

WEEKEND READING

At the Archives



BY WAYNE DOUBLEDAY

To the letter

news from the war

FRIDAY is Anzac Day, the last before the 100th anniversary in 2015.

April 25 is our annual opportunity to remember the courage and sacrifice of the Australian men and women who have served in the Australian forces during wars and conflicts overseas.

For those men and women, communication with family and friends back home was (and still is) essential.

The CSU Regional Archives are fortunate to hold a number of collections containing letters sent from soldiers to their families, which contain moving descriptions of life during wartime.



The Florance Family Collection

DOCTOR Egbert H Florance was a well-respected and loved GP who practised in Cootamundra from 1890 until his death in 1928.

Five of Dr Florance's sons enlisted in the Great War, but only three were accepted and served overseas.

Dr Paul Florance was rejected on account of ill health and Hubert on account of having a small physique, his chest measurement falling short of the required size.

However, Victor, Frank and James all served in France for most of the war, with Frank also at Gallipoli for a few months.

Below are excerpts from two letters in the Florance Collection; one from Lieutenant Franklyn Florance and the other from 2nd Lieutenant Victor Florance.

Excerpt from letter written by 2nd Lieut VA Florence to his brother Hubert (Dorset, England, October 16, 1916):

My Dear Hue - ...How are things old man - I wish you were with me now - at least it's pretty rotten of course being tied up in a military camp and only getting 2/- a day, but I had a great time on furlough and as long as I can stay in "Blighty" I don't mind being in Khaki.

In France, it was hell some of the time but I had some good times there too ... Today, I have been reading a great article in *The Times* on the women of Germany in Wartime - sort of thing that makes you think hard.

According to this article they are absolutely kept in the dark as to any successes we score, fed up with all sorts of rumours about London being smashed up by Zepps etc.

This is quite true for I was present (at least in camp in which the incident occurred) when some of the prisoners our chaps had brought in. We all crowded round to see them.

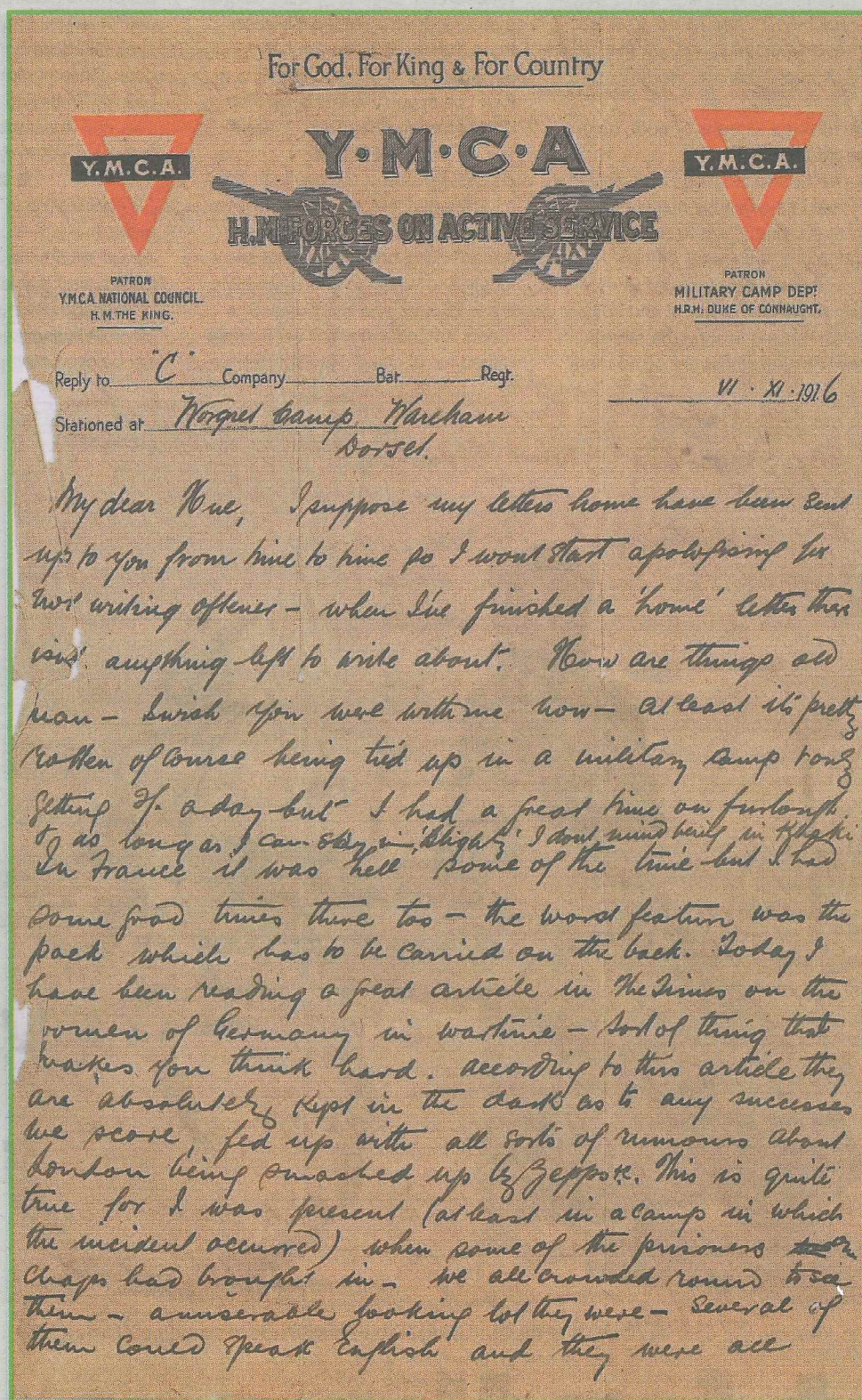
A miserable looking lot they were - Several of them could speak English and they were all astonished to learn that they would be taken to London.

One, an officer, speaking to one of our captains asked what would be done with him and when he was told "London" he got in a blue funk, believing that the German submarines had made the Channel impassable - nothing would cheer him up about it and he begged to be sent to some prison in France. Then he asked if the submarines would be warned that the boats were carrying German prisoners of war.

One noticeable thing here is that you never hear any "peace talk", never hear the word "peace" mentioned. It is not that people intentionally avoid it but because they don't think it. The war has fairly "searched" the Empire.

The Australian losses have been heavy but of course we haven't suffered nearly as heavily as many home regiments. I am afraid I am bordering on the forbidden talk ground so had better switch off. I got a letter from Frank the other day, he is fit. I should like to get home for Xmas but won't.

When you get time write me old chap... You'll get this about Xmas I think so all the same old Xmas wishes Hue - happy new year and lots of love from your affectionate brother, Victor.



Excerpt from letter written by Lieutenant F Florence to his brother Hubert (France, April 23, 1918):

My dear old Hugh - I think I will be home with you all this time next year. At present things look pretty serious but they are not as bad as they look, personally I give the war six months now and of course it will end in our favour. This stunt of Fritz's is the best thing that could happen for us because in England they were getting a little bit too apathetic. You know the idea "dreadful War this! But of course we will win in the end", they were getting a bit too used to it. I saw Vic the other day, he looked very fit. Of course Old Jim is OK.

On Anzac Day we had some sports. I coached a team of boys from my section for the "Tug of War" and they won.

We had an officer's race and I came in second, being beaten by about four inches. We had two football matches last week. I have a great mare

now old chap. She is fine under shell fire. It does not worry her as much as it does her boss I can tell you.

I was expecting leave to Paris when Fritz started making himself objectionable. Don't forget to write, letters have been pretty scarce lately, especially letters from home.

So long for a while, best love to all and yourself from your affectionate brother, Frank.

(The battle referred to in the above letter would have been "the German attack known as Operation Michael or Kaiserschlacht and subsequent fighting on the Somme, March 21 to 4 July 4, 1918.")

Compiled by June Dietrich

References: *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War* (www.1914-1918.net/bat22.htm); Service Records WW1, National Archives of Australia; CSURA Florance Family Collection, RW253/20.

The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of the month. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during normal business hours.

The next Saturday opening will be on May 3 from 10am to 3pm.

Info

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.

Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.