

*Personal Journal of
Corporal Alfred Edward Burchett*



1/5th Buffs

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*Thank you
Neil Clark*

BURCHETT A.E

St Mary's Church War Memorial Plaque, Ashford

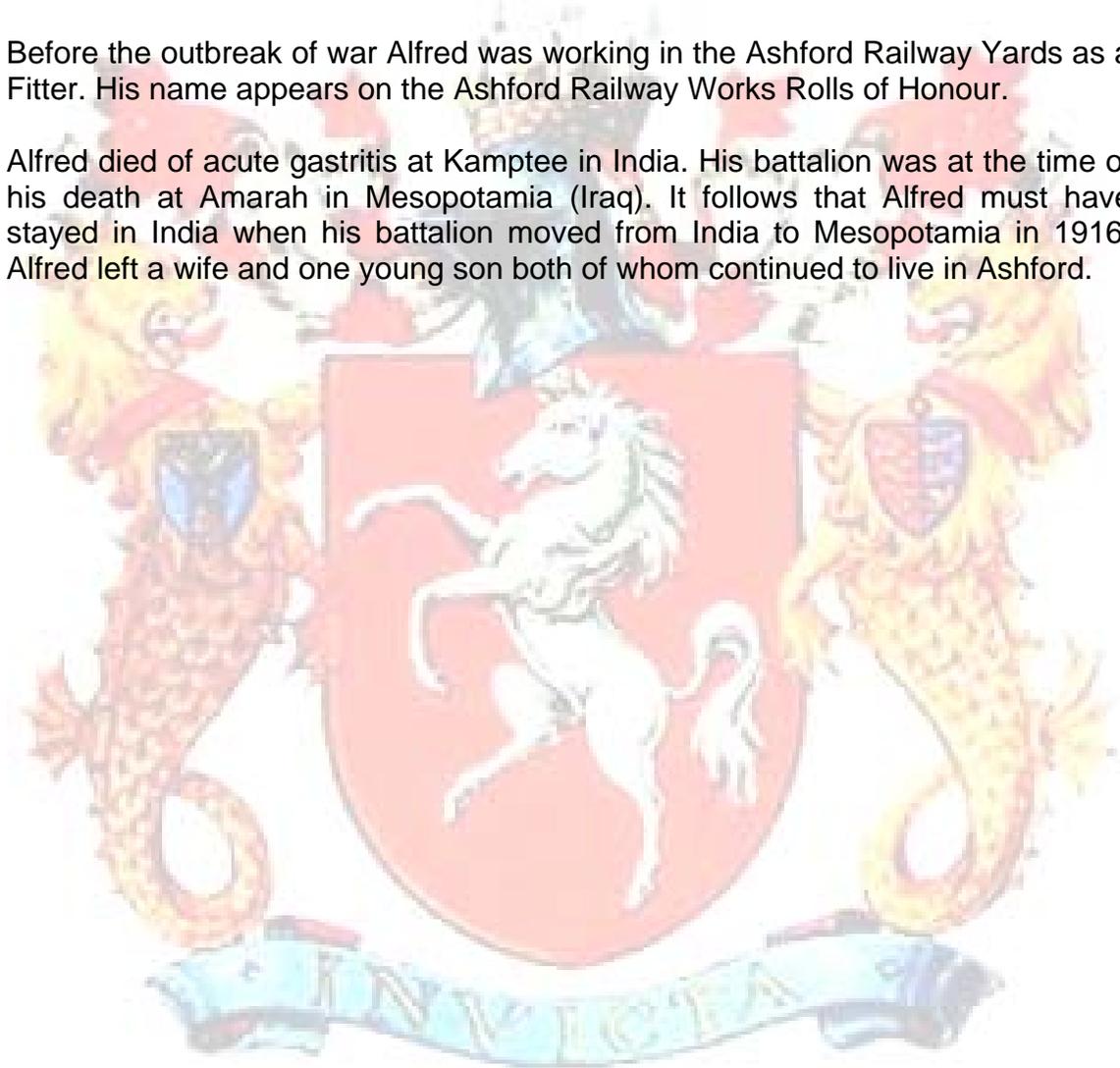
Ashford Railway Rolls

Dover Marine War Memorial

Corporal T/1367 Alfred Edward BURCHETT, 5th Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment). Died of disease (Acute gastritis) Sunday 6th June 1915 aged 25 years. Born Bridge near Canterbury. Enlisted Ashford. Resided 37, Star Road, Ashford, Kent. Alfred has no known grave. His name appears on the Kirkee 1914-1918 Memorial near Poona and Bombay, India. Panel reference -3.

Before the outbreak of war Alfred was working in the Ashford Railway Yards as a Fitter. His name appears on the Ashford Railway Works Rolls of Honour.

Alfred died of acute gastritis at Kamptee in India. His battalion was at the time of his death at Amarah in Mesopotamia (Iraq). It follows that Alfred must have stayed in India when his battalion moved from India to Mesopotamia in 1916. Alfred left a wife and one young son both of whom continued to live in Ashford.



In memory
of
**THE MEN OF THE
1/5 BATTALION EAST KENT REG^t (THE BUFFS)(T)
WHO DIED WHILE THE
BATTALION WAS STATIONED AT KAMPTEE**

NO 2181 PRIVATE JOHN WAYTE ACED 21 19 FEB 1915
.. 1755 .. **WILLIAM ANDERSON .. 20 16 MAR ..**
.. 1630 .. **WILLIAM VAN CAMPBELL .. 32 28 APRIL ..**
.. 1035 L. CORP^s **FREDERICK GEORGE SMITH .. 23 25 MAY ..**
.. 1750 PRIVATE **FREDERICK GEORGE YOUNG .. 20 4 JUNE ..**
.. 1567 .. **ALFRED EDWARD BURCHETT .. 25 8**

ALSO OF

.. 704 .. CLAUD RECHNARD TAPSFIELD .. 25 1

AT PACHMARHI

**ERECTED BY THE OFFICERS
WARRANT AND NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS
AND MEN OF THE BATTALION.**

My Voyage from Sandwich, England to Kamptee, India

At 8 am on the morning of October 29th 1914 I was put in charge of a guard over our ammunition van at Sandwich Station. At intervals of 1 ½ hours during the morning troops were entraining here to go abroad. The right half Battalion of the 5th Buffs entrained here at 12 o'clock, the left half entrained at 1.45 pm. It was with the left half that I travelled to Southampton. We stopped at Ashford Station for about 15 minutes to enable the engine to take water, leaving here at 3.18 pm. We made good progress all along the journey only stopping to change engines and take water. At 8.30 pm we were in the Docks Station of Southampton. Here we joined our right half Battalion, the 5th Royal West Kents and 3 Batteries of the Sussex Royal Field Artillery. The named regiments all boarded the same boat.

The name of the boat was R.M.S. Corsican. It belongs to the Allan Line Boat Company and is a twin-screw with one funnel. Before boarding the boat I was put in charge of 16 men to load up our baggage. This was all finished by 10.30 pm. At 11.30 pm the ship left the docks. We did not get many yards before we were stuck on a mud bank, because we were late leaving the docks the tide was fast going down. Tugs were trying to get us off until midnight, and failing to do so we had to stay here for the night.

At 6.30 am on the 30th October we made a start on our journey across the sea - or fishpond as the sailors call it. The sun was rising as we left the harbour. It was a fine sight and would have found a place in the eye of an artist.

We left the needles and lighthouse on our left about 9.30 am, soon after this we discovered the number that was on the boat. There were 800 Buffs, 800 West Kents, 600 Artillery and 300 crew making a total of 2,500. Things on the boat up to the time of writing are all upside down. The first day of the voyage is passed and as there is nothing else to say I will go to bed.

We were called by the bugle at 6.00 am on the 31st day of October and the second day of our voyage. Today we saw the last of England which is called Lands End at 8.30am. This morning we received our orders for the whole voyage which were as follows - rise at 5.30 am; physical drill 6.00 am till 6.45 am; breakfast at 7.00 am; all hammocks to be stowed at 8.00 am; general parade 9.45 am till 10.45 am; dry canteen open from 11.00 am till 11.45 am and 2.00 pm till 4.30 pm. Wet or beer canteen open from 11.30 am till 1.00 pm. Dinner at 12 noon; an occasional fire alarm during different afternoons; tea at 4.00 pm. From 6.00 pm till 8.30 pm the top deck to be thrown open for sports and concerts, the best and last, all men to be in their hammocks and all lights out at 9.00 pm. No land is seen during the rest of the day. It is now bedtime so I must bid you all goodnight.

Sunday 1st November. We were called this morning at our usual time and on getting out of our hammocks we were pitched to the floor like nine-pins. This you may be sure caused a great deal of excitement as we were all undressed. We dressed as quickly as we could and went on deck and found that we were in the Bay of Biscay. We had, by this

time, caught our convoy which consisted of 10 troop ships and 3 battle ships. Some of the troops were attacked with sea sickness and did not come down to breakfast. After breakfast I went on deck again to find that the majority of those on board were sick. The Officers were taken the same so all parades were cancelled. I had a nasty headache but was not sick. This was all gone and I felt quite happy by dinner time. The sea was rough all through the day making it very exciting. At meals the ship would lurch and your food would slide down the table, but this was no trouble to us as we only had to wait for the ship to lurch the opposite way and our food would come back to us. The only trouble we had during the day was standing on our feet. When the boat tipped to made us slide or run from one side to the other, but to stand in one place was more than we could do without having something to hold on to. This day has rolled slowly by and I am not sorry either that it is time to go to bed. No land at all has been seen today and as I have had enough of this for one day I will bid you all goodnight, and turn in hoping you have a quieter nights rest than I shall have because I am sleeping near the engine room and the engines sound like continuous thunder in the distance.

Monday 2nd Nov 1914. This morning we had our parades as were in orders, but there was still a few troops suffering with sea sickness. Soon after breakfast we sighted land for the first time since early on Saturday morning. It was Gibraltar. When we got closer we could see plainly that it is a very hilly piece of country. With white buildings dotted here and there along the coast, and the different coloured soils it was a sight well worth seeing. On our right hand side we could see the coast of North Africa. The hills and soils of this country appear to be much the same as those of Gibraltar. After travelling some distance further we came in sight of the Rock of Gibraltar, but this we could not see very plainly owing to a misty rain that was falling. The battleships that were escorting us stopped at Gibraltar and left us to go on by ourselves. When we passed the rock it was getting dark, therefore, I could not see it plainly enough to describe it here, but we have all learnt from Geography that it is a large fort belonging to the British Empire. About eight o'clock this evening we were signalled to by a battle ship that we were passing. They told us to put all lights out, and travel under full steam for Malta where we should receive our next orders. Through this we all had to go to bed in the dark, and a nice job it was too, being in practically a strange place or home as we had to make it.

I awoke this morning 3rd November to find that we were travelling along the coast of Africa, but as we have already spoken about it, I think there is nothing to interest us here now, so I must wait until tomorrow before writing any more.

Today Wednesday 4th November has proved as uninteresting as yesterday with the exception of one thing, this being the first day that our Canteens opened. You may wonder why they had not been open before, but this is easily explained. Nearly everybody knows that duty has to be paid on some things that go and come across the water. It is just the same in the canteens of all ships. If they sell their refreshments within a limited number of miles from port they have to pay duty, so you can understand that it is to save the duty being paid that they keep us waiting before opening their canteens.

About 10 o'clock in the morning of Thursday 5th November we passed the island of Sicily on our left hand side. Soon afterwards we met a passenger boat and was told that it was bound for Australia. The ladies and gentlemen on board her waved and cheered us, but this could only just be heard owing to the distance between us. About 4.15, while we were having our tea, a French torpedo boat passed us. It passed quite close to us, in fact, it was close enough for us to hear them speak. I did not understand what they said, but I take it they were wishing us good luck, or something similar to that.

Now Friday 6th November we were nearly frightened out of our lives. The Royal George, one of our leading boats had been a great distance ahead of us, when all of a sudden it was seen to turn round and come back as fast as it could. Our Captain seeing this naturally did the same. It was then rumoured on our boat that a German cruiser was after us. Afterwards we found that a message had been sent to the Royal George from Malta in code, and that she did not understand it so had turned round to come back and ask us. It was, you may guess, a great relief to us when we knew the truth and found that all was well. Just before dinner we reached Malta, but did not go into the harbour as a pilot came out and gave us our orders, which were for us to proceed to Port Said if we had enough coal to carry us there; and as we had sufficient coal we steamed away on our journey. In the afternoon we passed a troop transport and escort, which consisted of nineteen troop ships and three battle ships. It was a fine sight to see how they travelled in two lines one behind the other, and as straight as soldiers. Today has been rather exciting and was finished up with a concert in the evening on the hurricane deck.

On Saturday 7th November very early in the morning we had a rough thunder storm. It was very different from those we get on land, or more plainly speaking, those that one sees in England. Sometimes the lightening was like great sheets, and at others like huge forks cutting the skies, and lasting for several seconds. The thunder was so heavy that it was nearly deafening. The waves rose up on each side of us like mountains, and it seemed that if they were to meet we should be buried. At 5.30 am the storm was over and the sea as calm as a lake rippled by the wind. The weather was much warmer than it had been during the first part of the voyage.

Sunday 8th November. In our orders there was to be a full marching order parade once a week and this we had this morning. It came rather strange to us as we had been without it for a few days. The weather today has been very hot. At 8.30 pm we saw some lights in the distance and thought that some boats were coming towards us, but after a while we could see that it was land. We were told by one of the crew that it was Egypt, so of course we then knew we were going through the Mediterranean Sea.

At 2.00 am on Monday 9th November we were in the harbour of Port Said. As soon as it was daylight water floats were filling our tanks with fresh water for drinking purposes on the boat. After our tanks were filled, the natives, or coalies as they are called commenced to load the holds with coal. There was about 200 of them in number. They loaded 3,000 tons in 16 hours and it was all carried up planks to the ships deck in baskets on their heads. This way of coaling a ship is known as a human elevator. This is a cheap way of working as the natives only get 10d a day and a small loaf made with rice flour. They are

practically naked and do not wear any foot gear. They are also known to be the lowest race of people in the world.

On Tuesday 10th November at 4 o'clock in the morning we left Port Said and continued our journey through the Suez Canal. At the entrance of the canal is the wharf where the coal barges are loaded, ready to be taken to the ships in the harbour. Next we see a big market where camels and mules are sold like cattle are sold in England. For about 10 miles along the right hand side a rail road can be seen, with a belt of tall trees on the other side which makes it look very pleasant. There are some very pretty grasses growing here and their height is from 3 to 5 feet. The other side of the canal is nearly all boggy ground, and as there is nothing of interest in this we will watch the right hand side all through. After passing the end of the railway we come to the deserts of Egypt. It is nice to see the wind carry the sand in the air. In the distance it looks like large clouds of brown smoke flying round and round like a spinning top in the air. At sunset the sand looks very pretty. It has nearly as many colours as the sun makes in the sky. The natives are working at places along the canal making it wider, and where it is wide enough a stone wall is being built. At the time of speaking it is guarded all along by British soldiers. The canal was made many years ago by a cutting from Port Said to Port Suez, joining eight small lakes together. At one time a ship would have to moor in one of these lakes to let another pass as the cutting of the canal was not wide enough, but this is not the case now. At places it is not deep enough for big ships to float in, so their passage is marked by buoys, which are about 100 yards apart and 30 yards in width. At night some of them have red lights on which are worked by electricity from Suez. Near Port Suez it widens very much. This place was once a large lake being as near as I can guess about 7 miles wide. The passage through this is also marked by buoys. All along the canal there are native camps and wigwams, which look very comical. We dropped anchor in Port Suez Harbour at 5 o'clock in the evening. The canal is 89 miles long, and the journey through it took us 13 hours. Two of the ten boats that left England with us arrived at Suez the same evening, leaving the others somewhere behind.

Wednesday 11th November was our first day in Port Suez and from where we were situated we had a fine view of the harbour. As yet it is the largest I have ever seen. Truly speaking it is the small end of the Gulf of Suez. On the left there is a large hill or rock with smaller ones on either side of it. At sunrise this rock looks very pretty. The sand on the shore is red, the top and bottom is black, and the centre of the rock is white. One would hardly believe that such colours existed in the ground and so close together. On the opposite side we can see the buildings of the Port, consisting mostly of warehouses and fishermen's huts. About 1 ½ miles to the left of this is the town of Suez, and still farther left there is a large desert with a gas works and water condensing works on the shore. On the right we have the mouth of the canal and the Gulf of Suez. The port will hold a great number of ships. In places the water is not very deep, therefore, this is all marked off by buoys. This evening five of the ships that we left behind have arrived here so now I expect we shall have to wait for the others, being three in number. They are expected here some time tomorrow.

This morning Thursday 12 November 1914 we were informed that we could go ashore

for a route march, by paying our own fares. This cost us 3d return. It cost me much more than that as will be seen later on. We had our early morning parade, breakfast and we were ready to go ashore by 7.15. It was 10 o'clock when we set foot on shore the first time for fourteen days. We landed on the east side of the Port. Most of the houses here were small and had the appearance of fishermen's homes with their tubs and boxes outside. The large houses were very nice and a credit to the builders. One sees pretty houses in England, but they do not compare with these in Port Suez. There is a small railway station here, with only one set of rails. The carriages are very different from those of England. They are small, and have no windows. In place of windows they have shutters, something like venetian blinds. These can be drawn down to guard you from the sun and rain. After having looked round here we started along the road to the town of Suez. The railway runs next to the road. It is not guarded like the railways of England with hedges, fences, or walls, but has only a small barbed wire fence about eighteen inches high between it and the road. On the other side there is nothing whatever. When entering the town we came to some very large and most extraordinary buildings. They were all flat roofed and mostly white. When it rained their appearance was spoiled, as their beauty is only whitewash. Most of the bazaars here are very dirty. The cleanest are those of the confectioners. Their cakes and pastry look much the same as ours at home but are far different in taste. They will not serve an English person in the Post Office so when one wants stamps one has to ask an Egyptian to get them. Most of the names over the bazaars are written in English with the Egyptian writing under it. Bazaar is their name for shops. There are a few white people living in Suez. I think myself that Suez is a very unhealthy place. The streets and people alike have a very horrid smell. Most of the natives are covered with vermin or as we call it in England - are lousy. They go about nearly nude and are not very particular what they do. It is not safe for one to go out alone at night time. If one did one would be lucky to get back with a whole skin or even at all. We finished our march and got aboard the boat again at 2.30 pm.

On Friday 13th November we had our usual parades. We were told that we were leaving Suez to continue our journey at midnight, but in the evening we were disappointed with the news that fever had broken out on board and we were ordered to stand by for a time.

I was Battalion orderly corporal on Saturday 14th November. My duty started at 5.30 in the morning. At six o'clock I had to see that bread, butter, tea, sugar and milk were drawn from the stores for the troops breakfasts. At 7.30 I went to the Galley (cookhouses) to see that the mess orderlies got their boiling water to wet the tea with, and the porridge for breakfast. At 9 am I went round with the orderly sergeant to see that the decks were all cleared of hammocks and properly cleaned. I had to go with the Officers at 10 am while they inspected the troops. At 11.30 am my Company Officer sent for me. He warned me, to my surprise, that four sergeants had charged me with three different offences. I was tried by a Battalion Court Martial at 2.30 pm. They could not agree so I was ordered to be tried by a Brigade Court Martial. My officer afterwards told me that my charges were not at all serious and that I should get off. This gave me more heart during the time that I was waiting for my trial, which I had two days afterwards.

Early in the morning of Monday 16th November some transport ships came into the

harbour of Port Suez. They continued to come in nearly all day. We counted 53 of them, and 5 or 6 battleships to escort and guard them. At 11 o'clock this morning my trial commenced. It lasted until 2.30 pm. I wanted my officer to stand for me but the court would not allow him to. I had 14 witnesses and won two charges easily. At first the court could not agree on the other charge, but afterwards they found me guilty. They closed the court but did not give out my sentence. This was enough for me, I knew then what to expect having seen such cases before. The men in the company questioned me and I told them all that had happened. They all cried shame on the sergeants because they know that my charges were false. I expect I was in their way or knew too much for them, so this was the way they tried to get rid of me. But shortly we shall know whether they have succeeded or not.

At 12 noon on Tuesday 17th November all the corporals and lance corporals in the Battalion were paraded on the hurricane deck. My charges were out and the sentence given, which was as I had been expecting (reduced to the ranks). The NCOs all sympathised with me so of course this made me a little less down hearted. They all knew that I was not to be blamed for my loss after they heard my charges because there was sufficient proof in them that they were planned out by the sergeants.

I paraded early on Wednesday 18th November for physical drill. Afterwards my Officer asked to see me in his bunk. On going there he told me that he was sorry and promised that he would get them back for me as soon as he could. I told him all about it and he could see as well as the others that it was not my own fault. This made me more cheerful than I had been as I knew him to be a man that would keep his word. Now let us turn to the voyage. At 8.30 this morning we left Port Suez after staying there for seven days. Going through the Gulf of Suez which is very narrow there are some fine views of the hills on both sides. On the left the country looks like the painted scenery of a theatre. The hills are all sizes and many different colours. They are very ragged. This is the gift of their splendour. This, on our left is the coast of Arabia. The hills on the right hand side do not appear to be nearly so pretty as those on the other coast. This is because the sun shines from behind them and does not light up their colours. It makes them look black or dark grey. This is the coast of Somaliland. It gives no interest here and as it is getting dark I must leave this until tomorrow.

We entered the Red Sea very early this morning Thursday 19th November. A few miles inland on our right hand we could just see the top of Mount Sinai. It is known to be one of the highest mountains in Somaliland. Its history can be found in the churches scriptures. After travelling a few miles farther we lose practically all sight of land. We saw a little occasionally, but not plain enough to be of any interest to us.

On Friday 20th November we saw no land at all. The time here is about two hours fast to the time of Greenwich. There are a few sharks to be seen in this part of the Red Sea, and also a large number of flying fish. These rise about a foot in the air and shine like silver. This morning we had a little life. One of the gun boats that were accompanying us had some practise at shooting. The target was drawn through the water by one of our transport ships. It was rather exciting to see the water spirit in the air where the bullets

struck. At first we wondered what it was because we could not hear the gun fired. If the climate had been cold instead of being hot one would have taken it for whales blowing the water into the air which they sometimes do. This lasted nearly all the morning, but there was nothing else of interest during the day.

All we saw on Saturday 21st November was a few rocks, which looked as if the council people had shot down two or three cart loads of dirt.

Early this morning Sunday 22nd November we passed a number of rocks on our left hand side. It was hardly daybreak, therefore, we could not see them very plainly. They are named the Twelve Apostles. At different times during the day we had sight of land on both sides of us, but nothing of interest. These were still the coasts of Arabia and Somaliland. These extend to the end of the Red Sea. About nine o'clock in the evening we saw a lighthouse in the distance, a little to our right.

This we thought was our next stopping place, but when we awoke early in the morning on Monday 23rd November we found that we had passed and left it behind about the same distance it was in front of us the evening previously. This was plain proof that we had been travelling very slowly. We found that the lighthouse was on an island called Perim Isle. This is the entrance of the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. We could see land on our left hand side. It was very rocky and would have made a nice picture for an artist. About 10.30 am we saw some cliffs in front of us. These leaned over and appeared to meet at the tops looking like a great stone arch over a gateway. When we got close to them we found they were a long distance apart. On account of its gate like appearance and the hot climate, it is known to the sailors as the Gates of Hell. Those who have been there will think the name quite suitable. This is the entrance to the Port of Aden. Aden is the hottest port belonging to the British Empire. At 11.30 this morning we anchored here to take more drinking water on board. It was my wish that we did not stay here long as it was far too hot for me. Natives came round us in rowing boats loaded with all sorts of articles for sale. Cigarettes were sold at 6d per 100, cigars 4/- per 100, and tobacco 1/- per quarter lb tins. This stuff in general was very good and cost about one quarter the price it would have done in England. Myself, I bought 1 tin of tobacco, 200 cigarettes and 1 large tin of pineapple and 1 dozen matches for 2s6d. Some of the natives are not bad looking. We saw one with ginger hair. This caused some excitement, because one would ask the other if he had seen a ginger-black-man. The rocks here look something like slate, and are of a very hard and rough substance. Most of them are surrounded by water when the tide is high.. There are some red huts on the largest of them. I think they must be the homes of some of the native fishermen. They look as though they are made of galvanised iron painted red, but no doubt the walls are made of mud baked by the sun. As the climate is so hot here the natives go about more naked than those in Egypt. They seem to be a better race of people than the others. Most of them can speak broken English well enough for us to understand them and are a lot cleaner.

On Tuesday morning 24th November we awoke to find ourselves still anchored in Aden harbour. We expected to get a view of the town, but was disappointed to find that it was too far off for us to see it plainly. The harbour is a very large one, much larger in fact

than that of Port Suez. We stayed just in the entrance of the harbour. This place is called the Gulf of Aden. This morning one of the natives was allowed to come on board and sell his articles. After he had sold them some of us got into conversation with him. He could speak English very well. All the drinking water of Aden, he told us is condensed from the sea. We asked him the reason for this and he told us that as long as he could remember he had not seen any rain there. He said that he was 42 years old, and could very well remember the place for over thirty years, so that is certain proof that it has not rained in Aden for all that time.

About 7 o'clock on Wednesday morning 25th November 17 troopships came into Aden harbour. They were loaded with troops from New Zealand. All the ships were painted the same colour as our battleships, which is grey. They were all numbered in large white figures. Some of the New Zealand soldiers came past us in small rowing boats on their way to the shore. We asked them where they were going to. They laughed and said "It is a straight road to Berlin, and we shall be there soon after Christmas if all goes well". We all wished them good luck and success through the war.

During the early morning of Thursday 26th November the New Zealand ships left here, but we are still at a standstill, much to our discomfort. This is making most of us dissatisfied, and we were all fed up with being on the boat so long. We were shifted this morning a little closer to the shore. Close to where we were there is a station or fort where some of our British soldiers are sent. It looks to be a very lonely place as it is a good distance from the town, and is nothing else but a huge rock. The sides of this rock are nearly perpendicular. On the top there is wireless station. This is known to be the highest station in the World. The rock is something like that of Gibraltar. It is completely undermined with guns and none of them can be seen from the sea. In the rock there are tunnels and railways, which are used for carrying the shells to the guns. The guns are loaded by small cranes, and fired from the station by electricity. On the other side of the rock there is another troop station. Every three months the troops change places with each other. This is done so that each company might do its share of work, because on the fort the work is very heavy. At noon today we left Port Aden, and had to go round the Fort to continue our journey. This gave us a good view of it. In places a little green stuff could be seen growing. It looked something like English heather. The rock is of many colours and is full of holes or small caves, which may be where the guns are placed. If it is so, they are so well covered, that you cannot see them through glasses. On the right there is another fort. If one knew what guns would look like under cover if they looked at this fort through glasses they would be able to see where its guns are placed. At the end of this there is a lighthouse, but I do not know the name of it. After passing this the land gradually faces away and by four o'clock had been left out of sight altogether. We had some boxing on board that evening. Some of the men were very good at it. There was one on the boat that none would box with. He was known as 'Long Slen' on account of his height and long arms. Just before dark we had some blindfold boxing. It was fine sport to see them try to strike one another and miss. The weight of their blow took them off their feet and of course they wondered where they were when they got up. They did not know which way to turn, so went where they thought their opponent was. In doing this a spectator would very often get a punch from one of them.

On Friday 27th November we had a boxing competition for prizes given by the Officers. It started at 1.45 pm and was over by teatime. The winners had orders to box the final contest next day. There was some very good bouts, but nobody would box with 'Long Slen' who I spoke about a short time ago. He was open for the heavy weight. Since leaving Aden we have seen no land at all and were doing about 18 knots an hour. The weather was much cooler though a south east wind was blowing.

No land was seen on Saturday 28th November. We were travelling through the Arabian Sea. At about 1.30 pm the final boxing contest took place. After it was over the prizes were given away. They amounted to about fifteen pounds. As no one would take on 'Long Slen' the heavy weight prize was given to him. It was a good sum very easily earned.

I was put on guard at 8.00 Sunday morning 29th November. This was the last time while we were on the boat. For a one day guard it took nearly a whole company, so each company had to take its turn. We did the usual time, two hours on and four off for 24 hours.

I came off guard on Monday morning 30th November at 8 o'clock. We had our usual parade at 10 am, with many more afterwards to get in readiness for landing. During the evening two of our men had a fight over a hammock. It ended with their trying to use entrenching shafts and bayonets, which are very dangerous. Another man and myself rushed in and stopped them. In doing so I had my right foot nearly crippled and a piece knocked off the back of my left hand. This made me wish that I had left them alone. Some of the men wanted us to report them, but as they left off fighting when told to so no more notice was taken of it. It would have made very serious trouble for them had the officers heard anything about it.

At 5.30 in the morning of Tuesday 1st December we had a compulsory bathing parade. This was through a few of the men being too lazy to bath themselves which had been reported. We had breakfast at 6 o'clock and at 7 o'clock our hammocks were inspected. All those that were missing had to be paid for. At 8 o'clock we had a general inspection (full marching order), this finished all parades for the day. We arrived at Bombay at 12.30 pm but could not go into the harbour. While anchored outside the harbour everything was got in readiness for landing. From there we had a good view of the harbour and its surroundings. On the right the country is rather hilly and covered with tall trees. These greatly resembled feather dusters. The harbour was in front of us. It is a nice place surrounded by a wall built on Except at the entrance. There are a number of docks joining it. These have all got gates at their entrances. The houses about here are very large and are mostly white in colour. From the boat they looked like a number of English picture theatres built close together. It can be seen by the tall chimney stacks that there are many factories around the harbour.

On Wednesday 2nd December at 6.30 in the morning we were towed into the dock by a small steam tug. As soon as we were moored natives commenced unloading the ship.

During the morning we were only allowed to land a few at a time for business. But after dinner we landed as we liked and were allowed out until 9 o'clock in the evening. We had a look round some parts of Bombay. There are no shops here they are all bazaars. It was strange to see grass growing in front of us. One bazaar we saw was the strangest that I have seen, and I had never heard of anything like it. It was a place with the word 'midwife' written over the top. Arranged in a row there were four or five wire cages, with a young black baby in each, without the slightest clothes on at all. Of course, we thought they were there for sale, but on making enquiries we were told that a certain caste of natives sent their best babies to this place for show. If these are their best I only hope I never have the privilege of seeing one of their worst, because they are nearly all head and have not got the best of faces. There is a very large market here where goods are very cheap. Nearly anything can be bought here. Fruit is also very cheap. You can get 16 bananas for 2d. On my way back to the ship to tea I went along the wharf. Some ships were here being loaded with coal. Native women as well as the men were carrying coal on their heads. They seemed to work just as easy too, and do as much. Now on the wharf is the Royal Army Temperance Association. We visited this place to find that it consisted of a coffee bar, and several stalls where all kinds of articles could be bought. The manager was an Englishman. He told us that he had arranged a concert for us at 6.30 that evening. It was here that we changed our money for Indian money. We went back to the boat to tea, afterwards going to the RATA concert. It was not a very good turnout as we had to supply nearly all the singers. While here we fell in with an Indian soldier, of the Ghurkha regiment. He told us that his regiment was leaving Bombay for the front on 10th December, and was going in some of the boats that brought us out here. We all had to be on board by 9.30 pm. At 11.30 pm we marched off the boat to the station, a distance of nearly half a mile. Arriving at the station we were all served out with one pint of tea and one blanket each. We then boarded the train and left Bombay about 12.15 am. After walking about during the day we were a bit tired so we made arrangements for sleeping directly the train had started and were very soon in dreamland.

We awoke on Thursday morning 3rd December to find ourselves very stiff and sore through the huddled up way we had been sleeping in the carriages, if sleep it could be called for we were awakened many times during the night by the sudden jars and sharpness of the curves in the railroad. We were travelling through the plains and farming districts of India. It was a fine sight to see how the different products of vegetation grow. There is a large number of tobacco plantations or fields all along the line. The tobacco plants are not unlike English cauliflower in appearance. They grow about the same height, but without a white head, and the leaves are the same shape, but a little darker in colour. Bananas, oranges, pineapples and dates can also be seen growing in gardens and plantations. The bananas look very pretty as they grow in large clusters of between two and three hundred on a stalk. They are not yellow as you buy them in England, but green. They turn yellow after they have been picked. Some of them are yellow, but these are only what are kept for sale in this country. Oranges grow on large trees similar to apples in England. They also are picked when green. Pineapples grow about the same as wurzels with the exception of the leaves. These are the same as wide rushes or flag leaves. Dates grow like plums and look nearly as such before being preserved and packed in boxes. They have an eye on one and practically the same as

those that are found on oranges. At intervals along the line cotton factories can be seen. These are where the seeds are separated from the raw cotton. Cotton is grown in fields like farmers grow peas in England. It first blooms with a flower something like the English orange blossom. When this falls off it leaves a bud like a large lily bud. After a time this bud bursts and the cotton comes out like pieces of sheep's wool that are found in brambles. In this the seeds are found. No matter how long it is left it will never drop from the bud. It is a good thing that it does not drop, because it all has to be picked and is therefore kept clean. We stopped twice on our journey during the day first for breakfast at 9.30 am, and for dinner at 3.00 pm. Our tea was issued to us at dinner time.

We arrived at Nagpur at 5.00 am on Friday 4th December. It was here we had our breakfast. It was A Company that was left at this station that they might go to fort Situbaldi which is in Nagpur. Each company has to take its turn of a fortnight at this fort. The rest of us went on our journey and arrived at Kamptee at 7.30 am after a train ride of two nights and one day. We unloaded our baggage from the train and put it on the oxen vans, or garkis as they are called. After a march of 3 ½ miles we arrived on the camp. It was then ten o'clock. We were shown our bungalows and taken to the RATA rooms for dinner by companies. During the rest of the day we were kept very busy drawing our beds and kit, and getting our places a bit straight and clean. The climate here is very hot. This being one of the hottest stations in India. At present it is winter and about half as hot again as an English summer.

On Saturday 5th December one of the Batteries of Artillery that came over on the boat with us arrived at this camp to be stationed here. We were left this day with nothing to do except to find our way about the camp. It covers an area of about 1 ½ square miles. It is a pretty place but very lonely, the only sport we got was provided amongst ourselves such as football, cricket and a few other games. Close to the camp there is a small bazaar. It is called the Gora Bazaar. This consists only of two streets with about fifty shops or bazaars. Nearly anything can be bought here. The cheapness depends on how you beat them down in price, because they ask you for about twice as much as the article is worth. The natives here are not a very civilized party. They have a post office of their own. Close to this bazaar there is a fair sized place called the Mall. It is here that Europeans live. The Mall is a nice place, each road being lined on both sides by very large trees. At the entrances of most of the houses or bungalows large bamboo plants are growing. These are very pretty. They have no trunks, but each cane grows straight from the root. In one plant there is roughly speaking about four hundred canes. They take up space at the bottom of about eight feet in diameter, and spread out at the top like a huge feather duster. All over India there is a bird known as the Kitehawk. This bird is a little larger than the English Crow. It measures on the average three feet across the wings, and its feathers are black and white. It picks pieces of food off the ground with its claws as it flies and eats while in the air. If a piece of meat is thrown into the air these birds will catch it before it falls to the ground on most occasions. They are very cunning and will take food from your hands if it is not covered up. They will sit by you at meals and wait for a favourable opportunity to pounce on your plate. If this happens you lose half your food and have the rest splashed in your lap. This very often means changing your clothes. There is another thing of the air in this country known as the Flying Fox. Its

body is about fifteen inches long and covered with brown fur. The head is just like that of the fox, and about the same size as a six week old rabbit. Its mouth, teeth and eyes are like those of the fox. On the fore-part of its body it has two short legs. Each leg has three claws something like a chicken. The wings consist of three ribs with a skin stretched over them like an umbrella. There is one claw on the first and second rib of each wing. On the back ribs there are two claws. These with the two legs are used for walking. It measures about four feet across the tips of the wings and are supposed to be good to eat.

Having forgotten the living we had on the boat I will describe it now. For breakfast we had bread and butter and porridge. The bread was not often very good and always tasted sour. The butter was so salty that very few of us could eat it, and the porridge was always made with scarcely any sugar in. Our dinner was fairly good. It consisted of roast or boiler meat and most times with two vegetables and pickles twice a week. For seconds we had boiled rice and raisins, the exception of Wednesdays and Sundays when we had plum duff. Bread and salt butter we had for tea with jam every four days. That is the living we had on the boat.

Now we will turn again to Kamptee. On the farther side of the Gora Bazaar from the camp there is a large river. At present it is nearly dry, but when the monsoons are on it gets filled with water which is then about eighty feet deep. The river is nearly a quarter of a mile wide, and its banks in most places are nearly perpendicular. We are not allowed on the other side of this because it is the natives' property and they would very quickly row with us. The natives have many castes. Some have red and some white lines painted on their foreheads. These are the Mohammedans. The colours represent their different religions. The Indian caste wear a little tuft of long hair on the crowns of their heads. These are the people we have for our servants in the camp. When a native dies in this caste they cover the body with white cloth and burn it, afterwards burying the bones. All those that attend the funeral get drunk on wine. This wine they call firewater. They dance around the body and have a band of drums and tin cans, and sing songs if singing it can be called. My story I think need not explain our drills as they will not be of interest to you.

On 14th December we had new potatoes for dinner. For two or three days before Christmas we were busy getting our food ready and decorating our bungalows. We had chicken, roast beef and vegetables for dinner on Christmas Day with pudding afterwards. The Officers gave us cigars and drinks, and we had a concert in the afternoon. We had a good tea, and were afterwards given oranges, nuts, and bananas. In the evening we had a concert which lasted until twelve o'clock, then we toasted the King and went to bed. A photo was taken of the room at dinnertime, am sending one home as soon as I can get one.

On Saturday 23rd January I had notice to get packed up and ready to leave Kamptee by six o'clock the next evening. I did not know where I had got to go until it was time to start. There were four men of each company being 32 all told. We were sent to a place called Pachmarhi. It is the Indian School of Musketry, and is a five hundred miles

journey from Kamptee, but as the crow flies it is only about one hundred and eighty seven miles, and is far up in the hills. The train left Kamptee at 7.30 pm and arrived at Gondia at 10.50 pm. It was here we had our first change. We had to wait here until 1.15 am. While waiting we went into the refreshment bar. It was the dearest place I have ever been into. We had to pay 4d for bottles of lemonade, and 8d for small bottles of Bass, one very thin meat sandwich cost 3 ½d and bread and butter cost 3d for two very small pieces. We were told that this was the same all over India. Our breakfast was served out to us at a station named Ass where we stopped at 8.45 am for half an hour. We then travelled to Jubbulpore and had dinner at 3.30 pm. Having to stop there for a time we had a run round the town in a ghari. It is a very large place, and the streets are very narrow. It is not altogether clean except in the European quarter. There are temples everywhere. Their stonework is all carved and kept pure white. The station is a very large one, and is covered like some of our London stations. We left Jubbulpore at 9.45 pm and arrived at Piperaya at 3.50 am. This being the end of our railway journey we had to load our baggage on gharries which were drawn by oxen. We had breakfast in the station yard and started on our journey by foot at 5.30 am. The rest camp was found after marching 14 miles a place called Maktuli. It is a small place consisting of about six houses, one shop, and a post office. All troops stop here when doing this journey. We had dinner and tea here and left at 4.30 pm after a rest of five and a half hours. We marched another eleven miles, nine of them being all up hill, and slept in the forest for the night after completing 25 miles. We had breakfast here and finished the journey by ten o'clock which totalled 32 miles, 13 of them being all up hill. The journey was a very interesting one going through the hills by train and through the forests by road. Monkeys could be seen in hundreds all along the road, some small and others as tall as any man. We tried to catch a small one but they were too sharp for us. They could easily jump thirty feet from one tree to another. On arriving at Pachmarhi we were taken off to our bungalows, given our dinner and left to unpack our kits and rest for the day.

The next morning Wednesday 27th January we were each given our work. Mine with two others was target making for the ranges. We were shown round on this day ready to start work on the next day Thursday. The bazaar lays east of the camp. It is not a very large one, and the natives are a good deal better than those of Kamptee. They do not ask too much for their articles but have one price like the shop keepers in England. they are a very independent lot and do not care whether they sell to you or not, but they are clean and take after the English in most of their habits. On the west side of the camp there is a European village. The Europeans come and live here during the Summer to escape the heat of the plains. There is a shop here where all English goods can be bought. It is kept by two English ladies. They say they have travelled all over the world and as one of them lost her husband here this would be her last place. It is a very nice place, the roads and cottages being nearly the same as those of a pretty English village. They have a church here where all the Europeans go. We always go to this church on Sunday evenings as it is the nearest one to our camp. On the other side of this village there is a large rock. In this rock there is a number of caves that are about the same size as a room of an ordinary cottage. Their walls are all carved into different figures and gods. They were once the homes of some natives, but we are told that when the Europeans came there to live they all cleared out. At the bottom of this rock there is a large waterfall

known as the Bee Falls. The water comes out and rushes from the bottom of the rock down a huge valley. The depth of this valley is about 1,600 feet and the width about 900 feet. On the sides trees and shrubs are growing. This makes the place very pretty. The water rushing down the side sounds like thunder. If a large rock is pushed over the side it sounds when reaching the bottom like a cannon being fired. The echoes and re-echoes can be heard for fully three minutes. On a large flat or plain two miles to the left of this rock there is a European garden. It covers an area of one and a half square miles. The climate here is similar to that of the English summer. Everything that is grown here in the way of fruit and vegetables is English. The high class are the only people that buy it, because it is too dear for the likes of us. At times we had a little luxury and this meant nearly emptying our pockets each time.

On the 8th February I had my first piece of English Xmas pudding and cake. This was sent from England to one of my mates. The camp is a fair size place with two dozen bungalows. Each bungalow is divided into four rooms. There are ten men's beds and boxes in each of them. They are not close together like those of Kamptee, but about one hundred yards apart. The whole camp is covered by trees. These of course keep the bungalows nice and cool during the summer months. The climate here on the hills in the winter is rather fresh and wet like the spring in England. In the daytime the sun shines very warm. The people of this country are very peculiar. The men wear earrings and their dress consists of a turban, shirt and a cloth something like a large table cloth with coloured edges. The turbans are about a foot in width and about seven yards long. They are twisted up and worn on the head. Some of them are silk and some are ordinary cloth and of many different colours. The large cloth is worn round the waist and twisted up between the legs so that one corner hangs round each leg. The shirts are worn outside like English ladies night attire. The women are the most curious looking beings I have ever seen. They wear earrings that weigh about two ounces. They have large rings on their fingers and toes, and some of all shapes through their noses. They have to lift them up while they are eating because some of them are large enough to cover their mouths. Their dress is similar to that of the men. They wear a cloth round their waist like the men. They wear another cloth round their shoulders. One corner is pulled up over the head and greatly resembles a large shawl. A bodice is worn something like a man's sleeve waistcoat. I forgot to mention that they wear large silver bracelets round their wrists and ankles, and a large number of beads round their necks. The way they do their washing is very funny. They take it to the river, make it wet and beat it on a rock like an English woman beating door-mats. It is then laid out on the bank to dry. It is washed very clean though strange to say, they do not use soap. When they wash themselves they get into the river fully dressed. Afterwards they change their clothes on the bank and wash those that they take off. They take no notice of anybody, so you may be sure we see some fine sights at times. The chickeroos (children) mostly run about naked until they are four or five years old. This is not a very nice thing for Europeans to see but of course in this country we have to get used to it. At certain times of the year the natives have festivals which are called "Ramsammes". They have bands which consist of one string fiddles, bells and drums which are called tom-toms. These are put into a cloth and tied round their waist, there being always two put together.

From 3rd to 6th March there was a “ramsammee” at Pachmarhi where I was stationed. Several of us went down each night to see it. The first thing we came to was one of these bands with children singing native songs. Their tunes seemed to us to be nearly all one note and the same words seemed to be sung all through the song. At times they would stop singing and dance. Their dances are very peculiar and mostly done with their arms. We left here and went further into the bazaar where a bigger “Ramsammee” was being carried on. Here there was more life than at the other place, but never the less their bands and singing make an awful row. They were throwing red powder about, and squirting coloured water over each other. The drink, a sort of wine which makes them light-headed. This wine is very hot and burns your mouth like mustard. It is the first of three nights of the Ramsammee and is supposed to be fairly quiet, but the first time of seeing this they made us think they were mad. The second night proved worse than the first. It was raining in torrents but being interested in the Ramsammee it did not keep us at home. We went to the bazaar to find that the bands were all indoors. This rather disappointed us until a native soldier pointed a crowd out to us further along the road and told us to go there and have a look at (something we could not understand). We went to find that the natives were all drunk and fighting like fiends. As soon as one pair was stopped another started. Some used their fists while others used sticks. It was rare sport to watch them until those that had been stopped made a fresh start. They were not satisfied with fists and sticks but drew their knives. Some of us had revolvers in our pockets so of course we were not very timid and stayed to see this fight out. It had not been going on long before others chimed in to help their mates. There being so many of them fighting it was quite enough for us, we cleared out while we had got a whole skin to go with. The third night is the last and best of all. They build a big bonfire and place their caste flag on the top. By the way the flag falls off the fire they tell what luck their caste is going to have. After this they have another battle with coloured powder and water. They then do a kind of a war dance round the fire with shouting and whooping which is deafening. After this a concert is given by the best looking women of their tribe. They sing and dance while the band plays making a noise like school boys playing with old tin cans and Jews harps. Then comes another shower of powder and water. They afterwards go to their temple and offer their prayers to their Gods in a manner which is most peculiar to us. Another sing-song and dance follows this with a shower of powder and water. They go again inside the temple and sprinkle their gods with red powder. This is the end of the Ramsammee except that they keep their sing-song up all through the night. On this day they wear their best clothes and all their jewellery. The women are covered in rings, bracelets and have rings through their noses. One we noticed in particular had fifteen rings in each ear and four through her nose, while her arms and ankles were covered with bracelets and her fingers and toes were covered with rings. Round her neck there was several strings of curious beads, and her hair was covered with brass chains. The women have a coloured plate stuck in the centre of their foreheads with wax. This is know as their caste plate. The men show their caste by the way they have their hair cut and by marks which are tattooed on their foreheads. A Hindu has his hair cut short except for a small pigtail which is left on the crown of his head. They shave nearly all over their bodies. The Mohammedans are known by their beards which are always cut short and the other castes are known by their tattoo marks.

I have explained this country and my voyage as well as I can in writing so the rest must wait until I get home when I shall be able to make fireside tales that will, I dare say interest you. I must say here that I had my first piece of English Xmas cake and duff in this country on 8th February. I have no more to say now so must draw this brief summary to a close with my kindest regards and best wishes to all at home.

I am,

Yours sincerely

A E Burchett

NOTE: Sadly Alfred never returned home to England for fireside tales. He died on 15 June 1915 in Kirkee, India.

His name appears on the following Kent Civic War Memorials –

Ashford Civic War Memorial, Ashford, Kent

Dover Marine War Memorial, Dover, Kent

Ashford Railway Rolls of Honour, Ashford, Kent

And on the Kamptee 5th Buffs War Memorial, Kamptee, India (Now Lost)

Rest in peace Alfred...

