

No. 2778
6/27th

At Sea,
November. [1915]

Dear Rose,

At time of writing we are away out in the middle of the ocean with nothing but water and sky to look at. If they don't take me by train to the next war I intend to stay home. We are all sick and tired of the sea and everybody is asking how long before we land. We have about another ten days yet, cross the line tomorrow & sight land in about 5 days time. The sea has been as calm as it could possibly be & the weather is perfect, about 3 days rain straight off & all the other days could not be better. It's mighty hot though, all we wear is pants & shirt & then you can feel the perspiration running down your chest. A cold shower every night helps things a little bit but even then it is hot. We had stew 3 times yesterday, once the day before & again for tea tonight. We made a complaint about it and was told it would be altered. We had rabbit the other day & fish a little while before that, also get milk in our tea too. The cook drives the cows in every morning & milks them before breakfast. The rabbits were trapped in the big paddock out at the back. When they want fish on board here they wait till the flying fish are about & then hold a frying-pan full of hot fat out the porthole & wait for the fish to jump in. All the preserved fruit is sold out, selling it for 1/- a tin, one chap bought 4 tins & sold 2 for 3/-. Drinks are 4d a bottle & 1d when you return the empty. Pickles, butter, cheese and sugar are issued to us every day, pickles once a week. If you saw what I eat here you would wonder what was wrong. Three meals home would only equal one here & then I get hungry. Have to be in bed by 9.15 and up at 6.15 & all hammocks stowed away. Only two parades a day about an hour all together and then lie down all the rest of the time. I only have 11 letters to write so I am busy for a while. It is now 12 o'clock midnight Adelaide time & 7.20 ship's time. Wishing you and Jack a Merry Christmas & a happy New Year. With best wishes

from your
loving brother
Ross.

Heliopolis,
Friday,
Dec. 17th/15.

Dear Rose,

I had a letter from Katie this week saying you had been down for a few days. I suppose you have peace and quietness all day long now? It's more than we get, if we're not drilling we're busy writing or else eating, that's about all we do now, eat, sleep and drill. Some days are easy and others are hard, but taking it all through it's passable. Saturdays we only drill in the morning and in the afternoon I always do my washing and mending. Can you imagine me sitting down washing my own clothes and mending them? It's a great life, this military business, it teaches a man to look out for himself. If Jack wants to buy some donkeys & goats, tell him there's hundreds over here. The natives use donkeys and bullocks to do all their work on the roads & in the gardens. Gardening seems very old fashioned to what it is home, no oil engines and pumps to do the watering, instead they use these old fashioned water wheels & long poles with a bucket on the end of them like the pictures you see in the Bible and other books. They manage to grow some big cabbages and tomatoes here, besides other vegetables and fruit. Oranges and mandarins are plentiful & apples, almonds, dates and peanuts can always be bought at the fruit shops. It's surprising the things you can buy here and the price we have to pay for them. They ask 5 piastres for a handful of postcards but are quite willing to take 3 piastres if you offer them that much. They generally ask about twice as much as the thing is worth. The natives carry on all their trades on the footpath in Cairo, bootmaking and so on is carried on till all hours of the night. A man drives a cow through the streets and if you want any milk you go out & help yourself. One thing, it's bound to be fresh when you get it. Don't take the trouble to send any parcels here, we get letters and papers alright but no big parcels ever turn up. I had a letter from Blanche about a fortnight ago to say she was sending me a cake by that mail but so far nothing has been seen of it, and I'm not expecting it either. We get paid every 10 days over here, it's a big wage 1/- per day is a lot to live on but I manage alright. Other fellows getting 2/- a day are broke about 3 days after pay day. That's the beauty of smoking and drinking, you want about £2 a week to keep you.

Wishing you & Jack & the family are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

Heliopolis,
Sunday,
January 2nd
1916.

Dear Rose,

I suppose you had a good time at Christmas & New Year? It was very quiet over here to what it is at home, although we had a better time than I expected. We have a lively time now all in our spare time hunting for livestock in our clothes. About 10 minutes ago there was great excitement in the hut, someone had put their shirt on the window sill in the sun early this morning & just now the thing started to walk away. I went and had a look at it & without a word of a lie, I counted 15 on it without moving it. The hut is lousy with them. Mother gave me a tin of Insectibane before I left home so it will come in very handy now. They are the biggest I have ever seen or heard of. Did you know I had turned Catholic now? There is a fine Catholic Church in Heliopolis & I went and had a look at it this morning with a couple of mates who are R.C. There is a splendid pipe organ in there & the church holds about 400 if not more. It's full every Sunday morning & nearly all are soldiers, very few civilians. Had a letter from Mother this morning written on December 1st, it was the first letter I've had for a month from anyone. I was beginning to think all my letters had gone astray. Haven't heard anything of my parcel that Blanche sent me, I expect it's put down as a deserter by now I'm afraid it will never turn up now. We are all wondering whether conscription is coming in in Australia, it will do some of them good to have a bit of drill. It won't do to make Gordon Wilton's excuse that he would go, only his people would rouse so much if he went. I am having a real good time here, the fellows home don't know what they are missing by staying in S.A. it is as good as a holiday in camp here when you get used to the stew & the fleas. Some nights it is a job to keep warm but taking it all through it's not so cold as some fellows make out. There's no trouble to keep warm in the afternoons especially on the route marches. Another lad has kept count of the lice he has found & the total to date is 30. Will have to examine my clothes thoroughly this afternoon to see if I am still free from them. Went for a walk this afternoon to the Virgin's Well where Christ was supposed to have rested in His journeying about Egypt. It is not very far from the camp about 2 miles away. Am sending you a post-card in with this letter.

With best wishes to you all

I remain
yours,
Ross.

No. 2778.

Pte. A. R. Rowney.

6th Reinforcements.

27th Battalion.

7th Brigade.

A.I.F. Egypt.

Heliopolis.
January 31st
1916

Dear Rose,

Nothing very startling has happened lately, although there was a lot of excitement yesterday. We're not allowed to write about it so we were told this morning after I had written to Katie telling her all about it. I suppose it will all be censored but it's too late now. We had to be in readiness all day yesterday & this morning we were up at 4 o'clock & having breakfast at 4.15. Nothing like getting in [early]. We're not likely to go to the front just at present although I would not be surprised if the order came shortly. All of us are just about fed up with this place & would welcome a change somewhere else. Yesterday was the first Sunday off for three weeks & then we were not allowed out till about 4 o'clock. Since I wrote to you last there has been a few little incidents in the camp. Had to get up at one o'clock one morning and look for a place to sleep in. It rained fairly heavy & of course it all came through the roof & we got our clothes, blankets & everything else wet through. For tea the night after that we had 4 very small tins of brawn between [12] men. What was left we had for breakfast & dinner the next day. The next night we had eggs, at least some of us did, they had 3 each, I was one of the unlucky 20 or 30 that had to go without. We had pineapple instead. A lot of men left here about 3 weeks ago & went to Tel-el-Kebir and encamped there. We've been expecting to go every week but we are still here. None of them seem to like it down there, reckon it's the last place on earth. This seems to be a terrible place to get hungry what little I used to eat home would not go far here now. There's very little I don't eat now, anything as long as it's good to eat, a bit different to home where I had a mother to cook anything I liked. We get some pretty solid drill route marches at times, lately a few miles across the desert with full packs on soon makes us hard, we are just beginning to get used to it now. The first two or three marches knocked us up but we don't notice them so much the last fortnight. Won't be sorry when the warm weather comes again, it's not bad in the middle of the day but cold at night. I suppose you are used to living in the country by now? Will come up & see you when I come home again. Don't know when that will be, but it can't be any longer than a couple of years or so. Saw a little donkey cart go along just now with a live camel tied on the cart, it looked a bit funny. Some of the mob got a small donkey the other night & put it in a sergeant's bed, you can guess what he said when he came home & found the thing still there.

With best wishes to you all

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

No. 4 Axillary Hospital
Abbassia.
Tuesday February 21st
1916.

Dear Rose,

I was very pleased to get a letter from you last week & also one from Annie the day after. We were on guard at Abbassia when your letter came when I began to read out to the chaps in the tent what you had for Xmas dinner. I was told to shut up or else clear out. I suppose you are wondering what I am doing in the hospital, the fact is your poor little brother has been stricken with the mumps. Of course all you mob will laugh when you know that but I don't feel very much like laughing with a face swollen up like a drowned cat. You must have a nice little homestead by now with your sheep & cows, if you would like a few [expletive removed], donkeys & camels let me know, there's thousands of each over here & a few hundred wouldn't be missed. You can bet your life I will come up & see you when I get back again. Am sending you another photo taken a week ago, I don't know if it is better than the one I had taken home, I only saw the proofs of that. Have been in here since Saturday & have to put in 21 days so am likely to be here sometime yet. The 6/27th are supposed to go away this week & there's 11 of us in different hospitals & we can't go. I don't know where they are going but heard last night they are going to reinforce 4 different battalions so they will be split up & sent all over the place. Sorry I can't make up 4 pages in my letters but if I write to everybody every mail & put 4 pages in each it would mean writing 30 pages more. It's hard enough to find enough news to fill 2 pages in each letter. I wrote to Blanche yesterday & just managed to fill three pages, one of the longest I have ever written to her. It's easy enough to write when I get a letter to answer but my average mail is one letter. Since I have been here I've had about 25 letters & used over two pads in writing to people home. Hope you can read this lot alright. Never was much of a scholar. When we were coming over on the boat Lt. Stewart told us to write home & tell them not to put 6th Reinforcements on our letters. Blanche & Fred leave out 6th Rein. when they write & all their letters go to the 27th Battalion. I may get them some day if I am lucky, I got 11 back from there one day, I get all of yours alright. The doctors & nurses don't trouble us very much, we are shoved out in a tent at the back of the hospital & are out of everybody's way, 19 of us in a tent. The A.M.C. chaps come round with our dinner if we are not well enough to go for it & the nurse comes round every morning & asks us all how we are & we look as pleased as is possible & say "quite well thank you sister". I've seen the doctor once since I've been here & that was when he walked through the tent yesterday. They took all my clothes when I came in & at present am dressed in one shirt & a suit of pyjamas that fit anyhow, no socks, I kept my hat & boots & razor, etc. & that was all, everything else has to be fumigated. Look funny if they burnt all my clothes & had to go back to camp dressed in a hat, pair of boots & a razor. We get plenty to eat, nothing to do but lay in bed & all day to do it in. The time goes quicker than I thought it would, there's plenty to read, I have plenty of writing materials so can fill in time alright. Cigarettes were issued yesterday 10 to each man that smoked, toothpaste & pipes are all gone so we didn't get any. Have porridge & curry & rice or eggs for breakfast & stew & rice pudding for dinner yesterday & bread & butter & bread is already cut for us for tea & get cocoa & two biscuits at 7 p.m. So you see I don't starve, the photo shows I am looking better than I did when I came. I feel as well as ever I did since I've been over here & eat as much as a horse. It wouldn't be safe to leave almonds & raisins on the mantel here now Rose, remember that lot? I would eat anything now, especially over the bread we get at camp, sometimes you drop it on the tables & it comes down with a thump just like a stone. There's another mail leaving here on March 2nd & that means writing a few more letters so will finish this one.

With best wishes to you & Jack & the children

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

[Letterhead – The Young Men’s Christian Association with H. M. Forces in Egypt.]

Heliopolis, Egypt.

Wednesday, March 22nd 1916.

Dear Rose,

I expect you will be surprised to get this letter after telling you last week there was no mail for 6 weeks, our camp was about the only one in Egypt that was told. The Y.M. up in Cairo doesn’t know anything about stopping the mails so will post all my letters up there, they are not censored there although they are stamped “censored”. I haven’t left this place yet & have no hopes of ever getting away from here. In years to come after the war is over & everybody is wondering where I am, the War Office will wake up to the fact that they had left me here & they will still find me here. Have a new job this week, am sergeant’s batman now. Yesterday morning another 800 men left here for regions unknown & my hut was nearly empty, so when the 9/27th moved in the hut, they forgot about me being orderly & appointed two more. I went & saw the orderly sergeant & told him I was hut orderly & asked him what he was going to do about it. He thought for a while & then put me down as sergeant’s orderly & told me to look after their quarters until I got further orders. One [part] of the hut is partitioned off making a little room for sergeants & I have to look after that lot. There’s only three in it so far but another one is moving in tomorrow. You should have seen me this morning, folding their pyjamas & blankets, sweeping up & making things tidy. It takes me about half an hour each morning to do all the work & then I make myself comfortable on one of the beds & see that nothing gets lost, stolen or strayed. All the mob in camp have to turn out at 5 o’clock every morning but this chicken stays in bed & gets up just in time to have wash & clean my teeth before breakfast 7 a.m. Sitting in there this morning, one of the sergeants came in & got his shaving materials out, and turning round to me, he said, “Are you the orderly here?”, of course I told him “yes” & then he said, “Go & get some water then, will you please.” I trotted off like a hero & got the dear boy’s water for him. What a life. By rights there should be only two orderlies in each hut but there is three in ours. There’s only 5 of the old 6th boys left here now, all the others went away yesterday morning & left us 5 behind as usual. They had to get up at 3.30, have breakfast at four & march out straight away. The night before a sergeant and one of the men got arrested in Cairo for being drunk & of course could not go. As soon as we heard this another chap & I went to the Sergeant-Major & asked if we could go in their place, he saw the adjutant straight away & put in for us but it was no good. The adjutant said we belonged to the 10th Battalion & must stay here. Rather than let us two go, they went away two men short. Today the company we get our money from, was asked to send in the names of all the men left here who belonged to the 10th or any other Battalion but the 27th so perhaps we will get away shortly. When the old 6th boys packed up they gave me all the stuff they didn’t want, here’s a list of what I had after I sorted the things out. One pair of white shoes, one pair of new puttees, 3 cane beds, about 15 walking sticks & canes, 276 revolver bullets, but no revolver, 3 hair brushes, one mirror, 4 blankets, a tin mug, an enamel plate, one towel, one pair of trousers, one tunic, one overcoat, one fountain pen (broken), a battery for an electric lamp (but no lamp), one clothes brush, one boot-brush (but no polish), one shaving brush, about 6 books, one box of tooth powder, one dungaree coat, a periscope with no glass in it, about 7 short pencils & a few pieces of soap. I’m thinking of having an auction sale Saturday. There is need to tell you I get no letters now until the I join the 6th Reinforcements again, they will keep all my letters, expecting me down there every week & if I don’t go down I won’t get them. Went to Cairo Saturday afternoon & met Frank Charles from Payneham, he’s expecting to go away any time so we had a farewell dinner at one of the flash hotels. Talk about a blow out, soup, fish, roast meat, pudding & fruit (one orange & 3 dried figs each) also a serviette. That got me, after the way they [slop] feed at the camp to go there & use a serviette, it was just like giving chocolates to pigs. We paid 12 piastres each for

the meal & was well satisfied. Went to the Pyramids with Arch Sara on Sunday & haven't got over the climb yet, am still stiff & sore, it's a good job I don't do any drill. Sorry I can't write longer letters, I very seldom get less than four pages in my letters from home, but if I write three pages I reckon it's a big letter.

Hoping you & Jack & the family are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

[Letterhead – For God, For King & For Country. / Y.M.C.A. / with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.]

Sunday April 9th 1916.

Stationed: Somewhere in Egypt.

Dear Rose,

How about a few letters from you? Haven't had one since February 16 about time I got a few more. This is the beauty of being left behind when all my mates go away, haven't had a letter from home for weeks & am not likely to get any as far as I can see, still, it can't be helped, it's one of the little things we have to put up with over in this place. As you can see by the address I don't live in Heliopolis, live a long way from there now, it takes three hours to get there in the train so can imagine where we are now, right out in the country. We arrived here last Monday afternoon & have done nothing but fatigue work since I have been here & never been in such a place in all my life. Flies charge here in billows, that thick there is no room for any birds to fly about, we go about with our bayonets cutting our way through them. When we have our meals is the time to see them, you don't know what flies are till you come here, I wondered what sort of a hole we landed in when we got here, hot as blazes & nothing but sand & flies everywhere, we soon put our fly nets on but were ordered to take them off Thursday morning, it's against orders to wear them now but I have mine on at present writing this letter, the flies are crawling all over me & on the paper, it's great fun trying to write but it is the only chance we get, the Y.M. is full up every night & we live in tents now so candles are not much to write by. We don't get fed too bad here, get plenty of stew as usual & as a change we have porridge, boiled meat & bacon, cheese & jam for tea so it's a little better than Heliopolis used to be, one thing we miss is the showers we used to have that we can't get now, we can have a shower here if we like to carry our own water in to buckets, it's a long job if you want a shower every night but we have to do it sometimes, there's plenty of water here laid on so we can keep ourselves clean if we want to. It's funny to hear the fellows here talking, there is hardly a soldier in Cairo now & the fellows reckon peace has been declared & we are being moved out of Cairo so we don't do any damage in our excitement when we hear the news. I am afraid it will be a few months yet before we come home again, all the last lot of reinforcements that are here from S.A. do nothing but talk about when they are going home & keep wishing they were back home again, anybody would think they were compelled to enlist to listen to them. I don't mind another 12 months of this place if they would only send me to the front for a few months, it's rotten being kept here like I am all the time. I may get away some day but have not much hope at present. I suppose you are well settled down by now, will have to come up & see you when I come back after the war, I'm not anxious to come home before it is all over. We are not settled down yet, hope to be some time this week & will just get used to this place & have to go somewhere else then. I wouldn't be surprised to be moved on to some other camp after a while. Hope you will be able to read this lot, my pen ran out & had to fill it again with some patent ink pellets I bought in Cairo, they are very handy to carry about, just mix them up with water & they are right. Don't care for the idea of carrying a bottle of ink about in my kit bags after the job I had when I came out of the hospital. There's five flies right on the nib of my pen tasting the new ink all the time, hope the stuff is poisonous & gets rid of a few of them. A man doesn't know what to do with himself here on Sundays everything is out of bounds or else you want a pass to go there so the sooner we move on to another camp the better, if we keep moving we may get to the front some day. Only have 5 more letters to write yet, don't know how I am going to do it.

Hoping you & Jack & the family are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

[Letterhead – For God, For King & Country / Y.M.C.A. / H. M. Forces in Egypt. / Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.]

Easter Monday, April 24 1916.

Stationed at: Egypt.

Dear Rose,

I suppose all of you are going out for the day today, I am over here building a barber's shop, rather a nice way to spend a holiday, we are having our Easter Monday tomorrow, having a great sports day then somewhere in the camp open to all of the soldiers in this camp. Am having a decent sort of a time here in this place, better than what I thought it would be, still troubled with flies a lot & fleas at night are brutes, bad, we fumigated all our things last Friday but did not get rid of them all then, caught two more in my blankets this morning when I was getting up. Has mother been up to see you in her motor yet, I got a surprise when I saw her name in the paper, am anxious to get home now & see it, will be able to borrow it occasionally to drive to town, etc. I have to go through the school of instruction next week in the machine gun section, may be able to get to the front if I pass my exam alright, the course lasts about three weeks, don't know where the school is situated. Haven't been out much lately like I did at Heliopolis, there's nowhere to go here, been to the pictures three or four times this week, haven't been to the circus yet, have that pleasure to come. Had a few letters turn up during the week, a couple from you, I knew I would get some if I waited long enough, expect a few more anytime now. Glad to hear you are still alright & going along, the letters were about 10 weeks old but they were letters just the same. Get plenty of papers here, always see two or three every mail, borrow them from other fellows who get them. I wouldn't advise you to send any parcels, I may be shifted to some other camp anytime & will stand a very good chance of missing all my letters again. Would not be surprised at anything now, may be ordered to go anywhere at any time & may have to stay here till the end of the war, we never know from one day to another what is going to happen. We sleep in the Pioneer's hut now & get woke up every morning by cooks coming to shake timber at 4.30 every morning, cooks come from everywhere to shake wood for their fires.

Hoping you & Jack & the family are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

Egypt, Sunday, May 7th

1916.

Dear Rose,

I don't know if I have written to you since April 9th, if I have, well & good but if I haven't I must have forgotten you last time I wrote to all the crowd at home. Having to write to so many I forget who they are so I have to put in all down in a book. Am in the pioneers now, we are the men who do all the odd jobs around the camp such as building ovens for the cooks, building bird cages, barber's shop & few other things, there are two masons, two labourers, one plumber, one painter & three carpenters under the command of the pioneer sergeant who is also a carpenter. We don't do any drill and get no guard or piquet duties & best of all we can lie in of a Sunday morning. Tomorrow we get issued with tobacco & cigarettes as per usual, get them once a week & lime juice three times a week. We only had fried bacon & porridge for breakfast yesterday morning & bully beef, jam, hot vegetables & pickles for tea. There is one thing about this place that I like better than anything & that is the climate, it never gets hot here, today is quite cool only about 140 in the shade, it isn't hot until it gets about 190 or 200 in the shade. The flies are a nuisance but they have to be endured, it's no use making complaints about them. Got hold of a February Chronicle just now & saw an account of Wickham Grivell's wedding, didn't see anything about it in any of your letters from home, also Sid Hamblin's wedding. Everybody seems to be getting tied up now, there will be no single ones left soon when I come home. Be getting paid again next Wednesday if all goes well, get paid once every fourteen days & only get ten day's pay, the other will be made up to us later on, there will be 22 days owing to me on Wednesday. Found a belt over a week ago & nobody claimed it, over 15/- in it altogether. I advertised it well enough but nobody came down to get it. Won't be sorry to leave this place with its flies, fleas & heat, found a little insect coiled up in my shirt yesterday & another man in the tent found two on him so we are preparing for a siege tonight. Always boil all my clothes now, saves a lot washing. Caught a cold yesterday afternoon when I was doing it, had no shirt on all the afternoon & must have caught it that way. Another mail came in yesterday so I will be getting a few more tomorrow or the next day, have been getting a lot lately & expect a lot more. I suppose it is cold up there of a night now haven't had any snow yet I suppose, send over a bit if you have any to spare.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

England,
Saturday June 26
1916.

Dear Rose & Jack,

I suppose you will be surprised to hear that I am in England now. I was expecting to be left in Egypt, but was lucky enough to come away with the mob. Had a very good trip over from Alexandria, it was after midnight when the train got in & we went on the boat straightaway & got to sleep how & where we could. We were issued with hammocks & blankets the next day & could have done with more blankets over us but had to be satisfied. Egypt was pretty hot when we left & were not sorry to leave it, this country has one drawback & that is the weather, the day we landed here it was 56° in London, somewhat different to 110° in Tel-el Kebir, it has been cold ever since we got here & this is the middle of summer & we are in the hottest part of England. Since being in England we have developed a sort of restless, wandering-Jew habit & can't settle down, it was last Monday week we arrived in camp & spent that night & the next day & the next day & night there & then we marched 13 miles to another camp & spent a week there & then marched another 1 ½ miles to this camp & now expect to go back to where we started from next week. The camp we are in now was the dirtiest & filthiest camp ever an army could live in, the mob who were here before us must have thought they were home, rubbish was everywhere & the tables looked as though they had never been washed, you could hardly believe a camp could be left like it. We have been working hard & are just beginning to get things cleaned up a little, the Pioneers have not had much work to do & have had to give the sanitary squad a hand to clean up & suppose we will have to do it tomorrow (Sunday) again. Have some very nice huts to live in, room for 30 men in each, electric light & coal stoves in every one & they are lined all over inside with three ply. Are supplied with bed boards to sleep & two more blankets each it is just the thing. Of course we have not had any mail since we left Egypt & don't expect any until we settle down for good & I don't know when that will be, it's like the joke about being paid, will pay us when we get settled down & are moving us about all the time so that we can't settle. Get plenty of leave, every night till 9.30, weekends & every man gets up to 6 days to go to London so I am expecting to see London before I come home again. The part I am looking forward to is the 6 weeks trip on the sea to get home, think I will stay here for good when the war is over. There is a nice little village about a mile away, 5 hotels, 3 churches & a good number of shops, things are fairly cheap at some of them. The first place we were in some of the shops wouldn't take Australian money, others would give as much as 1/8 ½ d for a florin & others would give us full value. I had to pay 10d for a loaf of bread last week & had to buy our own tea Thursday night. It doesn't get dark here till 10 a.m. so have plenty of time for reading & writing.

Hoping you & the children are all well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

Same address as usual

only England instead of Egypt.

England,
Monday, July 10th
1916.

Dear Rose & Jack,

The day after writing to you last on Sunday afternoon we put in all the afternoon digging for a drain-pipe that was blocked up & then in the night I went to the Shrewton Wesleyan Church, they are not Methodists around here, Wesleyans they call themselves. Had a look through two other churches both over 400 years old, it was interesting to go through these old places built years ago, there are memorial stones in the churches erected in 1702, also a stone to the memory of a woman who died at Plympton, S.A., the churches were open every night in the week for visitors to go in & have a look around. Have had plenty of rain the last week or two, more like winter than summer and gets rather cold at nights, haven't done very much work in the pioneers, only about 4 days altogether & last Saturday I left the 7th Training Battalion & came to the 3rd Training Battalion to join the 10th Batt. reinforcements & they refused to take me, I was sent on because I belonged to the 10th but when I got here I was told I didn't belong here & had no right to come on here, anyway they attached me to "A" Company (9th Batt. reinforcements) who all come from N.S.W. & Queensland. Today I went out on parade & had a very easy time, about three quarters of an hour before breakfast at physical jerks, a little over an hour after breakfast at musketry & the same this afternoon, we were dismissed because there as a night parade tonight from 10 to 1, but our sergeant-major made a mistake its tomorrow night that lot comes off, we were the only company dismissed this afternoon. One fellow done a bit of swearing because he was disappointed over the night work. We don't have as good food here as I did with the 7th Training, have our meals in the huts we sleep in & don't always have tea for breakfast, at the 7th B. we had proper mess huts & basins & plates were provided for us at meal times, we always had coffee for breakfast there & the last three nights I was there we had rice, tapioca & sago for tea, all we have here is bread, margarine & jam, it is alright as long as we are getting plenty of it. Another chap came here with me & a bonger fellow he is too, the day we left he tried to shake a pair of trousers belonging to another man, had them in his kit bag & the owner came & made him turn his bag out, he had no hat or cap the day before we left, but when we came away he had a hat in his bag & was wearing a very good cap, we have only been here two days & he has got down on my boot-polish already. There's only about 10 of us in this hut, all of them have been to Gallipoli & if he gets down on anything belonging to them I intend to be neutral & sit on the fence & watch events. One of the Australians was put in the clink in one of the camps here & when they searched him before putting him in they found over £100 on him, the next man put in only had threepence on him. There was a big argument here the other night, no private fight about it, anybody could join in & they did, but I was safe in bed.

Hoping you & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

England,
July 24th 1916.

Dear Rose,

Have been fixed up at last, the reinforcements of the 10th Battalion had to take me in with them after all. Not such a good camp as the one I was in before, it is not so clean here & the food is not plentiful, bread & margarine was all we had for breakfast twice last week, today is not so bad, bacon & potatoes for breakfast & soup, boiled meat, onions, potatoes & beans for dinner, seldom get so much other days. Saw Gavin Reid here the other day, he's been here about a week & Bert Higgins & Bill Hill are in the same lot as I am. Very lucky the last two pays, drew £1.10 the first pay & eleven days after I put a book in & drew another £1, am overdrawn now to the extent of 4/6. One fellow went to London for four days, only took £7 & reckoned he didn't have a good time because he didn't have enough money. I went to London with £2.5 & brought 15/- back with me, get another pay & will have enough to go again if I can get leave. Had a fairly good look round while I was there, knocked myself out the first two days, went into a shop with a corporal to have a drink, had three or four each & talked to a woman & a girl for a while, I sat on the counter & went to sleep. Went to sleep yesterday afternoon writing letters, woke up about 2 hours after & still had the pen in my hand. What do you think of a man coming home late at night, putting his rifle in his bed, covering it up with the blankets & leaning against the rifle rack all night himself? Course a few don't get a bit [foo] every pay day & keep us awake at night but that is only once a fortnight. Had a nice little route march last Friday afternoon, nice and warm, a bit better than marching across the desert for a few hours, found a pair of puttees in the bath house when I came home again, not much good though. Didn't go to many places while in London, went to St. Paul's Cathedral the first day and saw Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, the fish market & the Tower of London on Tuesday, saw the Jewel Room & the Armoury in the Tower, in the Jewel room is kept the King & Queen's crowns & a lot of valuable jewellery belonging to the Royal Family, all the old suits of armour & old rifles are kept in the armoury, some very old guns are there & one or two fairly new ones. Had a few rides in the Underground trains while I was there, also a ride back to Waterloo in a taxi with a sergeant. Terrible lot of traffic in the streets, nearly all motors, very few horse vehicles in the busier streets, a lot of motor buses knocking about. Wednesday afternoon I went to Westminster Abbey, there was a service being held at the time so couldn't see very much while that was on. Nearly missed the train coming back to camp Thursday night, dozens of military police on the station to pick up all the men who missed the train. I suppose George Rowney is still a military John or is he Provost Marshall now. M.P.'s have earned a nice name for themselves over here, they must be hard up for a job to pull that game on, don't envy them after the war is over & they get back to Australia again.

Time to fall in so must finish.

With best wishes to you & Jack & the children

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

Sunday
August 13th
1916

Dear Rose,

Just a few lines to let you know I am somewhere in France, after waiting all this time I have landed here at last. Am not in the firing line but by the time you get this I will be there I hope, am not too far away now, but have to do a bit more training yet. Went out this morning under an English Captain & he put us through it, gave us a little bit of everything in order to see if we were raw recruits just turned soldiers. Am in a lovely camp, nice sand-hills everywhere for us to march in & sand blowing up everywhere it's a treat trying to keep our rifles clean. Had new rifles issued to us & we have to keep them clean or else get into a row. In our spare time we can sit and watch the trains go past, we are only 10 yds. from the railway line & every train that goes past whistles like blazes just to keep us awake at night, only have one blanket here to curl ourselves up in but that is enough if you know the way to roll yourself up. Can't tell you much news from here now, may only be able to send a postcard after this if you hear from me at all.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

[Letterhead – Australian Commonwealth Military Services]

On Active Service.
Friday, September 1st
1916

Dear Rose,

The mail is closing tomorrow afternoon & as I have a few minutes to spare tonight will drop a few lines to let you know how things are going. Since writing to you last I have joined 10th Batt. & put in "C" Company do please address letters accordingly. Last Monday they detailed me off for machine gunner & have been learning all about it during the week, it is very interesting work and am picking it up quicker than I thought. Have travelled around a bit during the last fortnight but have now settled down for a rest, don't know how long the rest is going to last but we are having generally get up in the morning about 7.30 & have breakfast at night. We are in a fairly comfortable camp, of course it is not as comfortable as the camps in England but a lot better than one would expect, plenty to eat and drink & a bed to sleep in at night we are perfectly satisfied with our little lot. I suppose there is a lot of talk concerning conscription in a month's time, call up a lot of the football, cricket etc., glad I enlisted before it came in. If the fellows home only knew what they are missing they would not wait to be compelled to join, certainly it is no strawberry fete sometimes but there are other times when it is more like a holiday than war. Don't know when I will be home again but am not looking forward to Xmas this year at home.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are all well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service
Sunday, Oct. 1st
1916

Dear Rose,

Had a surprise party this morning when 4 letters for me turned up, one of them from you. I wondered who was writing to me from Currie St., Adelaide, are you living in there now? It was the first letter I have had from you for over seven months & naturally I don't know much about home or what any of you are doing. Had three letters about three weeks ago & heard that Will had another son but didn't know what his name was. It's a wonder he didn't get a war name & be in the fashion. What possessed Ed & Ray to enlist & pull this game on? If a man can put up with all the discomforts it won't do him any harm of course it is not much like home over here but I am satisfied. Just discovered it is a month today since I wrote to you, sorry to keep you waiting so long but getting no letters from any of you a man doesn't feel much like writing. Been writing to Mother & Blanche all the time & that is about all. Bought a postcard about a fortnight ago to send to you & haven't had time to write, been on fatigue a lot in the night time, the last two weeks we have been having a holiday doing nothing at all, but before that I was out all night in the mud & rain & coming home wet through about 4 in the morning & then sleeping all day or trying to, it was great fun. All the time we were on that game it was raining always & now we have finished it is as fine as can be. Sunday morning here is a bit different to Sunday at home, last Sunday afternoon was the last time I had a shave & a wash, course I look nice & clean with a week's growth up, but will have a grand clean up tomorrow, it is not like England here where we have to shave ourselves every morning & clean our boots etc., they don't mind how much we knock about. The firing line is still a long way off as far as I am concerned, but I expect I will get there some day if all goes well. Sorry I can't write as much news as you people send when you write, but there is no restriction on your news. If I put in too much, the letter might be destroyed. The rats are getting very cheeky here, one of them eat a hole in my haversack & eat my rations & eat our bread the other night & last night in bed one of them was running up my leg, they frighten the life out of us at times. We don't pay 10d a loaf for bread here, 8d a loaf, round loaves like a pancake, about 9 inches in diameter & 2 ½ " thick, we get an issue of a ½ of a loaf a day, sometimes ¼ of a loaf, bacon for breakfast every morning & stew for dinner, some times we get roast meat, potatoes, beans & onions for dinner instead of stew & bread & butter & jam for tea. There was an issue of tobacco & cigarettes this morning, also an issue of [rum], have had that issued several times lately, but I only had three times, that was when I came home wet through & mud up our thighs, if we didn't wear long boots up under our arms somewhere we would get in a mess. The lice haven't been so bad lately and I am not sorry either, they're crows of things to have in our clothes & hard to get rid of once we get them in, nothing unusual to catch about 20 in our shirt every time we look. Hope you will excuse pencil as my pen is dry & my ink is away in my pack with my razor and other things. Hoping you are all well at home.

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service.
Sunday, October 29th
1916

Dear Rose,

Just a few lines in answer to your letter received Friday night dated Sunday Feb. 6th. I had two parcels from Mother Friday night & 13 letters all old letters though the latest was written in May, one from you, Low & Gordon Fulstone, & the rest were from Blanche, Mother, Katie, Fred & Elsie. Your letter must have been written just before you left Montacute as Mother told me in one of her letters that you were leaving & Jack had a good job in town. I suppose you don't feel so lonely in town as you did up in the hills it must have been lonely there at times. Have lost your other letter written from where you are living so will send this one out home the same as the other. Have to put in all my spare time writing letters now in reply, one of the parcels was posted last February & had a pair of socks in it from Mrs Arthur Hill, Paradise. Had another parcel three weeks ago from Mother & there was a pair of socks in that one from Gladys Pitt, that is the second pair she has made for me now. We get plenty of socks & other clothing here but the issued socks are nowhere near as good as the knitted ones we get from home, this is the weather we want plenty of clothes as it is getting cold here now, but the last few days we have been doing nothing much at all but sit around a fire in our own tent, have done a little bit of fatigue one or two days. The cooks have a cockatoo that was brought from S.A. with some of the reinforcements he is everybody's pet at night when he is cold but in the day you can hardly get near him, he has seen a fair amount of fighting since he has been here and expect he will see a bit more before he has finished, a funny thing about him is that he has never learnt to swear amongst all the men here. There is plenty of mud here in this place but that is only natural after the rain we have had, it doesn't rain hard, just a drizzling, sneaking sort of a rain that comes just when you don't want it, but we have not been wet through yet & it cleared up a little bit tonight so we are all fixed now for a few day's fine weather. The first night here I slept in on the damp ground, but I found a few empty shell-cases & sleep on them now, it is a lot warmer than on the ground & we all have two blankets each so can always keep warm at night. We have done a bit more marching lately & had a three hour ride in motor-lorries, didn't do so much marching as I did when I first joined the battalion. There has been a few promotions amongst the men lately, several of the boys who came over with me have got their stripes, Dink Barry the old South Adelaide footballer has got his two stripes & is acting sergeant now. There was a football match here last Sunday, "A & B" companies played C & D. C & D had Dink Barry, Watson, the Port man & several other good men. I put in for a game but went on guard instead. Needless to say we beat A & B, 7 goals to 11 & a few behinds to each side. There was supposed to be another match, the 11th Batt. challenged us but we moved off before we had time to get a team together or else it would have been another win to us. I am supposed to be in the machine gun section but the poor dopey little boy in charge is like a great kid so am pulling out of it the first chance I get but one part of the army is as good as the other as far as I can see. One good thing when there is only a few of us in the camp, we get all the little odd jobs in the camp to do, I had to go to the Regimental Sergeant Major & get the orders last night, had three of these pages nearly full & had to be all written out as they were read out. We are a fair distance behind the firing line here, no shells or anything like that ever come near us but at night we can just hear the biggest guns if it is a very quiet & still night. I suppose you voted in favour of conscription yesterday? We all had a vote & nearly all of us voted "No", we are not in favour of it over here, I am not sorry I came anyway. The voting in Australia was on Saturday & Sunday the rumour came that Billy Hughes had been assassinated & conscription was in force. The votes must have been counted very quickly, but I suppose it was only a rumour. It is just the same as us, every time we move we are going to England for three months spell, the last time we were on

the road several of the mob had the "official" news that we were going to do eight weeks garrison duty at one of the biggest sea towns in France. We are further than ever from that town now. When we were billeted in a village last week I had a look through the church there, it was a fairly old place but not as old as the ones I went through in England. They are all Catholic Churches over here & the work inside some of them is worth seeing but have seen nothing in England or France to compare with the Citadel in Cairo, Egypt. Would not mind seeing Egypt again before coming home but don't expect I will ever see that country again.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
France,
January 12th 1917.

Dear Rose,

I expect you have all been wondering what has happened to me, not hearing from me for some time, but it is a long time since I have been able to write any letters & now I have the opportunity I am going my hardest trying to catch up my correspondence a little. So write straight at once, it is October 29th since I wrote last, not including a Xmas Card I sent & all that time you expect me to have a lot to write about, but there is not too much to tell you. I have been in the trenches twice since then & am still safe, sound & going strong, although one of my letters came the other day marked wounded, in Hospital 9/11/16, with a blue pencil but I think they must have made a mistake somewhere as I have not been wounded yet & am not anxious to be, I am quite content to go on like I am at present. Have done a fair amount of fatigue such as ballasting railways, scraping, making & repairing roads, carrying railway sleepers, unloading trucks, in fact there is hardly a job that I have not done at some time or the other. Fatigue work is alright for a change & a change is as good as a spell, we are out for a spell now, drilling from 8.45 to 11.30 & from 12.45 to 3.30 don't do very much drill, it is nearly all physical jerks & a march to keep us warm, it gets terribly cold if we have to stand about very long. Today was an easy day for us, kit inspection in the morning & a battalion parade in the afternoon only it rained that much that we had to come in & dismiss. This afternoon we were inspected by a Major Giles, commonly known as "Farmer", I don't know why. He came to one man who had not shaved & in a quiet, gentle voice the Major says "Haven't you a razor?" "Yes, sir." "Do you use it at all?" "Sometimes, sir." "Well just use it after this parade, will you?" He doesn't pull a man out of the ranks & make an exhibition of him, but quietly tells him the fault in a half-serious, half-humorous way that makes one correct the fault without a grumble. Another day he told the battalion "You all call me 'Farmer', but I'm still here." Christmas was a very quiet affair with us, for breakfast we had porridge, bacon & tea, for dinner we had tea only, at 2.30 we fell in for fatigue & arrived home about 8.15 & had tea consisting of stew & tea. I believe there was a small quantity of pudding, but not quite enough to go around. Still, if we grumble about a little thing like that we will be wanting flowers on the table (when we get a table). Fortunately, on Xmas day the first lot of parcels came up & our tent got a few, Mother's was amongst them & I can tell you we lost no time in opening them. Everybody seemed to get cakes & chocolate & we lived like kings for a few days. Previous to this our bread issue was ¼ loaf per man a day, rations were difficult to get up there & the last time we were in the line we were getting hot Oxo first thing in the morning, hot stew for dinner & hot tea at 4 in the afternoon in addition to the usual rum allowance. There is no need to tell you how we appreciated a hot meal & a hot drink when I tell you it was snowing some of the time. You may think it funny for me to be drinking rum, but when I come home at night cold, tired & wet through there is no Mother waiting with a hot cup of cocoa & some supper for me, so I have a little rum to make up for it, it makes a man feel a lot warmer & altogether better after it. One thing we all look forward to when we come out is a hot bathe & our officers try & get us one as soon as possible, a hot bath means a wash & a clean change & when a man hasn't had a wash for two or three weeks a bath is a luxury. We had one last Sunday & got a change of everything, shirts, underpants, socks & towels, they weren't new clothes but they were clean & that was the most important thing to us, our other clothes were as lousy as a wombat. I have been getting letters by the dozen the last few weeks, it is something unusual for me not to get any letters, had seven of them tonight one from [you] & I had one or two from you some time ago but lost them somewhere. Three I got tonight were written last August & had been all over the A.I.F. after me. I sent an enquiry card to base about a month ago & since then I have had about a dozen old letters, will send another

one soon, as there are a lot more letters about somewhere. In your letter you said it seemed wicked for you to be enjoying yourself while we were having such a bad time, but don't worry about that lot Rose, I know you think I am going through a little Hell all to myself, but it is not as bad as you think I am doing nicely thank you. I will send this letter to Mother as you may have moved to Kensington before this & I don't know your new address, only had a short note from Howard last week, 5 pages. Have put up a record tonight, writing three pages.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

What is Aunty going to call the new heir & son? Some war name? I suggest, Anzac Beaumont Joffre.

On Active Service,
France,
January 30th 1917

Dear Rose,

A few lines in reply to your letter received this morning. I had two letters last & three this morning so having a few minutes to spare will try & reply. I don't write very often to you but it isn't because it is too much trouble, I write on an average one letter a day & it is nearly round to your turn again. It started to snow again this morning but left off at dinnertime, by the feel of the weather we will have some more tonight, it's generally as cold as blazes a few hours before a good fall, the snow that fell over a fortnight ago is still on the ground. At present we are billeted in the front room of an empty house in a fair-sized village, the houses are very convenient, the water-tap is in the front room just inside the front door, how would you like your tap in the front room, be nice if the tap leaked very much. The kids out in that part of the world get very flash names, Raymond William & Ronald West. I suppose the next three will be called East, North & South. How is it the kids don't get any war names like Charles Thiepval, Robert Ypres or Anzac Pozieres or something like that would be a little more up-to-date then. We had our photos taken last Sunday, two of us, but they did not turn out very well so we are only getting half-a-dozen of them, three each. I will send one each to Mother & Blanche and keep the other one myself such as it is, we both look a couple of bushranging heroes out of work and with no hope of getting any. I expect your parcel will turn up some time this week. This afternoon it is snowing again but we are in our billet learning all about the machine gun, we have a fire going all the time, the machine-gun officer told us to make ourselves comfortable and we did. Firewood is hard to get & all the coal- dumps are guarded by English Tommies, but we kept our fire going somehow, it would be horribly cold without a fire, our boots are frozen hard and stiff every morning. Still we are standing the winter far better than ever I thought we would, it is cold though all the same but we can't have everything we want in this place. The first two or three days we were in this place the issue of bread was rather [small] but we got plenty of biscuits to make up for it, last night we got 9 loaves for 15 of us & that is as good an issue as we ever get, it is over half a loaf a man & our issue is supposed to be a third of a loaf, so we done real well. In addition to this we get two tins of butter, 4 tins of jam & a great big wheel of cheese that nobody hardly ever eats, it comes in handy sometimes to eat with orange marmalade. With so many men out of work over there, with strikes etc., Jack is lucky to be in work all the time as long as he can get a constant job there he will do. Got a good leather coat from the quartermaster last week, it is a lot longer than my tunic & warm as one could wish for. I am sending the two photos in this letter, will you please give them to Mother & Blanche? I wrote to them last Sunday & I want the photos to go with this mail.

Hoping you are all well

I remain
your loving brother

Ross.

Am sending this to Mother's as I am not certain whether you are moving. The other man in the photo is Pte. Victory from Broken Hill also in the Machine Gun Section

P.S. Note one of our steel helmets alongside me in the photo against the wall, it isn't a piece of a toilet set, remember.

On Active Service,
France,
Tuesday 6th March
1917.

Dear Rose,

A few lines in reply to your letter received on Sunday night, the first letters from Aus. for over a month. I had six altogether, one from you, two from Fred & Elsie & three from Blanche. I think my letters home have been stopped or lost somewhere as you all complain about not getting any, Blanche didn't get any for three or four mails & Fred didn't hear for over 8 weeks. I haven't had any news from home for 5 weeks but am hoping to get some this week. We are [just] resting now & having a spell & we want it too after another good trip through the mud. It seems as though every time we go in the line every square inch of mud in France is dumped in the trenches we are going in, we get stuck in the mud time after time & of course we always come out nice & clean & there are no new clothes in the way of puttees, boots & trousers wanted. We are having a pretty good time all through, although the last few days the rations have been a little on the light side, last night it was a tin of butter to seven men, a tin of jam to eight & a loaf of bread to three, tonight it was 4 to a loaf & rather small loaves at that, still 4 to a loaf is better than no bread at all. They have even cut our cheese down, not so very long ago we used to get cheese by the wheel but now we get a very small issue about 1/3 of what it used to be. We all had a bottle of stout issued to us last week don't know where it came from but it was there all the same. One of our officers & our quartermaster are supplying porridge for us in the morning in addition to the usual breakfast of bacon & tea. Somehow or other the machine-gunners lost a day's rations in the line again the same as last time. But considering the mud & other things it is a wonder rations or anything else got up there, one thing we got a good drop of rum fairly often & I might tell you we found it very acceptable & we looked for it. We don't get enough to make us drunk, although not being used to it, it would take very little to make me want to finish the war on my own, but after struggling through mud & water over our knees & then sitting in the cold all night you would be surprised how much better we feel for half a cup of rum about 5 in the morning, sometimes we only get about two spoonful's & that is just enough to make us wish for a little more to warm us up properly. I suppose you are used to the daylight saving business by now, expect we will be altering our clocks & watches again shortly, when we altered the time last summer for the winter we were in the trenches & I was mess orderly, I got out with the breakfast an hour too early. Glad to hear you got plenty of fruit last summer, the only fruit we get are oranges & tinned stuff, oranges 2d each & tinned stuff up to 3/- a tin, still we have nothing else to buy & a tin of milk & a tin of pears or peaches make a decent tea for two of us. Tell Jack to get in the A.S.C. or Light Horse if possible, the A.S.C. is about the best for him.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well,

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
France,
March 28th
1917.

Dear Rose,

A few more lines before the mail closes, haven't much time to write very much as we only have a concert to go to tonight & pictures tomorrow night & last night we done a bit of stunt, just to keep our minds off the war. Today is a beautiful day, raining & hail nearly all the time but we are in our billets this afternoon doing nothing, a couple of us cleaned our gun just now & our rifles are clean so we have a few minutes to ourselves & nearly everybody is writing. A few are playing poker with the old chaplain looking on & talking to them at the same time. He's not a bad old sort, often drops in to see how the boys are getting on. We had a lot of stout the night before last, often get it issued to us, a franc a bottle, so we put all the empty bottles under the corporal's bed & he didn't know they were there till the morning when he rolled his bed up & then the look on his face, he thought it was a bit hard but didn't know what was wrong. He came home drunk last night & at two o'clock this morning he woke everybody up, he was only drilling his platoon in his sleep & yelling orders out at the top of his voice. We thought he had all the rats lined up & drilling them. We often wake up in the middle of the night & hear the rats on a route march round our billet, we saw them three nights ago, they must have been moving into the line as they were all in fighting order & had their artillery with them. We have a rattling football team in our battalion now, we have never lost a match & can line up any team in the A.I.F. yesterday a team went away & played a game of soccer & of course they won. Have you heard anything of George Rowney lately, have never heard a word about him since you wrote & said he was in England. Haven't had any letters from home for weeks now, we very seldom get any Australian mail, had a letter & a parcel from England last week. Has Jack gone into camp yet? The war will be over by the time he gets over here, it is just about finished now & we will all be home again soon. I will send this letter out home, the last one I think went to Sturt St. so I don't know whether you will get it alright.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are all well.

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
France,
April 21st
1917.

Dear Rose,

A few lines in reply to your letter received on April 5th & which I was very glad to receive & to hear that you are all well. Have been getting plenty of letters this month, had about 18 so far & expect there are one or two more to come yet. It is about 11 a.m. now & I am lying in bed writing two that will tell you the strenuous sort of life we are living just at present, had to get up & go for my breakfast & then back to bed again. There is nothing else to do here in the morning, might have to do a little fatigue this afternoon or tonight, am not sure yet. I suppose you all had a good time at Easter, we had a pretty fair time under the circumstances so can't complain, but it is just as well to enjoy yourself while you can. We are away back from the line now, miles & miles away can just hear a big gun chuck something over occasionally, they are giving us a good spell & expect the war will be over before it is time for us to go in again. We are getting plenty of rations lately, have more bread now than ever I've had before, last night it was a little over two loaves for 5 men & often it is a loaf to two & very seldom we get a loaf to 3. Bought a block of cherry cake from the canteen yesterday, about 5 lbs. in the block & cost us 5 francs (3/6 in Aus. money) pretty cheap for that sort of cake, there's about 1 lb. of it left, two of us bought it between us. It's all we can do with our money now, buy a few little extras from the canteen such as lobster, sausages, cakes, salmon, golden syrup etc. The parcel arrived safely and was very acceptable, everything in it was perfect & we thoroughly enjoyed it especially the cocoa, we lost no time in making a Dixie of that for breakfast. We are having some nice weather the last day or two, not very sunny but a lot warmer than it has been for weeks, it is to be hoped the winter has finished now for good, it was the worst winter for 18 years over here & the yarn was going around before the winter that all the Australians were going back to Egypt because we would never be able to stand the winter. We got through it somehow but I never want to see another winter like it neither here or in Australia. Wouldn't mind the cold so much if it wasn't for the eternal mud everywhere we went, but as we can't have snow & rain without the mud we must put up with it. How long will Rowley be in Melbourne before he comes over, he will stand a good chance of seeing the finish of it all if he waits long enough, don't think it will last much longer. Had a letter from Mother & she said her & Bessie went to your place, found no one home so got in through the window & had dinner, good job the police didn't see them or they may have been arrested, that would cause a bit of a sensation. Glad you are still getting plenty of fruit, we get an orange now & then & that is the only fruit we see, you are rather lucky having grapes growing in the backyard all ready for you as soon as you moved in. Have just had dinner, a real good stew again followed by bread & golden syrup & have a tin of sausages & bottle of sauce left for tea & there will be another issue of rations & rum again tonight so we are not living too bad. I suppose Phyllis is tired of going to school already, it is a long way for the poor little kid to walk.

Hoping you & Jack & the girls are all well.

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

P.S. How long have you been wearing glasses? I didn't know anything about it till you mentioned it in your letter. Ross.

On Active Service,
France,
July 5th 1917.

Dear Rose,

A line or two to let you know I am still going strong & doing well since joining the battalion again last Sunday. We are out for spell, still having a fairly easy time, plenty to eat & not very much training, do a little bit of a trot around of a night time, occasionally I have all the next day off, we were out from 7.30 till 11.30 this morning & are having the afternoon off. I have quite recovered from the little scratches I got in May, they were only small wounds & are completely healed up now, there's only some small scars left to show where I got knocked. Had a pretty good time in hospital, the sisters were very good to me all the time I was there. They looked after me well & kept me there as long as they could but the major came unexpectedly one day & I had to pack up my troubles & nick off out of it. Didn't stay at the base very long, left the hospital on a Saturday, hit the base on Monday & left on Wednesday. The last letter I had from you was written on March 4th so expect there will be one or two with the next mail unless they have been sunk, that is what we will have to blame it on. Didn't do much writing while I was in hospital, wrote two letters home & one to England, stand a good chance of getting leave to England soon if I can raise enough money, supposed to have £10 before we go, but I think it makes a difference if we have relations to go to, am anxious to get over there & see them all. I had nine months service with the battalion before I got hit so I had a pretty good spin. Has Rowley left for the front yet? He will be just in time to empty all the sand bags after it is all over. The country round about here is great, everything is green wherever you look & wild flowers, "wild" strawberries & cherries are plentiful. We are getting fairly good rations lately, a loaf to three men, plenty of butter, cheese & jam & we get bully beef & biscuits by the train load. According to what Billy Hughes said in Australia lately we must be a flash mob, he says the Australian army is the best fed & the best clothed army in the war. Somebody must have been telling him things in a green envelope or else he dreams a lot, if he saw us sometimes he [wouldn't] say we were the best clothed mob in the war, when we leave hospital they chuck any old clothes at you & it's a case of take them or go naked.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
France, August 1st,
1917.

Dear Rose,

A few lines to let you know I am still going well & feeling fit. Today is a beaut of a day, started to rain sometime in the night & is still raining, we were supposed to go out on a bit of stint today about 4 miles away but it was too wet, we started off & at about ½ mile on the way & we had to come back again. So we had a lecture in the billets instead. We have a pretty decent billet in this place, nice & dry & warm, the billet we left last Sunday was even better than this, in one way, we had almost 6 ft. of hay underneath us to sleep on, only the roof leaked a little when it rained & we were liable to lose things in straw, but we managed to find all our things when we paid the rent & left. One thing about this village we can't buy very much, plenty of beer & chocolate & that is all, I don't think the French people know what jam & honey is, very seldom see any for sale, we get a pretty fair issue of rations as a rule, last night we got 3 tins of jam & 5 bottles of pickles for 39 men. There's four sections in the platoon so we tossed up to see who would go without jam. Needless to say our section lost but we got two bottles of pickles instead, two nights ago we got 9 tins of Jam for the platoon. The shortage last night was due to an extra issue of tobacco & cigarettes & matches, a packet of tobacco & cigarettes each. We were paid again last Saturday night but haven't used much of it yet don't spend much here as we are a fair distance from the canteen & it is too much trouble to walk there & buy anything. One thing we always have plenty of is biscuits we get more biscuits than the King, they are not bad to chew when on the march or for supper. Had a letter from Bessie last night about 5 pages she wrote & told me she had killed a magpie, put it in a bag & hit it against the wall until it was dead, I bet Mac wouldn't laugh about it. Had several letters the last few days from Howard & Glen & others at home, have one here from you written on April 1st that I got some time ago, it is nearly a month since I wrote to you last, no sooner get finished writing when it is time to start all over again but I manage alright.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are all well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
France, August 20th
1917.

Dear Rose,

A line or two in reply to your letter of June 5th received last night, I was very glad to hear from you again & to hear that you were all well at the time of writing. We are having the time of our life just at present, undergoing a severe course of training, you should see us. Every morning we start off about 6.15 for the river after a drink of hot tea, only have to go about 2 ½ miles & as soon as we get there, hop in the water for a swim, we go down in boots, socks, underpants & shirt, nothing else, the underpants are made of calico & are not quite as long as the football pants I used to wear home, the water is not as cold as one would think & we feel great after the swim. We are all hot & wet with perspiration when we get there but we take things pretty easy coming home again, have breakfast at 8 o'clock & then have till 9.50 to get ready for parade. Have to shave, clean our boots & rifle, clean equipment & polish all the brasswork on it, I tell you we are the crack battalion of the A.I.F. not another battalion can touch us. The Colonel gave us a night out at the 1st Division cinema & concert show last Saturday night, bought the house especially for the 10th Battalion & we had a very good show. I had four letters last night, one from you, one from Blanche & two from Fred & Elsie, you had all just heard that I had been wounded, not bad enough to get me home to Australia, not even bad enough to get to England. I am feeling pretty good now, in fact I have never felt better, the training is doing me good & I feel fit enough for anything, would never know I had been wounded if it were not for the scars left behind, there were no pieces taken out of the wounds, although I have an idea there is a piece left in one of them, but have not had any trouble with it. I'm sorry to hear Jack was put off, hope he is in work again now, I suppose work over there is scarce & the workers are plentiful. I've a pretty good job, had it for two years now & haven't been told anything about finishing up yet so I suppose it will last a bit longer. I haven't heard from Katie for some time now, the last time she wrote she said she was going to be married & that is the last I have heard from her. We are in a rattling good billet one of the best we have had in France, plenty of clean straw to sleep on, we don't like turning out in the morning.

Hoping you & Jack & the children are all well.

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

On Active Service,
Belgium, October 7th
1917.

Dear Rose,

A few lines to let you know I am still going strong & feeling pretty fit only the weather is not all it might be just at present. We have just started winter by the seem of things, has been raining for 4 days now & cold, don't talk about sunny France or Belgium to me, for 4 nights now we have a freeze, the boys are up in the front line & I am back here safe & sound but liable to go any minute. Don't know how they are getting on with the cold in the trenches but it is something damnable back here, still have one blanket & one overcoat & last night I slept, or tried to sleep, with 2 pairs of socks on, all I possess, & then my feet were terribly cold all night. Am sitting in bed now with my boots off & wrapped up in my overcoat writing this, the rain is coming down a treat, cats & dogs, lying everywhere & the wind is blowing, all we want now is the tent to blow away & then it will be a case of "Oh! Wert thou in the caud, caud blast!" (We act). Things could be a lot worse than they are though, we could be out without any coats all night & it could be raining twice as bad & we could be lost & hungry, that's the time to rouse & growl. I came back from England last Monday, put in a good time over there, a lot better time than I am having just now, had a nice warm bed to sleep in every night & three good meals a day, get three meals a day here, at least we eat three times a day & somewhere to sleep at night. It's great fun coming back looking for the battalion, nobody ever heard of the 10th Battalion, didn't know such a thing existed, some Australians admitted they had heard of a 1st Division some time or other but as for a 10th Batt., never heard of it. I got out of the train at 4.30 Monday afternoon & started out to find the battalion, at 7.30 that night I was still finding them. I got tired of asking for them, at 7.30 I came across the Area Commandant (a Major) & asked him if he could tell me where the 10th Australian battalion was & he says "No, what do they belong to?" I explained to him patiently who & what we were & then he invited me to stay to tea with him & I did. We had baked rabbit, mashed potatoes & gravy, boiled rice & preserved fruit. I stayed there that night & the next morning I started out again & found the mob at 11 o'clock, had been within 100 yards of them the night before, but didn't know it, was just too late to go in the line with them, I am waiting back here now. Had my photo taken in England, I will send you one when they come, if they come at all. It will be a few days before this goes so may send them with this, there are some letters for me a few miles further back, don't know who they are from but expect there is one from you, had a parcel from Mother the other day.

Hoping you & Jack & the girls are well

I remain
your loving brother
Ross.

[In another hand – I think this was the last letter any of us got, never saw any photos from England.
Rose]