

1ST LEICHHARDT SCOUTS
145 BALMAIN ROAD
LEICHHARDT 2040
PO BOX 155
LEICHHARDT 2040

1ST LEICHHARDT SCOUT GROUP FOUNDED 1908

**RECORDS OF JAMES X COUTTS, SCOUT LEADER AND DISTRICT COMMISSIONER,
LEICHHARDT DISTRICT AND RECORDS OF 1ST LEICHHARDT SCOUTS,
FROM 1908 TO 1938**

(Transcription of records collated by Allan Songberg,
Regional Adviser, South Metropolitan Region)

PART 3

By R.A.K Doyle.

On Active Service

1st Annandale Troop

Camp

France 17.9.16

To

My Brother Scouts.

1st Annandale Troop.

Comrades,

It is now sometime ago since I last wrote you, and I feel that I have neglected my Duty for did I not promise to write at least once a month when I left two years ago? However when you take into consideration the activities of the last few months. I am sure you will forgive me.

No doubt you would like to hear of some of my experiences during the last few months. I will endeavour to make this letter an interesting one and give you an account of our big battle at Logines.

We were in a sector of the line further North when we received the word to move down to the Somme. We entrained and arrived in the Somme District the following morning. The country here was glorious and not much unlike

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We were in a sector of the line further north when we received the word to move down to the Somme. We entrained and arrived in the Somme District the following morning. The country here was glorious and not much unlike

our own Dear land. We marched nearly all that day and arrived at a fairly big country town where we spent the night. The next few days saw us marching from town to town. At last we arrived at a town not far beyond the range of the guns. Here we prepared for what we now call the "stunt." Bandages and field Dressings were collected. Haversacks of Dressings were equipped and issued to us. Then the day previous to our moving we were issued with distinctive colors to sew on the back of our tunics. Then the eventful day arrived when we left for the trenches. We marched throughout the afternoon and arrived at dusk at the old line before the charge on 1st July. Here we waited till dark so that we could take over the line from the Tommies. At last it came dark and we split up into little groups and proceeded across what had once been "no-mans land" but is now British. We kept on top of the enemies first line trenches now hardly able to be recognised having been heavily shelled

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and all battered in. We proceeded this way for a good way. Here and there passing one or two bodies of dead Germans or Tommies who had died days before and were then in no ways fresh. At last we lopped a rise and came into full view of the flare lights being sent up from the line. We now had to go along quietly and take extra precautions against being seen. A few shells came over our way but fell short. We were sitting down taking a short rest when a cool and pleasant smell wafted across to us. We immediately guessed it was gas and got our helmets ready. Some of the boys did put theirs own but most of us had them over our heads ready to pull down at a moments notice of danger. As the gas came from the shells it soon passed over us. At last after roaming about among the smashed trenches we arrived at our line and took over from the Tommies.

We occupied a dugout which had been the home of a German Viscount. It comprised four dugouts each connected with a subterranean

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We occupied a dugout which had been the home of a German Viscount. It comprised four dugouts each connected with a subterranean

passage. The first dugout had been used as an office of some description, probably a dressing station. The next one had bunks fitted similar to a ship's cabin. There were four bunks fitted with spring mattresses - also a dressing table with a splendid big mirror fitted in the wall above it. The whole of the room being covered with a white cloth. The whole looking very homely. The next room was evidently used as a sitting or smoking room. It contained several arm chairs round tables shelves and books (written in Hunnish) the furniture and carpet probably borrowed from the French villages. Adjoining this room was another small room containing a splendid big stove and table cupboards etc. In fact it was a veritable little mansion on the field. The whole of it being about 30 feet under the earth and therefore quite safe from the shells. We stayed there for two days, then we took our Dressings up to three dugouts near the line and prepared for the charge. We erected small tables and laid out our dressings and instruments ready to

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receive the wounded which we would get from the line. After having a little to eat we lit our pipes and cigarettes and sat and smoked and waited for the hour to come. At last the guns increased, it was now ~~was~~ twenty-eight minutes past 12. Outside the heavens are lit with a flickering red glare from our shells. Inside the dugouts are shaking with the concussion of heavy guns and the candles are continually go out. The guns have almost stopped. One of the boys looks at the watch. It is 12:30. We each say "they are over" A weary wait for the first wounded to come in, as we know no man other than wounded will be in from the line until the morrow. An anxious time I can assure you. We are not near Headquarters so do not know how the battle goes. The noise is deafening we have to shout to make ourselves hear each other. There is a few pebbles roll down the stairs we look up and help the first wounded man down. He is slightly injured in the back with a piece of shrapnel shell. Seeing he is only slightly

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wounded he is showered with questions "How goes it up there. Cobber" "Don't know. got hit going over. and came in" he is heard to shout back. More wounded are arriving now. Here is one man a slight wound on the own head made by a blow with a nulla nulla. His steel helmet has saved his life. He was getting over the parapet into Fritz's trench when the German biffed him. His language because he did not get the hun is too lurid for this letter. However he knows he will have to leave for Hospital but finds consolation in the knowledge of still being the possessor of a hun helmet. One of the Prussian Guards. From this we know our boys are up against a good hun regiment. I cannot tell you of each mans tale as he entered the dressing station, asked whether we could hold our positions won. the wounded, seriously and otherwise, would yell "yes" one man I asked did he think we would loose the ground newly won. he answered "Did we loose the Pine" (Lone Pine, Anzac) he then

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asked for a drink so that he could walk down to the clearing station. Other men would say "we have not lost any position yet and I am sure we are not going to start now" or "that is not in our training" such remarks as these goes to show the spirit of our men and the confidence we have of Victory. The noise outside has grown, we now have an enemy barrage placed outside our dugout and on the road. There are wounded men that can see us, and we can see them, but cannot reach them as the shell fire is too bad. As the shelling would lift we would get as many in the dugouts as possible and dress them. Once while I was dressing one man, he had a deep wound on the shoulder. I caught the sweet and pleasant smell of the tear gas. Then the eyes began to water and the smarting was terrible. I put on my goggles but could not see through them as I had left it too late. I took them off again and fought the gas while I dressed my man. When I had finished my eyelids were burning and

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tears were rolling down my face in torrents. I dried them and adjusted the goggles again over them this time I was successful in beating the gas and felt great relief. It is a pity that the hun cannot fight us fair, but now, I understand, we have a lot of his shells and are sending them back to him, per gun, so what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

I cannot give you an account of the six days we were there. One day a shell fell in front of our door, killing two and wounding four of our boys on the stairs. I was at the foot of the stairs and had just time to remove my head before a heap of dirt fell where I had just lain.

After 4 days of perfect hades we got the order that we were being relieved. How the bearer of the news was welcomed by us is beyond my powers of writing. We hugged each other and brightened up wonderfully in the face.

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of being fagged out and having had practically no sleep for 4 days. But we were not out of that place and in safety alive yet.

The barrage was still there and between us and safety. 9

The time has arrived now for us to leave we each take our haversacks and take to the road. We run on down towards our big dugout which we left 4 days ago. Shells drop behind us but we still continue on our chase. A piece of shell whistled past me and buried itself in the ground. At last we are through. I looked over my shoulder to see the land. The battlefield is hid by a pall of black smoke punctuated here and there by the red flash of bursting shell. God, it is marvellous how any man could have lived through it, but have we not lived in it for the past four days. The road of is strewn with corpses some are our own while others our enemies been blown to pieces by

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own artillery while they were prisoners in our hands and being removed to safety.

The sight is fearsome. We hurry to the dugout where a hot drink of tea awaits us. Now we drink it and pass our mugs back for more. It is 4 days since any hot food has been eaten by us. The tea we had sent to us once we gave to the wounded, poor chaps they did more than we and so deserved it. We had hot tea and hot stew given us. After eating this we wanted sleep, but we had to fight this desire as we had to pick up the rest of the Battalion.

At last we are on the march again. We have arrived at the Battalion. Here there is plenty of hot food and drink.

I shall never forget that meeting of the Battalion. Many a mate gone missing. Many handshakes and blessings as mates met again. All cheery but fagged out. After a spell we march away and bivouac for the night. Now we sleep. There is

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sleep inducer than sheer and utter fatigue. We were up again next day and on the move back, singing along the route and displaying many a German helmet or cap to the great delight of the French folk. Of course each holder of a helmet had some fantastic tale to accompany the souvenir.

After many more days of marching we at last arrived at a little village where we rested for one week. Being fitted out with new clothes for most of our clothes had been torn by the barbed wire and also smeared with blood. My coat had one sleeve almost covered with blood while our trousers were all bespeckled. After a weeks rest we were on the march again for the trenches.

I have tried to give you an accurate pen picture of the Battle as experienced by me. Of course there are many tales of the doings of our men. But it would

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take more than me to write these. I can only give you an account of the happenings about two hundred yards behind the line and also what the men tell me who were in the actual fire.

Before ending this description I cannot pass without saying that the wounded mens spirits were wonderful. They were as cheery as children at a Sunday School.

One man, I remember, was shot in the back so had to lay on the stretcher face down. However this did not dampen his spirits for he kept singing "Australia will be there" for a long time. When he was shifted down to the ambulance he wished us all good luck, and the last I heard of him he was still singing. Then there was another man with one of his hands blown off who kept on singing to the Doctor to give him something to ease the pain in these words and to the tune of

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Clementine. "Oh dear Doctor! Oh! Dear Doctor give me something. Give me something to ease pain." We gave him morphia and put him to sleep. Such men as these are common among our army. Confidence in Victory is ours and nothing the huns can say and do will destroy it.

The doings of the second trip back I will deal with in my next letter to you.

I will now go on to more general news.

The first thing I want to know is. Why do not some of you boys write to me? It is now many months since I last heard from any of you. You chaps must not forget that now I am so far away from you. I do not forget you. I am continually thinking and speaking of you, and eagerly watch the mail for letters from you, but I seem to be confined to disappointment each time for there are no scout letters from you. I feel this

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I think too much of them for that: I often sit at night and look over the photos I have of you and think of the happy days we had together and wonder whether we will ever enjoy them over again.

My word Chaps if ever I do have the fortune of getting out of this game alive I can tell you we will have many a fine time together. These days may be quite close to us now for all we know. I want to keep my mind fresh with you chaps and if you will write me letters it will greatly help me to keep up my memory.

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If I sat here and wrote you page upon page of the comfort one receives when he gets a letter. I could not impress the full meaning of which I write. Suffice it to say that while we are reading our letters we are home again among you.

I do not think I can write you any more this mail so will soon have to end.

Before ending I must give my best wishes for Tom Chapman, Burny Cockburn, Bill Graham, Young Barr, Young Greives, Rover and all the others I know in the Troop. I also send greetings for Jack Willis, Bill Lee and not forgetting my friend ----- Farrar. I do not know why he does not write me. However if we meet again all will be well. I cannot end without remembering that I

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I do not forget them although I
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Now I will end with Kindest Regards
to all the workers for the Troop and best
wishes for you, my own Scouts. and
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Believe me to be

Ever your true Friend and
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