

France via the Depot.

I won't describe the life at the Depot to any great extent, as most of the readers of *Pat's Post* are only too familiar with it, but I will just tell you enough to make you envious and wish you had been in my shoes when I left "happy" Cooden. It is an old saying of Biblical origin, I believe, that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." This being so, a certain spot "Somewhere in England" should be a suburb of Heaven, but it ain't. Like Heaven, the Depot is a place where everything is "bright and shining," but unlike Heaven, it has many "partings" especially from a financial point of view. The "Other Rank" and the Paymaster certainly do not think alike. The former would like many shekels on pay day, but the latter, with a paternal solicitude for days to come (*apres la guerre*)—war is feminine, I think—thinks otherwise, and doles out ten bob or a pound—more frequently the former amount.

SOME IMPRESSIONS—THE DEPOT.

My first experience at the Depot was being told by a certain Sergeant that I was a d—d fool—I think he said a d—d *old* fool—for leaving such a home as Cooden; and after a few days cutting wood with an infernal machine that tried hard to include the tips of your fingers in the operation, polishing brass, boots and other things, I came to have very much the same opinion.

THE BEST OF FRIENDS PART.

I was just getting on the most friendly terms with the infernal machine, after about seven days' close intimacy—6 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day—when I was called off to try conclusions with a "Box Respirator"—in other words, qualify for Overseas by taking a "Gas" course. For six days I and twenty-five others were instructed how to know gas and how to prevent it having any ill effects. I might here mention that previous to the official course we had, more or less, been fairly well prepared by the "knowing ones" as to what we might expect. Some of the tales (from experience) told us were gruesome in the extreme, and cases were known where men had gone into the gas chamber white, and were carried out a beautiful black or blue. The only things about me that were black when I emerged from the gas chamber were my buttons and badges. Anyway, the course was not so bad as we were led to expect, and the whole crowd passed the final tests with *eclat*, and there were no casualties.

Another experience at the Depot, and one that has far-reaching effects that will last for all time, and that is, you are taught how to polish buttons—back as well as front—without staining your tunic. This is a very valuable thing to know, and should prove most useful at the Front. Five weeks of careful tuition, and I was declared a fit and proper person to proceed Overseas, and for

the fourth, and a last time, I was put on a French Draft—to stay.

AMBITION REALIZED.

The next few days were busy ones, what with blancoing equipment, medical inspections and other inspections, and then, on a long-to-be remembered Tuesday afternoon, headed by the band, we marched to the port of embarkation. At last we were off to "Where things are doing."

The march to the boat was quite an event, and if it hadn't been for the weight of that—ahem—pack and the pouring rain would have been quite enjoyable. Our conducting Officer was quite a wit in rather a heavy way, and some of his sayings caused quite a spirit of merriment amongst the men, which decidedly relieved the tedium of the march. He very kindly told the men that they were to look "straight to ze front" when marching to attention, and that he would do the "looking back at the pretty girls for them." "Kind of him, wasn't it." Anyway, it was raining hard, and there were no pretty girls about, so I wasn't tempted to disobey orders.

Arrived at the Quay, we had about an hour's wait, while the various units represented and the leave men embarked. I was just figuring out the most comfortable part of the ship to make for, when a khaki-clad individual with a band on his arm, bearing the legend "Ship's Sergeant Major," told me I was to be marker for our draft. Now—what in the "Kaiser" does a marker do, I thought; but I wasn't going to give the C.A.M.C. away, so I said "O.K." It meant that I had to stop on deck—it was pouring with rain and d—d cold, and my greatcoat was in my pack—with all the other markers, during the trip across, then do as I was told when we reached the other side.

An awful sound, like the siren giving warning of an air raid, suddenly rent the air, and we were off. In a few minutes there was a W.O. 1st Class, who clung to the bridge ladder—rattling nautical terms I believe—at my side. I thought at the time he must have been banqueting before he left his unit. I was in pretty good company during that memorable crossing. I think all within touch were W.O.'s or Staffs—or is it Stave? Anyway, all the decorated ones were ill, in proportion to their rank. I was so tickled that I quite forgot to join them until it was too late, and I found myself wandering, in the dark, through the streets of a French port, *trying to mark* for my own special bunch. After what seemed like a journey, somebody told me to stand "thaar," and I stood "thaar." After I had stood "thaar" about—it seemed a h— of a time, and I was wondering if I was marking right, a voice shouted "Here's Dad." It was the first time I did not mind being called Dad. I would have hugged the chap if he had called me "Grandad." I guess I was a success as a marker—for the draft had found me—in France.

—D.G.F.

(To be continued).