

MERRIEWEATHERS
BALLURE ROAD
RAMSEY
ISLE OF MAN
TELEPHONE : RAMSEY 812533
(STD CODE 0624)

June 16th 1986

Dear Mr Starling,

Thank you for your letter of June 12th which convinces me it is going to be fun working with you over the production of your 152 H.B. history.

It will help me a great deal if you will confirm you have a copy of the article I wrote for The Gunner because that fact may save me having to work up again the things I have already touched on.

My proposed way of tackling the job is to write a series of incidents as I remember them and leave you to use them or throw them out. It is your history and I confine myself into making noises off. Do you agree?

Yours

L.C.A.

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July 8th 1986

Dear Starling,

The P.S. to your letter brought joy to my heart. I never imagined the archives could possibly contain a record of the Battery's amazing win at the Bonn Horse Show. I wasn't there of course but I have always understood our First Prize for the best gun team was the one and only prize that the British Army lifted. The French just cleaned up everything.

Amongst my papers I have recently come across a couple of photographs that may interest you and here they are. They are contained in a photostat copy of my contribution to Gunner that was made for the House Magazine of my old firm. The first is of the officers who spent so much of the winter of 1917 in Sanctuary Wood a short distance in front of Ypres. It was taken the day after the Battery was sent to the back areas for a rest. I well remember what a joy it had been to spend a night in pyjamas again---we had slept for weeks in our clothes. The second photograph is of Yours Truly aged 20, taken in London.

You must forgive me if my memory does not contain information about "groups". We thought very little about higher formations than the Brigade to which we belonged. Shortly after I joined the battery we were hitched onto the 1st Heavy Brigade of the Canadian Corps and when six months later we were removed and sent north to the Ypres area to become part of the 84th Brigade and we remained with them right up to the Armistice. Perhaps I should mention here that a Battery was usually commanded by a Major and a Brigade by Lieutenant Colonel (called colloquially "a half Colonel because he had a crown and one pip not two on his shoulders). However perhaps we were not as ignorant as I have made out because I can recall that while we were with the Canadians we were in the Canadian Corps and with the 84th we were with the 6th Corps. The Canadian Corps was in the 1st Army and the 84th in the 3rd Army. There were five British Armies in France.

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The 6th Corps H.Q. had a Bulldog sign painted on all its transport and some people thought following the great success of the big German offensive in March 1918 the Bulldog should be substituted by a Greyhound! Now this is leading up to my asking you why everybody in 152 wore a white horse painted on the righthand side of their tin hat. We all imagined at some time in history there must have been a famous White Horse of Hackney. Was there? If you don't know I suggest you write to the Editor of the local paper. I am willing to bet he does'nt know either

In your last letter you picked me up with a question about ammunition columns. Yes every horse drawn battery had its own ammunition basely of course on the battery's horse lines or waggon lines as they were generakly called. The duty of the ammunition column in trench warfare was "keep" the Unit supplied with rood and ammunition, also fodder for the horses, from an Army Service Corps Depot usually situated a good many miled from the Front Line. The rations and ammunition were atken to the gun position after dark to avoid the position being spotted by enemy aircraft.

I think I have written quite enough for one night. The next installment I hope will contain details of the 60lb gun, also a thumbnail sketch of the wonderful character who commanded our Battery.

A very much younger gunner told me one day last week that many batteries to-day are assigned a name as well as a number and he believes the name that accompanies number 152 is ~~INKERMAN~~ INKERMAN. I don't believe it !!!!!

Yours

E.C.B.

P.S. Wonders will never cease, I have just found this small print of the whole battery. I don't know when it was taken or where! CAN YOU PICK OUT YOUR FATHER.

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July 26th 1986

Dear Christoher S,

Many thanks for your letter of July 14th. I have not been able to answer earlier, I have been a little bit under the weather.

Your photographs are interesting. In all honesty I cannot say I remember your father but his face is certainly familiar ----sixty odd years is a very long time! I think the photograph must have been taken at home because of the date November 4th. The battery arrived in Mauburge during the late afternoon of November 10th and it follows the battery must have been battling on and nobody would have had the opportunity to pose for his photograph on November 4th! As a matter of interest we fired our guns for the last time on November 7th from the village of Ruesne.

As for the two group photographs you must appreciate yours was taken when 152 was a four gun battery, not a six gun one as mine. The extra two guns would put up the numbers of gunners, drivers and signallers by 50% "Quite easy my dear Watson" !!

I don't think much of your suggestion that the White Horses on our tin hats might have some vague connection with the Hackney Carriage. Why not slip a letter into the local newspaper? I shall be amazed though if you get a reply.

The Battery O.P. poem is good but please the chap in charge wasn't an F.O.O. That bread only appeared when our side was launching an attack. He was always a gunner subaltern sent out with say a couple of signallers to get information about the progress that our infantry were making. And get that information back as quickly as possible. Remember there were no wireless sets. The news had to be presented to the General in charge by somebody who could vouch for its accuracy. In one show I was in acting as F.O.O. I was able to use a Lucas Signalling Lamp

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from a bit of higher ground to send a message in Morse straight to the battery and leave them to pass it on by telephone to the unfortunate general in charge of the show. He couldn't see anything himself, he had to rely on reports he received and decide which were good and which were bad.

Now going back to your O.P. poem whenever a telephone went dead a signaller was immediately sent to walk along the line, probably holding it in one of his hands, until the break was located. He would repair it and then return. (Of course he would have an instrument on his back to test that he had done a good job)

I have gone into all this detail so that I can get off my chest a nasty experience I had. Our position was in a very large farm and early one morning my batman shook me by my shoulders and broke the news to me that all my signallers were blind. And he was right. Apparently one of my chaps had walked through a field of wet cabbages seeking the break in the line. He stepped in some mud where a Mustard gas shell had exploded. When he returned to the cellar where the off duty signallers were sleeping he lay down in his boots. The mud from his boots gave off the Mustard gas which did the damage. The chaps all recovered their sight after about a week. I had a small reserve of signallers who were able to take over until the invalids returned. But it was very hard work indeed.

I set off this evening to write about the sixty pounder gun but your wretched poem pushed me off course!

BETWEEN

During the Boer War our 4.7 gun got a lot of favourable publicity and I believe that War and the out break of World War was born as an improved 4.7. Both guns were drawn by a team of eight very large horses----Shires and Clydesdales. In France the sixty pounders were used chiefly on counter battery work. For instance if the R.F.C. reported that a particular German battery was making a nuisance of itself the Staff would order a sixty pounder battery to give it a dose of say twenty rounds. The muzzle velocity of our gun was simply colossal. The shell would arrive only a split second after the noise of its approach would be heard. It was quite frightening as I know because

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I was far too close to a bursting sixty pounder shell one day. (I'll tell you that story one day but not now) Another duty assigned to the gun was to harass roads immediately behind the enemy's lines to interfere with transport, chiefly at night. We were most unpopular, if the enemy located us he gave us hell. You will remember I wrote in my account for The Gunner how we had a shoot to destruction handed to us and we lost all our guns. That was at Fosse Six near Lens and our particular crime was that from our position we could shoot right along the Lens/Carvin road. (Enfilade is the correct Army word for that service!) We must have done a very great deal of damage or he wouldn't have got so mad with us!

The range of our gun was very much greater than the thirteen pounder of the R.H.A. or the eighteen pounder of the R.F.A. and for that reason it was much more fun to serve in trench warfare. At first the maximum range was 9000/10,000 yards but this was improved to about 12,000 yards late in the War by redesigning the shape of the shells head.

On being fired there was a fierce explosion and the barrel was forced back about sixty inches between two guides and then brought forward again by the strength of two enormous springs. However it did not return to its exact position and to achieve that it had to be rigged back by gunners using hand spikes and a very tough job that could be! Modern guns do return perfectly and so a much greater speed of fire can be obtained.

The bore of the gun was five inches and the weight of the shell of course sixty pounds. We fired shrapnel (black shells) high explosive (yellow shells) and gas (grey shells). Firing gas never bothered us but strangers cleared off immediately when they learned what the colour grey meant!

I think I have written quite enough about the gun for the present. 'Any questions?

In the next installment I will explain what went on in the B.C. post---that holy of holies.

Yours sincerely

L.C.B.

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3107
July 27th 1986

Dear Christopher S.

I am sure you did not expect another edition of The Hackney Saga so soon after you received the July 26th Number.

All the time I was with 152 the O.C. was W.E.Hicks, most remarkable man.

For about a couple of years before the 1914 War he was an N.C.O. in the Garrison at Gibraltar and he was so outstanding the Commandant recommended him for a commission. After some little delay while his records were being searched he got it and he was posted to the 114 Heavy Battery (a regular Battery of sixty pounders) and with that battery on the outbreak of the war he went to France. At the battle of the Somme he was seriously wounded, he had a machine gun bullet in his left leg which did permanent damage to his knee. It wasn't until the following year he was passed fit to return to duty. He was posted to the First Army Artillery School at Aire as an Instructor with the rank of Captain. He proved to be an immense success there--which as one of his pupils I can confirm. Early in April 1917 he was informed by the Commandant of the School it had been decided he invited to take charge of a battery that was in a very bad way. It was made perfectly clear if Hicks failed to make a big improvement it would not count against him. Moreover those in charge would not go near him for six months to pass judgement. On the other hand if he pulled the show round his appointment as C.O. would be confirmed. He was assured he would have a free hand to make any changes in the Officers or the N.C.O. In actual fact he did cause two officers to be moved and he replaced them with others (very keen types) of his own choosing.

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In a remarkably short time he changed the spirit of the show. Perhaps the first surprise the men got was the improvement in the cook house. Not only did Captain Hicks insist on the highest possible standard of the food the men got he interviewed the cook when the rations arrived and planned every meal. When this became generally known his demand for strict discipline and much greater care of the harness were accepted without a murmur. I got hell from him on parade many times but we were always very great friends despite the difference in rank. It would be only too easy for me to rate him as a paragon but I prefer a quite different label. --- a catalyst! Now my dictionary defines catalyst as " a person that precipitates changes while remaining unchanged himself"

I don't wish to gild the lily but I am putting in here an experience of my own which may help to illustrate the point. The Staff wanted to know whether a sixty pounder could be towed over very rough ground by a tank. I was detailed to assist with an experiment. I took one of the guns out of the position we were occupying at the time with a team of horses and proceeded to a certain map reference in the back areas. I arrived there early and halted about 200 yards from the spot indicated. I dismounted the drivers and made them go over the harness with a moist cloth and finally dust their boots. Later having reported to the senior officer present I had the gun disconnected and handed over to the Tank Commander

Well he did his worst heaving the gun with his tank and finally through some very large heaps of manure in some disused horse lines. When the gun was returned to me I made the drivers move the a few yards, dismount and clean off every piece of manure, rub up the harness and as a final touch wipe the dust off their boots. I think it impressed the audience. We left with all our noses in the air! Now do you imagine for one moment I as a civilian dressed up in uniform would have staged the demonstration that it not been for that catalyst?

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H07

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I think I must have satisfied you I looked upon him
as a very great leader and a very great man who knew instinctively
how to get the very best co-operation out of people
he commanded. For instance I recall an incident that took place
when he had hardly dug himself in. In a speech he told us he
had come from a very famous regular sixty pounder battery and the
O.C. used the term "battery" as might be expected, he said "114".
Captain Hicks as he was then told the officers and men when
he felt proud of his Unit he would address them as "152"!!!
And the day he did just that everybody purred with pleasure!
I have two more installments to write for you and then
I think your saga must come to an end. The final two are

- NEVER
- (1) What went on inside that holy of holies the B.C. Post ?
 - (2) What did it ^{and} feel like to be in charge of the O.P. ?

Yours ever,

E.C.B.

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September ~~3rd~~ 1986

Dear Christopher S.

I was so pleased to learn from your letter of August 23rd that you had not been ill as I imagined but merely seeking sunshine. And so that accounted for the delay. I like to seek the sun myself and I plan to spend the whole of the month of March in Tenerife. I have not written the two instalments I mentioned in my last letter. I decided I would wait the arrival of your letter before starting work---in fact I awarded myself a holiday.

With regard to your queries. The photograph contained in the Gunner article was of the few officers of the battery that manned the position in Sanctuary Wood, the others were at the horse lines waiting to replace casualties and strange to relate (I mean officer casualties -we had plenty amongst the other ranks) there weren't any. That particular gang was known as the Zillebeke Ruffians because the battery position was in close proximity to Zillebeke Lake. Why were there so few of us ? It was nothing more than prudence not to have all the eggs in one basket. I have never explained it was the custom in the gunners for the second in command to be kept in cold store ready to move to the gun position should the O.C. become a casualty. By the way the O.C. was usually a Major and the second in command a Captain.

Strangely there were a few instances of a battery being caught on the wrong foot and being captured during a sudden attack by the enemy. In one case the unfortunate Major of a battery that was over run was taken in his pyjamas! Now that couldn't have happened to 152 because we slept in our clothes in the Line. Incidentally you must bear in mind no battery in France dreamed of keeping their horses near the guns, they were stabled miles back out of harms way.

You ask what happened to 152 before the arrival of Hicks. Well I didn't intend to tell you but now I must ~~say~~

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break silence because of your inquiry. When Hicks was my instructor at the First Army Artillery School we became great friends and one day riding alongside of him on the way back from one of our daily daily mounted map reading exercises he asked me if he ever got command of a battery would I like to join him. Well I was most emphatic in my reply. I assured him I would transfer from any battery in France to be one of his subalterns. We laughed together and forgot all about the conversation had ever taken place. A couple of evening later I was in the Mess ante room and one of the servants told me Captain Hicks wanted to see me immediately. I met him in the corridor and his face and hands were about the colour of a lobster. He blurted out "It has happened" . The story he had to tell me was this--- he had been summoned to appear before three very senior officers and they told him of a battery that was in a real mess and the O.C. of the School had strongly recommended Hicks to take it over. They emphasised it would be an uphill task, they wouldn't check what progress he had made in less than six months. If the job proved too much for him he could be sent somewhere else and it wouldn't count against him . On the other hand if he pulled the show round he could keep it. You must remember he was a very junior Captain. Finally you will have carte blanche to cause the removal of any officer or N.C.O. he thought he couldn't tolerate. Of course Hicks accepted --it was a terrific honour and he asked if a pupil in the School could be posted to #52 a few days after he took command. And that was granted, of course, they couldn't turn down Hick's very first wish.

Things moved very quickly, Hicks went off the next morning and I received my posting within a week.

Hicks had an icy reception from the outgoing Major. They knew one another in Gibraltar a few years before when Hicks was of course an N.C.O. During their talk Hicks asked if there were any bright gunners that the Major would like to be sent to a Cadet School in England with a view to promotion and Hicks got the reply "No I don't believe in promotion from the ranks" What a cad the man must have been! I remember his name and I am not going to pass it on to you for your history!

A few days after I joined we were told we were joining the Canadians and we were expected to be in action on a certain date

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in the Souchez/ Vimy area.

'Well things hummed. Did I tell you Hicks was a catalyst ? I saw a catalyst in action as soon as he took over. The men fell for him immediately they found he was a born cook that could show the real cook how to make the very most of our indifferent rations. Don't please imagine because he brought me to the battery I was a kind of Golden Boy when on duty I did something that didn't satisfy. I got hell like the others. But off duty we remaine, the best of friends.

You ask in what part of the country Hicks was brought, I think it was Birmingham. He certainly had a brother there in the theatrical business. I believe the father died very young. Hicks was devoted to his mother. His intiaks were W.E. but I never heard what they stood for. We kept in touch right up to his death in 1971. He had a wonderful wife he called Muffet--I don't know why. His son didn't quite make the grade. He went to Australia where I think he still is---he drives a taxi in Sydney. He returned for a few days to attend the funeral. Following the end of World War 1 the armed services were boiled down ruthlessly and like so many officers Hicks decided to retire. He became a Conservative Party organiser. He enabled two members to win their seats, one in Cornwall and the other in the suburbs of London. Of course when World War 2 broke out he rejoined the regiment but his age stopped him getting posted abroad. Once thw war was over he returned to politics and only gave up a year or so before he died.

Writing this long screed has worn me out so I propose putting off working up the two the installments on the B.C.Post and the O.Pip until another evening.

'Any more questions ??

Yours

E.C.B.

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October 24th 1986

Dear Christopher,

I am sure you must think me "lost". Well that happens to be an appropriate word. I wrote my promised instalment and put it on one side intending to post it of immediately your letter arrived. When your September 28th arrived my poor instalment went missing and has remained missing ever since.

I shall have to write it all over again and the rehash won't be as informative. Damn!

So you have come across a Sixty Pounder Manual have you. That means I must be careful or I may get tripped up!

You say you intended to find out whether Hackney has a Historical Society. Now that is an excellent idea we might get great help from such a Body. For instance they might be able to solve my riddle as to why we wore the White Horse of Hackney on our tin hats. Forgive my great interest to know, the matter has become an obsession with me. I wonder whether a short letter to a local newspaper popping the question might produce the answer. I am quite prepared to put up a £5 prize for the first correct solution. Our letter would have to be very carefully worded, but you could do that part I am confident. Think it over. Any Hackney Historical Society could certainly provide the life story of that character Horatio Bottomley. I have written earlier I thought he was the Mayor 1915 onwards, but on second thoughts I am sure he was the M.P. for Hackney. Surely it should be easy to confirm that from the records at the Town Hall. It is no exaggeration he was a national hero. He owned and conducted a weekly newspaper with the title "John Bull" It was an immensely popular paper and I can confirm it was read by the whole Army and most of the Civil population. He had a kind of insurance scheme not exactly like Neddie that was run dishonestly and many many people suffered grievously and Horatio was sent to prison. His trial was a "cause celebre". Although he briefed a very famous K.C.

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November 16th 1986

Dear Christopher,

No reply has been received to my last letter which was dated October 24th. I don't think you have gone off the boil but to find out I am not sending you my promised contribution about B.C. Posts (although it is very nearly ready). I am sending you instead a portrait of the Octogenarian who has been worrying you for ages with his inquiries as to why he wore the White Horse of Hackney on his tin hat very nearly seventy years ago.

The photograph was taken by my daughter with my new self focussing Minolta camera. No, not self raising, that is flour and I ought to know I am my own cook and I should know !!

Yours as ever,

Eric Carter Braine

W. I.

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January 1st 1987

My dear Christopher,

One of my New Year Resolutions is to continue our strange correspondence, so here goes on the first morning of 1987. It is cold and wet on this ridiculous island and I feel if don't do something I may be tempted to go back to bed. I spent last week with my Daughter in Kent and while there I went with her to Great Dunmow in Essex to meet my two "Greats", now five and three.

The first of my two final installments for your history is the job I have given myself, it is the Battery Command Post. It was customary for a B.C. Post to be manned in trench warfare day and night by an officer and two signallers and it would be connected by telephone with the Adjutant at Brigade H.Q., the Battery's O.P. and possibly one or two of the adjacent batteries. One signaller manned the phone and the other was there to repair any of the telephone lines that might be put out of action by shell fire. The accepted procedure being to take the damaged line in his hand and walk along it until the break is found. It would take a matter of minutes to join up the two ends and return to the B.C. Post. The B.C. Post would probably be situated in a small dry dug out and it would contain a rough wooden table with a large scale map on it, also several small technical books called Range Tables. There would be bunks for officers. The duty Officers bunk be close to the table and the telephone. The off duty officers would sleep quite happily through the night oblivious of the noise created by the guns firing only a very few yards away. The duty officer wouldn't get much sleep!

At night the guns would be laid on the S.O.S. lines ie each gun aimed at a particular enemy battery as ordered by the Adjutant. This was to enable them to be fired with the very minimum of delay should the infantry call help. During

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daylight immediately a gun had completed engaging a target it was washed out and covered with camouflage cover to minimise the chance of the battery being spotted by an enemy aircraft. Strict control of tracks should be maintained in the battery position for the same reason

Generally speaking the B.C. Post was a busy spot by day and night. Message poured in from the O.P. and the Adjutant. Weather reports arrived frequently and they need to be decoded and the important information concerning the direction and velocity of the wind, the barometer reading and the temperature. I won't bore you with the details of the effect all these had on shells flying through the air to targets. I assure you with experience the average officer can make the calculations in a very short time. Let me add the amount of wear of each gun would be known and in addition proper allowance made. Calibration of guns by visual observation is most important and in 152 the job was done by me! Not to frighten you but to give you an example of what the officer in the B.C. Post had to do on say the arrival of a message by telephone from the Adjutant to fire so many rounds (generally about 20) on a German battery that was in action. There were numbers allotted by the Adjutant to the German batteries. The duty officer would first decide which gun he would employ and he would warn the No 1 of the gun to get ready. He would work out the range, the angle from aiming post, the height that the shell would on its way, estimate effect of the wind on the shell at two thirds of the height the shell would go and add the extra ~~yards~~ in yards that gun would require to offset the wear. The No 1 the angle from the Aiming Post and the number of yards to be set on the range drum on the gun. The officer if he was not too pressed might run over to check his orders had been carried out. But do please remember I am having to think all this out after Seventy sixty years of inactivity and I am probably wrong! I now recall I have not mentioned that this poor officer has also to pass on to the No1 what ammunition is to be used and that information requires much further thought. Shrapnel, High Explosive or Gas. They ~~all~~ fly differently and a reference to one of the Range Table

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January 3rd 1987

My dear Christopher,

On reading my letter of January 1st it occurred to me I have never explained the difference between a gun and a howitzer.

In both the First Canadian Heavy Brigade and the 84 th Heavey Brigade there were two 60 pounder batteries and six or eight howitzer batteries, which were known as Seige batteries---"6" "8" and "9.2" and they mechanical transport. The 60 pounders were horse drawn. (HAD)

The big difference being that the guns had a low trajectory and the howitzers "lobbed" their shells into the air. The howitzers were much more accurate and they were employed to destroy enemy gun positions or fortifications with the benefit of observation from the air.

I have been at the wrong end of both types and I can assure you the noise made by a shell from a gun of H.V. gun is terryifying and that is why 152 was employed most of the time shutting up active German batteries. Of course if our position was detected we gor special treatment. I am sure I have told you we got severely handled and had all six guns put out of action.

Yours as ever

ONCE

E.C.B.

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January 24th 1987

My dear Christopher,

Long before I imagined I would commence my final installment for the Tale of #52 you would be able to tell me why I wore the White Horse of Hackney on my tin hat but you have failed me. Now don't you try to assure me it was a gimmick produced by Horatio Bottomley to help him put over one of his recruiting speeches that he made from the steps of the Hackney Town Hall. I won't accept that!

Well this O.Pip is quite a simple one, there were no brain teasers there in the form of Range Tables. I enjoyed the role of Observer to that of the chap behind the desk in the B.C Post and I frequently swapped duties with my friends

It was the custom to set off to both the Battery and the Brigade O.P. at dawn carrying food, a Primus stove and a very heavy can of water. We hated having to take water with us for our tea making, we would much prefer using the water from the shell holes. And we did sometimes! The normal party consisted of a junior officer and two or three signallers. During very cold weather we might dare to have a very small fire on the bottom of the trench but only if we were convinced it didn't give away our position to the enemy. The hut we occupied was minute, generally dug into the side of the trench but the top must not be deeper than the trench or it would be seen by the enemy. The Observer peered through a slit at about the eye level of the ground in front and some rough camouflage was arranged over the top. In front of the Observer's head an instrument called a Director was screwed on to a ledge and it was used to measure the angle to things of interest such as enemy movement ^{flashes} or smoke from guns. Anything of importance was reported by telephone.

The Brigade O.P. would be manned day and night

by each battery in turn. Battery O.P. were usually manned during daylight hours.

As I explained in an earlier installment the work of calibrating each of our guns was my responsibility and naturally I did it when I was on O.P. Duty. It was my practice to chose a building behind the enemy lines that could be identified, and range on it. This job of establishing the amount of wear I found most interesting and rewarding. I recall doing this job when we were reasonably close to the town of Lens and I was delighted to work on a girl's school which was clearly marked on the map and had a large board outside with the school's name on it. When the 60 pounder first arrived in France it was assumed a barrel or piece as we called that part would have to be renewed after firing 1500 shells. Owing to a shortage of guns (and some spare parts having been lost crossing the Channel @) we had to keep some guns of ours in service up to I seem to remember until 4000. You will appreciate they had to be cocked up a bit towards the end. That should illustrate how important it was to celebrate!!

Now your letter dated January 14th has just arrived and as it contains some interesting questions I must change my plan and call this letter not Final but Penultimate!

I hope to start work on Final very soon, but not of course until you have told me you have received this one.

Yours as ever

J. M.

MERRIEWEATHERS
BALLURE ROAD
RAMSEY
ISLE OF MAN
TELEPHONE : RAMSEY 812533
(STD CODE 0624)

May 3rd 1987

Dear Christopher

Yes, it really is me and I am full of remorse for not having written you for so long. I popped your last two letters into my "Too difficult basket" and I am sorry to admit there they remained until yesterday when I came across a recently published book with the title "History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery Western Front 1914-1918 and I remembered your letters at the bottom of the said basket.

I am so sorry. I promise to turn the basket upside down one day soon and that will bring your letters to the top. To get my stripes back I will have to take drastic action. I trust you will do something for me and remember I am now in my ninetieth year--but like Johnnie Walker sill going strong!

Yours as ever

A handwritten signature, likely 'Johnnie Walker', written in dark ink. The signature is stylized and appears to be written over a horizontal line.