

Signalman at Gallipoli

**The Wartime Letters of
David Kerr Haig**

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Published September 2017

On August 17th, 1914, David Kerr Haig, the sixth son of James and Jane ('Jeannie') Haig of 2 Lawrence Street, Mornington, Dunedin, enlisted in the 1st New Zealand Expeditionary Force. He had just turned 21.

A corporal in the Signalling Company of the NZ Engineers, he spent two weeks in camp at Tahuna Park, South Dunedin. He then travelled by rail and sea to Palmerston North and Auckland for further training. In Auckland he began writing letters home to his mother describing his experiences.

This booklet reproduces those letters, tracing David's sea voyage to Egypt, his time in Zeitoun Army Camp near Cairo, and his involvement in preparations for the April 1915 landings by ANZAC forces at Gallipoli.

Letter 1 - 28 September 1914

Divisional Signal Coy

Expeditionary Force

Troopship No 8 [Star of India]

Auckland

My dear Mother,

I suppose you have heard from the papers what has happened to us since we left Auckland. We have had a great experience.

Last Wednesday we were marched up to the Domain where we were officially farewelled by the Prime Minister. Then we boarded the troopship all ready to sail.

The first night I was not seasick as we did not leave the wharf. We did not expect to sail until about Saturday but to our surprise off we went at about nine o'clock on Thursday morning [24 September]. You could just imagine what we felt like as the boat sailed out of the beautiful Auckland harbour.

Well I was enjoying the boat very much till about dinner time when she started to toss and knock things about. Then of course off I went just after dinner. I tell you Mother I did not feel decent for about a couple of hours then I felt better. After that I lay on deck until bed time. I soon got off to sleep and slept sound all night but when I awoke I wondered what was wrong. The sea surely must have calmed down considerably but when I was told we were back in the Auckland harbour I could have fallen through the floor. All that for nothing.

My word you should have heard the boys go off.

We are now anchored out in the harbour awaiting further instructions. We don't know why we were ordered back. Some say we were chased back by the German warships but I don't see how that can be true. But you can rest assured that we were sent back for some good reason. What it was we cannot tell but I believe that it took us about 13hrs to go and about 8 hrs to come back. So you can see there must have been a great hurry to return.

We were sailing right up North. Where we were going I don't know, but we haven't got there yet.

I have heard that the horses go off tomorrow, so we will have to go with them I suppose. It will mean another camp for a few days.

I received your telegram all safe. I also was surprised to hear Willie [William Haig] was off. I wonder if they got very far out before being called back or if they sailed at all.

Well Mother dear this is a great life on board this troopship. We get up at six in the morning. First parade 6.30, breakfast at 8.30. Roll call at 9.30, drill till about 11am, then feed horses, etc till about 12 o'clock. Then dinner comes on at 12.45. After dinner we have exercises, boxing, jumping, and all sorts of things to keep us fit.

Then we feed horses again at 4pm. After that comes our own tea. That settles our work for the day.

At night we get round a piano and keep things lively up till 9.15. That's lights out, we all go off to sleep.

Today I had a nice hot salt water bath. I tell you it was just decent. We also had a nice plum pudding for dinner. So you see we are not doing bad are we.

Well Mother dear I will stop here just now. I will probably have time to write again soon. That's if they don't take us away suddenly when we are not expecting it.

Hope this reaches you in the best of health. Also the little ones, are they all well, and also remember me to Mrs. Cain. Goodbye Mother.

Your loving son

Dave.

Letter 2 - 30 September 1914

Divisional Sig Coy

NZ Engineers

Expeditionary Force

Takapuna Racecourse

Dear Mother

I am just feeling in a writing mood tonight. I am sitting in the Guard tent in charge of the guard tonight. So I have a good opportunity to write a few letters. I have already written to Mort + Jock and I think I will start on Jim + Jessie after I am finished with you.

Well Mother dear I suppose you got that Telegram I sent you yesterday. I thought you may be wondering where I would be.

We are camped on the Takapuna Racecourse in Devonport. It is a lovely little spot for a camp. Everything is now practically in good swing. It looks as if we are settling down for another few weeks camp again.

The horses were all taken off on Monday and all us mounted men are in camp. The others still sleep on board but come ashore every morning and drill on the racecourse. I think we have the better job of the two. It is far healthier in these tents than stuck in a stuffy old troopship all day. I suppose we will see enough of it before long if we ever get away. It is rumoured that we will not go now for about 3 months. Oh dear Mother I hope that is not true. We are all disappointed enough without that being the truth, although I suppose you hope it is true yourself, don't you.

We have nothing much to do in camp at present. Perhaps we will have it a little more solid later on.

Yesterday we spent the day swimming the horses in what they call the Narrow Neck beach. It was great fun making the horses swim in the briny.

Today we spent the time doing horse drill, which is totally new to most of us, so it became very interesting.

This is a very pretty little place. It seems to be used greatly as a weekend place for the Auckland people. They can get across in the ferry for six-pence or even cheaper by taking a season ticket.

I got a letter from Agnes yesterday. She wants me to go and spend a few days with them if I get a chance. But I don't think I can get off.

I hope Evie will get through her exam alright. I suppose she will have to work hard for it, but she is sure to do well. The good little kid as Jim would say.

I always notice that the letters are all addressed by Evie. It strikes me she is not very busy in the mornings as she finishes up her letters by saying "it is time for the Mail". I suppose she finds a big slackness in business since Will + I left, doesn't she.

I meant to have a washing day as soon as I got on board ship but I found that you had need to keep your eye on everything you have. For the moment you take your eye off anything it was gone. My word, talk about thieves, they beat the lot. They wouldn't think twice about taking your shirt if you didn't sleep in it, so I sent a bundle down to the laundry today.

Well Mother I will close now. Tell Evie, Frances + Edith I was very pleased to get their nice little letters but I must make my letter to you do for them as well.

Well Goodnight Mother Dear. I am still keeping great. Hoping you and the rest are the same. Give my love to Mrs Cane.

Your loving Son

Dave.

Divisional Sig Coy
C. F. Engineers
Expeditionary Force
Lakapuna Racecourse
30/9/14

My Dear Mother,

I am just feeling in a writing mood tonight I am sitting in the Guard tent in charge of the guard tonight so I have a good opportunity to write a few letters I have already written to Mort & Jack and I think I will start on Jim & Jessie after I am finished with you.

Well Mother dear I suppose you got that telegram I sent you yesterday. I thought you may be wondering where I would be.

We are camped on the Lakapuna Racecourse in Devonport it is a lovely little spot for a camp everything is now practically in good swing it looks as if we are settling down for another few weeks camp again.

The horses were all taken off on Monday and all us mounted men are in camp the others still sleep on board but come ashore every morning and drill on the racecourse I think we have the better job of the two it is far healthier in these tents than stuck in a stuffy old troopship all day. I suppose we will see enough of it before long if we ever get away. it is rumoured that we

Letter 3

[postcard] -

31 October 1914

Dear Mother

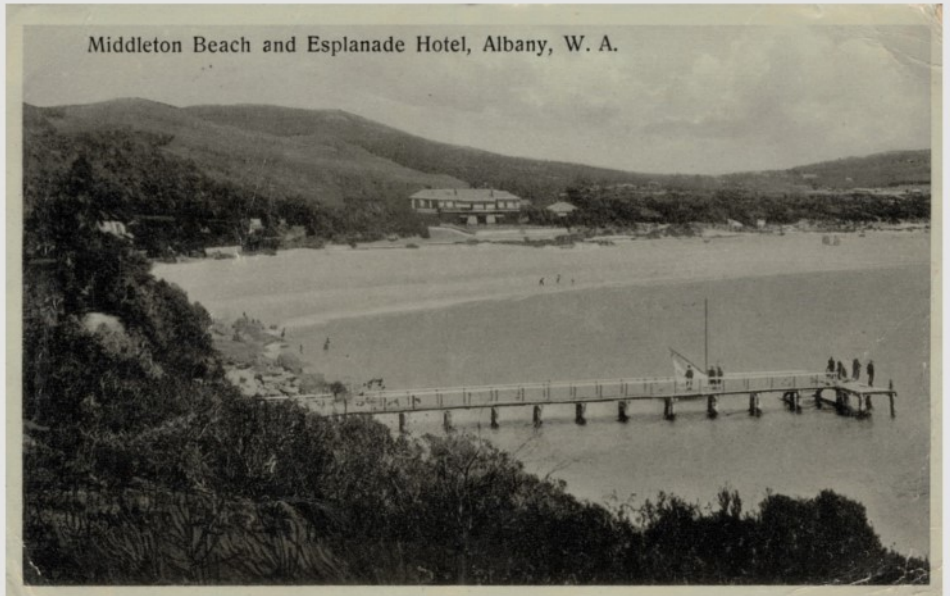
Since writing to you last we have not moved from here. I thought we would have been off before this but we have been delayed till Monday morning.

Thursday we were taken for a march round the streets of Albany [Western Australia]. It is a very pretty little place, we enjoyed the march very well.

We are now anchored out in stream today.

We have been out for a row. The weather has been very hot. Goodbye
Mother. Dave.

Middleton Beach and Esplanade Hotel, Albany, W. A.



POST CARD

ADDRESS ONLY

31/10/14

Printed in Saxony.

AFFIX
STAMP

31/10/14

Dear Mother,

Since writing to you last we have not moved from here. I thought we would have been off before this but we have been delayed till Monday morning.

Thursday we were taken for a march round the streets of Albany. It is a very pretty little place we enjoyed the march very well.

We are now anchored out in stream today. We have been out for a row. The weather has been very hot. Goodbye Mother.
Dave

721/20

Letter 4 - late November 1914

Div Sig Coy

Expeditionary Force

Transport No 12

My Dear Mother

I am going to write you a few lines to let you know where we are since I wrote you last.

At our last port Colombo we were ordered not to mention where we were or anything about what happened since our departure from Albany, but we have received no orders so far as regards our next port of call which will be Suez. So I will try and give you a few notes from my diary if you would call it that.

Well I think I told you Mother that we had a route march through Albany but we did not enjoy it so much as Hobart. I suppose it was solely because they did not load us up with apples, etc as they did in Hobart. But apart from that I think that Hobart is far prettier. Of course it is much larger than Albany and the people were far more enthusiastic.

Well we left Albany on Sunday Nov 1st after spending close on five days waiting in stream. Well this was our trouble, where were we off to next. Well we were not out very long before our Officer Commanding politely told us at Church Parade that our next port of call would be Cape Town. This caused a great stir among us, all thinking that we would most likely be tipped off at South Africa. At any rate we came to the decision that it might be better for us to spend say 3 months there, and so miss the cold English winter.

After sailing in a direct route for Cape Town, one night we changed our course and next found ourselves heading for Colombo. The cause of the change is unknown but we arrived safely at Colombo on Sunday 15th [November] at 11.30am. Sunday and Monday were great scenes of livelihood. This port is a very funny one. As soon as we arrived the place was swarmed with natives in their little cattermarangs (is that the way to spell) sailing in every direction.

Then next would come out a small steamer towing about a dozen punts loaded with coal which is in small sacks. Sitting on the coal would be hundreds of coolies singing and yelling like a lot of madmen, by Jove what a noise there would be.

Well these punts were fastened to our boats and the gangways made. Then the natives started work carrying these small sacks on to the boat. It was very funny to see them sometimes drop their sacks and start a free fight between themselves by throwing coal at each other till their master would come along and belt them over the head with a great big stick that he had for the purpose. They would then continue on.

Well mother we managed to get a few hours ashore here and we made the best of it. As you can well imagine. But of course in a place like this you almost want to have someone with you that knows something about the place so as to waste no time and be able to see all there is to be seen.

This is a very cheap place to buy anything. That is if you know exactly where to go. I bought something for you. I think it was supposed to be a tablecentre. I made a big mistake I think in posting them from Colombo. I should have brought them back to the ship and posted them there. I never thought until I gave the parcel to one of our chaps to post that they would charge a pretty heavy duty on it. And of course he never asked at the post office how much it would be.

Consequently the parcel has gone and will probably reach you before this letter. But it can't be helped. Now it is too late to mend.

One thing I liked was the lovely bananas and oranges they have in Colombo. You could get a great big bunch with over 100 bananas on it for one shilling. They were small but very tasty.

We left Colombo at 12.30 pm on Tuesday the 17th [November] heading N.N.W.

Letter 4 (cont)

I forgot to tell you that after we left Albany five days sail brought us into the Tropic of Capricorn. That was on the 5th Nov. On the 6th the HMS Minotaur left us, destination unknown. And then on the 9th the Sydney left us at about 5am full steam ahead. We began to think that something was doing so at about 11am we received a wireless to say the Sydney had blown up the German cruiser Emden that is supposed to have done so much damage. This happened just off Cocos Island. I suppose you have had word of it before now. I tell you it was a great surprise for us. As soon as we heard it to think that she had been so close to us. We have to thank God that she did not spot us and come up the rear that night seeing that the Minotaur had left us two days previous.

On Friday the 13th we picked up the Hampshire (China Squadron). We also crossed the Equator at about midnight.

On Saturday 14th we held the great Father Neptune Ceremony which was very funny indeed. Everybody was dipped or had the hose turned on them. This was a very unfortunate day for Lieut. Webb. No doubt you will have heard of him. Poor chap he slipped and broke his neck. He was put ashore at Colombo where he died. My word it would be a great shock to Mr Webb when he heard the news. It is a great pity. Fancy it just seems the other day since he hopped on that train with us on the Dunedin station, as large as life, saying good-bye for the last time to his father, mother + friends. I remember it well. He was on the Arawa.

Well I have told you almost everything of much importance up to the present. We are now in the Red Sea. We left Aden on Weds 25th [November]. We arrived there at night and sailed the next morning. We were anchored very far out in the harbour. Thus I was unable to see the town, and also no mail went ashore. I am hoping to get this posted at Suez or Port Said. I will close here for the present. Will add to before posting.

Well Mother we are now in the Suez Canal. We expect to reach Port Said at about 7 in the morning.

We arrived at Suez at about 9am. We did not anchor very long. We were off again early afternoon.

Suez is a great looking place looking at it from the boat of course, they would not allow anyone ashore.

We were scarcely in the harbour when the Egyptians were out in their boats and alongside selling fruits, cigarettes, etc.

Well Mother dear we have been told at last that we are to disembark at Alexandria. That will settle us for going home at present.

It is reported that the Turks are on their way to Egypt so they will be rather surprised to meet about 30,000 Australasian troops in camp anxiously waiting for them.

There has been about sixty or seventy thousand Indian troops just a little way ahead of us. Most likely they will land in Egypt so we will be well prepared if anything should happen.

It is rumoured that the Indians were fired upon while sailing through the Canal. So all our boats are in readiness for an attack. Also we have the maxim guns on the bridge and special men are told to go on guard all through the night. So you see things are quite warlike now.

Well Mother I must bring this to a close now. Hoping this will reach you safe + well. I have written a good number of letters this last two or three days. One to Jess, Mrs Shannon, Mr Jameson, Jim and I am still going strong. I don't know how long they will take to get to their destinations. I dare say they will hold them up for a while before sending.

I will write again as soon as I get a chance. Give my love to all at home. Also Mrs Cain. Tell her I will perhaps be able to bring her home a present. Say a pyramid or an Egyptian Mummy or something of that sort. Well Good-bye Mother Dear.

Your Loving Son

Dave.

Letter 5 - 10 December 1914

Zeitoun Camp

Egypt

My Dear Mother

I wrote you last from Port Said stating we had received orders to disembark at Alexandria. We arrived there last Thursday after a calm night's sail from Port Said.

We were out in stream up till Saturday then we pulled up alongside the wharf to start that lovely job of disembarkation.

Well on Sunday afternoon our horses were taken off and put into trucks ready for an eight hour run in the train to this place called Zeitoun, which is quite close to Heliopolis if you know where that is Mother. As I never heard of such a place as Alexandria or Heliopolis in my life before. I dare say I will never forget them in a hurry now.

This trip has been a great experience to me. I have to say that it has really been an eye opener so far to see the way that these people of the East live their happy lives.

We were granted general leave at Alexandria while there. This is a rather funny sort of place. I could not make head nor tail out of it. The place is full of blacks, mostly Egyptians, a few Turks, French, etc. They seem to be of a much better class than the blacks of Colombo, Suez or Port Said. They earn their living in all sorts of ways. Some driving cabs, carts with donkeys instead of horses. Of course some of the richer class have those Arabian horses that we have often heard of. Others are on the street from morn till night selling fruit, mostly oranges, dates, figs etc. You can get about 60 oranges for 1/- . They seem to be their principal fruit here. They are growing all over the place, just like apples growing in New Zealand.

There is a place about 10 minutes walk from our camp called Helipolis. This is the loveliest little place I have seen. The buildings are magnificent. They are all built of a very white stone which shows up very well.

I understand this is a suburb of Cairo which is about four miles from here.

Cairo is a much larger city than Alexandria. It is in my opinion a much more cleaner and better set out town too. I have only been into Cairo once. I would like to see it in the day time, but so far we are too busy to get off. Probably we may get day leave as soon as things are freed up.

We are quite close to the Pyramids. I believe I may have a chance of going there on Sunday if all goes well. There is a tram that will take us out in about half an hour for I think one piastre which is equal to 2½ pennies of our English money.

We are now camped on a desert. The sand is rather strange to us chaps after being used to seeing plenty of nice green fields. Fancy not seeing a blade of grass anywhere. The camp is nothing else but sand. I don't know how those horses of ours will get on. They don't seem to feel quite at home yet, but they must soon have to get used to it.

I had a visit from Will yesterday. He is looking tip top. I don't think I have seen him looking so well before. You ought to see his nice little moustache. He looks quite a first class soldier. I had to look twice at him before I could convince myself it was him.

There is a rumour that we are to hoist the British flag in Egypt in a few days' time. I think the real object of us coming here is in case of any trouble by the natives. It is also reported that the Germans and Turks intended invading Egypt, but the papers report that the invasion has been postponed. It is just as well for them as I think they would get rather a surprise to come up against about 32,000 Australian and New Zealand boys and about 22,000 English Toms to give them a hearty welcome.

Zeitoun Camp
Egypt
40/12/14

My Dear Mother,

I wrote you last from Port Said stating that we had received orders to disembark at Alexandria we arrived there last Thursday after a calm nights sail from Port Said.

We we sit in stream up till Saturday then we pulled up along side the wharf to start that lovely job of disembarkation.

Well on Sunday afternoon our horses were taken off and put into trucks ready for an eight hour run in the train to this place called Zeitoun which is quite close to Heliopolis if you know where that is mother as I never heard of

Letter 5 (cont)

We are all very anxiously awaiting the arrival of our first N.Z. mail. There was a rumour that one came into camp yesterday, but nothing has been heard of it since.

Well Mother Dear, it is a question how long we are to stay here in Egypt. I only hope we shall move off before the summer comes round. They say we will leave for England early in Feb and then straight across to France. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we don't even see England now, let alone the front. I think that we have just about reached our destination and I don't think I am far out when I say they will have us here for a little longer than the three months they talk about.

Now Mother I must close this letter tonight. I have not inquired how often the mail goes from here but I will endeavor to let you have a line by every mail if possible.

I hope that everything is going along well with you all at home and that you are keeping quite well, also Mrs Cain. Goodbye Mother Dear. I hope to have a letter from you very shortly.

Your Loving Son
Dave.

[Written diagonally across bottom left hand corner of this page]

In future I will number my letters to you on the back of the envelope so you will know whether you get them all. Dave.

Letter 6 - 15 January 1915

Zeitoun Camp

Cairo

My dear Mother

I am very sorry I left it too late to write you a line in time for last week's mail, but I went to the St Andrews Church of Scotland in Cairo on Sunday night after going to the Pyramids, when I intended to come home and tell all about the things I have seen since last writing to you.

I received your most welcomed letter written on Dec 9th. There seems to be both good and bad news in it. Fancy your last two letters have carried the news of the death of two of our dear friends. I was very much surprised to hear of Miss Burns. My word it must have been a great shock to her sister. The little ones will be very disappointed won't they.

The night your letter arrived Willie was up to see me. You can just picture both of us getting close round the candle as I opened the letter. We were reading on quite calmly until we came to Andy's report. This broke us up completely. We had to read that part over twice before we could properly believe our eyes. I hope he won't get married until we get back home. We would very much like to see the fun. What do you think. Good luck to him. I wish him every success and join in with you in hoping that he has a girl that will give him every happiness throughout his life.

I am very pleased to hear that Evie did so well in the exam. She must have worked pretty hard. I suppose that will give her a chance of a fairly good position now. She deserves it at any rate, doesn't she.

I see Mr Pedlow managed to get Mr Mitchell's position. I am very pleased to hear that as I believe he is a rather decent chap, although I thought he would have been better off at Bullieds.

I will be glad to meet Mr Catto + Gordon with the reinforcements. I believe they will arrive here very shortly.

Last Saturday we had a General Review and March Past by the Hon Thomas MacKenzie. He afterwards gave us a very good solid speech. At the conclusion of his speech he gave an invitation to all who wished to meet him may do so at the Post Office between the hours of 2pm till 5pm. I was sorry I was otherwise engaged that afternoon, so I unfortunately was unable to have my interview.

On Sat afternoon I went round to the Virgin Mary Tree + Well which is only about twenty minutes walk from the camp. I have been to this place before. I really forget whether I told you about it.

I am enclosing a half dozen P.C.[postcards]. These are copies of the paintings around the walls of the Chapel which is quite close to the Tree. I have taken a photo of the Tree and the Virgin Well but have not had them developed yet. I am hoping they turn out well. I am also sending you a book explaining the whole History of the garden which I brought from one of the Keepers.

All this week we have been doing our usual cable cart work running all over the country laying cable and seeing how fast we can wind it up again. It's good sport. As usual our cart is the best of the three so far.

On Sunday morning a small party of us set out for the great Pyramids. We left Camp about 9 am and took the train to Cairo. It takes fifteen minutes by train to Cairo. Then we took a Pyramid car which takes you right up to the Pyramids for the large fare of 1 piastre (2½ pennies) for an eight mile ride.

On arriving there received a guide and proceeded up the sandy roadway to the first Pyramid called Cheops which is about 470ft high, built of solid blocks of granite. This at one time we believe was covered over with lovely marble but there is not a scrap to be seen on this one now. Although on the second one, which is only about a couple of hundred yards away, there is a little marble just around the top.

I believe that the marble was taken off by some King and taken away to build the Citadel which is not very far from here.

Letter 6 (cont)

We made a visit to the King and Queens Chamber in the first Pyramids. There is not much to see. When you get there you have to crawl for a few hundred yards through long dark tunnels with the help of a guide with a lighted candle. You reach a big room at one end. You see a solid granite coffin but the body has been taken away. Then you crawl down again and through another channel to the Queens Chamber which is exactly the same as the Kings.

We afterwards walked round the hill to the Sphinx. I took a photo of this. I hope it turns out well.

I don't know how many Pyramids there are supposed to be about here, but from these three we could see another batch of them a few miles off. The place seems to be covered with them.

We got back to town about five and had a little tea which consisted of four eggs on toast, a nice cup of coffee, all for the large sum of 3 piastres each. After tea, as I said before, I went to a nice little service in the first Presbyterian Church I have been in since leaving N.Z.

Last Thursday the whole coy [company] was vaccinated and of course it is my first time and I hope the last. It is now nine days since, so you may imagine in what sort of condition the coy will be in. There were only about 40 men unfit for duty today. I think the worst of mine is over now. This is the first day off I have had, so I am making good use of it by writing to you (good scheme).

I hope Mrs Cain is still keeping well and is still able to look after the garden in the usual way. Is Mrs Davies quite recovered. I really must write to Jock this week. He sent me a nice card, also a photo of his football team. Jim McNish, Ernie Jeffs + Bob Smith wish to be kindly remembered to you Mother. They are always asking after you every time I meet them.

Well Mother, I think I have done good enough for one letter seeing I am to write every week now. Give my fond love to all at home. With heaps of love to you Mother. Good bye.

Your loving Son

Dave.

Letter 7 - 13 March 1915

Div Sig Coy

Zeitoun Camp

My Dear Mother

I was pleased to get your letter last Weds in reply to my first from Egypt. I also see Willie got his too.

Glad to hear all is safe and well at home.

I was so pleased to get those nice long letters of Edith and Jean. They were great. I could just imagine them sitting down at the table and writing those big long letters to Will + I, they were very good indeed. I must not forget to write them each a line or they will not send me any more will they?

Well Mother I told you in my last letter that I thought we would be off probably before next week, but I think we are as far off as ever. We are now told that our departure is postponed indefinitely. So you see we will just have to patiently wait and not growl. I dare say our turn will come soon enough. This week has been just the same as usual although I hear they are going to cut the work down a bit now that the weather is becoming a little too warm at midday. It has not been so bad for us chaps on the horses, but I reckon it must be very solid for the poor infantry tramping over that sand day after day. But they don't seem to mind, they are quite used to it now.

Today I have been for a spin on the back of a motor. Ernie Jeffs was the motorist. We went all over the place round Heliopolis, then into Cairo and off up the Nile across the bridge down the other side. Came home the other way. It was just decent. The scenery was lovely. We arrive back to the camp just in time to enjoy the good tea that was awaiting us. I took a photo or two. Most probably I will have them ready for next mail. I hope you do not burn these photos when I take all this trouble to take them for you Mother, although a good few of them want burning. But just try and keep them till I come home and tell you the mistakes I have made in them etc, etc.

I am afraid I would make a very poor photographer. I have not enough patience for one thing.

Now then Mother Dear, there is very little to tell you of this week, everything is so quiet here at present.

I think Willie intends to write this week. I have often taken a walk round to see him. He is still quite happy on it, and looking well.

Give my kind regards to Mrs Cane. I posted her a P.C. the other week. I suppose she will get it alright.

Well Mother, I must close with best love to you and all at home. Hoping you are all still keeping well. Goodbye.

Your Loving Son

Dave

Letter 8 - 5 April 1915

Divisional Signal Co

NEW ZEALAND ENGINEERS

Zeitoun Camp

Cairo

My Dear Mother

I have not had a letter from you since last writing, but I am anxiously waiting for the mail tomorrow.

I have not a great deal to report since last week. We have been doing very little work and plenty of play. Today is the start of another week and now we are told that we are going away for certain this week, most likely Tuesday or Weds. It sounds well doesn't it. I wish it comes true.

We are now ready to move, everything packed up. All we are waiting for now is that little word "Go".

Have you heard about Willie + Bill Finlayson. They have both been transferred into the Army Service Corp. I have been over to see them a few times. His tent is just across the road from mine, scarcely twenty yds. So you see we are quite close to each other now. They seem to be better off in the ASC. There are some fine chaps in their section. They are in No 1 section. I understand they are to be on driving the wagons. This is a pretty fair job. There is one thing in their favour, they should never have need to get short of tucker, the ASC is the best coy for that.

I had Willie Brown over to see me today. I took him over to see Will + Will Finlayson, so that was three Willies together. If I am lucky I may get a copy of the photo that I took of them. I will forward it on with a few more that I took at Luxor when I got them on Weds.

I was at an evening last Weds night at Fletchers. I have been there before. They are very nice people indeed. We had a good old singsong. Then to cap it all I was invited for dinner on Easter Friday. So you see they are not treating me bad in Egypt. There was only a Col + three Majors at dinner with me and I wasn't shy at all. That's a wonder, isn't it.

5-4-15
Today I have been having a good old loaf about until Gordon Catto came and shook me up. We wandered around Helipolis and had tea there. I have just left him. I believe he has been rather fortunate. He has been drafted into the Otago 7ths, and if he is lucky enough he will retain his stripes as he thinks they have a position for a corporal in the signal section, and he stands a good chance of getting it. I would be pleased to see him get it.

I saw Tom Harvey tonight. He is doing all right here. I think he will soon get to like this great country like us. He will be sorry to leave Egypt (I don't think).

Well Mother, I think I had better close now as there is really very little to write about. I hope you and the rest at home are all quite well. Give my best love to all. Remember me to Mrs Cane. Goodnight
Mother Dear.

Your Loving Son

Dave

DIVISIONAL SIGNAL CO
NEW ZEALAND ENGINEERS.

Zeritoun Camp
Cairo

5-4-15

My Dear Mother,

I have not had a letter from you since last writing, but I am anxiously waiting for the mail tomorrow.

I have not a great deal to report since last week we have been doing very little work and plenty of play.

Today is the start of another week and now we are told that we are going away for certain this week most likely Tuesday or Weds it sounds well doesn't it I wish it comes true.

We are now ready to move, everything packed up all we are waiting for now is that little word "Go."

Have you heard about Willie + Bill Finlayson they have both been transferred into the Army Service Corp I have been over to see them a few times his tent is just across the road from mine scarcely twenty yds so you see we are quite close to each other now. They

Letter 9 - 8 April 1915

Zeitoun Camp

Cairo

Dear Mother

I did not get a letter from you this mail, I supposed you missed the bus that week. However, I suppose and hope everything is still the same with you all at home.

We are now I hope on the eve of our departure from this dear little camp at last. Tomorrow night at 7.15 we are to say good-bye for ever to our most beloved homes in Egypt.

Our destination is a very vague one. Of course as usual we are all quite certain that we are going to this place and that place, but I am afraid we may be sadly disappointed. Yet you never know, our rumours may be correct this time. As far as we know the Dardanelles are going to have the pleasure of our company for a little while.

We have been expecting to move away any day. This week we have been doing nothing else but packing and unpacking all this week, but I think tomorrow will be the "Finnis" as the Arabs would say.

Today I have spent in a tailor's shop, giving him the size and shape of a new haversack that I wanted and he only took about three hours to make it. I sat and watched him all the time. He only had to unpick it about three times till at last I got it right. It is about three times as big as the ones they issue to us. I have a good deal of stuff I want to carry with me. That's the reason I had this one made. I am anxiously waiting to hear the remarks passed about it tomorrow when I turn out with it on. Some of the boys have already asked me if it was going to be my sleeping bag.

The train leaves Cairo Friday night at about Eleven. We arrive at Alexandria at six on Saturday morning. The name of our Transport this time is the Luzow. We will be travelling with Alex Godley and his staff, but we don't mind. It may be only a very short trip, so we will be able to put up with him alright.

I have not heard the name of the boat Willie is to be on. I forgot to look it up. He is in the No 1 Section ASC. I did not get a chance to see him today. He was out most of the time but I must make a point of seeing him tomorrow.

I have been over at a concert in the Y.M.C.A. They have been worrying us for a long time to give them another concert. So over went the four of us. The other three are London artists, sung at Covent Gardens etc, etc. They are very good. My word they can give a fine concert. Their names are Sutherland from Auckland, a fine bass singer, Aitkinson, a real good baritone. Then we have Theo Tresize, he is a very clever chap. He has done a good deal of variety work, a very good pianist and a very clever dancer besides being great on musical monos [monologues?] etc. He is well worth listening to. We have been practising a few quartets over lately but I am afraid we shall have to give up for the present. They are to be on a different boat to us. They are in the Field Coy Engineers.

I met Jim Wallace at the concert. Also Keith Cameron. I haven't seen much of these two for a long time. Jim is looking very well indeed. I hardly knew him when he stopped me as I was walking up to my seat near the stage. He wishes to be kindly remembered to you all at home.

The mounteds may be here for a little while yet. They have no orders to move at present.

Well Mother I think this is about the lot at present. I can't think of anything more to tell you. I am enclosing about 30 more photos. Also some films. A few of these prints are no good. I had to send them to a shop close by and he has made a mess of them.

Letter 9 (cont)

I had a nice letter from Jim + Effie this mail. I am pleased to hear they are doing so well. That must be some garden of theirs now from all accounts. I am sorry I am not there to give Jim a hand to hoe the turnips, cabbages, etc but Good Old Fred I see takes my place alright. I suppose Walter is still Mrs Cain's gardener isn't he.

Give my best fondest love to all the little ones. Also Fred, Walter + Eve and largely yourself Mother Dear.

I hope I will be able to get a line through to you after leaving here. If you don't get one don't worry mother, all will be well. I most earnestly pray that very soon God will see His way clear to send us all back to dear New Zealand, back to our dear loved ones at home who are so anxiously awaiting our safe + speedy return.

Now Mother I must close for certain here as it is close to Eleven o'clock and we have lights out at 10.15.

Good night Mother Dear

Your Loving Son

Dave.

Ernie Jeffs sends kind regards to all.

While on active service, David also kept a detailed diary. This focuses particularly on his experiences at the Gallipoli battlefield from 25 April 1915 onwards. The text of the diary has been reproduced in a companion volume, *Signalman at Gallipoli: The Wartime Diary of David Kerr Haig*. Free digital copies are available on request (see below for details).

Acknowledgements: We are very grateful to Tim Linzey, nephew of David Haig, for preserving and making available the letters reproduced here.

This booklet has been compiled and edited by Ian Hodges and Caroline Maskill. Free digital copies of the booklet and other WWI Haig family history material, including David's diary, can be obtained by emailing hodgian@gmail.com or by downloading them from the following website:
nzfamilyhistorysearch.com

Divisional Sig Coy
C.V. Engineers
Expeditionary Force
Lakapuna Racecourse
30/9/14

My Dear Mother,

I am just feeling in a writing mood tonight I am sitting in the Guard tent in charge of the guard tonight so I have a good opportunity to write a few letters I have already written to Morn & Jack and I think I will start on Jim & Jessie after I am finished with you.

Well Mother dear I suppose you got that telegram I sent you yesterday. I thought you may be wondering where I would be.

We are camped on the Lakapuna Racecourse in Devonport it is a lovely little spot for a camp everything is now practically in good swing it looks as if we are settling down for another few weeks camp again.

The horses were all taken off on Monday and all us mounted men are in camp the others still sleep on board but come ashore every morning and drill on the racecourse I think we have the better job of the two it is far healthier in these tents than stuck in a stuffy old troopship all day I suppose we will see enough of it before long if we ever get away it is rumoured that we