

EIGHT

LIVING CONDITIONS

APRIL–AUGUST 1915

A periscope view of No Man's Land was a terrible sight – littered with jam tins, meat tins, broken rifles and discarded equipment – every few yards a dead body and hosts of buzzing flies. Chloride of lime, with its hateful associations, was scattered thickly on all decaying matter, and the scent of Anzac drifted ten miles out to sea. In this fœtid atmosphere, with the miners on both sides burrowing under the posts like furtive rabbits, hand-grenade throwers carrying on their nerve-wracking duels, stretcher bearers constantly carrying out the unfortunate ones, digging and improving the trenches under a scorching sun – is it any wonder that the men of Anzac were looked at almost pityingly by the reinforcements and the rare visitors from Helles and the warships?

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE Gallipoli campaign is largely confined to the landing of 25 April. Yet more New Zealanders and Australians landed on Gallipoli after this historic date, most of whom spent months on the peninsula and endured dreadful conditions.



PRIVATE THOMAS ALICK RIMMER, WELLINGTON BATTALION, TO HIS SISTER LIZZIE
(ROBIN RIMMER AND PETER SALMON COLLECTION).

Gaba Tepe
Gallipoli Peninsula
Sat 10th July 1915

My dear Lizzie,

I must say that I was extremely pleased to receive your letter yesterday the first I have received since we left N.Z. Mail day is a great day here at the front & you can imagine how we all look forward to getting news from



Thomas Alick Rimmer. ROBIN RIMMER COLLECTION

home, more so than we have ever done before. With your letter I received five others: two from Mother & one each from Lillia, Harold & Bob & I must say that I spent a very pleasant half hour or more in reading them all & then when I had finished I read them all over again. Well Lizzie, I suppose Mother will have sent you some of her letters to read as I asked her to send them round to you all as I cannot promise to write to all; one of the chief reasons being that my stock of writing material is very limited & I have also at times had to use cardboard off tobacco boxes & think myself lucky to get even that so do not be surprised if you get a cardboard letter sometimes. I have now been nearly five weeks here at the front & have got broken in to things & got used to having to put up with all sorts of things. It is surprising how used one gets to the sound of guns & rifles & the close shaves which one continually has. When we came here first the sight of so many dead & wounded made one feel queer but we have seen such a lot that we take little notice now, & I have seen some pretty bad wounds at times. I am thankful

to say that so far I have been spared from getting any wounds although at times I have had a few close shaves but one ceases to worry about it after a while & treat it as part of the day's work. I must admit that at times I feel a bit run down & I have not the strength & condition that I had in N.Z. for we do not get fed like fighting cocks by any means, & what takes it out of one more so is the lack of sleep we have to put up with. The past two nights we have had to turn out at eleven o'clock & go on fatigue work making a road as it cannot be done in the day-time on account of the gun-fire that would be put on to us. When we are on duty in the trenches we have to go for 24 hours on duty without rest every other day & then when one gets a few hours to rest he is pestered awful with the flies which are a curse to us here. I am not downhearted in the least though. I shall always try & do my duty for if so many others can stand it I think I can. The Australians & N. Zealanders have so far fought in a way that they need never be ashamed of & we all have a good name to keep up. I often wondered what name you would call your boy. I like Rex very much. I am looking forward to the day when I shall see you all & the kiddies once more. Yes I will have seen a bit of the world by that time, enough to do me for a while. I am putting a couple of badges in for the children that I got out of some packets of cigarettes that were issued to me.

Love to you & Colly & also love & kisses for children.

XXXXXXXXXX

Your loving brother

Alick

PRIVATE THOMAS ALICK RIMMER, WELLINGTON BATTALION, TO HIS SISTER LILLIA
(ROBIN RIMMER AND MARIE ADAMS COLLECTION).

Gallipoli Peninsula
Gaba Tepe
Friday 16th July 1915

My Dear Lillia,

I believe I have received more letters from you than anyone else since I left N.Z. You have really been good to me what with letters, weeklies & papers, I feel very grateful indeed; for letters, or any kind of newspapers are a

God-send in a place like this. I have been well off for mail since I have been here. Six last Friday, & seven the day before yesterday. The seven consisted of two each from yourself & Mother, & one each from Annie, Ruby, & Willie. I began to give up on hearing from Ruby but I have not let it worry me a great deal as I have you all to care for me & perhaps it is for the best that we parted. Lillia, if I cannot get to write to you very often you will understand, won't you?

We never know when our time is our own now that we are really on active service & another thing, I am just about out of writing material & it is a problem where one can get more. Even a bit of cardboard is hard to get. I try to keep a little in hand so that I am sure of being able to write to Mother for her letters must always be my first consideration mustn't they?; & of course you will all read them so it will be nearly as good as getting letters yourselves won't it? Fancy, Bert being back in N.Z. again. No wonder I could not find him for I enquired often about him. I may get a chance yet of seeing him out this way. I have kept in splendid health all the time I have been here only I feel a bit worn out some mornings when coming out of the trenches from the firing line after being 24 hrs on duty without a proper sleep for if one does try to snatch a couple of hours rest in the day-time he is pestered out of his life with flies as they are awful here. The sea is not far from where we are camped & I take every opportunity I can get of going down for a swim, it does one a world of good. We go into the firing line every other day & our part of the trench is only about twenty yds from the enemy's, close enough to throw bombs by hand from one trench to another. The bombs & shells are the things that have done us most harm. I am quite used to close shaves & seeing so many wounded & killed for we see it everyday. I feel thankful that I am still unharmed. Last Sunday while I was down at the beach to help to carry the mail up, several shells burst within a few yds of us. One burst not three yds. from where I was, killing an Australian on the spot & wound[ing] a N. Zealander very severely. Bits of shell spluttered all round me but I never got a scratch, I feel that if I am to come out alright I will, for God will do all for the best. When I come back to N.Z. I shall have seen a bit of the world & will be able to tell you plenty. Write often & I shall look forward to more papers. Remember me to Rob. Love to you dear sister & all. Your loving brother

– Alick xxxx

Private Edwin Herbert (Bert) Honnor's letters are remarkable for the depth of feeling they reveal toward fellow soldiers. He was immensely proud to be a New Zealander, greatly admired the Australians and Indian soldiers but had no time at all for the British soldiers of Kitchener's New Army. Honnor was killed in action on the Somme on 16 September 1916; the same day as three close friends from his home town of Hastings. These letters were provided by Doug Honnor of Hastings, Bert's nephew; they may not be used in another commercial publication without the permission of the Honnor family.

PRIVATE EDWIN HERBERT (BERT) HONNOR, WELLINGTON BATTALION,
TO HIS MOTHER.

Cairo
Port Koubbeh
Hospital
August 15th 1915

My Dear Mother

You will see by the above that I am in the hospital but I am only a very slight case to come. I came here on 10th after leaving Gallipoli on 5th; I was sent away with dysentery after being there nearly fifteen weeks & only three days before the fearless New Zealanders made a brilliant advance. The hand of Providence seemed to keep me out of these battles, but again I must say that I was lucky as our Regiment was terribly mauled after a great fight & taking a hill 971 feet high. The Colonials are the bravest soldiers in the world. The Australians have no nerve & never budge an inch from their trenches; if the Turks get in their trenches, they get right into them with the bayonet; never a Turk gets out. Some Regiments of Kitchener's Army were supporting the New Zealanders in their latest great fight, & although our fellows were stale troops after fifteen weeks' heavy work they showed the Tommies how to fight & hold their captured ground, which the other fellows didn't do. The landing was nothing compared with this; our game fellows fell by the score but the standing ones kept at it & they won the day.

Our Colonel was killed & also was our Company Commander; many of the finest fellows were killed & many wounded & judging by accounts only a few are left. Sid Brimer was wounded but as yet we have not a full list.

Well dear Mother, I am feeling a lot better but the doctor doesn't seem inclined to let me out. We are well looked after here & get good food. I expect to be out in a couple of days & until then I cannot send a cable so you

will see why my cable was delayed. I should have sent it last week.
Hoping all are well at home.

Your loving Son
Bert.

PRIVATE EDWIN HERBERT (BERT) HONNOR, WELLINGTON BATTALION,
TO HIS MOTHER (DOUG HONNOR COLLECTION).

Port De Koubleh
Cairo
26/8/15

Dear Mother,

Just a few more lines to let you know that I am still in the Hospital but I am getting on well now. I was rather unfortunate as just as I was nearly better, I got a slight touch of fever. However it never got a hold; this was about five days ago & I have seen an enormous difference since; only milk & beaten eggs, & custard. We are very well cared for, & our nurses think the world of us. The doctor came round yesterday morning & I told him that my nerves were pretty shaky & I didn't sleep well. He asked me if I had been at the front & how long. I told him fifteen weeks & he said 'A long time. I will give you a good spell before you go back'.

Now mother you don't want to be alarmed because I am in Hospital. A fellow wants a little care after our arduous times & the hospital is a nice quiet place. I think I will be sent to Port Said shortly; there is a convalescent camp there on the sea back & people have told me that it is much cooler there than here. Wallie Nesbit is here in the Hospital; he has a shrapnel wound in the foot. The Sister says I can get up tomorrow so I will be able to see him. Des Stanley & Sid Brimer are at Heliopolis Hospital but I haven't seen them yet. A large number of our fellows have gone to England, & I don't think it will be long before a lot more go. I haven't had a letter from you since early in July but after you leave the Peninsula your letters get all over the show. However they will turn up later.

What did New Zealand say when she saw the casualty lists of the last big fight? But what would the Turks say when they saw their lists? If the



Edwin Herbert (Bert) Honnor. His strong opinions regarding the qualities of his allies are reflected throughout his letters.
HONNOR FAMILY COLLECTION

Colonials opened the eyes of the world in the landing fight, well I don't know what they will say about this last go. They drove the Turks off a hill & the Tommies retired on the wing. Consequently our fellows were infiladed & lost heavily. There is no love lost between Colonial & Tommy. When I say Tommy I don't say the Regular Tommies. I mean this pet lot of Kitchener's. The British will never drive the Germans out of France if they are all like the crowd we had behind us. I tell you it will take the Canadians & Australasians & Indians. We are told that these fellows dropped their rifles & went for like blazes. They can never say they are soldiers; should have been put to the wall. Harold Hyde's cousin is in the Hospital, but he is well now. A nice boy & just like Harold; I don't know how he fared.

Well Mother it is very warm & I will bring this to a close with kindness love to all at home.

Your Loving Son
Bert