

## Getting to the Front.

The following extracts from a letter by Basil Helmore should be interesting. He is in the Artillery, and will have most of his training in England.

On Transport B24, "S.S. Benalla."

Reveille sounded at 3 a.m. on the eventful 9th November, 1916. In the grey semi-darkness we arranged our kits, dressed in full marching order, and about an hour later fell in two deep in a long line outside the tents on our usual parade ground.

At 4.30 a.m. we marched out of the western gate in full rig out, carrying our sea kit-bags. Accompanied by relatives and friends who were waiting outside the gate, we marched along Illawarra Road to the Marrickville Road corner, where we lined up to wait for special trams which were to convey us to the wharf. Once aboard these we were whirled through Marrickville and Newtown, past the University, the Railway Station, and other well-known buildings, down Elizabeth Street, through Hyde Park, down the new Anzac Parade, to the wharf at Woolloomooloo. This was thronged with people. As the trams passed through the crowds their relatives and friends jumped off to wish them a brief farewell before passing through the barrier which kept the crowd off the wharf. After passing through the barrier, we lined up in our respective reinforcements and received our embarkation cards, and those who had not paid the night before were paid up to the date of embarking. At about 7.30 we moved off in single file along the wharf up the gangway, where we handed in our cards like passenger tickets, and on to the transport, which was to be our home for the next two months. We were conducted into our mess-room (formerly the second saloon) where we deposited our kit bags and equipment. As soon as possible we were out on deck and swarmed into life-boats, on to the deck houses, or up the rigging, in order to obtain the most advantageous views of everything which was taking place.

At a quarter to 2 our long journey commenced. The steamer moved down the harbour, attended by the small craft, and to the accompaniment of tooters and sirens galore. Past Bradley's Head and Balmoral, over towards Watson's Bay, where the pilot steamer "Captain Cook" joined us. We cleared the Heads at 2.10 p.m., leaving the motor boats behind. Soon the troopship began to roll and we could observe the "Cook" pitching and tossing in the sea. About half a mile out the pilot steamer approached us closely to take off the pilot. I could distinguish Dad and Frank quite clearly on her decks, and shouted out "Good-bye" to them as she passed us, then I stood at the stern and waved to them until they faded out of sight in the distance.

We were all very glad to turn into our hammocks that night and in spite of the novelty of sleeping in mid-air some feet above the floor or tables or chairs of our mess-room, I dare swear the majority of us enjoyed a good sound sleep.

We were allotted to various messes on Friday, and I being asleep on the deck at the time lost the number of my mess, which I really consider providential, because on my reporting this I was given a vacant place, number 103 mess, and next to the boys who have since become my greatest pals and with whom I hope to remain till the end of the brutal war. After a couple of days at sea we began to brighten up and to take an interest in things which surround us and to settle down to the routine prescribed for us.

Our routine is as follows:—Reveille sounds at 6 a.m. and we turn out, fold up our blankets, roll up hammocks and place them in boxes provided for that purpose. Breakfast is obtained by the mess orderlies at about 7.30 a.m. Our morning parade is from 10 to 11.30; we are then dismissed until 2 p.m. Dinner is ready at 12.15. Afternoon parade from 2 to 3.15 p.m. consists as a general rule of a lecture in the mess-room; after that we are free for the day. We sling hammocks at 8.30 p.m. and "lights out" sounds at 9. Once a week we have a washing parade and after hanging out our washing on spars, ropes, etc., lounge about and keep an eye on it to prevent it from developing legs. On Sundays church parade takes the place of the morning parade.

The food supplied to us is of good quality. For breakfast we have porridge and meat (chops, curry, stew), for dinner, soup, meat and generally pudding (plum duff, rice or rice and prunes), and for tea, bread and jam. Butter is issued to us at each meal, and tea which tastes suspiciously like dish water. There are twenty men to a table (forming what is known as a mess). A Corporal and Bombardier occupy the head of the tables and serve out the eatables. Two from each table do duty as mess orderlies, each man getting a week's turn during the voyage. The mess orderlies get the meals, wash up, clean down the tables and clean out the mess-room.

One of the chief luxuries on board is the hot salt water baths. I have had one of these nearly every morning since I have been on board. We have had two concerts on the after deck, and sports of all kinds from boxing to dominoes are now in progress. The Y.M.C.A. provides us with magazines and writing material. The Bible Class started by Capt. Poulton, the Chaplain, has grown by leaps and bounds and now has over 60 members; by special permission we hold our meetings on the boat deck. An amusing paper, known as the "Benalla Sun," has made its appearance, and is published three times a week. On the whole everything has so far gone smoothly and the voyage has not been at all unpleasant, although I can assure you that we are all looking forward eagerly to seeing land again at our first port of call.