

Life in barracks

A typical day at Baird Barracks began at six o'clock in the morning; there would then be a parade for drill from 6.45 until 7.45 a.m., breakfast at eight, followed by inspection of quarters at 9.30 a.m. From 9.45 until 10.30 there was physical drill in the bungalow. The men were free until



5.30 p.m. when there was an hour's parade, and from 6.30 p.m. they could consider the day's work done. There were plenty of opportunities for sports. It was essential to keep fit and this was done by taking part in boxing, swimming, running and football matches. At seven o'clock every evening, Edgar would change into running clothes and sprint round the outside wall of the barracks, which was about a mile all round.

The Royal Army Temperance Association [R.A.T.A.], like the Y.M.C.A., had an institution in all the barracks in India. For a subscription of four annas, reading and writing material were provided, also concerts, games and social arrangements. Besides this, the Association ran a canteen, serving hot food at reasonable prices.

Edgar spent much time writing at one of the many tables arranged in rows in the Institute bungalow, for there he could write practically undisturbed. All around him would be fellows writing home to a background of the chink of billiard balls. It was here he came to do his drawing.

From the earliest letters, it is evident that Edgar was very interested in sketching. After being in India for only a few weeks, he wrote: 'I have been amusing myself with pencil at odd moments. There is plenty of material about and should get some good subjects. I wish I had a camera. I shall get one soon'.

He planned to buy one as soon as they were released from barracks. He also wanted to buy some oil paints.

Pen and pencil does not seem to satisfy with all the colour abounding.
Sunlight and blue shadow you know Dad.

The subject of art arose again a fortnight later:

I have spent most of my spare time sketching and you can imagine there are plenty of subjects, even in barracks, to keep me busy. I tried to get some oil colours but there were none to be bought, so will have to wait until a chum has his sent from England. Am longing to do some real colour work. The colour here is amazing.

The longing for oil paints became so urgent, that only a week later Edgar requested that his father send some out from England.

Now I do not want to put anyone to trouble or expense in asking for them to be sent out but had I the materials I could do some real live work. Now could you get together Dad, say, eight tubes of colour and together with three (quite enough) brushes and pack in a small box and post on. A half-pound tube flake white, a burnt sienna, cobalt blue, Prussian blue, yellow ochre, vermilion (or scarlet lake) Indian red, and chrome yellow. Can you do this for me, Dad?

Mail-day and pay-day were the events of the week.

At the appointed time the orderly room is besieged by an expectant crowd of chaps clamouring to know their luck. You should see the look on the recipient of a letter's face before and after. And those who have no letter – well I leave it to you to picture.



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