

Letters Home
from
Private Hugh Ramsay Veitch
3387

3rd Pioneers A.I.F.



With thanks to David Young
for permission to use "Hughie's" [Letters](#)

Introduction to Hughie's World War 1 Letters

These are transcriptions of World War I letters of Australian soldier Hugh Ramsay Veitch, some to his sweetheart Grace Nunn and others to his sister, "Tottie". The letters describe his journey to England via the Panama Canal, his life in the Army in England and in France in the trenches.

Hugh was born 21st February, 1893 in Ballarat, Victoria and enlisted in the Army in 19th March, 1917 as Private # 3387 in the 3rd Pioneers. He returned to Australia on 11th February, 1919.

Also mentioned in the letters are two of his brothers:



Andrew Wilson Veitch - 3rd from left, front row

Private Andrew Wilson Veitch, # 3259, enlisted 13th October 1916 in the 37th Battalion. He returned to Australia, invalided out, on 5th July, 1918 and to Ballarat on 6th July, 1918.

Sapper John Tennant Veitch, # 2751, (referred to as Jack) who enlisted on 14th January, 1916 in the 1st Australian Tunneling Company. He returned home on 20th April, 1919.



John Tennant (Jack) Veitch
just before going to War

The photo used as the banner heading for these letters is of some of the members of Jack's Company, the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, excavating at the Menin Road area of Hoge, in the Ypres Sector in September, 1917.

The letters transcribed here have survived in family archives handed down in my family. They describe Hugh's journey from Australia to England via the Panama Canal, his life in the Army in England, in France in the trenches and of his meetings with a relative who cared for him in England. Most of the letters were written to Tottie, my Grandmother, who lived in Geelong at that time, and some to his girlfriend Grace, later his wife, who lived in Ballarat. In the letters, Hugh comments occasionally about his art works. I have only a couple of these in my possession. I'll add photos of them when they fit the context. I'll also add photos of embroidered greeting cards that were sent from France to Tottie and to their mother, Margaret.

The letters begin with Hugh being disgruntled that his embarkation has been delayed due one of the soldiers coming down with the mumps. I wonder had he known then what he was about to embark upon would he have been so eager to embark on this journey.

Photo reference is [AWM E01396](#)

David Veitch Young

Below is a selection of letters relating to Sutton Veny Camp in Wiltshire

No 3 Compound, Isolation Camp, Ascot Vale. Victoria

4/05/1917

Dear Tot,

Rats to this blooming place. I was getting Final Leave on Thursday night to sail next Thursday but a bit of a joker in our tent got the mumps and we were pushed off to Ascot Vale and there we are to stop for 21 days so I won't be over to-morrow night.

If you are in Melbourne at all in the next week, bring some tomato sauce and you can come out here and talk over the wire entanglements. Nothing to laugh about.

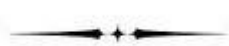
Have you got the picture I painted for you yet? Is it knocked about at all?

I think I shall be able to finish off a few more yet. In fact it will be a couple of months before I get away. Rotten.

There are eight transports leaving next Thursday and I was booked for a shine job over the other side but it's all off. Anyhow, I'll get there.

Have to write to Jess (*sister*) so shall shut up.

PS. Write, write and then sit down and write again.



Fovant, Salisbury: 9/10/1917:

Dear Tot, Received your second letter Sunday. Very decent of you to write two so quickly. I have been here a week today and am still satisfied with the place. Guess this spot would suit you down to the hilt. Everything green and long narrow country lanes enclosed on both side by great oak trees that often block the sky out. It is the same almost everywhere.

If I get out of isolation soon, I'll send you some sketches. As it is, we can't stop too long in the one spot 'cause someone is likely to recognize us, and that wouldn't do. Yesterday afternoon I thought I would like a walk down to the village and I sneaked out the back way. I was just patting myself on the back for dodging the sentries when our two lieutenants hove into sight. Couldn't get out of the way, so thought I would brazen it out. Gave them a dinkum salute and buzzed past looking straight ahead when a voice bade me halt. "Veitch, aren't you supposed to be in isolation?" "Yes, Sir I am." I thought I was in for at least 30/- fine and a few days C.B. (*confined to barracks*). But no. Now I go about without caring a toss. But, as I said before, it doesn't do to hang about the one spot too long. The M P s are a bit thick.

I think I told you that I had written to Ramsay Gilchrist (*a distant relative*). I got his answer in less than twenty-four hours and such a welcome. He wants me up in London as soon as I can get leave and, if too long in coming, he will come down here and see me. It will be hard luck if the authorities won't let him visit the isolation quarters, won't it? He said that he had written to me months ago in Ballarat and wondered why I hadn't sent a reply. My being in camp explained things. Anyway, I'm quite satisfied for a bit and think it very decent of the old bloke to be bothered at all. My luck was in the day I was called Ramsay. The poor old bloke's nerves are a bit upset with air raids, and he is evidently in bad health. Anyway I'll soon liven him up, trust me.

I've learnt quite a lot since I left Australia. Yesterday morning we went for a route march of eight miles. Some walk I can tell you, after two months on the boat.

I don't know why they reckon this camp is worse than rotten. Every move I make it seems to get better. There is plenty to eat and of the best quality. But I forgot – the Pioneers are considered some class over here. Why I don't know, as the work is not as hard as at Seymour. We have to wear felt hats and as a distinction the big Rising Sun

is in the front of the hats. This is to show that the 3rd Pioneers have done something above the usual. They saved an English Battalion from being wiped out or something like that. We have pride of place in all route marches and run a wet canteen at our camp. Soldiers come from miles around and visit our Canteen.

This afternoon we are due for another walk, twelve miles this time, with pack and rifle. I rather like these little jaunts as they give one an appetite for dinner.

On Thursday next our whole camp is shifting on foot to a place called Sutton Veny (*about 2 miles from Warminster in Wiltshire*). We will be moving all day so this is the first test. Provided I can get plenty of cigarettes I'll get there alright and won't be worse off when we do arrive.

There is only one drawback with this place and that is it is very cold, that's why we are moving. I'll write again in the next camp.

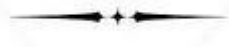
Till then

I am Your Loving Brother

Hughie.

p.s. got four letters from Grace but none from home. I wrote to Auntie Nell Sunday.

*(Letter addressed in ink to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia.
YMCA envelope posted in London 17 Oct 1917.)*



(Hughie had begun to settle into Army life in England by the time he was relocated to Sutton Veny Camp – see web site below. He began to write short notes to members of the family – photos of original envelope and letter below. DVY)

#3387 7/31 Pioneer Company 31st Battalion Sutton Veny England: 26/10/1917:

Dear Alex (*Hughie's brother-in-law, Tottie's husband, my Grandfather DVY*)

Was extra pleased to get a letter from you yesterday as it was the shortest mail I have had here. I only got one from Grace and I believe she sent four or five. Hard luck for me. I suppose they have had my cable long 'ere this. I got a Scotsman to send it from Glasgow but it was returned to me next day at Fovant (*Salisbury*) with a note and a packet of cigarettes stating that I could send it much cheaper from my camp and just as quickly since Glasgow wasn't a direct cabling station during the period of the war. Very decent of the joker. I have been writing to him ever since and have had invitations to spend my leave at Loch Lomond but that chap Ramsay Gilchrist puts the kibosh on that.

You shall have to wait until I have leave to gather any news. At present we are confined to camp as an isolation but once out of that we will be able to get about the country a bit. The rest of the camp are allowed out within a five mile radius and as five miles means a deuce of a lot of villages one can see a fair amount. Will send some sketches as soon as I can rake together a set. Hoping everything is in apple-pie order.

I remain, Yours, Hughie

p.s. Excuse the shortness of this. Paper is extra scarce.

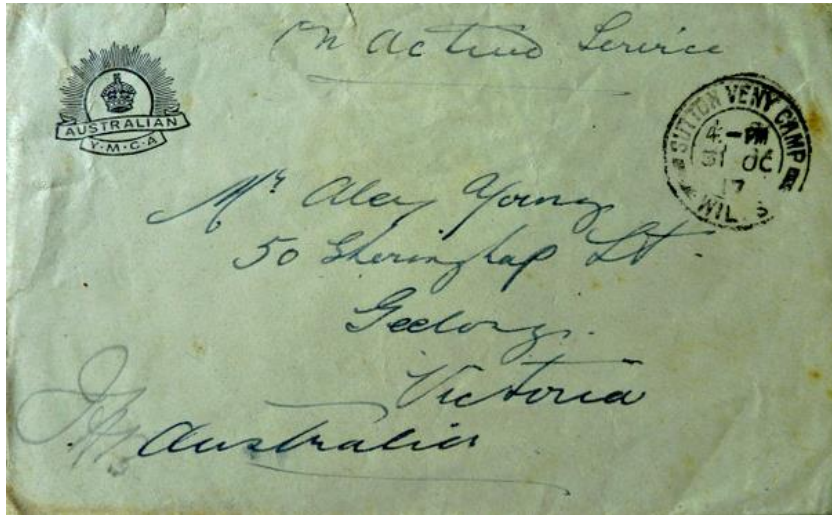


Photo of envelope addressed to Alex from Hughie

(Envelope as above addressed in ink to Mr Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia . Envelope marked: On Active Service. Australian YMCA black monogram. Posted: Sutton Veny 4PM 31 Oct 1917)

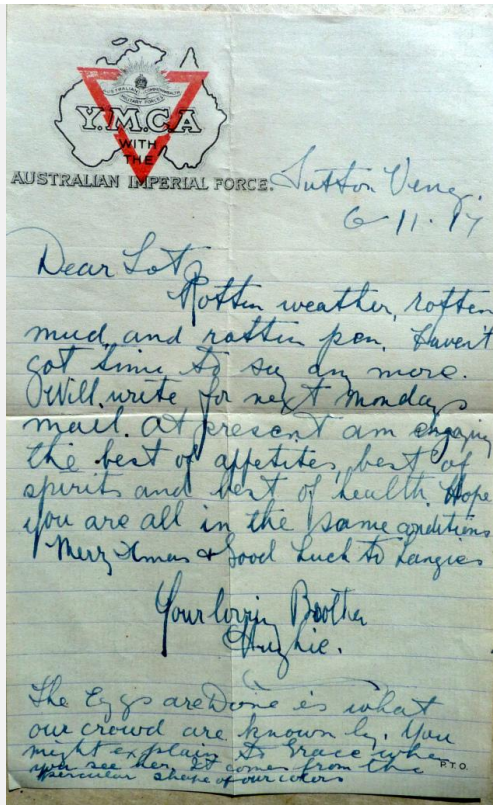


Photo of original letter to Tot from Sutton Veny Camp dated 6/11/1917

(Transcription of above letter. DVY)

Sutton Veny: 6.11.1917 :

Dear Tot

Rotten weather, rotten mud and rotten pen. Haven't got time to say any more. Will write for next Monday's mail. At present am enjoying the best of appetites, best of spirits and best of health. Hope you are all in the same conditions.

Merry Xmas and Good Luck to Langies

Your loving Brother

Hughie

p.s. 'The Eggs are Done' is what our crowd are known by. You might explain to Grace when you see her. It comes from the peculiar shape of our Colours.



"The Eggs are Done" Colour Patch of 1/3rd Pioneers



(Hughie gets a week's leave and uses it to visit London before he goes by train to Scotland. He has time to do some sketching – one sketch is included here DVY)

Sutton Veny: 25.11.17:

Dear Old Tot

Am just back from leave and have been too busy to write for the last week or two. I was missing a whole lot of letters since Granddad's, so sent up to London and stirred things up a bit, and when I got back from leave, a whole post bag awaited me. I think I got eleven altogether. Two from you, dated August, and half a dozen from Grace, same month, and the rest from home. Took me all one day to read them.

So let's go back to my trip over England and Scotland. We left here for London last Thursday week with seven whole days ahead of us. I hated London as soon as I saw the place. We detrained at Paddington and marched to the AIF headquarters in Horseferry Road, there to hear a lecture and be dismissed. From there I had to find my way to 14 Bedford Row. Some job I can tell you, but after a couple of hours I eventually got there. And the welcome I got, why it fair took my breath away. I was given a cigar, and a cup of tea made for me by Mr Gilchrist's partner and made quite at home in a few minutes. We went into our family tree and my relationship to Mr Gilchrist. Of course I argued this point somewhat. I could see that it would be best to let the old bloke prove everything after a show of argument. In fact it was a master stroke on my part letting him prove that I am a relation of his. Blowed if I can see it yet, but nevertheless he says the proof is there.

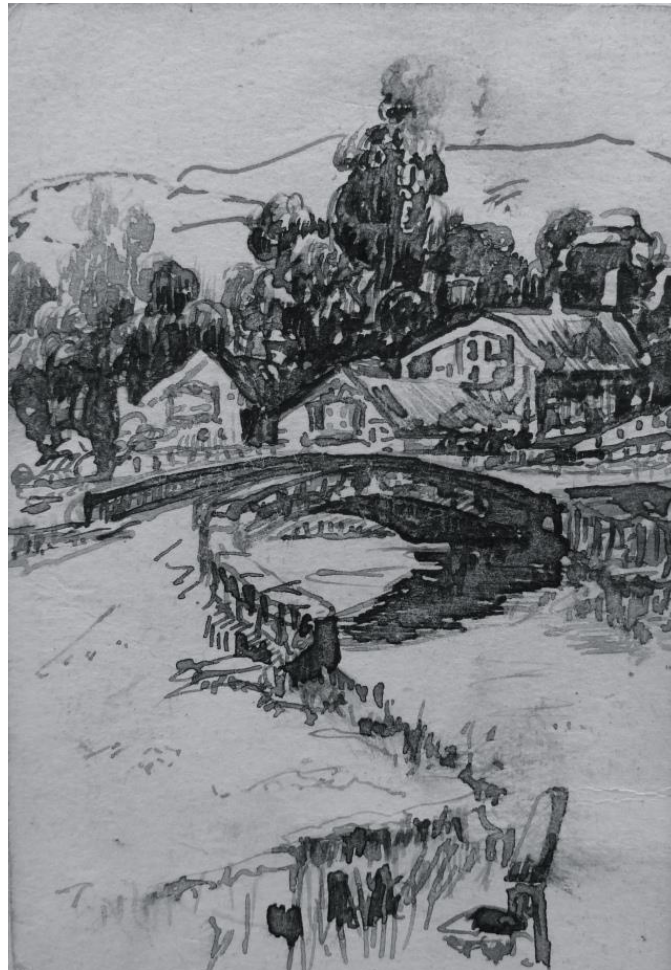
He gave me my whole family history which dates back to the 11th Century. I have proof of that from the tombstones in the graveyards where our ancestors are safely stowed away. He made me promise to go to Edinburgh and visit his family graveyard. I took a copy of the headstone and a little sketch. This is where the Ramsay comes in. He was highly delighted to think that there was another Ramsay in the world younger than himself. He mentioned his relations in the USA but they are out in the wet (*cold*). He proved to me that I am the only relation he has left. So far, so good. Then we went out to dinner. By hooky, some dinner that. I had to leave London at 8:30 for Glasgow and Mr Gilchrist wouldn't leave me till the train left. A really fine old gentleman if ever there was one. I was sorry to leave him. If it hadn't been for business which he has been putting off so that he could see me, he would have been in that train with me.

I had a fine time up in Glasgow, saw Loch Lomond and got a sketch which nearly cost me a few days in a clink. Sketching is not allowed in Scotland. From Glasgow we went over to Edinburgh and took a taxi up to the Forth Bridge. That cost us 22/-, some doh – ah! After tea I decided to fish out an address Miss McKenzie gave me. Extra very nice people made us welcome, gave us cigars and took us to a picture palace at night. Then they saw us safely in the train bound for London.

We travelled all night and went off straight to camp as London didn't look at all promising. Scotland will do me for my next leave. The people up there are much nicer than the English. They simply cannot do enough for us up there. One feels quite at home as soon as one gets in Scotland. Everywhere we went, everybody seemed the same – warm, friendly and sociable. Alex's mother (*Tottie's mother-in-law*) gives one a good idea of the general run of the Scottish people. Everyone trying to do us a good turn. In England here one has to fend for himself; up there, everybody looks after the Australians.

Tottie, how would you have liked to take that trip with me? The only thing wrong, I was a wee bit lonely all the time. You see, I was thinking of the bonny nights over home that you will be having now. Over here it is cold day after day and nearly always wet. We go through it all. We stand freezing for hours listening to lectures and still I'm plugging away. What about Andrew and the route marches? (*This must refer to letters home from Hugh's brother, Andrew*) I haven't missed one yet. We have one every Saturday morning, about twelve miles or so, with all equipment.

Today is Sunday and we have nothing to do all day, the most monotonous day of the week. I generally write my letters Saturday afternoon and sleep all day Sunday. But yesterday I had to write to Grace as I haven't written to her for a fortnight so that took up all afternoon. I've got about six more to do this afternoon so shall have to finish this with a rush. Some day I'll send you a copy of our family tree if I can work it out. I have our connection with the Gilchrists here in my book, but that mightn't interest you.



Hugh R. Vetch

Signature on back of 'bridge over stream' drawing

I've done more sketching over this side than I ever did. I've got dozens of little water sketches and any amount of lead pencil sketches. I have sent about a dozen over to Grace. She might give you a couple. Wait till I have finished the book of sketches some day. This book starts off with Loch Lomond, from a point that has never been sketched before. Then on to quaint old houses in the North of England and a couple around here. Some are in the next county and some hundreds of miles away. A lot I got from the carriage windows as we were at a standstill at different points. I am sending this book to Grace as soon as I have finished but she might let you have some if you ask nicely. Anyhow, I'll tell her, too.

Eight pages now so that's not too bad for me. Why, I only sent ten large ones to Grace and wait till she hears that you have eight. Guess she will perform. Must shut up now. Hope Alex passed his Exam's. It would be a boost for him. Best wishes to Alex and Norman and best of Love to yourself.

I am your loving brother

Hughie V

(Letter addressed in ink to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia

Posted Sutton Veny 4PM 26 NO 1917)



(While in training camp at Sutton Veny, Hugh tried to write a letter to Tottie at least once a week to have a sort of a chat. Tottie had always been close to Hughie as the eldest sister who played a large part in his upbringing. DVY) Sutton Veny; 28.11.1917:

Dear Tot

Got your letter last night and yours only. Suppose I shall get some tonight. Am extra glad to hear that mine are dribbling in home by degrees for I was a bit afraid of them going astray. I wrote you one last Monday night and gave you all the news. I told you about our relation (*Gilchrist*) and my trip round England (and *to Scotland*) so this will very likely fizzle out into a short epistle.

I caught guard (*duty*) for the first time yesterday and your letter was smuggled into me at lights out. I was just bemoaning my luck and can tell you I was bucked up somewhat to know an Australian mail was in. Thanks extra very much for contents of letter (*money*) and good wishes also, but Tot old girl, please don't bother sending me anything of the like again, 'cause it only frightens me. You see, since I left Australia I have become Scotch, as they call it here, and am always in a sound financial position. I can't quite make it up (*understand it*) myself, but there you are. A card will always do. Another thing, we are not allowed to post parcels and that makes me feel mean.

Oh yes, a bit about Vessy (?). He certainly turned up... but will never be any good over yonder as he is full of bronchitis and has a very weak heart so he is booked for home. That's luck for you. A trip around the world free and six shillings a day, that's the dream of every Australian. I would like to be in his shoes in a sort of a way and again I'd be disappointed somewhat if I had to clear off home before getting in at least one smack (*at the Germans*). Every day's training gives me more confidence in myself till one gets a kind of freezing contempt for all Germans.

The fellows in here are arguing the point (*of the war*) so further writing is off for the present. I'm going for a walk, to fish out more news. So long in the meantime.

Have just had 2's (*?shillings*) worth of Charlie Chaplin. Entertainment in this country is fairly cheap. One can have the best two hours 'for a penny stamp' around these parts. Have just received two letters from Grace, some other letters too. I think I am missing at least two from her this mail. Rotten luck. Am glad you thought to send (*brothers*) Jack's and Bowler's (*Andrew's*) addresses. I couldn't find out anything about them at Horseferry Road. Get me – ten stone and going strong. I started this game just under eight stone so the life agrees. (*Note. Hughie was only a little more than 5 ft 2 inches tall! He was denied entry into the army when he first tried to sign up earlier in the War. By 1917, they were taking just about anyone prepared to go – ? like Vessey, mentioned above.*) When I do get over t'other side I'll be right amongst the Ballarat chaps. Belong to the same Division and am bound to be working right through the lot of them. More of my luck.

Best wishes. Write again next week

Your loving brother Hughie.

p.s. I'll write to Norman after Church Parade. Remember me to Vernon, Mr & Mrs Forrest

p.p.s. I'll have to write to Talbot tomorrow night so I'm getting in a short letter before I start. I never know when I will finish when I start on Grace's letters.

(Posted 1 DECEMBER, 1917 from Sutton Very Camp)

Below – a photo of a Christmas Card that was painted by Hughie and sent to Tottie



Christmas card painted by Hughie - initialled bottom left corner

Sutton Veny 12. 12. 1917

Dear Tot, It's as cold as charity and is going to be worse so we are in for bad weather for some time. I don't remember writing last and having a few minutes before next beat, I'll try and get in a few minutes.

Friend Gilchrist is still keeping up a gentle flow of letters. That bloke doesn't intend to lose sight of me. He wants me up in London again so suppose I shall have to spend my next four days leave there. He is not a half bad old stick and certainly tried his best to entertain me on my last trip up there. We are going to have a long quiet talk next time we meet. Don't know what is on the books but expect something to happen according to the wording of his letters. Can you see me doing the Strand towards Piccadilly in company of our respected long lost relation?

You remember Mrs Wells of Essendon. I'm sitting alongside her nephew right now, funny thing being in the same Company as him. We were great pals from the jump; ... it wasn't until we were on the water a couple of weeks that we found out we were to visit the same *(person and)* place in London.

Am on guard at present and consider it the rottenest stunt ever invented. I had to do three two hour beats through the night and it was as cold as charity all the time. Had a bit of fun though on the second beat between 12 to 2am. A chap tried to break into the Railway Station which was my post, and found me very much awake and ready for (a)

fight. A bayonet threatening ones throat is no joke and this cove nearly dropped with fright. Helped to pass the two hours.

I can see my pen running out... so shall I.

Best wishes all around. Hope Langies (*Stocks & Shares*) are on the rise again.

Heaps of Luck Your loving brother Hughie

(Ink addressed letter Navy and Army Canteen Board (NACB) envelope to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia.

Posted from Sutton Veny Camp 14 DECEMBER 1917)



French women embroidered cards like these for the soldiers to send home.

London 24.12.1917 Dear Tot

Am in this smoky old place once again but not for long I hope. Tomorrow is Xmas day and I'll spend it at Glasgow. I can't stand London at any price. Everything here gives me the pip, don't know why but I want to get away as soon as I set foot in it. I wouldn't be here now only that the Northwest train doesn't leave till 8.50 tonight.

This trip is what we call a chuck-in. Twenty five of our Platoon were sent off in a hurry to "somewhere" (*in France*) to relieve a party for ten days and as a result we got Xmas leave, (*but only*) five days when we earned ten. The place to which we were sent is the hottest corner in the world at present, (*hot, in terms of the war, that is*); a place where they don't beg pardons. No wonder Jack is about tired. I only had ten solid days there and am perfectly satisfied, and will not be in a hurry to leave Sutton Veny for some time to come. What about the cold weather and me now. Why, I seem to be the only one able to boast of ever feeling warm. The coldness hasn't even worried me yet and I can tell you we are getting some sniffers.

When we came back to Camp the whole place was white with snow fallen a couple of days previous and which had frozen. Frozen. Did you get that? You people in Victoria don't know what cold weather means. Here, you can take a cup of water and boil it, then place it outside for about ten minutes and get a cupful of ice. That is after we have to light fires under the water pipes every morning (*to get water*). But still I don't seem to feel the cold so much. In fact I'm rather disappointed.

Tell you what I did on Friday morning. I dug a narrow gutter from our hut door to the wash house, a distance of about twenty yards, filled it up with water that night and now we skate for a wash every morning.

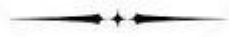
©Wiltshire OPC Project/Cathy Sedgwick/2015

Am going to fish out old Gilchrist now and get him to trot me around this rotten hole (*of London*). That old bloke can't do enough for his "relation". He seems to be dead frightened that I might have to go back to France. Wishes to be remembered to all at home. So do I.

Your loving Brother Hughie

p.s. Best regards to Mrs Young (*Alex's Mum*) when you write.

(Ink addressed YMCA envelope to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong, Victoria Australia. Written on YMCA note paper. H.M. FORCES ON ACTIVE SERVICE Posted DECEMBER, 1917)



Dear Tot, How's everybody, I haven't had too much time to write you lately as things move fairly quickly over this side and one might be here today and hundreds of miles away tomorrow. My usual luck has stood me in good stead this Xmas.

I got five days leave and went off up to Glasgow with my pal, had what most people would call a good time up there. Came back to camp last Wednesday and was warned to be ready to go back to France on New Years Day.

But, a joker in our hut got a dose of meningitis and here I am isolated as large as life and with a grin on my dial that simply will not come off. You see, when I do come out of this place, the draft will be well into the game over t'other side and they should have to set to and train me again. Also I got word this morning that my particular pal has been crossed out of the draft too, so that is an extra piece of luck. I've had one go at the game called War and am not particularly anxious to have another. Nobody, willingly, ever puts his plate back in for more.

I'd have been there yet if it hadn't been for a court martial on one of our chaps and three of us were wanted as evidence. Our luck was large because the draft are draft no longer. They form one of those "lists" that come out every day in Australian papers. I think I'm likely to be here in England for at least another month so that's not so bad.

How did Alex get on in the Exams. I've been expecting mail for the past week but never a line. Friend Gilchrist sent me two boxes of cigarettes. A great old bloke. He never forgets to write every week. What do you think of these pages? They are ideal for letter writing to my point of view. Must hop off now and get dinner.

Regards to Alex and Norman also Mrs Young when you write.

Your loving Brother Hughie.

(In plain ink addressed envelope to Mrs Alex Young 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia Posted from Sutton Veny Camp 2nd JAN 1918)

Sutton Veny ; 29.1.1918

Dear Tot

Yours to boot dated 22/11/17 and very much surprised to hear that you hadn't received any of my letters as I have sent at least one regularly every week since I left Australia. By the same I don't suppose Grace has been getting any either, but heavens I've sent a lot. I know Grace got the Panama letters and you should have had five also according to my book. To date I have sent 104 letters to Victoria and half a dozen to New South Wales so you can see I'm always writing.

I am pleased to hear that Ma and Nell have been holiday-making at the beautiful City of Geelong. Hope they had a good rest. You mentioned a letter from Nell. I haven't had one from there since the beginning of November and I am short of about a dozen from Grace which shortness makes me rotten mad. Don't know how yours managed to dribble through but was mighty relieved to get one all the same.

Andrew was down here last week and by hooky he looks like a ghost but is getting A1 again. He was gassed in Ypres, which is a cow of a place, to put it in Australian. (*Andrew had Fibrosis of the lung as a result of the gassing – naa.gov.au war records*).



Gas being used by the Germans in Ypres area of France

I haven't had a word from Jack for the last month. Don't know why but he isn't a bit particular about his addresses. The last letter I got from him was addressed like this – Pte Veitch, 3rd Div. France. It found me.

I have written up to Headquarters any number of times but still nothing ever turns up. If I was sure that mine were getting through, I wouldn't care a dump, but it's the blinking uncertainty of everything that makes me fizzy.

Now I sent Grace a big parcel of stuff that I collected and if that doesn't turn up I'll snort some 'cause there was a piece of hand-worked Irish lace -the prettiest I have seen- and a piece of silk voile that I got up in Scotland right off the bleaching tables. Now I happen to know something about laces and silks so you can guess they were something out of the ordinary or they shouldn't have bothered me. Hard luck if that goes astray too. Tot, that lace will turn you green with envy. I was nearly sending it to Auntie Jess but thought Grace would look just as nice in it, so there it went. I sent Auntie Jess a postcard instead. Of course, if I ever get another chance, I'll get you and Nell a piece too, that is if the same woman is on the job but they change them every few months.

Now, look, don't worry about Andrew, he is as well as I am and that is saying a blooming lot. He only got a dose of gas and that isn't much. I've heard of worse cases. Jack's all right too. He has a job that is the envy of all the army. And me, well, it doesn't matter about me; I can look after myself. So you see we are all fairly well.

The only thing about me is that they cannot fill me. You know those sponge puddings you make, well I could polish off a couple of them with ease.

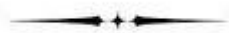
Have to write to Friend Gilchrist this afternoon. Can you see me at a dinner of about ten courses with that gent? I was quite at home too and could talk them blind when we went in for a smoke. Must hop off for dinner here now so shall close.

Hope Alex got the exams off successfully.

I remain your loving brother Hughie

p.s. Love to Norman, I wrote to him too.

(In green printed ACTIVE SERVICE ink addressed envelope to Mrs Alex Young 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia – Posted "Field Post Office" ? FEB 1918)



(Hughie realises the importance to him of contact with family and of mateship. He's not happy about NCO school or sure about the merits of promotion in the Army. DVY)

Sutton Veny: 5.2.1918

Dear Tot

Yours dated Nov. to hand last night. Can't understand why you are not getting any of my letters. To date I have sent 25, and if one of that little lot cannot find Geelong then something must be radically wrong. Of course after the Panama letters got over, you couldn't expect any more for a month at least.

Fancy Ma and Nell hopping down for a week-end and staying three weeks. Good heavens, that beats everything I ever did. What did you do with them? I'll bet Alex had cold dinners all the while they were there. You couldn't help it could you, Tot.

I'd like to see your face whilst we are being fed over here. Guess you would wonder if we had even had a decent meal. Don't remember one myself. Reckon I'll have to go through a course of table manners when I come home.

I got a Xmas card or rather booklet from Sydney. The only sign of life I have ever had from there and by jove I write them (*his aunts*) regularly every fortnight. I think I'll cut it out till they do send me a letter.

I should have liked to be in Geelong Gala Day. Must be some day over there. A Ballarat chap came rushing into our hut this morning with a great handful of cigarettes and gave them to me 'cause I came from Ballarat too. It is wonderful how the Golden City chaps hang together.

There goes the dinner gong. Sorry, more Donkey and Thick Pudding.

The Battalion had a Route March last night and Snowy and I made ourselves scarce with the result that we are getting an extra half hour after drill. A Corporal takes the two of us out on the parade ground and we about turn, 'tion, and mark time.

It has cut me out of the school business (*NCO Training School*) which is a blessing as I was shivering in my boots for fear that I should miss the boys. It is no joke to be separated from the crew you get to know. I suppose you will call me all sorts of fatheads and all that but you just want to be an Australian blooming soldier here in England and you would understand things.

I have been told by all the jokers about our Orderly Rooms that I am missing a chance of a lifetime (*to be promoted*) but all of those idiots have all been over the other side for at least six months. That's the difference.

Didn't get a chance to finish this last night. A chap had drawn a great Rising Sun on the end of his hut and they dragged me off to paint it. I did it with a shaving brush – some painting. Well Tot old dear, hope you have got at least one of my letters by now.



The Australian Army Emblem - the Rising Sun

Got a letter from Mr Gilchrist, the relation. He is arranging to come down to Warminster for a week as I can't get up to London. Warminster is about two miles from here. He is retiring from business. Must shut up now.

Your loving Brother Hughie

p.s. Old Gillie writes wanting to be remembered to all my people. He says he has a lot to talk over and must see me before I go over.

(In plain ink addressed envelope to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia Posted 4 PM Sutton Veny Camp 7 FEB 1918)

3387 3rd Pioneer Balln. A.I.F. abroad Sutton Veny 14.2.1918

Dear Tot

Behold, in the third male member of our Brilliant Family, a Corporal Officer, in the Blithering A.I.F. with a stripe upon his arm. This misfortune happened to me yesterday. Yesterday I was just Hughie to everybody in this camp, respected (largely) and fairly well liked by all. Today I'm Cpl. Veitch, a cut above Pte. and cussed by all and sundry because some blithering idiot thought I would make a good N.C.O.

I've been suspecting all along that something was going to happen to me. Things have been too quiet to be good and I broke a mirror last week and this is the result.

Ever since I came back (*from France*), I have been kept away from drilling with my pals and have been getting tactics and high faluting rubbish pumped into me instead. I didn't drop even then, else I'd have been a proper dunce and failed at the exam. Now it is too late, I've just got to put up with it all and try to keep the old smile going. If there was any benefit to be derived from it all, I wouldn't mind so much.

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If I am lucky I shall keep the stripe when I do get back to the land of fireworks, and if not, I revert to the ranks and wait till some poor unfortunate Cpl. has been outed. Well I don't want stripes under those conditions. I'm not built that way.

This stripe business, Tot old dear, I consider the worst possible thing that could have happened to me. I've been pulled away from all my friends who went to France last Tuesday, and dumped amongst a blooming lot of strangers, to learn the art of being a blithering idiot. What I do not like about it is, I have been selected before my old Seymour N.C.O's. which trick I reckon is rotten. Must be the fatal beauty, or something like that. 'Nuff said.

Address my letters in the same old style 'cause I've got enough bother getting a delivery now as it is, and also, I don't think I'll hold rank long when I rejoin the Battalion, anyhow not until I have served for a couple of months.

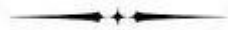
Was sorry Alex missed the exam but better luck next time. Can Norman swim yet? A jolly, good thing to teach him. I am on guard now, otherwise you would not be getting this so early in the week. I generally wait till Sunday. Got a letter from Auntie Kis with 10/- inside.

Best Regards to Alex and Norman

Your loving Brother Hughie

YMCA with the AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE letterhead

ink addressed plain envelope to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia Posted Sutton Veny Camp 8AM 16 FEB 1918



Sutton Veny: England 2.3.1918

Dear Tot

Must get in a few lines to you 'ere departing this frosty, snowy and altogether rotten place called Bonny England. I'm certain that France is not any worse! Into the bargain we have to arise now at 6 o'clock and drill an hour longer for luck like. I've been on draft for over a fortnight and am expecting to leave here any minute. The sooner the better as I'm heartily sick of this place.

I've lost most of my pals and to be mooching about here like a lost sheep is not at all to my liking. Nothing but medical inspections and Guard work. I did not mind the Dr's Exam so much but to hop around in front of a blooming Doctor wearing only an identity disc, is above the giddy limit. This goes on every day as they reckon one must be thoroughly fit before moving on. I suppose I'll be around there again tomorrow morning.

Oh yes, I'm sending you my stripe. I cut it off my sleeve a few minutes ago as I can't see that there is any further use for it since the school business was cancelled. Hard luck in a way but I reckon I can pick up some over t'other side and would much rather anyway. Cannot send you any more sketches as the Authorities have stopped me doing any around camp, and I will not get any further leave until after spending about two years in the land of fireworks. Funny thing I'm finding myself dead anxious to get back to that place, as before, I reckoned it was the last place one could want to be. I suppose the difference is in being lonely.

Well Tot old girl, I am afraid I shall have to cut your rations, I mean letters, down a little. You know a Pioneer is always working and only gets a chance to write at meal times. I'll do my best though and try to keep the weekly going. I have not missed to date and reckon I have done fairly well considering. I have about ten letters a week to write to Vic., two now and then to Sydney and heavens knows how many to Mr Gilchrist. Hard luck I shan't be able to get word through to him before I go as he has gone away this week into the country.

Your loving brother Hughie

(In ink addressed YMCA envelope to Mrs Alex Young, 50 Gheringhap Street, Geelong Victoria Australia

Posted Sutton Veny England 2.45 on 2.3.1918)

(Once Hughie was in the trenches in France, the only way he could correspond with family for the next couple of months was by 'Field Card'. Example below sent 11 March 1918 saying that the last letter he received from home was in Dec 1917. DVY)

A.F.A. 2042.
114 Gen.No. 5248.

FIELD



POST CARD

The address
only to be writ-
ten on this side.
If anything else
is added the
post card will
be destroyed.

[Crown Copyright Reserved.]

Mrs Alex Young
50 Gheringhap St
Geelong
Victoria
Australia

An address only permitted on this side of the card.

NOTHING is to be written on this side except
the date and signature of the sender. Sentences
not required may be erased. If anything else is
added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card
addressed to the sender of this card.]

~~I am quite well.~~

~~I have been admitted into hospital~~

~~{ sick } and am going on well~~
~~{ wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.~~

~~I am being sent down to the base.~~

~~I have received your~~ { letter dated Dec.
telegram ,, _____
parcel ,, _____

~~Letter follows at first opportunity.~~

~~I have received no letter from you~~

~~{ lately.~~
~~{ for a long time.~~

Signature
only

Date

Hugh R. Mitchell

11. 3. 18

(19. 62) Wt. W1566/P1619. 10,000m. 1/18. E. & S. Ltd. (E2367).

The bare minimum of information from soldiers in the trenches.





Hugh Ramsay Veitch (Photo taken 1916)



Group Photo at Training Camp before leaving for War - Hugh Ramsay Veitch (marked)



Private Hugh Ramsay Veitch

Hugh Ramsay Veitch married Grace Victoria May Nunn at Ballarat, Victoria in 1920. Hugh Ramsay Veitch died on 10th March, 1966 at the age of 73 years. Grace Victoria May Veitch died on 21st March, 1979, aged 85 years.

Hugh & Grace are buried together at Ballarat Old Cemetery, Ballarat, Victoria.



Hugh & Grace Veitch's Headstone at Ballarat Old Cemetery