aisle we were met by a Priest.

The priest announced. "*I am sorry, but unfortunately, the Church will be closing in 5 mins. We close at 4.30 pm today. If you can come back tomorrow at 10.00 am the church will again be open.*" He politely informed us.

Making ready to go, I casually replied, "*Unfortunately, we have only come to Bruges for the day and my friend is going back to Australia tomorrow.*"

The 'A' word worked its mysterious magic again.

*"Australia? Well if you have a little time you wait till I have closed the church, and I could quickly show you the relic and museum. They are very worth seeing."* He generously offered.

Meredith replied, "*Thank you Father, that would be brilliant, thank you very much!?*"

*"Then, please have a look around the main chapel and I will be back shortly."*

Good to his word, the priest appeared at the top of the stairs around five minutes later.

*"Ah, good." He exclaimed. "We shall now go to the right and into the side chapel. That is where the relic is housed."*

Through the side arch was an elaborate white marble throne, flanked by marble angels, and bedecked with golden candelabra and rays. The golden ended, rock crystal reliquary is gently held in a splendid silver tabernacle on which a sculpture of the lamb of God had been formed.

We followed the priests example by bowing our head and bending our front knee in deference.

*"Very impressive, Father. This chapel is an important cradle."* I commented.

*"Yes."* He said with a sigh. *"It is our privilege to tend."*

He followed with. *"Have you got time for a short drive? It is good afternoon and I have a route and some places I like to visit at this time of day. You could come with me if you would like?"*

I looked quickly at Meredith and both of our glances indicated that this was too good an opportunity to pass up.

*"That would be wonderful Father, if you are sure you have the time."* I responded.

*“Yes, yes, I would like to very much, it will be a very nice evening and it is good to have company.”*  
He replied. *“Just come through this door and I will change down to my less formal clothes.”*

*“By the way Father, we should have introduced our selves, my name is Evan and my colleagues name is Meredith.”*

At this point I held out my hand and shook his, as did Meredith.

He replied. *“My name is Father Daniel, I am very pleased to meet you both.”*

And so it was that we left the Basilica of the Holy Blood and drove in the direction of Damme. I sat in the front passenger seat while Meredith preferred the rear of Father Daniel’s car.

With his car Father Daniel expertly navigated the maze of alleys, one way streets and roads out of the old town. We continued on crossing canals and then the railway into the new town, travelling in somewhat of a north easterly direction.

Soon we were travelling along a medium sized canal that was lined at regular intervals by poplar trees. We were heading in the direction of the medieval town of Damme that is set in the green Flemish polders. Damme was originally Bruges’ port city, hence the canal and its importance.

Our guide then asked. *“So where in Australia are you from?”*

Meredith responded. *“We are both from Adelaide in South Australia. It has the distinction of being the driest capital city on the driest continent on earth.”*

*“Ah, so a different scene to my Flanders where we have to build canals to drain our fields.”* He continued.

By the time we were approaching towards Damme, the sun had tilted sufficiently to shed an auburn tinged light on the scene. We finally stopped just short of Damme, on the canal in a position to take attractive camera shots towards the town down the canal and also back toward Bruges. There was even a windmill to our right, not far across the fields. A chocolate box with out the chocolates included.

Father Daniel then announced. *“Well that is the best view I can show you.”*

A sentiment where Meredith and I were very much in agreement with our host.

*“Thank you very much Father Daniel, you have been most generous with your time, church and country.”* Meredith gratefully acknowledged our benefactor.

At this point, we returned to the car and travelled back to Bruges.

A little further down the road Father Daniel asked. *“Where would you like to be dropped off in Bruges?”*

Meredith quickly responded. *“If you could drop us off near the train station, that would be great.”*

And so it was there that we were dropped off by Father Daniel, at Bruges train station. We heartedly thanked Father Daniel again, before waving him goodbye as he drove off.

“Well Meredith, that was a bit of luck to round off a top day, I would say.” I commented.

“Yes, you are not too far wrong there, Evan. And look, there is a train back to Brussels leaving in five minutes. Perfect timing.” Meredith replied.

The hour’s train journey back to Brussels was quiet and spent largely in contemplation as the day darkened. We arrived back in Brussels at around 8pm at Bruxelles du Midi, from whence we started.

Meredith enquired. “You have another full day in Belgium, what are you going to do?”

“Well I am going to go down to Ypres in Southern Belgium as our family has a couple of great uncles buried near there. It will also be a chance to check out some of the battlefields of the Ypres Salient from the First World War.” I replied.

“Well you are welcome to that. I am going to have a bit of a sleep in before I catch my plane back to Australia around the middle of the day.” Meredith replied.

“Which route are you going?” I asked casually.

“Brussels then London via Singapore and Melbourne back to Adelaide.” She replied.

“Firstly, I need to get a ticket from Brussels to Ypres in the morning while we are still at Bruxelles du Midi.” I commented.

I walked up to the ticket counter.

“Hello, could you please tell me what trains tomorrow morning travel from Brussels to Ypres?” I asked the ticket officer.

“There is a train at 7:50am arriving in Ypres at 9.40am or there is also an earlier train at 6:50am arriving at 8.40am.” He replied.

“I think the 6:50am train will be most suitable. I was also hoping to hire a bike at the station if that is possible?” I replied.

“It is very possible sir.”

He picked up a ‘Trein + Fiets’ brochure and pushed it towards me.

“You can purchase the train ticket and bike hire together here for Ypres.”

“Excellent!” I exclaimed and purchased a ‘Trein + Fiets’ ticket for the 6.50am train.

After the ticket purchase, Meredith and I quietly moved off in the direction of the Hotel Pacific.

We stopped briefly to buy some take away pizza. It had been a long day and we were both tired. We had also had our main meal for the day at lunch in Bruges by the canal.

Entering the Hotel Pacific we decided to eat our pizza on one the tables in the bar area.

I approached the bar and asked for a couple of bottles of Juliper beer from Paul, a lighter lager style beer that would be most satisfactory after a hard days touring. Paul even had a couple of properly branded glasses to go with the beers. We were of course in Belgium!

“So what have you and Meredith seen today?” Paul enquired.

“We took a train to Bruges and had a good look around. It is a very pretty town.” I replied.

“You have done well then. Bruges is my favourite Belgian town.” Paul commended.

Paul asked. “So, what time will you be having breakfast tomorrow?”

I replied. “I am actually catching a very early train down to Ypres, so I will miss breakfast tomorrow.”

“Ok, I will probably see you then in the evening. Have a good trip.”

I made my way back to Meredith and our table with the two beers and glasses.

Pouring each beer out into its glass, I concluded that. “Tomorrow you will go your way, and I will go mine.”

We saluted our glasses together and wished each other. “A bon voyage.”

***Recommendation for a Military Cross, ended up being a Mentioned in Dispatches.***

***Lieutenant DG Evans, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1916***

*Running a raid on the German trenches near Hollebeke on the night of 30<sup>th</sup> Sept/1<sup>st</sup> Oct, Lt Evans was in command of the left raiding party. He trained his men so well that they do the work with calm regularity and precision in very great danger. He took his post on the enemy parapet and controlled his party with great coolness. The party killed one German and brought to our lines one wounded German from whom the necessary identification was established. His fine leadership was to a very great extent responsible for the success of his party.*

***Major General Gordon Bennett, Commanding Officer***

## Chapter 16

### Tommy should have kept him on the crick

France

29<sup>th</sup> October 1916

My dear Mother -

Since writing to you I have returned to the Battalion from leave; it has been raining a good deal here so things are not very cheerful but suppose I will soon settle down again soon -

Think I told you young Jarrett was with this Battalion now, poor kid, Tommy should have kept him on the crick for a couple more years, he is not developed enough for this game.

I had my photo taken in London and sent four over to you, please give one to Minnie and do what you like with the others. Don't think Ken had landed in England when I was there, I went to Headquarters and inquired about him & they said his unit was on the way over.

I have told you about my trip in previous letters to various members of the family so will not repeat much of it - I had a glorious time, quite the best holiday I have ever had. We went for a bonzer trip through the islands of the west coast of Scotland & my only regret was that you could not be there too. It is quite a short trip from there to Ireland. When you come over we will go for a trip to Ireland together.

You should get this letter about Xmas time, so I wish you the very happiest one and hope to be home by the next, I meant to get you a Xmas present in London but could not think what you would like best, however I am enclosing 5 pounds in this letter by registered post & you can buy just what you would like best -

I must stop now, with best love to all  
Your loving son  
Gerald

(written Éperlecques, Northern France, a wooded area South of Calais and West of Poperinge)

Even at 6.20am in the morning, Brussels was alive and industriously busy. Its inhabitants going about their daily routine as I brushed my way via the Grand Place to the Bruxelles du Midi station.

Mornings are to saviour with their promise of the forthcoming day. The blush of morning light and crisp temperature is always reviving and focussing. Everything seems cleaner and newer.

Catching the train and finding the appropriate economy carriage was a simple process. A take-away espresso coffee and a sweetbread treat made for a very acceptable breakfast on a train that was soon speeding in a westerly direction.

As the train hurried through the countryside and towns, the day's light gently quickened. By and by better definition is provided of the trees, fields and houses that are rushing by in their blur.

This country is flat, nary a high point, let alone a hill.

After a relatively efficient hour and 50 min journey from Brussels, the train sidled into Ypres. Time to shake out my limbs and begin my day of movement. Over my shoulder, my backpack is firmly in place with water but lacking in sustenance.

Exiting from the train, the day was somewhat overcast with the clouds occasionally breaking to release welcome warm bursts of sunshine. There was little wind. An overnight shower of rain, now departed, had cleansed and freshened the streets of *Ypres*. It was welcome.

Moving towards the Station Masters office, I extricate my ‘*Trein + Fiets*’ ticket.

“*Good morning.*” I greeted the Station Master brightly.

“*I have a ‘Trein + Fiets’ ticket, could I please pick up my bike?*”

“*Good morning, sir.*” He replies.

I hand my ticket to the Station Master and he examines it perfunctorily.

He hands back the ticket and issues the following instructions. “*The bikes are in the next room. You will find the key in the lock and I recommend you use the lock. Please choose a bike and return it by no later than 9.00pm. When you have selected a bike come and see me to complete a small amount of paperwork.*”

With this directive, I headed off in the direction he pointed to find a small room full of bikes. From these I selected a medium sized bike with the standard seven gears. Withdrawing the key from the lock and freeing the rear wheel, all seemed in order. The paperwork was easily negotiated, so then I was free to roam.

I was keen to get underway given the expected length of my day’s journey.

I consulted my map, wheeled the bike through the station and into the stations drop off zone. In the distance I could see the top of the clock tower of the Cloth Hall which would be my objective. For this is where the Grote Markt was adjacent. Being a Saturday, it should also be where the morning market would be located.

Mounting the bike, I headed up the appropriately named *Stationsstraat*. The street first passed a small park, before entering a section that was shouldered by a mixture of tidy brick buildings that embraced the sidewalk. All manner of stores for clothing, toys, chemists, photography, convenience and bikes slowly passed, along with the occasional bank. Intermittently various cafés and bars were presented, generally with few chairs and the odd table arranged in front of them. These were interspersed by sections of residential apartments, in front of which, a wide array of cars were parked. A number of Yparians were out and about keeping to their day’s schedule.

The bitumen pavement also gave way into small bricked cobbles that were less smooth to ride over. The tyres of the occasional cars that slowly passed made a distinct drumming racket on these cobbles. I suppose that was their purpose to remind car drivers that they are in town and to slow down for bikes and pedestrians.

Rolling my way through these dignified but somewhat sterile streets in the morning light was quite pleasant. The closer I got towards the *Grote Markt*, the greater the frequency of shops and particularly bars and cafés became, and greater the levels so of patronage.

After a time riding and a turn to the left then right, the street opened up and I came out at one end of the great Cloth or Guild Hall of *Ypres*. Although rebuilt after being nearly totally destroyed during the First World War, it alluded to another much earlier era where *Ypres* had been a prosperous town. A town that was renowned for its linen trade. The Cloth Hall was an impressively grand

building. The road side of the square was lined with a series of bars and restaurants. Many had permanent *al fresco* dining with tables that spilled over the sidewalk.

My main objective was the Saturday market and that was what I had come to the *Grote Markt* for. Even at just after 9am in the morning, the market was busy and a large number of tourist buses had already arrived, or were they there from the previous day? The buses were parked at the far end of the square.

I parked my trusty steed on one side of the square, taking care to lock the back wheel as instructed. It did not seem nearly enough to prevent my bike from wandering. In Australia, I would use a sturdy D-lock, and lock my bike to an immovable object. But I suppose, convict stock were not so common to Flanders, and conversely bikes were more plentiful. In fact, they are ubiquitous as would be expected in such a flat country.

The food caravans and stalls of the market beckoned. Being Spring, the stalls holding vegetable produce appeared to be the most bountiful. The component that attracted my attention the most were some small round melons, around the size of a soft ball. They looked a little like the '*paddy melons*' that grew in some places on Redcamp. I had noticed several other market shoppers with these in their purchases, so this melon must be good and in season.

I approached one of the stalls that appeared to have a significant display of the melons. I picked one up that looked suitably ripe and then paid the stall holder. The accumulation of my picnic basket supplies for the day had commenced.

The next stop was a caravan displaying a range of breads. Here I again selected a 'baguette' style bread, partly out of practicality and partly in reminiscence of my time in France. I also selected a waffle that had been lightly coated in a sugar solution and then dried.

Stacked on the counter, I spied a small, round tarte that looked interesting but I had no idea of what it was.

I asked the proprietor, pointing in their direction. "*What are those tartes?*"

She replied. "*They are a special Belgian sweetie called Rijstevlaai or rice tarte.*"

*"Hmmm, they look good, I will have one of those too, please."*

*"You will not be disappointed, they taste as good as they look."* She encouraged my choice.

Paying for these goodies and then depositing them into my trusty backpack, I bid her farewell, and continued on looking for further sustenance. I now needed some cheese and ham.

I moved along the alley of stalls till I was adjacent the *fromagier*. Looking at the cheeses displayed under the glass fronted cabinet was one that was instantly appealing, *Chimay à la Bleue*. With a name after a classic Belgian beer, it must be washed with this famous Trappist beer, and therefore must be close to Belgian royalty.

I asked the stall holder if I could have a small piece to taste.

The stall holder commented. "*Unlike most cheeses, this is a cheese that you should eat the rind as it has most of the beers flavour.*"

It was delicious, having been washed in the beer to the strong mature flavour of the cheese was balanced by the flavour of malt and yeast from the beer. That evened out and combined with the slight aroma of bittering hops.

Good enough for me. “*Could I have a 100g portion, please?*” I requested from the proprietor.

I also asked him. “*What other Belgian cheese would you recommend?*”

He replied. “*The Herve or red cheese is a firm cheese and one of Belgium’s best known cheeses. It is a cheese that originates back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.*”

Again he proffered me a small tasting slice. The cheese a pale yellow interior with a glossy reddish-brown coating and a flavour on the strong side, whereas the outer parts closer to the rind were spicy, while the interior was sweet. Interesting.

“*Yes, can I please have 100g of the Herve cheese too.*” I ordered after a further favourable tasting experience.

The stall holders of the *Ypres* market were very professional.

I now had my suitable cheese selection for the day, last stop would be at a small goods stall. A suitable stall was located three further stalls down the aisle. Here I selected a couple of slices of thinly sliced ham.

Impulsively, I also selected a small portion of an interesting looking terrine. I was now complete for my picnic supplies for the day.

Given the impressive nature of the Cloth Hall, I was beholden to go in and have a quick look around. It also housed the appropriately name ‘*In Flanders Fields Museum*’.

Turning into the Cloth Hall via the end doors, I immediately came across a group of old soldiers. They were too spritely to have been in the Great War, so were either of the era of the Second World war or military service from some time after.

They looked a treat with their blue blazers bedecked with their decorations. Their berets were stamped with the insignia of their regiment.

Given their proud and impressive stance, I asked. “*Could I please take a photograph of you three old soldiers? You look very finely kitted out.*”

The silver haired soldier, with an imposing moustache, on the right said. “*Stuart and Tom, lets line up so this polite young chap can get a photo.*”

I snapped quick photo of this group of three old soldiers standing to attention in the cloth hall.

The middle fellow put out his hand and said. “*My name is Tom, on my right is Reg and on my left is Stuart.*”

In return I shook his hand and those of his comrades in turn. “*Pleased to meet you, my name is Evan.*”



Photo 17: Proud old soldiers in the Cloth Hall, Ypres.

Tom then enquired. “*I suppose with that accent you would have to be from Australia?*”

“*Yes, you have accurately divined my origins. I am from Adelaide in South Australia, to be exact.*” I replied.

“*So where do you all hail from?*” I asked in return.

Reg answered saying. “*We’re all Londoner’s but have served in the Devon Regiment at one or other times in the past. We are here on a regimental excursion for the retired to pay our respects to some of our forebears who were not quite so lucky.*”

Tom cheekily added. “*And to have a few quiet ales with our pals while we’re at it.*”

“*Well you are in the right place to do that. They have some great beers here in Belgium but you need to be careful, some have pretty decent kick to them.*” I replied with an air of assurance.

“*And what about you, laddie.*” Enquired Stuart.

“*Well, unfortunately our family has two members that are buried near Ypres. One is at Lijssenthoek, just outside Poperinge. The other is out at Passchendaele.*” I replied.

“*So they are not on the Menin Gate or on the wall at Tyne Cot then. In some ways your family is fortunate.*” Stuart commented pensively.

“*Yes, I suppose so, but unfortunate in other ways. We have quite a number of letters home from one of my great Uncles in particular. They make him appear a very interesting person and it would have been great to have had the chance to share his company.*” I replied wistfully.

“*There are many who would share those sentiments, laddie.*” Reg replied seriously.

Finally, Stuart questioned. “*Do you know about the Last Post service at the Menin Gate?*”

“*No, I do not.*” I replied.

"Well laddie, it is well worth attending if you can. The buglers from the Ypres fire brigade play the last post every night at 8.00pm sharp." Stuart informed.

"Thanks, I will look to be at the Menin Gate at 8.00m, then. Thanks." I replied.

"Do not be late, there is usually quite a crowd at the service." Stuart advised.

With that we bid each other good day and headed in our separate directions. I headed up to the 'In Flanders Fields Museum' for a quick look and to see if there was anything useful in the way of maps or other information available there.

The 'In Flanders Fields Museum' entry was at the other end of the building and on the next level. It was reached by climbing up three flights of stairs. At the top of the stairs there were a number of glass cases holding various pieces of soldiers equipment such as helmets, webbing belts, old rifles and spent bullets and artillery shells. There were also a number of mannequins dressed in the uniforms of the day from the various imperial forces, including an Australian soldier with his slouch hat.

There were also a large number of maps and photographs displayed on the wall. Some of the photographs I had seen before. These included a few famous photographs of the *Ypres* battle front by the Australian photographer, Frank Hurley. One photograph, showing an intersection of duck boards over the mud was interesting. This junction had a number of slim poles between which were hung reams of hessian. Here and there the hessian was torn by a shell. Presumably this was a device constructed to counter observation at an exposed and vulnerable junction.

As expected there were a few maps, particularly of *Ypres* that I picked up as they would probably be useful. There was also a brochure advertising the Last Post at the *Menin* Gate as Stuart had advised.

I decided to pass on entering the museum. I had a lot of riding to do to make my two primary objectives, *Lijssenthoek* and *Passchendaele*. The cycling route of approximately 70km is laid out on the map on the next page.

Turning on my heal, I retreated down the stairs, back along the Cloth Hall lower level and then out into the market square. I quickly skirted around the market and found my bike where I had left it.

The map of *Ypres* that I had got from the 'In Flanders Fields Museum' was as a step up in detail from what I had initially. Studying this new map, I plotted the best route to deliver me out towards *Poperinge*. This turned out to be deceptively simple. I just needed to go to the station end of the Cloth Hall, turn right, then take the second left. This would directly put me on *Poperingseweg*.

Unlocking the back wheel, I mounted the bike and headed off in this direction. After passing through a couple of round-abouts and over a canal I was onto *Poperingseweg*. The further in this direction I rode the less dense the housing appeared till I was riding into the farm land surrounding *Ypres*.

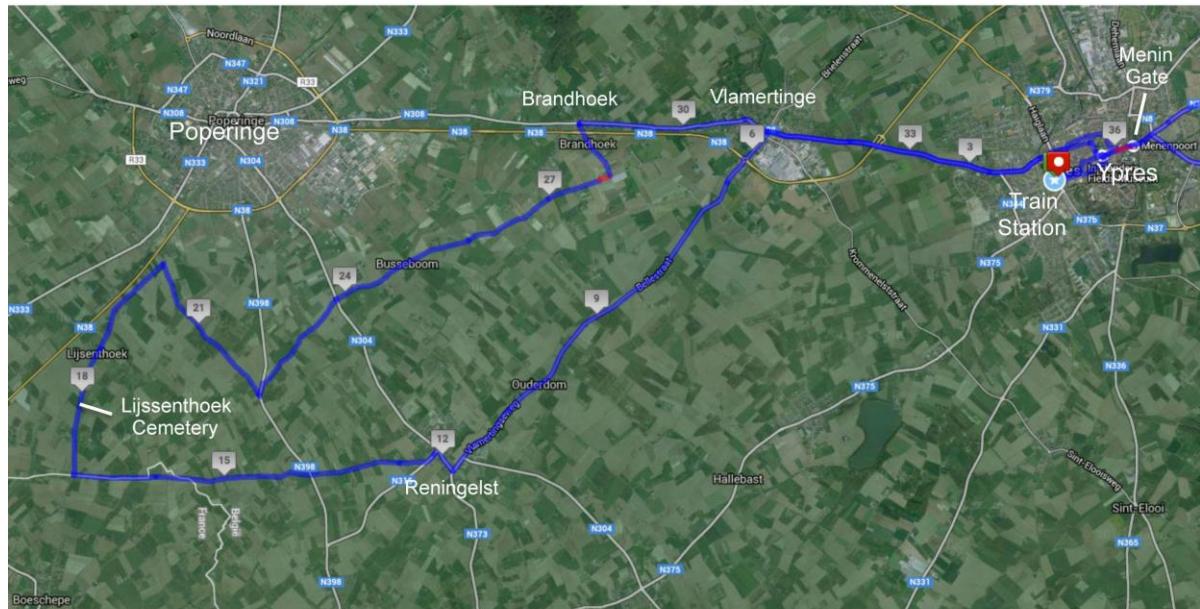
The cobbled streets also gave way to smoother bitumen and a proper bike path that flanked the road. Shear luxury.

At this point I did notice that my bike tyres that were comfortable on the cobbles did appear a little under inflated for a long road ride. This made it a somewhat harder than it should to peddle the bike along. Something that could be a bit of an issue later into the ride.

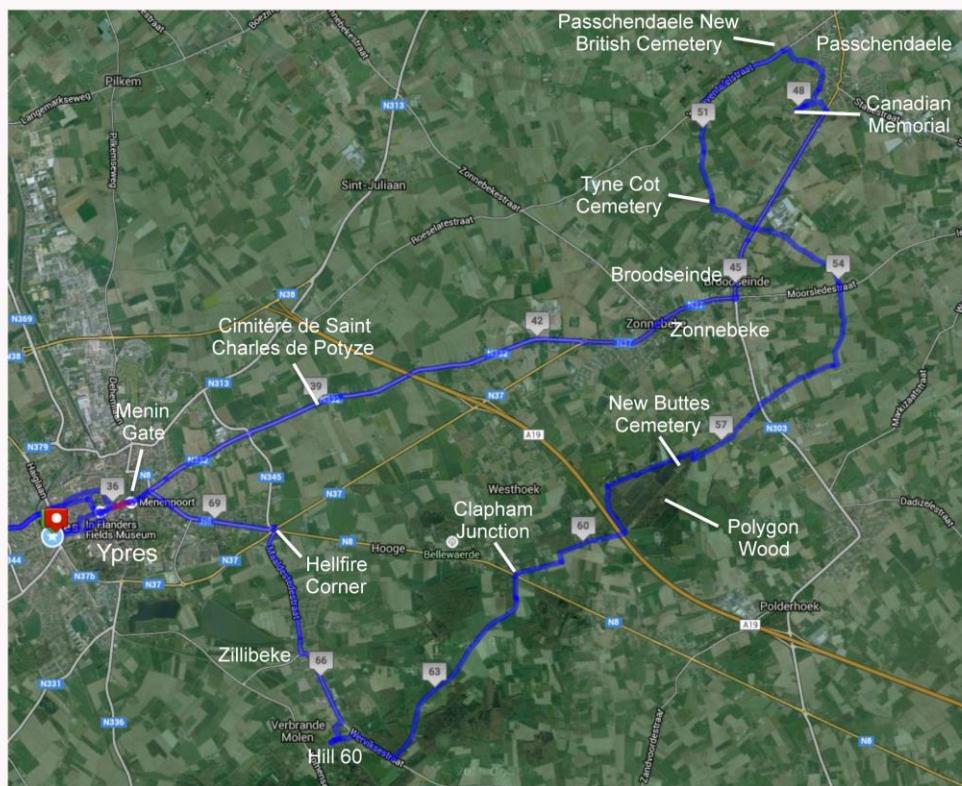
# Cycling Ypres/Ieper

(71.5 km, 299 m climbing)

## West towards Poperinge



## East towards Passchendaele



*Photo 18: Cycling route in Flanders, Ypres to Lijssenthoek back to Ypres, then to Zonnebeke, Passchendaele, Tyne Cot, Polygon Wood, Clapham Junction, Hill 60 and Menin Gate*

<http://www.mapmyride.com/routes/fullscreen/192610068/>

Passing the first farmhouse beyond the city limits of *Ypres*, the sun burst through the clouds. In the ploughed field on the opposite side of the road, the corn cotyledons were almost fluorescent. Sown in the field where they grew, row by row, plant by plant. Instead of a cemetery, they were new life and the promise for the coming and bountiful season.



*Photo 19: Spring emerges in field on Ypres-Poperinge Rd*

The scene in this field, the start of a new day, the promise of the new season, recommended Vaughan Williams' musical work 'The lark ascending' which was originally written in 1914, although not played publically until 1920. Shortly after in 1921 it was rescored for the solo violin and orchestra into the version that I am accustomed to. Williams himself was inspired to write this music by a poem of the same name, written by George Meredith in 1881.

**Music 13: 'The lark ascending,' Vaughan Williams.**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR2JIDnT2l8>

This scene, this music and theme further draws me to reinterpret this view though a passage from Shakespeare's '*Romeo and Juliet*'. So much the effect of looking out on a field while standing by a road.

***Extract from Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare***

**Juliet:** "Don't be afraid. That sound you heard was the nightingale. The lark sings in the morning, the nightingale sings at night. Nightingale, not the lark."

**Romeo:** "It was the lark, the bird that sings at dawn, not the nightingale. Look, my love, what are those streaks of light in the clouds parting in the east? Night is over, and day is coming. If I want to live, I must go. If I stay, I'll die."

## Chapter 17

**The mud is indescribable, though I have heard some excellent attempts at describing it from the men**

**France**

19<sup>th</sup> November 1916

Dear Albert -

As it is a good while since I wrote to you, here goes.

You seem to have done very well with the cattle. They must be very dear now.

I have not heard anything from Ken yet, but expect he will write when he gets over here.

We are having a bit of a spell now and it is very acceptable, the weather conditions are worse than the Germans and the mud is indescribable, though I have heard some excellent attempts at describing it from the men.

What sort of a time have you had lately - has it been very hot? I wouldn't mind if some of the heat was transported over here. It was snowing the other day but has not been too bad last week. Today is Saturday & we have to walk about 4 miles to a lecture.

On Wednesday I had a long walk to one of the large towns near here, about 15 miles altogether.

The old French woman in this billet is a hard case, she is about 80 & lives by herself, is a good old sort & told me her whole history the other night. I don't think she has ever been out of the village -

I must stop now.

Love to all

Your affectionate brother

Gerald

(Written from the training area near St Vaast, Northern France after time in the line at Gueudecourt. Probably walked to and from Hesdin.)

Lijssenthoek beckons, for Poperingseweg continuing to trail Ypres behind. Across the Ypres to Poperinge railway line and then through an underpass under a more senior road. It is then back into a town, Valamertinge, a satellite town of Ypres.

While riding along Poperingseweg in Valamertinge, another cyclist rode past me at an impressive speed. Following him along the road, I saw him pull up to a house no more than a block ahead.

Since my tyres are a somewhat under inflated, I figure this might be my chance to rectify the situation. Riding up to the house he entered, I see his bike is still leaning up against its side. Knocking on the door, the man I saw riding comes to the door.

I ask. "Hello, could I please borrow your pump?"

The rider looks at me blankly and shrugs his shoulders.

I regroup and try. "Bonjour, s'il vous plaît votre vélo pompe."

This I say while pointing at my bike and motioning a pumping action. This seems to do the trick and translates my message to him one way or another.

"Ok." He simply says to indicate an affirmative response to my request.

He disappears into his house again, returning with his bicycle pump.

I respond with. "*Merci monsieur, merci beaucoup.*"

He disappears back into the house again, shutting the door.

Gratefully, I pump up both tyres on my bike to a more suitable level of inflation for the day's ride.

I again knock on the door and hand back the pump to him with another round of. "*Merci monsieur, merci beaucoup.*"

I can now resume my cycling on the way towards *Poperinge* with less resistance.

In the centre of *Valamertinge* there is a significant intersection. The cross road leads off in a South Westerly direction towards *Reningelst*. This direction, along a smaller road will be most suitable because *Lijssenthoek* is also on the Southern side of *Poperinge*.

Once clear of the town of *Valamertinge*, the road is again verged by unfenced fields. Many have been ploughed to receive the seed of the new seasons crops. This leaves the edge with a luxuriant growth of grass right up to the side of the bitumen.

While peacefully riding down this road, I soon come across a sight that was familiar and that reminded me of home. It was a hop garden, like those tendered by Austen and Clive Evans in the 15 Mile Creek Valley. Granted, there were not the towering hills lining this valley, but this was very much a hop garden complete with poles and wires. The bines had been trained at some point in the last week to two weeks as the runners were only around 2 meters off the ground.

I wondered if Gerald had also seen these when he was in this area? Perhaps this area was too close to the war front so that the farmer was not cultivating their hop gardens at that time?



*Photo 20: Hop garden and cyclist bunch on road near Reningelst*

A little further again down this road, I came across a small peloton of road riders of varying ages. They must have been on their Saturday morning training ride. We each called our polite greetings as we passed. They all appeared very amicable with the shared enjoyment of bike riding. The flat country and lack of wind were most likely the assisting factors.

My bike was drawn on down this small road through the hamlet of *Ouderdom*. Again it was characteristically built in the red-brown brick of the region, relatively modern and well maintained with richly agricultural fields surrounding.

Fields past, *Reningelst* was the next town to pass through. Being somewhat larger in size it contained a basic shopping zone, but it contained nothing of interest or of immediate value to my expedition. *Reningelst* did however require a tricky zigzag route. Firstly, turning right onto a road signed with 6 km to *Poperinge*, followed by a left hand turn opposite an impressively large church, St Vedast's, towards *Westouter*. Although St Vedast's Catholic Church had been extensively damaged during the First World War, it was on land that was proudly never occupied by the Germans. Like many buildings in the area, it was of course rebuilt after the war.

The next right was a little more tricky as the road was not sign posted but it did lead through onto *Casselstraat* which would eventually lead me to *Lijssenthoek*. Looking over to my right, over a hedge, I noticed a familiar upturned sword-cross, the cross of sacrifice. This indicated the presence of another Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. In this case *Reningelst* New Military Cemetery. The Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery Commissions little dark green signs with white writing seemed to be everywhere in this area!

Riding along this quiet and narrow road, I began to be cognisant that at a number of the road intersections or even driveways on which a small construction was often placed. This structure might be in some cases, such as a drive way, be around the size of a large post box. At road



*Photo 21: Road side shrine near Reningelst*

intersections they tended to be somewhat larger, being about the size of a beach changing hut that I fondly remember seeing in my youth on Dendy St Beach in Melbourne. In the Summer holidays when I would often visit my Nan, this was my favourite beach to visit for a swim.

All these road side shrines had a cross on their outside, a door and a small devotee statue or Pietà. Often the statue was attended by flowers, that in most cases appeared fresh. It was clear the people in this area were pious and devout.

Ahead and in the distance lay a crescent of low lying hills, some partly tree covered. My map indicated that they were in the direction of *Boeschepe* and were on the other side of the Belgian-French border. It seemed like the *Casselstraat* criss-crossed the border and even ran along it for a time without my being particularly aware of it.

Cresting a small rise and entering a small hamlet, I recognized the right hand turn for *Boescheepsweg* that would take me to *Lijssenthoek*. Conveniently the corner was the site of a bar, Den Grooten Ozen. Here adorned with the legendary Belgian beer brand plaques of Leffe, Hoegaarden, Rodenbach and Stella Artois were posted on the sides of the bar. Unfortunately, it was not open at the time of my passing. The riding, so far, had built up a thirst for me that would have been well slaked with a glass of cool and tasty Hoegaarden!

As I travelled along *Boescheepsweg*, in the distance I could see a straight line of poplar trees. I had an apprehensive feeling that I was getting close to one of the goals of my quest, *Lijssenthoek* Military Cemetery.

Finding *Lijssenthoek* was just a matter of following the road to its logical conclusion.

The front fence of the cemetery was lined with a series of willows that wept over the fence from above the road. Along the fence itself, a muscular Wisteria vine trawled. It was old and had been on the wall for very many Springs. In May it was blooming so that the fence is a cascade of pale lilac flowers that also flowed out towards the road.

The main entry gate of *Lijssenthoek* Military Cemetery is monumental. Composed of white lime stone and red brick to form three sturdy ‘arches’, while a set of heavy iron gates keep watch on the entry. Inside a stainless steel plaque describes that this cemetery was once the site of a railway siding and large hospital. A standard, small brass doored cupboard, complete with a central Latin cross and brass handle, that contains the cemetery register that outlines the inventory of the burials. *Lijssenthoek* Military Cemetery was huge, listing the graves for the 9877 casualties from the battles of the First World War. As this was a hospital, most of the graves are identified.

Parents of these poor souls, this is the place of your despair and a place to weep. Very few of the parents of these soldiers would have had the opportunity to visit this place. Perhaps that was a good outcome. Certainly Gerald’s parents, John and Eleanor Evans never visited here from Australia after the war had ended. Such a visit would have just been too painful.

## Chapter 18

### As today is my birthday

*France*

*8<sup>th</sup> December 1916*

*My dear Mother -*

*As today is my birthday, think I had better write to you - I had my last birthday in Egypt and it was a bit warmer than this; however, I have a good camp and plenty of tucker today, so what more could a man wish for?*

*Alec Campbell has gone on some engineering job and will probably get his Captaincy out of it - They seem to have rejected a lot of the eligibles who were examined - I wonder why?*

*We had a sports meeting the other day. I competed in the football kicking but was out of form - we played the 7th Battalion and beat them easily - we had some very good men who were playing including several league players.*

*I have not heard from Ken yet. No doubt he is having a good old time in England. I don't think it will be too bad for the next couple of weeks if the weather doesn't go mad altogether.*

*I have not been able to get any cable forms lately so have not sent any to you, but will send one to you before Xmas - You will all be having a bonzer time then, I will be home for the next one, so it will be quite alright.*

*I must stop now, with love to all  
your loving son*

*Gerald*

*(written from the training area near St Vaast, Northern France, near Vimy and just North of Arras, after time in the line at Gueudecourt)*

Stepping out through the far side arch of the entrance arch saw the sun also burst out from behind a sheltering cloud. I stepped out from the shadow of desolation into its warming light. So too there was the touch of Spring on the trees. Be that of blossom, rose petals or the flush new seasons leaves. Birds also coursed the air, going unconstrained about their own directions.

Still this is a cemetery as I was quickly reminded by the grave stones that formed a corridor towards a copse of old cypress trees. They gathered around the low plinth monument that was the Stone of Remembrance, that itself is shaped like an alter or perhaps even an anonymous sarcophagus. This side was inscribed with the epitaph, '*Their Name Liveth Evermore*'. The opposite side is simply marked with '*Lest we Forget*'.

Outflanked by a sea of headstones it is difficult not to get lost either geographically or in despair. I was searching for row 19A. At the Evermore monument, I headed across the freshly mown grass towards the right and then down the second ride between the blocks of gravestones.

At this point and warming under the suns radiant heat my thoughts focussed on Youssou N'Dour's musing encouraging the youth of his country, Xale. Where the pizzicato cello soon metamorphoses into rhythmic bow strokes that in some ways reminded me of Elgar's Cello Concerto: Adagio Moderato movement. Certainly the English translation of N'Dour's Senegalese-French lyrics seem most appropriate for this moment in time.

**Music 14: 'Xale (Our Young People,' Youssou N'Dour,**  
[\*\*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-KaUI8AU84\*\*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-KaUI8AU84)  
**extract of lyrics.**

*Young people of our country  
 This is how I see it  
 Let's start by asking God  
 To accept our prayers  
 To bless all our endeavours  
 To shield us from the devil*

The scene of *Lijssenthoek Cemetery* had almost surrealistic overtones that Margarite would have been proud to brush. It had a lingering atmosphere that was unsettling and difficult to define. Walking over the closely mown grass, I pass gravestones, stencilled on the sides, at the top with 15A, 15B then 16G, 16H to 17 E, 18G and then finally row 19A. My feet were dragging, such a long way to walk, so many head stones. Row 19A stood on a broad ride between blocks 18 and 19. Further down the aisle and to the right was a significant tree which had completed its blossoming for the year.

Finding Gerald's grave it was just a matter of moving along until grave 11 was reached. On his Portland stone the insignia of the Australian Infantry Forces, the rising sun, topped a Latin cross, above the latter read:

*Captain  
 Gerald David Evans, M.C.  
 8<sup>th</sup> BN Australian INF.  
 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1917.*

Below the Latin cross was a personal dedication from my great Grandparents:

*The loved son of John  
 and Eleanor Evans  
 Greater love hath no man.*



*Photo 22: Captain D. Gerald Evans MC  
 (photo likely to have been taken at a professional studio in London)*

Below the dedication was a small clump of purple daisies, in freshly tilled grey earth, that completed the scene. Either side of Gerald's grave stone was a space. On the right was where a

comrade had been exhumed for some higher purpose. On the left was a small half space given in recognition of his rank as a commissioned officer.



*Photo 23: Lijssenthoek Cemetery, Plot 19, Row A, Grave 11  
Captain DG Evans MC*

From my backpack I extracted one of the small, poppyed, crosses purchased at *Longueval* and a bag of the red soil from Redcamp. The soil, sterilised in a microwave oven and dried in a convection oven, was sprinkled in a red sash on the grey earth in front of his grave stone. The cross was struck

into the soil to signify for a time that someone who had cared, a family member, had recently visited. Rest well Gerald.

The objective of this part of my expedition was now complete, it was time to settle down and reflect for a while. Again out from my trusty backpack, I withdrew my blue japara raincoat to sit on the moist grass beside Gerald's graveside. Also being 11.30am and after having had an early start to the day, it was also time to have lunch and who better to share it with than Gerald.

The sun continued to shine, warming my body and drying my clothes from the exertion of the ride from *Ypres*. In combination with the sunshine, the bread, cheese and terrine reinvigorated my body for the next part of my journey. The rice cake was the next component of my meal. As the stall proprietor had recommended, it was excellent. Finally, the melon, of which I ate half, was a revelation. Sweet, flavoursome and reinforcing, which explained their popularity in the *Ypres* market.

Time was passing and I now had to turn my attention towards Ken at *Passchendaele*. I got up, shook the crumbs off my japara towards the centre of the aisle, and then folded it back into my backpack. It was time to bid farewell. With my head bowed and in silence for about a minute, I regrouped my position.

Interestingly for such a large cemetery, I seemed to be the only visitor. The only others present were two gardeners going about their work towards the rear of the cemetery.

I retraced my steps back towards the cemetery gate. At the Stone of Remembrance, instead of turning towards the gate, I turned in the direction of the Cross of Sacrifice. It was in the *Poperinge* corner of the cemetery. In its plan the cemetery site was in a partial triangle so that the Cross of Sacrifice appeared to be like some sort of prow on a ship or perhaps even a stylised and simplified *Nike of Samothrace*? It faced to the West and ploughed towards the onward journey that I would be taking.

My return to the main gate was along the front wall of the cemetery. At even spaces along the wall the burly *Wisteria* vine was sustained as it clung over the wall. Just before the front gate there were a small section of German graves. Unlike the graves of the allied soldiers, only but a quarter was given to each. Each plot contained the graves of four German soldiers, presumably stacked one upon the other. The plain rectangular gravestones contained a simple list the names of the occupants of that plot.

In contrast, on the other side of the gate was a small set of French graves. Their graves were marked with a simple wooden cross with a brass plaque identifying the graves owner along with rank, decorations and other details.

No good or bad angles here, Pieter I Bruegal, just the cold bones of long dead soldiers. They all had died fighting for what they believed in and for their country. They are united, one and all, in the cold earth above which is an appropriately well tended garden. They are at least at peace now on the crick of a friendly country.

## Chapter 19

### Turkey & plum pudding, and a dry camp with a fire, so you could not wish for more

**France**

26<sup>th</sup> December 1916

My dear Father -

Your letter dated 29-10-16 arrived some days ago when I was on the front line. Since then we have come back a bit and spent Christmas day in comparative comfort, as we had a turkey & plum pudding, and a dry camp with a fire, so you could not wish for more -

Everything seemed to be going satisfactorily when you wrote, hope they continue to do so - you will be in the middle of harvest now and will be fairly busy being so shorthanded -

I received several papers this morning with three local papers amongst them - Some of the excuses for the exemption are pretty funny, I could not help laughing at Dan Byrne saying he was supporting his mother and sisters - The papers seem to be full of the Conscription business, and it seems remarkable that it should have been rejected with all the papers unanimously in favour of it- Parker Moloney should be put out on his head at the next election, but don't suppose he will be - I would like to have the crawler here, he would soon find out if men were wanted or not.

I saw Austin Mahoney today & have also seen Cliff Anderson several times.

I wonder what the result of all this peace talk will be? I don't think England will consider peace at present, as they could be hardly be very favourable to her under the present circumstances.

Have not heard from Ken lately.

Will stop now, with love to all  
your loving son

Gerald

(written from near Mametz, France just West of Albert)

Sitting on my own at the Lijssenthoek Cemetery gates, it is hard to know how I felt right now. I touch my face to make sure I can use my eyes to see. I can not afford to stay too long. Stretching my map, I decide to avoid the periphery of Poperinge and take a back road route. In this way I will end up close to where I started from, in Ypres.

It is now time to get on my way again, pushing hard on the pedals to get up the road. I take the second road on my right to lead me back on my exploratory route. The side road is little more than a track although it is roughly paved and is little wider than a single car. I suppose with the propensity for mud in this area, paving is almost obligatory, even for the smallest roads.

In the main the road appears to broadly roll on down 'hill'. It passes through varied prepared fields that have or are yet to be sown. There was also a hop garden or two along the way. Anywhere that has not gone under the plough was fertile and lushly green. This is rich and prosperous agricultural ground.

Always keeping Poperinge on my left flank, my route picks its way towards the Ypres-Poperinge Rd. Past isolated or groups of houses and the locality of Busseboom. Surprisingly, the odd more major intersection often yields to a small local bar. I suppose with the high yeasting beers that the

Belgians are so clearly fond, a short drive, cycle or walk to return home is almost obligatory after a night at the bar.

Not so far down the road from *Lijssenthoek*, I came across a garden that caught my eye. Perhaps it was the pale yellow flowers of an *Acacia* tree that reminded me of Australian wattles. Or it could have been the splash of red on its jutting corner. This was a very pretty garden, obviously with a gardener who cared a lot.

Regardless of why this particular garden had attracted my attention it created a pause in my journey. Dismounting my bike, I reached for my camera to take a picture.

In the throes of executing these actions, I looked up to see a woman of around 40 years standing watching me. She must have been in the garden tending it. She was of solid build, fair hair and a serene face. She was watching me inquisitively in sort of the way a possum does from a tree.



*Photo 24: Hop woman's garden near Lijssenthoek*

Looking up with slight embarrassment I said. “*Hello, you have a very pretty garden.*”

The woman just smiled and looked at me blankly, obviously not having much understanding English.

I then tried my fall back statement in French. “*Bonjour Madam, votre jardin le beau!*”

With this she smiled more broadly and tranquilly nodded.

I then requested politely. “*Prendre une photo, s'il vous plaît?*”

Again smiling she nodded her head in acceptance of my proposition.

She shyly stepped towards me and out of frame so that I could take my photo. In the bright sunlight it would surely be a good photo.

Once I had completed taking the photo, I put my camera back into my backpack.

I then said to the woman. “*Merci.*”

For good measure I put out my right hand to shake hers. In this she readily reciprocated. It surprised me as the surface of her hands felt like velvet and they were stained a slight yellow-green colour. Where had I felt skin like that?

Musing over this last thought, I mounted my bike and bid the woman. “*Au revoir.*”

Down the road a short distance, I looked back and thought, John Delany<sup>17</sup>! Her hands, she must have been training hops recently! This made sense in this area with all the recently trained hop gardens.

Finally, I rode left onto a small road that went in the direction of *Brandhoek*. Around this corner there were a large number of semi circular polyhouses and what looked like trellised apple trees. The main horticultural crop appeared to be cruciferous vegetables. This enterprise, with the aid of irrigation appeared to continue right up to the town of *Brandhoek*.

Riding through *Brandhoek*, Commonwealth War Graves Commission signs appear not just for one, but three *Brandhoek* Military Cemeteries. One of which I passed on my right before I passed the major *Nooderring Rd* to get to the *Poperingesweg* which was just on the other side past the railway track to *Poperinge*. Although there were bike lanes on the *Nooderring Rd*, I preferred the more genteel *Poperingesweg*.

A short way along this road I was again in the familiar territory of *Vlamertinghe*. It was then a simple matter of retracing my route from earlier in the day to reach the Centre of *Ypres* and then to the *Menin Gate*. Additionally, I now had the clock tower of the Cloth Hall in the distance to assist in guiding me along this route.

Eventually I passed through *Ypres* to the point that I rode to almost behind the Cloth Hall. This was after becoming acquainted once again with the cobbles of the streets of *Ypres*. The tighter tyres made the ride a little harsher than on the first passing.

Located on the corner was the St Georges Memorial Church. This Church of England Church was constructed between 1927 and 1929 as a living memorial to the sacrifice of the half million men of the allied armies that gave their lives during the First World War.

Entering the nave via a side door, the design was a simple Romanesque barrel with uncomplicated lead light and stain glass windows. The walls were covered in brass plaques, shoulder to shoulder, commemorating individuals, regiments or devotions from the towns or countries from which the soldiers had come from. From the side walls numerous flags of the nations and cities contributing soldiers were hung. The Australian and New Zealand flags were to the right of the alter, the Union Jack and the British air force flag to the left. All the colourful cushions on the pew seats were dedicated to a regiment. This was a very dignified remembrance.

Time to keep riding on. At the end of the Cloth Hall, the road veered left but being on a bike, I got off and walked through the cloisters of the Cloth Hall to gain access to the *Grote Markt*. The day’s market was in the throws of being packed up as it was around 1.30pm. Most of the remaining visitors and locals were now snuggly tucked into the bars and cafés flanking the market square. As such, it seemed as if there were far less people about.

Once I had ridden to the end of the square my objective, the *Menin Gate*, became visible. Riding pass numerous well patronised cafés and bars, the memorial was approached.

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<sup>17</sup> John Delany was from the Redcamp area and who I learned to train hops with. He was one of the hop trainers who did not use finger protection.

## Chapter 20

### Naturally it is wet and muddy here at present

*France*

*29th December 1916*

*My dear Father,*

*I was very glad to receive your letter dated Oct 29th which came to hand yesterday, also one from Minnie and I am very pleased to hear that all are well at home and the season is good.*

*I have now been over here about three weeks and am well. I have not seen any Victorians I know so far, no doubt I will see some any day now.*

*I received a letter from Gerald last night, he is well, I am posting a letter to him tonight.*

*Naturally it is wet and muddy here at present, but it isn't too bad, we have a dry place to sleep and enough to eat.*

*Give Minnie my love and tell her I received the wild flowers alright.*

*With fondest love to Mother and yourself.*

*Your affectionate son  
F Evans*

*51st Battalion  
B Company  
A.I.F*

The *Menin Gate* was a monumental structure that was not all that different, apart from scale, to the main gate at *Lijssenthoek Cemetery*. It had a similar configuration of white limestone and red brick, a central arch and two square side passages than ‘windows’. It was however substantially more grand, of course, being the memorial ‘listing the names of 54,896 men who were missing, in the period 1915 to August 1917 in the Ypres Salient, and who were denied by fortune an identified grave.’

The inside of the arch, had echoes of the ancient Pantheon of Rome. The ceiling was covered with tessellated rectangular coffers. Like the Pantheon, it too had an oculus or rather three oculi because the *Menin Gate* monument is a barrel arch rather than a dome. On its floor the cobbled road passed through the vault with chain-linked bollards guarding the side walks and for respectfully corralling the attendees of the Last Post ceremony.

It is on the walls, drawn up neatly in blocks of columns in order of regiment and rank, with names in alphabetical order, is a list the missing. Most of the flat vertical spaces are covered with these blocks of names. British, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Sth. African and others.

My father had requested that I take a photo of the inscription of one missing soldier in particular, Private Wilf Jarrett. This was a request from old Alb Jarrett who was Wilf’s younger brother. Alb lived over the hill from Redcamp in the King Valley and was a long time neighbour of the Evans family. He like most had never got the chance to visit *Ypres* and at over 90, he was never going to get that opportunity. Private Wilf Jarrett must has shifted to the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion from the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion as part of the expansion and rearrangements of the AIF in 1917.



Photo 25: The Menin Gate looking towards the Cloth Hall, Ypres

|                  |                          |                 |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| WRIGHT L.G.      | 27TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF. | PRIVATE         |
| SECOND LIEUT.    |                          |                 |
| ORGAN S.         |                          | ERIKSSON J.H.   |
| SERJEANT         |                          | FISHER H.J.     |
| JOHNSON L.A.M.M. |                          | FLEMING D.H.    |
| LACKMAN A.H.     |                          | FROST A.J.      |
| ROYALS W.H.M.M.  |                          | GEE G.T.        |
| LANCE SERJEANT   |                          | GILBERT B.W.    |
| PILGRIM M.J.     |                          | GREEN W.S.V.    |
| CORPORAL         |                          | HALL G.G.       |
| EDWARDS P.G.     |                          | HARDING F.W.    |
| HENDRY J.N.      |                          | HARRIS H.       |
| MULLIN E.        |                          | HARVEY E.L.G.   |
| SILL A.          |                          | HARVEY W.H.     |
| LANCE CORPORAL   |                          | HAWSON G.S.     |
| CHALONER T.      |                          | HILLS W.G.      |
| COGHILL R.       |                          | JARRETT W.T.    |
| EGHLINTON C.R.   |                          | JOHNSON M.J.    |
| LAMB R.H.        |                          | JONES G.R.      |
| NORMAN M.W.      |                          | JONES H.O.      |
| SPARKS C.R.      |                          | KENNY W.        |
| TREBILCOCK F.H.  |                          | LOVEDAY S.A.    |
|                  |                          | MCDONALD H.A.   |
|                  |                          | MCLAUGHLIN A.J. |
|                  |                          | MADDISON W.S.   |
|                  |                          | MAYBERRY J.S.   |

Panel, missing of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion  
AIF including Pte. WT Jarrett

In the middle of the vault, there are two narrow archways on either side accompanied by staircases. The passage on the left, when looking out towards *Passchendaele*, is where there is a scaffold for placing wreaths at the nightly Last Post ceremonies. It was on this side that WT Jarrett's name is inscribed on the monument. Up this short flight of stairs and to the left, and on the right hand wall. I dutifully took a picture for Alb of his older brother's name.

Moving up the stairs further, past more regiments and names, I eventually came to the top of the monument. The *Menin Gate*, befitting it past associations was embedded into the old ramparts wall of the *Ypres*. On top it was grassed with trees and a bike path that lined the centre of the wall between two low stone fences. Passing through the top of the *Menin Gate* structure, via a walkway, brought me to the other side of the gate. Here a green with white writing sign potentially directs the curious or the connected through to the Ramparts Cemetery which is a short walk along the ramparts, and just beyond the Lille Gate. Here a further 198 graves lie in a picturesque position.

Walking across to the outer side of the wall, and directly at the bottom was a moat befitting such a medieval fortification. Beyond the moat and over the top of houses and businesses, the *Ypres* Salient beckoned.

Having recognized the *Menin Gate* for the evening, my present duties were acquitted for now. It was time to pass through and travel in the direction of *Passchendaele*. Like those of an earlier time. I mounted my bike and rode through with some foreboding of what I might encounter on the other side.

Those of that earlier time who would have marched out in hope and then hoped to return in despair. This emotional balance was captured best by bitter misgivings of the great first World War soldier poet, Siegfried Sassoon.

*Extract from "On Passing the New Menin Gate" by Siegfried Sassoon*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6-AGRaLCFI>

*Who will remember, passing through this Gate,  
 the unheroic dead who fed the guns?  
 Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate, -  
 Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?*

## Chapter 21

### I had some great fun at the riding lesson

*France*

7-1-17

*My dear Mother-*

*Don't think I have written to you since Xmas day so here goes - Am at present at an Army School of Instruction for five weeks, which is rather a chuck in at this time of year; as I have a good bed and comfortable room, besides the school is really a good one.*

*The work is pretty constant and covers nearly everything. I had a lesson in riding the other day and we have another tomorrow at 7.45, rather early at this time of year. There are a lot of English officers here and one of them said this morning "I do detest early morning riding, it makes me positively sick". I had some great fun at the riding lesson, don't think some of them had ever seen a horse before except in pictures. You must excuse the writing but my hands are jolly cold.*

*This afternoon I am to play in the Hockey match, they wanted to make another team and as they said I could kick, hit or anything I thought the chance was too good to miss -*

*I see in "The Times" this morning that I have been "Mentioned in Dispatches" in the New Years Honours list. It is not much when you see all the Military Crosses kicking about but I suppose it is something. Suppose this was for the raid I took part in -*

*So love to all  
Your loving son  
Gerald*

*(written from Buire, France, between Albert and Corby)*

My cycling journey was most likely to result in my safe return. The only danger was from motor vehicles not proceeding with due care. Belgian law is such that in the case of collision with a cyclist, the onus was on the motor vehicle driver to prove why they could not avoid hitting the cyclist, rather than the apparent reverse application of the law in Australia. Not surprisingly, the motorists tended to be very careful about the welfare of cyclists. It was a refreshing attitude compared to Australia and I very much appreciated this legal perspective.

Heading straight out along the *Zonnebeeksweg* was the most direct route to *Passchendaele*. The road, although busy, had a bike lane with a good surface. It passed many shops, offices and apartment buildings, many built in the all too familiar red-brown brick with red terracotta tiled roofs but with more variations than I had seen in previous towns. *Ypres* was undoubtedly a prosperous town.

The road was otherwise relatively flat and unremarkable. Regularly, the familiar dark green and white written signs appeared along the route, with even more regularity than on the *Poperinge* side of *Ypres*. Gradually the density of building decreased from tenements to semi-detachment to predominantly detached houses. After an appropriate distance travelled down the road, it got to the point where agricultural fields began to intervene.

Entering the *Potyze* locality, a round-about with a small sculpture of what looks like a pestle, as in mortar and pestle, on a pedestal in the centre of the round-about. This would be appropriate given the area that I am heading into. However, later inquiries suggest that it maybe a model of a small jar used to preserve or store snuff.

Either way, the sculpture was quite apt as a description of many of the battles in the *Ypres* salient, particularly the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of *Ypres*, where more than half a million men on both sides died and were ground into the mud for a paltry gain of just 8 km. It was in this battle that names such as *Zonnebeke* Farm, *Broodsiende*, *Polygon Wood*, *Tyne Cot* and *Passchendaele* became synonymous with pointless butchery and flagrant waste of life. These gains were essentially reversed by the German counter attack in the Spring of 1918.

Approaching *St Charles de Potyze* Cemetery, agriculture again began to more fully take over from housing. The road was at last starting to feel less claustrophobic. That changed once the cemetery was reached. A veritable forest of French grave crosses, were neatly laid out in order row by row, block by block. Again, the number was almost overwhelming. No graves of the Unknown Soldier for the French. After the war most of the graves of unidentified French soldiers were exhumed and reinterred in the ossuary at *Le Mont-Kemmel*.



*Photo 26: Memorial to French Soldiers at St Charles de Potyze*

A Breton pietà has been stationed at the front and centre in this cemetery. It is a pitiful sight. Mary and Joseph attempt to take some of the weight from the dead Christ, while at the foot of the cross women grieve over their soldier husbands, sons and brothers who were killed in action.

Entering this hard fought over area, my mind descends towards Philip Glass's 'Koyaanisqatsi' which best matches the mood of the history of this area. Music that was composed by Glass from the inspiration of the Native American Hopi Indian prophesies that ruminate on their version of the apocalypse. The music and translated words appropriately match this area and the direction I am heading.

This earth has been dug by artillery and ashes have been flung that have burnt this land with invited disaster. Mothers weep your eyes, for you know where your precious sons lie. My heart weeps in unison with yours, ye parents who yaw from a far. Light little candles in those hollows of your cathedrals in care.

***Music 15: 'Koyaanisqatsi.' Philip Glass & Philip Glass Ensemble***

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6Il58Ln4cI>**

***Translation of Hopi Indian Prophesies upon which Koyaanisqatsi was inspired***

***"If we dig precious things from the land, we will invite disaster."***

***"Near the day of Purification, there will be cobwebs spun back and forth in the sky."***

***"A container of ashes might one day be thrown from the sky, which could burn the land and boil the oceans."***

I think these verses probably summed up the conditions that were created during the third battle of Ypres very well. Instead of digging up, it was more the burying of precious lives that was the invited disaster. Although the oceans in this land were of mud. Certainly the Armageddon that was unleashed would not have been out of place with the imaginations of Pieter I Brueghel or Hieronymus Bosch, with their apocalyptic visions, inspired by the ravages of the plague, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The good and bad angles, grubs, grotesques and other fell creatures that befell this ground are at least gone, but their legacy remains.

## Chapter 22

### Some grand fellows in my Battalion and it is almost worth going to war to know them

France

15-2-17

My dear Minnie -

I will be leaving here in a very few days and have had quite an enjoyable time, and though the weather has been cold and the frosting hours fairly long, it has been a jolly good change and rest -

We have had some good sport such as wrestling, Tug of war and musical chairs on horse back, and Boxing. I am boxing in the officer's heavy weight class and have won twice. I am in the finals tomorrow night and think I have a fair chance of winning.

I will not be sorry to get back to the Battalion, as it becomes quite like home and one misses everything that is going on there. There are some grand fellows in my Battalion and it is almost worth going to war to know them.

I have now arrived back in the Battalion since this letter and have been put in Command of a Company again.

We have not had any rain for about a month but it has frozen pretty hard and fairly cold on the hands and feet, but is preferable to the mud. I have not seen Ken yet but may run across him any day if he is back with his Battalion, I hope I do.

I see the Safety filly had bad luck. I reckon the Evans' should give up racing.

I have not heard from the Turtle Doves lately, hope they are looking alright.

Love to all  
Your loving brother  
Gerald

(written Flers-sur-Noye, France, South of Ameins and Sth West of Albert)

These days before entering Zonnebeke, a large freeway has to be crossed by over-pass. By the time I am entering the outskirts of Zonnebeke, my water bottle was all but exhausted from the day's exertions. I am going to need a refill.

Passing some houses, on the right hand side of the road, I notice a prime mover truck and a family tending to it, washing it down.

This should be my opportunity to refill my drink bottle.

Pulling over to the side of the road and into the family's driveway, I approach, the most senior male, and most likely father of the family to ask slowly. "Could I please fill my water bottle?"

The man replies, nodding. "Yes, that is possible."

While his children and wife look on in interest to this interruption to their day's chores.

I respond. "Thank you. Some tap water would be great."

"No, it would be better to have some water from the house." He instructed with conviction.

He summoned his wife, and spoke rapidly to her in Flemish. Taking my water bottle, she dutifully disappears into the house to fill my water bottle.

He casually asks. "How far have you ridden today?"

"I started in Ypres this morning and then rode out to Poperinge. Then I rode via the Grote Markt to the Menin Gate and then to here." I answered.

"That is a good ride. Where are you riding too now?" He further continued in his inquiry.

By his demeanour, I suspected he knew what I was about to say.

"I am going out to Passchendaele then back to Ypres."

"You have family out at Passchendaele?" He stated with increasing conviction.

"Yes, you are correct. One great uncle buried at Passchendaele New British Cemetery." I replied.

He nodded in satisfaction at the accuracy of his judgement.

"You are Australian?" He continued to directly question.

"Yes, you are correct, I live in Adelaide South Australia, but my family came from North Eastern Victoria." I continued.

He nodded with grim satisfaction again. "If you have time you may find Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is close to Passchendaele, it would be worth you visiting. There is a big memorial to the Australians there."

At this point, his wife came out of their house with my water bottle and handed it to me.

"Thank you very much for the water." I said to her and took a small sip from the bottle.

I bid the family good bye in return for the water, advice and expressions for a good journey.

Four sets of eyes watched me as I mounted my bike, and began riding up the road.

After two more sets of round-abouts and the centre of Zonnebeke I came to a park entrance near its centre. The park was in the shadow of a tall but unremarkable campanile-like, brick clock-church tower. The entrance was book ended by two concrete components from a blockhouse that had gun loops incorporated in the blocks.

I was curious.

Riding quietly through the gate on a gravel path, it was obvious that this particular park was of special interest. The park was leafy and well tended. The path soon came to a small lake with an island at one end. On the other side of the lake was a grand house. This was probably the rebuilt Zonnebeke Chateaux which was a key corner in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres. All the buildings and trees

around here had been flattened by artillery but time was a good healer. Although this park was well cared for and tranquil, it still had an uncomfortable ambience, with sinister echoes of that earlier time.

It was somewhere in this vicinity, between *Zonnebeke* and *Broodseinde*, that Ken was killed. The field reports say that Lance Corporal L. Raemers, Sig. Frank Evans and Infantryman Kennedy, all from the 51<sup>st</sup> Battalion, were “killed outright” when directly hit by a shell just as they were moving up into the front line to relieve another Battalion on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1917. At the time they were buried in the field as the front line advanced. After the war Ken’s lot was to be moved to *Passchendaele* New British Cemetery. We are probably very fortunate that his grave remained identified as with many of these battlefield cemeteries, the identity of those buried was often lost as the frontline moved backwards and forwards.

I wonder if Ken knew that his brother Gerald had been killed 3 weeks earlier?

I wheeled my bike around and headed for the exit. Time to get moving up the road to *Passchendaele*. The next major locality on my trek was forebodingly named *Broodseinde*. This was approached after turning left, off the *Roselare/Moorslede* Rd, following the signs to *Passchendaele*. The road appeared to follow a low ridge in that direction. After *Broodseinde*, the density of houses seemed to diminish so that the view off the ridge over the agricultural land presented itself frequently.

## Chapter 23

### A decided treat after the eternal trench business

*France*

30-3-17

*My dear Evan,  
As the mail is closing today, I am endeavouring to make up for my slackness of late-*

*You seem to have been getting some good prices for cattle again, and suppose you will want them with all the war prices -*

*You will see by the newspapers that events have been moving rather rapidly on this side of the globe and I really think we can look for even stranger happenings in the near future - The Russian Revolution may prove a blessing in disguise, at least I hope so, while I think the German retreat on this front has got the best of them thinking very hard. It has certainly made the warfare more interesting and open which is a decided treat after the eternal trench business.*

*As I told the others, I have seen Ken, who is looking awfully well and seems to like the life - I have decided to get him to come to this Battalion, if he will come -*

*Had a letter from Carrie today letting me know all the news about Red X etc. She must have a busy time with all the funds and so on - The comfort funds have been doing good work here lately, by supporting coffee and soup for the men going to and from the trenches, and it has been very acceptable indeed.*

*I had a game of football for my Company & we won the Battalion competition. Roy Kennedy of Milawa was playing against me. It took several days to recover from my exertions -*

*Will write to someone else at home by this mail  
love to all  
Gerald*

*(written from near Dernacourt, France, South of Ameins and Sth West of Albert)*

Gradually in the distance along this straight road, the silhouette of the *Passchendaele* church and its clock tower became obvious. Once into *Passchendaele* Village, directions from a green sign and a series of left hand turns, I end up at the area called Crest Farm. Crest Farm and then *Passchendaele* ridge itself were captured by the Canadian Corps over 23 days between October 26<sup>th</sup> and November 19<sup>th</sup> 1917. This cost the Canadians 15,654 casualties of which more than 4,000 died. As such, it is very appropriate that there should be a Canadian Memorial here.

From the memorial grounds, an excellent view is provided over the low valley and gentle rise to the *Passchendaele* ridge. How could such a bucolic scene have ground men so thoroughly back then? It was here that Haig's pestle found the bottom of Ludendorff's mortar in the Autumn of 1917.

The rain and artillery made the approaches to the ridge into a quagmire. It was reported that men were literally swallowed in this mud and drowned. Some soldiers told stories of the mud literally sucking men into their deaths when they slipped off the duck-boards. One first hand account, by *Major George Wade*, described a supply detachment that disappeared in the quicksand like mud. All that remained on the surface was one dead arm still grasping for air and holding a water container. This correspondent also commented that this sight was less distressing than those who had died in the mud but their faces were still visible above the surface.



*Photo 27: View from to Passchendaele Ridge and Passchendaele New British Cemetery from the Memorial Canadian*

As the cloud increases to darken the sky, the scene recollects Bob Dylan's song '*All along the watchtower*', as performed by Jimi Hendrix. This would appear to be the most appropriate music to accompany this scene. Hendrix's booming guitar, and accompanying bass captures the mood, the anger of the situation and the futility of the scene.

**Music 15: 'All Along The Watchtower' by Bob Dylan as performed by Jimi Hendrix (extract)**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4\\_xaYynY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4_xaYynY)

*"There must be some way out of here" said the joker to the thief  
"There's too much confusion", I can't get no relief  
Generals, they drink my wine, artillerymen dig my earth  
None of them along the line know what any of it is worth.  
(with two adaptions from the original lyrics in blue and underlined)*

On *Passchendaele* ridge opposite, there are two braces of three poplars. In front of the poplars a white monumental fence can be seen. This will be *Passchendaele* New British Cemetery and where Ken awaits.

**Recommendation for Mentioned in Dispatches**

**Lieutenant DG Evans, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1917**

*A highly competent and efficient officer, who since joining the battalion 18 months ago, has done a splendid work and shown initiative and great ability as a leader. His work as a leader of raiding parties has always been gallant. His calmness and courage had at all times given great confidence to men under him. He is most reliable, and his work has been consistently good and well worthy of recognition.*

## Chapter 24

### The soldiers are all tired of this war & that is putting it very mildly

*France*

*April 16<sup>th</sup> 1917*

*My dearest Minnie,*

*I received two letters from you yesterday & was very glad to get them,  
it is very good of you to write so often.*

*I received a note from Gerald yesterday he is well, no doubt you have  
received a letter from me saying that I had seen him about three weeks  
ago & he was looking very well. I was very pleased to see him as I was  
always wishing to catch up with him*

*The soldiers are all tired of this war & that is putting it very mildly.  
I am very glad Evan was turned down. The weather is still bad and there  
has been a lot of snow this month. We are resting now and have been out  
of the line for a week.*

*Tell Mary I did not meet any girls in England, was only there for three  
weeks.*

*With much love to Mother, Father and yourself  
Your loving Bro  
Ken*

*F Evans*

*Please excuse writing, hands cold.*

Gathering my bike, it was time to go to Ken.

My route followed the streets around the head of the valley skirting the lower edge of the now reconstructed *Passchendaele* village. From time to time the poplars of *Passchendaele* New British Cemetery come into view to provide assurance that I was pedalling in the right direction.

Finally, on *Vierde Regiment Karabiniersstraat*, I rode down towards the bottom of the valley and they up the gentle incline to *Passchendaele* ridge. It was not that difficult and did not even require the shifting down a gear on the bike. The field on the left is in grassy fallow while the field on the right has been planted with wheat that is at the tillering stage of growth.

A left hand-turn onto 's *Graventafelstraat* and *Passchendaele* New British Cemetery is contacted. The front of the cemetery gates presents as two squat block house like buildings made of Portland Stone. They are linked by stone fence, of the same, with barred sections alternating with stone sections. Directly behind this fence, and in the middle, is a podium for the Cross of Sacrifice which is led over a grassed section to the Stone of Remembrance. The prominent two groups of three poplars were at the back wall and on the lowest of the three levels of the cemetery.

Entry to the cemetery was through a single iron gate in the nearest of the two fence memorial buildings. The register of graves is accessed by crossing the stone causeway, past the Cross of Sacrifice, to the second memorial building. The description of the area on a stainless steel plaque conceded that there were 2101 burials of which an incredibly high 1600 were Known unto God.

One of the known burials was Private Francis (Ken) Evans. His grave was located on the second level and half way down, on the left hand side. For the moment, the clouds had increased in density and the sun was well hidden. It even felt as if the clouds were considering discharging some rain. Walking down the central ride, down to the lower levels of cemetery drew my mind towards Catpower's song '*Cross bones style*' as it seemed most appropriate for this moment in time.

**Music 17: ‘Cross bones style’ by Catpower (extract)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU29IyKCbBE>

*Oh how time flies  
With crystal clear eyes  
And cold as cold  
When you're ending with diamond eyes*

*Oh come child  
In a cross bones style  
Oh come child  
Come and rescue me*

*Cause you have seen some unbelievable things*

Walking quietly over the grass down the central ride, I descend the step and proceed left to Ken’s grave. In plot 13, at the beginning of the row A, grave 30 is present and correct. On Ken’s Portland stone was also the insignia of the Australian Infantry Forces, the rising sun, topped a Latin cross above which read:

*2399 Private  
F. Evans  
51<sup>st</sup> BN Australian INF.  
13<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 Age 33*

Below the Latin cross was the personal dedication from my great Grandparents:

*The loved son of  
John & Eleanor Evans*



*Photo 28: Private Francis Evans  
(photo likely to be taken at a professional studio in London)*



Photo 29: Passchendaele New British Cemetery, Plot 13, Row A, Grave 30, Private F Evans

Again, I unhitched my backpack and extracted a small bag of Redcamp soil and a small wooden Longueval cross. I spread the soil in front of the base of Ken's gravestone. The soil in Passchendaele was rich and fertile black in colour, so the red soil from home contrasted mightily.

The cross was also planted in the soil in front of the gravestone to mark the attendance of someone from home.

From my backpack I also extracted the Belgian waffle I had purchased earlier in the day at the market. Its lightly sweet taste, combined with the coffer-like waffle was a perfect pick me up at this point in my journey.

Turning in a circle, I could survey the country side out beyond the poplars. This higher ground was not really that much higher than what lay beyond.

Looking at the other grave stones, so many were marked as Australian, British, Canadian or just Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God. It was distressing to see this and think of all those families that did not have the option of visiting a specific grave of their family members. I now fully understood Evelyn's and the old soldiers from the *Ypres Cloth Hall* sentiments, that our family was indeed fortunate to know where both our family members were buried.

Picking up my bag and slinging it over my shoulder, it was now time to move on. The last act of filial respect was to face Ken's grave and bow my head in a minute's silence and reflection, at the foot of Ken's grave.

## Chapter 25

### We caught a hare yesterday & didn't forget to cook it

*France*

1-5-17

*Dear Father-*

*Your letter 26-2-17 arrived a week ago with several others from home. You are lucky having a good season and appear to be going to have a good Autumn.*

*The weather was delightful here the last few days and the mud and rain of Winter seems hard to believe -*

*We have had a very busy time during the last fortnight but have had an easy time in the last few days -*

*Am sorry to say that Alec Campbell was badly hit but is progressing well -*

*We caught a hare yesterday & didn't forget to cook it, there are plenty of partridges about here too but they are hard to get.*

*They are taking a long time to win a race with the Safety fillies, about time we gave up racing -*

*Have had a couple of letters from Ken, he is getting on alright but does not intend to come to this Battalion.*

*Love to all  
Your loving son  
Gerald*

*(written from M orchies, France, which is North of Baupaume and South of Bullecourt. Shortly after the on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, Gerald went to the front for 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Bullecourt which is where he won his MC.)*

My specific objectives had been achieved and my duties had been done. It was now time to make my way back to Ypres. However, I remembered the advice from the trucking family in Zonnebeke that Tyne Cot Cemetery was a worthy place to visit. My map showed that Tyne Cot was also not far from Passchendaele New British Cemetery. Thus I continued riding along the road along Passchendaele ridge, the road that went past the cemetery, until the intersection with the conveniently named *Tynecotstraat*, for a simple left-hand turn.

*Tynecotstraat*, was a breeze because it presented a gentle but long coast, almost until Tyne Cot Cemetery, that was essentially on the valley floor. There was a certain odour in the air which suggested that there were piggeries in this area. A particularly smelly muck-out from the sty's, that lay near the road, confirmed the source of the odour. Otherwise the area was being heavily cropped and was clearly very productive agricultural land. In the distance the tell tale sign of a group of poplar trees indicated the presence of the next intended cemetery. Once over a small rise and around a corner, Tyne Cot Cemetery came clearly into view.



*Photo 30: Main gate Tyne Cot Cemetery. The wall of the missing, at the rear contains the names of 34,984 men missing from 17<sup>th</sup> August 1917 to Armistice day 1918.*

Riding past the white capped, dark-stone and conglomerate-like fence, it became obvious that the poplars surrounded two square, ugly concrete bunkers. One at either side of the cemetery. The gateway into the cemetery was inset into a shallow crescent. Looking through the centre of the gate a memorial, holding the Cross of Sacrifice was evident. Consulting the cemetery register from behind its brass door it was clear that this was a huge cemetery with 11,956 graves. This made Tyne Cot the largest Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in the world. Regretfully, 8,369 of the graves were identified as 'Known unto God'.

Through the arch into Tyne Cot Cemetery I walked straight up the central ride to the Cross of Sacrifice. The Cross and its pedestal sit on a German Bunker that the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division captured on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1917. Two other bunkers still present, were also part of a German defensive complex of six, that were all captured on the same day by the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. The central bunker was particularly large, so it was used as a first aid station soon after its capture. Within a two days of capture the first of 343 original burials around the bunker were made. These burials can easily be distinguished as they are less regimented in their placing and they encompass the Cross of Sacrifice. The remainder of the burials were made after the Armistice as a number of smaller front line cemeteries in the area were consolidated into Tyne Cot.

After the war the bunker was modified into a memorial to the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, reputedly on the suggestion of King George V. The King made a well publicised visit to France and Belgium in

1922 to inspect the Commonwealth War Graves Commissions work. In a speech he was reported to say.

*We can truly say that the whole circuit of the Earth is girdled with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.*

— King George V, 11 May 1922

Proceeding beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division monument, I was drawn up and over a low parapet to the Stone of Remembrance. It sits in the middle of a large crescent that is bordered by a wall. It is on this wall that the names of the nearly 35,000 men missing from 17<sup>th</sup> August 1917 to Armistice day 1918, are recorded on the stone. This is the ‘younger’ sibling to the list on the Menin Gate.

I was repulsed by this concave shield containing so many names with unknown graves. Daunted, I headed back towards the front of the cemetery by selecting a ride that would take me past one of the remaining bunkers at the front of the cemetery. There is rightly no way of entry into the bunker. As it is, the small rectangular holes or loops at its front enable part of the dark interior to be penetrated. It would have been through these holes that the bunker defenders would have pointed their rifles and machine guns. The ferocity of the fighting was evident on the rough concrete of the bunker around the loops which had been abraded and enlarged by the fighting.

Now moving back towards the front gate along a wide grassy ride, parallel with the road, the scene in front of the cemetery was at peace and agriculturally fecund. Just a single row of grave stones up against the front fence reiterates that you are inside a war cemetery.

## Chapter 26

### Somehow I don't feel inclined to write today

*France*

20-5-17

*My dear Mother-*

*My letters my have been a bit irregular lately, owing to fewer opportunities of writing. We have been having a fairly busy time and one gets out of the way of writing.*

*The Germans are getting pretty desperate now and I see the Commander in Chief say we may finish the war this year -*

*How are my horses getting on? I have been riding a bit lately and quite enjoyed it. I will send another cable soon as the other may not reach you & I will probably be reported wounded but I am quite alright and may get some promotion out of it.*

*Somehow I don't feel inclined to write today so will ring off and write again when I feel more like it.*

*So love to all*

*Your loving son*

*Gerald*

*(written just after Bullecourt where Gerald won his MC)*

I know what you were feeling Gerald, because it is in my mind too.

I can imagine, what it was like for you growing up on Redcamp as a boy. There were cattle, sheep and maybe pigs to tend. One of my father's favourite farming axioms is, '*where ever you have livestock, you have dead stock*'. It is a fundamental truth of farming livestock.

The unintended loss of livestock can result from a number of natural factors including difficulty in birth, injury or disease. These day's modern interventions such as drenches, vaccines and veterinary assistance are better than what was available in your time, so losses and stock welfare have improved, but not completely. Nature is a powerful force. As was then, and is so now, sometimes the rifle has to be the priest to avoid unwarranted suffering for the animal.

In your time in particular, some of the livestock would also end up on the dinner plate. Quite a contrast for most people these days, where meat typically comes wrapped in plastic, and on a foam tray. Regardless of the time, someone has to slaughter the beast and prepare it so it can be used to feed our family. As you grew up, your father like mine, would have taught you how to despatch a beast with the minimum of travail to the animal. This is fitting, as all good farmer's respect and revere the stock they raise. Farmers need to, as their stock feeds them one way or another, for that is the purpose for which they are raised.

Perhaps more like war, farming also requires eradication of excessive number of pest species. This would include rabbits, foxes, roos and wild dogs. Like you I have shot my share of rabbits, roos and foxes. Some of them were used for the table, others as dog food but the remainder and majority, purely for the eradication of a pest. The eradication methods may have included poison baits, traps, shooting or just rounding up against a fence as during the rabbit plagues around the time of Australian Federation. At times the rabbit or fox may suffer some pain in a trap or from shot that did not kill them outright. However, where possible a follow up stretching of the neck for rabbits around a knee, or a blow or shot to the head was quickly administered to avoid undue suffering of larger pest animals.

These actions are something that just have be done. It makes no difference if you like doing these duties or not, it does not change anything.

Were these experiences for you some preparation for modern industrial warfare? To some extent I expect yes, but in so many ways no. I suppose in this regard you would have at least been better prepared than your mates from Australia's towns and cities.

Unlike you, I have been fortunate in my life that I have never personally had to go to war. This is the bounty that I have received from your service and sacrifice, and that of countless other Australian military personnel across the past century. I respect it.

But something happened during the Second Battle of *Bullecourt*, didn't it? What was it? The loss of a close friend, the savagery of the fighting, the killing of Germans at close quarters rather than from a distance, a German you killed in the heat of battle who took time to die, or was it the things you found in one of your dead enemy's pockets. As you were instructed, you would have been looking for intelligence in the pockets of a dead foe. Was it that you opened up a wallet and found a picture of a mother, a child, a family or a wife?

Perhaps you realised that the men you were fighting against were little different to yourself. Human beings trying to do their best for their country, trying to do what was right. All were being let down by their monarchs, generals and politicians. For war is always the hallmark of political failure. Politics and diplomacy properly practiced is the art of compromise, so that war should never be consummated.

Maybe it was just the cumulative sum of all these experiences from *Pozières* to *Ypres* to *Bullecourt*, and back to *Ypres* again. At the end of the day, killing men is just not like slaughtering of rabbits or stock back home on Redcamp, is it? This was a war that brought a whole new definition of slaughter and butchery. It was industrial in scale.

However, if you are going to survive, you can not think like this. Survival is the most basic of all human instincts. Whether you like it or not, in the heat of the moment instinct will prevail. But oh, the regret for having survived. Later you have to live with it and square it with the teachings of the God you answer too.

After typing out your letters from 1915-1917, I used to wish I had met you and was influenced by you like all the other older people on Redcamp who had enriched my youth. However, having now visited the battlefields of France and Belgium, I wonder how much of your character would have survived the war. How damaged would it have ended up? Would you have taken to the bottle like numerous other members of our family to become an alcoholic? Would you, like Jim Evans, have redeemed yourself after a period, from this morass?

I think this dilemma is best summed up by a quote by one of your contemporaries.

*"When the war has gone on long enough we shall all be well trained soldiers and worthless citizens."*<sup>18</sup>

*Recommendation for Military Cross*  
**Lieutenant DG Evans, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 17 May, 1917 (Bullecourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle)**

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<sup>18</sup> Quote from Gunner William Fincham, cited in '*The Western Front Diaries*' by Jonathon King.

*During the heavy fighting in the Hindenburg line on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> instant, Lieut. Evans was in charge of the flank company which had the enemy in the same trench alongside of them. Lieut. Evans organised and personally led a bombing attack along the trench, thereby gaining about 200 yards of same. He personally supervised the consolidation of the new position, successfully repelled three strong counter-attacks. Throughout the fighting, Lieut. EVANS' courageous and capable leadership and example inspired his men to a wonderful degree. By his dash and courage an almost impossible position was greatly improved and placed on a sound tactical basis.*  
*(Awarded)*

## Chapter 27

### We are moving in the opposite directions at present

*France*

*May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917*

*My dearest Mother,*

*I saw Gerald for a few minutes yesterday. I was marching through a village where his Battalion had been billeted for four days and he happened to be standing on the side of the road, I couldn't stop but we saw one another at about the same time, and he walked along side me for a good way & we had a bit of a talk, I was more than glad to see him as I have been wishing to for some time & he looks really well. He was leaving there that afternoon, so we are moving in the opposite directions at present.*

*Our Battalion had rather a rough time when last on the line. We have been resting now for about three weeks and we needed it, expect to be moving again shortly, of course we do the usual drill and practice route marches etc. I had a leave for a day yesterday to Amiens. It was a change to get away, there are some nice shops there and the cathedral is fine, well worth the journey to see it. The business people are only allowed to serve soldiers with refreshments, liquid or solid from 12pm till 2 & from 6 to 8.*

*All we want now is for the infernal war to end so as we can go to our dear homes in the only country in the world for me, Australia. However, all will be well yet Mother dear & try not to worry too much as 1917 ought to see the end of it.*

*The crops are beginning to show up now, some of them are about six inches high. The weather has been fine for about three weeks & some days fairly warm.*

*I am well and have everything that I want.*

*With much love to Father, Minnie and yourself*

*Your loving son*

*F. Evans*

*(On this day Gerald's Battalion was moving to Bresle which is near Albert on the Ameins side, from Biefvillers-lès-Bapaume which is just to the Nth West of Baupaume).*

On my bike and moving on from Tyne Cot. As I still had some time, I consulted my map and saw that Polygon Wood was a relatively short diversion on my route back to Ypres. The first direction was to continue to follow *Tynecotstraat* across the *Zonnebeke-Passchendaele Rd* in the direction of *Keiberg*. The way was mostly flat along a narrow paved road between ploughed fields both planted and not. There were also fallow fields, those holding cattle or those that had been planted with Winter cereals.

One thought occurred to me, unlike in the area towards *Poperinge*, there were no road side shrines either at road intersections or at private entrances. Were the people in this area any less pious or devout? More likely, was it that the fighting and destruction effectively wiped God from this part of the earth.

On *Spilstraat* and through the village of *Molenaareslst*, a large wood could be seen to the South West. This would be Polygon Wood. Before the First world war, Polygon Wood had been a Belgian Military firing range and equestrian school. On reaching Polygon Wood, there was a sharp dogleg to the right and then left to follow around the top corner of the wood.

The top corner of Polygon Wood ploughs into the barley field adjacent like a silvan *Nike of Samothrace*. The field of Winter barley was in full head waiting to complete maturation before desiccation and harvest. The road, *Lange Dreve* continues under the shelter of the wood which wards off the barley till a cross ride of Cross of Sacrifices is encountered. This cross ride is between the Cross of Sacrifice for the small Polygon Wood Cemetery to the apparent Cross of Sacrifice on the Butte of the major Buttes New British Cemetery that is inserted deep within Polygon Wood.

The Polygon Wood cemetery is small and compact, contained within two hexagonal, white brick topped fences linked like bar bells. Entry is through a set of five bollards that are striated towards the top. The Cross of Sacrifice is in the first and smaller hexagonal enclosure. Through the barrel, between the enclosures, leads to the cemetery proper where there are 107 graves, 87 identified and 19 unidentified, and 1 German grave. The graves are generally less regimented in their positioning. This was a battlefield cemetery, presumably centred on a casualty clearing station. Thus the graves are positioned as the situation at the time and protection allowed.

The second enclosure is dominated by several maple trees that shade the cemetery from the edge. I had come to expect all the Commonwealth War Grave Commissions cemeteries to be well maintained, however Polygon Wood Cemetery takes this care seemingly to a new level. This ascetic is assisted by a level green crop of barley on the left of the cemetery and relatively small yard on the right which contains a donkey and a pony. Presumably the animals belonged to one of the adjacent houses.

After viewing Polygon Wood Cemetery, that is adjacent to rather than inside Polygon Wood, it is time to visit the ‘main game’. The big brother of Polygon Wood Cemetery is Buttes New British Cemetery.

## Chapter 28

### Don't take much notice of the utterances of the politicians

*France*

*June 23rd -17*

*My dearest Minnie,*

*I received two parcels lately, one containing sox which I mentioned in a letter to Mother.*

*I got two letters within the last ten days from Gerald, he is well & has won the Military Cross. He said in his last letter that Frank Corker had been severely wounded.*

*I would cable you some times but we privates are not allowed to do so except for special reasons such as being wounded etc. I believe the reason for the restrictions is that soldiers are limited to a certain number of messages on the cable & the authorities wish to give the wounded and sick the preference, I suppose one reason is as good as another however the fact remains we can't send one.*

*What you saw in the paper with regard to the Divisions is not true, the usual work is being done. You don't want to take much notice of the utterances of the politicians, they are often wide of the truth & most of them will say anything to gain their ends, the same remarks apply to their agents who are touring Australia at the present time.*

*Father says in his letter that I don't say much about what I am doing. Tell him that I can't say much.*

*I have not received the other parcel yet, but it may arrive alright. I have enough socks etc for the present; it isn't much use sending parcels of eatables etc unless they are registered, as the sharks along the way mop them up and they don't get as far as their owner.*

*We had Australian rabbit for tea last evening.*

*With much love to Mother, Father & yourself*

*Your loving brother*

*F Evans*

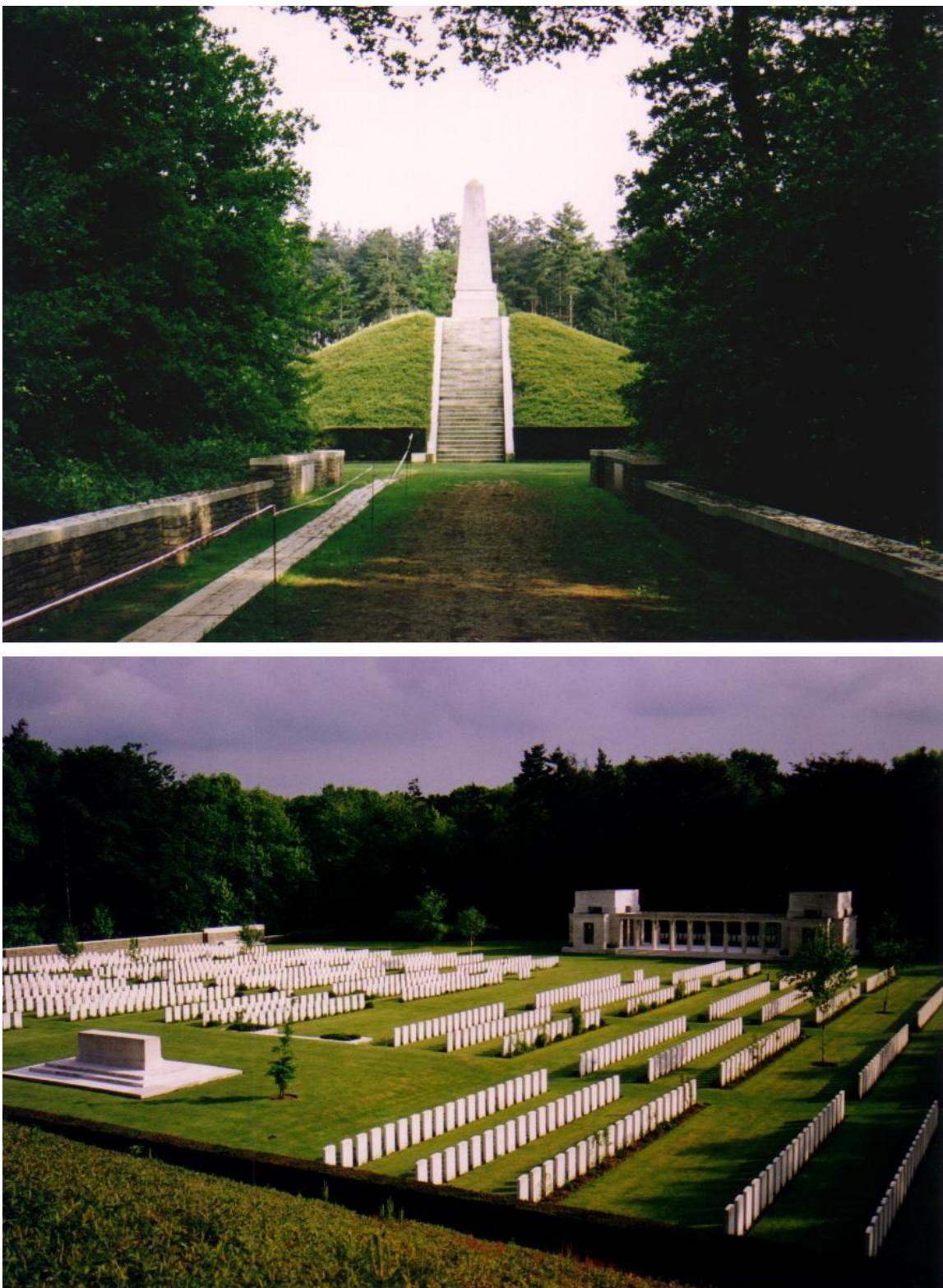
The entry to Buttes New British Cemetery is almost the inverse mirror of Polygon Wood Cemetery. One is surrounded by trees, while the other is surrounded by fields. Buttes is however a substantially larger cemetery being established after the armistice where front line graves from around the Zonnebeke battlefield were disinterred and then consolidated into this cemetery. As such, only 431 of the graves are identified, with the remaining 1677 graves are 'Known unto God'.

I moved on through the bollards and down the avenue towards the Butte that sits at the head of the cemetery proper. The white pillar on the Butte turned out not to be a Cross of Sacrifice but an obelisk that is the Australian 5th Division Monument. The monuments obelisk is similar in design to the monument for the Australian 1st Division in *Pozières*. Both are tall blocked, white stone obelisks.

Polygon Wood itself has grown strong and luxurious. This is a more modern eventuality. During the First World War the wood was cleared by Commonwealth troops in 1914, before being given up to German forces in May 1915. Thus for many of the early years of the Cemetery, it would have been surrounded by devastation that evolved into reafforestation.

The Butte had served at the sharp end of the target shooting for the Belgian Military. As the butt

also housed a number of German dugouts, it was also a target for fire during the battle to take Polygon Wood in 1917.



*Photo 31: Polygon Wood, Buttes New British Cemetery.*

*Top: Memorial to Australian 5<sup>th</sup> Division designed by Pompey Elliot.*

*Bottom: View of cemetery from memorial surrounded by Polygon Wood.*

It is natural in walking into the cemetery, to continue walking and climb up the steps of the Butte to its apex and the Australian 5th Division Monument. On the obelisk, beneath the rising sun emblem of the AIF, is a large plaque dedicated “To the Officers Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of the Fifth Australian Division who fought in France and Belgium 1916 - 1917 - 1918.” The

monument was designed by controversial Australian Major General, Harold ‘Pompey’ Elliot for the more than 5000 men of the 5th Division who were wounded or lost their lives in this battle between 26th and 28th September 1917. It was Pompey’s design for an Australian Calvary.

Reaching the monument, coincided with the sun in the late afternoon again bursting though the clouds. The sun’s rays illuminated all the white head stones in the cemetery and the Stone of Remembrance with an orange-tinged light. At the rear of the Cemetery, reminiscent of the design of front gate of Passchendaele New British Cemetery, except it is all white stone, is the New Zealand Memorial to 378 casualties that were lost in this wood but whose graves remain unknown.

It is natural in walking into the cemetery, to continue walking and climb up the steps of the Butte to its apex and the Australian 5<sup>th</sup> Division Monument. The monument obelisk is similar in design to the monument for the Australian 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Both are tall blocked white stone obelisks. Beneath the rising sun emblem of the AIF is a large plaque dedicated “*To the Officers Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of the Fifth Australian Division who fought in France and Belgium 1916 - 1917 - 1918.*” The monument was designed by controversial Australian Major General, Harold ‘Pompey’ Elliot for the more than 5000 men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division who were wounded or lost their lives in this battle between 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September 1917. It was Pompey’s design for an Australian Calvary.

Reaching the monument, coincided with the sun in the late afternoon again bursting though the clouds. The sun’s rays illuminated all the white head stones in the cemetery and the Stone of Remembrance in an orange-tinged light. At the rear of the Cemetery, reminiscent of the design of front gate of *Passchendaele* New British Cemetery, except it is all white stone, is the New Zealand Memorial to 378 casualties that were lost in this wood but whose graves remain unknown.

How can a place so sad look so beautiful and tranquil? Looking across this cemetery, fighting to hold back the tears in empathy with the families of the dead, my mind turns to Pergolesi’s ‘*Stabat Mater Delorosa*,’ as the only appropriate music for this scene.

**Music 18: Pergolesi: ‘*Stabat Mater Delorosa* (excerpt)’ CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra, Harmut Haenchen, Conductor.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2C1pXdpkHw>

**Latin 1<sup>st</sup> two verses:**

*Stabat mater dolorosa  
iuxta Crucem lacrimosa,  
dum pendebat Filius.*

*Cuius animam gementem,  
contristatam et dolentem  
pertransivit gladius.*

**English translation**

*At the Cross her station keeping,  
stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
close to her Son to the last.*

*Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
all His bitter anguish bearing,  
now at length the sword has passed.*

**Translation by Edward Caswall  
*Lyra Catholica* (1849)**

I turn and sigh, for it is but the echoes that morn. Walking down the Butte, I did not have the heart to walk among all those unknown. I just kept going down the avenue towards the road and my patient bike. It was definitely time to leave this sublime place of beauty and desolation

Mounting the bike once more, I headed along the road which flanked Polygon Wood. It was serene riding with little bother from traffic. Woods to the left and fields to the right. Soon a high, green mesh fence on the right was encountered. On the other side were what appeared to be some houses of the well to do.

At the end of the road the *de Dreve café* is situated right on the corner of Polygon Wood. Given that it was a warm evening and I had been working hard riding, I decided that I needed some Belgian Wit beer as a reward. Parking my bike, I walked into the café.

I asked the barman. “*Could I please have a pint of Hoegaarden from the tap?*”

He held out his hand and said. “*My name is Johan*”

Taking his hand, I replied. “*My name is Evan.*”

“*And you are from Australia, are you not?*” Johan replied.

“*Yes, you are correct, I grew up in North East Victoria, in Australia.*” I replied.

I asked Johan. “*I see quite a number of pictures of tunnels on the wall of the café. Are there still some of the First World War Tunnels around here?*”

“*Why yes, there is an extensive network of tunnels and dugouts under Polygon Wood. I have written a book, ‘Beneath Flanders’, on these tunnels and dugouts.*”

“*My great uncle fought in the war. In one of his letters he talked admiringly about the construction of the German dugouts. He noted that one was down 40 feet and had a hospital in it with kitchens, baths and even billiard tables.*”

“*Yes, that is accurate, but the Australians were the best tunnellers in my opinion. That is why this café is known as The Australian Tunnellers and Brothers in Arms memorial.*”

“*Did your uncles survive the war?*” Johan enquired.

“*Unfortunately no. One died of wounds after being hit by shrapnel, just across the freeway from here at Clapham Junction on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1917. The other was killed by a shell somewhere between Zonnebeke and Broodseinde on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1917.*” I replied.

Johan replied. “*Both of those were very nasty places, lots of shells.*”

At this point another group of thirsty customers entered the café. I thanked Johan and took my beer out into the courtyard to one of the tables and chairs sited there, facing the wood. Here I was able to sip my beer with a gentle afternoon sun on my back. Over the delicious and refreshing wit beer, I considered the day’s events and observed Polygon Wood as the day further waned.

The Hoegaarden beer was spot-on for this moment and place. A Belgian wit beer is lightly and refreshingly flavoured with coriander and orange peel, and it is perfect for drinking towards the end of a warm day.

The Hoegaarden drained, it was again time to continue riding. My next objective was going to find Glencorse Wood and Clapham Junction where Gerald was fatally wounded.

At the T-intersection *Lotegatstraat*, I turned left in the direction of the Black Watch corner of Polygon Wood. This meant the A19 freeway was on my right, beyond a brief screen of trees, and on my left was Polygon Wood.

At the end of Polygon Wood, the area called Black Watch Corner is encountered. The corner was so named after the gallant defence of this section of the line against the Kaisers Prussian Guard in November 1914 by this famous Scottish regiment. The successful halting of the German advance by the Black Watch and other regiments heralded the end of the First Battle of Ypres.

My path, however, was to turn hard right and go across the bridge over the A19 freeway. This opened up the Glencorse Wood and Clapham Junction area in front of me.

## Chapter 29

### I think brothers should not be together in this game

*France*

26 July 1917

Dear Father-

Many thanks for your letters dated 1<sup>st</sup> week in June. You had been having a lot of rain, the weather has been beautiful lately here; though the rain interfered with the push made a month ago as you probably saw in the papers.

We have not been in the line since you last wrote to me and are having a splendid rest; think the men are going a bit stale on continuous drilling and a trip to the line would do them some good -

Have not seen Ken again yet but had a letter from him and he is quite alright -

Jim MacCartney came to see me last Sunday, we had a long talk over things, he is a good trooper in the 4th L.H. and evidently looks at life from a troopers point of view, he wants to get Ken in his Squadron; Roy McCleish an old friend of Ken's is in Command of it, so no doubt they can manage it, as you know Ken preferred not to come to my Battalion: perhaps he was right. I think brothers should not be together in this game. -

Events are moving quickly here, the Russians have done their best to prolong the war indefinitely, but the French are very fine and as you will have seen, have come again at Verdun, much to the Germans surprise. The Americans are a very smart looking lot and will no doubt make a difference; the Canadians have done fine work lately.

I had a letter from Charlie who told me all about the stock business, stock seem to be very high and suppose the Auctioneers are making plenty of money -

I am still pegging along with the same company and am quite alright. Hope you are all the same and with best love to all.

Your loving son

Gerald

(written from le Doulieu, Northern France just South of Bailleul, Belgium)

Making my round about way towards Clapham Junction, I came across the first driveway or cross-roads shrine that I had encountered in the area East of Ypres. It was relatively small. The shrine was essentially in between Clapham Junction and Glencorse Wood. It was simple in that it was made of the reconstruction red-brown bricks and had a small, white statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus behind a white, arched and glazed door. The statue was originally part of a pair, but the other had been broken and was now used as a base to hold dried flowers. It was situated on a driveway into a small farm.



*Photo 32: Road side shrine between Glencorse Wood and Clapham Junction*

I quietly wondered to myself if this was close to the place where Gerald was fatally wounded? Certainly the scene would have been very much different back then. After 3 years of war and shelling, all the trees, houses and farms would have been reduced to close to unrecognizable ruins.

The Summer and Autumn of 1917 were very wet and muddy so that the army engineers would have put down duck boards to ensure the smooth flow of soldiers and equipment to and from the front lines.

Being an important junction that was exposed to observation, the engineers would also have erected poles and hung hessian to impede scrutiny that would quickly bring down an artillery barrage on this busy troop intersection. This hessian would also have had shell holes and tears in it from previous artillery salvos.

Back in the early hours of the morning of September 20<sup>th</sup> 1917, Gerald and his company were advancing from *Ypres* to take up their positions for the Battle for Polygon Wood. This was the beginning of the second phase of the Third Battle of *Ypres*, the first being the Battle of the *Menin* Road.

I imagine this scene, floating, being in the middle and somewhat elevated. An observer, unable to intervene, at a point somewhere past Clapham Junction. In this surreal dream scape, the shell-torn hessian shrouds billow in breeze, while duck boards course into view from among mangled trees and the bric-a-brac of war.

At this point my mind focuses on Sergei Prokofiev and the music he wrote in 1935 to accompany the ballet Romeo and Juliet. Specifically, I contemplate the piece '*The Montagues and Capulets*' (also known as the *Dance of the Knights*). The music is ominous and its commencement to a cacophony of horns sound like a symphonic mimicry of the sound of the artillery of the First World War by the composer.

***Music 19: 'Romeo and Juliet: Montagues and Capulets,'***  
***Prokofiev, Scottish National Orchestra, Neeme Jarvi***  
**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_1Bpgc-MaU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_1Bpgc-MaU)**

At around 5.15am in the willowy predawn light, I see a company of soldiers make their way along the duck boards towards the junction. In this murky dawn, one of the soldiers strikes a match, while attempting to shield the flame.

A lowly bass voice curtly commands. "*Butt out that cigarette now, ya silly bugger. The Hun will piss artillery all over us if they see it!*"

The soldiers carefully move on, now with a little more urgency in their steps.

Coinciding with the cacophony of horns, woodwinds and percussion laid over strings. concurs with the shriek of incoming artillery shells.

"*Everybody down!*" Shouts a voice.

But these are all war-experienced soldiers. They are already off the duckboards and flat on the mud. While the SOS salvo<sup>19</sup> comes in and explodes with the very Dickens of a noise.

The music and the artillery noise goes quiet. All are temporarily deafened and concussed by the salvo. All ears seem to tingle in disbelief.

The soldiers stay down, they know the drill and what to expect. The next salvo shrieks in, again with its incidental music.

An authoritative voice calls. "*Are all you blokes ok?*"

Another voice from beyond the junction voice calls back. "*Yeah, except Gerry. The bastards cracked Gerry!*"

A small group is gathered around the slumped form of Gerald who was on the ground while the company continued to move though the junction. The Prokofiev music goes into its waltz mode, so that it appears the soldiers are moving over the duck boards in 3/4 time to perform some sort of bizarre martial ballet.

A discussion was quietly going on between the badly wounded Gerald and his lieutenants. They reported later that Gerald had refused assistance as he did not want to endanger any others nor delay

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<sup>19</sup> SOS salvo: shoot on sight.

the company's advance. His men brought him a short distance away from the junction with its inherent risk of shelling. They propped him up against a small pile of bricks close by, using his backpack to make him as comfortable as possible.

The stretcher bearers came back for Gerald sometime later and conveyed him to an aid station on *Menin Rd*. My father thinks that Gerald maybe one of the wounded soldiers on a stretcher in the foreground of the famous photo by Frank Hurley of Australian wounded being processed at the Culvert Relay Post on the *Menin Rd* on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1917.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, Gerald would have been tended at this casualty relay station on that day.

Looking down on Gerald's slumped form, I thought I could see a small white object lying in among the bricks.

As this vision disappeared, a final conscious thought entered my mind.

“*Wherefore art thou Gerald, wherefore art thou now? ...*”

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<sup>20</sup> Link: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-147383296/view>

## Chapter 30

### You had better get to work & build a dug out for me

*France*

27th August 1917

*My dear Minnie-*

*Your letter of June 19th came a few days ago after we came out of the last stunt, which I managed to get through with just the tiniest crack on the shoulder which didn't hurt at all -*

*I have not written to you since going in, it was not quite so hot as the last one but quite hot enough. Young Whitty was wounded, not badly, while Condron of Wangaratta was killed. Mother will probably be pleased to hear that we have done a move from that part of the world, but I don't know what the new spot will be like -*

*It is great to get back and have a good hot bath & undisturbed sleep -*

*Am glad to hear you are having the house fixed. You had better get to work & build a dugout for me. I will have it 40 ft deep & two entrances like the Germans with electric light laid on - they must feel very annoyed to know that we are using them now - One place they had entire hospital under ground with kitchens, baths - everything billiard tables etc. They come in very useful now -*

*Yesterday we came through some very pretty country. They are harvesting now; the women do most of the work & do it very well. Reapers & binders are very rare. Mostly reaping hooks & scythes. One valley we passed through was surrounded by a low hill, they were harvesting right up the valley as well as hops & other green crops & hedges, there were about a dozen old windmills working around the hills & right on top was a very old Convent; been there since the flood.*

*They were playing baseball this afternoon near our Camp & get very excited over it, suppose you know what troops I mean; they are very hard cases & have a very pronounced twang.*

*I have been getting my mail very well lately & think I have beaten them all.*

*Will write to mother again soon*

*Love to all*

*Your loving brother*

*Gerald*

*(written from le Doulieu, Northern France just South of Bailleul, Belgium)*

Clapham Junction in fact lies within the area locally known as within the village of *Gheluveld*. On either side of the junction are two grey-stone obelisk memorials. One of the memorials is to the Gloucestershire Regiment, while the other is to the 18<sup>th</sup> Division of the British army. It was between these two memorials that I rode off on *Pappotstraat* from Clapham Junction in the direction of the infamous Hill 60. My plan was to swing past here before returning to *Ypres*. I had a little time.

My mind pondered the scene, like a photo negative of Clapham Junction. The regimental report of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion for that day concluded that the move up into the front line that day had been successfully accomplished with 'light casualties'. It seemed ironic for Gerald that having survived the carnage at *Pozières*, 2<sup>nd</sup> *Bullecourt* and other battles, that he would be fatally wounded by an

anonymous artillery shell on a day when only light fighting had taken place. Such are the fortunes of war, I suppose.

Initially the road sidled along the edge of the wood that contained the area known to the troops as '*Stirling Castle*'. The road soon turned into the typically rich farm land properties that are bordered by a number of wooded areas. A mixture of grazing and cropping dominated.

Approaching the outskirts of *Zwarde Leen*, the road ticks up as it works into some slightly higher ground. The road passes through a small wood before exiting right at the T-intersection onto *Werviksestraat*. Finding Hill 60 is a simple matter of riding into town and following the yellow memorial signs to Hill 60. Arriving at the Hill 60 grounds, even nearly a century later after the upheaval, it is obvious what has occurred on this broken ground.

The monument to the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Tunnelling Company is at the left hand edge of the entry car park. It was the tunnelling by these true diggers who mined beneath Hill 60 and 'The Caterpillar' over the winter until June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917, after which the British fired a series of massive mines under *Messines* Ridge to begin the Battle of *Messines*. The mines were detonated at 3:10 a.m. on 7 June 1917, when 990,000 pounds (450,000 kg) of explosives went off under the German positions, demolishing a large part of Hill 60 and killing approximately 10,000 German soldiers between *Ypres* and *Ploegsteert* Wood.

The sound of the explosions were apparently heard in Britain. It is sad to think that there are still many German soldiers and some Australian miners still interred somewhere under the ground in the Hill 60 area from the tunnelling and the explosion.

The ground still faintly ripples with the reminders of that day. In many ways the Hill 60 reserve is a signature relic for the whole of the Ypres Salient. In this my mind drifts towards the ghostly echoing trumpets of Jerry Goldsmith's 'The Battle Ground.'

**Music 20: 'Battleground' from Patton soundtrack by Jerry Goldsmith**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsu6difHB9Q>

One has to step lightly on this ground. There is hardly a flat or even section as the trail heads to the centre of the memorial that has been left untouched, as it was left in 1918. It was as though the rippled and contorted surface of the hill had haemorrhaged as a result of the explosion. The area is sparsely forested with trees with lank grass often intervening. The 'summit' is crowned by another memorial, this time to Queen Victoria's Rifles.

Going beyond the monument, I soon come across a German bunker. It seemingly has two eyes that stare out with ill intent. In many ways this bunker symbolised this place. It was an evil place, for these sorts of actions should not be taken against your fellow man, no matter what the provocation.



*Photo 33: Block-house at Hill 60, still staring out with ill intent over broken ground*

Retreating from Hill 60 it was time to return to the *Menin* Gate for the Last Post Ceremony. Retracing my route from Hill 60 to *Zwarde Leen*, I turned left in the direction of *Zillibeke* and then towards *Ypres* beyond. I had soon pedalled into *Zillebeke* to do a dogleg to pass onto the road which ended at the ominously sounding Hellfire Corner on the *Menin* road.

On the outskirts of *Zillibeke*, the Perth (China Wall) Cemetery is encountered on my right. It was called Perth as the predecessors of the 2nd Scottish Rifles were raised in Perth, and China Wall from the communication trench known as the Great Wall of China that ran from *Ypres*. In all there are over 2791 Commonwealth casualties buried in this cemetery, of which just over half are identified. Enough, I have had my fill of cemeteries for quite some time.

The entry into Hellfire corner, now a large and busy roundabout, is still something that needs proper consideration when you are riding a bike, even in Belgium. Back in the First World War it was considered '*the most dangerous corner on earth*'. The German observers and artillery on the heights such as Hill 60 had a clear view of any movement. When anything was seen to move across, they were immediately fired upon. Here too the British put up hessian screens in an attempt to conceal the detection of movement. As a general rule, the allies moved though the corner in darkness when observation was more difficult. That was unless someone was silly enough to light a match for a bloody cigarette.

Fortunately, my traverse of Hellfire corner did not involve the risk of artillery fire, but there were still cars to contend with on the busy *Menin* Rd. Safely through and onto the *Menin* Rd into *Ypres*, the clock tower of the Cloth Hall was prominent in the distance, and acted as a homing beacon. Taking this route, I passed the *Menin* Rd South Military Cemetery where another 1657 casualties lay. Finally, a sign announcing *Ypres Grote Markt* appeared indicating to me to ride left towards the centre of town. A short way down this road the imposing structure of the *Menin* Gate awaited my repatriation. My cycling journey was nearly done.

## Chapter 31

### Last Post!

*France*

24<sup>th</sup> September 1917

Dear Mr. Evans,

It is my sad duty as one of Gerald's Officers in "A" Company, 8th Battalion to have to write to you and tell you of his death. At present quite a gloom hangs over the 'A' Company and the Battalion and Brigade over Gerald's death. I was one of his platoon officers, and one of the two officers with him at Bullecourt in the bombing attack when he won the Military Cross. On the morning of the 20th Gerald was just assembling his company prior to the great attack and was hit by a shell, and died the same day. Just a few days before the attack, I was sent to Brigade as Brigade Bombing Officer and felt I was leaving a grand friend as Gerald and I had been together in "A" Company for some time, and I was the oldest "A" Company left, and we were the oldest "A" Company left, and we were in the same billet together. When his Military Cross came through the men cheered, and when his Captaincy came we were more proud of him than ever. The boys worshipped him, his officers, his Colonel and his General loved him.

Though he made the greatest sacrifice, in that he laid down his life for his King, his Country and his God, the life he led, the example he set for us, will never be forgotten. He lived for everything that was good and clean, and had high, lofty and noble ideals, and above all he was a man among men. My mind last night was taken back to Gerald when I heard a man recite 'Be a man.'

God grant that you may be helped to bear the great loss which has befallen you. We have lost our leader, our friend, our brother in arms, but when the men went over the top last Thursday morning they knew what was required of them and they answered the call. We have a vacant chair which can never be filled. Though he will not be with us in person we will always remember him. Our Padre will write to you, also our Colonel, and may this dreadful war soon end.

I must now conclude.

Yours sincerely,  
signed

R.V. Andrewartha. Lieut.

*'If' extract, by Rudyard Kipling*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWvcwVWCcnY>

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

First published in 1910 but later dedicated to the poet's son John  
who was killed in the Battle of Loos in 1915

A mark of a man is what others think of him and the impression that you have made upon them. Such impressions can only be earned by actions and deeds, and in the military, most especially in the heat of battle.

After Gerald's death on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1917, the following comments were recorded.

One of the most decorated men in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Percy Lay (DCM, MM, MC, C de G) noted in his diary that day. “*We had lost the best Captain in the AIF.*” A fellow officer went even further in his praise saying: “*Gerry was a grand man... I cannot speak highly enough of Gerry's courage and behaviour.... The test of a man is to know what the men think of him and Gerry was, to use the boy's own phrase betokening the hall-mark 'A Dinkin Bloke.' Believe me, that is the highest tribute a man can be paid.*”<sup>21</sup>

The time of my arrival at the *Menin* Gate was almost perfect, being 45 minutes before the last post ceremony. A number of people were already lining the sides of the inside the *Menin* Gate. More were busying themselves by looking over the exhausting lists of names on the monuments walls. Looking for lost family members, plain curious or the just grateful.

I rode my bike through the *Menin* Gate, over the cobbles. The *Menin* Gate is a prism that I have passed through, both out and back. I felt as if the essence of my soul had refracted through the *Menin* Gate, dispersed and then re-blended back whole again on return. For now, I was one of those fortunate ones favoured with return.

Returning from tying up my bike out of the way, I lined up with subdued expectation amid the assembling crowd. As cars pass through the *Menin* gate, rattle of tyres on the cobbles regularly fills the memorial with echoes. Under the oculi and coffered ceiling, I found a front row position against the chain on the *Passchendaele* and Polygon Wood side of the memorial.

Around 7.30 pm, two Belgian police officers arrived to stop the traffic from driving through the *Menin* Gate. This action appears to bring a contemplative calm on the crowd building under the gate. The drumming of car tyres on the roads cobbles quietens. The crowd talks in hushed tones while observing the order of events and preparations under the gate.

Finally, at 7.55pm, the two buglers from the local volunteer Fire Brigade arrive on the salient side of the gate. They are dressed in their finest dress uniforms, of navy blue with white gloves and gleaming silver bugles. For them, taking part in this service is being entrusted with a great honour and is a highlight of their service. They stand ready to perform their role at 8pm.

A tap on the shoulder from behind, draws my attention to another person paying his respects to the fallen. I oblige by changing my attitude from standing front on to side on at the chain. This allows this person a front row view by sliding in behind me. He being taller than I, around 6 foot in the old scale, this gives him an uninterrupted view. He seems a big man who is solidly built perhaps even heavy weight class, but from an older generation. We are otherwise both transfixed by the impending actions of the two buglers.

At just before 8.00pm, the buglers quietly march out into the centre of the arch way to a position, approximately just below the first oculus. Facing towards the centre of *Ypres*, they stand to attention. The crowd obediently and respectfully quietens in expectation. As 8.00pm the Last Post is sounded.

**Music 21: 'The Last Post' by Peter Tiefenbach & Stuart Laughton**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7CkfcMWwtI>

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<sup>21</sup> Extracted from “Cobbers in Khaki, The history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 1914-1918 by Ron Austin.

The bugle strains of The Last Post echo out hauntingly off the walls of the *Menin Gate*. Off walls inscribed with the names of those without a known place of resting. Off the names of those who can never hear that call again.



*Photo 34: The Menin Gate Ypres which records the names of 54,896 men missing from 1915 to 17<sup>th</sup> August 1917.*

*At 8.00pm each night buglers from the Ypres Fire Brigade sound the Last Post*

At the completion of The Last Post call, the echo reverberates for a short time as the crowd passes into a minute's silence.

At this point I notice the old soldiers that I had met earlier in the day at the Cloth Hall. Tom and Reg are each holding a poppy wreath which they march smartly across the road and up the steps on the opposite side to lay the wreath at the top of the stairs on the scaffold. The position for the laid wreaths is overlooked by the panel upon which Private Wilf Jarrett's name is engraved.

When the wreath layers return, Stuart marched out into the middle of the road and booms out the exhortation that is familiar to anybody who has ever attended or watched an ANZAC day service.

### The Exhortation

*"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them."*

(Excerpt from the poem "For the Fallen" by Laurence Binyon, 1914)

The whole crowd quietly recites the last line with Stuart.

"We will remember them."

After a short moments respite the buglers pick up their bugles and sound 'Reveille.'

### Music 22: 'Reveille,' by Peter Tiefenbach & Stuart Laughton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nPjYXmdWBI>

The more cheery sounds of "Reveille" wake the crowd from their sombre contemplations. As the echoes of the bugles fade off the walls, coffers and cobble stones, the two buglers exited, to the side then out towards the salient. For a moment the crowd stands in stunned silence but then gradually rouses.

Behind me the solidly built man who I had given quarter, again taps me on the shoulder.

He holds out his hand to shake mine and says in a deep voice. "Thank you for coming."

I extend my hand in automatic reciprocation. His hand was cool and weathered, but firm.

I was a bit taken aback and shaken by this unexpected expression of gratitude from a stranger. At this point, the crowd had started to disperse providing a little extra room. The man moved back a pace to reveal his companion. This man was also relatively old but was of a slighter build and not as tall.

The big man sternly commanded his companion. "Shake his hand!"

This we did. The other mans was just as cool but a little less certain in its firmness.

I was now not quite certain of how to react. I was off balance, how should I react, what should I say or do? I looked into the distance briefly for inspiration. When my focus returned to my vicinity, they had both melted away into the crowd.

I put my hand down on the chain bollard for support. I was confused at what had just happened. It had been a long day, tiring both physically with the long bike ride but also emotionally with the places that I had visited.

I again looked for solace in music. At that point in time, under the *Menin Gate* there could only be one piece of suitable music. That was the stirring choral *Introductus* to Mozart's *Requiem*. The hushed strings, bassoons and oboe progress into announcing horns. The choral refrains quietly surge towards the soprano solo conjured my state of mind precisely.

**Music 23: I. 'Introductus: Requiem (Chor, Sopran I)', Requiem, Mozart, Bernstein**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vO45Y4Sv6vI>

**I. Introit: Requiem**

**Latin text**

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion,  
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.  
Exaudi orationem meam,  
ad te omnis care veniet.  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

**English Translation**

*Grant them eternal rest, Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine on them.  
You are praised, God, in Zion,  
and homage will be paid to You in Jerusalem.  
Hear my prayer,  
to You all flesh will come.  
Grant them eternal rest, Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine on them*

My welling soul rose abdominally up, floating upwards towards and out through the central ocular on Mozart's tempo.

## Chapter 32

### Reveille!

*France*

*1<sup>st</sup> October 1917*

*Dear Mr. Evans,*

*By the time this letter reaches you, you will already know of poor Gerry's death, but I am just writing to tell you how terribly sorry I am that he is gone.*

*He and I had managed to stick together since we were Non. Coms. at Broadmeadows, and he is the best friend I have ever had. I arrived here two days ago, and did not hear of his death till then, but in any case I shall send you a cable as soon as possible, as this letter will take months to arrive.*

*He died at the 10th Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, and I shall go across there some time this week and get whatever information I can about him. So far, I have only heard that some pieces of shell went through his leg and body, but I have heard no other details.*

*I also went to the Cemetery, which was close by and saw his grave. We are getting a cross made to put over his grave, and when I go to the Clearing Station, I shall have a look at it and see that it is alright. The grave is in the Lyssenhoek Cemetery, on the Poperinghe - Borchipe Road, about a mile south of Poperinghe, and is in Plot 19 A 11.*

*Good-bye for the present, Mr. Evans. With kind regards, and deepest sympathy for all you all at "Redcamp".*

*I remain,  
Yours truly,  
signed*

*A.G. Campbell*

At 39,000 feet I dozed into wakefulness on the flight from Bangkok to Melbourne. There was the reassuring but all pervading sonication of my body by the hum of the planes engines. There was also that certain stiffness and weariness from being cramped in the one place. But at least I had some self preserving sleep. Slowly, as my vision cleared, some semblance of clarity of thought gradually returned.

That was when I noticed a distinct reddish hue reflected on the cabin interior around the window. This quickly jolted me into a higher consciousness as this phenomenon registered in my mind. I sat up in my seat and looked out through the window to the ground through a cloudless sky. The ground was red. Australian outback red, with reoccurring features that were consistent with the planes position, inland and midway between Derby and Dampier. I was home at last, back home in Australia!

While staring mesmerised at the vastness of this virtually uninhabited country, my mind settled on one last piece of music. This music was again from Mozart's Requiem, but this time the Kyrie. I knew the words being sung were 'Kyrie, eleison' but for me their translation was reinterpreted. They sang, "rejoice!"

Rejoice! Because I was on the way to my dear home in the only country in the world for me, Australia.

Rejoice! The journey was now almost done.

Rejoice! For you have come home with me.

*Music 24: ‘II. Kyrie, Requiem,’ Mozart, Bernstein*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6\\_DqHKKfoQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6_DqHKKfoQ)

***II. Kyrie: Requiem***

***Latin text***

*Kyrie, eleison.  
Christe, eleison.  
Kyrie, eleison.*

***English Translation***

*Lord, have mercy on us.  
Christ, have mercy on us.  
Lord, have mercy on us.*

## Chapter 33

### Epilogue: “The purple noon's transparent might”

*The purple noon's transparent might,  
 The breath of the moist earth is light,  
 Around its unexpanded buds;  
 Like many a voice of one delight ...*

*Extract from ‘Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples by Percy B. Shelley, (1818)*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WjKzFBRTaA>

By trade I am a research scientist. This is primarily for the Australian barley industry where I seek to make better quality beer and more of it. Also a kind of National Service or aspirational research if you like. As such, my writing career has focused mainly on technical/peer-reviewed works but also the writing of works that convey aspects that are more accessible for a more general audience. I find beer is a very easy subject to talk to most people about because most people are interested in knowing a bit more about the product they like.

As part of my research career, I have had many opportunities to travel in Europe and other places. This has included travel to France and Belgium and the areas that my two great uncles fought and died in during the First World War. Although this book is based on an amalgam of these trips, it is based primarily on my trip to France and Belgium (Flanders) in 1995, where I took the opportunity to first visit my great uncle's graves.

In preparation for this trip, in 1994 and early 1995, I transcribed all Gerald and Ken's letters in my father's keeping into a word processing form. This achieved two important outcomes. The first is that the letters could be arranged and read in chronological order. The second was that the letters could be printed out and distributed to any interested members of the family. I also had a professional black and white photograph taken of Gerald's photo at the beginning of the book and also his Military Cross. By duplication, so the letters of my great uncles could then be protected from the random ravages of fire or misplacement.

In particular, I have been fortunate to have so many trips to France in which I have generally been able to work, as side trips, into my professional trips. Although France is known for its wine and champagne industry, it is also a very large barley producer, in fact a little larger than Australia. A significant proportion of this barley is malted and goes into making beer. This adds to the professional attraction for France. A personal attraction has been that my younger sister Julie worked in France between 1998 and 2002. During this time, she lived in *Aix-en-Provence* working near *Marseille*.

In 2000, when my father was visiting Julie, we undertook a road trip from Paris down the Loire to Nantes and then up to Bruges. While in Bruges we did a side trip to *Ypres* including Gerald's grave at *Lijssenthoek* and Ken's grave at *Passchendaele*. This was Julie's first visit to the First World War battlefields and cemeteries. My father had previously visited in 1983. For Julie, like most people who visit these war cemeteries for the first time, it is typically a very emotional and personal experience, particularly if a relative is buried in one of these cemeteries. Despite how excellently the Commonwealth War Graves Commission looks after the Cemeteries, the strongest of these emotions are sadness and then anger at the senseless waste of so many young lives. This is particularly so in the larger war cemeteries such as *Lijssenthoek* and *Tyne Cot*. They are overwhelming in so many ways.

I have also had the opportunity to take my two sons, Gerald in 2008 and Angus in 2012, when they were eleven years of age to visit the cemeteries at *Lijssenthoek* and *Passchendaele*. In both cases these visits were with my mother, Bunty, and the route we took was somewhat of a grand tour of France. This included areas such as the Loire, Burgundy, Rheims, Alsace, Somme, and of course Paris. With Gerald the primary reason for the journey to France was to attend his auntie Julie's wedding, which was held near Lyon. Her husband, Yann, was from near Lyon and he met Julie on a holiday in Patagonia, which I had recommended to her. But that is another story. With Angus the opportunity arose after I completed work at the University of Tasmania. At that time Julie, Yann and their children were in *Dusseldorf* in Germany. Both Gerald and Angus also found the visits to their great, great uncle's graves challenging.

In writing the book, I have been assisted in particular by the letters that Capt. Gerald Evans MC and Pte. Ken Evans, sent home during the war. The writing was also stimulated by an insightful observation by my wife Kathy. Knowing me well, she commented that Gerald's letters would have been very similar in style and content if I had written them instead of Gerald. This was a perceptive comment as she is oft willing to make.

The letters, as you will have read, mostly concentrate on observations of the countryside (from a farmer's perspective) and the people they encountered. The letters rarely discuss any specifics or mechanics of the war. This was because of the omnipresence of the '*censor*' and also in an attempt of both my great uncles to shield their kin back in Australia from the realities of war, in particular their mother and sister who it was clear they both were very fond.

In using these letters for the spine of the book, I admit that I have done a little editing of Gerald and Ken's letters. This was done to remove some of the more mundane components of the letters and also to better anneal them with the story line. In some cases, I have combined two or three letters from a similar period into one. The dates of writing represent the date at which the bulk of the letter was written.

I have also used some of the details about the history of the Evans family at Redcamp that my father is currently compiling. This endeavour also has been assisted by the Evans family's reticence to throw out anything. Over the last 153 years has generated diaries, letters, maps, rainfall records, employment and stocking records, and a number of original lease documents, including one signed by Governor Latrobe in 1853. Our family is extraordinarily fortunate to still have these materials, in the hand of the participants, available for consideration. Such is the value of long-term tenancy.

You will also know that I have begun and ended the book with extracts from two poems that are among a number of story 'staples' included in the book. The poems being '*After-thought*' (1820) by William Wordsworth, (*Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide*) and '*Stanzas written in dejection, near Naples*' (1818) by Percy B. Shelley (*Purple noon's transparent might*). Both of these quotes were used by Sir Arthur Streeton as titles for two of his Heidelberg School era Australian masterpieces in the 1890's. '*Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide*' (1890)<sup>22</sup> and '*Purple noon's transparent might*' (1896)<sup>23</sup> both sought to use impressionist techniques to capture the Australian way of life, the bush and the harsh sunlight that typifies our country. Being painted in the decade leading up to Australia's Federation in 1901, the paintings captured the romantic nobility of Australia's landscape and were idealistic celebrations of pastoral life. Coincidentally, these paintings were painted not long after Gerald's birth.

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<sup>22</sup> Streeton, '*Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide*' (1890):

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/859/>

<sup>23</sup> Streeton, '*Purple noon's transparent might*' (1896):

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3060/>

## Obituaries

**David Gerald Evans** was born at Redcamp, Moyhu, via Wangaratta, in 1889. He was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. John Evans. He went to Melbourne Grammar School from 1905 to 1907 and was with his father on Redcamp Station until he was enlisted. He was promoted to Captain on 24th May, 1917, and was awarded the Military Cross in July, 1917. He died in the 10th Casualty Clearing Station as a result of shell wounds received approaching Clapham Junction on 20th September, 1917, and was buried at Lyssenthoek Cemetery.

He was awarded the Military Cross for "Conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He organised and personally led a successful bombing attack, consolidated the captured position and successfully repelled three strong counter attacks. His courage and able leadership set a splendid example to his men and placed an almost impossible position on a sound tactical basis".

**Francis Evans** was born at Redcamp, Moyhu, via Wangaratta and was the third youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. John Evans of Redcamp, Moyhu, via Wangaratta, and a brother of David Gerald Evans. He was born in 1885 and was at Melbourne Grammar School in 1902 and 1903. On leaving school after being on Redcamp station with his father he joined a firm of Stock and Station agents first in Wangaratta and then with Dalgety & Co. Ltd. in Perth. He enlisted in Western Australia and was a signaller in the 51st Battalion. After a year at the Front he was killed by a shell at Zonnebeke on 13th October, 1917.

**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

**John 15:13**

## About the Author



**Evan Evans aka The Tassie Beer Dr**

Evan Evans was born and raised on 'Redcamp,' a mixed enterprise (livestock and cropping) farm in North East Victoria, near Wangaratta. He graduated with a B. Agr. Sc. (Hons) in 1986, followed by a Ph.D. in 1990, both at the University of Melbourne. His first international travel was to work as a soybean breeder focussing on soymilk and tofu quality at Purdue University (IN, USA) from 1990-1992. In 1992, he joined the University of Adelaide where he developed his interest in malting barley and brewing. Between 2002 and 2013 he relocated to the University of Tasmania working towards improving malt quality to improve beer quality and the efficiency of the brewing process. In 2013, Dr Evans started the Tassie Beer Dr brewing research consultancy. During his career, Dr Evans has so far published almost 50 papers in peer reviewed journals, four book chapters and 20 magazine articles.

He has also given multiple presentations of his work at all the major Australian and international brewing technical conventions. At these conventions he has often been called upon to participate as part of expert panel debates. The pinnacle of this activity was at the 2010 Institute of Brewing Conventions where he lead a choir of maltsters to 'sing' an adapted version of "*Malting a beerway to Heaven*" in remembrance of the passing of his mentor, the singing maltster, Gordon Allen. He is also internationally recognized for his ability and willingness to ask questions. This lead to his award as the "Most Inquisitive Delegate, Lifetime Achievement Award" at the 2009 Australian Barley Technical Symposium. In 2005, Dr Evans was made a Fellow of the Institute of Brewing and Distilling. Beyond malt and beer and in his spare time, Evan is passionate about fly fishing, improving cycling infrastructure and organising road cycling races in Southern Tasmania.

In writing this story I would like to thank my wife - Kathy, mother – Bunty and father – David, for their helpful comments, contributions and encouragement. I would also like to thank my friend Prof June Olley for 'nit picking' my editorial 'faux pas,' encouragement and for the contribution of insightful comments.