

# **ERNEST PHILIP ELWIN (1881-1947)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In his 66 year on Earth Ernest led an adventurous and often dangerous life. He was born in China where one of his sisters died from ill health. In his first job he sailed halfway across the world to lay undersea cables. At the start of WWI he volunteered, and was sent to fight in Gallipoli. He was discharged due to ill health but went back to Siemens, and back to laying cables in the submarine infested waters of the N. Atlantic. Between the wars he lived peacefully and had a family, but then at the start of WWII he lived through the Blitz, before finally retiring to the countryside. His experiences damaged his health and left him with mild depression, although the latter may also have been partly a result of his mathematical/scientific personality.

The following story records his life, in his own words from his letters, from comments from his sons, and from historical records and books, particularly a history of The Royal Naval Division by Douglas Jerrold.

He is a grandfather, and great grandfather to be very proud of ☺.

## **CHAPTER 1: EARLY LIFE IN CHINA**

Ernest was born in Hangchow, China, on 9th November 1881.

His parents, Rev Arthur Elwin and Mary nee Jacob were missionaries in Hangchow, China. They were there first from 1870-1874 and had come back for a second time in 1878.

They had brought their 4 children with them to China: Rosy (Rosa Mary), Willy (William Hedger), Edy (Edith Lucy), and Arty (Arthur Crawford Jacob), aged in 10, 8½, 6½ and 4 respectively. Two of their children had died in China: their firstborn, Elizabeth, at 2 days old in 1871, and their 6<sup>th</sup> child, Berth, at 21 months, earlier in 1881. They brought English nurses out to look after the children, and had various Chinese servants to cook and do housework.

Shortly before Ernest's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday in September 1884 the Elwins returned to England, and in December his youngest sister, Rowena Ruth ("Wena") was born.



At the age of 5, in October 1886, he returned to Hangchow. His parents were going for their third time, but this time they only took Ernie and Rowena (aged nearly 2), and a nurse. The family was divided, not to be reunited until some of the children were grown up.

They arrived back at Hangchow in December, and soon Mary was giving Ernie lessons for about 3/4 hour in the mornings. The nurse returned to England about March 1887.

Ernie's earliest surviving letter, written for him but with him printing his name at the end, is dated *Hangchow 21st Oct. 1887: My dear Arty, Thank you for your letter & the picture you & Willy sent me. I do like riding the horse a little. Two days ago Mama let us ride in the garden: Wena rides behind me. Mr Neale gives me the best rides on his back & shoulders; he doesn't give me so many rides on his back, but on his shoulders. I like Mr Neale very much: he is very kind to me. He stayed with us once a little while & when he spread bread & treacle for me, he spread it very thick! We have not got any tortoise yet. I like digging in the garden & I like mixing water with earth & making mud & then putting stones together! Ahming (a servant) is gone away to buy cows; he will come back soon. I do lessons every day with Mama, & then at the end of the week Mama counts up my marks & gives me cash every week. I buy little Chinese cakes with them. I don't remember my bamboo stick at Hampstead. I have some bamboos here & I have an old walking stick Papa gave me, which he broke. Carlo has been lost a good many times - it was lost yesterday again. I send my love to you & Willy. I am your loving brother ERNEST PHILIP ELWIN.*

For much of 1887 and 1888 the health of both parents was very poor, and Arthur in particular suffered diarrhoea, nerves and languor. At last, in September and October 1888, the family went for a holiday to Japan. They had a rough crossing from Shanghai to Nagasaki, but Ernie was not as ill as his father and Wena (who had stayed below in the stuffy cabins). They stayed a week at Nagasaki before going on to Kobe.

Next year Ernie wrote (in his own handwriting) to: Master A.C.J.Elwin, 2 Castle Street, Dover (with a French Stamp and Shanghai postmark): *Hangchow 15th May 1889. My dear Arty, I wish you many happy returns of your birthday. We have had a great deal of rain lately. We have had very nice cherries off our own tree this year: how did we get them? Duncan & Gordon came to play with us yesterday. On Saturday Mrs Mason with Pansy & Mary & the baby Beulah came to stay here yesterday. And we were very sorry when they left. Wena & I send love & kisses to you and Willy. I am your loving brother Ernest Philip Elwin.*

Earlier in the year "little Ernie was taken suddenly ill with a bad knee and fever, and did not recover for some weeks. He was not able to resume his lessons till the 22nd of April." A month later his mother was very ill for six weeks or more. Eventually the family went to the sanatorium on the hill for a couple of months, and this was particularly good for the two children, who regained good appetites and stopped looking so pale and thin. At the end of 1889, just in time for Christmas, Ernie's 19 year old sister, Rosy, arrived from England. She must have been quite a stranger to the two young ones, and to have seemed more like a nurse or an aunt than a sister to them.

Another glimpse of life in China comes in a third letter: *Hangchow June 2nd. 1891. My dear Artie, We went to Shau-shing last Wednesday, I mean papa and mama and I. We played lawn tennis; & I liked it very much. Every morning Mr Walshe & Mr Wheatley papa & I went, outside the city to bathe in the canal, it was great fun. June 3rd. Last Saturday we went to see Mr Valentine's grave; we started at 9.30; & we had dinner in the boat; we went in a boat as it was a long way off. When we went to bathe we had to climb over the wall of the city it is not as high as the Hangchow wall. We came back yesterday. June 5th. Thank you for the letters you have written to me at different times, we like to hear from you all, I wish you many happy returns of your birthday which is coming soon. Please give our love to Edie and Willie and with the same to yourself, I am your loving brother Ernest P Elwin.*

When Ernie was about 11 1/3, in March 1893, they left for England, and lived in Hampstead, near Mary's mother - "the last time they were together as a family".



However, in October 1895 the parents set off for their fourth and final term in China, leaving Ernie to stay with relatives (presumably with his father's solicitor brother Edward and family at 2 Castle Street, Dover) and to attend Dover College, where his brother Arty was already a pupil. He seems to have done well at school, where he won the mile race (in 1900), and gained a number of school prizes. He was in the Army Class, where the boys did more maths and science than in the classical classes. He came top of the school in Mathematics and was house captain for the football XV.

In 1900 his parents returned from China for the last time, and settled at 1 Anerley Park in South London, and presumably Ernie lived with them for holidays.

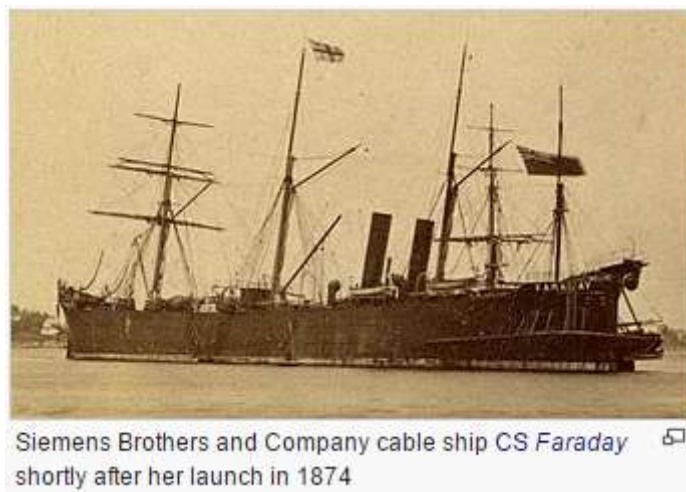


## **CHAPTER 2: CABLE LAYING FOR SIEMENS BROTHERS**

On leaving school he took a 3 year course at the City and Guilds (Engineering) College in South Kensington (now Imperial College), and from 1903-1905 he was a "free pupil" (i.e. apprentice) at the Brush Electrical Engineering Co., Loughborough, where he *passed through 15 of their shops*.

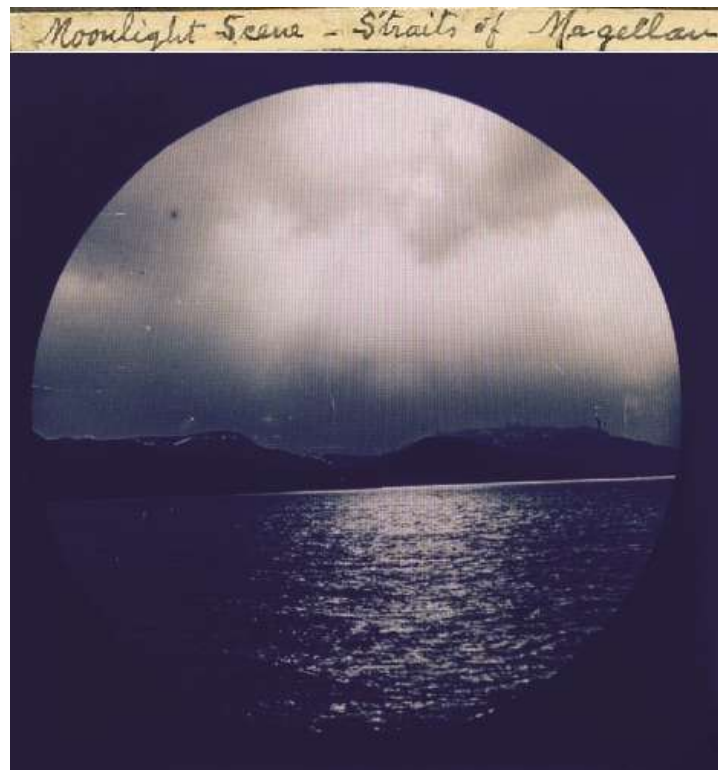
He qualified as an electrical engineer: A.M.I.E.E. (Associate Member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers) and A.C.G.I. (Associate of the City and Guilds Institute). His mother's brother, Francis Jacob ("Uncle Frank") worked at Siemens Brothers, and he helped Ernie start at the Cable Department of Siemens Brothers at Woolwich, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1905.

In November 1905 Ernie was sent on his first cable-laying expedition as assistant electrician, travelling through the Magellan straits and up to Lima, on the C.S.Faraday, to lay the Valparaiso - Iquique - Chorillos (Lima) telegraph cable.



The Faraday was 31 years old in 1906, purpose built for Siemens Brothers in 1874 for laying subsea cables. The C.S.Faraday was 360 feet long, 52 feet beam, and 40 feet depth, displacing 5052 tonnes. The bow and stern were indistinguishable, both with a rudder and screw, so that she could steam in either direction, giving great manoeuvrability. To ensure steadiness and minimise rolling there were two bilge keels. The electricians testing-room where Ernest would have worked was amidships with a good view of the cable tanks, and the deck was fitted with machinery used in cable laying and in grappling for lost or faulty cables. A steam-launch was also carried on deck to assist with cable handling. The cables were stored in three large watertight cable tanks, filled with water to keep the cable cool. Each tank could hold 1700 miles of 1¼ inch diameter cable.

The C.S.Faraday continued in service for 50 years, until 1924. (<http://atlantic-cable.com/Cablesips/Faraday/>)



Extracts from a letter from: S.S Faraday, Callao (the Port of Lima), El Peru, 20th July 1906, give a glimpse of Ernie's experiences: *My dear Mother, The Relay was to arrive on 24<sup>th</sup>, but when it will really come I do not know. I have just heard we are not leaving till the end of August or beginning of September. Thank-you for your letters (17<sup>th</sup> May and 7th & 8th June), received on the 17th July from Valparaiso. I hope Father is better. As you know I never liked riding through town roads with him very much, I suppose he will still freewheel full speed down Anerley Hill. It is fortunate it was not worse. Was the bicycle damaged? Please thank Willy for his note & tell him I am not quite sure whether to be glad or sorry I am not home yet, as he has a baby.*

*I spent the night of Wednesday & Thursday over 12,000 ft. above sea level. On Saturday I paid my first visit to Callao. On Sunday there was an excursion up to Matusana, 64 miles from Callao, nearly 7800 ft high. About 20 went from the ship, of whom 11 were from the saloon. It was only \$4. They came back with great accounts of the scenery. So they began to talk of an excursion up to Oroya in one day. They found the cost of a special train and said it would be £1 each, probably going next Sunday. They have since heard that it cannot be done in one day and if they go they will have to spend a night up there. I had decided to go up on Monday before we heard of this. Mr Graham was most obliging and in spite of work being on, he arranged the shifts so that I and another could have Wednesday and Thursday free. Some of them were rather annoyed that we would not fall in with the £1 excursion.*

*We left the ship at 5.10 a.m. on Wednesday morning & caught the 6.5 train at Callao for Oroya (this was the highest railway in the world at that time). The highest point we passed was 17,575 feet above sea level, 107 miles from here. Oroya 12180 ft high is 138 miles from here. I was very sick at night in the hotel partly due to the Soroche (altitude sickness) but more to the dinner I think. I had felt worse in the train after having a little aniseed essence which is supposed to do it good. I had a*

*bad headache round the top of my head & my legs felt very heavy & I was rather tottery altogether at the highest point. Coming back it was scarcely noticeable I had a headache but not so bad as the day before & could get about at the stations without difficulty. Nearly everyone seemed to feel it; many were very sick. There were nearly 50 in the carriage; a few ladies; mostly mining engineers. We left here 6.5 and reached there 5:50pm, left there 7am and reached Lima about 5pm, and got to Callao by tram 5:45.*

*There is a big evening party tonight given by our fellows and some on shore to those who have been entertaining them so much. They intend it to go on all night.*



*21st. 8.50 a.m. I was in bed at 5.30 this morning & out soon after 7.30. I had a walk round Callao between 1.30 & 2.20 & 2.30 & 3.30, the streets were deserted. At one place a 'wake' was going on. The corpse was on the bed opposite the window, images (life size) & pictures were in the room & candles burning. The people were in the next room (the hall) & round the door. At 1.30 a.m. they were cracking jokes & laughing, by 4.30 they were rather quiet...*

He arriving at Valparaiso, Chile, on the day on which the great earthquake occurred on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1906. It was an 8.2 magnitude earthquake, lasting 4 minutes with several aftershocks. It caused a tsunami which reached Japan, and it destroyed much of Valparaíso and caused severe damage in central Chile, killing 3,886 people.

Victoria Hotel - Valparaiso earthquake -



Williamson Parkson Hotel - Valparaiso -



Hill Parkside Station - Valparaiso -



Buenos Aires - Valparaiso earthquake -



Trinidad earthquake -





From 1906 to 1914 he was engaged in various cable laying and repairing expeditions.

From 1907 to 1908 he worked for the Siemens Outside Contract Department working most of the time on the LCC Tramways cable contract, superintending the laying of the cables, as well as superintending the laying of cables at Woodhouse Station GWR and at South Kensington Museum.

He laid several lighthouse cables, e.g. in May 1909, Guernsey, and later Holyhead and the Lizard.

In 1910 he went on a voyage to repair the Atlantic deep-sea cable (Western Union repair), and to Newbiggin (Northumberland) and Arendal (Norway) for the Anglo-Norwegian telegraph cable, both also on the C.S. Faraday.

He also worked in the Testing Room where his work included: *taking of temperature coefficient on samples of wire, testing aluminium welds and work on loaded telephone cables, besides the ordinary cable testing.*

### CHAPTER 3: GALLIPOLI



On 4 August 1914, following the German invasion of Belgium, Britain declared war. During August Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, formed the Royal Naval Division (RND) from the existing Royal Marine Light Infantry and Artillery plus reservists and volunteers. The RND was sent to defend Belgium on 27 August, but evacuated again on 31 September. In early October the RND was sent back again to defend Antwerp, but a lot of the original marines were taken prisoner.

In the first two months of the war almost half a million men volunteered to serve their country. On 16<sup>th</sup> September the RND started to recruit for the Naval Division Engineers, mostly directly from the three Institutes of Civil, Mechanical and Electrical Engineers. Ernest could have continued to work at Siemen Brothers, who, despite being nationalised due to their German ownership, played a key role in removing German undersea cables. However, he must have seen the call for Electrical Engineers and volunteered to join the RND. He was sworn in as a Private in the RND Divisional Engineers

(attached to the Signal Corps) on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1914. Ernest's number was N091, Royal Naval Division, Divisional Engineers, Signal Company, Section 4. He would have been attracted to join the RND due to his experience at sea and the fact that they had a battalion based at Deal, Kent, and decided to join the signals from his cable communication experience.

Ernest started off in camps and barracks very close to the home, where his ancestors had lived for several centuries:

#### ***Monday October 19<sup>th</sup> 1914 (to Mother)***

##### *Oxney Bottom Camp, Ringwold, Dover*

*It has been pouring off and on all day. We were out in the country this afternoon doing skirmishing exercises, the ground was surprisingly dry.*

*Yesterday morning there was a church parade and we all marched past St Margarets at Cliffe and had a short service. (Many Elwin ancestors are buried at this Church as it was near the family farm and Bere).*

*In the afternoon we went for a walk, it was supposed to be a march but never attained it.*



*In the evening there was a voluntary parade and about 60 went to the evening service.*

*On Saturday evening there was a concert in the village.*



*I am trying for a weekend pass as it is possible we may be off to Blandford in 10 days or a fortnight.*

*So far I find the sailor costume most uncomfortable, I could only get a very tight suit and in consequence am getting indigestion. I am rather overeating at the moment; they keep a tin of biscuits in my present tent.*

In November 1914, Churchill, together with his French counterpart hatched a plan to take the Turks out of the war by launching a naval attack on Constantinople through the Dardanelle straits. However it was also realised that the naval attack might also need support from land forces and the RND was earmarked for this purpose. From November 1914 to February 1915 the raw recruits of the RND were gradually trained and equipped as light infantry at Blandford Camp. On 5<sup>th</sup> February the Marine Battalion of the RND embarked for the Mediterranean. On 19<sup>th</sup> February the Navy began attacking the Dardanelles straits, and the rest of the RND began preparations for departure:

### **Tuesday February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1915**

*Blandford Camp: We seem to be off on Saturday at latest, and have just drawn sun helmets and are going to draw drill suits at 5pm. Am just having tea. The food is very poor. Hope it will be better on board. We do not know where we are going. The camp (our part) is 4 ½ miles by road or 3 ¾ by shortcut (from Blandford). I do not know if I will have any leave.*

### **Thursday February 25<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*We were reviewed by Churchill and the King this morning, they passed on foot, not more than 20 yards away from me. I heard Churchill telling the King that we should take a fortnight to reach our destination, wherever that may be. My present information is that we leave Avonmouth in the S.S. Somali on Saturday. Probably leaving here on Friday, though this is uncertain. About 8000 men were reviewed this morning. The King looks quite an insignificant man.*

*It was bitterly cold last night and has been bright and fine today.*

**Friday February 26<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Full parade in the afternoon. Leave tomorrow probably. Meant to make will but forgot.

**Saturday February 27<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Fearful day yesterday's rehearsal of departure. Latest, leave here 10pm Sunday. Train Shillingstone 5am Monday.

Thanks for parcel. Many thanks for socks and mittens. We are supposed to leave here after 10pm tomorrow. It rained in the night. I was sick last night. We are expected back here in May so must be going for garrison duty I should think. Please have the pyjamas and gloves washed, the rest of the tin can be put in my room at present.

**Sunday February 28<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

I enclose a will.

Below is a code, the RND would be in address, the numbers or letters at the tops of sheets, or underlined. This is in code as we are censored. If we are at the place RND will be underlined, if merely going there it will not be.



Asia <u>RND</u>	Africa <u>RND</u>	Europe <u>RND</u>	Malta <u>RND</u>	Cyprus <u>RND</u>
<u>Asia</u>	<u>Africa</u>	<u>Europe</u>		
1 or A Smyrna	Egypt	Dardanelles		
2 or B Palestine	German E.Africa	Constantinople		
3 or C Black Sea	Mombasa	Bosphorus		
4 or D Asia Minor		Adriatic		

We have been packing this morning. I am somewhat better.

3pm: I have just heard that we do not actually sail till Wednesday, or possibly do not go aboard till then. We parade here at 8pm, at Pimperne at 10pm, and leave there at midnight. 1<sup>st</sup> train leaves Shillingston at 7:30am and 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10:30am.

**Monday March 1<sup>st</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

(scrawled, hasty handwriting) off by SS Somali this evening.

**Sunday March 7<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

I hope my postcard saying that we were off last Monday night reached you alright. I gave it to a man to post. We had a strenuous night march last Sunday night or rather Monday morning and got to

*Shillingstone about 4am. Some of the mules gave alot of trouble. Our train got away at 7:30, then those of us left got breakfast, and I and another man had a nice one in a cottage attached to a cycle shop, for which of course we paid. We then loaded our mules and got away at 10:30am reaching Avonmouth at 2:40pm, and leaving again at 6:30pm.*

*We have had an extraordinarily calm passage so far. A number were of course sick, but beyond a headache due to the foulness of the air in which we sleep I was alright.*

*My section mostly have bunks in the convalescence ward (this is to act as a hospital ship), owing largely to the energy of our section officer and sergeant, we had annexed the bunks, but might have been turned out.*

*On Thursday at 8am I went on guard and was on till 12:30pm and again 8pm to 12:15am (really 12:30) and as a breakfast relief 7:30 to 8:15am. I had a blanket and tried to sleep on a deck seat, but kept on been woken by NCOs and officers wanting to know who I was; several men I think did not turn up at their right time.*

*There was no chance of a wash or change, and my legs were aching as puttees do not seem to suit them, especially with riding breeches which I had on. We then had to parade for physical drill, the NCO a sergeant Robertson, quite a boy, gave us several right and left turns and so on, at which I was not very quick and he at once threatened me with the orderly room (i.e. taking me before the commanding officer), then when we came to the physical drill and I did not do it as I was tired he asked me if I refused to do it and I believe I said yes. Anyhow I was dressed down and locked up for an hour or so and then brought before the colonel (Lacey) and the adjutant under a charge of refusing to obey orders and given 48 hours cells. The cell itself is not unpleasant, but it stops all chance of promotion I believe. Two men asleep on sentry post were only given 3 days CB which consists in reporting themselves once an hour during the day. I was shut up without books, knives etc, but I had a good port hole and an hours exercise in am and half hour in pm, i.e. walk on deck from one sentry to another about 12 paces apart. The men asleep on sentry were Field Company to which the Colonel belongs. I was in a very subdued light from 5:30pm to 6am as the dead lights were up, and did not have a proper wash or shave till I got away at noon today.*

*We passed [censored] at 6.30a Saturday and I think [censored] this afternoon. We do not yet know where we are going. Some say [censored] as a base for operations against some part of [censored].*

*Our routine on board is 6am reveille, 7 breakfast, 9 physical drill, 10 parade, 12 dinner, 5 tea and 9pm lightsout. We have extra parades in the afternoon and evening. They seem to alter the clocks during the night.*

*Picture postcards are not allowed and this letter has to be franked by an officer, which I suppose means read.*

*Only part of our signal company is here, the mules and horses and 2 largest sections are on another ship, so our own CO is not on board. Our section officer is one who was in the same lodging as I was during the last week at Walmer, Lieut. C.F.Edwin.*

**Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

*We have reached the Island (Lemnos) where we are today and have transferred to another ship which has marines on board. I think I told you we (i.e. RND) were going to join up to marines already on the spot. I went into hospital today owing to a cough, sore throat and temperature, and have been put in hospital here, which consists of a berth in a cabin. The men all have hammocks. Only my section is here, the other 2 are on other ships. I don't know where our mules or other 2 sections are. We have had a wonderfully calm voyage so far, I don't imagine we have more than 40 to 50 miles to go now.*

*We were not allowed ashore.*

*14<sup>th</sup> : I have had a bottle of sterilized milk, the only drink except one bottle of ginger beer and water that I have had since Blandford. Tea and coffee are so frightfully sweet.*

On March 18<sup>th</sup> 1915 the fleet, including 18 battleships launched the main attack on the Dardanelles. The RND also sailed out and stood off Cape Tekke. However seven of the Battleships were damaged, critically damaged or sunk by mines, and the attack was called off on 21 March.

The RND sailed from Mudros on 22<sup>nd</sup> March to Port Saide on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Ernest spent the time on shore from 31<sup>st</sup> March to 6<sup>th</sup> April:

**Monday March 29<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Port Said



(On back of Postcard) *So far safe and well.*

### **Friday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

*We have been living in a wild sandstorm for two days but it is better today. I have been in the water the last two mornings. It is a change after the ship. The water was so scarce on board that only one lot was put in the basins and everyone had to wash in it. I always slept on a mess table; the one night I spent in my hammock, which was much too short for me, was so uncomfortable that I did not try it again.*

*We are having a week ashore I believe, we landed 2 days ago, and then go on board again if is summoned. Where for then I do not know.*

*The Mooltan passed us last Wednesday I think, it was curious to see ladies in the distance.*

*We are kept fairly busy and have most of our equipment now, and they grumble because we are not efficient with it.*

*I suppose this place does not alter much from year to year, and is much the same as when you saw it. We had a service of sorts this morning.*

On April 8<sup>th</sup> the RND sailed for Mudros, Ernest was on board the Braemar Castle, and also General Trottman and the Plymouth Battalion. On 13<sup>th</sup> April, off Lemnos, Ernest was transferred to the Gloucester Castle, which held the Portsmouth Battalion. From here onwards, while still in the Signals, he seems to have been attached to the Portsmouth Battalion.

### **Monday April 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

*My section has changed ship and location. The quarters are very much worse, but there is water to wash in and the food is possibly slightly better but scanty. My ear is better but not right yet. In the other ship I frequently washed complete in a small mug of water. I have not shaved for several days, there is little room to do so. We have 4 watches now so get longer nights. The mules overhead make so much noise that I seldom sleep well.*

*We hear a rumour today that Antwerp has fallen and 6000 British casualties, but have had no reliable news for some time. I was ashore yesterday. I don't suppose this place is on any map we have. Most of what I might say would be censored I expect.*

The Allies strategy was now to seize the Gallipoli peninsula by making two landings in force, one at the western beach of Kape Tepe and the other in the southern toe of the Peninsula and then to seize the well defended areas of high ground above these, Sari Bair Ridge and Achibaba hill respectively, and from these to dominate the Kilid Bahr Plateau. The ANZACs were assigned to land at Gaba Tepe, and the 29<sup>th</sup> Division (with the Plymouth and Anson RND Battalions) on the South.

The RND was assigned the task of making a diversionary landing at Bulair, and ordered to rendezvous at Skyros. From April 15<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> the Ernest's ship stood off Skyros, and then on the 24<sup>th</sup> the RND ships steamed north to Xeros Bay. HMS Dartmouth and Doris began a bombardment of the Bulair lines, and during the night Lt Commander Freyburg landed and light flares to simulate a landing. The diversion worked enough to make the Turks move half their forces to protect Bulair. On 25<sup>th</sup> the landings on the 5 southern beaches started, and Ernest's ship moved south from Bulair to this area, off Cape Helles, staying here until the 27<sup>th</sup>. More of the RND Battalions joined the

southern landings. Many men were lost in these initial landings: it has been estimated the the RND Battalions were reduced to half strength by killed and wounded, and while at first successful, within days the Allied forces became bogged down in opposing trenches, with neither side able to make much progress.

#### Gaba Tepe/Anzac Cove

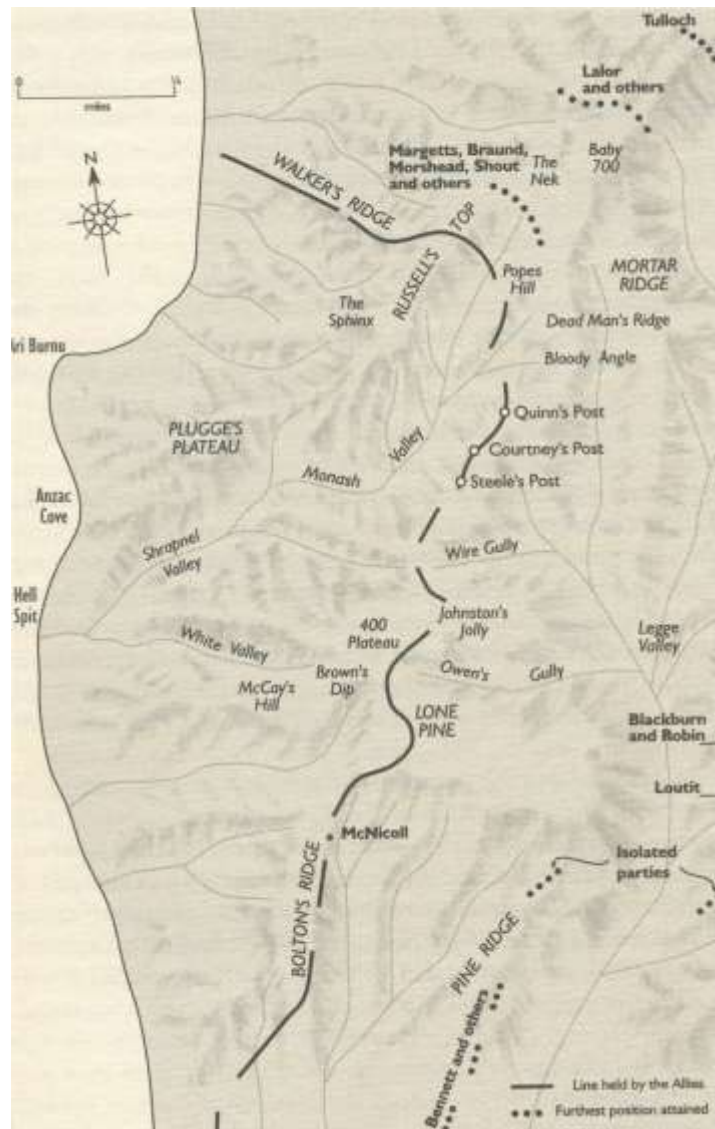
Also on the 25<sup>th</sup> the ANZACs had landed at Gaba Tepe. During the first two days they loss 5000 men, and were in danger of being pushed back into the sea, and by 28<sup>th</sup> they had still not reached a defensive position, only holding a strip of beach (Anzac Cove) and ridge surrounding it (Maclagan's Ridge), and inland heights on either side of Deep Gully, running NW from the coast, immediately south of Maclagan's Ridge. The heights on the left of the gully were reasonably secure, but on the right the heights were divided by ravines, covered with undergrowth and rocks, and the Turks and ANZACs often lay very close to each other. The head of the gully (Pope's Hill) was held by the Turks, dug into trenches, with no good cover or defensive positions for the ANZACs.

It was decided that a defensive fortress had to be built until reinforcements could push further inland. It was also decided to land RND battalions so far held in reserve, to enable the ANZACs to regroup, so on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Portsmouth, Chatham, and Nelson Battalions were landed; the first two moving into the front line trenches, with the Nelson at first in reserve on the beach. On the same day Ernest's ship moved to Gaba Tepe from Cape Helles, and on 1<sup>st</sup> May he landed. The RND was engaged in fighting in the trenches almost continuously until 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

A description of the fighting comes from the V.C. citation for Lance-Corporal Parker of the Portsmouth Battalion: *on the night of April 30<sup>th</sup> a message was received from an isolated fire trench, asking for ammunition, water and medical supplies ...a party of men and volunteers was despatched ... several men had already been killed in a previous attempt ...to reach this trench it was necessary to traverse an area at least 400 yards wide, which was completely exposed and swept by rifle fire ...it was already daylight ... one of the party was wounded... Parker going alone succeeded in reaching the fire trench ...the trench finally had to be evacuated ... Parker was seriously wounded.*



The RND was relieved on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, but in the evening an attack by the ANZACs was launched on the Pope's Hill heights overlooking the main gully. The 3 RND Battalions were in general support in the gully. The plan was for a two pronged attack on either side of the gully, but the Turks were in well entrenched positions, and a confused running fight followed for several hours, with the ANZACs gradually beaten down by a murderous fire. At dawn the Portsmouth Battalion was asked to go forwards, but before they even started to advance the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion was pushed back into the gully, spreading confusion as they retreated. A hail of bullets was coming from every direction: the trenches in the gully were under fire from both flanks, from the front, and in places even from the rear. The Chatham Battalion was sent forwards to attack the Turkish trenches opposite the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and in the face of very heavy fire two lines of trenches were taken, but as no support could be brought up so after 6 hours the position was abandoned. At the same time as the Chatham Battalion moved forwards, the Nelson Battalion was sent to attack on the flank of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but this attack failed, faced with a machine-gun position, and they fell back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion trenches. It became clear that it was a useless waste of life to cling on here, but before retreating countless wounded, stores and ammunition had to be cleared. The Chathams and Nelsons suffered particularly heavy losses, with 300 and 200 men respectively killed or wounded – this compares to a total Battalion size of 1000 men.



The next day a defensive plan started, with 3 main posts (Courtney, Quinn and Pope) covering the front of the position, and the Portsmouth and Chatham Battalions were given the responsibility of holding these. There followed a period of desperate small scale conflicts, with the Turks and Allies launching a series of abortive attacks, often with disastrous losses.

Finally on 12<sup>th</sup> May the RND was relieved and sailed for Cape Helles. Ernest spent a night on the Cawdor Castle, and then landed at Gallipoli on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

Gaba Tepe was finally evacuated in December 1915.

**Saturday May 15<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

*We landed a fortnight ago with colonials and were more or less under fire night and day all the time. One man of our section was killed by a sniper; the snipers got over 20 men some days.*

*We left that place on the 12<sup>th</sup> and came here the next day, to the main body. We only get an occasional shell overhead here and are in quite open countryside far from the firing line. In the other place we were in valleys holding the ridges; in some ways I preferred it.*

*I have been fairly well but rather collapsed getting here.*

*We passed close to the Manitou soon after her attack, whilst they were recovering the bodies on our way to [censored: probably Skyros].*

*(The Manitou was a troop transport ship, waiting near Skyros: on April 16<sup>th</sup> a German torpedo boat approached here and said she had 3 minutes to evacuate: in the panic that followed 51 people died, with overcrowded lifeboats falling off davits and capsizing: the two torpedos missed, and the torpedo boat was chased and eventually beached).*

*At Gaba Tepi I lived in a dugout by myself, about the size and shape of a coffin, 18 inches to 2 feet deep.*

*We feed better on shore than on board but each cooks his own food.*

*We have rejoined the other Engineers here. As far as I can gather there is only one really good officer in the Signals Co.*

*The weather has been very good, only two wet days; it is hot in the day and cold at night. The dew is almost like rain here.*

*I have got quite a good beard again now, not having shaved for over a month.*

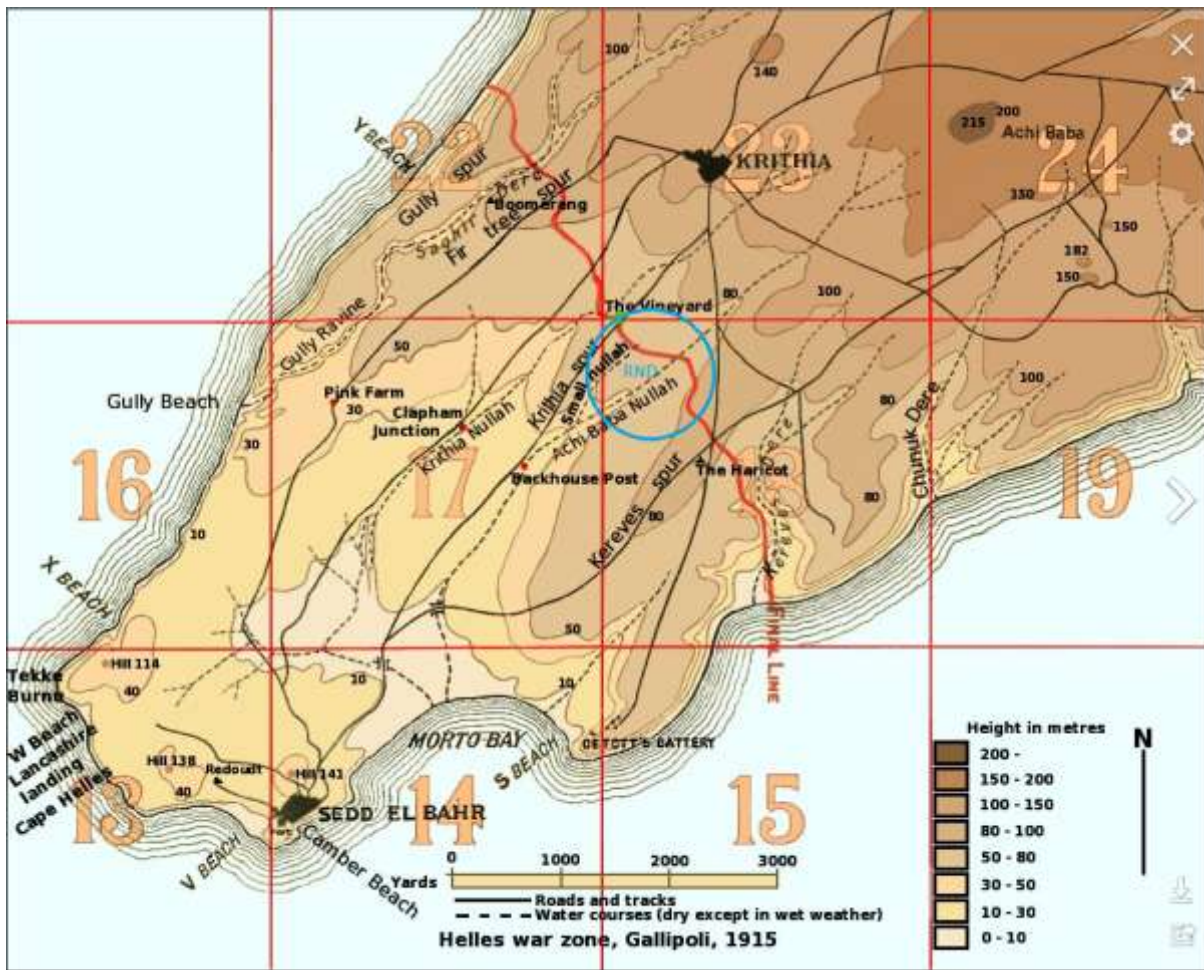
*We sleep in boots and clothes complete, and have been for some days, without removing anything. One gets quite used to not washing*

Gallipoli

With the return of the RND Battalions from Gaba Tepe to the Achibaba front, all RND forces were concentrated under the command of General Paris. The campaign developed into trench warfare, with the French holding the right, then the RND the centre, and then the 29<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Divisions.

Every square yard of the peninsula was under fire. The days involved hard labour with every spare man employed in digging communication trenches.

The RND carried out four night advances on 18<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> May, which pushed the line forwards half a mile, the later attack was by the Marine Brigades where Ernest seems to have been attached. The losses in these advances were less than 50, but the daily wastage from snipers and shells was high.



### Tuesday May 18<sup>th</sup> 1915

Our day. Called 1am, stretched, rose and went down line to Portsmouth Battalion HQR, relieved Hague. In fresh dugout, not wide enough, orderly sleeping beside me very restless. Fine cool morning. Dozed very slightly between 2 and 3am. Rifle and gun fire going on at intervals. Light between 4 and 4:30am. Relieved by Sleet 5:20am (had phoned up at 4:50 for him to be called. Lay down again till 6:30; had breakfast (fried bacon and bread and marmalade, very strong plain tea). Some shrapnel over, got into trench for a time. Began a dugout or at least worked on its position. Off to bathe with Gordon and Baxendell to beach to west, where road up cliff is, which we saw being made when lying off the land in the ship. Nice cross country walk, interesting view of our and Turkish trenches, some in wavy lines, communication trenches, etc.

Bathe good but water shallow and very rocky, fairly cold at first. Back 11:30am. Read a little. Helped prepare dinner 12:10pm. (Bully beef and dried onions in ½ dixie of water), cup of tea from Downer. Also had biscuits again. Sudden shower of shrapnel about 1:10pm, jumped for trench, Gilles hit in 3 places above shoulder, Bellaway and Christian in elbows. Bound up Christian's temporarily for him with emergency pad. Our man HQRs hit, he and Gilles off on stretchers. Had been watching futile shrapnel at an aviator. Down to Portsmouth Battalion about 1:40pm relieved Hague. Got hair cut by Portsmouth man whilst on watch. Orderly took phone for the time). Got cheeks trimmed a little by orderly. No buzzers now, all ordinary Western Electric company's portable phones. Very warm in dugout. Read mail.

Quiet afternoon. Relieved for tea by Sleet 5:25pm. Shrapnel. Lay down and read in Lucas' new dugout. Shrapnel at one time sweeping over and hitting earth at top of dugout. Worked on my own new dugout after dark, got about a foot out.

On again 9:30pm, late owing to talk with Gordon re German genius for developing and improving others ideas and inventions. Watched magnificent sight for a time, bombardment of hill. French 75mm guns shells causing sheets of flame. Warships shells flash not seen but reverberating explosion of shells heard and felt. A few star shells and balloons also up. Slept about 40 minutes. Awake just before midnight to receive a message about troops standing by; so asked for my relief (Sleet) to be called, and came down (1am), he arrived about 2am and I went up and lay down in my shallow dugout and got 2 or 3 hours sleep. This day taken at random turns out to have been quite a sleepless one.

### **Wednesday May 19<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Up 5:15am. Dug hard at dugout with Baxendell's help. Breakfast (usual fried bacon, bread and marmalade). Relieved Hague for breakfast 7:30. 8:40 wrote to sister. Shrapnel during breakfast and when on duty men killed in their dugouts by shells. Continued digging. From 10am to 1pm read, dozed, and wrote this up.

### **Wednesday May 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 (Extracts from letters written by E.P.Elwin to Siemens Brothers)**

We are in dugouts here now, and have just been shelled. They got onto us yesterday at dinner. I dived through a shower of shrapnel into our trench; one man got three about the shoulder and two in the elbow and had to be carried off. I bound up one temporarily. I finished a fair dugout for one [myself] before breakfast this morning, and we got a shower of shrapnel over us whilst eating. One really wants a spring back board, you get tired leaning back when you hear the guns; fortunately you can hear them, of course, the shells whistle, but it is rather too late to duck then. They do all sorts of funny things, one went right through a red cross hamper basket and blew the back off a dugout without hurting the man in it. They showered shell at tea time yesterday into crowds of men and horses – we could see them running about – and I believe wounded one man slightly. ....

The weather is fine fortunately, hot sun during the day, very heavy dew and chilly at night. The dew often does not fall until 1 or 2 am. I have a sea bathe most days; it is almost half an hours walk away ....

### **Friday May 21<sup>st</sup> 1915 (to Father) 7:30pm**

I am writing in my dug-out, keeping well down as they have just been shelling us. They have been very quiet all day. I suppose this is a sort of night cap. They usually catch a few men when they fire unexpectedly, but is astonishing what little damage a lot of shells can cause.

I have felt twinges of sciatica or rheumatism in my legs, specially the one that had it before.

We hear rumours of a coalition government, but no confirmation yet. A sheet (foolscap size) is published periodically giving war news so we hear a little.

I have had 5 bathes in the last 6 days.

*You will have read all about the landing here by now, as I hear the casualty lists have been published. Our section was not in the first landing and I was 3 days after them. It was interesting having a few days among colonials before moving here. We move off a ship on 13<sup>th</sup>.*

### **Monday May 24<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*Woke 6:15am. It began to rain 6:30am, continued with short pauses till 10:30. Got up and covered over dugout with waterproof sheet. Got changed and dressed before rain became bad. Got some stale cheese and fried it with a little bacon fat and had it with bacon, bread and marmalade. Relieved Sleet for breakfast 8:15am. Hague down soon after 9am. Wrote Mother. No rain. 9am going back. Squatted in dugout and read till 10:30. Then opened out things. Very close and oppressive damp heat. Fried steak, bread and jam and tea for dinner. Relieved Hague 1pm. Wrote Arty after finishing Mother's and Mrs Harding's letters, got envelope off Snow (orderly), and put all 3 letters in. Slight showers about 2pm. Telephone working alright, occasional messages. About midday shells flying about, but not so near us. 9am walked back through old Plymouth lines looking for a bit of wood for a peg, found a pot of apricot jam, just opened, but scarcely touched. Rain 4:15pm.*

### **Monday May 24<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

*Yesterday was a beautiful day, like a good English Summer's day, but this morning it is raining. It was extraordinarily peaceful yesterday, a few shrapnel came over about 6pm but not near us.*

*2pm. It stopped raining about 10:30 for a time, and has been oppressively hot with a damp heat. I took a walk over some vacant lines today and found a tin of apricot jam. It had been opened but scarcely touched. Most of our jam is everlasting Plum and Apple, one plum to 100 apples, very occasionally marmalade turns up. Menu: breakfast: bacon, bread, jam, Dinner: meat (bully or fresh, lately often steak, fried or stew), sometimes cooked dried vegetables and bread and jam. Tea: tea, bread and jam. There is also cheese. I warmed some stale cheese up with my bacon this morning. The allowance of jam is 1lb pot among 4 a day. 'Bully Beef' is lying unopened all over the place. It is a great pity so much is wasted.*

**Tuesday May 25<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 29<sup>th</sup>** *In trenches. (On 27<sup>th</sup> May the RND Marine Brigades made a night advance pushing the front line forwards).*

### **Monday May 31<sup>st</sup> 1915 (Extracts from letters written by E.P.Elwin to Siemens Brothers)**

*.... I just got back to our HQ at 2.45 am Sunday (yesterday) morning, I rather enjoyed it in spite of the want of sleep. After the first night I was in charge of one of the stations. There are three in each; ours had one of the Battalion men in as we were short handed; he was a sergeant, but we got on all right. It is amusing in the dark. I am nearly always addressed as 'sir' when I ask questions, it is very useful when I want to get through a crowded trench. We had it fine the rest of the time and one advance was made.*

*.... the Times account of the landing (May 14<sup>th</sup>) is very good as far as it goes.*

*My dugout is about 6'3" long, slightly coffin shaped, about 2' wide and 2'3" deep, swarming with ants. The ground is very wet at that depth, but dries a good deal after being dug out ...*

On 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May the 3 remaining RND Battalions landed, and the 12 RND Battalions were finally reunited as one force. Its fighting strength however had been reduced from 10500 to half.

On Friday 4<sup>th</sup> June the Allies launched an attack with the aim to capture the Turkish trenches and then advance a further 500 yards to establish a new trench line. The Howe, Hood, Anson and Drake RND Battalions were assigned to this, with the other RND Battalions held as a general reserve in the rest camps. During the morning the navy bombarded the Turkish lines, but with little effect. Then at noon the RND Battalions climbed over the trench parapet, to be swept by Turkish fire. Only half of the men reached the Turkish lines, and found them unoccupied except for dead and dying. The Collingwood Battalion then began its advance, but were also halved by Turkish fire from the upper slopes of the ridges. The captured trenches were untenable and the RND finally forced to retreat. Of 1900 men who advanced only 950 returned, and almost no ground was captured. The Benbow and Collingwood Battalions were disbanded and the RND reduced to 9 Battalions.

### ***Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)***

*There is very little news. I am somewhat better today, but had bad sciatica the last two days.*

*It is no use sending clothing to me. I have nowhere to put it. Our kit bags are at Alexandria. We left our packs with blankets, spare shirt etc here last time we went to the trenches.*

For the remainder of June to mid July the fighting settled down into trench warfare with minor skirmishes.

### ***Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup> 1915***

*I see in the papers that in France envelopes are scarce too. I got 4 out of a dead man's pack the other day.*

*We went up to the trenches again on Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon, and a youth and myself were sent up to the right of the French line, a long walk through trenches, and close, about 10 yards from the firing line. We came away the next day. A few more hours of the smell and flies, which are bad enough farther back in our lines would have finished me.*

*I went to the doctor several times, at last they have them further up and he was going to send me to 'hospital' one day but postponed it till evening and as I was slightly better I did not go. I have a lot of spare room in my clothes. I believe hospital is merely a large dugout near the shore, well inhabited by humans and other beings.*

*The sand and dust is supposed to be largely responsible for the complaint, practically a mild form of dysentery. I am feeding on bread and jam today and feeling tired and slack and finishing off the last scrap of chocolate I possess.*

*My post the rest of the time was near where I was on my 2<sup>nd</sup> night up on our first visit, and old line and reserve trench, now merely a communication trench. We had our new sergeant with us, he was the man who sat opposite me in the train when I first went to camp. He comes from somewhere in Woolwich, and is a neat contrast to the other who was killed (we put a cross on his grave this afternoon). He is rather shifty in some ways and a toady to those in authority. A rather good man has been made corporal in his place. I had much more spare time, as we were a kind of extra station*

*and explored two disused trenches. At the end of one I got into a gully with a stream, but soon retired, there were 3 Turks in the stream and 2 incompletely buried. The system of trenches is rather interesting; I hope someone has made a plan of them.*

***Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup> 1915***

*It is cool and blowing hard from the North with a tendency to rain a little.*

*I had two fried eggs for breakfast, the first eggs for ages. They were got at the canteen on the beach run by the Greeks, decidedly for profit. Often they have nothing worth getting, occasionally eggs. They are supposed to have chocolate and other things but I suppose sell it directly it arrives. It is rather a shame they should be allowed to run it in the way they do. The army authorities could so easily arrange for it to be worked properly.*

***Saturday June 19<sup>th</sup> 1915***

*We had to deepen our dugouts yesterday. I struck water at 4'9" and finished up 4' deep. I have still to put 2 or 3 sandbags over the head part.*

*Eggs have run out and I am rather rotten today, partly due to the digging and damp dugout.*

*On our way down on Monday a high explosive shell from Asia exploded 15 to 20 feet to my right; it was so close that no dirt or bits hit me as those near me. We were in straggly single file. They give no warnings of their approach. The ones from Achi Baba whistle and you can usually hear the guns go off.*

*I wonder if we shall be back for Christmas next year. It does not look like it at present.*

It was decided that the RND line could be pushed forwards 100 yards without great hazard, except for an advanced Turkish trench opposite the central section. The Hawke Battalion was given the task of capturing this, so on 19<sup>th</sup> June they launched a night attack, but were met by heavy fire, but managed to capture the trench. However the trench was not well protected from fire, and the Turks managed to crawl close and throw bombs into it. After considerable casualties the Hawkes withdrew. On June 22<sup>nd</sup> the Marine Brigade took over the positions in the trenches, and the Portsmouth Battalion was ordered to capture the advance Turkish trench. They again succeeded in doing this and were again repelled with considerable casualties.

Dysentery had caused a few deaths early in the campaign. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> the poet Rupert Brooke had gone down with this and 20 days later he was dead. It began spreading more widely in June and significantly increased in July, becoming a major cause of incapacity during the final part of the campaign. At some point towards the end of June or beginning of July Ernest went down with this severely enough to need evacuation to Malta. The RND stayed in Gallipoli until 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016. They continued to fight and die. It is estimated that of the 16500 RND men who travelled out in April, that in the following six months 13000 became casualties: killed, wounded or evacuated sick.

As well as the British, Anzacs, and French there were also Indian troops providing artillery and mule transport. One of the Indian Regiments which assisted the Anzacs throughout their campaign was the 26<sup>th</sup> Jabob's Mountain Battery, and artillery regiment. This was founded in 1858 by the brother of Ernest's grandfather, General John Jacob. He raised a unit of mountain artillery in Jacobabad,

Sindh, called the Jacobabad Mountain Train for service on the Sindh frontier, manned by men from the infantry regiment he had formed, Jacob's Rifles. The Jacob's Battery saw service on the Northwest Frontier of India and fought in the Second Afghan War of 1878–80. It also took part in the Lushai Expedition of 1889 and served in Burma from 1889 to 1893 where it took part in operations against the Shans and Kachins.



## CHAPTER 5: HOSPITAL

**Saturday July 10<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**



Royal Naval Hospital, Bighi, Malta

*Admitted to Royal Naval Hospital.*

*I am in bed at present but was up for an hour or so in the afternoon. I don't know quite why I am in bed. My food is low diet and in my case is somewhat like this:*

*Breakfast: 7am: 1 egg, 1 slice bread and butter, mug tea*

*Dinner: 12 noon: mug beef tea, piece of bread, 3 soup ladles, rice pudding with milk*

*Tea: 4pm: as breakfast*

*Supper: 7pm: ½ mug cocoa, slice bread and butter*

*A good many of the men appear to be getting their back teeth taken out under the pretence of aching, and then are sent home as unfit for active service as they can't eat the food!*

*Apart from the Peninsula Press one seems to have lost all touch with the outside world.*

**Monday July 19<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*Owing to the number of medical cases they have rearranged the wards and I am under my 8<sup>th</sup> doctor. Since June 26<sup>th</sup>, and the 14<sup>th</sup> since leaving England. The fresh doctor was on surgical cases and is English. The former one was Maltese.*

*I get up part of the day and am on what is called full diet. One gets less nourishment on it than on the low. Full diet consists of tea, 2 slices bread and butter and a mug of Burgoo, a kind of milk with oatmeal in it like dilute porridge for breakfast. Tea is the same omitting the Burgoo. Dinner: meat is usually very scanty and badly cooked (today there were ribs of mutton with some dried up skin and meat on them), 2 or 3 potatoes of moderate size, 1 onion, and a small piece of bread, and a mug with a tablespoon of rice and 2/3rds full of milk (=rice pudding). Supper: a mug of cocoa and 2 slices of*

*bread and butter. There is a schedule of weights but one certainly does not get full measure in meat for instance.*

*Everybody who has to do with food in the services seems to be cheating from what one hears. When we were at Port Said the residents were taking sackfuls of stuff from the cooks and quartermasters apparently.*

*I miss the egg I had on the low diet.*

*I had another dose of castor oil a few days ago and am having a very bitter taste now. I suppose I am getting better, I am simply tired.*

*There have been rumours for many weeks that the Naval Division was leaving Gallipoli to do garrison work, but I don't know if there is anything in them.*

*The ward I am in is about 25 feet cube and has 10 beds. There is a chaplain but I have not seen him yet.*

*Visitors do not come much to the Naval Hospital. One has been in, she comes from Palace Square! I don't know her name. She seems to have several children here.*

***Sunday July 25<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)***

*I went to Church this morning for the first time for two months. There were not many there as it was 11am and the doctor's rounds were on. It was very unfortunate changing my doctor, the first one I had here is very much better than the others. They send some of the wounded straight home.*

*A hospital ship was in yesterday and we are full up again. They cleared a lot out on Friday. Those who are going back to work go first to HMS Egmont, a camp across the water, and pass out from there. Others only convalescent are now being sent to Corredena (?), normally a naval canteen I think but built so that it can be turned into a hospital.*

*There is a strong cool breeze today.*

*I expect I shall be kicked out this week, especially as they are sure to want all their rooms. I have had no letters forwarded – I was supposed to be at Alexandria. I have been getting up all day for some time now, but lie down a good deal of the day.*

*We occasionally see Reuter's telegrams, but otherwise know little of what is going on. Achi Baba seems to be still there.*

*My postcard from Gaba Tepe (May 6<sup>th</sup>) may have gone to Australia but should have reached you by now.*

***Monday August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915 (to Father)***

*(still at RN Hospital, Bigli)*

*I think you had better continue to write here. The next place I go to will probably be HMS Egmont, Malta. The HMS is merely a figure of speech. Some are going to Corradina, also in Malta. The men*

go to Egmont when they are supposed to be fit for duty and may stay there 3 or 4 days or a month, some return to hospital; they get leave into Valetta alternate days and the other day do fatigues, they come over as stretcher bearer parties here. A large contingent left for home during the last few days.

One of the nurses in my hearing about the doctor that she would rather be treated by one of the patients than him.

I only weigh 10 stone 2 lb in the light clothes we wear, so am a good deal below normal. The food here is so poor that I see no prospect of putting on more weight whilst I am here.

**Sunday August 8<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

There is a most frightful muddle in the delivery of letters, letters, papers and parcels are scattered about, some marked D/L for those who have died.

I think the doctor intends to send me out to duty, i.e. HMS Egmont as I have mentioned.

The chaplain of the Majestic took the service in the chapel this morning.

**Monday August 9<sup>th</sup> 1915**

I have just weighed myself again, 10 stone, 3lb, no change in practically a fortnight. I have been moved to the verandah facing the harbour, which means getting bitten by mosquitoes. I have not seen the doctor yet today. He has a way of making people think they are going to England and then suddenly sending them off to duty. It has happened to several since I have been in.

It is interesting to see the transports go through here, some people say there are a million men out this way.

**Sunday August 15<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

There was a general clearout on Friday. I was put down to go to Corradina, en route for Egmont and duty. Owing to the numbers they tried to discharge being in excess of the accommodation most of my ward have not left yet. We shall probably go tomorrow.

Yesterday I was put down in the list of those to be sent home. This does not mean that I go home, some have been on this list for some time, then they are suddenly sent off to duty. There are men here now who have been down to go for over a month and have not left yet. When they are considered fit for duty they go to HMS Egmont (the ship disappeared a long time ago), and await passage to Alexandria where they undergo three weeks training before joining their unit.

I don't think I am really much better than I was a fortnight ago. I am having malt and cod liver oil three times a day now. We are worse off for news here than on the peninsula.

Things have quietened down in the harbour the last week. We hear another Australian submarine has been sunk.

**Monday August 16<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*The move to Corradino is cancelled. I am in my 6<sup>th</sup> week here. I am sorry as from Corradino one is allowed into Valetta and is also I believe given a fresh outfit. I have got a tunic minus several buttons, holey trousers, and too short, and from the sister a small tight army shirt, and socks. The things I came in were quite good. Everything was scattered about. I got too tired to select an overcoat, there seemed plenty of them on a top shelf. I brought in a good one, towel etc.*

**Tuesday August 17<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

*I met Mrs Rivers in the grounds of the hospital yesterday afternoon, and she went and fetched your letters. I weighed myself this morning but am not putting on weight. It is a very still, close, muggy day today. 200 patients are said to be coming in. Mrs Rivers said she would bring some grapes in the evening, apparently she was advised not to visit the medical wards owing to the possibility that some of the cases might be typhoid.*

*At 11:30am I was told to get my kit ready as we were to leave tonight for a ship leaving Malta tomorrow for England. P.S. We are now said to be leaving early in the morning for the "Asturias".*

**Thursday August 26<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Father)**

*From Hospital L&SW Train, between Exeter and Plymouth*

*Only 45 got into the Haslar train, the rest of us left at 3pm for Plymouth Naval Hospital. The journey is rather uncomfortable as I am just sitting on a wooden seat. Otherwise we have been well looked after since leaving the ship. I don't suppose they will keep me at hospital, as there does not seem anything actually the matter with me now.*

**Thursday August 26<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*British Red Cross Society Card: I have arrived at Plymouth Naval Hospital, Plymouth.*

**Friday August 27<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*Medical Information Bureau, Royal Naval hospital, Plymouth: Dear Sir, I beg to inform you that your son, Ernest P. Elwin was admitted to this establishment on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1915 suffering from Enteritis. His condition at present gives rise to no anxiety. Should any change for the worse take place you will immediately be communicated with.*

**Sunday August 29<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Wena, sister)**

*The censorship seems to be strict here as nothing in any way construable into reflection on the hospital seems to be allowed to pass.*

*I left Malta early on the 19<sup>th</sup> going on board the night before. As any remarks I might make about the ship would probably be censored I must wait till I see you to tell you about it. I see no prospect of getting away from here for some time, unless I can persuade them I am quite well. I met a marine on the day after getting here who has been in and out three times for that reason.*

*The ship called at Gibraltar last Sunday morning, and dropped over 200 of the deck patients, mainly Australians; paradoxically though it may sound we had less room soon afterwards than before. The voyage was good and we got into Southhampton during the night, proceeding to the docks in the mornig, alongside about 8am, and left 3pm, getting into hospital here about 10pm.*

*Service in the chapel was compulsory. I am afraid deafness is another of my complaints.*

*You seem, and other people do the same, to forget the gulf between officers and men when you talk of leave. Many naval officers idea of a man is a human being that gets drunk on shore at every opportunity, for all I know it may be true of most of the regular navy – the point is that is the view you have to remember.*

**Sunday September 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 (to Mother)**

Rendalham Vicarage, Saxmundham, Suffolk



*I leave here on Wednesday and may go to Shrewsbury for a few days.*

Ernest's brother, Arthur Elwin had married Oliver Harding, one of 5 sisters, daughter of a Shrewsbury dentist. Ernest fell in love with and eventually married Olive's sister, Grace.

**Wednesday October 13<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Royal Naval Camp, Blandford

*The doctor flatly refused to give me a longer time at home. I went about my ears this morning and a very new assistant squirted them and I am to go every day for a week.*

*If you see Uncle Frank (Jabob) you might enquire discreetly if I should be any use there at present (i.e. back at Siemens Brothers), it seems rather a waste of time being here. The present engineers are largely transferred from C.P. and very poor, not to say low class.*

*Men are returning almost every day now.*

**Tuesday December 14<sup>th</sup> 1915**

*I saw the doctor again yesterday and went over to the hospital at 5pm and had to wait until 6:45pm. They never seem to know at what time the duty doctor is coming. He looked at my cards of medical attendance and I think the report from Plymouth in a book, but did not examine me. He then wrote that "this man is unfit for service abroad at present, but will probably be so in a few months". In addition I have had to sign a statement saying that I was willing to return to civil employment, so I*

*suppose it may be coming about. As the first stage has taken three week, very probably the second will take the same which means sometime in January.*

*All Christmas leave is stopped. A Draft is due to leave next week and another early in January, instead of the single one on Jan 6<sup>th</sup>.*

*From tomorrow I am to be acting corporal without pay, a very hollow honour; the officers commanding the Depot Signal Co has been talking about it for 2 months, it has come about now owing to my being left in charge of the orderly room, the senior man having left. As I have to speak to officers they make me an NCO, strictly an ordinary soldier is liable to fairly severe punishment for speaking uninvited to an officer.*

*It was freezing for a day or two but has been raining all day today. I got back most of the private contents of my kit bag yesterday. My spectacles and one or two military books have not come, but my wristwatch has. I shall probably send it to the stores to be put right. Was it bought there do you remember?*

*I see Yuan Shi Kai is to be emperor of China.*

Shortly after this Ernest was discharged. If he had been able to return to the RND he would have been sent with them to France, where he saw action at Ancre, Miraumont, Arras, Passchendaele, Welsh Ridge, St Quentin, Albert and the Hundred Days Offensive. Instead he embarked on a new and possibly equally dangerous adventure.



## CHAPTER 6: CABLE LAYING TO RUSSIA

Following his discharge from the Marines in 1916 Ernest returned to work for Siemens. He served on at least one cable laying voyage on the C.S. Faraday, probably more. The C.S. Faraday spent a lot of the war repairing cables in the North Atlantic.

Ernest has left one letter from a voyage to Russia on the C.S. Faraday, in the Summer of 1917, laying a cable from England to the Kola Inlet, Russia, and from there to Archangel with a loop to Yukanskiy (now Ostrovnoy).

The sea was not a safe place to be in 1917: In autumn 1916, five U-boats operating in the Barents Sea between North Cape and the Kola inlet had attacked shipping bound for Russia and, together with 2 minelayers laying minefields in the White Sea, were responsible for sinking 34 ships before winter ice closed the area for operations. On 31 January 1917 the Kaiser signed the order for unrestricted submarine warfare to resume. While this quickly brought America into the war, during 1917 U-boats sank 4000 British ships, approx 10 per day.



Archangel was the main Northern port and city of Russia, with access to the Barents Sea and a rail link to Moscow. Murmansk was a relatively new port set up as an ice-free port. Both ports were used by the Allies to supply Russia with munitions, which quickly began piling up in warehouses.

Prior to Ernest's arrival there had been two huge explosions in Archangel, and he describes some of the debris left from this. The first occurred on 26 October 1916 at Archangel's southern port, Bakaritsa. A huge Russian transport ship packed with munitions exploded, followed by a second ship. *From the left bank of the river a fantastic tongue of flame soared into the autumn sky, and a mushroom cloud of black smoke soared over the forests along the river's banks. Flames cast over the*

*wharf from the explosions easily lit the wooden structures; fanned by the winds, the whole port area began to blaze, and a lava wall of fire rolled down over the wharve . Archangel's northern port at Economiiia was similarly destroyed in an explosion of two whips on 13 January 1917. A cargo ship, the Cheliuskin, carrying cannon, shells, explosives, lorries, autos, aeroplanes, started to burn and then disintegrated in a huge explosion, setting fire to other ships, the munitions piled up ashore, and the wharves: explosions continued for 3 days. The explosions and fires completely destroyed both ports, killed thousands of people and destroyed approx 60000 tonnes of munitions.*

[http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern\\_mariner/vol21/tnm\\_21\\_377-405.pdf](http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/vol21/tnm_21_377-405.pdf)

The Russians were gradually losing the war to the Germans: the Russian offensive in June 1917 had been crushed by a German counteroffensive. The Russian Army was now plagued by mutinies and desertions. In November 1917 the Bolshevik revolution brought Lenin to power in Moscow and St Petersburg, and in the following year the British and Americans sent a force to Russia. The Bolsheviks only finally captured Archangel from the White Russians in 1920.

Captain R.S. Gwatkin-Williams described the arrival of CS Faraday at Yukanskie in Russia in the summer of 1917 ("Under the Black Ensign" – 1922): *During the course of the summer the British cableship Faraday arrived. She had run a submarine cable direct from England to the Kola Inlet, and thence to Arkhangel, making a loop in it so as to include Yukanskie. Delay there was whilst the Russians built a hut to accommodate the end of the cable; and further delay before operators could be found capable of working it. But before the end of the season this direct cable route was actually in operation, and as it did not run through neutral countries, nor through other parts of Russia, we hoped that for the future messages would not be tapped en route or distorted. The Faraday herself is a wonderful old ship, even then more than forty years old, and her officers and crew seemed all to form part of one happy family. In spite of her immense size, tending to increase her vulnerability, her state of immobile helplessness, and the fact that she was continually being employed in submarine-infested waters, she passed unscathed through all the perils of war, rock and tempest. It was a year later that I saw her for the last time, in mid-Atlantic and a thousand miles from anywhere, hard at her perilous work of repairing some damaged submarine cable. How it was that the U-boats overlooked her I cannot imagine.* (<http://atlantic-cable.com/Cableships/Faraday/> )



Archangel Quay c.1900



The letter (from Archangel based on the reference to the Cathedral and destruction) reads:

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October 1917**



*My Dear Sister, We are about to depart from the neighbourhood so I am sending you a few lines which will be posted when we leave and may arrive before us owing to our slow speed (the letter arrived in England on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917). We are in a filthy mess from coal dust [from loading coal onto the ship]. It is bad enough ordinarily but usually only lasts a day or two, but we have had it since Monday morning daily 7 to 5 except one day when it rained hard and stopped 3:20 pm and yesterday 4 pm. Today it must have been before 4 I think. They only put on 70-90 tons a day. They work for 30-40 mins each hour and then have a rest and smoke for 15-20 minutes.*

*Today I left the ship at 9:15 and went into the town from this place, reaching the cathedral about 10.5 and stayed there till 10:50. It is an extraordinary service. Have you been at an Eastern Church Service? The priests/popes do such a lot of bowing to each other. I suppose one was a bishop. He wore a crown or tiara and had his hands kissed frequently. They also kiss the altar and march round and round it. The icons are wonderful. There is a painting covered over with a metal casing, in front cast or beaten to represent a picture, e.g. of a saint, but having holes cut where all the fleshy parts would come so that one sees the picture which is behind at those points only. In most cases only the faces and hands are thus visible. The rest is like a bas-relief in metal, often gold I should say. One man with very fuzzy hair, just like shock headed Peter, about 15 or 18 inches in diameter had a very fine bass voice. All the congregation have to stand all the while, very occasionally one saw one kneel for a few minutes. I think there was a bench along one side where a few people sat occasionally but they could not see much of the main service. There are two churches one above the other. We were in*

*the ground floor winter one, very like a crypt. I believe the upstairs one is only used in summer. They are almost identical but the winter one has enormous pillars shaped something like this [ ] and about 6 or 8 feet thick at the base and is quite low. The reredos [altar screen] is one mass of icons. Before the principal ones candles were burning. It was curious how people interrupted their main worship to put a candle in front of the shrines, the one I have marked S seemed to get a lot of attention. The congregation was more than half men and I think very largely common soldiers. I believe the principle service is always on the eve of the day, i.e. the main Sunday service is 6 pm on Saturday and lasts 2 ½ hours long. The same for the saints days. All the popes have long hair. The congregation and incense and heat and stuffiness made me glad to get away. People were going in and out all the time. The pillars and walls were one mass of gilded icons.*

*I left and went to the British Consulate. When I got there about 11.5 am there were 3 naval officers present. The organist (a naval p.o.) came after and then a lady. Then the consul in a surplice and later 3 more ladies, a blue jacket or p.o. and another naval officer. Total 10+organist and consul. He called it the 19<sup>th</sup> after Trinity and 8<sup>th</sup> of the month. It lasts about 40 mins and I got back on board about 12:55.*

*About 4:30 pm I went out for a stroll and saw some people coming out of a large church near the bridge a mile from here, so went in. The priest was performing service in a side aisle with 3 or 4 congregation and no choir, one man acted as choir and congregation. The rest of the church was in darkness, it is packed in the morning.*

*If we go in the morning it is probably my last walk ashore. You had better send this home whether I am back or not as it is all fresh now and they may like to see it.*

*They wear magnificent robes.*

*I shall be glad to get away from this land, where you see tens of thousands of pounds worth of stuff going to wrack and ruin for want of attention. They say the government at home won't believe what the local people tell them. In the first place they are ignorant and in the second they don't care. When the explosion took place aeroplanes, smashed no doubt, fell onto the ice and they left them to fall into the river when the thaw came, instead of collecting all of the undamaged parts. I believe there are broken down cars all over the land which have never reached the front.*

*There was a hard frost last night but it thawed by midday and is nearly 40 degrees tonight (freezing = 32 degrees).*

*We get very little except rumours, all our news about Turkey seems to have been mere gas.*

*I darned 2 pairs of socks yesterday. We get porridge some days now and butter, cheese, jam or marmalade and I think have plenty of meat.*

The C.S. Faraday returned to Murmansk in 1918 and it is probably Ernest was also on this voyage, but this is not certain.

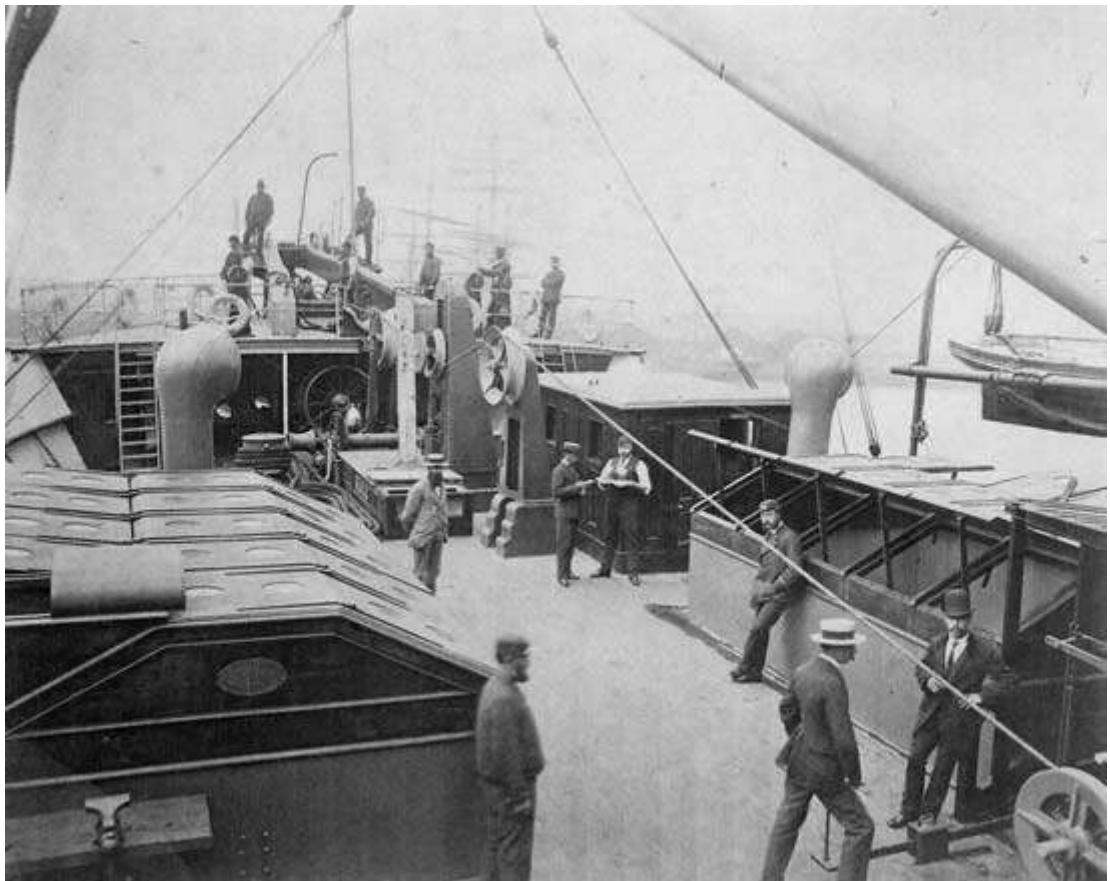
Ernest may have been on the C.S. Faraday on armistice day on 11 November 1918. If he was he would have heard the Captain reading a message from King George V sent to all Navy ships saying

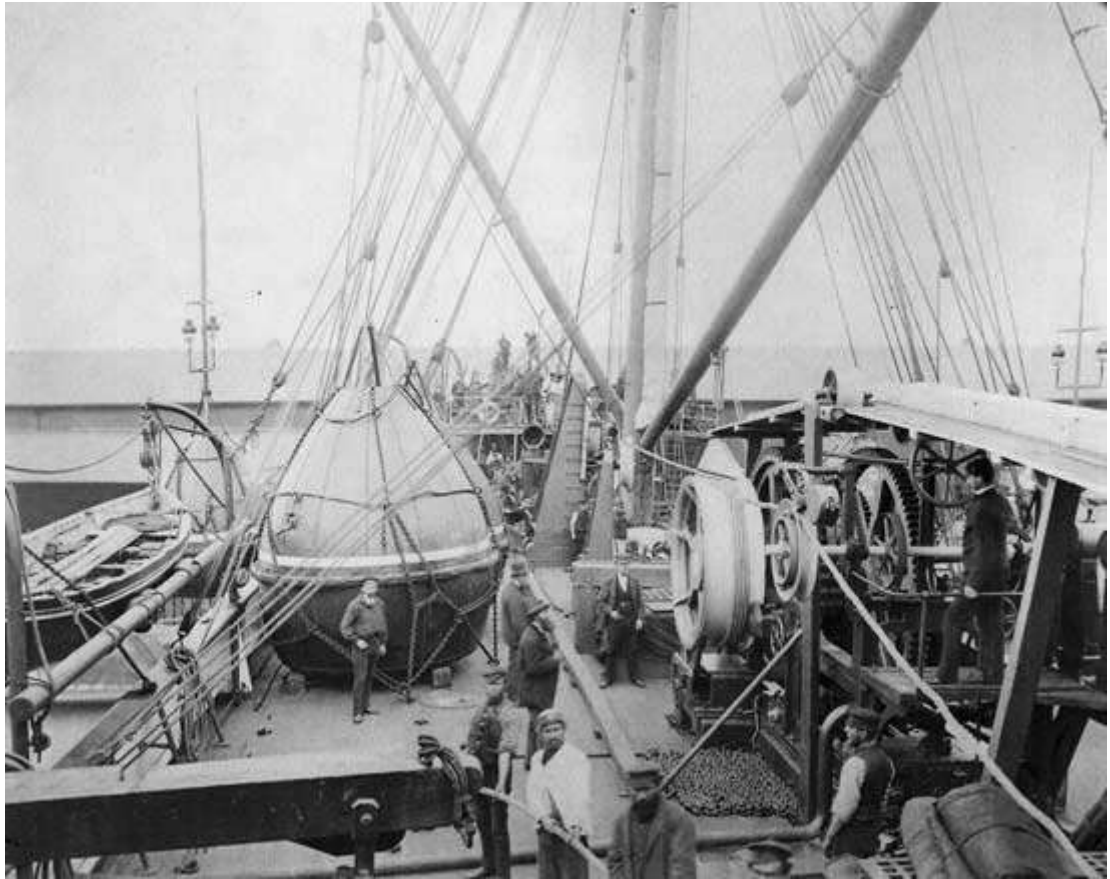
*Now that the last and most formidable of our enemies has acknowledged the triumph of the Allied arms on behalf of right and justice, I wish to express my praise and thankfulness to the officers, men, and women of the Royal Navy and Marines, with their comrades of the Fleet auxiliaries and mercantile marine, who for more than four years have kept open the sea, protected our shores, and given us safety. The Captain, Chief Cable Engineer, and Chief Officer all received civil honours for their service.*

Pictures of C.S.Faraday from 1896

<http://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/ships/Faraday/>









## CHAPTER 7: A WARTIME MARRIAGE

Ernest and Grace Harding married at Shrewsbury on 14th June 1918, when he was 36 and she 31. His Best Man was Dr Warwick. They had presents from about 148 people, and cheques totalling £183/14/-d. A group photograph shows 17 people present besides the bride and groom.



Some of their friends could not be at the wedding. A letter to Grace from J.Owen-Jackson on 'active service' in France survives. It helps to show the world they were living in at this time: if Ernest had not gone back to cable laying he would have ended up in the trenches with the Royal Naval Division in France. J.Owen Jackson wrote on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1918: *It was good of you to take the trouble to write to me a special letter of thanks for our joint present. I hope you will like the tea set and I hope someday I will be able to come and see them myself.*

*I never expected to get so much pleasure out of the life out here as I have, but the fact is it is summer and the weather delightful makes all the difference. Also I have been very lucky personally so far. We are in tents in a big wood and a few nights ago Fritzzy threw about half a dozen shells into our wood. The noise an N.E. shell makes when it bursts in a wood is absolutely deafening. I've never heard anything like it. I was sound asleep when they came, and I must admit that for a moment I didn't know whether it was an earthquake or the end of the world! However in two or three minutes I was asleep again only to be startled out of my wits afresh by another shell. I managed to get to sleep each time except after the last, when I lay awake for nearly three quarters of an hour. It seems so silly to get to sleep every time except when the show was over.*

*Two of the shells were close enough to scatter the earth round about us, and it was a curious effect to listen to the earth and stones falling through the trees like hearing rain. Nobody was hit. It seems wonderful what a lot of stuff goes off without touching anyone. Two nights ago a Fritzzy aeroplane dropped several bombs bear here (two fell close to our bayonet course) and not a soul was hurt.*

*Wishing you every happiness in your married life, yours very sincerely, J Owen Jackson.*



## CHAPTER 8: MARRIED LIFE BETWEEN THE WARS

Their first (and for 9 years their only) child, Angela Mary, was born on 30th May 1919. Soon after her birth Ernest was working in Scotland, where they lived in lodgings, and Grace had great difficulty coping with the baby there, especially with all the washing and drying needed. Back in London they settled at 51 Foyle Road, SE3, from which Ernest could walk down towards Greenwich to get a tram to "the works" at Woolwich.



In 1927 he was put in charge of the cable testing department at Siemens and in February of that year he went on his last cable-laying trip.

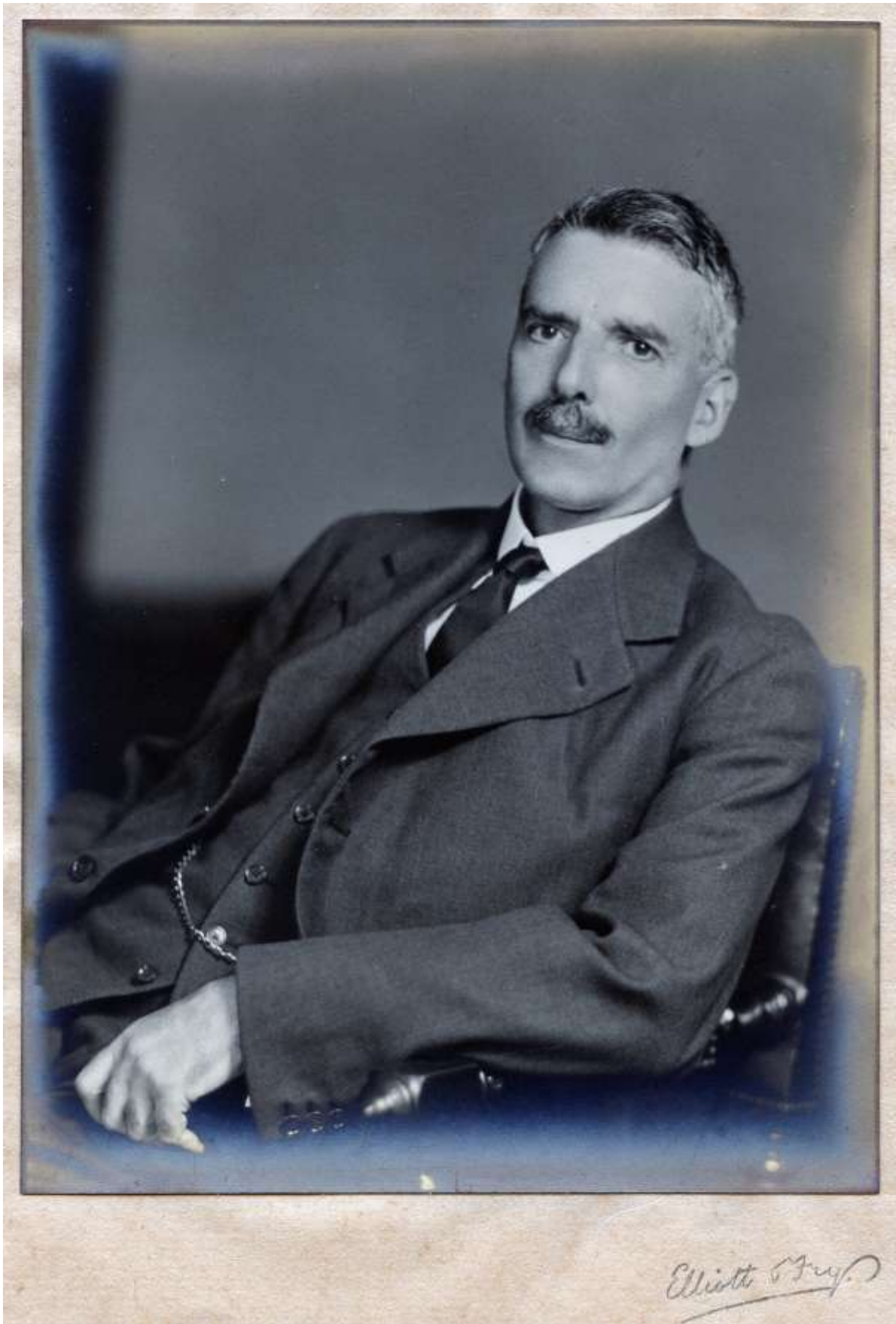
On 16th February 1928 Grace gave birth to Philip Michael (at a Nursing Home on Lewisham Hill), and soon afterwards the family moved to a larger house further up Foyle Road at No. 71. Grace became pregnant again, but had a miscarriage. But on 24th January 1931 the third and last child, Ernest John (Jack), was born at home.

Jack remembers his father as reserved and distant, but this is partly because of Ernest's age and ill health when Jack was young. Michael, 4 years older remembers his father as *very caring and loving ... Papa tried to enter into his children's interests, though his reserve did not make this easy for him or for them. He took us for outings to Kew and the Zoo, and occasionally for walks to the park. But he had to work for 5½ days a week, and was often tired at week-ends. He made some very good play-things for us, especially a box of wonderful wooden bricks which gave us hours of fun, and he made me a little ladder about 4 feet long. He took trouble to show us how things worked and to explain*

*them to us, and we watched him using tools, repairing the sash-cords of windows, mending fuses, etc.*

In 1933 Ernest was given the general oversight of core testing of under-sea cables at Siemens, retaining this position until he retired. He did not have much free time, working 5 ½ days a week, and with only about a fortnight's annual holiday. *His relaxations were mainly gardening, carpentry, and reading. But his reading was limited. He was particularly fond of Austin Freeman's stories about the scientific detective, Dr. Thorndyke, where the interest lies not in the characters but in the clever scientific clues and solutions. Papa collected nearly all the Thorndyke books, and read them aloud to Mummy, carefully noting the dates of reading in the margins. He also enjoyed mathematical puzzles and the Daily Telegraph crossword.* He does not seem to have been a very sociable or happy man. He held very deep religious convictions. His health was not good, and he suffered from indigestion and a hernia.

CHAPTER 9: WWII: THE BLITZ and EVACUATION



When the 1939 war broke out Ernest began to get very tired, especially when Sunday working was started, and his nights were disturbed by air-raids. The Blitz began in September 1940 and shortly after this Ernest and Grace sent Michael and Jack to live with their Grandmother, Grace's mother, in Shrewsbury. Ernest and Grace continued to live on 71 Foyle Road, Blackheath, and a series of their letters to Michael describe some of the effects of the Blitz.

***Sunday November 24<sup>th</sup> 1940 (Papa to Michael)***

*Mummy is much relieved to have you safely away. I have heard a few bombs falling in the night, but none very near here. No more windows have been broken since my letter to Angela. (a drawing shows 15 panes of glass had been broken on 5 windows). Someone who has kept count says that we have had 23 H.E. (high explosive) bombs in the works and 5 Das (delayed action) besides 89 incendiaries. To add to these 3 fell last Saturday about 6.45am, 2 small HEs and 1 DA.*

***Wednesday December 11<sup>th</sup> 1940 (Papa to Michael)***

*No one has told us of any damage in the airraid. There were incendiaries in the night and one of my places where were about 1900 Leclanche cells was badly damaged. Our bells ring off Leclanche cells. On Friday Nov 29<sup>th</sup> between 8 and 9pm a bomb dropped on the end house in Dunsdale Road at the bottom of Foyle Road and broke the windows as far up as 63 Foyle Road an quite a long way along Humber Road, and damaged a number of roofs. 5.59pm the sirens are going.*

***Saturday January 6<sup>th</sup> 1941 (Papa to Michael)***

*No bombs have fallen near us except the incendiaries I told you about.*

***Sunday February 11<sup>th</sup> 1941 (Papa to Michael)***

*We have had a very quiet time lately, very little gunfire when there has been an alarm. They are clearing up alot of bombed places now, taking everything right away. They are at work just across the bridge this side of Westcombe Park Station, near the top of Halstow Road. They have pulled a number of houses down and taken the bricks away. They havn't done anything to the house in Humber Road near the end yet.*

***Wednesday February 28<sup>th</sup> 1941 (Papa to Michael)***

*We had a shower of incendiaries on Wednesday evening. The sirens went whilst we were at supper at 7:32pm and a few minutes later there was a great swish. Angela ran out to look and called out about the fires. There was one in the garden of the house next to that of the man at the end of our garden, but the others were higher up. The roof of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> house in W.Park Road (towards the Park) was alight, and a man managed to push the bomb off the roof with a long handled rake of some sort. Many of them were of the explosive sort and you could see a sudden extra light as they went off; but they were behind the roofs from our house. Sometime after 8pm someone came to borrow our stirrup pump (I put some more tallow hemp packing in at the top last week so it doesn't leak now) because one bomb fwas ablaze inside the roof of No68 opposite: they had only just noticed it. There were alot of flares after 9pm, mostly towards Woolwich and East Ham; but they were all out, and the bombs before 10pm.*

Ernest decided to retire from Siemens and Grace and he decided to move to the country where they could be reunited with their children. They found a very old farmhouse to rent in Cornwall: Lantewcy, St. Neot, Liskeard.

***Sunday March 17<sup>th</sup> 1941 (Grace to Michael)***

*We are very busy trying to get things ready for going away. There is alot to do, but we are tring to be as quick as we can, because we want to get you and Jack with us again as soon as possible. The house we have taken is quite in the country. It is very hilly all round there. Very steep hills. It is only a small garden, but we are quite close to the moor, where there is plenty of room to play, and there are lots of lovely walks. There is another farm house quite near. This house is called Lantewy. It was built in 1640, so is very old. It has very thick walls. Papa has some days at home now, to get on with clearing up. He misses you very much. So do I. Lots of love, my dear old boy, from Mummy.*

***Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1941 (Papa to Michael)***

*On Thursday I spent most of the day repairing some of the damage done on Wednesday night (from bombs). Another kitchen pane was broken and the cross bits of wood broken away, ...I also repaired the French windows in the dining room... One bomb fell in the back garden of 49 Westcomb Park Rd, and showered the whole neighbourhood with sand and gravel and bits of turf. One of the gasometers down Blackwall Lane was burning for a long time. There were several H.E.s near the works, but only 2 or 3 incendiaries inside which were soon put out.*

## **CHAPTER 10: RETIRING TO THE COUNTRY**

Ernest finally retired in April 1941 and they moved down to Cornwall.

### ***Tuesday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1941 (Grace to Michael & Jack)***

*You must come home on the Wednesday after Easter, April 16<sup>th</sup>. We will meet you at Paddington. Bring your bed things in a separate package as you will want them for the night. We can leave the rest of your luggage at Paddington ready to take to Cornwall. Don't stand in the corridor all the way home unless you can't get seats. You will be much too tired. You will have another very long journey. We are getting on here, but we are awefully busy and in rather a scrum I can tell you.*

In Cornwall Ernest spent his time gardening and reading, suffering somewhat from depression. It was a beautiful but lonely spot, half a mile from the nearest house, 1 ½ miles from the village, and without electricity or running hot water.

Ernest and Grace lived here quietly for 6 years.

In 1947 they bought a vicarage which the church was selling off, at Clyst St. Lawrence, East Devon. Ernest was unwell when he moved, and was almost immediately afterwards taken to hospital at Exeter, where he died on Christmas Day 1947 aged 66, and was buried in Clyst St. Lawrence Churchyard.

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HMS Bighi picture: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RNH\\_Bighi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RNH_Bighi)