



Letters from the Past No. 30

The WW1 Letters of Reginald John Greig.

3. England Part 2

These letters have been transcribed by Reg's daughter Dawn Daken. They were published in the Moruya Examiner and kept in a scrap book by her Grandmother. Reg is still in England but has now moved to the coastal town of Swanage in Dorset.



Swanage

Swanage August 8th 1916

My dear Mum - you will see by the above that I have got to the new camp. It is a fine place right on the sea coast, If you look at the map, you will see Swanage on the South Coast, a little west of the Isle of Wight, which we can see from our back door. We got here on Thursday, and it was a change to be near the sea after 4 weeks on Salisbury Plains. When we arrived at the station there were hundreds of people to see us and the band was waiting to play us to the camp. It was a grand march along the sea front. There are only 100 of us here among about 1000 tommies. We get along well with them. It is very funny, they thought the Australians were wild chaps and for the first day or two they used to eye us and keep out of our road as though we would eat them, but now they are roar good chums with us, we drill together, under their officers. The officer instructing us is a Scotsman and he is a fine chap. He was at the front for 18 months and he can give us some good tips about the game. He was in the army for 21 years and rose from the ranks. They are the sort of officers that we can get along with.

England is turning out more guns per month than the whole British army had at the beginning of the war, and shells by the million are being turned out, mostly high, explosives. We are getting along well with the howitzer. They are fine guns. The beauty of them being that they can be fired from behind a hill or out of a hole and no one can see them, but they fire a 40lb lyddite shell, which will shift things.

Last Sunday week we went to Salisbury and went to service in the Cathedral and the Sunday before we went to St. Pauls. Last Sunday we went to the Congregational Church in Swanage. The London trip was great and wouldn't mind another 4 days. If I get any more leave I am going up to Scotland. The tube railways in London are a revelation, you go down in a big lift capable of holding 50 people or you can go down the moving stairs and then you find yourself in a big rabbit burrow, that is the only thing I can compare them to. The trains are some travellers, they are driven by electricity. It seems funny if you going anywhere to drive down one of these and then come up a few miles away. The tubes are all steel cased and the air is circulated by the carriages acting like a big pump drawing the air through after them, if you are on a station you can feel the air rushing through before you hear the train.

There are no tram cars right in the city, there is no room for them. The motor buses run in the streets but they are too slow. The suburban trains are all electrified: it is possible to travel 10 miles in 7 minutes from Clapham Junction to Waterloo. The train to Brighton does 62 miles in 68 minutes including 2 stops, the express does the journey in 58 minutes but since the war it has been cut out.

The country between London and Brighton is the prettiest I have ever seen. England is not a bad place at all. I am glad we didn't go to Egypt and I bet you are too. Well I think I will bring this letter to a close, hoping it finds you all well. From your loving son, Reg.

Swanage Sept. 3 1916

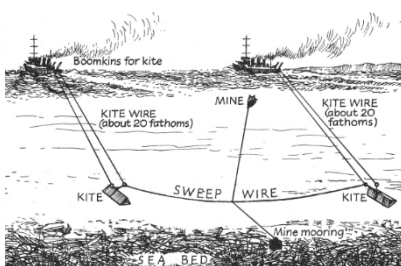
Dear Dad - I am just writing these few lines to give you some idea what I think of things in general over this way. We arrived here in the best time of the year, all the crops were just grown and beginning to ripen and it looked fine now the harvesting is finished and the wet season is settling in. The land is not at all like the soil out there. The most of it is chalk sub soil which holds the moisture well; it is wonderful the crops of wheat they grow, of course no big paddocks like in Australia. The soil in most cases is very shallow but the chalk keeps it supplied with moisture and lime. The clover and rye in Devonshire and Hampshire would do your eyes good to look at. I would like to be able to take some of the farm horses back with me, they are the finest sample of horses I have ever seen. The roads here are wonderful; they go the right way about making them, they dig off the surface down to the sub-soil then they fill in with stone and then put a 15 ton roller on it and then a layer of gravel or metal and roll it again. Then they put fine gravel and clay on it and water and roll it again. When they finish it is like concrete and wears well too.

There was a big zeppelin raid on London last night, there were 13 airships altogether but only 3 got as far inland as London and they brought one of them down. One of our boys was in London that night on leave and heard all the row. He looked out and saw all the airships shown up by the search lights and he also saw the one bombed and burst into flames. It fell slowly to the ground in a field. He went and saw the wreck and he brought back a piece of the propellers. There were a few casualties but I don't think there were many. The zeppelins can't do much damage as they can't tell where they are because of all the lights being shrouded London is as black as the ace of spades at night, not a street lamp or any other light showing, the only lights to be seen are searchlights and they are everywhere, England is alive with them.

From here we can see the search lights on the Isle of Wight and also at Weymouth, they light the whole place up. It is great to see a fleet of minesweepers, some time we can see as many as 40 at a time, I don't know whether they find any but they are always after them. Some of our boys came round from Plymouth to London and they said that the boat was piloted through mine fields all the way up the channel and some time they would have to anchor for an hour or two and then it is just like drafting cattle, they run the boats from one yard to another. The channel is nets and mine fields from end to end. I think they have about settled the submarines now they don't seem likely to do anything now. I will now bring this to a close.

With love from Reg.

Minesweepers & Trawlers – World War 1



From <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com>



HMT De La Pole



HMS Atherstone

At the beginning of World War 1, the British regular minesweeping forces comprised 10 ex-torpedo gunboats. By 8 August 1914, 94 fishing trawlers had been mobilised and converted for minesweeping.