

Diary 1

1801 J W Morris
12 Batt Inf AIF

Star of England to Egypt
Derflinger to Lemnos
Franconia (Hos) to Egypt
Minniwaska to Lemnos
Andania (Hos) to Lemnos
Acquitainia (Hos) to England
Invictor to France.

No 1 1st Division

With the Australians

In France. Aug. 11th/16

On the morning of Tues. Aug 9th/ we learnt that we were to receive marching orders for the same night. The draft I was in had been formed since Saturday, & meanwhile we had been engaged in special training, bayonet fighting, musketry bombing etc. The order to move had been impatiently waited for, & was now hailed with satisfaction by us all. The 'fall in' sounded at the same time, & we were marched away for medical inspection. After passing the "MO" an iron ration for 24 hours was issued, also articles of clothing to those who required them. We were then dismissed & told to pack our kits etc, & be ready to fall in at 10 pm that night. All concerned settled down soberly to the business on hand Those of us who had seen previous active service were able to help the others in choosing the articles required. It was interesting to note the difference in the bearing of the men, the reinforcements who were going for the first time to the firing line, and the old-hands who were returning for the second or third time to the blood stained trenches where death forever walks by one's side. What were they thinking of those new men! There was a kind of quite [sic] excitement about them, as they tried to anticipate some-thing which their minds were not capable of. The old hands having been "through the mill" moved about with a calmness and unconcern which plainly showed that their feelings were under control & did not fluctuate at all.

When the time came to fall in all the boys were in gay spirits & any misgiving they had previously felt, were gone; for they had all been to the canteen to drink for the last the several healths of their rather too numerous friends! Some few there were whose "friends" must have been almost a company strong judging by the unhappy state of their legs! After much noise & many rounds of cheering we moved out on the road to the station at Sidworth. Just as the moon was setting, in the dead of night we said goodbye to Peckham downs. There was no one to see the men off, many of whom would never return. And like thieves in the night we crept away. On

board the train we settled ourselves [sic] as comfortably as possible and tried to sleep; but as the days of miracles are past our “comfort” did not reach a very high standard. However most of the boys soon seemed to be asleep, especially those whose friends had been numerous at the canteen and I managed to sleep on & off (mostly off)!

The troop train lived up to the best traditions of such things, & after 5¹/₂ hours journeying we arrived at Folkstone, just in time to see the sun rise over the sea which was very pretty. All the buildings houses etc facing the sea have been taken over by the War Office, and are used as rest houses for troops awaiting transportation etc. In one of these we had our breakfast. There are wash houses & all conveniences for the troops including a dry canteen & Y.M.C.A. At 9 am we went on board. There were two transports & about 3,000 soldiers Tommies, Scott NZ & Aus'. Boulogne was reached at 11.45, & we stepped [sic] for the first time on French soil. We were greeted by dozens of kids & old women with baskets of fruit & sweets etc, who at once tried to sell their wares at an exorbitant price. The impression thus given was far from favorable, for it reminded us of Egypt & other Eastern countries. That is one thing we never meet with in England which places the old country so far ahead of other places. There we were never harassed [sic] with dozens of miser-able children trying to sell us things on the railway stations & such like places.

From the pier we had a refreshing march of about three miles to a rest camp. We went through a wretched portion of the town & the streets were dirty & very offensive to the nostrils. A high steep hill had to be climbed, & we were ever so glad when the camp was reached. After a meal of bread, jam bully-beef & cheese & tea we promptly went to sleep.

At 5 pm I & another sergeant went into town with a picquet of 20 men to bring home any of our boys who had broken out of camp. We were all glad of opportunity thus afforded of seeing the sights of Boulogne. But as was soon proved the sense of smell was of greater use & more frequently appealed [sic] to than the sense of sight. The streets were narrow, & the gutters full of a slowly moving black slime, the stench arising there from was horrible.

We found a few of the lads about the streets; but they were perfectly quite [sic] & orderly, & about 8 pm they started to return to camp. An officer was in charge of the picquet. When the time came to return, he was not at the place appointed, so I took the picquet home, & the other srgt waited for the officer in command, he was nearer drunk than any of the privates in town! So much for officers.

We moved off next morning & marched to the railway station. We were squeezed into dirty trucks & after the usual delay, which seems to be part & parcel of all military movements, we got away. The train was the longest one I have ever seen, being fully 440 yds in length.

After a slow bumpy journey of about two hours we reached our destination Etaples. We were near the sea, & the country was all sand dunes a dreary looking place. We were marched in

single file through a large building where we were given rifles. The rifles were handed out with great despatch, quite the fastest thing I have seen done in the army. After that we marched along the sand for about two miles, & camp & came to H.Q., 1st A.D.B D., were [sic] there was another weary wait with the heavy packs biting into our shoulders. After a time some officers appeared. A consultation was held, & then we were inspected, & asked a lot of foolish questions, as to whether we were short of anything or not etc. Had we been short nothing would have been given us then, & all the time we had to stand to attention! Officers are fools!

Off again through another half mile of soft sand, & up a hill to our camp at last! We were soon put into tents, & after a scratch meal we promptly went to sleep. During the afternoon we got one blanket each.

Next morning we were taken for a good route march. Next morning we entered the “bull ring”. The “bull ring” is a special training ground, a terror to all the lazy chaps. Then we had drill, open order work trench work & bayonet fighting under special instructors. There was no smoke-O-, or rest. At 1 pm camp was reach, & we were tired & hungry. Being Sunday we had the afternoon off!

This morning we went to the range, & this afternoon did fatigue work.

14.8.16. The railway just by our camp is the busiest line I have ever seen. It is a double tracked line, one way leading to Ypres, & the other to the Somme. The trains average 100 daily each way!

I left England for active service again in France on the 10th Aug. just exactly 12 months to the day that I left Gallopli [sic] wounded! Rather a funny coincidence I thought.

15.8.16 We went to the “bull ring” at 7.30 am, & worked without a rest until 12 30. But it was an easy morning, for we had bomb-throwing, demonstration & lecture on gas. In the afternoon route march. At night I got a pass & went with a friend to the local town of Etaples. It is rather disgusting place, dirty narrow cobble stone streets, & the gutters running with a stinking black slime. The people seem to throw all the household slops & dirty water into the streets! Fishing seems to be one of the chief industries, & the fisher fold [sic] appeared to be shockingly poor. Most noticable [sic] were the numbers of ragged hagged old women, many of whom are scarsely [sic] human in shape & appearance. For the most part they are fat & ungainly. And their care-worn, wrinkled weary faces, with an expression of dumb patience, gave eloquent if silent testimony of the hard struggle life was to them. Many of these poor old creatures can be seen daily on the roads ploding [sic] wearily along bent double under huge bundles of sticks & brushwood collected in the woods & along the road side. There are many such pitiful sights to be seen about here. It is hard to believe that these people are whites, for their conditions of living seem little better than the nation of Egypt & other countries. No doubt the war has caused these unfortunate people new sufferings; but judging by their houses & other conditions,

poverty has always been their lot, & their standard of living far below our own, they seem resigned to their fate, and well they might be, for there seems to be no hope of rising above it.

16.8.16. A hard morning at the “bull ring”, & a route march this afternoon concluded an uneventful day. No mail from England yet. Another draft arrived from Peckham Downs. We have had three days incessant wind, which blew the dust everywhere, & into into [sic] everything. It is funny that we Aus’ always seem to get put in the sand if there is any to be found!

17.8.16. Had a fairly easy day. Bull ring of course this morning as usual. But this afternoon we did nothing, beyond falling in to listen to the proceedings of a court-martial. I received one letter from England.

18.8.16. Had another fairly easy day. Bull ring this morning as usual, but the work was tempered by a lecture which gave us a good rest. This afternoon about 100 of us were taken for a hot bath near Etaples¹, we were told to bring any clothes we had to be washed. About 30 did this, & on arrival at the place, we found that there was no hot bath to be had accomidation [sic] for washing only being provided! So those of us who had brought dirty shirts etc, washed them the others sat down & waited for us, when finished we marched home again sadder but wiser men! With a greater insight into the muddling methods of the army!

19.8.16. “Bull-ring” all the morning, & being Saturday we had the afternoon off. The officers arranged some sports, which were rather good, & amused the boys all the afternoon. At dinner time I found four letters waiting for me, three from home. At about 8 pm. we received orders to the effect that we were to proceed to the firing line at midday tomorrow Sunday.

20.8.16. Sunday. All the morning was spent in getting ready for the front. We were issued with 120 rounds of ammunition each, another gas helmet making two, one pair goggles for tear shells, field dressing, tube of iodine, and any shortages we required in the way of clothing etc. Finally at 1.15 we fell in to move off. We had been inspected during the morning by the Major in charge of the Divisional Base. We had to stand to attention all the time while he went slowly along the line & asked each man careful whether he had everything, naming separately the various articles he should take with him, just as tho’ we were all little children. If he had heard the muttered curses, he would have known that there were at least a few men among us! After that ordeal we were allowed half an hour for dinner! At about 1.30 p.m. we moved off, & were met by the band which played us into the station. There we were cheered by the sight of a long train of trucks which were to convey us to the firing line. After waiting for sometime we got into the trucks & got nicely settled, when we were all moved out again. We crowded into the other three trucks occupied by the 12th Batt making about 35 men to each truck! I was more fortunate by getting into the truck where our rations were This was not so crowded. After the

¹ French town on coast which was a major Allied centre during World War 1 with railhead and numerous hospitals.

usual wait of about two hours the trains started with several heavy bumps. These French trains are the slowest I have ever seen. Our train was no exception, & we crept along at about five miles an hour. The sandy wastes were soon left behind & we came into very beautiful country. Abbyville² was reached in about two hours. This is a most lovely part, and the scenery called forth many expressions of delight from the boys. A pretty river Somme skirted the railway with rows of tall trees on either banks. Across the river the land was flat for upwards of a mile & then rose in a gentle slope. Harvest was in full swing & all the land looked just like a garden. The scene was prettier than anything of the same nature I had seen in England. Every inch of land was cultivated, & the golden corn fields were intersected with bands of green crops & strips of harvested grain with the sheaves stood up in rows, the scene was an ever varied & lovely one stretching as far as the eye could reach. There were no hedges, & fewer trees than in England which allowed one to see for miles. We travelled thus until dark.

The train crept along at the same snails pace with frequent long stops. The journey was getting monotonous, [sic] & as the the [sic] night was cold, we had no blankets & were too crowded to lie down. At 2 am **21.8.16** we reached a big siding where the train was to be altered & re made up, after a wait of two hours we again moved off!

We had breakfast as well as we could, opening up the rations & issuing them to the different trucks every time the train stopped, which of course was frequent! We got a drink of tea by going to the engine driver for hot water!

After journeying wearily all the morning we left the train, at a siding at 11.30, after about 20 hours in the trucks. I suppose we had travelled in all about 100 miles! After a march of an hour we came to a rest camp where [sic] we soon settled down. The occasional roar of a big gun could be heard which made the boys sit up.

22.8.16 We rested for the day & night. At 9 am we moved off. Our packs were taken by the transport which was a great relief [sic] to us; but the waggons [sic] were only going half way to a place called Warloy.³ We had a 14 mile march that day to Albert which was our destination, & we had to carry our packs the last 6 miles. Warloy was reached without undue fatigue, we rested here for dinner, and were able to purchase some wine & ale. After dinner we strapped up our packs, & set out for the 6 miles to Albert. The “full marching order”, with 120 rounds of ammunition, water & rations, makes an awful load, as we found to our cost long before reaching Albert!

On the way several battalions of the 2nd Div. A.I.F. passed us on their [way] to the firing line near Pozieres. The 12th Batt was to be relieved that night & we were to meet them at their bivouac near Albert. At about 5 pm. the famous tower of the Albert Cathedral [sic] came into view. This

² Abbeville - a town on the Somme River about 12kms from the coast.

³ Warloy-Baillon – a town 21 kms north east of Amiens

tower is remarkable for the extraordinary effect the Hun shells have had upon it. On top of the tower is a beautiful image of the Virgin Mary weighing it is said 20 tons. The base of this has been struck by a Hun shell, & the once lovely structure is now a total wreck leaning over at an angle of about 55%. There it hangs in mid air in a most mournful attitude, a mute but eloquent testimony to the brutal & savage methods of the Hun. All who view this trully [sic] extraordinary sight are moved with a strong sense of disgust against a foe so cowardly as to do such things in the evident hope of cowering their opponents. As we came down the hill, the flat before us present a most animated scene, there all the ramifications of war were exhibited in active operation. There were lines & lines of transports, battalions in bivouac ambulances, field batteries stores etc. etc. It was a grand sight, a peep behind the scenes at the theatre of war.

All the troops were in bivouac on the open ground. We were taken to our battalion bivouac, and allotted a space. With our great coats & water-proof sheet each we lay down & endeavoured to make ourselves comfortable

I dosed for about an hour but the night was far too cold for me to sleep under the existing conditions, and I was forced to get up & walk about to get warm. At one end of the billet area I spied the fitful flare of a small fire, so I went round that way. I found a man boiling some water to make tea for the officers when they should arrive from the trenches. I spent most of the time by this fire until daylight. The actual firing line was about six miles distant, & the men were not expected in until near daylight. A heavy bombardment was taking place, at the trenches, & it was anticipated that the men would experience great difficulty in getting out, even after being relieved [sic].

23.8.16 At about midnight, the first lot of men arrived under an officer, & from then on until well after day light the others came straggling in in small parties, & twos & threes. The men were utterly worn out as could be seen by their haggard faces & shambling walk. So soon as the billet ground was reached they sank to the ground & slept. The men's packs were placed out ready for them, so that they could get their over coats at once. They had been in the trenches three days, & on the second night, had taken a line of trenches, & advanced a few hundred yards. The trenches were taken without resistance, the Huns ran at once. But the bombardment which followed was awful, & the trenches were leveled [sic] to the ground. This is always the case, & men are little better than cannon-fodder. It is a war of artillery & nothing else, except perhaps bombs & machine guns. All the ground for miles around Pozieres is pounded into dust, & pitted with great shell holes, many large enough to hold 50 men! The morning I spent in looking up old mates in the battalion, all of whom I am thankful to say were safe & sound.

23.8.16 We rested until 3 p.m., when we moved out in full marching order with packs. Warloy was our destination 6 miles distant, & the road was rough. On arrival we were billeted in old houses & barns [sic] etc. I had some straw to sleep on in a corner, & made myself fairly comfortable. The houses for the most part are built with wooden frame filled in with a kind of plaster make [sic] of clay & straw. All the places are most horribly dirty, & in the yard of each

house is a stinking cess pool where all the dirt & refuse is thrown! The villages are inhabited by peasant people, & the buildings are built on a square principle, barn stable, fowl run, pig-stye, [sic], calf house, dairy & house facing opposite each other with the yard in the middle In the morning **24.8.16** the transports took our packs & we faced a 15 mile march with a cheerful heart. At 8 am we set out, at mid day we past the rest camp that we went to on the 21st. All the men were weary & many of them foot sore; but no one droped [sic] out, & we reached our billets at 4 p.m, in the town of Beauval⁴. Beauval is a fair sized town, with some very nice houses, & a fine large church. Our billets were as usual – so ‘nuff said. The barn where I was had a number of bunks rigged up three teirs [sic] high made of fowl wire, or mesh wire. Most of them were badly broken & we had to use up all our straps & string etc mending them! After tea I went out with my friend Spot, & we had a nice big bottle of champagne (6 francs)

A soldiers life is one of extremes. One night he sleeps in a foul den & lives like a dog, the next he goes out & makes merry on the fat of the land washed down with champagne!

25.8.16 Next day we rested. An advance party moved off to the station at 4.p.m. & we received orders to follow early in the morning. During the afternoon I went around the town, and seeing that the church was a fine building I went in. The decorations were in keeping with all Roman Catholic churches, & I admired the interior very much.

During the night we were disturbed three times by different details coming into our billets. All stragglers etc, & some new arrivals were sent to our billets because there was room, owing to the advance party have gone out earlier.

26.8.16 At 4.30 we were roused out, breakfast at 5.30., and fall in at 6.45. At 7 am we marched out in full order. The station was about 4 miles distant where we were to intrain. Coming into the town we passed through a lovely double avenue off [sic] Horse-Chessnuts [sic] about a mile long Doullens is the town where we take our train. On arrival at the station we were cheered by the sight of a long train of trucks waiting for us. The trucks we found had carried horses the day before, & they had not been cleaned out!

At about 9 am we were on the move. It was rather a cold day & the wind blew a gale through the open doors of the truck. I undid my water-proof & t blanket, & gathering some straw & using my pack as a pillow I made myself comfortable & was very soon in the “Land of Nod” The soldiers bliss! I enjoyed a good three hours sleep, before the cravings of the inner man caused me to wake. After a frugal meal of biscuits & bully I again sought my couch as being the best means of passing the time until our destination should be reached. But I could not sleep much during the afternoon, & all there was left for me to do was to look drearily out on the passing country. However the scenery was very nice even lovely as I have stated before in this book. The agriculture of this part of the country is marvelous [sic], England is completly [sic] out striped,

⁴ Probably Beauval, a town situated on the Somme approximately 25kms north of Amiens

for mile on mile all the afternoon as far as the eye could reach there stretched small fields of grain golden wheat light brown oats, brown barley intersected with strips of green crops such as turnips, beets, marigolds clover etc. Some of the grain was harvested & there were sections or fields cut, with the sheaves stood up in straight rows giving a wonderful picturesque variety to the Landscape. There were no fences, ditches, or hedges dividing the farms or holdings, which is a novelty rather pleasing than otherwise after England.

At about 4.30 p.m after 7^{1/2} hours in the horse trucks we dis-entrained at a siding adjoining [sic] the town of Proven⁵ in Belgium! Sure ours is a life of change & variety we never stay long in one place! Here we learnt there was a march of 5 miles to do to our billets. We were soon on the tramp fully loaded & did the distance with one stop. Our billets were in the good sized town of Poperinghe⁶.

This was the best town I had been in since coming to France Boulogne of course excepted. The stone flagged streets were clean & fairly wide, & the centre of the town is marked by a spacious square. Several fine big churches were conspicuous land marks. Poperinghe is within range of the German guns, & evidence of the fact could be plainly see [sic] in sundry demolished houses rows of broken windows & gaping holes in prominent [sic] church corners etc. Also dozens of shapernal [sic] marks were showing on the fronts of the buildings. We were billeted in a large building near the square. The back part of the house was damaged by shell & all the windows were completely smashed.

We were well pleased with ourselves & comfortable, for the billets were the best we had yet been in. After the strenous [sic] time of long marches & hard fighting which had been our portion since The “Big Push” began, we looked forward to a week or so’s rest in these pleasant surroundings. As last pay day was more than a fortnight past the boys not unnaturally expect to get some money as well. I had just got nicely settled down in our room when the C.S.M. came along & told me I was for guard at H.Q. right away. I thanked him with as little sarcasm [sic] as possible, & putting [sic] on my equipment, & taking my rifle I proceeded to my duty.

Coming into the town the roan on one side was lined with little Belgian cottages newly built. They were of wooden frame & the usual straw plaster & thached [sic] roof. There were very pretty, neat & clean & painted in picturesque style in colors of white or brown, with the little windows & doors picked out in green or dark red. Some of the cottages had a black painted band at the ground line about two ft wide on all sides, this served to show up the white windows to their best.

27.8.16 Sunday. This was completely a day of rest & we all enjoyed it to the full. In the evening after being relieved [sic] from guard I went for a stroll around the town The flag-stone streets

⁵ Small town about 16kms west of Ypres

⁶ About 11kms west of Ypres. Poperinghe was a major Allied military centre during World War 1.

were very clean, but presented rather a rough appearance. Most of the people were well dressed, & seemed to be in comfortable circumstances, & I noticed some nice looking girls. Inns & drinking saloons were very numerous & of course mostly full of soldiers. The town holds thousands of troops which is of course very good for trade in general

28.8.16. At 9 am we fell in & marched out into the fields where we had to do drill, rifle exercises, & musketry After dinner I went to a lecture on gas, which was very interesting, because I could lay down all the time!

All the boys were greatly disappointed regarding pay, as no word had been received as to when we were going to get any.

29.8.16. We learnt this morning to our hearty disgust that we were to move again at 1 pm! Gone were our fond hopes of a rest, & vanished our dreams of an enjoyable time in our comfortable billets like morning mist before the sun! After dinner we packed up with a heavy heart & fell in at 12.45. One o'clock found us wearily [sic] plodding along under the same old load. We had about five miles to go, & did the distance in one stop

As we went along we could the guns heard sounding louder & louder which told us that we were going towards the firing line at Ypres.

Our destination was the small village of Reningchelst⁷ about 4 miles behind the firing line.

Our billets consisted of miserable huts. These were built with a roof & a floor, no walls at all, which meant that we could only stand upright in the centre. Rain came on heavily, & the roof of our hut soon leaked in 20 different places. Some of the men found room in a stable close by, which relieved the rest of us considerably & allowed us to dodge the drips somewhat as at first the hut was crowded.

During the night there were two gas alarms, and the rain coming on again some of the men got wet through as they lay. I was lucky in finding a fairly dry spot to sleep in.

30.8.16: The day is wet & miserable, but too wet for drill. Lots of Canadains⁸ [sic] are billet around about us, & we will relieved [sic] them later on in the trenches.

This is the home of gas attacks & this morning we had a lecture thereon.

The chief topic of conversation among the boys is pay, it is nearly three weeks now since last pay day & we are all on the rocks. I have a few franks left; but most of the boys are quite

⁴ About 8kms south west of Ypres

⁵ Canadians

“broke”. Every morning so soon as we are awake, someone asks “are we going to be paid today”! It is quite the burning question of the hour.

The rain is getting lighter, & we are looking forward to a dry sleep tonight.

31.8.16. Today is fine & the sun shines again The rain stopped [sic] before dark last night which pleased us rather. This morning we went for a short march, & did a little drill in a stubble field by the roadside. This afternoon we did bayonet fighting & drill until 4 p.m. Still no pay & the rations are not too good ¼ loaf of bread per man 1 small tin of jam to 6 men no butter, small piece of cheese per man, plenty of “bully” & generally a fresh meat stew for one meal every other day. In addition there are army biscuits. Got some letters this afternoon. Had an issue of rum this evening. There are rumours of us moving again in a day or so!

1.9.16 A fine bright morning, fall in at 9.a.m, drill order. We spent the morning at the usual old drill. After dinner we were taken for a march, & on returning to camp at 3.30, we were delighted to find pay in full swing. It seemed to [sic] good to be true after having heard the cry of “Wolf” so many times.

So soon as I had drawn my money I went down to the village with a mate in search of a meal. Oh the joy of anticipating a good square meal of fresh food nicely cooked. There are no regular eating houses in the village. But a number of the cottagers cater in a small way for the hungry troops. And to one of these we went & had fried eggs (4 each) bread & butter & coffee, & it was fine. After that we went across the road & had a bottle of champagne! [sic] Then we took a walk through the village, & returned latter [sic] on for another bottle of champagne. [sic] When that was finished it was closing up time, so we went to the Y.M.C.A & listened to a concert which was in progress there. After two or three items we re-traced our steps & returned to camp.

All the boys were happy, some had more happiness with them than they could properly look after! And they were making grotesque attempts to maintain their balance! At length we settled down in our huts. The confusion in my hut was tremendous. Blankets, over-coats [sic] equipment etc all over the place, in the centre of the hut half a dozen men were playing cards by the fitful light of two candles, further on another party were gambling with a Crown & Anchor board. Several men about the place were eating bread & jam, tin fish etc, & arguing about something that happened at home long ago. Some few were too happy to stand up properly, & moved about with a series of wild plunges, which added a touch of excitement [sic] to the scene, for one had to keep a watchful eye on the movement of these few fellows. There was no prospect of sleep for at least an hour. But still it was a great night & we were all sufficiently happy not to notice such trifles. Pay day does not often come & the general routine is often upset a little on that momentous day. Luckily the wind is not favourably for gas, so there will not be an alarm. At last the place is quite [sic] at about 10.30 pm & I am dropping off to sleep.

2.9.16 At 6 am next morning our hut was a sight to see. Men were lying everywhere in all

manner of positions all over the floor, some with a two blankets & others with none. The morning after the night before. It presented many object lessons! Pay day always brings troubles in its wake for the troops!

Before breakfast orders were given to be ready to march out at 10 am. On the move once more. But we are not going far. At 8 a m I was to [sic] ordered to fall in at once with all my gear on my poor old back, to go to some gas lecture. Luckily I was nearly ready. There were several of us & two officers. About half a mile out we met the Colonel he was evidently going to the lecture also. Not having anything beyond a gas helmet to carry he made the pace a cracker, & we were soon bathed in perspiration [sic]. To make matter [sic] worse he missed the direction & took us about an hour further than necessary! All the time at a break neck pace. How we cursed him & the gas school! At last we arrived & were able [sic] to drop our packs. We were given a very interesting lecture & demonstration on the new box gas helmet. At 12.30 we put on our packs again & set out again to rejoin the battalion

After about an hour we found the boys in a new camp much better than the previous one. None of the huts leaked, & they were higher than the others.

Being Saturday after-noon there was a football match between A & B boys, so I enjoyed a good rest & wrote some letters home. In the evening we went out to a picture show at the Y.M.C.A.

3.9.16 Sunday. I have just been warned that I am for guard with three men at Div. H.Q for three days. We are to leave in full marching order. I am told about the direction, & we start at 9.45. After inquiring once or twice the way, & a rest by the road side we finally arrived at 11.30 rather weary. There are dozens of Staff officers doting [sic] about & colonels & generals; but it is an easy guard & the tucker supplied by the cook-house is good, so I think it will be alright. The staff officers seem to have a good time of it & live on everything good. They have comfortable quarters & a nice mess just opposite us. They are having dinner & their after dinner cigar now, & listening to strain of a very nice gramophone! Such is war – to them, & I expect they would be sorry if peace were suddenly declared. War is an unequal thing, there is nothing even or fair about it. Here are these men who live well behind in comfortable quarters eat of the best, & sleep in beds, actual beds, Ye Gods, They visit the trenches sometimes, but don't stay there. Compare them with the thousands who are continually running the awful risk, & again & again expose their bodies to the taring [sic] iron hail. The men & officers of the service battalions for me every time. Staffs & staff officers we must have; but give the kudos to those who stand up to the hell of actual fighting. The gay laughter coming from the mess almost almost [sic] drowns the hard "crump" of an occasional heavy German shell which heralds the death or mutilation of some one or more of our fighting men up in the grim firing line.

4.9.16. I was cold last night in bed, & did not sleep too well. The weather has changed & today wet & cold, we are getting a taste of winter, how I am going to live through the cold weather † in the trenches I don't know. I spent the day in writing letters & reading; but it is rather dreary

here. There is no where to go & even so, I could not be away for long. There are the pubs close at hand where one can get a glass of wine in the evening.

Just down the road a little way there is a threshing machine at work in a field. There are about **25** hands at work mostly women, and I have been amusing myself watching them for awhile [sic] this afternoon. The machine is a slow old fashioned ramshackle affair, & they have been all day on one stack & it is little more than half finished now!

At 6 pm there was a very heavy down-pour of rain, & we are going to have a miserable night.

5.9.16. I managed to sleep warm last night. It is still wet & cold today & I have not been able to go out anywhere. This afternoon I sent one of the boys on a bike down to the battalion, to get the mail & see what news there was about moving. He returned with no news & no mail. I have sown [sic] my blanket up & made a sleeping bag out of it.

This afternoon “Fritz” has been dropping some [indecipherable] shells into Poperinghe the church spires of which can be plainly seen from here. I don’t know when we are to be relieved from this guard, I am getting rather tired of it, altho’ it is better than drilling in the rain. This a dull country nowhere to go, nothing to do & nothing to see.

6 .9.16. Today has been beautifully fine, & the place is drying up. The ground here seems to turn into mud very rapidly. I am getting fat & lazy at this job. One of the boys went down to the battalion, & got the mail, but there was nothing for me, he brought back my high boots. The camp is all mud, & we are not being relieved yet which is just as well. Tomorrow is pay day & we are getting ours here.

The barmaids in the public houses about here & also many of the shops are a course foul mouthed crew. They can all speak English & swear most horribly. One girl in a pub near by is rather nice looking; but she is almost the only passable one I have seen. Yesterday I saw two nice looking girls driving along in a trap They stoped [sic] outside the hotel just by our gate & waited while the old woman went in & had a drink! Most of the girls are coarse & fat they would measure more round the chest than the average man, & judging by their arms I would not like one of them to box my ears! But the Belgain [sic] people are rather hospitable & kind to us. The old lady of the hotel always brings a drink of coffee out to the sentry at night & again early in the morning.

7.9.16 Another beautiful day. I loitered away the time & wrote a letter. During the afternoon I went out for a walk with one of the boys. We went along a quiet by-road, & came to several refugee houses, quaint pretty little places, ever so small with thatched roofs, each with a name. I stoped [sic] to look at the smallest one arrested by the name “Villa De Australia” It was a tiny place with walls as well a roof of straight neat thatch & two pretty, long narrow windows which swung open like doors. Sitting in the door way was a nice looking young Belgain [sic] woman she

was picking hops, & had her little child by her side. She spoke to us in good English & we went to the door & talked to her. She was not at all shy & invited us sit down inside; but the room seemed too tiny, & I liked to look at it from the doorway. She told us her husband was in the trenches, & sometimes came home on leave. They had formerly lived near Ypres, but had been forced to abandon their home on account of the Hun, she told us with a smile. She seemed as happy as a sand-boy, in her two tiny rooms so simply furnished. Truly I thought this is love in a cottage, & people who could live on & smile under such circumstances were worthy of help. I was greatly pleased with the simple picture of contentment that she presented in her little home so frail & neat.

8.9.16. Another lovely day. I have lazed the time away; but there is one event I must record -I had a bath! Ye Gods! Yes a bath, with hot water too. One of the waiters in the officers mess fixed it for me. He got me a canvas tub, & the water from the kitchen. It was just just [sic] lovely & I feel ever so comfortable now. It is just a month since my last bath, which was at Pecham [sic] Downs, Eng.

Today was pay day, & we got ours here with the Div' Staff, quite handy for us.

9.9.16. There was a gas alarm last night at about 8.30, which caused much excitement among The Staff. Some Colonel gave orders that helmets were to be worn, or else some nervous person credited him with the order. We are about 7 miles behind the line & if gas is going to be so dangerous to us here, it will certainly kill two thirds of us when we go into the trenches! The authorities make too much fuss over it at this distance. New troops would get badly scared. On making inquiries I find the civilians living living [sic] round about have no helmets, & they have never been harmed, nor do they fear it.

The sun has shone brightly all day, & the nights are now moonlight. This afternoon there was a heavy bombardment in the line.

10.9.16 The weather is on the change, today has [sic] dull & cloudy. I had quite a nice bunch of mail, one of the boys went down to the batt & got it. There were four letters for me. There is no sign yet of a relief coming for us, I don't mind how long they stop away either, because this is a good job, the food is of a more liberal nature & we get dainty tit-bits from the mess kitchen. There is a rumour among the boys that we are to be relieved [sic] next month & the 1st Div is going to England for a rest!! Too good to be true I think! I often go out & talk with the Belgain [sic] women in the little refugee cottages, which adorn the roadside where ever we go. They are pretty neat little places & some are ever so tiny. All these people in the early part of the war had to abandon their homes & fly before the advancing Huns. Their courage & fortitude[sic] is wonderful, & they calmly wait the time when they shall be able to return in peace & rebuild their homes. May God grant their silent prayer[?]

11.9.16. Today is dull & quiet, but no rain has fallen yet. I have been busy writing letters, and

have not finished yet.

12.9.16 The weather has turned out fine again without any rain. This morning early a flight of aeroplanes went over on their way to cross the line, it is a fine sight to see a dozen or so of these of these [sic] great birds in the air together. I went for a walk this morning and again after dinner, also wrote a letter & read a magazine, now I am going out for another stroll in the glooming. There is not much to do here all day, but rest, I must be getting fat. I think, will soon lose it I guess when the time comes!

13.9.16. Nothing doing today. I sent a man down to the batt' for mail, he arrived just in time to see the batt' marching out the way to the trenches. Of course all the mail went with them. I expect we will be relieved [sic] tomorrow by the 1st Brigade who are coming out of the trenches today, relieved [sic] by the 3rd. This afternoon I borrowed a pair of trousers, & put mine through the wash, along with my shirt & sox.

14.9.16. The relief has arrived 10. a.m. My clean clothes are a treat, but the trousers are still wet in places! But that is only a trifle. We are to go to the reinforcements camp at the Gas School, & will go from there to the batt in the trenches. Arrived at the camp in time for dinner, & a good a good [sic] meal it was too. Nothing to do all afternoon so we went for a stroll. During the evening there were some heavy showers, & the night was very cold. But we were 12 in the tent, so the cold did not trouble us, for good reason, because we were packed like sardines! A number of reinforcements came in at 3.30. pm.

15.9.16. A fine bright day but with a decided 'nip' in the wind. After doing nothing all the morning, we are told to be ready to move off a [sic] 2.15. The reinforcements were put through the gas this morning. We moved off at about 3 o'clock and arrived at our destination Halifax Camp at 5 pm. It was good to be back with the boys again And I found two letters waiting for me. We are much nearer the firing line here, & there are some battries [sic] of heavy guns close at hand. After tea I went for a stroll with Percy Mawson, a little way along the road there is a destroyed village, but we were not allowed to go into it, we could see the effect of the shells from the roadside quite well, however.

16.9.16. I slept well last [night] and during the morning we were sent to the Div Baths close by for a bath. The baths are a rough & ready concern the water which is hot sprays out from a tiny rose over head about the size of a half crown, there is a tub placed under each one, & two men share one shower! About three minutes is allowed, & then water is turned off. Just as well perhaps that we canot [sic] take too much of the dirt off at once, for then some of us might catch cold.

During the afternoon there was a football match (Australian rules) between 'A & D' boys. I was foolish enough to allow myself to be persuaded to play, & I am sure I shall be sorry tomorrow, for I have not played a game for about four years!

It was a good close game & we (A Coy) won by 4 points. I found myself badly out of condition & am now very sore & tired.

17.9.16. Last night was cold, & at about 2 in the morning, the Huns trained a gun on the camp & fired about 6 shots. The shells fell in a field just behind a stable of mules about 3000 yds away. Afterwards there was a gas alarm.

18.9.16 This morning Sunday, is nice & fine. I went to have a look where the shells fell. The holes are about 10 ft across & 6 ft deep! This morning the line seems quiet. I have often noticed that the quietest part of the day is the morning after sun rise. The warm rays of the sun, & the peaceful, quiet feeling that the morning always seems to impart, appears not to be without its effect even upon warring nations closely engaged in their deadly work. This morning then was another football match between B Coy & H.Q. bombers pomeers etc [?] This afternoon some boxing matches are to be decided

19.9.16 A real wet day, too much rain even for parade! So I spent the day writing letters. In the evening I went to see a mate or rather friend in the Engineers.

20.9.16 All the place is wet & muddy, so we were taken for a route march by way of a change! We went about 7 miles at a brisk pace. After dinner we were told to get ready to move out at top march. To pack our packs, & leave them behind taking our waterproof, equipment, & rifle, fighting order. We had to go straight to the firing line, & do fatigue work during the night. When finished we were to return some distance & camp in big dug outs built of sand bags.

We started at 6.10 pm, & after two hours marching we had left Ypres behind & were nearly there. After waiting for a half hour, we moved on again, & soon came to a communication trench running off from the road to the left.

After about 20 minutes we came out into an old railway track, which had boards leading up to the line, we went along this & of course soon found that we were wrong! About turn, then sit down. In about 20 minutes back came the officer & told us our job was ready. A party had been told off, at the dump down the road & they had brought a truck load of explosive in large tins, the truck was pushed up the railway referred to & where we were sitting. These had to be carried up into the support trenches and stacked. We soon got away with the first load, & the truck was pushed back for another load. We had to wait for 2 hours in the wet & cold before that truck came back. There was mud & water everywhere, & a couple of showers sprinkled & refreshed us! At mid night the truck arrived & another one close behind. We set to work again and where [sic] finished at 1.30 am. We started for camp & after passing through Ypres, we arrived at a smashed farm house at 4 am. Here we were given our packs & taken to our dug-outs. The floor ours was wet, & the rats had made holes through the sand bag walls covering the floor in places with mud. But we were quite worn out having walked about 18 miles that day

besides doing the fatigue work. So we soon settled down & had a bite of bread & bully, & took off our wet clothes. I was in bed at 5.30 a.m, & was soon sound asleep. I woke up at 8.30, & had a drink of tea, & then slept until 12.30.

The day being wet & showery we have rested all the while, & now feel much better. We will do this every night for 6 nights & then we go up into close support.

22.9.16 Today is fine & the sun is shining nice & warm, & we need old Sol's help to dry the place up. We have all been at work today, cleaning draining our billets. We will be quite comfortable if the weather is at all decent, but Belgium is a very wet place. The dug-outs are well within gun range and there are marks left by shells, great holes in the ground, & trees smashed & chopped about. There is not a single solitary farm house or building that has not been hit, & most of them are smashed beyond hope of repair. No civilians are to be seen, & the country is desolate and dreary, & all the fields are covered with thick high grass, & shell holes, smashed trees, & tumble down houses arrest the gaze on every hand. There are no cattle to be seen in the fields, & the whole place is neglected.

Near Ypres there are the remains of some lovely homes standing in fine large grounds. Ypres is quite a city in extent, & there are the remains [?] grand buildings exclusive of churches, which later are of that magnificent order peculiar [sic] to Catholic countries. The churches are utterly smashed, only odd bits of wall left standing. There is one street only where the houses are not completely smashed. Just entering the town we passed a grand pile of buildings used prior to the war as a lunatic asylum, this is in complete ruins, on our return to camp we stoped [sic] there for a rest, & I went inside through the one time grand entrance hall, in a moment or two I came to a small court yard in the centre of which was the largest single shell hole I have ever seen, it was fully 20 yds long by 15 yds across the dept [sic] I could not judge because the hole was half full of water; it was oval shaped, & even.

23.9.16. I enjoyed a good nights sleep as we did not go to the trenches last night. We spent the day in improving our dug outs putting down duck-boards & making drains etc. At 8 pm we fell in to go to the line again, we got out on to the Ypres road just in time to catch all the transport traffic going up to the line. The noise could be heard long before the road was reached, there were columns & columns of transport mostly horse or rather mule. The organisation of our armie[sic] is marvelous,[sic] & when one is in active co-operation & in conjunction with the various units the bewildering ramifications & control is absolutely astounding. After a two hour tramp we reached the forward "dump" & were soon each on our way to the trenches slipping & plunging about over the uneven muddy track. The track had a trench running long side to get into in case of bullets, it lead to a rail road destroyed of course which in turn led up to the dump in the trenches.

A double row of duck-boards were laid along the railway bed. This board track slippery & lined on each side with water filled shell-holes, waiting with horrible patience to receive the unlucky

carrier, load & all who should make a miss step, was just alive with men, a line going up with a load, & a line returning for another journey. Every conceivable article was being carried up, poles, posts frames planks, bread & rations boxes of-stuff tons of explosive bombs, cans of water sand bags, sheets of tin for roofing, duck boards etc pumps piping iron & rubber, tanks & lots of other engineer material It is marvelous the quantity of stuff that goes up those boards. And this goes on night after night, & every night since the war began & will continue until peace is declared, & this is only one part of the line. How many thousands of tons have ben lugged up those boards on the shoulders of men weary & wet or hot & sweaty, each oz a sigh each pound a curse each load an awful burden, each man a phantom [sic] figure struggling in the dark and so it goes on every night & all night, with the same weary heart breaking monotony.

We had four trips each to make, & were finished at 2.45 am, At 3 oclock the weary tramp was started At Ypres there is a coffee stall run by the ANS comforts fund, & we stopped here for a drink. If the home folks knew how much that coffee is look [sic] forward to and appreciated by us they would be well repaid for their charity Camp was reached at 5 am & we turned in after a tot of rum.

24.9.16 Another fine day & I laid in until 2 p.m. Had some more letters today from Australia. We fell in again at 7 pm for the line. We went a new way tonight much shorter than through Ypres. On arrival we found there was a new job for us, digging a scret [sic] trench about 500 yds long just behind the firing line. We were divided up into parties & with guides went to our jobs. The ground was a mass of shell holes & old trenches grown over with rank grass. We soon set to work, but were much hindered by the night flares, for each time one went up we had to stop. These lights make the place like day for half a mile around, & one can read a watch by them miles away. At 6.30 am we covered our work & left for home, had some more rum on arrival.

25.9.16 (Sunday) Sleep all day again. I got two more letters this morning, they were handed to me in bed! Such is war, full of variety! Tonight we have to move up to dug-outs close to the line we will be in close support & carry on with the trench digging We started fully loaded at 7.30, & arrived at our dug outs in a long trench two hours later. We had walked along about 2 miles of duck-boarded trench stumbling & tripping in the dark. We left our packs along the trench, & went back to our job, we took a track across the fields as a short cut, all over & round shell, holes & mounds it was the devil for about half a mile when we came out onto the duck boards along the railway mentioned before & from then to the advanced dump, & then to our work. At 2.30 am we returned, & had the job of finding our way into the dug outs all in the dark. It was a picnic that only a soldier can understand.

26.9.16 I succeeded in finding a good dug-out – that is good in comparison to the others. The world it is said goes by comparison. My dug out was about 6 ft x 5 ft & 4 ft high there were three of us in it, we could enter without having to crawl & also sit up inside, the floor was of thick boards laid unevenly on the ground, there was fine mesh wire all round the side, which stoped the earth from falling down on one at all times in anything more than a trickle! The roof was of

galvanised iron with a row of sand bags on top. There was a shelf on which we could put our tucker. We slept until about noon. At about 4 pm our guns started up a heavy bombardment on a sector of Fritz's line, & soon he began to reply & the shells (high explosive) came mighty close to us. They came in threes or fours & were tearing up the ground about 50 yds from my dug out. I decided to put some more dirt on our dug-out when the guns should stop!

[End of volume]

Diary 2

N° 2 Book Aus. In France

27.9.16. Last night I did not go out to work, because I had to go early this morning with the captain to the trenches to look round. We are moving up tonight & I have to take charge of a post in the front line, so I made all enquiries necessary. The company had a sector of trench to take over to the right of the railway about 300 yds long. The trenches did not impress me favourably. The line was built up with sand bags, the trench actually being only about (?) ft. deep. The trenches were in a very bad state of repair in many places the parapet was tumbling down. There were no duck-boards in the bottom of the trenches & the wood-work along the side was in a rotten state. The Canadians must be a lazy careless lot of beggars to allow the trenches to get into such a state. After a good look about we returned to the dug-outs in time for dinner. During the afternoon we were taken away down the trench to where it was deep in case the Huns should start shooting again, & sure enough at 4 pm they started, our batteries first. Old Fritz sent over about half as many as our gunners. It was a good “stunt”, & a lot of shells fell around about our dug-outs.

28.9.16. Last night at dark we fell in with full packs & marched up to the trenches, I went straight to my post & took over from the cpl. there.

I had 8 men & a L/Cpl, two men observed at night looking over the parapet one hour on & three off; by day one man observed with a periscope. There was 250 rounds of spare ammunition & 50 bombs (Mills) About 25 yds on our left was another observation post with 6 men, the next post on our right was about 150 yds distant. Each hour we had to patrol that portion of the trench & report to the next post. The parapet all along that part was in a most delapidated [sic] condition & it had been allowed to go to ruin I was told because the Germans were supposed to have it mined! For the same reason no men were posted there. The line was very thinly held & I did not care much about the place for some reason or other. Fritz was about 65 yds distant & “No Man’s Land” was flat & covered with high grass & occasional [sic] bushes. Our front line was just a single trench with nothing behind it but water-filled shell-holes. The support trenches were about 100 yards to the rear, ours was an isolated position, & we would not stand much chance in an attack. But Fritz would have nothing much to gain by taking the place: & we were assured that the sector was very quiet, moreover any bombs etc that he had hitherto sent over always fell way back near support, so I soon settled down & had the two sentries peering over into “No Mans Land”.

But one can see so little at night, & the place being strange we did not know what stumps bushes etc looked like men in the dark. This night post business is always nervy work in the quietest of sectors especially the first night. During the hours of darkness Fritz is lavish in the expenditure of “flares”. His are wonderful lights making the night as clear as day for hundreds of yards around, even two or three miles behind the lines one can read one’s watch no matter how

dark the night may be by one of Fritz's flares. And in like manner we always make good use of his flares to keep watch on his own trenches & "No Man's Land".

The night passed off without a murmur from Fritz, soon dawn, always the hour of danger was seen painting the eastern sky in soft glowing colours, when every man stood to arms. During the night the officer in charge of the line had visited us two or three times, & sent up a flare or so, just to let Fritz know we were there. I remained awake all night, & at daylight the captain came round & told us to 'stand down', he also said we would be relieved [sic] after breakfast that we may get some sleep, also there was some rum for us!

Day is always welcome to the watchers in the front line no matter how quiet the trenches are, & now that the tension of the night was over we all felt much more cheerful & easy, & when the rum came along we soon forgot all about the war, in fact one would not have thought there was a war on at all. After breakfast the relief [sic] came along & we moved out along the trench to our sleeping place. Immediately to our rear about 200 yds was a great high mound or dump. It was a great hillock formed there by the loose earth dumped there from the railway cutting. We went to the rear side of this, where we found a number of dug-outs, were [sic] lots of our mates lived who were not in the front line, some of us went into the dug-outs, but there was not room for all. A tunnel had been cut through the dump about 50 yds long. Branching off from this tunnel were "possies" for two, & men were at work making others. The L/Cpl & I went down this tunnel, & half way along found a nice little "possie" just room for us two. The tunnel was timbered throughout & the "possies" also, they were little subterranean [sic] chambers about 4 ft high & as dark as pitch, rather good for sleeping in during the day.

The tunnel was low, & my old "tin hat" (steel helmet) saved me an awful bump on the "nut" as I went in- one beam being rather lower than the others. The "tin hats" are a splendid idea. They save one no end of bumps on the "summit"; for wherever one goes in dug-outs & kindred places, one has to crawl with one's nose on the ground. A dug-out that will allow the occupants to sit up is a good one, & always much sort after, and one where you can kneel, allowing the lucky owners [sic] to put their trousers on & tuck their shirts in (for those who are so fortunate as to be able to undress to go to sleep) without laying down, is a real treat & rare! Our "possie" was occupied by two other men by night when we were out bravely keeping back the Hun, & we slept there by day when they were out working on fatigues etc.

We lit a candle & soon fixed ourselves comfortably & as I slid down into my sleeping bag, I felt very satisfied with the world in general & myself in particular! We were absolutely safe having about 25 ft of earth over our heads.

On blowing the candle out there was soon plenty of evidence that we were not the only occupants, for we heard lots of rats of rats [sic] running about, over the ceiling & under the floor. One commenced to pull at a newspaper somewhere overhead in a most irritating [sic] manner; but I was far too tired to be bothered with such trifles, & I was soon in dreamland.

We slept all day & did not bother about dinner, afterwards we heard that no dinner was provided for us, we were expected to sleep all day, & only have two meals breakfast & tea. All the while in the trenches rations were short, & for the first three days there were no biscuits to be had. Our issue was 1/3 of a small loaf per man, a little butter or cheese, & one small tin of jam to 6 men. For breakfast we got cold bacon & tea, & at night cold meat or stew. All night on

duty we starved not having even a biscuit to chew.”

Tea was a [sic] 5 pm, & by 10 pm all hands were getting hungry again, & we waited until 8 am for breakfast! Twice I woke up in time for dinner, & found tea only was sent from the cook-house, so we did just as well to sleep all day! We had no work to do, just standing & sitting around in the trench all night, so I did not mind much being hungry, but I would not have been able to work under the circumstances.

In the trenches the rats a [sic] a force to be reckoned with, they scamper around everywhere, & have a nasty habit of appearing suddenly on the parapet just in front of one's face giving you a horrible fright! I used to wait for them to appear & stab at them with the bayonet, it was quite exciting work for they are such cunning beggars! One night I banged on [sic] with my tin hat, he squealed & sprang about 3 ft into the air & fell down the Fritz side of the parapet!

At 5 pm we had tea, stew being provided, all the boys came swarming out of their various “holes” like rabbits in the evening, & the little space behind the hillock presented a busy scene. Overhead one of our aeroplanes was calmly sailing up & down observing, & Fritz was firing away at the “Great Bird” like one demented, his shells would burst in groups of about 10 always well away from the mark. It was good to watch the air men dodging the shells with keen judgement until all the sky was filled with little black puffs. The pilot would take a course straight for Fritz, & in a few moments a burst of shells would appear in front, if the air man held on his course Fritz would have a good of getting close next time because there were his first shots to judge by, but the pilot would turn at once to the left or right, & keep on for about half a minute while Fritz was re-adjusting his guns he would then turn again, & sure enough every time so soon as the turn was made, so good was his judgment, a burst of shells would appear just about where the machine would have been, had the pilot held on his course. This would happen again & again until Fritz grew tired or the air-man completed his observation.

Just before dark we put on our equipment, & filed back to our post in the firing line, all along the trenches men were getting ready to go on duty for during the day only a few men are kept on the watch. War is a most extraordinary & colossal thing unlike anything else in the world. During the day little is done. The men rest, & only a few are kept on the watch in the trench. But so soon as darkness sets in everyone is astir, sentries are doubled & post strengthened & reoccupied in the front line, support trenches are maned, - machine guns are set up ready for action, & in short all the trenches, lines of communication, & roads are a buzzing hive of industry. By listening quietly the distant rumble & grind of the transport wagons can be heard, on the roads behind bringing up the rations & the countless things that are needed by this great & exacting war machine such as, timber & frames of many kinds for riveting (building up the sides of the trenches) galvanised iron great beams, posts, boards, coils of barbed wire, boxes of ammunition, & Red Cross stores, pumps, lengths of hosing & other mining material etc. With the rations comes the mail & next morning the boys are greeted with news from home. Night is the time for activity & like wild animals of the forest, we come forth, & move about with stealthy step, & peering eyes to our duties in the trenches.

The night passed quietly,[sic] The darkness being disturbed only by the brilliant night flares from Fritz, which periodically [sic] gave a good view of “No Man's Land”.

29.9.16. We were relieved after breakfast, & tramped back to our under ground chambers for a good old sleep. But before turning in I had a good look through my shirt for “creepers” for two days had passed since my last search. I found several, & had therefore a more comfortable sleep.

Night again found us at the same post straining our eyes out into the darkness

30.9.16 All night there was nothing doing & we were relieved [sic] again as before, & went out to sleep. During the afternoon an artillery duel took place started of course by our gunners, I go up to watch the fun, The 18 pounders were flying over head with a sharp & vicious wizz. The “big stuff” was easily picked out by the different sound they made in passing. They came from way back, one could hear them coming & they flew slowly over head with a funny wistful melancholy whistle, they seemed to say “never mind if we are slow & clumsy just wait until we arrive”. And they were right too, it was good to hear them arrive, they announced themselves with more vigour than ceremony!

We took post as usual & everything was quiet, when at about 8 pm, the parapet rocked, & there was a tremendous explosion on our right not far away, & a column of dirt shot high into the air followed by a bright flame, & then the earth commenced to fall making a hiss and roar like heavy rain. A mine had been fired by the Germans. Fritz at once began to send over some rifle grenades just to keep things going. We had no chance of finding out what damage the mine had done or whether Fritz was going to rush the crater. However after about an hour the bombs stopped & everything was quiet again. In the morning I went along to see where the blow was, I found Fritz had blown up a portion of his own front line. What his idea was I don't know, he may have made a mistake or else been trying to blow in one of our own tunnels.

When the relief came we went back to sleep as usual.

1.10.16 During the afternoon Fritz sent over some “Minênwerfers”⁹ but not near use [sic]. The first one fell right close to a working party digging a support trench. When the smoke cleared the men were seen scattered everywhere, but they quickly came back & jumping into the trench commenced to dig hard while one remained on top to keep watch for the next “Minne”, in a minute we heard one, & the men scrambled away as fast as possible, it fell with an awful crash not far from the trench. The men returned at once and began to dig with feverish haste, it was clear that one of their comrades lay buried there covered in by that first Minn'e which fell so close to them without warning. After dodging three more we saw them lift a man from the trench, & one of them taking him on his shoulder carried him in towards us, he had about 200 yds to go. We could see that the man was alive.

⁹ German short range mortar used during World War 1

A “Minnenwerfer” is a hugh [sic] shell about 4 ft high filled with high explosive & thrown from a trench mortar. Fritz also sends over another patent affair known among us as a “Rum Jar”. In shape it is like an oil drum, & one can see it coming end over end. They make a might [sic] crash on landing.

At dusk we went up to our post again & I put the two observers on. After about 20 minutes I heard some talk between them, & I found to my surprise one of the men crouching [sic] down in the bottom of the trench trembling with fear.

He said he could not get up on the parapet again & was not going to try. He asked to be taken out saying he had a “wisper” [sic] to the effect that on our post was going to be blown up by a mine that very night, he said that he felt it coming. It was clearly a case of nervous break-down, he was trembling miserably, & almost sobbed with fright whenever a shell whistled by or a flare went up. He was taken out by the officer in charge of the line, & another man sent up in his place. It was a nasty occurance [sic] and I was glad when the poor chap went out, for he was beginning to make us all “nervy”.

Of course needless to say the trench is there yet, & seems likely to remain. The night passed off quietly, & after breakfast we went back to under ground cabin.

2.10.16 Tonight we had a different post to hold. We were to take the post on our left right against an arched bridge of brick spanning the railway cutting, our line crossed the railway at this point, & the front trench where we were occupied the site of a one

[The Diary is interrupted here by a page of writing in purple pencil, followed by one page cut and torn from the book near the spine. The unrelated notes in the purple pencil follow:]

Helmets will be drawn 10% in
excess of requirement 80% Medium
15% Small
10% large

All helmets will be tested when worn in a room of gas for 5 minutes

No 1 post

8 men 2 NCOs

2 sentries at night one by day. As the sentries come off they patrol to 5th Batt

Each hour

Taylor } 1st shift
Pitchford }

Purton } 2nd “
Church }
Hamilton } 3^d “
Waddington}

Polly } 4th “
Hollson }

[The centre top section of the final page of this volume is torn out of the diary]

time ro..... who previously this post were removed to the supports, also the men on our right were removed further down the line. Leaving the trench with fewer men than before, & about 250 yds between unmaned. [sic] The night passed quietly as usual & at daylight we went out for breakfast behind the hillock, our post being unoccupied during the the [sic] day.

[The final page of the volume is a printed multiplication table in French]

Diary 3

(Continued) 12.10.16

Diary With the Australian
1st Division In France
Book N^o 3

2.10.16 (continued)

site of a one time road. The men in the post on our left had been removed to the support & we took their place. Also the post on our right was abandoned, & the men removed further down the line, leaving the trench with fewer men than before, with about 250 yds between unmaned [sic]. At about 8 pm our batteries suddenly opened a smart bombardment of Fritz's parapet in front. First came one shell & then two & in an instant the air was alive with flying shells bursting with an incessant crash on the German front line about 70 yds away. It was a nice bit of shooting for the trenches were rather close, & to hit the German parapet, the shells had to just skim over our own. I jumped up to have a look, the air was alive with smoke & flashes & old Fritz's line seemed to be literally plastered with shells. There was so much noise we could not here [sic] ourselves speak This lasted for about 15 minutes & then stoped as suddenly as it commenced. Meanwhile Fritz replied with a few "rum jars" one of which knocked a hole in our parapet about 100 yds on our right. This was soon mended & the night passed off quietly

3.10.16 Dark found us back at our post again. During the night we were to be releived [sic] by another battalion. We were all waiting for the releif [sic] to come rather impatiently, for, no matter how quiet the line, there is always a certain amount of nerve strain especially with night work. It may not be noticed much at the time; but when "releif [sic] night" comes its effect can be seen. At about 9 pm the releif [sic] arrived, & we moved into the supports, & in a short time the whole company were leaving the trenches behind. We went into reserves near where we were prior to coming into the line. The dug outs were small poky places & very low. The communicating trenches were water loged [sic] with the "duck boards" in some places afloat, outside the trenches the surface was muddy & slippery. After being alloted[sic] to our respective dug-outs we were taken to the QM's dug out (a nice big one) & given a shovel each & a pair of high gum boots or waders, this was about 11pm, we expected to be told to get the boots on ready to go out & work in a trench near by which we knew was in the course of construction & incidently [sic] half full of water & mud, hence the boots. But instead the order was given for us to return to our "possies". The men naturally began to get to bed altho' we fully expected at first to be taken out to work. Sure enough at 12.15 we heard an officer call out "come on, out of your dug outs get ready for a working party". The men were too disgusted even to swear which shows a bad state of affairs for a soldier! They crawled out of bed & dressed in eloquent silence. We grabed [sic] our shovels & were soon lined up outside. The night was pitch black, "Lead on in front" & we were slipping & plunging in the ungainly boots, some few unlucky ones fell cursing like demons into shell holes, but most of us managed to keep more or less on our legs until the road was reached. In about 15 minutes the trench was found we turned to the left toward the firing line along a by road through which the trench cut. On arrival not engineers could not be found to take charge of us & put us to work, so after waiting a while we were told to go home. We lay down again at about 1.30. with strong opinions concerning the military.

4.10.16. I did nothing all day except divide up the rations in the morning. A party was set to

work to drain the trenches connecting the different lines of dug outs, & put the duck boards straight, but I was not in it. I found a book to read so made myself comfortable for the day. At 7.30 pm. we again fell in for work. The shell holes claimed about an equal number of victims, as previously before the road was reached!

The engineers were waiting for us this time all right. One party was told off to continue digging the trench another party followed behind to finish off the work & put in the wood frames & revetting work, a third party were behind filling sand bags & building up the parapet; this was the best job as the two first parties were working in mud & water. A fourth party were detailed to carry from the dump about ¼ mile behind, They had to bring up big wooden frames, posts, wire, duck boards galvanised iron etc. We worked until about 1.30 am & then went home, & after a “tot” of rum turned in and slept.

We followed this routine working at night & resting by days until the 9th. That night we returned our boots & shovels & marched out to Ypres having completed our term in the trenches a company of another battalion were coming in that night to take our place. At Ypres we were to take the trains back to billets for our rest (ie drill all day). I was detailed as a guide, I had to go out to Ypre [sic], meet the relieving [sic] battalion from the train, & quick back the company that was to occupy our dug-outs. I had three men with me, we arrived back with the new men at about 10 p.m. Our company had already left & were probably now at Ypres. The distance from the dug outs to where the train stoped [sic] the other side of Ypres was about three miles therefore by the time we rejoined our comrades we would have walked 12 miles. We now had to carry our equipment & packs & blanket. After waiting about half an hour the captain joined us & we set off it was now about 1130 pm. On arrival we found the train waiting & full up, but we managed to squeeze in. We only went a few miles in the train, getting out at about 1 am. On the road again marching, we were all tired & sick of it all. But there was a solid hour to do, & the road was rough, narrow & muddy in places, before camp was reached, when we found ourselves in the same billets as before we left for the line. The cooks had a drink of tea for us, & we were all soon in dream land.

The last hours march was a killer, all the men were tired & ever so sleepy, coming in the train we expected to be put down close to our billets & all the men were much dis-heartened at having to do another hour. If the people of London could have seen us in the dark blundering along the rough & narrow road some in pairs, others in threes & single file like a herd of cattle at home, slipping & tripping & cursing, they would have wept tears of blood. We were dirty rough & unshaven, so unlike the work pictures given in the papers about the happy careless soldiers glad at being relieved, smiling & joking on their coming back from the trenches. Oh if the average Londoner could only come over here & see things for himself, how often would he throw the newspapers away in disgust when he returned home. I don't wish to give the impression that we are badly treated, or are asked to do too much, for we all know what to expect on active service; but it is annoying to know that the home folks are having dust thrown in their eyes by the rotten twaddle so often appearing in the newspapers

10.10.16 The Segt Major came through the huts & woke us up at about 8.30 for break- fast. We rested all day, & in the evening I went out for a a [sic] walk with a mate, down to a house where I knew we could get some eggs bread & butter & coffee; we polished off six eggs each with bread & butter & several cups of coffee. It was a fine meal greatly enjoyed by us both. Afterwards we went for a stroll The moon was shining brightly, & it was nice to feel perfectly

safe. No need to avoid all high ground, or stand still when a flare went up, or avoid corners or crossroads, & other places known to be covered by hostile machine guns or snipers. No occasion to keep one's ears open for the vicious scream of a shell, nor keep a good look out on the ground to catch sight of our old enemy the water filled, grass hidden shell-hole! It is a great relief [sic] to feel that sense of security which 10 miles behind the line gives to the soldiers just back from duty in the trenches. Here we were once more in civilisation, of the [sic] course the Military note was ever dominant, there were camps of all units on either side, & the road was alive with military traffic; But to the experienced eye safty [sic] was written in Large letters over it all. We went a picture show at the Y.M.C.A. & at 8.30 were well in bed.

11.10.16 This morning I was detailed to take a fatigue party with picks & shovels to work at some engineers dump. I was given a map reference, & told the place was near were [sic] we had camped once before a At 9.15 I found the place a sawmill but there was no one to report to. After making a lot of enquires [sic], a traffic conductor told me that the Engineer who waits there for all fatigue parties, had gone home liaving [sic] a message to the effect that we were to do likewise as there was no work for us. No second bidding was needed & we made ourselves scarce [sic] right away. Camp was reached just in time for pay. After dinner parade & inspection which was finished at 3.30. In the evening we had some more eggs & another good nights sleep. We were to move the next day to St Omer about four days march.

12.10.16 Breakfast at about the usual time, & the order was to fall in with full equipment & blanket folded round the pack at 8.15, our hearts were low & sad at the idea of having to carry our packs with blanket & water-proof sheet all the way to St Omer.¹⁰ Some undertaking, & we had not done any marching for about three weeks. After cleaning up we got away at about 9 am. marching down the road all the boys were singing & whistling. This lasted for about an hour! We did an easy day going into billets at 1 pm. Our billets was a barn; but close by was a little pub where the troops could slack [sic] their thirst. I slept comfortably on some straw up against a waggon [sic] wheel.

13.10.16 At 6 oclock came the Segt Major to rouse us out of bed. We packed up & had breakfast at 7 am, & then received the joyful news that our blankets would be carried. Each section rolled their own blankets, so that there would be no confusion at night. 8.15 am found us well on the road again & we marched at a good pace with few stops until 1 pm when a halt was called for dinner, & not before time either for the troops were hungry & tired to a man. As the field-cookers came along all the boys gave a cheer & waved their hats. It is wonderful the good tempered humour there is among troops under all conditions. Altho they may growl & swear, the mood quickly changes, & the grumbling ends inveriably [sic] in a laugh & a shout. Route marching fully loaded is the soldiers hardest work, bar actual fighting, but so soon as a halt is called or the day's march is ended, the troops are all fun & frolic & full of wit. It is a curious roving life, & altho the greatest stakes are at issue meaning nothing less than life or death to each one, yet the fact does not weigh one oz, & no one seems to care a bit what happens.

After dinner we had about four miles to do. Along the road a nice sized town could be seen, & we were all hoping to be billeted right there. But no such luck we marched right through & out into the country again. After a few minutes however a halt was called & it was plain to see, we

¹⁰ St Omer is about 45kms south east of Calais.

were lost, the “Heads” produced their maps, while company clerk went on ahead on a bike. The “wits” began to call out, “What is the news” “Lend us the papers Sir” “Very good war news A company lost etc etc.” Meanwhile we were all enjoying the rest, but of course grumbling at having been taken out of our way, others were saying “Have to come back tomorrow morning, a mile for nothing etc”! However in about 20 minutes the clerk returned, & we moved on again & found our billets a little way along the road. We had a big barn to sleep in, I got some clean straw & soon made myself comfy.

By the correct route the town was less than a mile back, & a good many of the boys went in during the evening They would have to be very tired indeed to stop away!

14.10.16 Early in the morning we were on the road again carrying our blankets this time. We marched back that extra mile before joining up with the rest of the battalion. The previous day we did about 14 miles, & we had about the same distanced to do again today. Just before dinner we climbed a long hill, & after dinner the road still ran up. When the summit was reached however there was a glorious view spread out on either side & in front of us. The country below was perfectly flat for miles & miles. There were patches of woods, & tree lined roads runing [sic] across the picture, the fields were square & colored [sic] alternately green & brown. In the distance the spires of a large town stood up into the sky, & far & near the neat red roofed house gave a touch of color[sic] to the scene. At the bottom of the hill was a large village & a busy canal intersected the landscape. Exclamations of delight were heard from almost all the boys as this lovely scene spread out before us.

Decending [sic] the hill going through the town & over the canal, found us once more in the country. The billets were now close at hand & we stepped [sic] out at a brisk pace. A turn of the road brought us into another little village & some of the battalion went to billets there. But we went on to a large empty barn just outside the village. After tea all hands invaded the village. I & a friend had a bottle of wine before returning to billets. Some of the lads had a little too much, & carried on with all sorts of rot when they returned. There is always someone who gets a trifle too much, but they never do any harm.

15.10.16 At 6 am we were all astir again, & after breakfast a start was made at about 8.30. There was about 5 miles to do, & we reached our destination at 11 am. Our billets were in a little village right out of civilisation, just our luck to get into an out of the way place. We were soon settled down, my platoon had an old barn to live in, with straw on the ground, rather a rough, dirty & bare place to live, nowhere to put our food etc. All we had to do was to walk inside dump our gear roll out our blankets & lay down like cattle. We all silently hoped the straw would be free from hen-lice etc!

During the afternoon I had a look round the village. There was one shop but no food beyond sweets, could be bought there, which fact was very dissappointing [sic]. There were hotels cafes in plenty, lots of drink to be had, but no food, & then the “heads” wonder why the troops get drunk, in a miserable place like this there is nothing else for them to do!

16.10.16 Physical drill at 7 am this morning, the same old story. Fall in again at 9 am drill order. We were marched about a mile along the road; & chased about at drill. Home again at about 12 o'clock. Fall in again at 2 pm., & drill in a field close by for an hour, when 13 Company came up to play us football. I played, but was carefull [sic] not to go too hard, we won rather easily, after

a good game.

17.10.16 The morning being wet we did no physical drill, but fell in at 8 30 in drill order instead of 9 am! All the morning we “sloped arms, “formed fours” & did some “company drill”. This sort of thing is frightfully wearying. After dinner we had an hour of drill, & then a football match was arranged between 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 platoons. I did not play because I was still stiff from the previous match. I tried hard this afternoon to purchase a loaf of bread in this wonderful village, but failed dismayly [sic] In orders this morning we were informed that we were not to stand about the street corners, & when going about the town, were to be properly dressed & wear our belts! How lovely!

The weather looks very unsettled & I guess we are in for some rain.

18.10.16 The weather is wet & rain fell all the morning. At 11 am we went to vote on the Referendum,[sic] as to whether conscription should become law in Australia. I think most of the boys voted No. Afterwards pay was distributed. In the afternoon the weather cleared. We fell in at 2 pm & went for a short march. On returning a football match was played between “A Coy” & the Batt bombers. “A” Coy won easily, but it was a bad day for “footer” & I did not play, the ground was wet & heavy. It is said we are off again tomorrow.

[19.10.16 *missed*]

20. 10.16 The same old drill during the morning, & a football match in the afternoon I managed to get out of playing being detailed for guard at Batt H.Q, I was not sorry as the ground was worse than yesterday & the weather very cold. We are moving off tomorrow morning, yesterday we had to roll up our spare blankets & take them down to the transport, so we were to sleep tonight with one & it was horribly cold too. I had three men for the guard & duly went on duty at 5 pm. The guard room was a large room with cement floor, & the only furniture was a butt of candle left on the window-sill by the previous guard! It was a bitterly cold night, but I managed to get warm & comfortable by going by the billet & getting an armful of straw.

21.10.16. I was up at daylight, breakfast at 6.15 am the guard was dismissed, & we packed up our gear in time to rejoin the platoon to move off at 7 am. There was a hard white frost & very cold, but a lovely morning for marching. There was about 5 miles for us to do, when we would entrain. The train was boarded at 9 a.m, at an immense military railway siding. It is marvelous [sic] to see the military roads & railways built since the war commenced.

We had horse trucks, with straw on the floor! The journey was slow & weary, & ever so cold. On the way we passed Calais, Boulogne, [sic] & Etaples the old training ground. Soon we passed Abeyville [sic] & a few miles further on we stoped [sic] at Pont Remy, it was now dark, & very cold. After marching out of the station, the officers had difficulty in finding billets in the dark, & we had to wait about for a good while. After going along the road about ¼ of a mile out of the town we were billeted in a house, bare but not draughty. We all went into the town so soon as we had dumped our gear. The town was the usual 4 rate French place. Plenty of cafés & drink of a poor quality but little else to buy

Sunday 22.10.16. We awoke to a cold & miserable morning. After breakfast there was church parade out in a field. The wind was bitterly cold, & long before the service was over, we were all

shivering like shorn lambs! The remarks I volunteered concerning parsons when we got back to billets, I will not record here! After dinner the wind droppd [sic] somewhat, & I went out for a walk with a friend. The surrounding country was very pretty, & the river Somme could be seen winding along the valley for miles.

23.10.16 We were astir at daylight packing up ready to move off. After rolling our extra blankets in section rolls & carrying them to H. Quarters, we fell in with all our effects on our backs, after marching to H.Q.^s to join up with the other companies, we were told to undo the blankets, & each carry our extra one, as there was no transport to be had. Of course the troops were pleased!

There was about 7 miles to do, when we were to be taken then in motor cars. At about 12.30 the cars hove in sight, I could see a line a mile long on the main road. French cars they were all painted a blue-grey color [sic], we could see the drivers all clad in lovely fur coats some snow white & others brown, they looked like bear skin. We halted for dinner, & at about 1.30 boarded the cars. Each driver took his car load (16 men), & in about ten minutes we were all on board, with no confusion at all. In another few minutes the column was on the move. But for the first half hour-we kept stoping, the car would move about 50 or 100 yds & stop, we just advanced in a series of short rushes! Just as the column got into good running, our jolly car stoped, [sic] & despite all efforts on the part of the driver refused to start. All the other cars passed us & presently the repairs car-stopod [sic] to see what was wrong & the mechanic soon buried himself under the engine of our car, but all to no purpose, so we transferred into the repair car & proceeded on our way. The driver put on speed & we rapidly overhauled the column. At about 6.30 p.m we had to get out, as the cars had reached their destination. After walking along the road for about twenty minutes a village was reached. named Baiere [?] The place was alive with troops English, Scotch Irish, & Australian, we soon found our billets, where the rest of the company were, in a great barn. After dumping our gear in a favourable place for sleep, I went out to buy something to eat, & also Something to drink, the latter first, as I had nothing to drink all day. There were several drinking salons, were [sic] one could also buy some food; These places were absolutely crowded with soldiers. Gambling & drinking, singing & swearing. The air was hot & stuffy. Some of the troops had just come from the trenches, others were going in on the morrow. It is wretched to see the men crowded together in these miserable dirty salons or cafés. The reckless crowds are hungry for any form of excitement, anything at all that would help them forget the dread monotony of war. The beer is generally served in tin mugs which are never washed the evening through. The beer is carried from another room in jugs, & poured into a large tub, from where it is diped [sic] out with the mugs. It is a disgusting way of serving the stuff. But the soldiers, used to mud & filth don't notice that in the least, as they clamour for a drink.

I soon went back to billets, with a tin of milk, a tin of tongue & two tins of fruit, we made a record meal & turned in.

24.10.16 When we woke up it was raining, After breakfast we moved of [sic], with our water-proof sheets hung over our shoulders. As we went along the road we saw parties of German prisoners working, digging drains etc and road making. One Fritz was driving a steam roller, & seemed well pleased with his job. As we went along the boys used to call out to the Germans, "Hello Fritz", "Dig it out old boy" etc. Some of them would smile, but the majority never looked at us.

Along the road Albert could be seen in the distance. We marched until about 12.30 & only had one spell. The road was muddy, & also the fields on each side. In fact there was not a patch of green to be seen. We turned off the road, & sloshed our way through the mud. This was our camp! There were a few rough shelters made with a tarpaulin, a few poles & some old bagging. Each platoon was put into one of these places. The ground inside was wet & slippery, & the rain leaked in along the sides. However we soon settled down, & the rain stoped, [sic] some of us went out & found a fire bucket & some wood while others cleaned the floor up with a shovel. After tea we had a good fire going which dried the place up. But when it came to making our beds, the fun started, for we were so crowded, each of us had about one foot of space in which to lie down. If one wanted to turn over, all hands had to turn with one accord! However we kept warm & were soon in dreamland, the soldiers bliss. Next day we found another fire-bucket & more wood, & also improved the roof.

We stoped [sic] this place for six days leaving on the 30th. Twice we went out all day clearing mud off the roads, but beyond that we did nothing. And there is nothing much to write about. Each night we had the two fire-buckets going, & used to sit round the kindly blaze & sing songs before going to bed.

30.10.16. Once more under-way with the same old load. The roads are in a very bad condition covered in slurry. The traffic in places was greatly congested, & we had difficulty in getting along. Once for an hour we would walk about ten yards & stop & so on. It was maddening, & all the time our packs were getting heavier! However after about 5 hours on the road during which time we walked about as many miles, we reached our destination in a corner of Bernafay Wood.¹¹ There were two rough tents, & the rest of us had to get into old dug-outs. I found a small one just big enough for my section. It was about 5 ft deep with narrow steps leading down to it. The roof was built with big logs across, then galvanised iron, & on top of that about 3 ft of earth & sand-bags. The place was dry, & had a fire bucket let into the end, with a hole leading up to carry off the smoke. We were pleased with ourselves, & thought to be nice & comfortable; one of the boys soon had the fire alight, & we made some tea & had dinner. Shortly afterwards rain came on heavily, & soon to our horror water began to drip in at half-dozen places, we put our mess tins to catch the drips, & then found water running down the steps. One of the boys covered the opening with a water-proof sheet at the top, & then dug a hole at the bottom of the steps to act as a sink and catch the water. This we found needed bailing out about every half hour, we had a tin for this purpose & had to carry it up the slippery steps to empty. The mess tins also needed emptying. In spite of all we could do the ground soon became wet & muddy. To make matters more interesting big lumps of wet earth began to fall in from the sides. One of the boys had his legs covered with a fall, & having his boots unlaced left them behind in getting his legs out.! We sat on our packs, and dozed as best we could until daylight, striking matches at intervals to see how the walls were. I did not like the look of those heavy logs so close overhead!

31.10.16 By daylight the rain had stoped [sic] so we carried all our gear out & lit a fire, made some tea & had breakfast. Afterwards we all set to work to build a decent shelter. Some of us dug the earth & sand-bags off the top of the dug-out, & took out the pieces of roofing iron. Others made a start with our new residence, for the walls they found about half a dozen logs cut to about the right length which was lucky, and with the assistance of some-sand-bags soon had

¹¹ About 10kms east of Albert.

three walls up about 4 ft high. By mid day our new home was complete, the cracks between the logs filled with mud, & a drain cut all round, and a fire-bucket burning inside to dry the ground. That night we had a glorious sleep, I never thought we would be so comfortable while in the war-zone.

1.11.16 This morning a large party of us went out to work on the roads. We commenced to dig a deep drain along the road side. The roads were in a terrible state of mud & slush. The mettle [sic] was all loose & mixed up in the slurry. This particular road was made with round poles covered with small mettle. [sic] The slurry was from 6 inch to one foot deep, & holes were numerous. In lots of places the poles were entirely exposed, all the mettle[sic] had washed away in the slurry. It was wonderful to see the motor transport lorries bumping along over this road. They rocked & rolled like ships at sea. As far as we could see around us, all was mud. In the mud were set camps of all descriptions, men were living in tents, in rough shelters of roofing iron, under tarpaulins raised on poles etc. There were transport camps with their lines of hores [sic] & mules, ammunitions columns etc, presenting a very animated scene. For dinner we had bread & jam & cheese, washed down with a mouthful of cold water. We returned to our camp at 4 pm.

2.11.16 Out on the road again today, & a wet day too. This time we were taken further along the road toward the firing line. The road we were working on was the one leading to Flers.¹² We passed through “Longueval”, the houes [sic] of which village had been absolutely smashed to match wood by shells. In the heaps of rubbish one could detect parts of furniture & household effects, pieces of chairs, tables iron bedsteads pots & pans etc. I even saw a sheet torn to ribbons spread over a heap of rubbish. Beyond “Longueval” is “Delville Wood”, or as it is better known “Devil’s Wood”. Of all the fights on the “Somme” this was no doubt the bloodiest [sic] of them all hence the name. It is a large wood & the trees are thickly placed & of good size. Every vestige [sic] of under growth had been completely demolished, there was not a green leaf to be seen, & the ground was absolutely churned & pulverised by shell-fire, & lay in irregular mounds & holes. Dozens of the large trees had been shot down by gaint [sic] shells, while among those left standing not one could be seen which had not got the top blown off or hopelessly torn. The tree trunks were ripped & slashed by shrapnel & great pieces were missing showing where shells had made direct hits. Every tree had been killed as the bark hung only in shreds[sic]. The ground was littered with limbs & tree tops. The trees seemed too much smashed about to be of use as none appeared to have been cut down to use in building roads etc. It is impossible to imagine or to give an adequate decription [sic] of such a scene of desolation as presented by “Devil’s Wood, when I saw it. No writer, however vivid his imagination, or powerful his pen could do justice to such a specticale [sic], or convey a correct impression of it to the mind of the reader. In the point of frightfulness nothing of war can be exaggerated. To think of the carnage caused by that deluge of shells is enough to make the hardest shudder. Along the roadside we passed lots of great 8 inch Howitzers, I counted 20 without looking far. A light tram line along each side of the road conveyed the shells to each gun. We passed a great dump about 10 ft high all 8in’ shells. In fact there seems to be plenty of ammunition for all guns now, & there is a lot wasted too, left lying about on the roadside anywhere at all.

Just beyond the wood we passed two of the famous “Tanks”. They were covered with tarpaulins so we could not see much of them. They are square sided flat topped, about 30 ft long 12 ft wide & 8 ft in height. Behind are two wheels to steer by, whilst in front the machine curves upward

¹² Located between Albert and Bapaume

like the runners of a sledge, to render ability in mounting obstacles [sic]. On each side is a 6 pounder gun mounted in a swinging turret, & there are 5 machine guns as well. On each side running the full length is an endless catipillar [sic] driving belt, 15 inches wide & with a 20 feet grip on the ground, this is the driving agency, the power being supplied by big motors, The armour plating is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, It will stop ordinary bullets; but not the special armour- piercing bullet. The machine is very low on the ground which appears to be a fault. These have undoubtedly [sic] done great work. But I am afraid the wet weather will stop them. On the front of each is the number, & the following H.M.L.S – “His Majesty’s Land Ship”. This one was C.21.

Here the slurry was fully 9 inches deep, & our job was to drain it away & sweep the road. On the side was a couple of broken limbers & a G.S. wagon also a dead horse, a few yards further was a decaying Hun. And from the bank on the other side protruded the leg of an “Unknown British Soldier”.

Rain had been falling steadily all the while & we were rather wet. Just before midday the rain ceased For dinner I had a piece of bread & cheese & a drink of water. During the morning one of Fritz’s large shells made a large hole in the ground about 50 yds from us. We knocked off & returned to camp at 2 pm.

The next day **3.11.16** we did not go out. I knew what this meant fatigue work at night, & I was right too. At 7.30 pm we were slopping along through the watery mud. We had to go to “Longueval” & carry timber & “duck boards” from there to a dump passed [sic] the “Tanks” to a dump, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to carry. The mud about the dump was knee deep, & some of the men were almost bogged with their loads. We did two trips & returned to camp at about 1 am hungry & tired. But a “nip” of rum was awaiting us which was very cheering. We put the fire together outside our humpy & warmed up, made some tea & scraped the mud off ourselves. After a bite to eat we turned in & slept the sleep of the just! This night work makes an extra meal, & we get no more food.

We went out to work each night after this, the same old thing, only that one night we got wet through. Fritz would sometimes send a big shell over our way, but none fell near us. About 200 yards from our cabin were two 6 in naval guns, huge things they are with barrels about 30 ft long. When in action they create a tremendous explosion. A gunner told me that the extreme range is 18 miles, using a 20 pound charge of cordite behind the shell.

On the night of **Tuesday the 7th**, the battalion moved up into reserve. We had about two miles to go to a trench some distance beyond the dump that we had been carrying to. Our destination [sic] was a trench on a ridge called “Switch Trench”. We left our packs in a large tent, taking a blanket & water proof sheet only, of course wearing our great coats, each man had rations a full water bottle, and an extra bandolier of 50 rounds, also every two men had to carry between them a box of bombs. This made a frightful load, and the roads were in a terrible condition, there was a strong wind blowing & no soon [sic] had we started than rain fell in torrents. At “Longueval” we left the road & went through “Delville Wood” on a duck-board track. By this time we were all wet through By the time we reached “Switch Trench” we were in a delightful pickle, the last few hundred yards there were no “duck boards” we had to flounder through the mud. The trench was a long tumble down affair full of mud. Along the trench there were a few shelters like dog kennels & full of mud. Half a dozen of these places were given to each platoon after a lot of waiting about, by this time the storm had abated somewhat, and the boys set

about sorting themselves out & getting into the kennels. I decided not to bother with the hovels in the trench, but to make one on top. I found a place dug from the side of a shell hole about 4 ft wide 2 ft deep & 5 ft long, this had plainly been used as a shelter. Presently the sergeant came along homeless & a mate with him, so the three of us set about making ourselves a home, to make matters more interesting rain came on again. First thing was to find three corkscrews (a long iron stake with a cork-screw end for screwing into the ground they are used for putting out barb wire entanglements) we soon had three about 5 ft long, one screwed in at the head & one at the open end of the dug out space made two good poles about 2 ft above the level of the ground, the third corkscrew was placed on the top making a ridge pole over this we stretched a blanket tent wise making the ends fast at the edges of the dug-out with mud, we extended the covere [sic] by the addition of a water-proof sheet, and there you are we had a home in ten minutes! Next thing † was to scrape the mud & water out, & dig a hole for the water to drain into. We found two empty benzine [sic] tins, & with a box of bombs the three of [us] had a seat inside, we felt [sic] our rifles & equipment outside in the rain. We sat down inside & huddled together to keep warm, we had to squeeze [sic] up as there was no room, I was soaking wet from the hips down also the arms. I took my boots & sox off & put my water proof sheet down & wraped [sic] my feet in my blanket, they kept warm all night altho' my body was cold. All we could do was sit & wait for daylight, & try to sleep a little as we sat. By this time we felt hungry, someone opened a tin of bully & we had bully beef & biscuits! I managed to doze off once or twice, but it seemed as tho' morning would never come. At last the welcome daylight appeared but we were so cold & stiff none of us felt like moving. However after a time we crawled out, & stood in the mud & looked about us. The ground was too muddy & slippery for us to run about & warm ourselves & a raw cold wind was blowing. We could see all around for miles our position seemed about two miles behind the front line, our shells could be seen bursting over what I concluded were the German trenches.

All the way to the firing line the ground was brown in color [sic]. Behind the German trenches all was green fresh green grass. This aera [sic] had not been fought over & was therefore not torn to pieces by shell fire. As we looked across the contrast struck me as being most peculiar. [sic] Where the brown joined the green marked the line of our advance, & showed where the opposing forces sat watching each other in the lull before another outburst of attack & counter attack.

At this juncture rain came on again, so, I retired into our shelter again. During the morning however the rain cleared off, & we put our gear outside & set about effecting a few improvements to our home. Just before dinner we were taken a little way back to work in an old trench clearing it out. I was just behind the ridge, & there were rows of guns in position, 18 pounders, & 4.5 howitzers, they made a fine sight. We went back to our mud holes at 4 pm. That night the three of us were able to enjoy a lay down but we were too crowded to get much sleep. To turn over we all had to turn together!

Next day 9th **11.16** was fine, this was a great boon to us as we were able to get ourselves & our blankets dry. We went to work at the same place at 9 am. At 8.30 Fritz sent over some big H.E shells he must have seen us moving about, a couple of the shells came very close to us.

We stayed in this trench until **Friday 10th**. We worked each day at the same job. Each morning & evening Fritz sent a few big ones our way, but there were only a couple of casualties [sic].

On Friday night **10.11.16** "A" Coy moved up to the line. We took our bombs two per man, one blanket & water-proof sheet & over coat. We went across the field avoiding the pack route. On the way we passed two disabled "Tanks" Here the ground in many places was not shell torn as the other had been. A bright moon was in the sky which made walking easy for us. Battalion Head Quarters was reached in about 20 minutes. Here we picked up our rations & whacked them out to sections. A guides from the company which we were to relieve [sic] met us at this place, one guide for each platoon. The guides were to take the platoons to their respective places in the line. Each platoon was to occupy four "bays", the sections were told off before starting, under a corporal & knew which "bay" to go to, each bay was numbered. We set off along a sunken road, the mud was sticky & we were heavily laden. The men soon grew tired, & the guide having nothing to carry was walking too fast. After a time we reached a high cutting called the "chalk pit" here we rested. The sunken road had disappeared & we seemed to be in a kind of gully. The whole place had been heavily shelled. After a rest we started again & followed the cutting along. On the way we passed several dead lying about some lay right across the track! A little further & we came to the trench The guide took us to the right place & we jumped [sic] in. The change was effected in about two minutes with no confusion at all. Quickness was very necessary when we had to come in over the top like that there being no communication trenches at all, just the one line not even a support line. In about two minutes the trench was taken over & the old company was slipping away into the darkness again. The German trench in front of our position was about 400 yards away, but on the right of the company sector Fritz was only about 80 yds distance. There was a bright moon shining which was a good for observation.

We were all hot & perspiring freely in spite of the cold night, and after a few minutes standing in the trench the cold seemed to penetrate [sic] into our very bones. Our under clothing being damp with sweat made it all the worse. I shivered so much that after a time I began to get warm again! I really believe it is possible to shiver oneself into a sweat.

It was about mid night when the relief [sic] took place, so we did not have long to wait for daylight. Our part of the trench was in first class order being intirely [sic] free from mud. It was an agreeable surprise for us. We had heard so much about the front line trench being knee deep in mud, and the best we hoped for was to get the chance to clean the mud out from a small part of each "bay" so as to get a dry footing for ourselves. Instead we found a far less mud in the front line than where we had previously been three or four miles behind. But I believe that the other platoons were not so fortunate as ourselves And I know that between the different platoons, a space of perhaps 20 or 30 yards, the mud was knee deep. The men next to us on the right had some mud to deal with for I saw them shoveling [sic] it out soon after taking over.

The best way to communicate with the several platoons was to walk along the back of the trench, this was quite safe at night if care was taken to bend down when a flare from Fritz went up at all close. The rations were distributed each night in this way. This night we carried the rations up with us, the next night they were brought up to us by a fatigue party from battalion H.Qs, the pack train (horses) would carry the rations to their [sic].

Just round the corner past us on our right between ourselves & the next platoon, two large shells had "lobed" right in the trench & blown it to pieces. This was the only place where shells had damaged the trench. The defence consisted of a single line of trench, there being no supports, or communication trenches. The part we occupied was well dug & of good dept. [sic] The trench was narrow & the traverses even & strong. I was immediately reminded of the

trenches at Anzaa [sic], except for the fact that here there were no fire-pits or lope [sic] holes. Instead in each “bay” there was a fire step or platform dug into or out from the parapet about a foot wide & 10 ft long. Standing on this a man could look over the top easily. During the night there were two observers on duty in each “bay” standing on the fire step with their rifles at hand. All rifles were loaded & ready with bayonets fixed. On the para- pet were several “Mills” bombs while there were two sand bags half full [sic] on the fire step. During the day bayonets were unfixed & one man only was on duty at the time observing by means of a periscope. The shifts were two hours on & four off. At break of day until daylight all hands would “stand to” that is wake up & get their rifles & be in a state of readiness, this was also done for an hour at dusk. These two periods are always considered the most favourable or likely times for an attack from the enemy [sic] hence the readiness.

11.11.16 At 7 o'clock we had our issue of rum, fine it was too, after freezing all night. There was plenty of rations for the day, and sitting about in the trench does not give a great appetite. [sic] For breakfast we had bacon [sic] bread & butter. The “Aus Comforts Fund” supplied us with some very useful little article named “Tommy Cookers”. They are small tins filled with an inflammable [sic] wax, a little frame fits over the top. All one has to do is to apply a match to the wax which burns with a hot blue flame. They are fine for heating tinned [sic] food or making a mess tin of tea. This morning we fried our bacon & made some tea just a little for each man; there were seven of us in this “bay”. For dinner we had tinned [sic] meat & vegetable [sic] ration & pork & beans, we heated the tins on the little “Cookers”. For tea we had bread, bully beef butter & jam, but no tea, as we had been rather extravagant with our “Cookers”.

Nothing happened all [day] & night came on, freezing cold. We shivered all night as before. I lay down once on the fire step & wrapped [sic] my blanket around myself, but I only dozed for about an hour, & was then forced to get up on account of the cold. When I moved my teeth chattered so much that I was afraid the enamel [sic] would chip off [sic] them! After an age of waiting daylight came again, & with it our “rum”, but it was a short issue because the rations party during the night ran foul of a shell on their way to us one bottle (the rum is in big stone jars) being broken & two men (one the guide) were slightly wounded, three casualties [sic] in all! The water was also short, this is carried to us in petrol tins like the rations, & it always tastes strongly of petrol! So we only had one mess tin of tea for breakfast. The rations were also a little lighter than yesterday, but there was sufficient.

At 9 am there was good news, we were to be relieved that night **12.11.16**, after doing only 48 hours in the line. We were expecting three days.

Behind our line & to our left was the ruined village of Goudacourt.¹³ It had been captured by the British. Every day Fritz shelled this place heavily especially during the afternoon. He had some reason for it; some said there were two very large guns left behind there by him half buried in a house, & he shelled the place to stop us from making use of them. Whatever the reason he certainly had one, & a good one too judging by the shells he spent on it.

During the afternoon “Fritz” heavily shelled the sunken road & gully we came along when approaching the trench to effect the relief. On looking behind us I could that this was about the

¹³ Gueudecourt – about 10kms north east of Albert on the Somme

only route by which our part of the trench & beyond us too, on to the left could be approached. Fritz evidently knew it also, but he did little or no damage by shelling it during the day.

At 4 pm the guides, one from each platoon were to go out to battalion H.Q.^s, & wait there to guide the relieving [sic] company in at night. The relief [sic] was to be carried out in the same manner as when we came in, that is each platoon was to be guided to the platoon which it was to relieve [sic]. The guide from our platoon was a man out of my section. Going out in daylight was rather risky for one stood a good chance of being sniped at. At 4 o'clock the men were ready with all their equipment, & the first two they were to go in pairs, climbed over the parapet and hurried across the shell torn ground, in the open to go faster than a walk was impossible. They headed straight for the "chalk pit, a distance of about 500 yards not going up the gully the way we came in. At the "chalk pit" they were fairly safe. Fritz was still sending over an occasional big H.E shell & lobing [sic] them in the gully & around the chalk pit. In a few minutes the first pair had got well away without anything happening. At this juncture the next pair jumped out, & so on until in about 20 minutes all had got safely away. There was nothing to do now but to wait for the relief [sic] which was not expected until about 9 o'clock. So we had a bite to eat, bully & bread & cheese, there was no water, we finished that at breakfast. After that we rolled up our blanket each & water proof sheet, so as to be ready when the relief [sic] came. All went well, & the night was misty, very bad for finding one's way, & we were all silently hoping that the guides would not miss their way. Everything was quiet at 8.30 & we were keeping a look out behind for the relief [sic], when suddenly a red flare went up from Fritz's trench in front followed by three others in quick succession. Now by means of a red flare Fritz signals to his artillery [sic] if there is anything there is anything unusual happening, he also uses golden flares to give direction to any especial place. Previously I had seen red flares go up with no artillery [sic] fire following the signal, so I did not quite know what to expect from signals in front. But I was not long in doubt. The fifth [sic] light was a golden one. And within a minute from the first red flare his batteries [sic] opened, & shells were bursting thick & fast all along just behind our trench, his shells covered all the open ground over which the relief [sic] would have to come, also along the gully up to the chalk pit. The smoke from the bursting shrapnel made a white bank 50 ft high behind us, we could see the smoke by the flashes of the busting shells. + also big H.E shells were taring [sic] great holes in the ground & the earth far & wide. From his trenches dozens of flares were going up turning the night into day. It was plain to us all that his observers had spotted with a flare some of the relief [sic] coming in hence the barage [sic] I hoped our guides would have not yet left the "chalk pit". At his juncture several golden flares went up on our right, & on looking along our trench from the parapet, I could see a long string of men, on the right of our sector, which was rising round, runing [sic] for the trench, they were the first or second part of our relief [sic]. The golden flares were high over the men (at this part the German trench was close to ours). No sooner had the last men reached the trench, than the German gunners obeying the direction signals pulverised the ground with three great H.E. shells right where the men had been running. Those just about to jump down fairly tumbled into our trench! I was afterwards told that where all those poor beggars jumped in the mud was knee deep, & they came in one on top of the other, knocking each other right down flat into the mud! And it was a devilishly cold night too! However they were lucky in not getting blown to pieces. The barage [sic] lasted for about ten minutes, & then stoped almost as quickly as it had started. But Fritz kept on sending an occasional big one over.

We knew of course that the relief [sic] would now be late. At about 9.30 we could see some more men coming along. So I went out to meet them & found our guide in front They were the

platoon to relieve [sic] us. So soon as the trench was reached they tumbled in anyhow & anywhere. Then there was confusion, no sections under an N.C.O had been told off to take post in any one of the four “bays” The trench was over crowded, no one could move, & every body was talking. The corporals were trying to get their sections together The observers on the fire-steps were asking to be relieved [sic], and other[s] were trying to get out to make room [for] the new comers. It was a good [job] that the German firing line was 400 yds away! However after about ten minutes the new arrivals sorted them[*selves out*] & took over the four “bays”. And our men got up on the back of the trench & sat down. Presently our platoon officer came along & told us to move. I made away across the open with my section heading for the “chalk pit”. We had gone about 50 yds when we heard a great shell coming, I could tell by the sound that it would fall close. We had just time to stop when there was a terrible scream over our heads & a tremendous explosion just on our right, the concussion almost sent me off my feet & a shower of dirt commenced to fall. But we did not wait I looked round, & saw all hand[s] were on deck, so we made off again. A couple more shells came over, but did not bust close to us. The ground was awful to walk, soft as a ploughed field & pitted with shell-holes. In the mist we went too far ahead & had [*to go*] back to reach the “chalk pit” I was feeling very much knocked up & the party was becoming scattered, one of us an old man, could not keep up & kept calling to me to wait for him, I was therefore obliged to let the others go on in front. I did not know much where I was, but just then we passed several dead bodies so I guessed we were near the chalk pit, no other parties could be seen. During the afternoon I saw a shell explode near the “pit” & lift a dead man & fling him high into the air, the body minus a leg turned slowly in the air with leg & arms outspread, & fell about 30 yds off. In a few minutes the pit was reached, & with a sigh of relief [sic] we slid down into comparative safety. I was greatly relieved [sic] at finding I was not on the wrong track for it is an easy thing to get lost in a thick fo[*g*] at night. Here we found a lot of the others sitting down. In coming out the platoon next to us lost one killed and two wounded, they were the only casualties [sic] as far as we knew. After a rest we started again along the track which was easy to follow, & the sunken road was soon reached. After following this road for a little way we branched off to the left to try & find the track that would take us to Batt H.Q. & then across the fields to “Switch Trench”. But in the mist we got lost. We did not find H.Q. nor the track. After walking in various directions we sat down for a spell. I don’t mind admitting [sic] that I was “bushed”, or in other words lost, & I am sure the others were too. However after a rest & a talk, we found our bearings somewhat & set off again. Soon we fell in with another party, & after a time we came across the pack track it was 2 ft deep in mud so we kept clear of that. Another half mile & we came to a trench with new duck-boards in the bottom the trench we could see had just been repaired, so we promptly slid down into this & followed it along. The boards were slippery but it was better walking than in the mud. Half a mile along the trench & we came out at the old dump near “Switch Trench” where we used to carry up to when we were on night work. We had a spell here, & got a drink of water at a water cart. I felt so knocked up that sat down for a spell. The rest of the chaps moved on & I was left with a few of the 11th Batt. While we were sitting down Fritz sent over two shrapnel the first one nearly got some of us, & the next on[*e*] burst overhead We waited for a time to see if ther[*e*] were any more shells, as we heard no more we started again & got onto the duck board track through “Delville Wood”. After a while I found myself alone, so I plugged [sic] along the road all mud & slush. The 12th Batt were to stop at Bernafay Wood. And after what seemed an age of walking I found myself there. I went up to one old home & was surprised to find nearly all my section already there & the fire alight. They told me the cooks had a stew, & also that the Q.M was dispensing an issue of rum. So after dumping my gear which was a great relief [sic] I took my mess-tin & went down.

We turned in at about 2.30 am done up. My shirt was wet through with sweat. But I was tired enough to sleep under a wire fence.

13.11.16 At 7.30 we were up again & had breakfast We had to move off again at 9.a.m. Meanwhile each man had to get his pack from when they had been stacked prior to going into the line, also there was an issue of rations & cigarettes, new boots &, sheep skin jackets. It was a rush to get ready. All hands were dog tired, & the pack with two blankets & now a sheep skin extra made an awful load, & the roads were heavy & stoggy [sic]. By 9 am we were ready to go. As we went along the traffic often blocked us. After an hour's walking we were all tired & expecting a rest. On either side of the road were clear spaces, but the Colonel did not call a halt. The different platoons became separated but still no rest was made & men began to drop out, knocked up & small wonder too. After going a little further I fell out for a spell also. After a while I went on again & soon fell in with others who had hung back. We kept going at our own pace and at 12 o'clock had a bite to eat. We caught up to the company after dinner. I had a ride in a limber for half a mile which was a good help.

At about 3.30 we passed through the ruined village of Fricourt¹⁴ & were taken to a new camp of huts.

After a rest we all went down to the tanks for a wash the first for about a fortnight, quite a treat it was. After tea I had a shave, another treat, & all the boys followed suite; for about an hour the place was all soap & bristles! After that we made our beds down & settled ourselves for a real good sleep another treat for we had hardly closed our eyes for several days past, & down a lot of marching to the bargain.

14.11.16 Next morning we were off again feeling considerably refreshed. But I was rather stiff & sore in places.

At about mid day we came to the village of Dernancourt¹⁵ & went into our billets. We had marched through this village when coming into the Somme. Our billet was an old cow shed with one side smashed out, it was a dirty cold day, and we were to stay here for two or three days. I soon found a shop where I bought some food.

15.11.16. Next morning we were taken for a bath. Fine baths they were & we got a change of underclothes too.

16.11 16 This day was my birthday, & we went to work unloading a train of timber at an adjacent military siding.

17.11.16 This morning we went to the same place to work, but returned at 11 am because we were to move to the next village about 1½ [?] further on. Arrived at the village it was the same one where we got off the cars coming into the Somme named Buire,¹⁶ & we billeted in the very

⁸ 3-4 kms east of Albert

⁹ 2km southwest of Albert

¹⁰ Buire-sur-l'Ancre, 2km southwest of Dernancourt

same big barn. The day was ever so cold & when I hung my equipment up on the wall I heard lump of ice rattling in my water bottle! During the night snow fell & when we woke up everything was white outside. It was most wretchedly cold, & at 8.30 we had to turn out for fatigue at the railway siding. All the rations we had to take with us was bread & cheese & a couple of figs dried, & water in our bottles. Periodically, at intervals of about ten days, dried fruit (figs or rasins [sic]) is issued in place of jam & butter, each man gets a handful of rasins [sic] or a few figs. It is a starvation diet & I don't know why it is done, for we never get too much jam or butter goodness knows. Well we set off & arrived at our job about 9.15. A cold wind was blowing which brought rain along also. Our job was to unload a big train of timber. It was a wretched job under wretched circumstances. We worked all the morning & by dinner time were rather wet about the legs. Some of the boys purchased some food at a shop in the village, & other managed somehow or other to get a drink of tea; but we all felt miserable & cold. At about 3 pm we went home.

19.11.16 Today we were to move away further back to rest billets somewhere near Amiens, motor buses were to take us. We packed up our gear about 11 a.m. & moved out along the road. After marching about 500 yds we stoped [sic] in a field by the road side, the cars were waiting along the road. We had a bite to eat, & then boarded the cars. Amiens was reached at 3.30. We turned off to the right & after travelling a few miles the cars stoped. [sic] We marched along the road a little way to a village standing on a hill. Arrived there we went into billets the usual sort. But my platoon were worse served than usual, & I think most of the others were too.

We were put into an old cowshed a rotten dirty place it was. The old straw & rubbish had been raked into heaps and left in the centre of the place. I felt disgusted with the place. I went out to try & buy some food, but I had no luck, it was such a miserable village that there seemed to be no shops in the place, so I went back. After a piece or two of bread & jam I went out again with the sergeant this time to try & find some decent wine. We could not buy any food, so we thought we would try & get something to drink, it would cheer us up at all events. We found a good many of the boys out on the same racket After a couple of bottles of champayne [sic] which was not of the best quality, we returned to our billet more cheerful.

Some of the fellows were rather the worse for wine & in the centre of our cow-shed was a narrow stairway leading down to a cellar. So soon as I saw the boys coming in I knew there would be some fun with that hole, & sure enough it proved to be a veritable man trap claiming a number of victims before all hands had turned in. The fellows would fall down the hole & hang by their elbows, & shout to be pulled out. We would always let them hang there a good while before pulling them out!

Next morning **20.11.16** we moved to better billets in a large brick barn, but the place was rather dark having no windows in the walls. The captain bought us some straw to sleep on & during the day I found a shop where I could purchased[sic] some grub, also heard that a battalion canteen was to be opened, With more comfortable billets & some decent food to eat I began to feel much more contented.

In the morning at 9 am the order came to fall in for drill, the same old thing, only that now ones hands ached with the cold.

This village of Rainville¹⁷ [?] was about six miles from Amiens, & there to be leave in the town for those of good character starting with the long service men, six per day from each company was the rate. This meant that more than half the men would not get a change [*chance*] to go in, for in ten days time we were to be on the move again. Why more men per day could not be allowed goodness knows, I did not go on leave as my turn had not come round before we had to move.

We kept on with drill each day except when rain fell which was not often, as the weather was rather fine & cold. I had a good many days off, drill which was a relief to me. I was on Brigade Guard, & a little later on I had four days off with a bad boil on my neck, it was very painful indeed so much so that I could scarcely walk.

We kept on at this village with the same old drill until the 29th November. On that morning we moved off fully loaded & turned our head Sommewards again.

Nothing much occurred [sic] on the march except that we were ordered to wear our sheep skin jackets. This went against the grain very much, for it was too much to wear whilst marching causing the men to perspire in spite of the cold, & so soon as a halt was called the men would begin to shiver having no extra garment handy to slip on. Why the men cannot be allowed to please themselves as to how much clothing to wear when marching, goodness knows. The first night we billeted in a decent town, just opposite our barn (which by the way was clean) stood, a shop where we could get coffee & biscuits. We smelt that place out almost before we were settled in our billets!

30.16.[sic] Today we marched into Dernancourt back once again. We stayed here for a couple of days doing drill. On the 3rd Dec the battalion was to move up to Fricourt. The night before I was detailed to take 20 men from the platoon & report to Brigade a 7.30. We were to do fatigue work at “Longueval RE Dump”.¹⁸ Motor Lorries were to convey us to Fricourt & we would [*march*] from there to Longueval. Of course the lorries failed to arrive, & after waiting until 8.30 we were told to make & start & walk it! Very nice! The boys were considerably down hearted at this prospect, for it was a good 12 miles, about twice the regulation distance for a days march in this area, because the roads are not good traffic is heavy, & the men have to carry everything including “tin hat”. However we set off & kept going with frequent short spells. We did the distance much better than I expect to arriving at Longueval at 3.30. The roads were in better order than when we left last time which was a gratefing [sic] surprise & helped us a lot.

We relieved [sic] the old working party at the Dump & settled ourselves into our “possies”. The dug outs were comfortable & all hands hoped to stay on there for sometime.

In the morning **4.12.16** the boys went to work at a new railway siding down near Bernafay Wood,¹⁹ they returned at 4.p.m. Rations were drawn from the engineers rum also, one of the boys did our cooking. That night I heard that the battalion had moved up to “Carlton Camp” a place near us. Our battalion was the first to go in the line this time, & we hoped to be left behind at the dump altho’ I had my doubts about it. Since ours was the first batt’ to go in I could not understand why we were sent to this job, Usually these jobs are given to a batt’ that has

¹¹ Rainneville – about 9kms NNE of Amiens

¹² 10km north east of Albert

¹³ 6-7km east of Albert

done its turn in the line or else to one that is going in about last, so that when there [sic] turn comes there will be several battalions available which have already done their turn in the line.

5.12.16 This morning I set out to find our battalion as I guessed there may be some rations to be had. I found them easily enough, & the rations were there for us too. I took these with joy, also with sorrow the news that we would perhaps be relieved [sic] during the day because the battalion was going into the line in the evening. And sure enough at 10.30 am a party of the 9th batt' arrived to relieve [sic] us. I sent them down to the siding at once to relieve [sic] my men, & then packed up my gear & had some dinner. At 1.15 we moved off for the batt' sadder but wiser men. It was bad luck indeed to lose our job after having walked so far two days before to get to it. As I remarked previously it seemed a funny idea to send us to the Dump when our batt' was going into the line so soon. But it would not trouble those in command to know that 20 men had done an extra long day's march all for nothing. We found our company just about to move off. We just had time to stack our packs in a tent set apart & follow on behind. The route lay along the "duck boards" through "Delville Wood", & then along a duck boarded trench to Flers. It was good walking nearly all the way. Night had fallen when battalion H Quarters was reached. "A" Coy went straight up into the line also "C" Coy. I with my men went into supports an old trench with a few shelters erected along it. We would have the job of carrying up rations etc to the front line. A rotten job. However we sorted ourselves out & turned in & strange to say, we were not roused during the night.

Next day **6.12.16** I was astir soon after daylight & had a look round. The ruined village of Flers²⁰ was on the ridge a few hundred yard to our left. Our trench was in a long hollow skirting the ridge running toward the firing line. Two or three other trenches used as supports ran straight up the ridge, our trench was parallel, & therefore struck me as being safer. During the morning I had to take over 24 reinforcements for "A" Coy which had arrived the night before. Poor beggars they were like lost sheep, and I was sorry for them joining us at such a time. They had as usual neither blanket nor food & I could get nothing for them until tomorrow, & then no blankets, reinforcements always get a rough time of it.

At 4.30 pm we had to take 16 petrol tins of tea up to the two companies in the line, & rations at 6.30. Also tea again at 4.30 next morning. The poor old reinforcements came in for a good share of this work! During the day Fritz kept potting at the village & supports with big shells. I had great difficulty in finding places for the new men to sleep in. The shelters in our trench were all occupied, & all I could do was to find some cellars in the village. This was awkward because it meant that the men would be scattered & therefore difficult to rouse out early in the morning, more work for me.

The route to the front line lay along the hollow for about half a mile until a broken tank was reached, just beyond this was a communication trench running at right angles across the hollow. This trench lead [sic] into the right flank of the two company sectors. There was a gap of about 200 yds separating the companies This gap was across a hollow. Another big gap on the right flank separated our line from the battalion on our right. Rather a dangerous place to go into at night. The communication trench was in good order with duck boards in the centre for about 300 yds. But the rest was rather muddy, & one part was shallow & very narrow, Fritz had shelled

¹⁴ 6-7kms south of Bapaume

rather heavily a portion of this. When going along I wondered what the place would be like after a [few] days of rain. Little did I think how much I would experience it before our eight days was up. We made three trips to the line each day until the company was relieved [sic] on the night of **7.12.16** & came back into supports for 48 hours. So far the weather had been fine, but I could see rain was not far off. The boys seemed to be in fair condition when they arrived, & soon set about making themselves comfortable for the night in the 'possies' occupied previously by the company (B) that relieved [sic] them. Rations were issued also rum & hot tea.

Early next morning **8.12.16** the rain came on. The galvanised iron on the roof of our dug out had been all shot through by shrapnel, & I woke up at daylight with a stream of water running under my back. We jumped up & put two water proof sheets & a cape over the roof, I found another sheet outside, & also the legs of several gum boot[s] these I slit & laid them over the last few holes. This made our "possie" water proof except for an occasional [sic] drip. All the other poor beggars like ourselves were climbing about the tops of their shelters laying on their sheets & exposing their bare legs to the wind, & my word it was cold too!

Rain continued to fall at intervals during the day. At night the company was taken out carrying "duck boards" up to the communication trench. They finished at about 10 pm.

During the night Fritz shelled supports rather heavily using however mostly "wiz bangs". There was a small ridge just to the rear of my "possie" with a couple of trenches along it occupied by the 5th batt'. Most of the shells were falling about that ridge, & not for nothing either for I heard several cries for stretcher bearers. Just about daylight Fritz lengthened his range a little & the shells began to fall uncomfortably [close] to my "home" shaking the place, which caused lumps of dirt to fall on us, & scattering mud & dirt on the roof. After a while he lengthened still more dropping them into the flat between us & the village. We were relieved [sic] at being rid of his attentions! Later on when I got up to get the breakfast & rations I was surprised how close some of the shells had been to us, good job they were only small ones.

Fritz kept to the shelling all day. At about 3 pm. he hit one of our machine gunners walking across the flat, the shell & "wizz bang" H E burst in the ground just behind him. The poor fellow died afterwards of his wounds.

At 4 pm we were ready to start for the line. It was "A" boys turn to go in for another 48 hours the last: I was going this time. We were to take our overcoat & water proof sheet, & leave our blanket. I had no over coat, but a water proof cape. Rain came on steadily but was not heavy. We fell in at 5 pm & started off. Our position this time was to be the left sector with a gap dividing the two companies. This sector of trench [was] not in such good order.

The mud was greatly increased owing to the recent rain, & that portion of the long communication trench which had no duck boards in the bottom was in a terrible state, the mud thick & sticky was almost knee deep. I felt exhausted before half way had been passed. The trench being narrow & the sides all wet & muddy, we were simply smeared & rubbed with mud from head to foot.

At last with a sigh of thankfulness we stepped [sic] on to the duck boards of the first section of trench the right flank. We walked along this to the left passing the men on duty etc. At the end we jumped out & across the gap to the next rise where our section was. We soon effected the

relief [sic] without any bother. The portion of trench where I was had duck boards in the bottom, but was in a tumble condition, big lumps frequently falling in. Some shovels were found & altho' all the boys were wet through & cold they set to work & straightened the place up.

All night we walked up & down the duck boards" that is those men who were not on duty. This was the only way we could save ourselves from being frozen as the night was bitter cold, & we were all wet. Just before daylight I sat down on a part of the "fire step" first of all scrapping [sic] away the mud. In spite of the cold I went to sleep for I was ever so tired. In about half an hour I woke again, & I was so cold & stiff that I could barely move. It is impossible to sleep for this reason. At 7 am we had a "nip" of rum & some breakfast, & we all felt much better somehow or other daylight always brings cheerfulness. The rain had stoped [sic] at mid-night.

Breakfast did I say! If the home folks could have seen us eating there in the mud like pigs or worse! Our table the fire-step was all mud inches deep. The bread carried up in sand bags was wet & muddy & covered with bits of hairy stuff off the bags, the cheese was in a like condition. To drink there was cold tea in petrol tins, tasting of petrol. Some meal that!

After breakfast we walked the duck boards again. During the morning each man cleaned his rifle, also changed his sox & rubbed his feet with whale oil. This was to combat the terror "trench feet". "Trench feet" is brough[t] by standing in the wet & cold. The feet swell up to a great size & ache & become frightfully tender, sometimes sores break out.

In the afternoon Fritz sent a good many shells over. He paid considerable attention to the track leading across the gap to the other company on our right. None of the shells came in the trench.

At 4 pm I received orders to take a man out to battalion H Quarters who was to stand his trial at a court martial the following day. I was a witness for the case, but forgot the fact. The captain said I could return at once. I did not like the idea of my trip much because of the mud. Not wishing to be overloaded I left my haversack behind containing my shaving gear, sox etc. We started at 4.15 pm & hurried across the gap which was in full view of Fritz's trench about 600 yds. distance. When we reached the communication trench Fritz was shelling along the top of it rather heavily, so we were forced to proceed along it. We decided to go on to the dressing station which was in a big dug out about 200 yds along there we could get a drink of cocoa. We soon found that the trench was in a worse state than the previous night. The mud thick & sticky was knee deep & over, several times I was all but bogged, & before half way was passed felt thoroughly done up. It required all my efforts to slowly drag my legs out. But for the shelling I would have climbed out & gone along the top. At last the dressing station was reached, never before have I enjoyed cocoa like I did that drink. After a spell we felt much better & as the shelling seemed to have ceased we decided to go along the top. The low & narrow part of the trench was reached when a salvo of shells tore up the earth behind us. We flopped down into the trench like lightning, & a good thing it was as that we were quick for the shells wizzed close & fast over our head for the next few minutes. When we tried to get out, I could not move being stuck in the mud & jammed in the narrow trench, We were forced to kneel down for the trench was shallow at this point: My knees were embedded in the mud, & my companion had to help me out. After this we were allowed to go in peace.

Night had fallen long before batt' H.Q was reached, & we were both wet, muddy tired & hungry. At about 6 pm we arrived, & D reported. Batt HQs was in a great deep dug-out about 30 ft under

ground. I tumbled down the steps & opened the door, then I found the colonel & other officers just finishing dinner. They were in a comfortable room with chairs & table & lighted by an accatilyne [sic] lamp. The parson was engaged in putting records on the colonel[s] gramophone. The colonel seemed startled at my rather sudden appearance, & small wonder too for I guess I did not bare any resemblance to an ordinary human being. I was forced to notice the easy & light hearted way these officers were spending the time whilst the men & junior officers were having such a hard time in the line. The contrast was very great. Truly there is nothing even or fair in war or the army at all.

After reporting to the R.S.M. I learnt that I was required as a witness at the trial the next day. I would not therefore return to the line. I had forgotten my being a witness, & now cursed my absentmindedness because I had been fool enough to leave my haversack behind, thinking that I was going to return. However, I went to the signal office & sent a message asking that one of the men in my post be told to bring it along the next night when they were relieved. [sic]

That night I had a good sleep in a cellar in Flers occupied by some chaps from H.Q.s.

11.12.16. At 7 am we were ready there were two other accused beside my man. The Adjutant [sic] came with us. The morning was frosty which made the mud hard & better to walk on.

The court was being held at a camp of the 1st Brigade not far from Fricourt. It took us almost 3 hours walking to get there! And I was not tired! No only a rumour! There were several other accused of the 1st Brigade to stand their trial. A start was made at 11 a.m. I thought that having so far to go our men would be tried first. But no such luck we came last on the list! And had to wait about in the cold until 3 pm. Luckily a YMCA. was close by where we were able to get something to eat & drink. I had a nasty boil on the back of my neck which caused me considerable pain.

We set out for home at about 3 pm. & got onto the duck boards at Delville Wood by dark. I reached Flers about 6.30. & sought out my cellar. The men were expected at about 7.30, & I went down to the support trench in the flat to help with the billeting of men etc & the rum & rations. This was the last 48 hours for our boys in the front line. At about 7.30 the first stragglers [sic] came along, they presented pitiful sights being wet & absolutely covered in mud & very exhausted. They all had a bad time getting through the mud coming out. Many of the shelters had fallen in owing to the rain & this made it difficult to find places for the men to go into. But in about an hour's time they were all settled down. Rations had been given out, also hot tea & a tot of rum & the men were getting into bed. Luckily their blankets were dry having been left behind.

I returned to the cellar & turned in.

Next morning **12.12.16** the place was white with snow, & the cold was awful, which was made worse by a constant & icy breeze. It was wretched for the men having to put wet clothes on. That night we were to be relieved [sic] the whole battalion making our time in the trenches 7 days in all.

At about 8 pm the first company of the relieving [sic] batt came along & went straight up to the front line to relieve [sic] one of our companies there. At about 9 pm we started. We were to go

into tents near where we had come from. It was not so far to go with duck boards nearly all the way, & we were already out of the front line, so we expected to get out easily enough. The tents were reached about mid night. The mud was easily one foot deep & there was no one to show which tents to go into, so after waiting for ten minutes we took possession of them ourselves. Many were wet & slippery inside hardly fit for a dog to sleep in. I tried to find where [sic] the officers tents were so that I could draw the rum for my men. But after slipping & plunging about in the mud for awhile [sic] I gave it up and went to bed.

13.12.16 Next morning we all had to go on fatigue unloading at a near by railway siding at Bernafay Wood, but when we arrived, there was no work for us so we returned. The camp was a melancholy place to live in tents in the mud.

14.12.16 Next morning we went again to the siding with the same result! During the afternoon we moved into oval huts a little way down the road. Here the mud was worse. But huts are much better to live in than tents altho' we were rather overcrowded having to take 32 in each hut, which are built to take 30. But that was only a trifle. We were to stay in these huts for about two weeks & would be engaged at various kinds of work each day. One day we would go to the siding unloading trucks, the next morning would see us digging a cable way, & again, we would be tunneling [sic] a Brigade H.Q.^s or making large dug outs near the railway, & so on. I did not go out every day the N.C.O^s took it in turns, but the work [was] constant on the men. They used to bring fire wood home with them & sometimes a bag of coal, and we always had a couple of fire-buckets burning at night. The boys where thus [able] to dry their clothes & get a good warm. Also there were several canteens beside one of our own, & as pay was given out a day or so after occupying the huts, the men were able to bring home coffee & rolled oats etc which they could cook at night. Fatigues parties were used during the day to clear away the mud & put down duck boards which greatly improved the place. We were more comfortable after a few days than I expected to be during my stay in the "war zone" The weather turned very rough wet & cold & I am sure we were lucky in doing our eight days in the line first. A little while back there was three days of frost which made the mud as hard as a road. It was good for walking about, but frightfully cold. About this time I fell sick & had four days or more off duty, I was also off my food too & felt very unwell. Nearly all the boys have bad colds & sickness is rather common. There being a large sick parade each morning some-time more than one hundred men.

We were to spend Xmas at this camp & already parcels were arriving for some of the boys. I was expecting at least three, one large one being from home! Of course we guessed that the work would have to go on just the same during Christmas. On Xmas Eve the Colonel came into our hut & wished us all the compliments of the season. He said fatigues would have to go on as usual, therefore he did not expect our Xmas would be a very Merry one. That night the Xmas parcels one for each man were distributed. These parcels are subscribed [sic] for by the home folds. The distribution is carried out by the authorities so that each man may be sure of receiving a parcel. The previous day I received a small parcel from a friend at home, so I expect the others will come on later.

Diary 4

Soldiers Diary

With the Aus 1st Div in France

Book N^o 4

Date Dec 26th 1916

“Life on the Somme.”

“Details of Sommeism”

The day after Xmas found us at one or other of the same old tasks, in which we had been engaged since the 13th. Each day we worked, sometimes leaving camp at 7.30 am, & sometimes an hour later, according to where it was we had to go to work. The weather was cold & miserable with a good lot of rain which how-ever fell mostly at night.

One day I remember well, we were digging a cable-way across a ridge, no more than a mile to the rear of Flers. This ridge was under direct observation from the German lines. Just to the right of us was a battery of 18 pounders a little way off the ridge. About 100 yds in front a bag screen had been erected with a view to protecting the battery from direct observation. It struck me as being a bad place for a battery position. After the men had started work I strolled across & soon started a conversation with one of the battery officers who happened to be standing by. It was the 39th Aus' Battery. The position the officer said was rather unhealthy as Fritz seemed to know all about the battery. He regarded our working party on the ridge with an anxious eye & asked me how long we would be doing the job. Because if Fritz were to notice the activity he would most likely shell the whole place.

Luckily the day was misty. On our left right on top of the ridge & running along it was an old trench. Out in front of it (the front facing away from the German line) I noticed dozens of rifles sticking up in the ground, so I just walked across to have a look. I soon found why the rifles were there. Each one denoted where a British soldier had fallen. Most of the bodies where [sic] entirely unburied, some few had a light covering of earth. The majority had been killed as they lay in shell holes. They had evidently taken part in an attack on the trench when they met their fate. It was a pitiful sight to see the poor fellows lieing [sic] there, just their bones, boots & clothes remaining to show what once had been a living man in the spring of life. These men who had made the “Great Sacrifice” that England may live, lay there just where they had fallen like wild beasts of the forest. And yet in books & papers we read of “a soldiers grave” etc. The writer probably never having heard a gun fired.

We who know of these things understand why it is that the fallen men are not buried. There is too much to do, & no time at all for any ordinary humanities of life. We do not expect that fallen men killed in the rush of an attack will be buried. But perhaps at some later date this will be done. We all hope so. In the ordinary routine of war when there is no hard fighting, any men [sic] who are killed always have a decent burial & a wooden cross erected at their head. Many of these little grave yards are to be seen dotted about behind the line. In a space of about 100 yds by 50 yds I counted fully 100 bodies. And down further where the men were at work there were bodies lying about in shell holes, most of which were full of water. In one shell hole I saw a curiously horrible sight. The hole was half full of brownish water & just under the surface a man's hand & forearm appeared to be floating in the water. The limb seemed to have been preserved by the water, also the tunic sleeve, the remainder of the body lay hidden at the

bottom of the shell hole. In the trench in front of which I had counted so many dead, I found several dead Germans who had evidently died in defending the trench, in one place there six lying together partly covered with earth, which had evidently fallen in on top of them from the side of the trench. Thus nature attempts to do that which should under ordinary conditions of live [sic] be man's first care.

Latter [sic] on the atmosphere cleared, & I thought of what the artillery [sic] officer had told me. Fritz was sending an occasional shell over; but they were going well behind us. At 12.30 a halt was called for dinner we had to eat bread & cheese & jam. I had beside a tin of fish which I had purchased at a canteen. During the afternoon the German guns became a little more active. And presently I heard the ominous roar of a big shell which I knew instantly & instinctively was going to fall close, and in another fraction of a second the huge missile with the rushing roar of an express train fell right into a "gun pit" of the battery about 50 yds to our right & exploded with a tremendous crash lifting the galvanised iron roof & poles of the gun pit high into the air. Most of the men turned & ran towards the road to escape the shower of falling mud & other fragments. I saw one man running holding his shovel over his head as protection from the earthy shower, he was wearing a felt hat! Hence the shovel! The officer in charge had a reputation for being nervy under shell fire & he ran with the rest holding his tin hat firmly on his head, it looked rather ridiculous for an officer. I was digging at the time the shell arrived we had just started a new piece of work. Nearly all the men left the work in the first rush for the shell[,] trully [sic] a big one[,] was a very sudden surprise to us all. After the mud had finished falling I moved away also, altho' I did not know where to go one place is as good as another until one can form an idea as to the line of fire, this requires at least two shots before one can judge at all how & where they are going to come. It was certain he would send some more, but probably only use the one gun, & I naturally concluded he would send some more into the battery [sic], so I moved towards the road where the other chaps were standing, also the road was several feet lower than the ground we had been working on. Fortunately no one had been hit with the first shell, & all the artillery men had quickly left the battery & gone further up the rise.

Sure enough in about three minutes time I again heard the whizz of the approaching shell, & in another instant it passed with a roar right over our heads & burst across the road about 200 yds beyond & to the left of the battery. This puzzled me rather & I decided to wait for the next one before moving. In a minute he came & burst about the same place, but not so far ahead. It was now evident that the German gunners had settled on their range and the next few shells would most probably fall in about the same place. Our position was not too safe being in the line of fire, & if one dropped [sic] short it would fall right among us in all likelihood [sic]. In this case the safest plan would be to flank the line of fire, but this meant either going into the deep mud across the road or walking up in front of the battery position which is not allowed.

So I did the next best thing walked straight toward the direction from whence the shell was coming for a 100 yds or so. Thus I would still be well away if one happened to drop short. My calculations proved correct because after a couple more shots in the same place one did drop short & burst by the road side about 20 yds away from where our officer & a group of men were standing. This time there was a real scatter to escape the mud shower which also contained stones from the roadside. They came running up the bank & over to where we had been at work. The officer signalled for us to go home as he considered it was too dangerous to stay just for work, which could easily be done another day, & in this he was right- So we all grabed [sic] our tools & tucker bags & made off at a good pace, & were well away before the next shell

came. I looked at my watch & found the time 15 minutes to 3., so we had to thank Fritz for sending us home about an hour earlier than usual.

That night too we were to move from the huts into an adjacent camp of tents a little further along the road. So we were all pleased about getting home early.

We found the tents not so bad, but of [course] the ground was rather damp. Tents for winter use should be fitted with wooden floors which are made in sections & therefore portable, but I suppose we were lucky in a way to have such a good shelter as a tent under the circumstances. As there were only six men per tent we were to [sic] able to avoid the wettest [sic] part of the ground, And with a few sandbags to lay on we found ourselves comfortable enough. The camp was situated on a hillside overlooking a long narrow valley, running along the bottom of which was a railway. All along the opposite hillside dozens of big guns were in position. I counted nearly fifty [sic] one day, & there must have been lots of others that I could not see. The guns were always firing too especially during the afternoon & night. I had no idea that our “heavies” did so much work. Sometimes the noise was tremendous even where we were, trying to talk during the firing being useless.

At this camp the mud was not so deep, but there were no “duck boards”. We had a much easier time to as regards work. But there was a certain amount of night work to do. It came to our turn every other night so that was not so bad, & sometimes we would get home quite early.

One evening we were going out to carry “duck boards frames” etc, to a point within half a mile of the line. Brigade H.Q^s was reached at 4 p.m and we had half a mile of exposed duck board track to walk along before coming to the dump from where the carrying was to start. While we were waiting at Brigade H.Q for the engineer, Fritz started to send shrapnel right over those blessed “duck boards”. The shells were arriving in pairs every minute or so. I observed a couple of shots & found that they were bursting high, so thought I if he keeps to that it won't be so bad. For in all probability the shrapnel bullets bursting high would carry far enough forward to clear the track before striking the ground. Just after making these deductions we moved forward again with the officer in front. We went along a trench for about 100 yds before climbing out onto the “duck boards” The shells were bursting about 300 yds in front of us. After waiting a few minutes for the next two shells we sprang out so soon as they arrived & went along those boards at the double so as to clear the dangerous space if possible before the next two came. In about a minute or less there were two crashes over head followed instantly by the demoralising scream which denotes shrapnel (caused by the little round lead bullets 300 odd of which are in every 18 pounder shrapnel shell, and bursting in the air the nose cap is blow[n] off & the bullets are flung forward). Bursting at the correct height about 20 ft the bullets sweep an area of about 25 yds wide & 120 yds long). And I knew we were safe for at that the bullets would strike the ground behind us. By the time the next two shells arrived we were well away, the dump was reached & we got off with our first load. We went towards Flers & soon found ourselves in familiar ground for we went past our old support trench & on to the “tank” where the timber etc was stacked. We had about a mile to carry the last haul[?] was deep mud. Just past battalion H.Q^s there is a small symmetry [sic]. On returning past this I saw some men digging graves & several bodies lying nearby. On making inquiries I found they had been killed in a dug out that afternoon, they were signallers of the 4th Batt who were then holding the line we had before. A great high explosive shell (HE) crashed through the dug out & killed every man.

Three of the poor fellows had to be collected in bags, & buried thus. Occasionally these big shell[s] make havoc in this way. Just before Xmas I heard of a big shell striking a hut which had only a few minutes before been occupied by troops coming out from the line. Only one man of the hut full came out of the mess himself, a few others were carried away. This was seen by a party of our men who happened to be working near by.

We stayed in the tents for a little more than a week, & on Monday morning

8.1.17 we were relieved. After spending five weeks in the “war zone” it was with a light heart that we shouldered our packs & marched to the railway siding at Bernafay Wood. Just fancy we were going to leave the mud & water in a train, ye gods! And altho’ the day was cold & there were only open trucks for us, we did no[t] notice that in the least for we were filled with that indescribable feeling which only comes to a soldier when he turns his back on the trenches the mud & the shells, & faces civilisation [sic] again.

We, every man of us felt all these things, as we slipped softly [sic] away on the train, & saw the mud & other evidences of war falling behind out of sight. And then we thought of the open country which would soon greet our eyes villages & woods & fields all undamaged, & which had never felt the shock of a bursting shell.

In about an hour the train stopped [sic] at Meaulte & we got off & marched to Durnancourt²¹ about a mile & a half. Our billets there were in a good barn. Wire bunks had been fitted up three tiers [sic] high, & each man was given a small bundle of straw to sleep on thus the bunks were warm & comfortable. But the building only having one window, one half of the place was in semi-darkness all day. The floor space was very limited, nearly all the area being occupied by bunk & the crowd at meal times was tremendous. The bunks were built about 3 ft above one another, this meant that those who slept underneath could not use their bunks to sit on without bumping their heads on the bunk above. Another foot of space between the bunks would have been very convenient & made a bit of difference to our comfort. But soldiers are not supposed to know anything of conveniences!

Here we had a bath at the Divisional Baths, & a change of undershirts. A complete rest was allowed us of three days. This was really needed & greatly appreciated by us all. On Sunday about the 13th. we moved to Bresle²² a village about five miles away.

Arrived at this village at about 3.30 pm. Billeted in a large building with several sky lights in the roof. Thus daylight was distributed evenly over the place. The building was probably a barn in civil life. Running along each side were shelves or benches 7 ft wide three tiers high one above the other. One side of the building was occupied by men of the famous 29th Division, which gained them a fine reputation at Cape Helles Gallipoli. The benches were for us to sleep on & each platoon was allotted a space in the usual way. We experienced the same trouble with these benches as at Durnancourt, [sic] in there being not sufficient space between any man of average height could not sit up without bumping his head. And moreover those underneath caught the dirt as it worked through the cracks above! That night members of our English comrades of the 29th Div

²¹ Durnancourt – about 5-6km south of Albert

²² Bresle – about 8km SW of Albert

gave a fine concert assisted by our Brigade band. A platform for this purpose had been erected in the centre of the building.

Next morning we were taken out to drill. The parade ground being up on a hill it was very cold. We drilled all the morning, the same old old thing how tired & fed up we all are with it. No one will try to do the work properly, & I for one don't feel like making them.

Next day was just a repetition of the first, with the break of a game of football in the afternoon, but the weather was too cold to enjoy it, I did not play.

The only difference between this village & others was in the prices charged by the French people for anything they had to sell us! Here we had to pay about 20% more than elsewhere even Durnancourt [sic] was cheaper. Small candle were sold at 2 ½ d each & oranges 3d each! It is horrible the way these frenchis [sic] exploit the soldiers men fresh from the trenches who for a month or more have [*lived*] like pigs rather than men, who have been strangers to anything approaching civilisation & the ordinary habits of human beings. These men naturally fall ready victims in the French shops & cafés. Certain things they must have, lots of other things they crave for, & they will pay almost any price to procure what they want.

One night shortly after arriving here there was a fall of snow, and next morning snow was still falling lightly. We went out to shoot on the miniture [sic] range. It was bitterly cold & we did not enjoy ourselves. After dinner we went out to drill! Ye gods! But of course drill was ridiculous under the conditions, so the afternoon was spent in games & snow balling etc. We had some great fun the officers entered into the sport & got a rare pelting of course! Some of the boys made a snow slide down a hill, but the snow was too soft, after a couple of days frost it would be good.

The next day was spent in games of snow balling, but the snow was becoming hard, as the weather had been freezing all the time.

Next day we found the snow too hard, so we tried the slide using old sheets of roofing iron, & to our joy we found it a great success. There was a sharp bank at the bottom & the object was to shoot over it. This was good sport no doubt. But the resulting bump on landing seemed too much of a good thing for yours trully [sic]! So I did not try that part of it!

Each day we would go out to drill & shiver in the cold. On two occassions [sic] we practiced [sic] company in attack. Some new formation has been evolved, so of course we had to get acquainted with it much to our discomfort under the circumstances!

On Sunday the 21st there was church parade & after that we had the day to ourselves.

22.1.17 On parade again as usual during the morning we did bombing, each man through [*threw*] a live "Mills" grenade. After dinner we went for a march.

23.1.17 Gas helmet inspection & gas drill, after that we each threw another grenade. In the

afternoon there was a football match.

24.1.17 Today the battalion was to move to Fricourt. We had just 16 days out of the “war zone” 5 days of which time was spent at “Durnancourt”. [sic] And now we were once more turning our faces “trenchwards”. At 9.15 am. we were all ready to move billets cleaned up & swept out. A few minutes later the company fell in, & marched out on to the road. Here there was some delay & we stood waiting on the road for nearly an hour. Then the order came to move, we went about 100 yds, & were then told to take off our equipment on the roadside & break off. By this time we were all well-nigh frozen for it was a bitterly cold morning with a heavy frost. Everything was frozen & icicles were hanging from the roofs of houses trees etc. We all ran about the roads and soon worked up a little circulation. In about 30 minutes we put on our gear & fell in again. This time we actually marched off for good without any waiting. As we got out of the village a keen biting wind met us. I am sure never before have I experienced such cold weather as we are now getting.

We marched through Albert & turned onto the Fricourt road. Fritz put three big shells over right near to the town as we went through.

We passed close to the remarkable church, which has drawn so much attention, & is know [sic] all over the world. It is a very fine church with a grand tower on the top of which is a guilt [sic] statue of the “Holy Mother” clasping the infant Saviour at arms length over head. A Hun shell has struck the base of the statue, and the lovely work now hangs over at a steep angle, a mute & piteous [sic] appeal to the world at large to halt & take heed of the Huns fiendish method of deserution [sic] of whatsoever is costly & beautiful, & cherished by the people of France.

Our destination “Fricourt farm” was reached at about 3.30 pm. We were all rather done up. Altho’ the march had not been a long one, it was done during the middle of the day, and no halt was given for us to eat at midday. However that is only a trifle. We found the huts lined & fairly draught proof & the camp had “duck board” paths laid throughout, so we were well pleased with the place.

To get some wood, of which there is plenty near by, & light a fire did not take us long.

As night came on a terrible frost began to settle. To try & keep warm during the night I had my waterproof over my blankets. In the morning I found the underside of it frosted over! Just before dark I went to the water tank to get a mess tin of water. The tank had ice over the top 4 inches thick, a hole at one corner had been broken through. When I got back to the hut there was ice around the sides of the mess tin! One morning before we left the village I saw a man with two eggs he was going to cook for breakfast. They were frozen hard!

25.1.17 The next morning we were up at 6 am breakfast at 6.15. At 7.15 we were marching off to fatigue. Before going far the moisture from my breath froze on my coat collar, the same happened to the others also. And those men who had a moustache soon found little balls of ice attached there to! [sic] I also saw several horses with icicles hanging from their lips, & head & neck all frosted over! We went to Bazantine²³ station & unloaded trucks of mettle.[sic] The job was finished at about 2.30 pm. & we set off for home, it was nearly an hours walk. The night

²³ Probably Bazentin – a few kilometres east of Pozières

before rations were very short five men to one small loaf!

26.1.17 Today there was no work, so we did not have to get up early. At 9 am we went for a run along the road & after that gas drill in the hut. At 11 am foot inspect by the M.D. After that we all washed our feet in hot water & rubbed them with whale oil. Whale oil is used as a preventive for “trench feet”.

The remainder of the day we had to ourselves, & one thing done was to lay in a good store of fire wood.

Rations were again short today.

27.1.17 Today we also did nothing much. At 9.15 am we went for a brisk walk along the road. Afterwards there was a rifle inspection. Then came the inspection of feet by the MD. After dinner we had an hour's practice at rapid loading using ball amunition.[sic] One of the chaps fired by accident a shot through the roof!

28.1.17 Sunday, & we are shifing [sic] camp. Always do something like that on Sunday.

We had to get up at 6 am & move off in full marching order an hour later carrying both blankets. Our programe [sic] was to march out to somewhere near our new camp, pile arms etc do a days fatigue & then go on to the camp! This we did. After piling arms we had the pleasure of walking a mile in another direction to our work. The day was bitterly cold because there was a strong wind, which blew right through one.

Our work was shovelling back the earth from the top of the bank along the road side. Up high the wind was stronger. It was a wretch [sic] cold job, & the earth was frozen hard. At midday we marched back to our rifles for dinner. I had some tinned rabbit in my haversack & a little piece of bread. The rabbit was frozen hard; but I had the luck to find a cook house of some other battalion were [sic] I was able to melt it. The cooks gave me a drink of hot tea. One of the boys bought a tin of herrings at a nearby canteen, the contents were frozen hard. After dinner we took our rifles etc & went to our camp. There was a hut to each platoon. Each hut was built to hold 30 men, there were 36 in our platoon.

Of course we were greatly over crowded, but that is only a trifle. At 7.30 pm we had our issue of rum.

29.1.17 At 5.45 am we got out of bed, breakfast at 6.35 fall in for fatigue at 6.45, a very early programe [sic]. For two hours we walked about all over the place, along the roads, to three railway sidings, & back onto the road near our camp, All this while our officer was looking for the particular work which we were to do! Along this road we went again & in a little time turned off to the left. We sat down for a spell & waited. Nothing happened we began to get cold, & were forced to move about, I went back to the road & walked up & down. After another hour of waiting it finally transpired that when a wagon should arrive with the tools, our work would be to start & form the bed for a new railroad, which was already surveyed. At 11 am 4 hours after we left camp the tool wagon arrived & we actually made a start! The ground was frozen just as hard as a pavement to a depth of 12 inches. It was impossible to make much impression on the stone like surface. And we left for home at 3 pm. The scene of our labours was marked by a line

of small holes about 1 foot deep & 2 or 3 ft sq.

Such a frost-bound time as we are now having, I have never before experienced, & most certainly never wish to again. “King Frost” has raised himself in his icy liar [sic] of the north, & breathed upon us & all in this devoted land. And now all the country is locked tight in his cold embrace. For two weeks now his baneful breath has moaned desolate & cold over the snow clad hills. The trees ar [sic] stiff and stark, grim in their frozen nakedness, the ponds are thickly armour plated with ice; & all the surface of the ground is frost bound - hard as a pavement.

30.1.17. We climbed out of bed at about 6.30 am & moved off to work at about 7.45. We went to the same work. The day was I think the coldest we have yet experienced. The sky was over cast & there were showers of snow all day with a bitter cold wind blowing. At the job it was found that where the soft earth had been reached the previous day, it had become frozen during the night & was almost as hard as the original surface. We worked all day with half an hour for dinner such as it was! Mine consisted of a crust & some jam, which latter I had been lucky enough to buy at a canteen the day before! At 3 pm we went home. For the next two days we worked at the same job which was finished on the 2.2.17. During the last day the engineers in charge found an unused 60 lb trench motor [?] bomb (“Plum Pudding”). They unscrewed the Detonator Plug & took out some of the explosive an iron grey powder know [sic] as “Amonal”. A very high explosive used in all kinds of bombs. A number of empty jam tins were then collected & filled with the powder. At odd places along the line of work large squares or lump[s] of solid earth had been left, several of them reaching right across the track. A hole was dug under one of these about for about 2 ft. The engineer sergeant took a tin of “Amonal” & inserting a length of detonated fuse pushed it into the hole, & ramed [sic] it tight with earth and lit the fuse. The resultant explosion astonished me. The mass of frozen earth was completly [sic] broken up, & many large lumps flung yards away. It was wonderful that such a small tin of explosive should contain such power. The remaining lumps of earth were promptly reduced in the same manner.

That job being completed there was, wonder of wonders, no other fatigue work for us during the next couple of days. We were engaged on the railway work for several days in succession which was also rather a wonder, because never before had we worked for two days consecutively [sic] on any one job!

On the morning of **3.2.17** the company went went out to drill! Oh honor. Physical drill & sharp walking for an hour, very good. Then half an hour saluting drill, groans from all hands! After that half an hour’s bayonet fighting over the rough & slippery ground. Sarcastic remarks from the acknowledged company wits & jesters! Followed by inspection of helmets & half an hour’s gas drill in the huts General silence! That night just after tea, the orderly sergeant came to our hut & to me to get ready at once with three men for Brigade Guard. He gave us an hour to get polished up, pack our gear & turn out in full marching order. As I needed a shave into the bargain I had to go some. However in due course we turned out were inspected & marched off for Brigade which was not far away. Arrived at Brigade & took over from old guard. Next morning in accordance with custom we duly turned out & presented arms to the Brigadeer [sic] General upon his first appearance. One of the boys caught his foot in a piece of wire & stumbled badly barely gained his balance in time for the present. The Brigadier after drawing attention to a couple of small faults such as having our gas helmets on the wrong side, complimented us upon our general appearances, smart turn out, & told me to dismiss.

Gas helmets always have a habit of getting hung on the wrong side! I don't know now which is the correct side! Thank goodness there are only two sides! Every General & other exalted [sic] personages have different opinions concerning the vital point. They seem to think it bears strongly on the ultimate issue! Some say that victory will be ours if the gas helmet is worn on the left side! At the same time others avow that success cannot be hoped for unless the helmet be worn on the right side! I am content & glad to leave this mighty problem to the proper persons! But in this instance I was artful enough to see that we all wore our helmets on the same side which ever it should be. And this the general noticed & commented favourably upon.

The inspection being over we had nothing more to worry us for the rest of the day. The cook supplied us with plenty to eat for breakfast & dinner, so the guard was voted a success by us. At 5.30 pm the relief came & we marched home.

4.2.17

5.2.17 Attended sick parade with a boil on the ankle, and to my great surprise the M.O. marked me for evacuation. I packed up all my gear & went down to the 1st Field Ambulance, from there by train to the 1st Anzacs Dressing Station, from there by car to the 1st D.R.S. (Divisional Rest Station). Where I am at present. We live in large tents connected to each other, eight in each tent. Each tent has a stove in it, but they are cold places in spite of the stove. The place had just been taken over by the 2nd Field Ambulance.

Next day the doctor of course lanced the boil. They like to knife one if possible these doctors.

I stayed at the rest camp for eight days. And I was not sorry at getting my discharge on the 12th. These places are all very well for a few days. But one soon gets full up of them. The food was not bad, but there was such confusion at meal times, & any one who happened to be a few minutes late generally fared badly. And so after dinner on the 12th I shouldered my pack & tramped back, about 7 miles to where I left the battalion. Meanwhile I knew they had gone into the firing line, so my idea was to find the quartermaster, who is generally to be found near the railway & supply dump. This I had no difficulty in doing. That night I stayed with the battalion quartermaster & his staff. The battalion had left behind a number of sick men & others with sore feet etc, & I was to join them the following day. During the night my left ear commenced to ache violently & I had no sleep that night. In the morning I went with the sick men to see the doctor at the 1st Field Ambulance. There my temperature was found to be high & the M.O. said I had influenza. During the day the ear ache eased a little. I was comfortably fixed in the hut where the men's packs were stored. I had a straw mattress [sic] & four blankets, so I went to bed immediately after returning from sick parade. I felt very sick for about 6 days, & my ear was painful all the while. I had no appetite for the usual bully beef, and stews. And I could get no milk or soft food. One morning the Q.M. gave me a tin of condensed milk, & so I had bread & mild that day. Next day I was lucky enough to buy another tin in a canteen. I am feeling fairly fit again now.

Some of the men have come out of the line & are living in this camp. They do fatigues each night up the line. The battalion is now in supports having completed its time in the front line. A few days will see all the boys out.

A thaw set in a couple or so days after the battalion went in. The trenches are now in a shocking

state. It is a very bad position the boys tell me hardly any trenches at all. For the most part the firing line comprises a succession of isolated posts in shell holes. Fritz was at a distance from 100 to 150 yds. Fritz has a new bomb called the "Pineapple Bomb". It is a very deadly bomb about ten pounds in weight. The projectile is fired from a trench motor. It is said the range is 1,000 yds and he certainly is very accurate with it. "C" coy had the misfortune to catch a barrage of these bombs one night. Their captain was killed & another officer wounded. The casualties [sic] that night were rather high. In several instances bombs fell right in the trenches & isolated posts.

The weather is again cloudy & wet & the mud is with us as deep as ever. "King frost" has retired to his home in the north, & flicking away with him his mantle of white has slipped us all back again into the mud. We are floundering in the slush like ants after a sudden storm in summer!

The days are warmer which is a great relief, but the mud is worse than the frost.

On Saturday night the 24th Feb/17, I took a small fatigue party up to the front line. We left before dark & went round "High Wood" on a good duck-board track. High Wood is even in a worse state of devastation than Delville Wood. The whole Wood is absolutely reduced to fragments, only about a dozen trees left standing. All undergrowth has completely disappeared, the surface of the ground has been torn & pulverised into a tumbled heap. I saw two disabled "Tanks" on the out-skirts of the Wood. At several points along the edge of the wood great wooden crosses were standing, erected in memory by the members of the different divisions & battalions whose comrades had fallen in the awful fighting which took place in & around "High Wood" before the position was finally won by the English. Such blood-shed & savage fighting has never been seen in any other phase of the "Somme Battle"

The track led on to a tram line which ran up to within a few hundred yards of [the] front line. The tram way was used to take all supplies to the trenches. Our job was carrying timber from a forward dump for trench building. We only had to carry a few hundred yds to a support trench, & made three trips & were finished early, & got back to camp again by 8.30 pm.

Sunday **25.2.17**. This morning we received the startling news that the Germans were retiring, & evacuating their positions all along the Brigade frontage. This news was followed by an order for all fit men to pack up & get ready to go to the front line. At 1.30 pm we fell in & tramped up the rough road to the tram line. This we followed right up to Batt Head Q'. As we moved heavy shell fire could be heard [heard] right ahead [ahead] which grew louder & louder as we tramped along. The German gunners were shelling our front line. Battalion H.Q. was a deep dug-out burrowed into a steep fold in the ground which extended several hundred yds to the left & right. By this time the noise of the bursting shells was considerable & I could see incessantly spurts of earth shooting high into the air, showing the burst of the shells, some distance in front. We went straight past Batt. H.Q. into a communication trench, & followed it about 100 yds onto the rise. He[re] we climbed out of the trench & walked along the top. Another couple of hundred yards & we came out onto a sunken road & followed it along. Shells were bursting about three hundred yards in front & an occasional one came down near us. A little way along the road & we came to another company of the 10th taking shelter in bits of old trenches & shell holes. We did likewise, & the captain told us we were to be in support of "C" company who were going out to relieve [sic] the 10th Batt. The 10th that afternoon had gone forward to occupy the recently abandoned German second line trench. The shallow trench where we were taking shelter was our old front line trench. About 150 yds in front was a portion of the old German front line. Three companies

of our Batt were advancing to our front & left front to relieve [sic] the 10th. The men were advancing in platoons in single file. The German gunners were putting up a barrage [sic] of high explosive shells all along the line of advance, which was fairly wide. It was a fine sight to see the lines of men advancing among the bursting shells. Slowly & calmly they walked in & out the shell holes, now high to view on banks & mounds, anon lost to sight in shell holes; but ever going forward. Twenty lines of men there were or more, all among the shells. Many times groups of men were completely hidden by the clouds of smoke & earth so close were the bursting shells. But the men held steadily [sic] on their way, here & there one or two would suddenly fall flat on the ground, when a shell burst extra close, only to get up again immediately & go on.

We watched the lines of men go out of sight. When the order came for us to go forward. We went along in single file several paces between each man. After walking for about 200 yds I suddenly heard the “yip yip” of machine gun bullets, & the man in front “ducked”. We were evidently in view of a machine gun sniper. The shelling had eased off a little by this time. Again the M.G. rapped out I heard it firing away to our left front, some of the bullets chopped into the ground at my side This time I “ducked”, flat onto the ground! Away in front the ground sloped down, & I saw a half destroyed wood & village. I did not know then that we were to become better acquainted with that village before long. Beyond the village the ground sloped up again & I caught a fleeting glance of smooth open grass lands & woods all undamaged by shell fire. Up again & on for a few more yds the M.G. barked out & the bullets sputtered round, down like a log for a couple of minutes, then up & on again. This went on for a couple of hundred yds following the others in front, when I tumbled with surprised relief [sic] into a fairly deep trench. An officer beckoned & told me to get down into a deep German “dug-out”. At the bottom was a wounded man shot through the head by that M.G. The trench I was told had been the German second line, & the 10th had advanced from it during the afternoon. Here we stayed all night sitting down jammed [sic] together. After dark rations came up. We had a meal & tried to doze the night away. The unpleasant idea occurred [sic] to me that perhaps Fritz had left a mine of some sort in the dugout that only wanted treading on to send us all to Kingdom Come! But I forced the thought from my mind & went to sleep. In the mornny [sic] there was a drink of cold tea & an issue of rum.

26.2.17 All day we stayed in the dug out. About mid day the weather cleared, & I went up on top to have a look round. During the night the 10th had been relieved [sic] by the other three companies of our battalion. The village before mentioned was about 1000 yds ahead & our forward trench was about 600 yds ahead. Our gunners were shelling the wood & beyond. The ground all round about us was frightfully torn about by shell fire. Acres & Acres there were all pulverised & blown to pieces, shell holes had been made & filled in & remade again. The surface was just a hillocky undulating jumble of earth. No wonder Fritz withdrew!

During the night it was rumoured we were to move up to the forward trench. When darkness set in we filed up out of the dug-out, & made away in the direction of the trench where our comrades were. We carried with us rifle ammunition & bombs. The remains of a sunken road acted as a track, this we followed & soon came to the forward trench. Putting our ammunition etc down at the roadside we filed along the trench.

The additional men made an awful crush in the trench, & to made [sic] matters worse there were a couple of badly wounded men laying along the side waiting to be taken out. During the night rations & rum & tea came up. This added to the confusion, & the issuing of rations in the

dark with nowhere to put anything except on the muddy bank. But this sort of thing is all in the game, and also this; just as we were in the middle of this most necessary & under the circumstances most awkward [sic] job which is always left to the N.C.Os., of the company the captain came up out of the deep dug out which was used for company H.Qs, and straightway straffed us for causing a block in the trench! I wonder what he would have said next day when the men complained of hunger, if we had sat down & just let the sand bags of rations sink out of site [sic] into the mud!

As the night wore one we heard wisperings [sic] of an advance at day light. The whole battalion were to move forward down through the village & take up a position at the other side. Patrols had been sent out into the village & reported all clear, but we were going beyond that. At about 4 a m 27.2.17 we had another drink of tea & a tot of rum, & then moved out along the trench onto the road again. Each man took some extra ammunition & two or three bombs. My platoon was in front & our captain was with us. None of us had much of an idea of what we were to do, or expect to meet with, Nor of what the other companies were going to do or whether they would be on our left or right. We were told nothing.

Away we went along this road almost knee deep in mud & water. Away out in front an occasional white glaring flare shot up into the air causing the shadows to dance & lighting up the wood in a lurid ghostly way. Jus[t] before reaching the wood we turned off to the left & skirted the front of the wood until the left boundary was reached. Here we rested for a few minutes. This side of the wood was open with hedges along the edge which suited us well giving protection from the German flare away on our left.

We picked our way carefully avoiding all noise. We advanced thus for several hundred yards all was quiet. The word came to sit down & fix bayonets. Dawn was breaking & it was becoming quite light, & still no sign of the enemy. It was a most a [sic] peculiar & uncanny expedition that we were engaged on. No one seemed to know where we were going no [sic] how far where the enemy were nor in what strength. We were about 60 strong & did not know what support we had.

Move on, & we were moving steadily on again. Word was passed back for the two rear platoons to edge off to our right. In a few minutes we sat down again. By this time the light was good, in front were two hedges with gaps broken in them further ahead was a row of big trees.

While we were sitting down a few men who had gone off to our right, walked out into the open ahead of us & on our right. The next instant I heard a loud shout of alarm followed by two rifle shots. The men dropped down & replied, & we sprang up & ran forward with shouts of "at them boys". Fritz must have heard us coming for he was certainly ready. Because before we had gone more than 10 yds forward the air was alive with whistling bullets & a machine gun open [sic] up about 100 yds on our left, also Fritz commenced to throw bombs which exploded with tremendous noise & smoke. I saw two men real [sic] back & fall, & the rest of us dropped down into shell holes. We were not more than twenty strong. The din & racket of rifle & machine gun fire was tremendous, & the roar of the bursting bombs. It was plain we had run into a nice little next [sic] of Fritzes, & it looked & [sic] tho' we were in for a bad time. The bombs luckily were falling a little short. All we could do was to lay in the shell holes & reply to the German fire as best we could. There was a hedge in front of us & I could not see anything to shoot at.

A few wounded men began to crawl back. I saw one poor fellow spring up & run back, he had hardly moved when he was shot through the head & fell within a yard of me.

After about ten minutes, the firing seemed to steady somewhat. Looking to the right I saw men advancing about 100 yds away. Fritz evidently saw too. In an instant we were up & running forward with shouts & yells. We sprang through the hedge onto a road. Along the bank of which Fritz had been in position. But now he was gone running back over the fields as fast as he could go. We promptly opened fire on them as they disappeared over a slight ridge. About 600 yds ahead was a railway and along this the fleeing Fritzes came runnings [sic]. It was good sport shooting at them but there was not much chance of hitting them at that distance, but we made them run some. I saw one beggar fall. Along the roadside for about 100 yds was a bit of a trench which we occupied. Along the road a bit was a Fritz lying [sic] wounded. When things had had [sic] cooled down a bit, I went along to him, as I approached him a real, live unhurt Fritz rose up from out a shell hole on the other side of the road with his hand[s] above his head. A mere lad of 17 he was, trembling with fear as to the reception he would receive at our hands, with mumbling lips & mute expression of appeal on his face pitiful to see he shuffled towards me as I signed to him. I walked him back to the trench & a sergeant & I searched him. I took his belt as a souvenir [sic] also a yellow tassel, the sniper's badge.

Two of us then returned to the wounded man & went through him in like manner. He gave me his flash lamp as a souvenir [sic] He had a nasty wound in the right side just below the ribs. He seemed in considerable pain. We bound his wound, & removed him to a more comfortable position against the bank. He was a fine big intelligent [sic] looking man, & could just speak a few words of English. He asked to [be] taken away on the stretcher. I told him he would have to wait for at least an hour while our wounded were being carried back.

Just near this spot was where [sic] the German machine gun had been a spare part bag & two boxes of ammunition & other sundries were left & about 25 ft of empty belting which he had fired at us! All along the road against the bank we could see where Fritz had been in position.

I then went to have a look at the spot where we had first encountered & been held up by the German fire. Four men lay dead, & there were several others wounded. The stretcher bearers were at work. The dead had all been shot in the head, & their wounds were ghastly, the work of the machine gun. One poor fellow had the top of his head completely shot away, & his brains were scattered on his left shoulder. A sergeant lay back in a sitting position with his right ear blown in showing plainly the inside of his head. Two men were killed in my platoon & about 6 wounded. A sergeant came round to collect the pay books & [sic] etc, & identity discs from the dead. I collected all the ammunition from the casualties [sic] & took it to our machine guns. The next thing was to clean our rifles & fix our trench up a bit. After that I discovered that I was very hungry, so the haversack was open [sic] up & I had bully-beef & bread & butter washed down with a drink of cold tea from my water bottle How bad eh, for real fighting conditions! But just a word here re the German rations. In the pack of the wounded man we found, half a loaf of dark brown coarse bread, one untouched loaf of a finer quality, a piece of cheese, a piece white hard margarine, a tin of meat & some jam & some other odds & ends of food. The water bottle contained a coarse kind of coffee without sugar. The cow-hide pack carried on the back same as ours seemed to be devoted entirely to the carrying of food. The only article of clothing found was a pair of sox [sic]. The man seemed to [be] fitted out [with] food enough for several days.

One of our planes came over and had a good look at close quarters. We moped about & did nothing much. About half a mile on our left the 17 Batt had pushed up through an[o]ther village & were in advance of ourselves. During the morning they carried out a bombing stint against a German trench on a ridge in front of them, but Fritz called for artillery support & our party was forced to retire. During the afternoon a squad of Fritz's planes came over & had a good look. After that we got a few shells, mostly shrapnel which burst right over our heads. During the afternoon the company stretcher-bearers buried our dead.

That night we were to be relieved [sic] & the hours dragged [sic] by with horrible slowness. At about 4pm a big shell came close to me & plastered one side of my face with mud, I felt that part of the trench for a while! At last darkness came, & felt ever so sleepy. The night was cold, & I sat & shivered & dozed waiting for the [?] which could not be expected for another hour.

At last, on our anxious ears there fell the sound of tramping feet coming along the road. In another 20 minutes we were quietly filing away back along the edge of the wood whence we had come that day at dawn. In another 20 minutes we arrived at the German dug out which we left at dark the night before. There we met fatigued parties laying duck-boards over the shell torn ground which only a couple of days before had been occupied by the enemy.

The train line was soon reached, & then we were well on our way for home, altho' we had yet an hours weary tramp before us & we were all dog tired. Many of the fellows were lame besides being exhausted but they tramped & shuffled & limped bravely on. Many of these would straggle into camp in the wee small hours of the morning.

At the camp the cooks had hot stew & tea for us. After visiting the cooks I found the Q.M. & got my pack, & a lot of medicine [sic] (rum!) Then to the platoon hut for a sleep. Most of our platoon were in. After making my bed the watch pointed to 12.30 am. In bed I fell asleep instantly & did not wake until 8 am. The morning I spent in washing, shaving, & scraping the mud of [sic] my clothes.

The next day March 1st/17 we moved off and turned our backs once more on the trenches. We marched to Durnancourt, the same old village where we always stop for a few days on our way in & out of the trenches. No one knew how long we were to stay in this village, but rumour had it our time was five days when we were going back to the line. But we have already stayed ten days and are still here.

Our billets are comfortable, wire bunks with straw in them (we provided the straw!). And a fire place & chimney! Ye gods what luxury for the troops! On the second day after arrival we were paid. In the village we can buy fresh eggs, butter, condensed milk etc. And believe me we have been living rather well. The fire is so handy for cooking. Also rations have been good; actually had half a loaf per man for two days! Of course we had been at drill each day, the same old thing.

We have had a week of very cold weather, a good fall of snow followed by frosts cold freezing winds & snow storms. Which however had one good effect, it broke the monotony of drilling in mud!

On the first Sunday after arrival we marched (in drill order, rifle & equipment) out onto the hillside for church parade at 9 am. But prior to the devotional exercises however we were given half an hour's battalion drill to loosen our sins I suppose! The colonel complimented us on part we played in the recent operations. After the drill we "piled arms" & hung about waiting for the time appointed for the service. The day was bitterly cold with a fierce wind blowing and the ground was frozen hard. I soon found myself reiterating once more my opinions of army parsons their methods, & the good they do among the troops! Here we were, wretchedly miserably cold waiting about for a church service! What good it was going to do us is past my comprehension. Our bodies were so frozen that it was ridiculous to imagine that our souls would be in a receptive state! At the service two parsons officiated [sic]. Just before concluding one of them fainted. No doubt the accumulated sins of those present weighed him down! After the service we were profoundly thankful to get into billets away from the cold wind.

During the week we drilled as usual, & did several attack practices which is rather interesting because a new organisation throughout has been effected, & a new method of attack. Also the weather took a mild turn & there were a few fine days. The next Sunday was fine & warm, church parade was held in the Y.M.C.A. Hut! After the service we were taken for a march. The parade was not to be dismissed until 11 a.m. But we did not march far! The next week was just a repetition [sic] of the previous one. Drill, attack practices etc each day. The weather again turned cold, & a fall of snow resulted, followed by cold winds & snow showers. One night we went out to do a scheme of outposts It was a wet windy night, but we returned to billets before 9 pm.

St Patrick's Day was pay day also. In the evening a few of us went out down the village to celebrate the double event. We had a good night of it. One or two of the boys celebrated rather well, & when we returned to billets at 8 pm. There was great fun for an hour. Egyptian songs & dances, music supplied by beating an empty biscuit tin with the hands just as we used to see in Cairo! Next morning sundry heads felt heavy & dull!

On the **22nd.3.17** I felt a pain just below the left ear, & a swelling developed there. The boys said Mumps! So next morning 23.3.17 I was a member of the sick parade. When the M.O. saw me he [?] evacuation (magic & wonderous [sic] work!) During breakfast there [were] the usual witty remark[s] & jeering from the boys. To which I replied vigourously [sic] (let me quote Beach Thomas!) Lucky beggar they said, "how do you work it". "Ah malingering again. I suppose you think the batt is going back into the line again" you should set a better example to the men etc" "You want to miss this route march today". (The batt was that day moving to another village about 5 miles away). I waited until the "barage" [sic] had slacked, & then brought my "heavies" into action with effect! This counter-battery work helps greatly to break the monotony.

At 10 am I was taken in an Ambulance car to the 3rd/ field Ambulance in another village. From there I went by car to the 2nd field Ambulance, where I had been only a month previously with that boil on my ankle. The Ambulance had meanwhile been turned into a mumps hospital.

I found many improvements [sic] had been effected during my absence. A large mess tent had been fitted out, & the food was better, hot baths were installed, also a barbers shop, good canteen & boot makers. All of these places I patronised the very first day after arrival. This month I have had several baths & changes of raiment, as indeed all the boys have, with the very pleasant & peace giving result that I am entirely free from body vermin or "chats" which name they are generally know [sic] by among their unfortunate owners! It is the first time in seven

months that I have been free from the little beasts!

The corporal in charge of the pack store is a friend of mine I knew him in England. He lives with three companions in [sic] a comfortable room with a good fire burning all day the [sic] [in] the fire place. I go to his room at night & sit by the fire & read or write. It is really jolly for me because the tents where we live are cheerless cold places bare as a prison cell, with no fire, & only illuminated by one lantern. On fine afternoons (which are rare) we go for a walk.

This place is very close to the La Bossielle²⁴ trenches the storming of which on July 1st 1916 open the famous & tremendous “Battle of the Somme”. This initial attack was chiefly characterised by the firing of a huge mine under the German trenches. British Engineers had spend [sic] months in preparing this awful mine. The resultant crater; which can be seen for miles in the shape of a great white heap, it is claimed is the largest in France, and is certainly one of the sights of that immense battle field.

The devastation caused by this giant explosion can be can be [sic] better imagined than discribed [sic]. Continuing on either side can be seen the remainds [sic] of the German trenches in ruins, & half filled with the chalky substance thrown far & wide by the explosion. The tons of chalky earth thrown out make a high bank round the entire rim of the crater. The crater is quite round & just the shape of a huge breakfast cup. It is about 60 ft deep with steeply sloping sides. At the bottom it measures fully 50 yards across, whilst at the top from rim to rim this distance is quite 150 yds. It is such an immense cavern in the earth that the [sic] [one] is dumfounded & confused in trying [to] estimate its size. I felt the same peculiar sense of disproportion when I first gazed on the “Great Pyramid” in Egypt from close quarters.

About the 5th of April the 2nd field Ambulance was relieved [sic] by the 6th field. The 2nd were to go up to the line & run aid posts & send out trains of S.B etc.

My battalion went up at about the same time. On the 9th I was discharged; & sent to the 1st Anzac Reinf Camp Albert, there to stay the night & go on next morning. During the afternoon a large number of reinforcements for the 1st Div came in. That night I had tea in Albert. This was necessary because no rations were given us at the camp, and altho’ 24 hrs rations were issued before leaving the hospital, I knew no rations are given at these reinforcement camps, so it behoved me to do the Devenport trick!

Next morning **10.4.17** the weather was miserable wet & windy. At about 8 am we fell in for our discharge and destination orders. I with a few others of the 12th were to proceed to Bayantine.²⁵ We started off and after time the rain cleared. I decided to keep to the railway all the way. After numerous rests Bayantine was reached about noon. The 1st Division reinforcement camp was just close to where the 12th battalion had been living in huts some weeks before. We were sent to a hut and luckily found some dinner! A great find it was too!

The day was bitterly cold but there was a fire burning in the hut, & I had two blankets They made a frightful load to carry, but they were worth it. Some of the others had none some only

²⁴ La Boiselle – about 10km north east of Albert

²⁵ Probably Bazentin – a few kilometres east of Pozières.

one. During the afternoon the new reinforcements for the first division came up. They looked out of place with their clean new uniforms, and I guess they [*did*] not feel much at home either! These men coming up from the Base to join the various units have a very rough time. They get nothing except biscuits “bully” & cheese & not too much of that. They are sent off without a blanket & often don’t get any until they have been several days with their respective units. In the winter time this is a great hardship. These new men were no exception to this iron rule. They must have spent a miserable night in those freezing draughty huts. After dark I went to a big dump that I knew of & “pinched” a bundle of sand bags to sleep on. Just laying [*sic*] on the bare boards with the draught whistling up through the racks is rather cold!!

At 4 pm I managed to get some bully & little bread to divide between us. Next morning being rather comfortable in my blankets & sand bags I did not bother to get up early for I knew there would be no breakfast provided for us not even a drink of tea. With the result that I had a great scramble to get packed up & ready to go, tumbling out onto the road without a bite to eat. The previous night orders had been given out that we were to start for Bapaume at 7 am. However I took a tin of “bully” in my hand & a couple of biscuits & munched this as we went along! The morning was awfully cold windy & cloudy. Before we started a heavy snow came on beating in our faces which lasted half an hour. These storms came on at intervals until after noon, but after getting onto the Bapaume road which ran in another direction our backs were turned to the snow. The road was in excelent [*sic*] condition wide & lined with trees which were of course rather the worse for wear,- shell wear. There was plenty of motor traffic on the road. On our way we passed the ruined village of Le Sars²⁶ & the last the position we held just on the right of it. The evidence of shell fire all round here was very terrible. At this spot a huge mine had been fired under the road. A little further on we came to a light railway which the Huns had laid along the road way. A long line of ruined trucks were lying along the road side, they had been caught by our gunners during last year’s “Battle of the Somme”. Our “Pioneers” were at work repairing the Hun line & linking it up with our own “light rail” & “motor trains” were running on it. On leaving this spot the scene of our fight on Sunday Feb 27th was passed. The village & wood of “Le Baïke” [?] which lay in a hollow about 600 yds to the right of the road. I could see the place plainly & the position we held then. And my thoughts went back at once to the exciting time we had that morning & the uncanny nature of our job. At about eleven o’clock the outskirts of Bapaume were reached. We could see the town quite well, & could form a good idea of what a nice place it was before the Huns came & went again leaving their mark upon it. The thorough way in which they did this has been set down by abler pens than mine. All that has been written about this unfortunate town is quite true. Every house had been scientificly [*sic*] destroyed. Of the “Town Hall”, which jumped into fame because it was demolished by an “Eight Day” mine, not a vestige was left, not even a mound of ruined & broken masonry [*sic*].

The [*town?*] was busy with traffic & soldiers. The officer had great difficulty in finding where the 1st Div H.Q was. After making a couple of false starts & walking about a mile out of our way it is quite all right, (you see the Officers had nothing to carry!) we came onto the right road, and leaving the town behind we marched out into the country. The fields & woods & trees were free, open & natural being entirely without the effects of shell fire. The country presented an extraordinary contrast to what we had just passed through & been used to for months. We passed two or three lines of trenches on each side of the [*road*] stretching across the fields as far as one could see. Each line was strongly protected with barbed wire.

²⁶ 5km SW of Bapaume

Division H.Q consisted of a few huts situated in a hollow near the road. They looked very comfortable! We waited here for an hour for the General to come & inspect us. A bitter snow storm came on & we gently & steadily froze. The remarks passed about our worthy commander were original & very much to the point. At last his lordship was pleased to come. We fell in on the road separated into our various battalions. He just watched us march off! The 12' batt kept on along the road for about 30 minutes & then turned off across the fields. After a mile or so we came to the village of Fremicourt.²⁷ Here we found the battalion Quarter Master & the "field Cookers". This was our destination for the present. Of course the village was in ruins & it was very difficult to find any buildings that would afford us shelter. However we were soon fixed up somehow or other for one place was much like another. So soon as I had removed my "harness" I went to our company "cooker" to get something to eat. Two of the cooks are members of my platoon & another came over from Tassej with me. So I am always right for a meal if there is anything to be had. This time my luck was in for they were preparing a stew ready to take up at dusk to the boys in the line. Every night this was done. After a mess-tin of stew & a good drink of hot tea I felt ever so much better. And then we had a yarn. The boys had been through a terrible fight during Easter. A village had been taken & they suffered heavily in the taking of it. "A" Coy had been particularly cut about. No one knew much about who had been killed & who had'nt [sic]. Outside the Quarter Masters was a large heap of equipments [sic] & other gear collected from the dead & wounded after the fight. This heap gave eloquent if silent evidence of our losses. Easter Sunday was an "ideal" time to start a murderous combat. I heard A Coy was to be relieved [sic] from the line. I was "living" in the remains of a French cow-house! The strong cement feeding trough was the best preserved piece of furniture in the establishment. Before leaving the village the Hun had carefully destroyed the place, reduced the church by means of a cleverly laid mine (he has a system for churches) to a glorious heap of ruins, poisoned the village well & cut down all the trees of all kinds.

With surprising speed our people had cleaned out the well, installed a motor pumping plant, & had a first class water supply running. Aus engineers & pioneers were working hard to extend it.

On the afternoon of the second we got orders to be ready to proceed to the battalion at 6. o'clock. At the appointed hour we left. The battalion was camped in a sunken road at the village of Morchies²⁸ about 4 miles away. I found the boys living miserably in bits of caves & holes dug into the bank with squares of canvas as covering. As I walked along they kept looking out like dogs from a kennel or pigs from a sty. Nevertheless they all called out joyful greetings to me, not unmixed with a little sarcastic banter!

There was no room in any of the "cavelets" for me, & besides I had the jolly reinforcements to look after about 30 had been detailed for A Coy. So far as I could see there [was] no room to dig in anywhere along the roads. Besides it was getting dark, why we could not have come up earlier goodness knows. However we were given 5 canvases and told to go into the village & erect some shelters for ourselves. Now Fritz always shells a village, & in this one was stationed a couple of batteries of big guns. However we would have to chance it. So away we went. We soon picked out a wall & got some poles & things together. The ground was soft & set for there

²⁷ 5km NE of Bapaume

²⁸ A few kilometres north east of Frémicourt

had been snow & rain each day. Luckily there was no snow just at present! I felt [*left*] the men at work & went to try and find a house or room with enough roof left on it to give me shelter. I was lucky in finding a “whole room” with the four walls stan[*d*]ing, albeit one side look [*sic*] ready to fall in. The roof & ceiling also were in a fair state of preservation. Worst luck the room was just in front of one of the batteries, and the muzzle of No4 was pointing over the roof at the distance of about 30 yards. Should the guns start action during the night sleep would be out of the question. However I went to one of the sentries & asked him whether action was to be ordered during the night. He said no, not unless there should be an S.O.S signal. But he went on to talk & gave the pleasant news that Fritz shelled the village badly. Three days ago his battery suffered 22 casualties [*sic*] in a few hours. However I decided to chance it for that night. I told three of the others to come down with me & went to get my pack & gear. We cleared all rubbish out. I went to get some fire wood & on return found two of the chaps had gone away. It appears they met one of the gunners & he told [*them*] that should the gun that was so close start firing the concussion would make the room more than merely dangerous to live in. That made them “windy” so they went off to look for another place in spite of the darkness. I proceeded to make a fire (there being a good chimney) and we were soon very comfortable. The night passed without any adventures, altho’ the cement floor was rather too cold for sleep. In the morning the two wanders [*sic*] returned. They had spent the night sitting up on their packs in a small shed in another part of the village which was used as a cook house by some of the artillery. We two had a good laugh at their expense.

I had the fire alight & the others went to the well for water, we soon had a mess tin each of tea, & with some biscuits & bully satisfied our honest hunger. Presently on looking through the opening where one of the windows had been, I saw the gunners getting ready for action. I told the others & we waited the result with nervous interest. The first shot was quite enough for me! And I suggested that we take our “eating tools” & great coats and go to spend the day with the day [*sic*] others in the sunken road. A good thing it was for us that we did this, for about 10 a.m. the Hun gunners started to reply with two very large guns. They concentrated on that part of the village occupied by the battery, & during the day shells fell so close to our room that I fully expected to see it demolished, but somehow or other [*it*] lived. The gunners had to quit their guns, but they opened again after dinner. Shells falling in village cause the bricks to fly so which greatly adds to their killing propensities. Great clouds of red dust would float up into the air after each explosion. I did not like the idea of sleeping in the village again. So I procured another canvas & luckily found an unoccupied space of the bank-side & we straight way proceeded to dig ourselves in. The place looked as tho’ some one had attempted to dig in before, & there was a large mound of fresh earth at the bottom of the bank. One of the boys came along & put a stop to my speculation in this direction. Why Morrie he said, “you are digging in on top of a dead horse” “Is that so” I replied. Yes came the answer, “he was buried there a week ago”. “Buried I said or just covered over”. Well, he returned “put it that way if you like, the horse was covered over there just where he died at the road side.” I replied “so long as he is properly dead it will be all right, but I don’t want him kicking up during the night & suddenly roll us all out of bed!”

A rumour had been current to the effect that we were to go into the line again in a day or two. At 4 pm I was told that at 6 pm I was to go with the captain second in command & the segt major up to the line to look over with them the sector which we were to occupy, the relief [*sic*] to be effected the next night. At 6.30 pm we started going round the village we kept to the fields all the way. The evening was soft bright & clear, the fields presented a happy peaceful aspect. It

seemed a cruel shame that there should be such an awful thing as a war. And I felt sad & tired of it all & not a little ashamed to think that we were walking over those quiet fields wholly on destruction bent. --- Why, Oh God --- was the unspoken thought in our minds. But we had to fulfill [sic] a destiny even if we could not understand it, which was greater or stronger than ourselves --- and so away with all hallowed musings.

After walking nearly two miles we arrived at the position held by the company we were to relieve [sic]. It was now dark. On our way thither we saw the remains of three British aeroplane[s] which had been driven down in previous air fights.

The company position was rather a good one being in a deep sunken [road?] the high banks of which gave good cover. The road we were told ran through the village of Lagnicourt the first houses of which were about 200 yds along the road. Out in front about 500 yds or more was a line of outposts. Each company & battlain [sic] on this sector working in co-operation in this respect. We went out with a guide to have a look at the outposts. What we could see in the dark was next to nothing. Just a bit of trench about 50 yds long and out in front two isolated posts dug in. On our right somewhere was "B" Coy. on left the other platon [sic] of "A" Coy. I did not like the aspect of the place much, too helpless & isolated. We returned to the sunken road. As there was not any attack for us to do this time, I believed that we would have a[n] easy turn in the line, & not before it was needed let me add. The sunken road was a good place, for there were dugouts & shelters where the men could sleep during the day. The captain had some arrangements to make & then we set off for the camp. As we were going round the village, The Germans open[ed] fire with one very large gun. The shell could be heard coming afar off. The terrible rushing roar growing louder & louder as the heavy projectile fell to earth. He sent over about half a dozen before stopping. When I got to bed, on top of our friend the dead horse, the hands of my wath [sic] pointed to well after mid night.

Next day broke fine & clear. Fritz shelled the village all day, & drove all the gunners away but not before some casualties [sic] occured [sic]. We also had a man killed in the village he has just that morning been promoted to Segt, & two others wounded. We had all day in which to prepare for going into the line at night. During the afternoon we stacked our packs in a house in the village. Just before dark we fell [in] all ready to go & were soon on our way. Our over coats we wore & carried three bombs each, & an extra 50 of rifle ammunition also a blanket & water proof sheet. There [were] no more than about 80 of us including "stretcher bearers" & signallers, so it did not have many to hold the position. In about an hour the sunken road was reached The boys were rather knocked out with the awful load they had to carry, & were glad of a rest. Two platoons were told off, one of which was mine, to go out & occupy the outposts. Another platoon was to come out later to do some diging [sic] & to reinforce us for the platoons were so weak. I had 20 men including a machine gun team to occupy three posts, that left one man beside myself in reserve! Rather absurd.

The darkness was intense & our guide had difficulty in finding the picquet line. But that [was] nothing to the trouble I had in locating the three outposts (I was shown one) & getting the men placed, without becoming totally lost myself in the darkness & losing all the posts & the whole position. The captⁿ went off to have a look at the other platoon on our left. And luckily I managed to get familiar with the position & have every- thing fixed when he came back. It was one of the queerest jobs I had met with. Later on the rum was sent out, & I took it round to [the] boys, there was a good issue. This was at about 2 a.m. and the moon a thin crescent had just

risen. I came back to the picquet line & was talking to the captain. Presently a long way out on our left & behind us I noticed some German flares fired in altogether a funny way. I watched them, & once in the light of one saw some men walking. I pointed it out to the captain. By the next lot of lights we plainly saw a lot of men rapidly advancing towards & behind us. We heard also much shouting & yelling. The Huns were plainly making a big attack & had evidently already reached the sunken road behind us. All hands were ordered to “stand to”. In about ten minutes or less the platoon on our left retired upon us, & told us that they saw large numbers of Huns advancing upon us from our flank & front. The men were becoming scared & in the darkness we could see nothing, & did not understand our position. The captain told me to run out & withdraw the outposts, this I did, & we all retired slowly towards the road but not in a direct line.

After a few minutes a section of good trench was reached, which faced in a better direction. The order was given to halt face about & man this trench. The men quickly obeyed, but no one could see anything. At this rather critical juncture a small body of men som[e]where in our rear or so it seemed, altho we could see nothing, opened fire on us. The tension proved to [sic] much for those few who had weak nerves. And the chill early morning air was filled with that curious, terrible & most awful of all provanity,[sic] prayers and curses.

It was thought that one of “B” Coys outposts were firing on us by mistake. But presently glimpses were seen of Huns working round our flank. At this orders were given to retire [sic] to the sunken road. Here one platoon had been left in reserve. It was now getting light. The men lined the bank, & the M.Gs were placed in position. Along the road near the village of Lagnicourt the banks ran down low at [the] place the Germans attacked us in strength. The reserve platoon was in position at this place. The main part of the village was in low lying ground, & the Huns were passing through hidden from our view & getting behind us. “D” Coy who should have held this part of the road (an impossible task under the circumstances) had evidently retired still further back or been wiped out. At this point the Huns came at us from front & rear & up the road. In the uncertain light they even placed a M.G. in the middle of the road not ten yds from a party of our men. But the gun did not fire a shot, two Mills’ bombs killed the crew & the gun was captured. Six of our boys lay dead already & several wounded. But the fight was soon over except for sniping, for the Germans found they could not drive us out, and contented themselves with passing on through the village. And they could well afford to leave us alone for the present because they were already through the line & behind us, & it seemed that we were quite cut off. And should the German attack be successful, we would meet our fate later. The situation was serious in spite of our initial success. However we knew there would be a counter attack ---and there was ---! Meanwhile the ‘phone was in order. I had some good sniping, but the stray Huns were not at all anxious to take risks. The time was now about 6 o'clock & the sun was just rising. I saw larger numbers of Germans coming over the fields away on our left to support the [ir] comrades. The attack appeared to be a big one. I watched these German supports for about 15 minutes & our artillery did not fire a shot. However in another half hour the fun (for us) commenced. Our counter attack had evidently been launched for we could see the Huns retiring on our left in great numbers. Our artillery of all classes great & small was now in full blast, and it was a grand & awful sight to see the Enemy running across the open fields like herds of stray cattle. Our shells were bursting thickly over their heads & in amongst them. It was a terrifying & bloody spectral [sic]. Great howitzer shells were throwing the earth in gaint [sic] black columns high into the air, & the deadly shrapnel was filling the air with soft white puffs just over the German heads. Nearer to hand we enjoyed some snap shooting as the

Germans came running back through the village. When the Aust' came sweeping through the village on the heels of the Huns. The captain ordered us out to join in the advance, & as we walked forward over the ground where we had [*been*] only a few hours before we captured many small parties of Germans lying in bits of trenches & holes, in one place there were twenty. On looking round I estimated there [*were*] 100 German dead around our position. When we reached to about the line of our posts A German field battery suddenly opened on us, & we had to seek what shelter we could. Some of the shells burst ever so close to me as I ran with two others for a small trench about 100yds off. As I got to within a few yds of the shelter a shell burst right by my side & something hit me with great force in the leg I thought[*t*] it may be a hard lump of earth. After resting a while in the trench the shelling stoped. On looking out I could see our boys in bits of trenches & holes about the place. The trench that we tumbled into was one of "B" Coys outposts. The attack had not reached them. And they had enjoyed the sport of shooting at the retreating Huns. My job was to collect my men together & get them over into our out post position, which was some distance off. In another hole I found some of our men & the second i/c. I don't know where the capt had got to. I collected up all the men I could find without much trouble & told them where to go. We found the position strongly held by the 20th Batt, who had made the counter attack through the village. But we had to stay also. I was dog tired very thirsty & hungry. I had some food but not much water. Before noon rain came on. Cold stew was sent up for the 20th Batt & they shared it with us. The second i/c was with us. Toward evening the capt came up, & told me to bring the men in at dusk so that we could reorganize, & then would have to return & hold the outposts again. On reaching the sunken road after dark we were told to rest where we could & wait for the cans of tea which were coming up for us. The idea of having to go out to those outposts disheartened the men very much, and there were now so few of us. I could only find 14 of my platoon.

In all the company had suffered some 35 casualties.[sic] The capt gave me some food from his dug out. But what I wanted was liquid. At last the tea came and there was plenty of it, or rather in other words there were very few left of us to drink it. I drank at least a quart, & then put some in my water bottle. After this came the glorious news that we were not going out to the posts again, but were to go to a sunken road in the rear & Rest, beautiful word! And we were not long in getting away. By this time my leg was becoming very sore & stiff & I could only hobble along. In the road there were a few holes cut into the bank, & most of them were wet. I found one big enough for two of us which was rather well covered, & was fairly dry except at the entrance end. I scraped out the mud & water & put a couple of pieces of board down. I then made our bed & crawled into the blankets while my mate waited outside until I was finished. It was a work of art to get undressed & into bed in such a tiny space & my leg hurt quite a lot. I found a big piece of light canvas which covered the opening so that we could have a candle alight inside that was a great help. When I was fixed my mate crawled in. That night I slept -- did I? No I just went into a trance! And I did not come round again until 10 o'clock next morning. Rations were issued also rum, one of the corporals like a good fellow fixed it all for me & brought me my share so that I did not have to get up.

At 1 pm we all had to turn out for there was to be a roll call, & the company had then to go into billets further back.

I had a look at my leg & found a small hole in it, so I went to the M.O. & he sent me away. I made off at once & hobbled across the fields to the "loading station", where the cars are. In passing by the village of Morchies I went in to get my pack & luckily found it right on top of the

stack! On my way I was frequently stopped & asked about the state of affairs at the front. The Ambulance car took me to the main dressing station where I met a doctor from Burnie the one who passed me for the A.I.F Jan 1915.

From there I went to the C.C.S. at Posziers²⁹ & stayed the night. In the morning the train took us to Albert, and I went to the D.R.S. there. It was a comfortable place with good baths and good food. After staying two days I was sent to the C.C.S at Durnancourt. There the X Ray & an operation followed, and a splinter of shell [was] removed from my leg. After a day or two I was put on the train for Boulogne. Oh glorious & lovely thought I might get to “Blighty” that paradise of the gods & goddesses! The Mecca of every soldier in France. Already I could see the beautiful green fields & roads of Old England. But I must not get too hopeful – in case -- No wretched thought go away! Rather let us quietly “wait and see”, with all the patience at my command. At 6 next morning we were in Boulogne. I was taken to the 13th General. The hospital was well fitted up. The food was not very appetising for sick & wounded men. And there were many shocking cases in the hospital. The cries and shouts & groans when the poor fellows were having their wounds dressed was really terrible to hear. The very air seemed charged with suffering, & hung like a heavy canopy of agony over the place. In the afternoon when the dressings were finished and all was quiet except for some stifled groan, the appalling sense of pain & suffering which pervaded the place was most oppressive.

Two days I had here & was then put on the boat “for Blighty”. My dreams were coming true, but I would not finally rejoice until I saw & felt the soil of England beneath me.

Yes it all came true & so wonderful it was that I could not at first realise it. The ship was soon across the channel, & we were put into a real English Red + train, & in an hour or so were whisked [sic] away to the beautiful village of Orpington in Kent. The Canadian Hos: there gave us a home, and here I am “right now”.

And here I would like to stay for the duration. However I know that cannot be. Nevertheless all my troubles are over for the present, & that is all I care [about]. I am perfectly happy & contented, in fact (whisper it) in the “Seventh Heaven of Delight”. The weather is simply glorious. After the long dreary winter of hardships the sudden burst of matchless sunshine startles one. And the sudden & quick rush of the spring of this country is always a joyful & wonderful revelation to us. And as I have once more returned to England after nine months absence I am going to draw this diary to a close. In it are set down all the happenings that I experienced & witnessed, and many things that have occurred [sic] to me in thought. I express the hope that it may be interesting to friends. In after years I am sure it will prove interesting to me & repay me for the work it cost. It is a true record of a soldiers life in France. And I am sorry if at times I have been rather blunt & cruel. If so I have merely stated or represent[ed] the truth.

²⁹ Pozières