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No 2 Australian General
Hospital -

Boulogne France

Word came thro' from the D.D.M.S.'s
office late on Thursday night
that Major Kelly & I could go
away next morning on leave to
Paris & Biarritz. We had
applied some time before to get
away as we both felt we
wanted a bit of a spell after
the hard work of the past few
months.

The train didn't leave
Boulogne until 11 am. on Nov
29th but we had to go for our
movement orders at the D.D.M.S.
office in High Boulogne. The
ambulance came about 10 am
& after seeing to one or two things
& the delay in getting our tickets
we found we had none too
much time, in fact only ten
before the train started. The
trains everywhere now are
packed and we were fortunate
in getting a couple of seats
thro' the kindness of a young
officer on the platform, whose

business it seems is to see to
officers & get them fixed up
comfortably. There was a
drizzling rain when we left
and it continued more or
less all the journey.

I think I gave you a pretty
good idea of the nature of the
country up to Paris early
this year when I was going
to the South of France, so I won't
bother you with any repetition.
Just before & for some time after
we got to Amiens we found
plenty to interest us. There
was plenty of evidence of the
first withdrawal of war machines
from the front. We saw
quite a number of whipped
tanks along the road & any
quantity of war material
and then the trenches built
prepared ready for the actual
defence of Amiens. Before one
gets to Amiens there are
numerous marches &
trenches on the good ground
between these marches were
well planned & camouflaged
It seemed for miles after

we passed Paris' Amiens on
the way to Paris we passed thro'
alongside trenches & dugouts
& staked & wired areas. I
suppose they were all in readiness
to make a desperate defence of
this all important line.

Amiens is a big place & is
scattered over a large area
& even now we saw plenty of
evidence of wrecked buildings
& stores etc due to the German
bombardment. And also
the attempts on the bridges
over the railway by air bombs.
During that big German push
at the end of March when there
was great confusion at Amiens
the German aeroplaneists were
very active at night time &
tried & did a great deal of damage
to the lines at Amiens. Of course
the lines entering Amiens are
v. numerous — they appear
to come from all quarters & the
big Central Station gives one
the impression of a spider's body
with a ^{great} number of legs.

A great many more people
joined the train at Amiens
so that we were now more
crowded than ever, even the
corridors were packed.

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with the less congestion of transport
along this line the express has been
speeded up a great deal, saving
about four hours, so that we
got into Paris about 4:30, about
the same time as in January last
but then we left about 7 am!!

The Gare du Nord seemed
crowded with people & we had
a good long wait before we could
get a taxi. We decided to go
straight to the Gare d'Orsay
the station the Bordeaux-Biarritz
started from. As we drove through
the streets they were still very
crowded after King George's
State entry into Paris that
afternoon & we passed many
French Cavalry troops. All
the buildings had flags of every
allied country & as it was
getting dark some of the
illuminations were already
lit up. However we were keen
about going through Paris at express
speed for the south. So on getting
to the station we enquired about
trains. We found one leaving
about 8.20 that evening & another
an hour later. We got our
tickets & tried to book seats also
but found that that booking office

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closed about 4:00. The girl
warned us to get down very early
& that there might be a chance
of securing a couple of seats - all
the trains now were very
crowded she told us.
Unfortunately there were no
wagon-lits attached & therefore
no chance of getting a sleeper.

After that we went to the
Hotel Buffet for dinner & had
a leisurely meal, altho' it was
a rather poor but expensive one.
We arrived on the platform at
7:30 when the train drew in
& by suitable tips to Cook's agent &
the woman-conductor of one of
the carriages we got a couple of
good seats. After we were fixed
up it was rather interesting to
watch the hustle on the platforms
& also to see the huge electric
motors instead of engines which
are used for shunting purposes.

They are shaped thus! - 
rather queer looking things.
But they are very silent & get up
their speed very quickly.

There were a good many
Americans on the train going
to Bordeaux which is one of
their main bases in France.

We had very little sleep during the night as the compartment was crowded & personally I find it difficult to sleep for any length of time while sitting bolt upright as one's legs get so stiff & ache. We got to Bordeaux a little before 7 in the morning & unfortunately we didn't know that we would stay there for nearly 30 minutes or else we should have had a chance of getting a cup of coffee & a roll. There was no restaurant car attached so we didn't get any food until we got to Biarritz. Bordeaux seemed to be a very big place but we couldn't see much as it was still drizzling rain. From Bordeaux on Bayonne the country is quite flat & we passed thro' miles of pine woods - mostly the trees showing evidence of being tapped for their gum or resin. The tapping is done by blazing or stripping a narrow strip of the bark off perpendicularly some ~~one~~ feet up the trunk to within a foot of the ground where a small tin tray or saucer is attached to collect the gum.

Of course? the timber trees are cut down for timber & we passed a good many sawmills. The Yanks have many of their lumbermen in these forests - in fact thro' all these forests of southern France. In fact what American officers we met in the train & also later at Bayonne & Biarritz ~~became~~ belonged to the lumber companies - & v. nice fellows they were too. Of course we also saw a good many other trees besides pine - & these it was interesting to note still retained their leaves & autumn tints. They looked very fine among the sombre green of the pines & especially in green ^{open} stretches. It was the first opportunity of seeing to advantage the real autumn look of a wood which we had.

Bayonne we passed thro' & then a few kilometres on we had to leave the train at La Grotte (the train continuing on its journey to the Spanish border) & we took another train to Biarritz which we reached at 12.15. When we left Paris we

had not the slightest idea
where we would stay & after
leaving Bayonne we asked a
French officer about the hotels
& he mentioned 3 or 4 which he
considered we would find
"très confortables" at the Biarritz
station we found quite a bevy
of decorated hotel porters & in a
moment ~~then~~ decided that we
would go to the Hotel du Palais.
There was no doubt about it
being a Palace because it is
the biggest & best hotel in the place.
A few minutes drive we reached
there & we found it most comfortable.
It is not the kind of place which
we would have selected for a
long sojourn as our purses were
not big enough. But we
certainly did like enjoy our
week's stay there as it was so
wonderfully quiet, clean & so
nothing of the luxuriousness of
it all. It is a large place
built right on the cliff overlooking
the Bay of Biscay — the land
being acquired from the
Empress Eugénie who had a
small chateau which was
burnt down on a couple of
occasions. So the hotel uses the
Napoleonic & Eugénie coat of arms on their plate etc.

Our bedrooms⁹ overlooked the sea
& were very comfortably furnished
with bathroom & wardrobe rooms
attached & the electric light fittings
were splendidly arranged — by
certain switches which could be
manipulated without getting out
of bed — & the bells for the servants
were similarly arranged. We
felt we were living like millionaires
even for a brief spell — but it was
v. nice, even if it was to get away
from Influenza cases for a while.
We had a shave & a hot bath
& were quite bucked after the
long journey & then were ready
for lunch — & such a nice
lunch too. But I don't think
I should tell you anything
about these meals we had there
as else you will think that
both Kelf & I had suddenly
become epicures & that no
war had really worried France.
Only 2 Guards Officers besides
ourselves were in the hotel & so
we found ourselves looked
after by about 30 different
waiters & attendants of one
kind & another & incidentally
on our departure the no. of

new faces we saw for the first time casually coming across our path & wish us bon voyage was remarkable. Anyone might have thought that our was a remarkably popular one the great sort of send off we had! But still the French are nice & even if they look out for their tips like everyone else similarly employed they do it very quietly & not with that apprehensiveness one sometimes notices elsewhere, & besides they do look after you & attend to you well. After lunch as it was still raining we thought we would go & have a little rest after the fatigue of the long journey. Biarritz is over 500 miles from Paris & between 6-700 miles due south of Boulogne so that there is a decided difference in the climate & also the length of the day. We noticed that we had the light until about 5.15 - a good $\frac{3}{4}$ hour later than Boulogne & we could easily go about without overcoats as the

weather was so mild. In fact from Sunday morning until the Saturday afternoon, the day of our departure, the weather broke fine & was bright & sunny very similar to what we experienced at Mentone last winter.

Bayonne & Biarritz are at the foot of the Pyrenees mountains. The latter (what we saw of them) were very fine, at the back of us were various tiers many of the peaks being snow capped. Then the coast on to Spain & the right angular bend of the Spanish coast westward was highly mountainous & very beautiful. Some afternoons these mountains looked particularly fine with such clear atmospheric conditions.

Biarritz has no harbour except a couple of small "yards" artificially made by cement walls connecting small islets so as to protect small launches & fishing boats. The town is a big place & has numerous private houses or chalets (as compared with the villas along the Riviera littoral) & a

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great many pensions & hotels because it is a very popular resort for the French & English rich. Some of the places were perched on curious places on the cliffs & see as much as possible of the Biscay & its magnificent rollers coming in on the beaches. One afternoon we strolled beyond the lighthouse & down on to the fine broad brown sweep of sandy beach, & we were fairly fascinated by the surf. I think it is quite the best I have seen. Such huge curlers breaking with such terrific force & sending the water up for yards. My word if all that force could only be harnessed into power!!

~~But~~ And speaking of power these places seem to be wonderfully provided with cheap power because like Mentone Monte Carlo & Nice &c all the electric lighting is generated up in the mountains by the wonderful water power they have in the raging torrents. The electric lights are seen everywhere.

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There is a splendid promenade beginning from the very gates of the Hotel du Palais & nearly to a Casino & of course baths of every description. There are plenty of places for these rich people to unload some of their wealth - & it is curious the no. of curios shops there are. I suppose most of the people who come down bring all the wardrobe they require & so they must spend money on something - & so called works of art & curios are easily sold. It was not the season of the year when we were there - the time is Sept & Oct & after Xmas the English people arrive & perhaps the best time of all is Easter. But the hotel people told us that they had been very full until quite recently & that a great many of the rich Parisians (especially the Jews & Jewesses) flocked down in swarms after the big German push in March when Paris was threatened. And they brought most wonderful things with them - their jewellery & other treasures.

¹⁴
parrots & birds of every
description, pet dogs & cats
&c &c. They remained on
there for months until a
little while before the
armistice when they knew
every thing was safe!

The Spanish border is only
some 15-20 miles away & just
across the border is the very
big city of San Sebastian.
But we were not permitted to
go there & besides there were no
motors available owing to
the difficulty of getting petrol.
However we went across to
Bayonne which is only
7 kilometres off by electric
tram - what one of the Americans
told us was "a rather good
trolley-car." All the way to
Bayonne we pass Chateaux -
in fact between the 2 places
are a series of suburbs. It
was most interesting to see
the bullock carts here & I
wish I had a photo to show
them off well. The cattle are
fine beasts with big horns &
yellow coats. The yoke fits
over each beast's ^{head} like a cap

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& the entire load is pulled
along from the head. No other
harness is used. The drivers
make them look picturesque
(& also fierce) by having a
woolly or hair-mat covering
the yoke & heads of the oxen.
The driver walks in front
with a pole like a long
broom handle & by directing
this pole one side or the other
the oxen are directed to the
right or left.

Outside Bayonne is a large
market for selling mules from
Spain. A very big trade is
done here with the Americans
& the afternoon we were there
we saw many strings of mules
being taken off by American
cowboys after their purchase.
These cowboys have the
Mexican boot-stirrup.

We were greatly interested
in Bayonne. It is a wonderful
old city surrounded by a
huge wall & a deep moat.
The latter has been drained
& the wall in 2 or 3 places
has been broken so as
to favour quick traffic.
As you know it is a place of

great historical¹⁶ interest & has
been subject to siege & battle
on many occasions during the
Christian era. The old castle
built right on to the battlements
of the old wall (I've sent a p.c.
of it) was built in the early
centuries on the remains of an
old Roman castle & then
rebuilt by one of the old Spanish
Kings in 11th or 12th century.
It has been occupied by the
Princes of Navarre & Gascony
(I think you'll find this all
recounted on the p.p.)

The quaint old streets are
very narrow & most of
them meet around the
Cathedral in stellate fashion.
Of course they all have
the usual pavé. Donkeys
are used much more here
than up north & the farmers
slung on either ^{side} all keep in
making a very picturesque
scene. Bayonne is built on
the Adour & Nive rivers at
their junction — & united they
form a big stream. There are
couple of fine bridges over them &
some smaller & more picturesque
types over the smaller R. Nive &
on either bank of both are camps
which are crowded with
Spaniards & Basques (French people)

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There are large numbers of small
steamers which trade between
Spanish ports & Bayonne & the
latter place presents all the
appearances of being a busy place.
The Spaniards themselves are
very similar to the Italians even
to the slovenly cut of clothes & ill
kept appearance. In some
we saw evidence of the Moorish
invasion by the type of features
& tawny skin.

One morning we breakfasted
early & left Biarritz for Bayonne
shortly after 8 o'clock & caught the train
shortly after nine o'clock for a little
Saturday's outing in the
Pyrenees. We went to Saint
Jean Pied-de-Port. The train
followed up the valley of the
Nive & for several miles we
passed thro' agricultural land
with farms dotted about &
occasionally pulled up at
a small country town — some
of these were rather well known
for their thermal springs &
of course had Bath-houses built.
Then the valley narrowed & the
scenery became more
mountainous & we passed

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Hard 2 or 3 forges ^hwere a track
on either side was cut out of the
mountain sides - one for the
railway, & one for the road traffic.
It was very interesting to travel
along overlooking the river
which was very broken in
places ~~into~~ rapids -

Then we came to a beautiful
plateau (after running out of the
mist-clouds) where the little
town of St Jean Pied-de-Port is.
It was a pretty sight, especially
as it was a brilliantly sunny
day & absolutely still. I
supposed the surrounding mountains
made it so still. The mountains
were magnificent - the lights
& shades were so fine, so that
we couldn't have picked a
more ideal day than we had.
As soon as we arrived at the
station the people looked at
us with curiosity & then one old
gentleman came up to me &
asked if we were American officers.
I told him no, British. He seemed
pleased as it was "out of bounds"
for Americans. Then he asked
from what part of Britain & when
I told him Australia he

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appeared & he delighted &
exclaimed in French (but for
your benefit I shall translate it!)
"Oh Australians! They are the
best British troops. Oh, Good
Australia! Good Australia!" It
all seemed so genuine & simple
& afterwards during our stay
there of 2 1/2 hours wherever
we strolled we were most
cordially greeted & everyone
seemed so pleased to see us.
Evidently this place is not
much frequented or visited by
the military people. The
old chap directed us to the
Hotel France which he said
was the best & there again we had
everyone's eyes on us during
the meal, they seemed so interested.
Afterwards a couple of the
old chaps came along &
recounted the Australians
deeds in saving Amiens & Paris
How grateful the French
people were. One old fellow
told us he had been to South
America (Argentina) & that
he spoke Spanish very well.
The old town was very interesting
especially the old walled in

part. Houses were built on either side of the river — the foundations of their walls being down to the water's edge & as they had small balconies built out over the river they presented the same picturesque as Lospel & some of those other towns I described in the Riviera. They had the same pulley method of dropping buckets into the stream for water.

The women folk also were to be seen washing their clothes in the running stream — a rather cold business I should imagine as the water is ice-cold.

I managed to get some interesting pt views & I hope they will arrive safely. Donkeys & oxen seem to be used almost entirely here instead of horses.

All this part of France is inhabited by Basques — a very strong vigorous & handsome type of French people. They are mostly dark — not so dark as Spaniards, & they look active & alert & appear to be prosperous. They almost universally wear a small dark blue or black cap (something like a tam-o-shanter made to fit like a skull cap

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& at the top is a tiny little tassle or tail. They seem to be very proud of the distinctive headgear & the soldiers & officers in the French army are permitted to wear them. It is ludicrous to see these caps in miniature worn by the old women to cover their bunch of hair & certainly not bigger than an apple or orange!

On the homeward journey after the sun set we ran into fog until we reached Bayonne so that we were not sorry to be back in Biarritz between 6 & 7.

We had some very nice walks at Biarritz — including a couple of jaunts to the Golf links there. Both of us felt sorry when we had to make our homeward journey on the Saturday afternoon Dec 7th. We were told that there would be a restaurant car on the train (which left about 5.15) but this was a mistake & we were bound we could get nothing to eat until 10 p.m. when we got a very scrappy & hurried meal at Bordeaux. The train was packed with people & we couldn't get into a first class compartment but got good seats in a second class carriage with

Three Spaniards who were going to Paris to enjoy the festivities. They also looked prosperous & were very nice fellows & we thoroughly enjoyed their company. They spoke French & well & were tolerant of ours, but we managed to get along all right. It was very tedious & tiring sitting up all night & when we got to Paris at 10 am. I felt very tired. Paris was very crowded & we tried 4 different hotels to get a room for a bath & a clean up, but every place was crowded. So we left our luggage at the Gare du Nord & got our tickets for the 10.15 pm train that night & then saw the R.T.O. He advised us to go to the Inter-Allied Club at 33 Rue Faubourg next the British Embassy. We were glad of the tip and we taxied there at once & found it a most luxurious place. We discovered that it was Baron de Rathskind's place lent as a club for any of the Allied officers so we saw there a good many French & British officers but a greater no. of Americans. It was nice to get a hot bath & later a shave by the barber & then as it was after 12 we let breakfast slide & waited for lunch. We got an excellent

lunch for 25 francs for the two - I believe this would have cost 2 1/2 - 3 times that amount in the Paris restaurants at the present price of things in Paris. After lunch we strolled along Rue Royale & onto the Rue de la Boissière & then to Madeleine which we visited for a few minutes. The funeral of the service was taking place & very beautiful it was. The Church was crowded & it is little wonder that the old pomp & dignity of the R.C. Church still attract the people. Afterwards we made our way down to the Place de la Concorde & there were thousands of people there viewing the captured German guns which were in large numbers & of every size & description. There was also a Hun Tank. As you know at various points around this Place are huge statues representing the largest provinces of France. The Seine is closely so we visited it also & went down & had a close view of a French submarine. The remainder of the afternoon we spent in the Tuilleries & then returned to the Club for a couple of hours rest

before dinner. ²⁴ We left the Club
at 9.15 giving ourselves a full
hour to get to the station in case
we couldn't get a taxi & various
other delays. It was just as well
because, being Sunday night,
we were told that it would be
impossible to get a taxi & the best
way was to go by the underground
electric - the Metropolitan. There
was a station at the Concorde
& it would be necessary to change
at Le Chatelet. However, as we
passed Maxim's along the Rue Royale
we, by a bit of manoeuvring, managed
to get a taxi so we were in good
time at the station. In the compart-
ment with us was a naval officer
from Madras, an American & a
Hindoo officer. It was a long tedious
journey to Boulogne & we got back
to the Hospital for breakfast at
9.00. Both of us were glad
to have a couple of hours in
bed after that as we were
both pretty tired with two
night journeys in the train.

Altogether our trip was most
enjoyable & I had to decide
to tell you more about it on
my return to Melbourne.