

Extracts from letters received
from Gertie on her
Voyage to Australia

Sailed in S/S "Anchises"
Saturday August 23rd 1919
Arrived October 9th

I

The train Devonport Aug 22nd/19

8.30. ^{am.}

Goodmorning! we have had a good run down – I have had a sleep and Morrie is getting on with his now. We are waiting on the line so I thought I would write a little We passed through some lovely country about 6.30 – You know good old Devon! thats the stuff

I hope you arrived back from Paddington alright after the exciting time.

Deck of “Anchises” 23.8.19

Well here we are sea, sea, sea as far as one can see! now no rude remarks!!! We did not sail until this morning & had a topping send off. There were all sorts and sizes of Ships in Dock, From Sir Admiral Beatty’s Flag Ship H.M. “Lion” to submarines from which the Sailors cheered us. We had a bugle to answer them with. Oh! The fun and excitement” and the sarky remarks from the poor old diggers – there are about 1,000 troops and about 120 first class passengers with wives and children. There are a good many children and several quite wee babies. The sea up till now is like a mill pond, and this afternoon I laid on a top bunk and stuck my head out of the Port hole and watched the lovely old sea rolling past. If I disgrace myself by “frowing up” [sic] on it, I’ll never forgive myself. Billy was tired out & has been sleeping this afternoon – We have a fine band on board which has been playing some dinkie pieces

Sunday 24th August.

Today the weather is lovely and the troops sang hymns in the morning and had a lantern lecture in the evening. Everyone has settled down now, and the few who have been sick are alright again

Monday 25th

We have been playing deck bowls, which is not a bad game,- the time here is very funny for every day the clock is put back a quarter of an hour – sometimes more.

There is still a nice breeze blowing and it is only at night that the cabin seems hot & stuffy, but being in the air all day, I sleep well; but strange to say woke about 6.30 ^{am} for the sea comes through the port hole on to me. I have had a warm sea bath every morning, but shall be having cold ones next week, as we shall be having some really hot weather by then. We have passed several ships & this morning saw a fine brig with the sails bellowed out with the breeze and it looked very graceful skimming along. We have passed through the Channel and are now near the Bay of Biscay.

I am sitting in the music Room writing this, which is a lovely comfy room, fixed up for writing – it also has a small library from which books can be borrowed.

Our hours for dining are:- Breakfast 7.45 – Luncheon 12.30 cup of tea 3 – 4^{pm} dinner 6.30. We go in the first batch. Oh!! and we have a cup of tea brought in by the Steward, Ahem!! At 7 am every morning. We had Boat drill today and had to put life belts on. Some friends of morrie’s [sic] are on board I don’t know whether you have heard of Stott, he lives in Tassy.

Two girls from Clapham Junc: who used to go to Belleville R^d School, also a girl from Golders Green are here. They are mostly young folks, & some are not so fortunate as I, for they are going to some trying parts of the Country.

Tuesday. Aug'. 26th.

The "Diggers" have the concert going in full swing tonight - dressed up in Pierrots costume. Morrie took me up to the Bow of the boat last night (although we should not be there) as I wanted to see the boat plow [sic] through the waves. Whilst there we saw phosphorous sparks in the waves – oh "it was pretty". We scrambled over diggers in bed – that is wrapped in their blankets lying about on deck. The water is as calm as ever - We are past Gibraltar & expect to see the Canary Islands tomorrow. Have seen two large boats today, heading I should think for Africa – I shall soon be getting quite a geographist!!! [sic]

We have a Picture Show on board & I daresay there will be some dances soon. Where I found it I know not but I have a cold in my "napper" – the weather is beautiful & the sun getting quite hot. I am enjoying myself ever so much & am quite "Lady Di" – Have chummed up with the Colonels - (I do not know first Mates on the Staff) Oh! Yes I like Navy Blue!!! & have lots of fun especially with two Aussies in the Flying Corp who dine with us at our table.

Wednesday & Thursday ^{Aug:} 27th – 28th

Yesterday there was nothing much to relate unless a little sneezing counts!!! Have been sleeping & playing quoits – there was a dance last night, but like a good child I went to bed early and arose early this morning, and had a swing, (as there has been one put up for the children). The first mate caught me and said "I knew what was good". He told Morrie he had a bet with the Captain about me! – The Captain said I was Irish!!! Oh!! Begorra [sic] now I'm worried.

Saw some porpoises in the distance to-day, - must leave you awhile as the Bugle has called us to dinner.

Here we are again – just come off deck after listening to the band, which is very good. There are Sports tomorrow & prizes for the best. Its a glorious night & I've been looking at the lights glowing in the water. There are some kind of phosphorus jelly fish which look like big sparks gleaming in the dark water, & the white foam swirling past makes quite a fascinating picture.

Fancy!! I've been on the sea nearly a week & in about 3 days we will be in the "Line" we passed the Canary Islands last night & that day achieved 330 miles. This is a lovely romantic life & I shall be sorry when we disembark.

Aug 30 & 31st

There are some lovely breakers today; last night was the first time I've felt the heat so much oh' tis hot even with two Port holes. We have canvas over the ship so there is plenty of shade – today there is a light breeze.

Yesterday we saw schools of Flying Fish – they fly for a good way just over the waves or from one wave to another. Last night was wonderful!!- I sat on deck – the boat just gently dipping, the sky was studded with stars & I saw several shooting ones; the water was dark & mysterious and right near us the band played. Most of the boys are sleeping on deck – also some ladies, and the girls in my cabin speak of doing so tonight

Sept

I feel well & have got rid of my cold, but feel very lazy. A few nights ago there was a fog and the old siren kept most of us awake. – I was too sleepy to bother or wonder if it was alright, & as I did not hear any fuss on deck I soon fell asleep – I heard that some of the girls got the 'wind up' properly.

You will be surprised when I tell you two little brown birds have been flying around the ship, for we have not even sighted land & have not been near any since leaving dear old "Blighty."

Thursday Sep' 4th.

Have been playing Deck Quoits with the "Diggers" this afternoon. They put in a paper to the effect that they would like the ladies to give them a game, so that they could talk to them & get them ready in manners for home. They are R'nuts & the remarks are too funny. Morrie has just gone upstairs to post a letter-gram. We are due in Cape Town on Sep 11th. We are having great fun with Sports just now – I came in 1st in the Whistling Competition but of course lost in the Final. did that also in the Potatoe [sic] race.- I was dancing last evening, learning the one step, fox trot etc The weather is fine again; have had some heavy showers & wind galore. Have nearly finished my Jumper.

Saturday Sep: 6th.

Saw another boat last night, the Sister Ship to ours – bound for "Blighty" – it looked ever so fine with all the lights gleaming in the port holes. I am enjoying myself and am well but would love to see you all. I slept one night on deck, and liked it immensely but its too windy now. Have been to the engine room – a most marvellous place. I'm not much good at describing it. Still I'll try. You go down iron steps like bars all slippery with grease & when one gets to the bottom there is an iron flooring. The first thing that strikes you is the deafening roar of four huge pistons, which seem to say crush, crush, - I kept well away from them. They make from 80-88 revolutions a minute. We were down about 26 feet & went right down the rear end shafts of the ship and were right against the ship's side – the steel plates were 7/8 of an inch in thickness – does not sound much does it? The cylinder holding 1000 pipes for condensing purposes was also very interesting. There was also an iron tank, one corner of which to the touch was icy cold, yet a bended pipe from the same was so hot that one could not touch it, through this steam was forced to another tank. I cannot describe the working or technical parts of the refrigerator. I peeped into the passage leading to the stoke hole but it looked too dirty & hot for a visit.

Sep. 14

We spent a few hours ashore at Capetown, leaving the boat at 10. am and returning at 1.pm. Whilst there we had a delightful run in a tram car to Champs Bay & round Mount Lion, from where we had a fine view of Table Mount. The view from away up the hill was splendid, & we saw cactus, gum, and banana trees - in fact there were Avenues of trees every where we went, and thickets of those beautiful palm ferns. We then came right round the Bay with its lovely colourings of red and brown in the rocks and beautiful snow white sand. I have seen some wonderful scenery – the weather was quite chilly though and not like you would think when you speak of South Africa, but then of course 'tis more winter there now. In the book of views you will see Table Mountain, also Mt Lion; when we were in the car we were just between them & saw a fine view of the Town nestling at the foot of the mountains, with the Sea in the distance. Having such a short time there I did not visit the Town. Some of the boys came back with armsful [sic] of beautiful white lilies, heather and all manner of flowers that we pay fancy prices for at home. We should be in Durban tomorrow and hope to stay there longer. The sea is very angry this morning & it is raining, so I am very glad of my jumper which is finished. The niggers were very interesting at Cape Town for I have not seen them working about in their natural state before. – They have such charming features!! I was scared to death of them!!! Yesterday there was great fun on board, Morrie and I had finished breakfast and the second party were well away, when without any warning – Swish!! went the boat, folks grabbed any thing that was near to save themselves from falling, Chairs went one way, milk jugs another, and plates and cups crashed on to the floor. Oh' it was a pickle but we had to laugh, and could afford to as we had breakfasted in peace. There is now a strong breeze at the back of the boat which sends the waves well up, but does not interfere with the motion of the boat. The wind catches the spray from the waves and from a distance it looks like smoke blown in all directions I am posting his at Durban & then hope to have more news.

Sep: 19.

Here I am again, settled on the sea for another three weeks We had a splendid time in Durban, It was a warm sunny day when we arrived, and being Spring time a nice cool breeze was blowing. The first thing that comes to your notice is the Zulu rickshaw darkies with their wonderful costumes and fantastic head gear – they are of a fine physique. As you come along they smirk at you & run forward & drop the handle down so that you may step in – if that does not suffice they cut all kinds of capers and dance – all to fascinate and lure you to their rickshaw, but such is their sanguine nature that if you prefer to go on a car they never look disappointed. The conveyance holds two people and never have I seen them to walk either up or down a hill, the gait they put on is amusing & they are dexterous in the way they rest in the shafts and change their hold. Whilst in a restaurant Morrie met a M^r Rayner, he came from Sydney years ago. He took us for a spin round in his car, first of all going to a place called Brera which way around the hills from which one saw a magnificent view of the town amidst the trees at the foot of the hills, and the lovely bay away in the distance. The country of Durban, to my mind, is not so lovely as that of Cape Town, as there, one has the mountains and many more trees; but the town of Durban is a pretty one and has some fine buildings. The bungalows too are very picturesque and have plenty of garden. After seeing the Town and a good deal of the Country we went to M^r Rayners house & had lunch – It was a nice little place, the rooms had polished boards or were stained; with rugs lying about – the servants were blacks. After lunch we left the Rayners & went to the beach – the sands are lovely and the bay sweeps round as far as the eye can see. The following day we tried to climb a hill just at the back of the wharf, but it was too sandy and the weather too hot. I wanted to see the wild monkeys there, but however did not; but saw a lizard and some wonderful butterflies. We then wended our way to the sands & I had a paddle methinks! A most daring feat” for although one sees bathers no one paddles except children in the paddling pond, which is a circular place with a fountain in the centre, and sand at the bottom. We saw some fine horses the nigs were exercising [sic] and racing them in the waves, which they seemed to thoroughly enjoy. The sands are nice & firm & a good place for racing horses – some of which looked like race horses. There is a race Course – swimming baths, a Theatre, Zoo and Art Gallery and the Post Office is so large that one could easily lose one self

We did not expect a third day at Durban, but nevertheless we had one. A Party of us hired a fine 7 seater car & went to find the Karaals, or native huts – It was a charming rackety ride over rugged paths and up and down wicked looking hills. We passed several Karaals on the way – they had the appearance of large bee hives. We pulled up at a hotel for lunch – the country here was rather barren and dried up – there are Cactus, gum, banana and lemon trees, & the latter look very pretty. After lunch, having missed the motor launch, we hired a rowing boat and proceeded up the river, & came across little piccaninies [sic] swimming & jumping in the water. I held a cigarette out to them which they fought and swam for, until one of them at last succeeded in getting it. All the babies run about with their birthday suits on, oh’ they are funny little things & all are pot tummied. Morrie poked one little chap with his stick to see if he would pop, at which the little chap laughed and held his hand out for money. Arriving at the landing stage we hired a black girl who could under-stand English to show us the way to the Karaals, the driver came too as he could speak with the natives. After toiling up a long hill we came to a hut and saw quite a mite with a baby strapped to her back, and a few squaws with sacks round them – most lovely looking creatures!! The hut was made of mud and thatch and you had to stoop to enter. In the centre was a small fire burning. The floor felt like cement and was comprised of mud beaten down and dried. Maize hung in the roof to dry and there was a hen and her brood under what looked like a settle. They have blocks of polished wood for pillows and mats on the floor to sleep on. Being no windows the interior was very dark. The walls were black with smoke, the driver told me that in the evening, they all squat around the fire and smoke, there is a piece of wood which closes up the opening of the hut, so you can imagine the atmosphere with a fire burning, no outlet for the smoke and smoking themselves.- delightful!! Asking where the men were, we were told they were away at another hut to drink beer, which they make

themselves. One of the squaws started shouting at our driver until I was quite scared, I asked the cause of the outburst and was informed she was slightly drunk and wanted money. We took a snap of the piccannies and their mother, after which we gave them money, and one of the boys gave an old squaw a cigar with which she was very delighted. I should have liked to have seen the real quarters in Zululand, for the Chiefs Karaal is supposed to be good, but that is more inland and too far to go.

We used to ferry back to the boat at night, and the last evening of our stay she was right out in the bay. One can see the size of a vessel when alongside, and it was strange getting from the motor boat to the gangway of the "Anchises".

Sep. 27th.

We have been having very cool weather, the last three days especially, and have had hailstorms. All portholes have to be kept closed, as there has been much excitement owing to waves coming in and swamping beds etc, my neighbours beds have been drenched twice. Last night was very rough we were up on deck quite a while watching the waves towering above the boat such a height that you think they must swamp over, but ere the thought comes the waves are baulked of their prey and the old "Anchises" rises proudly & seems to shake herself (some sentence!! what!) In the early hours of this morning, she was not so successful, for we heard the waves thudding over several times, and the wooden partition of the Sergeants mess was knocked in, so I guess they had some water.

A number of Officers and ladies are getting a concert up, & I am playing a violin solo for the Diggers on "D" Deck. There are some fine songs, some with actions. We are having scenery too. The opening Chorus is Tea, Tea, Teas there are 5 beside myself in that & we are wearing Kimonas [sic] as we are supposed to be Japanese girls. Also I take the part of a precocious child in a Charade, the word is Ad-J-Cent, we have no words to learn – just say what we think. I must go now as there is a dress rehearsal tonight.

Sunday Sep; 28th.

'Tis quarter past eleven and I am only just up! – that's after rehearsing. Morrie was a nice child and brought me breakfast in bed consisting of dried peaches, currant bun, roll, butter, Jam, and coffee. Gee! I was tired, slept through everything and by all accounts the boat has been rolling somewhat. We have had bad weather ever since leaving Durban, but for a change it is Sunny today.

Wednesday Oct 1st. We have given our concert on "D" and "H" Decks and considering we did not have a weeks rehearsal, we did very well. We are supposed to give the same to the Saloon tomorrow night; no one is keen though as we think they will be too critical, and we are not pro's. In four days time we should be in Adelaide & we shall all be very pleased for we are all tired of the sea and tired of one another – its too long a voyage to enjoy the last two weeks. I lost the semi final of Deck Tennis today – it was so Cold & I was tired I think.

Several days ago we passed a family Ship called the "Maln" [?] – a fine vessel by all accounts, but something has gone wrong with the engines. She has 1st, 2nd and 3rd class passengers - They have been 7 weeks getting to Cape Town – we are shaking hands we are not in her. There is a rumour we shall not call at Adelaide so shall arrive at Melbourne sooner - Still this is a good place for rumours.

(Oct 6th.)

Had a fine time at Adelaide! We went to a "Cheer up" Hut & there were plenty of private cars – we were taken for a drive round the hills there, and right up to Mt Lofty, and came back to a lunch of chicken, peaches & cream, fruit and tea. The Sisters were sweet & told me all the boats call here and are catered for

Life of late seems to consist of cars, compot fruit, cream, cakes and chocolates the latter are only 2/6 per lb.

Sat: Oct 11th – “Cleevedon” [?].

Well! I am home. Arrived here Oct 9th. We only spent a short time at Melbourne as we had to catch the boat the same day. The City has lovely wide streets.- the tram cars are funny. It was terribly dusty and the wind horrid

We went aboard the “Loonganna” at 3. pm and arrived at Launceston 9.30^{pm} the following morning. There we visited the Gorge, a most lovely place with Falls which run into the river, the town as it is called is quaint. Melbourne is the largest town I have seen so far, and there are plenty of people about. Well, after seeing a little of Launceston we caught a train which left for Burnie at 1.30^{pm}, arriving 7.30. where M^r Morris met us with a car. We are a lazy household for we do not breakfast until 10^{am}. It’s a lovely house, and one gets a charming view of the hills and sea, which is quite close – the bay and sands are fine. This month is equal to that of April in England, but warmer, there are mangollas [sic] carnellias [sic] violets, and plenty of roses in bud, all of which grow out of doors. Everything is being done to make me happy, which I am.

We are a nice little party of four,