

The  
WAR DIARY  
of  
CAPT. E. W. FRECKER  
A.A.M.C.  
1917 - 1919



*H. Brant*

*Capt. Eric Frecker*





*Norman McDowell*

*Eric Frecker*



*Vera and Joan*





This is the war diary of **Capt. Eric W. Frecker** who was born in Sydney in 1892 and who graduated M.B., Ch.M (University of Sydney Medallist) in 1915.

He enlisted in the A.I.F. in 1916, married in Sydney in December, 1916, and sailed for Europe in the "MALWA" on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1917. In England after a short training period at Salisbury he was posted to the 14<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance in France.

After the Armistice he was appointed Education Officer for the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Later he worked for and obtained his Membership of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh before returning to Australia in 1919.

In Australia he took over a general medical practice in Kiama, NSW, where he remained for 10 years.

Subsequently he practised in Sydney as a consultant radiologist until his death in 1968.

There are 3 notebooks:

Notebook No. 1	4.5.17 – 3.7.17 (Red Sea to London)
Notebook No. 2	29.9.17 – 11.6.18 (France)
Notebook No. 3	27.7.18 – 15.1.19 (France)

## NOTES

AAMC	Australian Army Medical Corps
ADMS	Assistant Director of Medical Services
ADS	Advanced Dressing Station
AFAB	Australian Field Artillery Brigade
AGH	Australian General Hospital
ASC	Army Service Corps
AWL	Absent Without Leave
BRC	British Red Cross
CCS	Casualty Clearing Station
CMDS	Central Medical Dressing Station
CO	Commanding Officer
CSM	Cerebrospinal Meningitis
DADMS	Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal; District Court Martial
DMS	Director of Medical Services
FACM	Field Army Court Martial
GHQ	General Headquarters
HQ	Headquarters
MG	Machine Gun
MC	Military Cross
MO	Medical Officer
OC	Officer Commanding
OO	Orderly Officer
OR	Orderly Room
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
RMO	Regimental Medical Officer
SUS	Sydney university Scouts

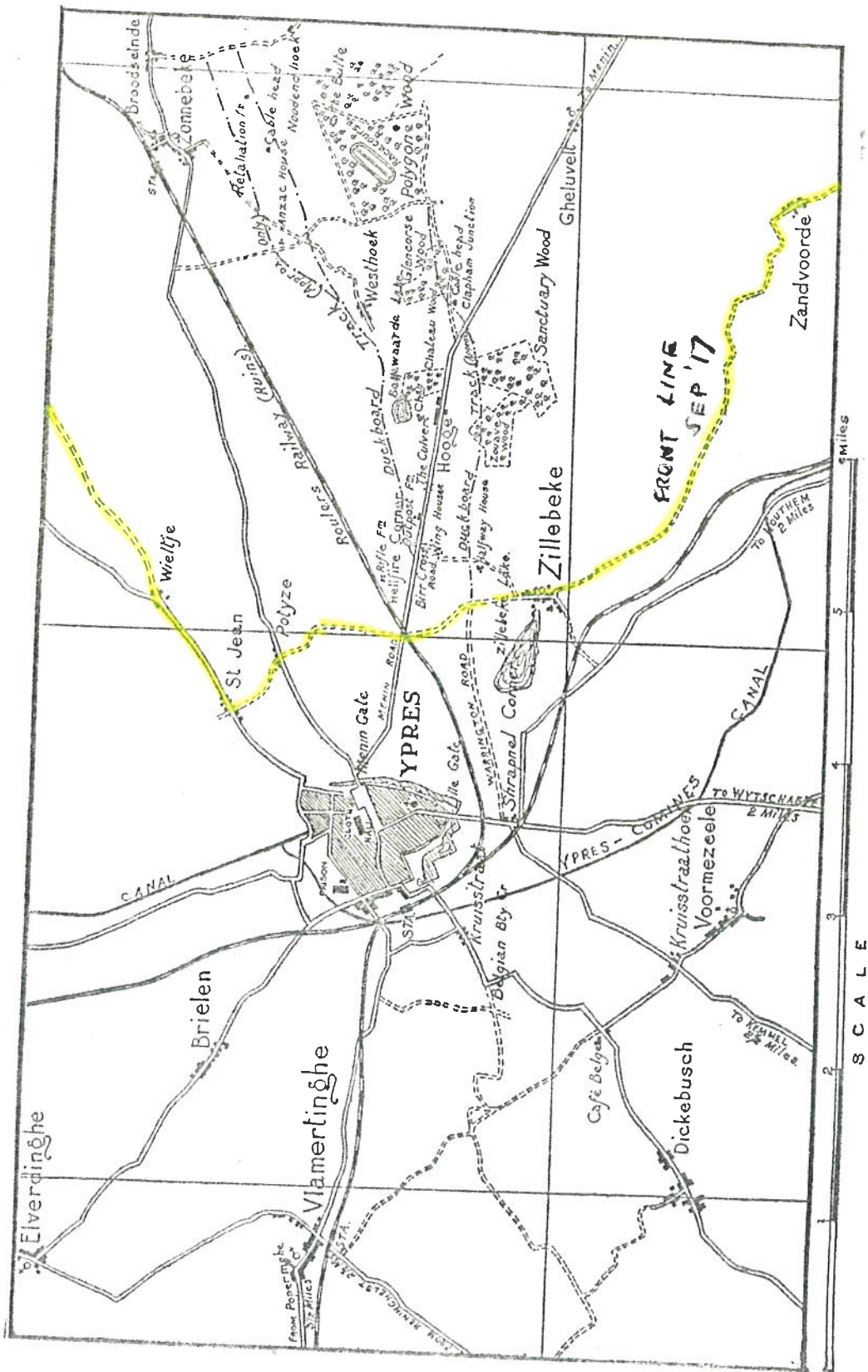
'Norm': Sgt. Norman McDowell, his life-long friend and brother-in-law

Vera: his wife

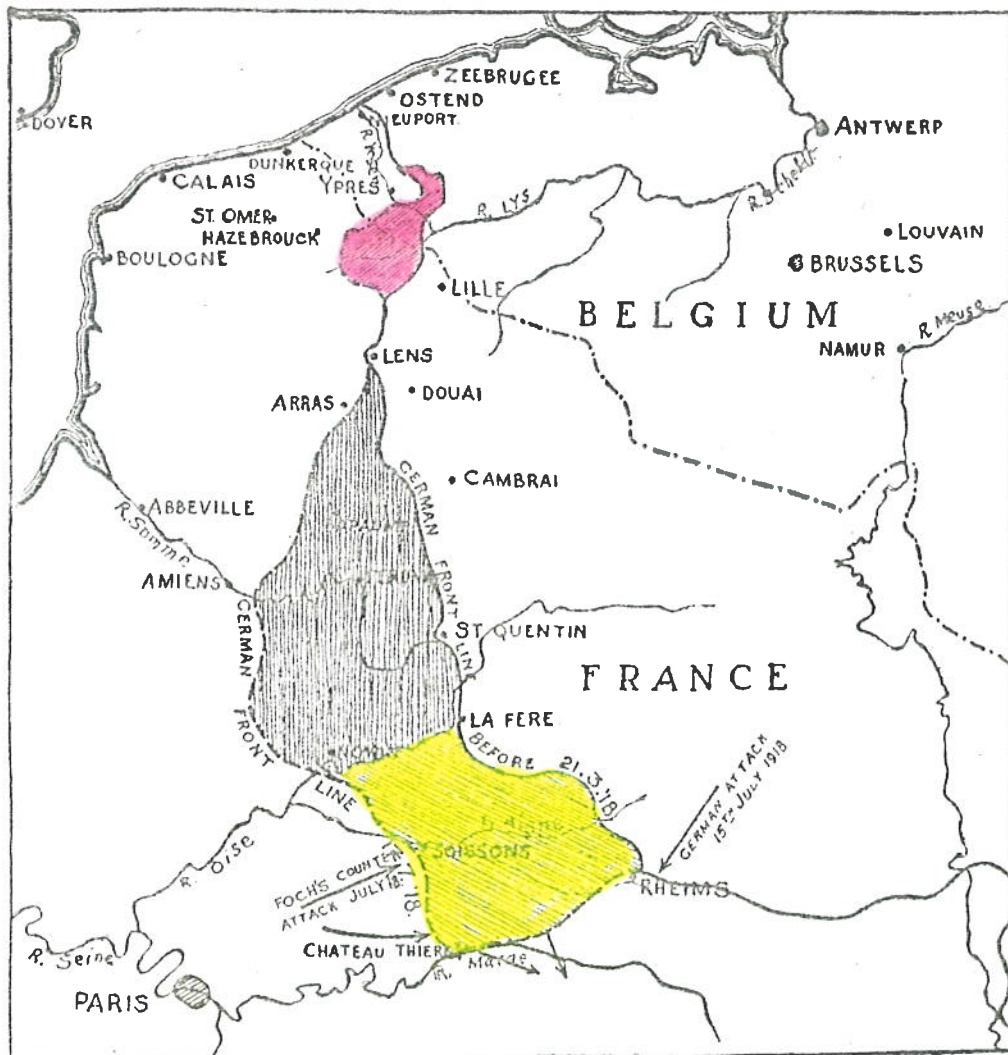
Ethel: his sister




'Archie': an anti-aircraft gun

'Blighty': England. Also a wound justifying evacuation to England.

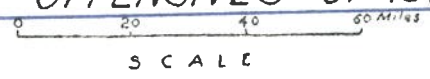






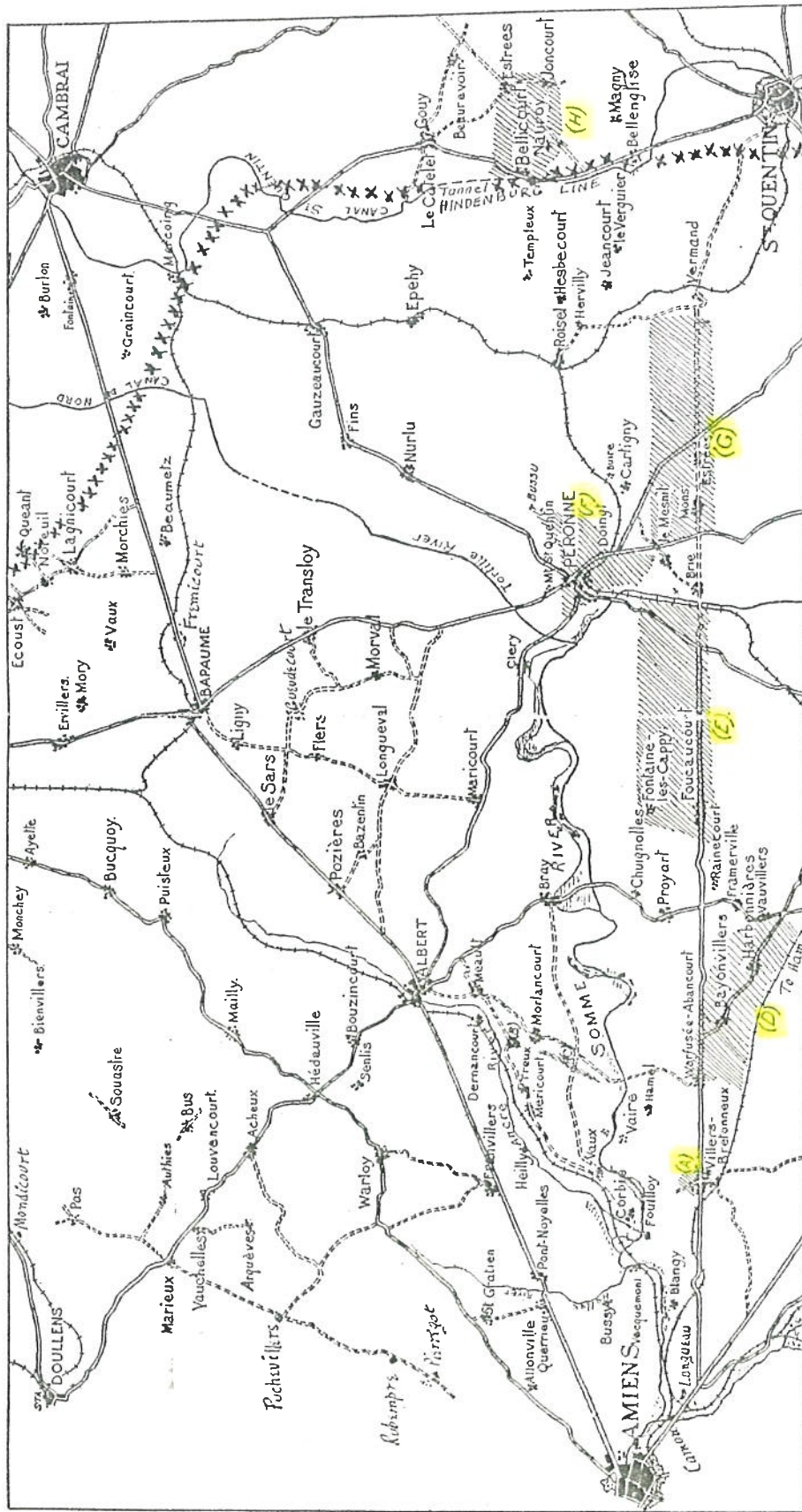
-  OFFENSIVE OPENED APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> 1918.
-  " " MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup> 1918
-  " " MAY 27<sup>TH</sup> 1918 AND  
CONTINUED ON JULY 15<sup>TH</sup> 1918.

AREAS CAPTURED IN THE THREE GREAT GERMAN OFFENSIVES OF 1918.









1918

Miles 5 10 15 20 25

S C A L E

THE DIVISION'S SECOND COMBAT CAMPAIGN  
The shaded areas are approximately those captured by the 5th Australian Division.

- (A) Taken by 15th Bde., 24th, 25th, 26th April.
- (B) Taken by 15th Bde., 4th July.
- (C) Taken by 8th and 14th Bdes., 29th July.
- (D) Taken by 8th and 15th Bdes., 8/9th August.
- (E) Taken by 8th Bde. as Adv. Bde., end August.
- (F) Taken by 14th, 15th and 8th Bdes., 1st/5th Sept.
- (1) Taken by 8th Bde. as Adv. Gd., 6th/8th Sept.
- (11) Taken by 8th, 14th and 15th Bdes., 29th Sept./2nd Oct.





## Notebook No. 1

### **4.5.17 – In the Red Sea**

These waters safe – soon will be in the Mediterranean & then we will have to keep our eyes skinned. The Medina is gone. Torpedoed in English Channel. All hands saved except 15 engine room killed by explosion.

An auxiliary watch is formed for the passengers, to keep a look out for periscopes. It is an exciting business travelling these days. At Colombo 24 mines were swept up in a space of three weeks before our arrival. Two ships have already fallen victim within five miles of the coast. There we learnt that the 4 raiders had been out but had been dealt with. More mines at Bombay. Some of the ship's officers seem rather apprehensive of this trip but so far our trip has been uneventful with the exception of the man who jumped overboard in the Indian Ocean.

### **8.5.17 – Alexandria**

Disembarked unexpectedly at Suez – things worse than we anticipated – submarines very active. In fact two hospital ships rather than face the Mediterranean turned back to complete the journey around the cape. One French transport snabbed (La France) with heavy casualties and one British, no less than 11 M.O.'s drowned. I am not writing these facts home. The current opinion seems to be that the RAMC men will not go but we Australians will risk it. Very Cheering !. To be spitted by a torpedo in the Mediterranean would be a glorious end – I don't think. There has been heavy fighting in Palestine – 17,000 casualties – shall we be sent there or shall we stay here and twiddle our thumbs? Five months in camp and we have only drawn pay so far – Cook's Tourists! A large Russian battleship was destroyed seven miles out from Port Said. I have cabled home that we have left the Malwa in case she is caught. In spite of all the essential war news continues good. These minor things loom larger to us because they are more personal. Everybody irritable or forcefully gay at dinner tonight. The TT seemed for once not quite spontaneous. We shall soon see our fate.

### **9.5.17**

Life seems a trifle less gloomy but apparently no chance of going to England. Rumours of all transport's been held up. Submarines too bad. Mitchell met SA men from Gaza who said that the AIF are short of AMC. Are we to go there? They are fighting a defensive battle only but officers say that it is equal to France in fury. Our bombers very active.

Today could see a battle cruiser passing up and down off the coast. One of our aeroplanes passed over camp.

### **10.5.17 – Alexandria**

Rumour has it that we sail Monday. But in what?

### **11.5.17**

Mediterranean is evidently entirely unsafe for traffic. Much shipping lies in harbour which is very suggestive. The beasts are said to be more numerous in between Alexandria and Malta – and we evidently sail on Monday. It seems a toss up whether we get through after all we have heard. But then one's inclined to exaggerate. We shall soon know perhaps we may go around Suez for two hospital ships are lying in the harbour. Allen and I had a walk around the docks this afternoon especially to see what boats were in but saw nothing beyond the very dirty native Arabs in whose quarters we temporarily lost ourselves. Some war ships in the harbour. How is the Malwa progressing? Must get a cable home promptly if anything befalls her. But I suppose she will pull through and we would all be cursing our luck that we were not on her. Or perhaps visa versa. Everyone seems to rather fight shy of the Mediterranean trip. There are men from the Cameronia which was torpedoed.

### **Saturday 12.5.17**

Still no news either good or bad. Beginning to wish for a move somewhere or anywhere as long as it is a move.

### **Sunday 13.5.17**

Packing hard. Five of us Shirlow, Archdall, Allen, Mitchell and self leaving this afternoon but we don't know in what.

### **Monday 14.5.17**

Here we are again in the middle of the submarine infested Mediterranean –HMT Kingstonian of the same line as the ill-fated Cameronian. She is a cattle boat and loaded with a Coolie labour battalion from way up north of India between Assam and Burma – said to be related to the head hunters. Essentially Mongolian and wear no clothes but a string and flap in front. On the string is a box at the back in which they carry a dow – a native knife. With them are a couple of Ghurkas armed with kukri.

Went below decks today. They are packed like sardines and the stench and atmosphere is appalling. They live in cattle pens and the scene reminds one vividly of the descriptions I have read of the holds of the old slave traders. Their black bodies, white eyes and half shaven heads seen in the light of a few oil lamps. The sally ports are open in the side of the ship and will sink us the quicker if we are torpedoed. The poor devils down below will be drowned in hundreds without a rat's chance if anything happens. Perhaps as well for the floating accommodation of both boats and rafts is quite insufficient for 2,500 people.

A comforting sight is the two patrol ships ahead, zig-zagging this way and that. They can at least pick us up. We also change our course irregularly. Our speed is 11 knots, 13 when pressed with good coal.

European troops of whom there are only 80 live forward. The weather very fine and warm. Lets hope it continues so for the next week. We will take about 8 days over the voyage. So I hear. Tonnage 6,500 odd.

Sentries are posted all around the ship to spy for tin fish.

The most dangerous periods are about dusk and dawn when there is enough light to see a large ship but not enough to see a small periscope. Still, it has passed out of our hands and the result is on the knees of the gods. So here's luck to our voyage.

### **Tuesday 15.5.17**

Now about 25 hours off Malta. This is the most dangerous portion of the whole trip and sentries have been warned to keep an extra specially bright look-out. This morning there was a moderate sea on but this afternoon the water looks so blue and inviting that it is almost impossible to imagine murder and sudden death being beneath it.

The question of the day is how will these coolies behave in the face of sudden danger. They are fighting men themselves at home and said to be very plucky but –

Sentries with rifles and fixed bayonets are posted at the foot of each ladder leading to the lower decks. There are roughly 130 white and 2,000 black men aboard.

If we pass safely through the next 24 hours then the rest of our journey is comparatively safe. It is now 1 pm.

### **Wednesday 16.5.17**

Now 4.30 pm: we have probably passed safely over the most dangerous area. Not that we are out of the woods yet by any means. Everybody is settling down to the sensation of sitting on the edge of a volcano. Our Naga coolies are quite an unknown quantity though they seem jolly and unselfish enough now. Yesterday late we passed two rafts and a boat, remnants of a submarine action no doubt.

It is said that we reach Malta too late to enter tonight and will have to cruise up and down all night. It seems rather a crude thing that we could not go straight in, but have to offer ourselves as a torpedo target for a gratuitous 12 hours when we might go straight in to the safety of a harbour.

Our two convoying sloops continue to give us surprises by darting off at a tangent occasionally.

We have just passed another smashed up boat on which we could read the name Cameronian with the glasses.

### **Thursday 17.5.17 – Malta**

Entered port this morning at 9.00 am after weary days waiting, shore leave granted 3 to 9 pm. Saw Malta. Town full of British soldiers and sailors. Harbour contains many war vessels. British, French and Japanese. One particularly ugly French battleship here. Learned we are to leave Saturday, also that last weeks bag for submarines was 72. I wonder how many British. This situation waxes serious for England.

### **Friday 18.5.17 – Malta**

The steward told me this morning that we picked up 5 SOS calls from Alexandria here, all probably decoys by submarines. My old friend Stria is in port here, on whom I checked the stores before leaving Sydney.

### **Saturday 19.5.17**

Left Malta at 9 am still convoyed by two light sloops. These Nagas are very jovial chaps and are controlled by Indian tea planters who talk their *lingo*. Very nice chaps most of whom have spent ten to twenty years in India.

**Sunday 20.5.17**

Truly it is said "One never knows". Last night we sighted the coast of Sicily and cruised along it during the evening. At 11.30 pm I awoke owing to the engines stopping but as they shortly resumed I thought it all right and rolled over. But thinking there was over much commotion after a while I got up and went out on deck. There I found a pretty pickle. On our starboard side not a hundred yards distance was a line of breakers and behind that a dark line of land one half mile away. We were piled up hard and dry on a lee shore in only about 15 feet of water. Our convoy was signalling furiously. Electric torches flashing on deck and the wind blowing a howling gale in the rigging. Shortly the sloop made off till morning for fear of submarines. The engines ran astern full speed all night but we only drifted further ashore. It sounds hard to believe but the tough crowd we have aboard all came on deck and when they found we were merely ashore on a sandy beach, rolled over and went to bed again. I had a few hours sleep but woke at 5 am. Dawn was breaking over the hills of Sicily, a red angry dawn too. We were now able to discern our position which might have been far worse. The ship had run aground on a shelving beach of sand. Half a mile further down an ugly reef of rocks and a lighthouse which could not have been alight last night. Another mile and we could have cleared Sicily and made a line for Sardinia. Two hundred yards further on the other side is another reef so we are very fortunate.

This Sunday is a day I shall remember for a long time. The winds freshened to a heavy gale and the sea rose in accordance and here we are with spray flying all over us, clear over the mast and funnel. The old ship bumping herself to pieces on the sand. Down below was pandemonium, every noise is magnified and the Nagas are weeping in crowds. Their overseers are splendid fellows who have worked like Trojans all day calming these savages, up and down to these dangerous lower decks.

There were one or two incipient rushes which they nipped in the bud.

Everybody wet, decks awash and sentries doubled. Three holds were full of water at 4 pm and to our eyes the deck seemed to buckle with the bumping. We have drifted until our bows are only two hundred yards off shore but two hundred yards of swirling currents and breakers. Everybody is watching the bits of wood and calculating their chances of swimming it.

The stewards stuck to work and got us a really good dinner in the saloon. It seems a strange meal with our ship bumping and jerking and twisting on the sand the whole time but everybody was joking as usual.

As the night came on the gale abated and there was not such a howling through the rigging and the waves which all day had passed over every minute or so now washed the foredeck once in ten minutes or so. But the sun went down with a lurid brassy tinge in the sky and darkness came on with wind and sea worse than ever. Our cabin floor was awash with water on the seaward side and as we had a big list to that side we intend to sleep in the saloon below. The consolation, we can't sink. We are lying in 11 feet of water and our keel must be at least 10 feet deep in the sand. The Kingstonians sailing days are over. Her present captain has been in her for 14 years.

Our convoy returns this morning and lowered two boats into the sea endeavouring to get a line across to us unsuccessfully. The boat was washed down the coast and a sloop had to go down and pick it up as they could not row against wind and sea. The men were taken out of both boats and one shortly filled and vanished. Three of our boats are hanging from davits by one end battered to bits. The sloops then signalled that they had rung up Malta for assistance and tugs and life boats were on the way. These tugs were sighted just before dark.

Altogether a most anxious wet day and with an anxious night ahead.

### **Monday 21.5. 17**

Not quite such a hopeless dawn wind abated sea almost smooth. Good hopes of getting off today.

Later: Tugs from Malta have arrived and endeavoured for some hours to pull us off but I fear we are stuck eight feet in the sand and we are hard and fast. There is a mere fresh breeze blowing and the spray is not going across the decks at all for there is only a slight surf running. It will be a couple of days before we get off but everything is nice and comfortable now. It is in fact a "ship wreck deluxe" with good meals and beds. A good shave and wash with a clean shirt puts quite a new complexion on things. Everything is packed up and we are ready to get off when there is anyone to take us. Probably we will go back to Malta again or better still go through Italy by road to Marseilles. Well we shall soon see what we shall see.

The natives have behaved on the whole very well and once they calm down they cook their meals on deck amid positive buckets of spray all with umbrellas up. Some sight! But the poor beggars feel the cold keenly.

7.30 pm: We have snapped three nine inch hawsers in succession both the sloop and the tug hauling together. In spite of this we have not moved an inch. There are now seven vessels about including the two sloops, five of them being tugs

from Malta. I'm afraid the *Kingstonian* is fixed until they lighten her. Word has come through to abandon ship. The coolies are going in three lots of eight hundred each in the tugs we presume and they are going of all places to Biserte near Tunis in Africa. Two medical officers with each lot myself with the third, so that if we leave tomorrow we will be lucky. It is eight hours run to Bizerte so that the tugs will not return till at least 18 hours for the second 800. Shirlow and Archdall go with the first lot. The breeze is freshening again but off shore and these small tugs are dancing a lively Polka in the offing. They are waiting till dusk to avoid observation by submarines. Meals still continue good and with a good nights sleep tonight we will tackle anything tomorrow.

Later, 10.05 pm. Wind once again howling as hard as ever over the port quarter. All idea of transferring troops tonight abandoned. Not so much sea as wind is off land. Anyhow time to turn in. The cape we are present berthed on Cape Garentola, the extreme south west point of Sicily.

### **Tuesday 22.5.17**

This cape is a cape of winds and storms. It is now 7 pm and the wind once more rising. It was reasonably calm this afternoon so that the tug cautiously felt it's way on to our side and took off 500 of our Naga coolies.

It was a sight to see 500 of their towzled black heads on the deck far below and their queer bundles. One youth went down with a bed pan in one hand and umbrella in the other. They carry big pointed baskets supported solely by a strap over the forehead. They enjoyed the joke hugely when one of their number fell off the gangway.

### **Wednesday 23.5.17**

More unavailing efforts to move the ship. And a tug and destroyer have been cruising around – a low snaky looking craft. Messages from Malta today enquiring "How many officers are saved?" "Are there any submarines?" "Is the ship breaking up yet?". The transshipping of coolies continued today. Only 800 left now with the English officers.

The scene is quite a busy one about the boat – signally, tugs, trawlers, patrols, destroyers make quite a carnival.

### **Thursday 24.5.17**

The four others have gone off to Bizerte. Rather a nasty trick served us by the RAMC. We are all going overland by Rome. All the Naga gone and a destroyer waiting to take us off.

**Friday 25.5.17 – 12.15 am**

Now in the train at Trapani a small town on the west coast of Sicily where I don't believe they have seen a British soldier since the war that is judging by the sensation we caused here. At 1 pm we embarked off the Kingstonian onboard the tug *Alice*. This tug, by the way, was up at the Dardanelles and shows a large dent in the stern where a torpedo struck but failed to explode. Leaving the Kingstonian on her sand bank and embarking the CO and a couple of officers on a tug and destroyer we set off on a 34 mile run down the coast to Trapani. The run was uneventful although the previous night all lights had been put out on the Kingstonian because submarines were about. A very pretty run down the coast past Marsala where the wines come from to Trapani, exquisitely pretty. It was a gorgeous and a real Mediterranean day and the white buildings of the town with the blue water in the foreground and a great heaving mountain whose shoulders were lost in cloud in the background, made a gorgeous picture. The hills studded with pretty little houses and crisscrossed with paths.

Once ashore the populace flocked out to greet us then many Italian soldiers in uniform made familiar to us by the pictorial press. Trapani is like all the towns we have seen full of narrow picturesque streets white houses all doors and shutters flanked narrow pathed roads. We leave Trapani tomorrow at 4 am for Palermo, Messina, Rome, Naples, Marseilles, Boulogne, London. Some Cooks Tourist!! I am glad we go through Sicily by day. It will be great to see. Our shipwreck has come to a good end. Here am I the last of the TT. I will be the first to arrive in England – with luck in about 10 days from now.

It seems a dream to me to see all these places which so far have been mere names – to see them materialise as it were is a great experience and all at no expense. Tonight as shipwrecked soldiers we had a fine dinner at the expense of the British Consul. And as the waiters only spoke Italian and very little French our efforts to understand were a trifle ludicrous. We had to be back at the station at 9.30 so finishing up with a huge plate of strawberries we bolted.

I have just spent the best part of two hours searching out for my kit which some misguided person had shifted but at last my efforts have been crowned by success after much sweating and swearing. Three of the British troops got loose uptown and returning raving drunk causing a great scrap on the platform.

1.25 pm: In the Grand Hotel ("Des Palmes") Palermo, Sicily. Have had the most gorgeous trip as far as here. Sicily is a garden island. Blue sea and sky, great and grey beetling walls of rock, scarred and roughened by weather wear. Cactus and brilliant scarlet geraniums along the railway vie with chocolate earth and green foliage produce a vivid riot of colour. Above all a clear cool sunshine,



intense yet not scorching and gentle breezes from the sea. Great escarpments run everywhere in long capes down to the seashore and the railway runs hither and thither like a hunted rat to escape these declivities. Finally repeatedly it plunges into burrows of tunnels passing through the bowels of the hill where escape from the steep shoulders is no longer possible. The people on the route have never seen a British soldier before and cheer and stare just as Australian people do to their allied soldiers. One could meet with a worse fate than living in Sicily. It is a superb place. We passed through the Barratute, Capaci and Steracavalli and then into Palermo. Here after a brief wait a band met us and played God Save while we all stood stiffly at the salute. The Italian anthem, more salutes and cheers, carriages, crowds of cheering school children and their curious elders and here we are awaiting lunch. What a chance for a sleep tonight, what a chance for a bath, what a chance for a feed. Yesterday it was carriage floor, wash in a tea cup and bully beef and ships biscuits – more like dog biscuits than anything I've met before.

### **Saturday 26.5.17**

Left Palermo in the grey dawn this morning. Many Italian soldiers also leaving for the front. Our men at the barracks were given a splendid time and returned to us laden with souvenirs, Italian flags, feathers from the Besaglian caps and such like. I have eaten so much food that I don't want to see any more for a week. We do not go through Naples, more the pity. Last night I speculated on a kind of Monte Carlo spinning automatic machine. First try I won 20 francs, about 15 shillings, then successfully lost it all so I was square again. So much for ill gotten gains, lightly come, lightly go. Four hours of beautiful sleep last night in a real bed. Left at 3 am.

Later 3 pm, Italy.

Last part of Sicily was not as interesting as the first. There are great hills as before but they are not so grand and there are more tunnels than scenery. One tunnel takes nearly 10 minutes at full speed ahead. At Messina we were invited to descend by an Italian colonel and partake of a little refreshment and this we did with great gusto, waited upon by French and English ladies. Nine years ago as you probably know Messina was laid waste by an earthquake and it is not yet properly recovered but it is a fine city even now. All our men by now were decked out with flowers. We crossed the strait in a boat train (two miles is the distance) to San Giovanni. Here we can see the stones of the quay which be partly below water. Went past the famous Scilla of Scythia and Charlybis of classical fame. The rock is a huge bluff at the end of a promontory, and now on through Italy. We are still in the vine country and even the sides of the steep

hills are terraced to grow the festive grape. One of our British soldiers distinguished himself by asking for a beer. When it was safely down he said "No baksheesh"! The result: under arrest with our boozy pal from Palermo.

The country is beautiful as we pass through it climbing on to a moderate range of hills we run along the sea shore. On one side the Mediterranean on the other the prettiest picture of pastoral industry one can imagine. It seems as if nature has been very prodigal of favours in this southern land. Flowers everywhere, little humble low lying flowers tingeing and carpeting the green fields with their own shade. Now a meadow white with daisies, now a green pastoral with dense patches of a magenta coloured blossom, now a natural tapestry of green and yellow. Trim velvety pale green squares of wheat side by side with brown patches of earth awaiting the seed. Dotted amongst the wheat are great red spots of magnificent poppies. And the borders of the railway as in Sicily are truly marvellous, scarlet and pink geraniums, purple flowers like cornflowers in shape, yellow blossoms on shrubs like a common wild flower in sunny NSW. It is all beautiful. I stand at the window most of the time for fear of missing anything. And fertile – wherever they can get a plough to scratch the soil there is a crop and by the look of the soil I should say a very good crop. The whole country side is a splash of colour.

Railway's very good – better than NSW both in speed and style.

In Egypt and Aden one sees the earth naked and unashamed but here it is clothed in its richest cloak verdure. We have just passed a romantic looking old ruined castle, its walls are crumbling into heaps covered with lichen but still preserving a little of its ancient grandeur giving a quiet dignity to the landscape.

Italy in a few days will be full of rumours of English soldiers going in train loads to the Italian front judging by the way the people stare. It gives one some idea how rumours rise.

Darkness comes and with it dinner time. My appetite is a little jaded but one must eat. So here goes! The spaghetti will of course appear first followed by fish and meat. Yesterday was meatless day here and we suffered like the rest dining off eggs and fish. I finished with a lightly boiled egg and the egg has not finished with me yet. All day it has remained with me at intervals of ten minutes or so. In future soft boiled eggs will be confined to breakfast.

### **Sunday 27.5.17 – Rome**

Last night about 11 pm we picked up the crew of a steamer which had been torpedoed and shelled at 6.00 the same day. There were only half dressed – eight men wounded with shrapnel whilst in the small boats – four killed. We had to

turn out of our carriages to make room for the wounded who were lying down cases. They are in good enough humour and were comparing fragments of shell casing that they had picked up. They were shelled by a 4.7 gun against which their own 12 pounder was powerless. Anyhow it jammed after five rounds. The coloured crew deserted in a body and left the whites to it.

We arrived in Rome at 9.30 pm passing the famous Appian Way and the ruins of the Aqueduct of Claudius on the way in. Breakfast first then Colonel Brown and myself and the two RAMC men hired a taxi. We were leaving again at 2.45 pm so we had to do the American sight seeing act. How to see Rome in three hours! Well we did our best and managed by good scorching to get around the principal sights – Forum, Coliseum, St Peters, St John Latran, both world famous cathedrals, the Pantheon, vestal virgins and so on all complete. The Forum and the Palatine Hill are the remnants of that centre of Rome statesmanship of which one reads so much in the classics. To stand on the very ground where Cicero made his orations and where Brutus murdered Caesar and to see the great Palatine Hill now covered with venerable ruins is a sensation of its own. I was familiar with the appearance from photos but the original gives a vivid reality and a sense of ancient age. On close inspection these remnants are rather disappointing. They are dirty and broken and ill preserved. It is only the association which gives them such a peculiar attraction. Passing from the Forum we went to the Coliseum and they pointed out to us the cells which held the ancient Christians who died torn to pieces by lions rather than deny their faith. I wonder if modern Christianity is so sincere. There were gladiators butchered to mark a Roman holiday and looking up from the floor in the centre of the high rows of mouldered and decayed seats one can imagine all the bustle and noise of a Roman gala day. Of the ancient splendour of this place nothing now remains. It is dirty and tarnished but it does not require much imagination to reconstruct and repeople it for one's own edification. The guides point the sight of Emperor's Box, the vestal virgins opposite, lion's dens, the gladiator's dressing rooms and lastly the pit where the wounded gladiators were finished off if mortally wounded. The fallen pillars litter the ground and broken pieces.

We climbed the funiculine hill. We saw all the old relics of ancient Roman empire but in three hours we cannot appreciate it all. We would like to wander around and investigate these places more thoroughly.

St Peter's Cathedral is a church of immense dimensions, larger than St Paul's of London. With Italian egoism they have plates of brass indicating the length of famous cathedrals and showing that their own is the largest. This church is head quarters of Roman Catholicism. It is indescribable in its grandeur, although, in my opinion the desire for display often rose to garishness. The best of quality everywhere. Imagine an immense hall 186 metres long and 88 wide, walls of marble of every conceivable colour, niches full of statues and carvings by all the

best known Italian sculptors, paintings by her artists, magnificent sarcophagi and statues of each of the buried popes. People wander about reverently. In front of the altar a girls school kneels in prayer. On the right is a bronze statue of St Peter seated with one foot thrust forward. The toe is absolutely worn by the kisses of the faithful and as we watched two or three people give a church salute to the image. The altar is a marvel of bronze marble gold and silver and in front of a sanctuary in which lies the body of St Peter. The tomb is carved by Celini and as a work of art must be priceless. To be conceived the interior of this church must be seen. We inspected the treasury, a wonderful collection of gold altar plate, gems and gold cloths, some centuries old.

In the chapel of St John Latran there is one small modern chapel built on the same lines but not nearly so good. It was estimated to have cost 6 million francs.

Back to the station again at 2 o'clock, lunch and leave at 2.45 pm. Everyone gives us chocolates, fruit, flags and flowers. Cheers as we push off. One stage nearer Blighty.

I cannot express the satisfaction it is to see these old places which so long have been but names. To have seen Rome although very hurriedly is an ambition to realise. Every place by the sound of its name recalls tales and names of ancient renown and prowess. It is a really stupendous thing of such talent in art existing at about the time of Christ.

One rather unique object in the chapel of St John Latran is a marble table mounted on four pillars. The height of the table represents the actual statue of Christ. If so Christ was about 6 ft 1 in. for I stood below it and it caps me by a good six inches. But also reminds me of a mosaic picture we saw in St Peters or, as they call it St Pietro. The picture was of Christ with St Peter and St John one on each side. The notable feature was that Christ is represented with a very Hebrew nose, a thing which is only seen in the earliest of pictures. This particular date being the 8th century.

I am looking forward to seeing some of the English cathedrals to compare with these ultra magnificent churches of Holy Room. Everywhere is a straining after display and luxury. One senses get cloyed with the rich carvings and colours. St Peters cannot be seen in an hour. Some of these sculptures on the walls you could gaze at for minutes at a time. One in particular represents two angels standing at a door. It is by Canova and the delicacy of the outline and conception is truly splendid. The English cathedrals are different, gothic in style and proclaim more truly I think the "dim religious light".

Well one could write and write. Rome was not built in a day but it was seen in three hours – very inadequate but the best possible.

### **Monday 28.5.17: Pisa, Italy, 2.45 am**

Our train arrived at Pisa at 1 in the morning and we have three hours wait before we go on. More American sight seeing. I have just returned from "doing" the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It is very dark but the fall of the tower can be seen and its very marked inclination. It was built by two architects and the man who built the upper portion became afraid it would fall and so straightened it a bit as he built it so the whole tower is so. The angle however is not obvious to the eye. Behind the tower is the cathedral and behind that is the baptisterie. It was too dark to see many details of architecture but the general forms of the famous buildings made an impressive picture in the gloom Pisa by night at 1 am with the flies flitting to and fro like little lamps. After we had gazed our fill, back into the carriage we had been lucky enough to find and clattered back to the old world streets to the railway, crossing a bridge over the river as we go. Of course no photos nor could I buy post cards.

Everywhere we go we pass troop trains laden with grey clad Italian soldiers, who laugh and call out Inglisi. The Italian officers are immaculately clad with creases in their breaches. They make us feel quite passé.

Sugar is very scarce here. One gets a tiny bag of sugar with each cup of tea. It is not sweet enough for my taste but there is no help for it. Butter is forbidden and there are two meatless days a week. The women work on the trains and trams and soldiers are everywhere. Lt Col Brown: I must say a word about him. He is a Londoner, an architect by trade and has an accent like nothing on earth. His regiment at the Gaza battle was cut to pieces and he lost nearly all his officers. The tale goes that he was hit and bowled over in a charge. His men who idolised him cried "Gor Blimey, John Brown's stopped it". But he jumped up again being merely hit in the arm and exclaimed "come on boys I'm all right". He is a hale fellow well met with everyone and one of the most affable Englishmen I have met. He is what we call a "Seed" and a photographer more over.

### **11 am: Genoa**

Treated like kings by BRC – topping lunch. Fruit cakes, sweets and flowers. Triumphant departure to the tune of enthusiastic cheers given and received. Three days now to London.

Shortly after leaving Genoa we passed into a beautiful winding valley with mound-like hills, inexpressively green rising sheer from the river bank. It was very narrow and the railway lies crammed in the rocky 20 foot banks of a small river. On the sides of the hills the quaint little hamlets among the clustering trees

of the again inevitable vineyard. It was raining hard and the tops of the hills were lost in clouds of mist. But the chief thing was the beautiful green – shades of all depths & colours.

### **Chromonte – in the Alps.**

The scenery here is superb. Great snow capped hills terraced in the lower slopes for the green vineyards and a brawling torrent running in the foreground, everything wet and misty and the fresh smelling wet earth on the air. Quaint old world hamlets with old fashioned clock towers and time stained walls. These hamlets be half hidden on the green slopes. Tunnel after tunnel with glimpses of excellent passage between. It is all wonderful. Occasionally they break between the tunnels the train crossed a narrow bridge over a cleft running shear down a mountain side. Below one sees a leaping foaming torrent on its way to the fertile valley visible far below, like a doll's country, tiny houses and tiny green patches. We have nothing to compare with this in Australia.

Last of all we come to the long alpine tunnel between Italy and France. It is very long and we rush through for what seems an eternity. At last we flash out into the daylight past strong sentry groups guarding this important work down to Modane, a small frontier town. Dinner here and I exercise my French for all it was worth. I can easily make all I want known but I have no ear for the language and cannot follow any involved reply. Still it is good fun. Next we discover our baggage van has not arrived. A fundamental principal in continental travel is never go on without your baggage. So here I am in the Hotel Internationale in a clean bed with linen sheets, a queer heavy old fashioned wooden bed big enough for three. In another ditto with me is Lt Mowat, a Canadian of the Royal Flying Corps. Everyone else is English so the two colonials cottoned on together. Well he we are in France. We have seen Sicily and Rome and crossed the Alps.

### **Tuesday 29.5.17.**

Our baggage is lost evidently. The others have gone on to Blighty but I am staying another day on the chance of it turning up. It is hard to lose one's baggage when one is near the end of the journey.

Today with Horrods, RFC, I climbed the Alps as far as the Chapel of Notre Dame of Charmaix, a small alpine chapel in the mountains at 5,000 feet. The view obtained was fine, but the weather misty and it rained all day. Snow clad hills all around. It would be grand on a sunny day. Had a fine meal at a little café but a rough French fellow half drunk nearly turned my stomach by tearing some of these edible snails out of their shells and eating them raw. I can say I have climbed the alps at least. It was a stiff walk.

### **Wednesday 30.5.17**

Left Modane for Paris at 7.30 pm by express. Baggage has turned up. Goodbye Modane by the famous Paris Express, sumptuous carriage. Now but five of our Sicily party left.

### **Thursday 31.5.17**

Paris: Arrived at the famous Gare De Lyons at 9 am. Scrambled for luggage. Hurried breakfast in a café where its waiters shrieked in French and the room abounded in fat dames with many bundles. Crossed Paris to Garde du Nord in a taxi. Now with driver – emerged minus 9 francs. Registered luggage.

We spent the day wandering around Paris, eating drinking and sight seeing. Home, little Hotel Aragon, café in open air watching the crowd go by at the Café de la Paix.

Every second French soldier has the Croix de Guerre. Few young men, many women in trams, shops etc. Otherwise not much evidence of war.

Saw Notre Dame, Louvre, Champs d'Elysée, Tuilleries, Cologne, Verdome and the famous places. Eiffel Tower and Les Invalides in the distance where Napoleon is buried.

Rather fed up. Will be glad to have a rest if possible. The constant moving for last eight weeks odd is becoming tiresome. Also saw the Arc de Triumphe and the Place Concord. The boulevards are very interesting, thronged with people and rushing cars. Fine shops and fair women. The French uniform is a toney confection of sky blue mingled with the various gold stripes, their idea being to use as much gold braid as possible.

On the train for Boulogne, 9.45 pm.

Time to turn in. The train takes ten hours to do what it does in three and a half hours in peace time.

Friday 1.6.17: On the Channel boat at Boulogne.

A busy scene – men moving backwards and forwards laden up.

Boulogne bombed the night before we arrived.

Arrived in London. Reported to Horseferry Road.

2 – 3.6.17

London sight seeing. Westminster Abbey.

4.6.17

Shepherds Bush. Met Norm. Obtained him a day's leave.

5.6.17

Day in London with Norm.

6.6.17

Reported at Tidworth. Overcarried to Salisbury. Slept the night at Park House Camp.

7.6.17

Ordered to report to Cadford as RMO to training Battalion (13<sup>th</sup>).

8.6.17 and 9.6.17 – Camp duties.

10.6.17

Fine trip to Salisbury and Stonehenge on a bike.

11.6.17

Camp Duties

3.7.17

Still at Cadford

Full account of travels sent home.



## Notebook No. 2

29.9.17

Slept overnight in Grosvenor Hotel Victoria Street. Breakfast at 6 am and caught train moving out at 7.50 am – embarked Folkstone and landed in Boulogne after a quick passage. Much tramping in Boulogne and attempted hiring of rooms in hotels to no purpose. Decided to catch the 9.10 pm train after reporting to DMS – no seats available in train and sat in officers' rest club till 1.06 am – experienced a fairly intense bombardment with bombs – left for Abbeville.

Arrived Abbeville at 4 am at Officers' Club, slept on floor till 7 am and reported at hospital, 3 AGH, and was not there two hours before receiving my marching orders. Report to 5<sup>th</sup> Division to replace a casualty.

I did my Gas course. I did not leave till the morning of 2.10.17.

Whilst there met the Reverend Mr Foreman who was a padre to the hospital and had an enjoyable stroll with him in the evening – we discussed all kinds of things and I bought an engraving of the Cathedral and a coat of arms serviette ring as a souvenir. I must get some of those Coat of Arms spoons of the French towns.

2.10.17

Spent the day in the train arriving early before lunch at Etables where we lunched, hired a room and visited Paris Plage, a pretty little water side town but desolated by the war - Allen and I endeavoured to improve our French by engaging the waiters in conversation. Stayed overnight at Etables and resumed journey by 9 next morning after reporting at 6.30 and sitting for untold hours on the train. A lively company in the car but all more or less inclined to be thoughtful – a rather forced mirth. Arrived Hazebrouche and pushed on in same train. Arrived at Poperinghe, Allen had left at Caestre as we both reported to different divisions. It was dark and cold on a desolate flat – felt utterly miserable – managed to secure a bunk in a rest hut and the Fritz shelled the town all night every 15 minutes regularly. Up betimes in the morning and located my division, walked untold kilometres through mud and traffic till I reported and was sent on to 14<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance – met Finlayson and Ellis – the same afternoon. Thus arrived at my destination 4.10.17 about 10 am but my travels were not yet over I just had time to get my stretcher up and be nicely fixed up when I was ordered to go over to 17 CCS the other side of Poperinghe which at the time was being slowly shelled.

More packing and a five mile march on a bitter cold afternoon in the pouring rain. I discovered my new trenchcoat was not waterproof and the water trickled

down & filled my trench boots. All this time successful stunts were going on up at the front around Z. And Fritz in desperation was shelling by the map the various camps 15 miles back from the line and bombing one or two heavily each night.

### **5 – 10.10.17**

These days I have spent at the 17<sup>th</sup> CCS in company with Maj. Strachen of the 14<sup>th</sup> FA attending to walking wounded. The work has been quite easy but the place had two bombs dropped on it three weeks ago, one of which by poetic justice killed or wounded 20 German prisoners. Every night one can hear the bombs and shells dropping on to Poperinghe and surrounding camps but for once the Hun was acting like a sport and left the CCS alone. The last stunt had been disastrous to the MO's, about ten being killed or wounded. I am beginning to doubt whether I shall see home again. A philosophic attitude is the only one to adopt. Our feelings here awaiting the order to go up to the line very much resemble a swimmer at the edge of the bath on cold day.

Maj. Buchanan (Buck) came across from the 5<sup>th</sup> FA two days ago.

Gus was brought in four days ago with his ankle shattered and had to have this amputated. Being away from home is a failure as far as I am concerned and this war cannot end too soon for me.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Div went up last night, the 14<sup>th</sup> FA with them but we are still left at the CCS. I don't know whether to be thankful or not – it leaves the ice still unbroken.

Buchanan told me Stan was only one quarter mile away from me and I did not know. What hard lines. I would have liked to have yarned with him.

There are many Americans here and it is both comfy and sociable.

### **14 October**

Still at the 17<sup>th</sup> CCS. I wonder when we are going to get our baptism of fire. I dress casualties from my own division every day and thank my lucky stars I am not up in it. Had two stretcher bearers from the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance two days ago both only slightly wounded. They told me they were the only casualties in the Ambulance when they left. One sees so many wounded that it seems impossible to pass through a year's war without stopping something.

The nights are COLD already. Tonight my feet absolutely ached until they got warm in bed and the winter is not here yet. A tent is at best a cold and cheerless place, what it will be when the temperature below freezing I don't know.

As it is now I sleep in most of my clothes. It is wonderful how easily one comes to discard the convention of clean clothes and frequent baths. I have gone without both for a fortnight and felt no worse. War is a ghastly business, a putrid loathsome excrescence of civilization and, when you are in it, without the faintest shadow of attraction.

Tonight the enemy planes came over bombing just on dark – I was just going to tell you he was bombarding when bang! an archie goes off close at hand and the hateful hum of Fritz's engines sounds just over head.

Out goes the lamp for the last five minutes, I lay in the dark whilst the guns roared and the shrapnel shells burst with a bright glare just over head – a most terrific clatter. One could hear the fragments whining away to earth around about. Enough to put the wind up anyone. I could hear his engines again. Enough for tonight and put out the light! That's poetry. Oh what a war!

### **October 25<sup>th</sup>**

I have been up in the line for four days 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> and seen more shells in that time than I have thought to see in the whole war. After relieving the 17<sup>th</sup> CCS I reporting to the CMDS near Dickelbusch and for three or four days was on general duties attending to gassed patients. This new mustard gas is an awful invention though not as lethal as chlorine. A conjunctivitis causing temporary blindness, extensive blistering of the skin and bronchial trouble in the lungs with sore throat and headache – quite knocks a man over. It causes little irritation at the time so that a man does not put his mask on and delayed effects begin to evidence themselves twenty four hours later.

After this I received orders that I was to go forward with the bearers to Bellewarde Ridge D.S. Accordingly on the previous morning I went up to Ypres to spy out the land. There is situated the ADS. The city itself once beautiful is now an appalling mess of ruins, not a whole house but buildings shattered by bomb and shell – all scarred with flying fragments. The skeleton of the magnificent Cloth Hall stands a tribute to the destructive genius of war. Men live like rats in sandbag shelters constructed amidst the ruins and all day the traffic passes ceaselessly up to the front line now some miles further. It is a wonderful sight, mudstained horses and wagons, motors & staff officers all in one eternal procession. Every day Fritz comes over and drops a few bombs to liven matters up.

I spent the evening at the ADS with Monty and Major James and we had quite a fine musical evening with a gramophone.

6.15 next morning after a hurried breakfast we pushed off along the road thronged as ever with traffic. A couple of miles out and the shrapnel began to burst overhead without any visible casualties. All reached Bellewarde in safety passing along a corduroy road ankle deep in mud and littered with dead horses by the side. Live shells be in profusion half buried in the mud where they had been dropped and batteries thunder out all around the countryside. The sides of the roads in places are camouflaged to prevent direct observation by army balloons. It is fine to see the stoical indifference with which men march along quite heedless of the shells except when very near.

The two days we spent at B. were very hot. I lodged in a small pillbox but shells came over in dozens all day long and our stretcher bearers had a very hard time but with good luck with only one man wounded. Pieces were flying about all day long and one chunk landed in a sand bag with a Phut!. I was leaning the back of my neck against the bag at the time and it startled me some.

After a cozy two days here I was pushed on to Helles, another pillbox well up. The walk up was deadly. Shells (big iron foundries of HE) flipping and crashing off at intervals of two to three minutes. A rustling wail and you hold your breath until you see a geyser of mud. Bags boards and beams sail forty feet up into the air a couple of hundred yards away. Then you cower down until the pieces land and resume again a little quicker than before if possible. An occasional dead man lies alongside the track and the whole area is a network of muddy shell holes from six or seven feet deep and twelve feet across. Over this frightful desolation the corduroy road runs & all over the place are duck walks, narrow wooden paths carted up in eight foot lengths and laid across the mud. These duck boards are very good for when he is shelling one track you can take another. We reached Helles' pillbox after many heart throbs and were at once told to report up to the left RAP 1000 yards further. It did not look inviting. Got there safe and sound after one or two shaves from flying bits of iron but on the way back he caught the two of us out in the open shell holes where there were no duck boards and put three rounds of eight inch HE within 100 yards. The second one dropped 15 – 20 yards away with an appalling crash and a regular volcano of mud went up. Away we went for the pill box 150 yards away crawling knee deep in the mud like flies through treacle. We both arrived absolutely done to the last ounce and found Monty being in just the same condition back from the right R.A.P. His sergeant wounded, a poor pommy with his face blown off and a hole drilled through the tail of his own coat. We had both had enough for a little while. We remained here two days and were heavily bombarded a couple of nights with real big stuff. The Batman was a bit of a wag and one especially

large shell he called "Herbert". This chap worried us some. At one appalling crash 10 to 20 yards outside the pillbox, he looked up from the primus he was pumping and said seriously "There is Herbert in the garden taking the tomatoes". The concussion from that shell put all the lights out including the primus.

We had a couple of cosy evenings in the pillbox however, yarns & songs and jokes and on 24.10.17 we were relieved and got back to safety best leg foremost. Things were very quiet coming out.

I heard one barrage whilst I was in and it was stupendous, put up by our own guns on the Germans.

### **30.10.17: Van Sohiers Farm G 21.c.5.8**

After coming out last time it was only 48 hours at the CMDS and then sent back again to Bellewarde for the two days remaining before the 5<sup>th</sup> Div. came out. As usual I slept the night at the ADS in Ypres this time in a dug out ten feet below the surface. I had to rise at 5 am and therefore it was a trifle annoying as the other fellows played cards till 1 am. It was a miserable night. I knew there was a big stunt on in the morning and did not feel too happy about walking up into it. I could not sleep owing to the card party. The next dugout leading off was a dressing station filled with groaning wounded all night. About 9.30 Fritz dropped seven bombs almost on our roof – more wounded. Next morning at 5 o'clock it was dark and cold. The air was filled with the reverberation of our own artillery as they put up a big barrage and outside on the bare ruined countryside you could look nowhere without seeing the flashes of some hidden battery. In spite of this there was no retaliation and we had a quiet walk up to our station – no casualties. During the afternoon he shelled us heavily. Next morning I walked up from Bellewarde to Ideal about 2000 yards and saw not a shell though our own were working overtime. Relieved on 28.10.17 (Ethel's birthday). We walked real quietly out till we came to Birr crossroads where things were too lively. We had balloon observation and was registering actively on the Menin Road. Shell after shell right on it enfilading. I had to wait almost an hour here for relief and the wounded were so numerous that I took off my coat and gave a hand. Finally relieved we set out. Fortunately my batman, Moran, knew another track running back to the ADS off the road so we set out along this and had a quiet but frightfully muddy walk almost across country. We were only two hundred yards from the Menin Road and could see shells bursting among the traffic every now and again. From the ADS we came back here, a nice green camp, but rumour has it that we go back into the line in four days time. I hope not!

Was over at Winnipeg camp last night with Stan and saw a first class show rather on the same lines as the Dandies and indeed bossed by their Manly manager.

Anzac Coves by name. It was some show especially the comedian who had an enormous mouth and every time he laughed his faced disappeared and the audience roared. The hall was packed to suffocation. This is the first of the camp shows I have seen since Salisbury and I enjoyed myself mightily. Coming home I jumped a lorry got within half a mile and walked the next listening to the hum of Fritz's engines and watching the shrapnel twinkling in the moonless sky like extra bright stars. At last to bed to sleep uneasily disturbed by the banging of our Archies and the clatter of our machine guns.

Today 30.10.17 it is cold and windy and full of promise of a bitter winter. I hope we are going back to rest a while.

I received two parcels from Vera yesterday and the day before, both for Xmas. It great to find that Xmas is still remembered.

### **Wednesday 1.11.17 (Van Sohiers Farm)**

To be or not to be that is the question. Are we going back to the lines or are we not. It depends on the troops now in the line. If they hold their gains we do not return or at least such is the DADMSs opinion and he should know. There are the usual Furphies about. The Italians have had a big reverse and we know 100,000 prisoners and 700 guns have been taken. The Furphy says we are going to that front. Too good to be true. Another says we go back for three weeks rest and then to a quiet front for winter. On the whole if Ypres is very bad as fronts go the war is not as bad as I expected.

But it is a moot point when most of the present division will ever see home again.

Stan was over to dinner last night and appears utterly war weary in spite of his military cross.

Bombing around here again early this morning and great German activity in the air. Last night in addition to bombs falling one could hear his big shells whistling high over head and exploding near Poperinghe. The outlook is bleak and the war seems as far off ending as it did a year ago. Truly Kitchener knew what he was saying when he issued his decree that the war would end in three years.

Am O.D. to-day and just getting into the swing of the military business once again.

### **Friday 2.11.17: Van Sohiers Farm**

Still undecided as to our future fate. Yesterday we received orders to push on for Winegale near Cassell but orders were countermanded at 11 pm. We had made all preparations to move out at 7 am next morning. This looks ominous. Yesterday I went to Dickebusch to see Norman but on arrival found that he had gone to Reminghelst where ultimately I caught him and found that Padre Webb had just left him one half hour before. However, had a pleasant afternoon tea with him at the Y.M.C.A.

Last night quiet, weather cloudy with light rain and subsequently no bombs. The night is still so and I hope it remains so for the rest of the moon.

### **Saturday 3.11.17**

Better news today – a dinkum oil in fact – we are moving to a place called Vieux Berquin down south probably going to the Saily front – I don't know. There have been the usual "wireless" rumours going about which precede every meal. The Australians are going to Italy says one because the staff officers are heard to say so etc. etc. till one does not know which to believe but this is the dinkum oil, we move to VB tomorrow. Man proposing GHQ disposing of course.

The weather still dull and rainy and the bombs have not come the last two nights.

### **4.11.17 – Dimanche**

Now situated at G.11.b.6.4. sheet 27

Left Van Sohiers in charge of transport and A Section bearers of this morning at 8 o'clock. Was mounted, spurs and gloves all complete and felt that it was a fine war. Was quite proud of myself in my insecure position of elevation for once. We junctioned up with the 55<sup>th</sup> Bn, 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade at 9.40 am and rode steadily all day to 3 o'clock passing via Godswaerbelde and Stingedede to Vieux Bequin, a medium village as yet undesecrated by shells. The country was all fresh and green and uncontaminated by the destroying touch of war. It was a nippy dull day but nonetheless the ride was quite enjoyable although the men probably did not appreciate the march. After an uneventful trip and a minute lunch we reached our billets at VB. A small farm of the usual French type with fowls scratching at the dung heap just outside the door. However it is heaven itself after Ypres and the most comforting factor is that we are probably going in on a very quiet front for the winter. I was met by Major Beard who showed me around my billet. It is beautifully clean and a real bed with real sheets – what luxury. If only I could get a bath my happiness would be complete. I was frightfully hungry but had to take a car over to Auterstun with a patient and do

some reporting at BHQ in VB. It gets dark now at 5 o'clock and everything went wrong. We lost our way, the lamps went bung and I was kept waiting 30 minutes at DHQ. So as may be guessed my dinner when I did get to it, needed no sauce.

The people here are cordial and even effusive. At present I am sitting in the kitchen and the family are chatting in Patois at a greater rate that I can follow though I have joined in the conversation two or three times with fair success. They have just asked me to have coffee and though I had recently had dinner I said 'yes!' for the sake of the Entente Cordiale, so to speak. I gave each of the men (two) one of Vera's cigars and was rewarded with beaming smiles "Monsieur, vos cigars sont exquisites!". For a long time I sat there and endeavoured to chat and picked up a good deal of French.

### **5.11.17 Monday**

Same place. This is a home. A fine sunny day and war miles away. These people are of the finest honest peasant class. Coffee in bed from them this morning and then up and out to the nice country smell of the farm with cows, pigs, horses and poultry. We have all our officers quartered in the building, the men in a hayloft and the orderly room, a little low ceilinged bedroom, the QM store in the cartshed, the cook house in a barn, the dispensary in a stable and so on but the men are all as happy as Larry.

### **6.11.17: Bailleul Farm still**

The rest of the Ambulance is coming down tomorrow except that the people at the 17<sup>th</sup> CCS, three officers (Strachan, Jose, McGlashan) & a few men. It is up to us to have a rest for a week or so. In the last six weeks the Ambulance lost 80 men (19 killed, 14 gassed and the rest wounded) also four officers. The CO Lt Col Thompson was wounded and I have not yet seen him. He is due back in a day or so. Major Metcalfe badly wounded, Capt. Fay and Capt. Ellis both badly gassed, their first time up the line. Fay is in England, Ellis still in France – too bad to travel across.

No wonder I could not understand what the people say to each other here for it is Dutch and Flemish they use but to us they speak French.

I am much to be thankful for. I have had two or three close shaves. The worst part almost is the separation from one's people at home especially when I hear that I am a happy father. The consoling factor is everyone is here and not to come would be to become embarrassed in after years every time the war was mentioned and to endeavour desperately to change the subject.



### **7.11.17 Wednesday: Bailleul Farm, Meriss, France**

Moving again tomorrow to more commodious billets for the whole Ambulance. Sorry to leave here. Have picked up a good deal of French.

### **8.11.17 Thursday**

Moved today. The other sections did not arrive probably because we are going into the line in a couple of days and they will move straight up from where they are. We are one kilometre outside Bailleul in a farm. Rode over today to number 2 CCS and saw Padre Webb. He is same old sport but anxious to get up and see the shells.

### **10.11.17 Saturday: Hospice Locre**

Landed here yesterday. Sent ahead as billeting officer for the Ambulance. Had a devil of a time all day and finally settled in Hospice Locre for the evening. Same old tale, nobody had made arrangements for us, nobody loved me and I was sent away with a flea in my ear everywhere I worried around. However A section and HQ came over today and we are settled here in conjunction with 57<sup>th</sup> Fld Amb, British. Fine meals are cooked by the nuns. We are moving up to the lines in five days so I hear, our northern limit Hellebeke, south of the Ypres canal, just where the salient merges into the line.

### **12.11.17 Hospice Locre**

A warm bath today, the first for a fortnight and a clean change of clothes. The DADMS, Maj McGregor was over today and said that we stay here at least four weeks. In addition our bearers are probably not going up to the line. Moreover I heard from another source that this winter we spent one month up forward with two months in the back areas. Sounds too good to be true. So at present it seems a rosy war. Nothing else of any importance beyond that last night I met Royale ex-RSM of the SU Scouts and we spent a very pleasant evening down at the mess. He is a sub in the first tunnelling coy. Our other two sections, B and C are still at Van Sohiers Farm but will doubtless join us here when we ultimately take over completely from these British people.

### **14.11.17 Hospice Locre**

C Section Tent subdivision turned up today. Lt Col Clive Thompson the day before yesterday in the evening.

The remainder of our men trek here tomorrow and we take over the whole outfit. Not too bad either but I am sick of the whole war and tired of being away from home. No more tonight.

### **16.11.17: Hospice Locre**

This evening we had the whole Ambulance now for the first time all in one place since the Passchendale stunts, 250 men and 10 officers made a fine roomful and the carnal tastes of the inner man were catered for by pea soup, cold roast beef, ham and mashed potatoes, plum pudding, cigarettes, chocolate, nuts, raisins and coffee with cigarettes. Once everybody got set and began smoking the visibility in the room became very low and the hanging lamps almost vanished in a haze of smoke. Speeches, congratulations from the old hands and welcome to the new reinforcements, musical programme choruses and an atmosphere of bon camaraderie which was very pleasing. Somebody referred in speaking to the many absent faces for the Ambulance was badly cut up in those six weeks which probably constituted the biggest battle that the British Army has ever fought. But we managed a fine evening and a merry one for a soldier on active service is one of the merriest of persons once he was out of the actual line. One lives in a world of young men over here and I was thinking how peculiar it will be, if we ever get back, to see all those men once more each in clothes of civilian cut and of their own fancy and choosing.

This position seemed too good to last. It is so comfortable & so much so that it would do me for the duration.

### **17.11.17**

Was detailed on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> to proceed to relieve the RMO 55<sup>th</sup> and today up to the line near Wytchaete (pronounced Witscartee). Line very quiet in this sector. Was nearly pipped by machine gun bullets from our own planes one day and once had a close shave from an Archie nose cap. Good substantial pill box and had quite a good time for eleven days.

Letters from home in this period.

### **28.11.17**

We were relieved by 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade and walked out without casualties on a perfectly quiet night. Personally I got lost and did about 1000 yards extra. Went back to a nice green little camp (vide after 13. 2.18).

**2.12.17**

Reported back to Locre and spent a week as OO chiefly shaking people up & making them do their job.

**15.12.17**

Our division moved right back to Cormont between B and Etables, a quiet little French village and the remainder of the division is billeted all over the countryside for miles.

**23.12.17**

Xmas very near. Still at Cormont and had hopes of being here at least a month. Captain Fay rejoined from Blighty yesterday. He was gassed. We also have a new officer from the SUS, Captain Wellisch who joined up at Locre while I was away with the 55<sup>th</sup> Bn.

**25.12.17**

A wild and woolly Christmas.

**29.12.17 to 6.1.18**

Spent in Paris on leave, eight days mainly at the opera. Letters home.

**18.1.18**

Spent moving up to Bailleul having received a wire the night before to report for duty to MO's school Bailleul as adjutant. The CO had come up to a special Corps meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> and then asked for me to assist him. Reported to DADMS, Major James, at Samer and went by car to St Omer where had lunch and bought a silver spoon. Hence by train to Bailleul. Met the CO in officer's club then billeted at school, 17 Rue Street Jacques.

**19.1.18**

School opened. Following officers present. (Names and units of 18 medical officers appended).

School ended 28.1.18.

### 29.1.18

Walked to 2nd ACCS, met a Nurse Fricker from South Australia. Met G W Firman, Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> Aust. Siege Battery.

### 30.1.18

No. 2 school opened. In the afternoon went to Dramontre to see Norm but Div. was not yet up. Heard that the 5<sup>th</sup> was taken over on 1<sup>st</sup> in Wytschaete, area. 14<sup>th</sup> Aust. Field Amb. running the forward area.

Following officers presented at the school (Names and units of 18 officers appended).

This school lasted from 30.1.18 to 8.2.18.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> school (10.2.18 to 18.2.18).

On 8.2.18 went over and saw Norm for the second time at Dramontre, 5<sup>th</sup> Div. HQ. We had a long walk across to Kemmel and right up to the top of the hill where the OP's were doing the Messines stunt. Then jumped a lorry back home to Bailleul dropping Norm en route.

On 9.2.18 Norm came into Bailleul. We had a yarn. He bought some lace and left it for me to send home. A mail arrived for me which we read together and then had a good dinner. I left him on the way home at 9.45 with three miles to walk. Quite a convivial meeting! Norm was not too well and was running a low influenzal temperature.

The officers at this 3<sup>rd</sup> course were  
(the names of 18 officers appended)

Two officers in these three schools did not complete. Captain McLean went home under open arrest for AWL. Captain OAD Timms was evacuated sick.

### 12.2.18

The job of adjutant is not bad but fiddling – one has little jobs on hand all the way. The chief advantage is that of meeting and knowing so many people but I found my wretched memory for names still clings to me. I must endeavour to improve it.

Fay was over here down from the Ambulance last night. He reports that things are going well and we have had only one of our men wounded so far – a small

piece nipped out of his chin by a whizz-bang. The Ambulance is running the whole forward show on the Young Wytschaete and Kandahar posts. Jose has been evacuated the day before yesterday to 2<sup>nd</sup> ACCS.

Tonight I had news that there is still another school after this so at the earliest we will not rejoin the unit before 28<sup>th</sup> February.

At the beginning of these schools we had an hours drill each day uner yours truly, the adjutant but it was slated so severely on the appreciations written by the MO's at the end of this school that the DDMS ordered it to be cut out. It was not a very convivial occupation drilling a squad of officers none of whom were keen at all for the drill, it is a very unpopular subject especially with these people who need it most.

### 13.2.18

Routine at school.

Baths and laundry (Palmers).

1<sup>st</sup> ACCS, Thomas Sprints.

Col Mamfold was present.

Particulars of tour with 55<sup>th</sup> Bn – November 28<sup>th</sup> 1917.

Left Locre by Ford car with Pittmann, reported to BHQ at Spy Farm at about 11 am. Capt Wisdom, staff captain, gave us maps and furnished me with guide who put me on duck boards leading to 55<sup>th</sup> Bn HQ and left me. We had come by car as far as Lamp Post Corner this being the farthest point on which a car was not visible to the enemy about 200 yards on outside of Wytschaete (known as Wish Cart). A soup kitchen on the cross roads. Hence along a fine corduroy road camouflaged by side screens and passed a board – "hurry past here in parties of two" visible to the enemy and finally my guide left me on my lonesome with a "cheerio – these boards take you right there". Everything very quick so I set off with my pack on my back and walked what seemed miles. Two or three times had shells passed over en route for Germany but everything very nice and quiet. The country green and not much cut up. The duck boards finally led to a communication trench which took me right up to Bn HQ, Derry House, without any excitement.

Met Captain Wiley here who immediately set off back for English leave.

Had a pleasant lunch in the pill box with the HQ of the Bn and at last about 4 pm walked another 1000 yards across muddy tracks to the RAP. This was an old gun position built like a pill box with a solid roof and good room. My own stretcher was in a little recess off the side probably used before by the German

battery commander. The openings at the back and front we have sandbagged leaving a small door to enter in the rear. Map reading 28.O27.d11. Five pill boxes in a line. One for Ambulance bearers, two for infantry. One for RAP and personnel and one for company headquarters, where I had my mess with the company officers. A small stream ran past the back of the duckboards along the banks. A quite snug position. We stayed here 11 days and had quite a jolly time. Used not to get off my bunk till 10 am at least. A few incidents occurred. There was shelling near us the whole time. One afternoon Fritz shelled a pill box on our right. 70 rounds of HE, only 16 of which were not duds. Saw him land one fair on the roof and saw people inside bolt for their lives down the hill.

A captive balloon broke loose one day. One of ours. Our archies bumped at it for 10 minutes without puncturing it. Only effect was to send us to earth for pieces landed all around us.

Fritz came over one afternoon and stayed for 25 minutes taking photographs.

Very low!. A daring fellow. One of our planes attacked him and, being in the line of fire had half a dozen of our own machine gun bullets zipping to earth directly alongside us – scatter!

Fritz went away but was back again in fifteen minutes with a pal a few thousand feet above to protect him. More impotent wrath from archie.

One case diagnosed as CSM isolated ambulance bearers. Reported negative finally.

On 27<sup>th</sup> 14 casualties from one shell which exploded INSIDE a forward pill box, entering by the door. One killed, eight wounded (2 subsequently died), five both eardrums ruptured with concussion. These were the only casualties barring one man with a slight scratch from a machine gun.

Fritz raided once, eight bombs thrown by us. No casualties on either side observed. He was unlucky for he struck a relief with 2 platoons instead of 1.

There was considerable machine gunning forward and intermittent shelling. SOS (red – green – red) went up one night and SOS barrages put up for 10 minutes. Only a raiding party of 30 Huns. Some windy officer! No TF but every evening 3 or 4 windy privates sent down parading sick. Nothing doing! Sent them back. Rotten game!

Hot food and dry socks sent up for the men but difficulty in changing socks forward of support line for men were merely in muddy shell holes. No trenches at all.

Line held by outpost and Lewis guns.

Evenings passed playing patience or yarning. Met some great chaps. – Giblett, Horne, Hill, Green.

Coming out a bright moonlight night 28.11.17. Lost our way and went across country – falling into shell holes over barbed wire etc. And back along Lessines Wytschaete Road to Lamp Post Corner. Had cocoa with a Padre then rode back to Lindemhok Camp. Aeroplane crashed with forced landing whilst we were there. Slight cuts in face to observer. Wrote a short poem;

Six of us set in a dug out  
As homesick as could be  
And gazed at feminine picture  
Cut from the old "La Vie"

We gazed on the lady's stockings  
We studied her silken charms  
From the man of a thousand passions  
To the subaltern child in arms.

We admired the lady's beauty  
With coiffure so typically French  
And we named her La Belle Dolores  
Vivandiere of the trench.

### 8.2.18. Bailleul

Great activity in air last three days clear moonlight nights and sunny days but cold and clear. One German plane forced down at Meteren and the Hun taken prisoner. He told a tale that he had only been up five times and had lost his way – eventually forced down like a pigeon amongst eagles.

Tonight dropped a bomb 800 yards down the street near the railway station. Allen and I were washing up for mess in my room and hearing the engine were arguing whether it was a Fritz or not. It was settled past all doubt by a whizzing and a crash as it landed. Only one peculiar to relate. The whole family down below scuttled for "Le cave". Must locate 'Le Cave' 'for future strategic retreats these moonlight nights'.

Third course of school finished today. Allen going on leave to Scotland tomorrow.

**19.2.18**

Day in between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> school. Went over to Dramontre, picked up Norm and walked to Daylight Corner to our transport lines. Fine sunny day.

**21.2.18**

4<sup>th</sup> course starts today. I believe there are to be two more. I find my memory for faces and names is extremely poor. I must try and improve it for it is very awkward at times.

**24.2.18**

A couple of days ago, a meeting at No. 17 CCS on "gas".

Treatment adoped at No. 1 CCS:

1. Venesection in cases showing definite retention of CO<sub>2</sub> – blue – but never IF BP less than 120 mm for experience shows that they bear venesection badly.
2. Stramonium cigarettes are useful
3. 10 grs of Ammon Carb and Vin Epicac useful to loosen expectoration.
4. Eyes: Bathe in 1% Sod Bicarb and instill liquid paraffin – great relief.
5. Necrosis of Larynx – inhale with creosote inhalants.
6. Ammon Chlor inhalants also useful.
7. Morphia in small doses in cases which were very restless but only if no oedema of lungs.
8. Vaccines for secondary infection were under way by experiment.
9. The great tripod of treatment REST, OXYGEN and WARMTH.

Today went to 1<sup>st</sup> AACS demonstration on Thomas Splints.

Full moon tonight, no more bombs so far. The great question nowadays is what is going to happen in the spring. The Germans are within 50 miles of Petrograd. Will he make his present holds a basis of bargain or continue to fight? What are the Australians going to do without reinforcements? Italy, Egypt, France: which of them?, probably the latter.

Most operations now in France are in search of information raids, aeroplanes, etc. Each side is endeavouring to ascertain what the other is going to do.

Spent the evening on music in the mess room. One time "So long Letty" brought back to memory the surging crowds in Macquarie Street in front of the Hospital when the first big units were leaving Australia in the early days.



### **25.2.18**

Seven letters from Vera, three papers, one mother, one parcel mother.

Wrote one letter home to Vera. School as usual, "Sentimental Bloke" at night. Full moon. No bombs.

### **26.2.18**

Day spent as follows. Morning at 2<sup>nd</sup> ACCS. Afternoon lecture by Col. Tunbridge at which ADMS's and CO's of Ambulances were present.

The following was the personnel of the number 4 course.  
(names of 18 officers appended)

### **27.2.18**

Inspected No. 3 Flying Squadron, Bailleul today. Met Capt Blake, now Major, who is OC. He was on A and I (?) staff, Australia and was second instructor at the officer's school, The Warren, in March 1915. Also Capt Errol Knox formerly of Fort Street.

Same evening a lecture on aeroplane photos with lantern. Many of these look like extreme examples of cubist art – but it is marvellous what information can be derived from such a source. We came away with the impression that it was impossible to conceal anything from hostile aircraft. Every foot track, every gun position, trenches, wire, railways, buildings, buried cables, pill boxes, dug outs. All had their peculiar distinctive appearance even telegraph lines and by little essay of deduction and common sense the enemy plans and projects lie before us. A convergence of tracks indicates a busy centre, say a Bn HQ. Every little details recorded by map and photos until we know every little nook and cranny of his line as well as we know our own. Photos of his aerodromes, his bombing schools, his hospitals with big red crosses and all the mass of information ordered systematised, reproduced and issued to fighting units in the front line. By this means the factor of surprise is almost completely eliminated in these days of big operations in which preparation for an attack goes on for weeks beforehand.

### **1.3.18**

An ominous sign of coming summer. Tonight the guns are booming heavily in this sector – things are beginning to wake up – Mars stirs from his winter sleep.

Definition of War: An existence of utter boredom punctuated with spasms of intense fright.

A Tale: Shell passes over front line trench en route to Bailleul. Sigh of relief from the boys "It's alright, digger, that one's for the heads".

Passing a traffic control today heard him remark of an officer "One thing I like about that old bird – he always chucks you a good salute". The rough Aussies dislike greatly that careless flip of the hand which passes for a salute in many officers. It is typical of the Australian that if he salutes properly. He wants to see an officer salute properly in return.

Finished the fourth course of the school today. Picked up a drunken Tommy asleep in the middle of the road tonight. Saved his life I think for even if not run over, the cold would have put out his light before morning.

A Tale: Pill box heavily shelled, hitting walls once every half hour or so. Bn HQ Orderly puts his head in the door – full of people – passes in basket of carrier pigeons. "Here's your F- wakatepoohs". Drops dead.

A Tale: Officer walking leisurely to latrine – paper in hand – ten yards from latrine. Whish! Latrine in air. Buckets turning somersault high up. Stops looks pockets paper and walks away with a deep sigh – what a disappointment.

Tradition in the army hath it that the latrine is the most dangerous spot – it is sure to be hit.

Everything is quiet outside once again – a single half hour strafe and now the gunners here have gone back their bunks in the dugouts and a few more Germans be wounded or killed behind the lines and perhaps not all our gunners have returned to their beds. A few more homes made desolate and the war a little nearer to end for every man killed brings us nearer to its termination. It is a bloody business.

#### **4.3.18**

Town full of recruits called up for service.

#### **6.3.18: Bailleul.**

Mail from home 21.1.18 from Vera, 2 from Ethel and a parcel from mother dispatched 24.9.17 which was very welcome.

Desultory gunning goes on at the front tonight. My windows are vibrating and the "pump pump" of heavy artillery echoes once every second or so, a peculiar India rubber sound with a kick behind it.

Went to "The Sentimental Bloke's" first divisional concert party tonight. They had a fine show but the "girl" is particularly fascinating and speaks and sings in a marvellous meso soprano voice.

Despatched a letter to Vera.

### **9.3.18**

Norm was over this evening to the school for a few minutes to tell me that he is located now with the 12<sup>th</sup> AFAB army troops so he is not in the 5<sup>th</sup> Div at all now. At present his unit is at Crucifix Corner about 6 km from here.

Just spent the evening at 4<sup>th</sup> Div's concert party "The Smart Set" who do not in my idea come up to the Anzac Coves on the Sentimental Bloke's, 1<sup>st</sup> Div.

It is now almost certain that this is the last school and we rejoin the unit on Tuesday or Wednesday next. They are at present at Dromontre running a scabies hospital but in all probability will take the place of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulances at present at Bailleul. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulances have also been in the town during our tour of duty.

Letter to mother and Vera.

### **10.3.18**

During the afternoon there were no lectures for double reason that I wanted to exercise and wanted to see Norm. I set off to walk to Crucifix Corner. Located him just coming back from "Watering Parade" and sat on a handy bank in the sun yarning and smoking until 5.30 pm.

On the way out on the Ravelsberg Road I ran into Phil Daniels of Sydney Hospital now 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and invited him to mess where he duly arrived.

During the morning was down at No. 3 Squadron (lecture on aeroplane photographs) and inspected the three types of planes they have there:  
RE8 – a big heavy machine for bombing and artillery observation.  
SE5 – a fighting machine and Dolphins, also a fighting machine.

The aerodrome is only 8 miles from Fritz and they have the wind up that he is going to shell it and the town too – ready to move out. They now carry a bomb even on scouting patrols – must drop it before returning.

Today the peaceful Sabbath forsooth I saw 16 or 20 aeroplanes depart for Fritzland each with a cargo of bombs – a special offensive parade.

### **11.3.18, Monday.**

End of last course. Bustle of packing off of officers to their units, winding up the school etc.

### **12.3.18**

Today was supposed to have been a round of work and wind up of the business of the school but Fritz intervened. I rose at 10 am, had breakfast leisurely and went up to the town Majors about 11.30 am. I was standing at the phone and suddenly there was a heavy muffled thud of immense volume and, through the window people running for cover – civilians and soldiers, most of them laughing. On going to the door over the roofs of the houses an immense cloud of pinkish brick dust rose 50 ft into the air – hovering just over the school premises. A love token from our friend over the way. I thought they had the school but as it turned out later it was 50 yards away. As I stood at the door we heard another – like "pomp – err" away in the distance, a rushing sound growing incredibly in volume and an immense reverberation close at hand. A house 100 yards down the street dissolved into dust and debris liberally distributed on the road, tinkling glass was crashing down everywhere from the concussion and the whole square was blotted out in a thick pink cloud through which people came running to get out of the danger zone. It was market day in the square so that it was full of French vehicles. Now the fun began. In less than two shakes all the vehicles were heading out of the town, ventre à terre. One particular old man with a little hand cart drawn by two dogs stirred us all to laughter. He lashed them down the street at the top of his bent with his cart bumping and scattering vegetables all over the pavé. Woomph! Another one 100 yards around the corner. Three in six minutes! Things are getting on. Inside the town major was at the telephone. Hello! Hello! Australian Call! Yes. General staff! Hello! Bailleul speaking! Enemy shelling the town! 3 HE so far! Count them? Righto! Good morning

The interpreter rushing in smiling. Ha Ha ze fun begins! Fritz ees at it again!

An officer came in from the building down the street, a bit shaken but with the same old smile "Nearly got me. The ceiling came down on me". He was covered in dust from head to foot and was asking where the nearest bath was to be found. Yet another within two hundred yards this time and then silence. I

waited ten minutes but as it continued to be quiet I wended my way through the rubble back to the school. Ever so soon the civilians had come out and a group of ten or so stood in front of the damaged house in sheer curiosity. However I was not stopping in the spot and I arrived back at the school to find the family in "La Cave" and half the neighbourhood with them and the CO gone out for a walk in the country. Taylor, my batman had sat in the room all through writing letters. For a while the town was like a quiet Sunday morning but an hour later the streets were filled again with soldiers and civilians. These French people are wonderful.

I went to have a look at the shattered houses and in every case it was only the top storey which had suffered. They blew the top storey off Burberry's taylor shop but an hour later it was still selling goods in the lower storey.

A Fritz aeroplane came over to take photos at 12 so perhaps these are only sighters and he will get seriously to work later on.

The range must be 11 miles and three out of his four shots must have landed in one hundred yards circle. Excellent shooting.

Result: three ruined houses, four men wounded included one MO knocked off his horse in the Rue de Lille and much excitement.

The following officers at No. 5 school:  
(names of 18 officers appended).

### **13.3.18**

Rejoined the unit at Dramontre and running the Scabies Hospital. Leave for blighty came through today but I turned it down. Money a bit scarce and no inclination to go so what's the use. Feel fed up especially as things seem to be going badly at home.

### **15.3.18**

Great gunning activity at the front the last two to three days. Last night he put 4 or 5 big shells right back behind Dramontre here and tonight so far he has put three which in my opinion only landed four or five hundred yards away from here. Deucedly unpleasant! He shelled Bailleul again today – 14 shells. Evidently every form of spring frightfulness is waking up again.

Forgot to mention on 13.3.18 aeroplane passed over (enemy) leaving peculiar long trail of whitish vapour on the surface of which ripple – like undulations passed. Left two trails in all which took thirty minutes or more to disperse.

Many aeroplanes flying about today.

### **18.3.18**

Enemy still spasmodically shelling a dump of ammunition along side the road which leads down from here. Shells landing 400 yards away from the camp. 5.9's I think and not doing much damage but making things unpleasant. Still it is wonderful what little notice people take of shells over here. He had two or three smacks with HE shrapnel at an observation balloon close handy without success.

Was in Bailleul this afternoon to buy whisky for the mess.

Today was second anniversary of the formation of the unit and we had a good dinner to celebrate the event. Programme pasted in! It was held in the dining hall belonging to the hospital which was decorated with flags and lanterns. DDMS Aust Corps (Colonel Manifold) and ADMS 5<sup>th</sup> Div, Colonel Downey with his DADMS Major James were present and many other 14<sup>th</sup> people.

Norm was in yesterday and stayed the whole evening and dropped in again tonight to leave a letter for me to censor.

I learnt today that I probably will have to go to the army school at Ebbingham.

### **19.3.18**

Strachan and Fay departed on leave. Raining all day. Our friend across the way has pitched shells over us at intervals all day and it is a mystery. We hear the whizz, hold our breath, and a stunning report rattles everything but on going outside we can never locate the burst. O O all day slushing around in the wet.

### **20.3.18**

A good deal of shelling of back areas tonight. Three men brought in from 12<sup>th</sup> AFAB, Norm's crowd, one badly wounded. Two bombs dropped into the village of Dramontre right next to our camp. Have got my bed down on the floor in case of eventualities. There are fourteen more days of full moon to go. Pittmann goes on leave tomorrow morning. Wilcox, the dentist was in Hazebrock. They were shelling the town.

### **21.3.18**

We have been warned that the enemy is making great preparation against our sector. A good deal of local shelling all around our camp even here all day. The

## SPYSKAARTJE

### TOASTS.

Soeppe  
Tomatten

-»0«-

Visch

Platvisch en Kapper

-»0«-

### THE KING

Hierbygevoegde  
Gebraad Vleesch Schapengatjes

-»0«-

Groensels

Pataten Ratalouille

Bloemkolen en Suikerboonen

-»0«-

Brusselse Kiekenfjes

ya Salaad

-»0«-

Zoetfjekens

Bodding het schnik

-»0«-

Gemingeld Jelap

-»0«-

Sezoen vruchten

-»0«-

Noefjes en Sjaetebollen

-»0«-

Koffie (omeyer Pruppeljes

Klambollen

-»0«-

Stinkstoks en Stinkpapierkes

\*\*\*

## PROGRAMME

BY

### "THE BILL JIMS"

CONCERT PARTY

OF THE

14 Anst. F. Amb.

MEMBERS

Sisgt DAVIES

Sgt. Mc. CULLOUGH

L. Cpl. ROBINSON

L. Cpl. TITCHER

Pte. DRAKE

" HYNES

" HAWORTH

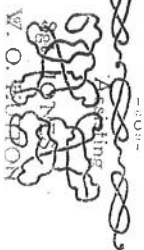
" CRAIG

" ROBINSON

" SWAN

" HAELEIS

FRYER (Pianist)



GENERAL COMMITTEE:

Major BEARD, M. C. Capt. WHEELER, M. C.

W. O. HUTTON, Q.M.S. PRICE. Serg. SHEPHERD.

## 14 Anst. Field Ambulance

## Absent Friends

work of revetting the huts proceeds but slowly despite the fact that there are 40 men on it all day. They have shelled areas on all four sides of us within a mile or so. So I expect one in the camp next. Shells whine over head here all day long.

The 12<sup>th</sup> AFAB, Norm's crowd had about 12 casualties last night from shells. I was getting rather anxious about him. The wounded passed through us so I ascertained their names but some were killed. I could not ring up but fortunately met an officer who assured me that he was alright. It was a great relief. I hope he comes up tonight. We may go up forward again at any time now. Only officers in camp now, the CO Major Healey, Captain Finlayson and the dentist.

In addition the enemy is throwing nine inch gas shells into billets and back areas like this so orders are issued that gas masks will be worn day and night ready for use.

Two shrapnel bursts back beyond us this morning so next we will have to sport our tin hats.

### **23.3.18 – Hagedoorne Dysentry Camp (Bailleul)**

A good many vigorous happenings yesterday. To put it in a nutshell, we have been shelled out of our Hospital.

Yesterday at 2 pm I was at the telephone (once again) ringing up the APM, 5<sup>th</sup> Div. I had just detailed off the parade and sent one limber down the road one hundred yards to get earth for revetting and six men were busy digging in a group. Suddenly without the slightest warning there was an inexpressibly vicious whizzing bang which ripped and crashed through the air. I went outside and there were our men running in all directions. The horses bolted and poor Henchen stone dead with a piece through the forehead and a horse kicking its last on the ground. Another man slightly wounded. Then the fun began. Ten minutes later another bang from a clear sky and then silence for an hour. 3.15 another lobbed short, 3.20 a fair hit on the camp just outside one of huts, which hold many of the wards and wounded two men, one a 3<sup>rd</sup> Div pioneer visiting a sick pal. Things were now interesting and rather grim. At the second lot we had got the men down into the trenches at the back of the camp, most of them patients in pyjamas but they gradually drifted back. 4 o'clock saw us all in the trenches once again (a reserve line) and tea was served out to all, the cooks bolting up to the cook house grabbing the stuff and skeltering back for cover. Two shells this time, one short, one long. Our telephone was cut by the first shell so a runner was sent to Division but they only told us to hang out.

We had another block of buildings in Dramontre itself and I was sent across to pump out the cellars with a squad of men. This we did and returned to camp for



my part with full expectation of disaster in the evening. We could see his balloons registering for him in the distance and a plane came over at 4 o'clock but was driven off by our anti-aircraft guns. We had mess in the hut at 6.30 but I had no appetite. Everyone was awaiting another burst. After mess I located a good dug out at the back of the camp and took my bed there (sleeping bag and great coat). Also 2 orderlies for use during the evening and then wandered around to see that all lights were out. Suggested to the CO that we should evacuate our lying cases but it was turned down.

It was now 9.15 and I walked across to the CO's hut to ask if he had any special orders. As I opened the door there was the usual spitting reverberating whizzing crash rising in a moment of time. We all fell flat on our bellies and lay there while fragments of earth return to the ground all over us. Right through the boot maker's hut set the QM store on fire. This was quickly put out. One man seriously hit in the chest but with a good prognosis. We all lay flat in the CO's hut waiting for the second one for he was shooting them in pairs. He came inside three minutes and I darted out back to the trench. This time these were filled with patients in pyjamas and shirts every man with a blanket. The afternoon had prepared them for the music and at the first crash they were out and down into the trenches. The stretcher cases were carried down and placed in reasonable safety. Many of the boys, pyjamas and all, wandered away from this lethal camp and found shelter in hay lofts etc. all night, returning in the morning.

It had been a most trying day and everybody's..... (A sign my nerves are jumping for Fritz just dropped a bomb about one half a mile away). As I was saying everybody's nerves were jumpy and we all had the wind more or less up, expecting a big crop of casualties at any minute. Even now the trouble was to keep the men down in the trenches for they would get out to walk on the top.

At last the order came from Divisional HQ to evacuate the camp and it was time. He had already straddled us three or five times and obtained two hits on the camp. Rumour has it that they are our own shells taken from the Russians.

Three lorries turned up. We evacuated a good many patients and sent the rest over to the other block 400 yards away and all our personnel. I stayed with a guard in the dug out at the back which was a perfectly safe pozzy and posted a man Newey but he was back in less than one half hour with a slight wound in face and hand so I sent a runner and withdrew the guard from the camp proper to the trenches. He put a few more over at the empty camp that night, no direct hits.

Next morning no shells came and we completed the evacuation of the camp without casualties, withdrawing the whole show into Dramontre.

Scarcely was I there then I was ordered to report with self and 19 OR to the Hagedoorne Dysentery Camp for duty. We are near Bailleul and in the edge of the aerodrome at present, Fritz is over going his hardest at scattering bombs over the country.

### **24.3.18 – Hagedoorne Dysentery Camp**

Bad news today. The enemy has made a big push down at Peroneel and claims a twelve mile advance including Peronne – 12,000 to 25,000 prisoners and 200 – 400 guns.

On the other hand the French have had a big victory for they repulsed a big German attack on their own. At present all is vague and unsettled. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions have moved down to the Somme and there is every indication that the 5<sup>th</sup> follows shortly which of course includes us. More mud and slush for us! This has been a big German victory. Haig has published a special order that it is a crisis of the war. Probably the biggest battle of the western front.

We went to Onteresteen CCS tonight and came back through Baillieul. As we entered the town there was a crash! Was that ours or theirs? I asked the driver "Ours, now" he replied and pushed down the accelerator. We went through the town at top speed in the bright moonlight. Like the city of the dead. It was only two weeks since I left it the day after he'd dropped the first shells and I had a glimpse of ruined houses all around the square. We whizzed through and did not tarry. Back at Hagedoorne we stayed and watched. Could see the flash from the gun and then 35 seconds later the flash from the shell followed five seconds later by the report of the gun and a second later the bang of the shell. The sequence was peculiar.

No. 2 ACCS had a note dropped from an aeroplane giving them a certain time to shift out or they would be bombed out. They shifted out! to another pozzy.

Beard and myself are running this Hagedoorne show but for how long it is impossible to say. I think we will all be trekking south in a few days.

All leave has been cancelled so my blighty leave is up the spout.

The pleasing part about our little adventure in our camp at Dramontre we saw the paper was sure the next day. London – 21.3.18: "The enemy is BLINDLY (blindly mind you!) shelling our back areas".

A few days before Wesley had remarked that the arrow in the paper pointed directly at us.

### **25.3.18 – Hagedoorne**

More rumours this morning. They say that we have inflicted 100 – 200,000 casualties on Fritz and he is asking for an 8 day armistice to bury his dead. He is said to have begun the offensive with 96 divisions, about 80 odd of which he had now used up so that they must be withdrawn to be organised.

One battalion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Bgde. passed here just now coming out of the line. Formed up in platoons on the road at 50 yards distance – the shelling of the back areas must have made the heads nervous. So it looks as if we will all be moving shortly.

The camp is a dysentery observation show. Personnel, two officers and 53 OR. All suspected cases are admitted here. Stools are examined each day for blood, puss, mucous, undigested food etc., and bacterologically at Baillieul mobile laboratory (Canadian) two officers of whom mess with us. Clinically all bacterologically positive cases go on to number 2 CCS (British), negative cases to the corps rest station.

Report has it that the Germans are shelling Paris. Sounds incredible as the nearest point is at the very least 50 miles.

### **27.3.18 – Van Sohier's Farm, Belgium**

Back for one night to old pozzy to which we came from Ypres en route for the Somme. Bad news still floats up here. It is now 900 guns 60,000 prisoners lost to us. Pretty near as bad as can be.

Everything is on the move, battalions, transport, technical units, railways, all moving south, it promises to be some affair. Beard and I evacuated all the patients at Hagedoorne to no 3 CCS, Arneke, and marched over here with the section rejoining unit. We entrain at Hopoutre at 2.45 am tomorrow morning. No sleep in store for us and it is devilishly cold once more. Probably the door and both windows will be knocked out of the carriage and we will do a freeze for 5 – 6 hours.

A great number of German planes were buzzing over Poperinghe last night. It is full moon. I hope they do not get onto us as we are entraining.

### **28.3.18 – Liubencourt (after 35 miles east of Abbeville)**

We have completed our move and are now safe in billets in the above village. At 12 pm we fell in at Van Sohier's Farm, marched out in the pale moonlight at

12.15. Full moon but heavy cloud flitting across it most of the time. Forty minutes it took us to Hopoutra side in the Remy and about 2 pm our train pushed out. Hot coffee was provided by the YMCA at the station. Weather was very cold and very little sleep as there were six in the carriage. The train journey was much as other journeys, it took till 2.15 pm just 12 hours. Men in horse trucks, 20 to a truck. En route we passed a train smashed by 15 inch shell. The 58<sup>th</sup> lost 15 men here. We were in luck for the day now turned cold, cloudy, windy and not a hostile plane have we seen. Anti-aircraft Lewis guns were put on open trucks. Spent the time on the train reading (Don Quixote) and otherwise eating.

Arrived at Mondicourt. A hot meal (Machonochie Stew) and tea (with soyer's stoves) were quickly prepared. We officers had ours standing on the railway line and using the edge the platform as a table.

4.15 pm saw us on the march to Lauvencaurt. It was bitterly cold and windy, the rain gradually became heavier and heavier. First my collar and then my tie, my back my knees, arms and feet all got soaked waterproof and all. The water came through my S - (?) and trickled down my nose. When we arrived after a stiff 8 mile march over hilly country quite unlike that we left which was very level, everyone was pretty soaked and tired. The men went into billets and I slopped about looking for mine getting wetter and wetter in two senses. Found at last. Place locked, dame out so in desperation Pittmann and self smashed a window and forced entrance. Found my batman after a struggle, collected my baggage and here I am in bed safe dry and warm smoking a pipe and writing up my old diary. C'est une bonne guerre! that is at present.

Passing up we noticed men digging trenches even back here in readiness for a further retreat.

### **29.3.18 (Good Friday)**

Heard a rumour today that Ostend and Zeebrugge had fallen to us but am afraid to credit it for all our strength seems to be collecting here. This village it seems choc a bloc with Australians. Every house has its quota of Australians billeted here. Transport is on the move all through the main street and we ourselves have to be ready at an hours notice. Everything is topsiturvy.

Just before we left Van Sohier Col Manifold came to say goodbye. He is the last of the British staff and our corps is now entirely manned by Australians. We have a very good dame in the billet - very genial and kind hearted. Like all these peasants who take the war very stoically everything is "C'est ne fait rien, c'est la guerre or après la guerre".

The old dame has just come in and told me it is Vendredi Saint (Good Friday) and says I have committed a great sin by eating meat.

Friday 10.30 pm. In bed. Fritz is putting over a few shells in the village. They are very silent and without any perceptible explosions so I suspect they are gas shells. Anyhow I sleep with my respirator well within reach. My bed is nice and comfortable none the less.

### **30.3.18 – Rouvencourt**

No move today. The 56<sup>th</sup> moved up this morning. Was medical officer today and it is marvellous the number of "accidental injuries" which eventuate on the way up to a big battle – human nature I suppose! The shells last night were very peculiar – either duds or armour piercing for they made cylindrical holes the diameter of the shell and right down deep into the ground and evidently exploded deep down without disturbing the surface. One civilian was wounded in bed. Two dropped just behind the QM store. The village is filled with Australians who patrol the wet and dismal main street in groups all day for all the world as if it was a fair. Pay has been cut out so that no man can go "zig zag" as the French call it. Transport passes backwards and forwards all day and numbers of heavy guns pass up at odd intervals. The morale is good and everybody is filled with expectation of great happenings in our favour which will hasten a favourable peace. I think a big battle is pending on this northern sector around about Arras. Both sides are now consolidating, recuperating and bringing up artillery.

### **31.3.18 – The Somme (Easter Sunday)**

Spent the day as orderly officer. Not exceptional. Only 150 German prisoners passed through the village guarded by three Australian mounted police. They say their pockets are filled with Gold Flake cigarettes and Milkmaid coffee and milk etc taken from our canteens in Bapaume and other places. They were all quite happy and smiling – glad to be out of it. The village is filled with Australians who lounge about hands in pockets in typical Australian fashion. Rumour has it that some of the British divisions behaved very badly on this front.

German planes came over two to three times today, one so low that we could see the crosses on his wings. The village became of a sudden a clattering barking booming mess of Lewis guns and archies but amidst it all Fritz sailed away calmly unhurt. It was rotten shooting.

Met Padre Bramwell looking for port wine to conduct his communion service.

All leave cancelled but Finlayson and Fay have evidently got away.

#### **1.4.18 – The Somme (April Fools Day)**

Still awaiting our orders to move but instead of being on an hours notice now it has lengthened to 3 hours. A good many New Zealanders passed up forwards today. It is again bright and sunny and enemy planes have been backwards and forwards – a fact which has stirred Archie and his friend Lewis to the greatest height of impotent wrath. Numbers of Lewis' guns are mounted on posts all around the village.

Was at Doullenes this morning to get some mess stuff and spent about 45 francs. We dined very unevenly these latter days. Today at lunch cold bully beef and Anzac wafers but for tonight there is poultry. Many people are packing up and leaving the village in fear of shells and bombs. Carts filled with the household goods of these people pass down the road all day. One feels very sorry for them but they bear it stoically, shrug their shoulders and sum it all up with the ubiquitous phrase "C'est la guerre".

One chap disposed of this stock of 11 fowls to us for 30 francs and we shared them with the sergeant's mess. What about this menu in contrast to the lunch. Boiled fowl and onions, potatoes and cabbage. Boiled pears and custard. Bread is off the last few days and we are faced with the prospect of living on ship's biscuits instead for the next few months. Oh! my poor grinders. I have not seen Norman now for some weeks or heard from him but I wrote yesterday. His crowd has probably participated in the usual moving and is now "somewhere" as far as I am concerned.

#### **2.4.18 – The Somme**

Amidst the great racket and confusion incident to the approach of hostile aircraft I learned that yesterday our chaps under the pretence of firing at Fritz pinked a number of French pigeons – pigeon pie for mess that night. Nothing to report today beyond that Albert is definitely evacuated. We are holding him up here so that I hear that the Australian Corps will shortly be withdrawn into rest.

#### **3.4.18 – The Somme**

Just one year today since I left Australian in Malwa and the war seems as far from ending as ever it was. Rumour has it that the Boche is contemplating a bigger attack on a line to Abbeville which is a big base for our supplies. "Furphies" by the way have become so frequent and so destructive of morale that HQ has published an order forbidding anyone to spread them and threatening disciplinary action.

Fay returned from leave today. States that all trains to 5<sup>th</sup> Div. from Boulogne were held up a solid week during the Boche push. German casualties are now agreed to be 300,000 in the last attacks, but there is an ominous silence as to those we have suffered ourselves.

#### **4.4.18 – The Somme**

News from the front still reassuring. Both sides recuperating. We are still stagnating in Lauvenscourt and the long days drag by very slowly.

Later: 9.15 pm. News just through that we are moving by motor omnibus tomorrow morning at 5.30 am. Breakfast at 4 am. We are going back 13 kilos from the line so it seems. Tonight the battalions are moving and the main road is just one procession of large motor buses and lorries packed with troops. Not a light showing, they thunder through the village at intervals of 50 yards. The French folk will wake up in the morning and find that we have all vanished from their ken. Our destination I believe is Maures, I am not certain. Anyhow it is somewhere.

#### **5.4.18 – Aubigny near Daours**

Moved today at present as above. We came across in motor buses – a long column of over 160 cars – some sight – a dull day and luckily for us without observation but a few shells were playing about and gave the transport a very uncomfortable passage with shrapnel – no casualties. Reached here 3.35 pm.

We take over the line tomorrow about two miles up the road. The line is very indefinite.

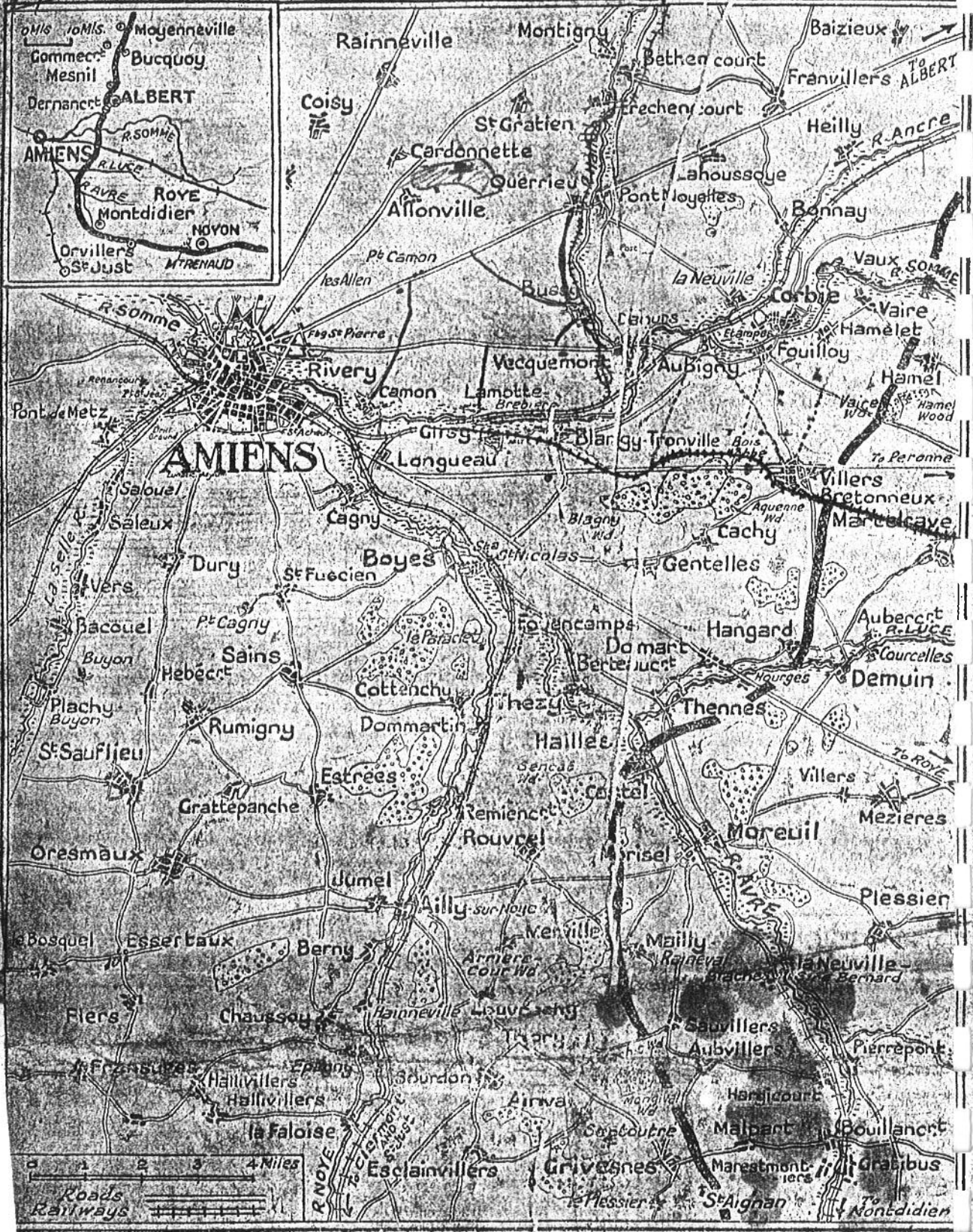
Five minutes later: As you were – orders just came through we take over from the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Car Field Amb. at Blangy-Tronville – we are in a fine farm house – the people have fled leaving everything except cattle and small portable belongings. Since then someone has looted the place from top to bottom and it was in a simply frightful mess. However we have cleaned it up and now get news to move out first thing tomorrow. An MO from RAMC with the cavalry has just been in telling us about a cavalry charge which he was in – with swords, 150 men took 105 prisoners. Quite exciting!

Orders for tomorrow C Section moves out complete at 6 am to take over from Canadians at 8 am. Breakfast at 4.30 am. Reveille at 4 am.



6/4/18 NEW GERMAN ATTACK EAST OF AMIENS. TIMES

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Early yesterday morning the Germans began a new attack in dense waves in the region of Corbie, east of Amiens. Until late on Friday night the enemy continued his onslaughts north of the Somme, but all his efforts were broken by our gallant troops. No further infantry action has taken place on the French section of the front—that is, below the River Luce—but a violent bombardment has taken place south-west of Montdidier.



#### 7.4.18 Daours at Blangy – Tronville Cross Roads two miles from Aubigny

To proceed with the history. We marched out of Aubigny yesterday with C Section complete with transport and reached the Ambulance above at 7.40 am (near Blangy – Tronville) after a quiet march passing through the support lines some archies gunning at planes overhead when we got there.

Was ordered to take Sergeant Watkinson and sixteen bearers up to the post on the Fouilloy-Villers-Bretonneux Road and relieve the party there. Captain Fay was to go to WLP west of VP. Went by car to Fouilloy as VB was being shelled. Both towns knocked about by shell fire.

Took over the show from a neurotic RAMC officer who had nothing, knew nothing and as he said was fed up. Visited RAP's 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Bn right away and had a long exhausting walk across country on loose clayey mud, harassed by shell fire most of the time. Very little heavies, mostly whizzbngs. Wellisch was at the 54<sup>th</sup> and Hawthorne with the 53<sup>rd</sup> located right forward simply in a Nissen hut in a position which he was shelling pretty vigorously. Posted squads at each RAP and returned. The carry from 53<sup>rd</sup> RAP to Ambulance post was 3000 yards so in the afternoon I put in a relay 300 yards this side of VB which he shelled pretty vigorously in the morning. Had a nasty walk back from this post for there were literally 70 or 80 planes over head and the enemy was pasting big black shrapnel at them right over head. Many dead horses along the road.

The Ambulance post was in a short quarry alongside the Bde HQ – just a corner which I covered in with an old tent and put two AMC stretchers to sleep in – erected a tent in the quarry which was on the side of a sunken road for my spare personnel.

The British had been there four days and not done a tap to improve the position. Our Ambulance car was kept here and evacuations were through Aubigny.

During the afternoon I heard that an attack was hourly expected and the 54<sup>th</sup> Capt Liebmann MC and 56<sup>th</sup> Capt Gibson MC came up to cover the 55<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> and dug in near us. Asked for two more squads to supply the RAP's and got them.

The country here was flat and rolling and covered with small trenches in echelon with Lewis and machine guns. The enemy will pay a big price if he gets through. This position extends right back to Daours. All bridges over the Somme are mined ready to be sprung if necessary but I don't think it will be. Road craters likewise. We are making our utmost effort to hold Amiens. The heights below which this Ambulance post was placed control all ground down to Amiens which is lost if they are lost. He will attack and he will be cut up.

Whilst up there about 8.30 pm enemy attacked 53<sup>rd</sup> but was driven off. Barrage put up by both sides. Had about 15 casualties all day.

By 9.40 pm all was quiet. It was raining and le Souef of 15<sup>th</sup> Field Amb, relieved me, relief being carried out in the dark and complete by 12 midnight. I returned to unit at Aubigny by car at 1.30 am. Sgt. Watkinson and bearers marched at all ranks were in bed by 2 am.

Next morning (that is today): Reveille at 7.30 am: Breakfast 8, moved out at 10 to Daours where we debussed. Men are billeted at the chateau in rooms just like in barracks. Officers in House of the Dien. mayor. The small villages are absolutely deserted. The places bear every indication of having been deserted at a moments notice. It is stated that the German agents dressed as despatch riders spread the panic by shouting "The Germans are half a mile away" and so on. Such people now are shot summarily by order. This house is the best I have seen in France, the furniture and linen is all complete, just as it was left. The British divisions have looted the place shamefully and as report has it even maltreated the French people. Some of the Battalions fairly ran during the retreat. This has aroused many bitter remarks from our boys. One for example is the story of the English Colonel who was legging it down the road when he stumbled on a running hare. He said "Get out of the road you brute and let those run who can". Many tales are told of the retreat but the truth seems to be that a bad battalion gave way and left the flanks of the others in the air. Bad staff work and bad liaison between artillery and infantry so that a rot set in. But I think it is stopped now that another attack is pending yet.

What with retreating and looting the name of the English stinks in the nostrils of the French just here. This house was upside down and a safe had been opened with a pick axe. All the houses are thoroughly looted but we have this place ship shape with first class mess, sitting & bedrooms, piano and all complete. Yesterday poverty in a dug out, bully and biscuits, tonight a mansion, four course dinner, music, good fires and clean linen sheets and Fritz only 6000 yards away. It sounds as life is full contrast. I was thinking tonight as we sat in the drawing room singing and yarning how queer it all was when a shell might come at any time and smash the place to bits. The tragedy is of a man having to leave such a place at a moments notice.

Another story: the Australians nearly shot a Colonel today shooting rabbits – with a machine gun, bless your heart!

Another tale is that one of our people doffed his tunic with its colours and pinched a lewis gun from the Pommies on the way into the lines. One Australian battalion now has 32 lewis guns instead of 16.

#### **8.4.18 Daours**

Camp routine. This is a deserted village. Not a soul in it – the houses disordered and looted by the troops and left in hideous disorder. No one works in the fields, no civilians in the streets. The bridges stand ready mined with armed sentries and guns on either side in front of and behind us. Two heavy pieces are 350 yards behind this house and nearly lift us off our chairs when they are discharged. Everyone is very comfortable here but it is only a matter of weeks before he shells the place. Any time he may start. We are locating a new posy on the fields in case of emergency away from batteries and counter fire. A few refugees have recovered from their first fright and drifted back to take out their furniture on carts but mostly these silent deserted homes with their disorder stand mute witness to the tragedy of war. It is pathetic to find children's toys scattered amongst the rooms of the houses. One or two brave civilians are hanging in here but a few weeks will see them put to flight, I have no doubt.

#### **9.4.18 Daours**

Camp routines. Attended FACM as witness at Augigny and walked the two miles home along the road. The countryside is sewn in small echeloned trenches with a few men and machine guns. Our strength is distributed in depth. Paid the unit in the evening. A battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Div. marched into our village from the line this afternoon. Bearers notified today to be ready to proceed to the line at a moments notice to support the 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### **10.4.18 Daours**

Heard that there was a big stunt on tomorrow morning by us but later that it was postponed. In the evening we invited the occupants of the chateau in the village to dinner and had a rattling good spread though where the cook got the materials I don't know. Afterwards music and dancing. There was the mother and four daughters all fairly good looking and our chaps had a very good time. It seemed so peculiar with the war just outside and here were all the elements of a happy evening. Three or four shells went over the village whilst it was on.

I had to go to Amiens during the evening to post five bearers and an NCO to take over from Cavalry Fld Amb. I found on getting there that the 12<sup>th</sup> Fld Amb. under Capt. Mendelsohn had got in before me so left the men there and came back.

#### **11.4.18 Daours**

Finlayson came back from leave to Rome having been in Florence and Nice also.

OO all day. Camp routine. More aerial activity today than since been here. One plane dropped two bombs at back of the village and flew only two hundred feet above us. Usual impotent wrath from the archies and MG's. Earlier today a squadron of six passed over.

News through today that the Boche has attacked the Portugese heavily at Armentiere sector and made a good deal of ground. He has us moving and the heaviest part of the battle is still to come.

1<sup>st</sup> Aust Div went back north and or is going back north shortly.

We are in the direct line of his best effort on the Amiens - Peronne Road. The post of honour I suppose.

In the event of retreat this place becomes the ADS and 15<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance now in the line go back to Amiens.

All civilians are being evacuated tomorrow so our friends of the chateau will have to go.

#### **2.4.18 Daours**

Was on the lawn behind the chateau instructing the section on the application of Thomas sprints when he dropped a shell 50 yards away from us which broke up the meeting rather hurriedly. After that under aerial direction he put four or five into the village but the next movement again was ours for our airmen drove down his plane and one of the airmen has since died in our receiving room, the other being wounded in two or three places. Our transport has moved out of the village to a safer place for he has the reins well and truly. Once again it promises to make it warm. We have picked another posy out in the fields but tonight I think I will forsake my little attic and sleep on the ground floor.

Later: Transferred to Major Strachan's room on the first floor and feel a bit safer though really I suppose I am not any better off. Received five Australian letters today. More enemy planes over tonight. I have observed a new stunt of his, from his smoke puffs and yellow flares at night. There are many batteries around here and his planes come across day and night looking for them though of course they shut up as soon as the plane is sighted. Looking out the back windows one has a fine view of flat cultivated or ploughed fields and at intervals the eye is caught by spurts of yellow flame followed by the usual smashing crash some seconds later.

Rumour has it that Steenverck has been taken and the enemy is on the outskirts of Bailleul. It remains to be seen whether it is true. At all times there are many

rumours but now when things are going badly they are so frequent that a special order has been published threatening dire punishment to anyone who repeats such rumours as are pessimistic and therefore destructive of morale. There is no doubt that many of these are disseminated by enemy agents.

The enemy has been shelling the battery 300 yards up the back of the village with more or less success but the whizz and whine of his shells so close all day has been disconcerting and everybody is getting short tempered and crabby.

Seven light tanks have passed here today up forwards and one broke down in the road outside our front gate. A nice attraction for shells but at this moment another tank is hauling it up a narrow street out of sight.

#### **14.4.18 Daours**

We still continue here at the same old dog trot. On night of 13<sup>th</sup> heavy barrage was put up by us and the battery at the back kept smack, smack against the windows all night so that there was very little sleep for any of us. They are 60 pounders. And their cough shakes the house to its foundations. This barrage was due to an attack on the French for the Australians now hold the extreme right of the British army in France with the French on our right. Everything has been quiet all day.

News up north continues to be disconcerting. Merveille and Estaines are gone and the enemy is nearly on the outskirts of Bailleul, Ontersteine and Steenwerke where numbers 1 and 2 ACCS were also to have gone. Messines is taken from us again and Wylschaete all but. Perhaps this northern attack is his main move now that he has met opposition in the south.

A British tank officer in the course of conversation told me he was glad to be working behind the Australians for with the British divisions he did not feel safe. Many of these divisions seem to have lost their muscle and gone to pieces in the face of the enemy where a little resistance would have meant everything. Others again have fought to the last.

Every available man is being pushed across to France from England as the age limit has been raised to 50 and 55 in special cases such as doctors, etc.

Wellisch returned from the 55<sup>th</sup> Bn yesterday and went out to MG Bn this afternoon.

Meanwhile we all live in our cushy billet. A few shells land in the village occasionally and he shells the batteries 300 yards in our rear with HE and gas at night.

They are building a bridge just forward of the village over the Somme and he dropped six bombs at it this morning. Result unknown.

#### **15.4.18 Daours**

There is a rumour that the French have advanced 9 kms down south. Major Coppleson just back from the north states that the place is full of French troops and refugees. Our breakdown tank on the door step moved off today.

There is every indication that we may expect no further advance here in front of Amiens. More guns go up daily, the village is now surrounded by 60 pdrs. and a pair of solid bridges are going over the Somme.

The unit played 8<sup>th</sup> Amb. football in the chateau grounds and won by 6 points, a concert being held later on at the wool factory (a billet of the 8<sup>th</sup> Fld. Amb.). Later on was over at the wool factory and it is sad to see the vast quantity of machinery now lying idle.

#### **16.4.18 Daours**

Today has passed in quiet idleness half asleep in front of a log fire in the sitting room.

This evening I was up at the 8<sup>th</sup> Fld Amb for a musical evening, the piano from the house being borrowed for the occasion. The ladies from the chateau were there to grace the occasion.

During the music he placed three shells over not more than a couple of hundred yards away and on the way home one landed unpleasantly close. Shortly after it getting back four casualties arrived from the Tunnellers a shell having burst right in their bedroom. None were very serious but one of the four was merely drunk and he had been carried in 600 yards as a wounded man on a stretcher. Picture the disgust of the bearers. There is humour in everything I think, even war. At the present moment as I am writing this in bed he is lobbing one every two or three minutes into the other end of the village 200 or 300 yards away. He is such an accurate shot and so methodical one can feel fairly safe here. He is probably shooting at 2 new bridges which they are putting up over the Somme or perhaps a battery of 60 pdrs which is located just in front of them.

All bad news today. The enemy is right through Bailleul to Meteren. I can see the Australian Corps being waltzed back north to take part in this new push of his. While things are fairly good on this front in front of Amiens here, there is

heavy fighting up north and some indication that he intends to push heavily up north now that he has met with opposition down south here.

#### **17.4.18 Daours**

Orderly officer all day. Camp routine. Unit played 28<sup>th</sup> AACCS at Australian Rules in the chateau ground was defeated by 6 points.

There was a 3 hour heavy gas shelling up forward this morning and many casualties in the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>. Both MO's, Leadman and Hawthorn were gassed and Pittman and Stewart from the unit went forward this evening to take their places.

The enemy are putting a few shells over the village this evening as I write. It is modern warfare with a vengeance to sit in a neatly furnished parlour and listen to shells falling outside. War gives rise to some peculiar conditions.

We are steadily bringing up more and more guns. The shells last night fell, one 115 yards from the corner of the chateau in the fowl house and four others in the backyard of our sergeant's billet just across the road.

#### **19.4.18 Daours**

Since last writing Captain Gibson, 56<sup>th</sup> Bn has been gassed. Captain Grey 8<sup>th</sup> Fld Amb went up to relieve him and was gassed in his turn. The enemy is drenching Villers Bretonneux with gas and many cases are coming down. It seems to be HS or some K stuff (lachrymotor) but a remarkable feature is the intense pain in the eyes. Otherwise the cases are not serious except as a cause of wastage. The lungs are not as much affected for the men turn down the eyepieces keeping the clips mouth pieces in place so that they breath through the container.

Many of the French people are coming back to the village and carting away their belongings.

Bodies of troops with bands playing pass at intervals all day long, big ammunition columns and lorries whilst the gun rattle and reverberate all round.

Much shelling this morning mostly shrapnel over the village, one or two HE's.

The gas question is becoming serious and we are to have gas drill by night this evening to practice the art of seeing in the dark.

The situation in the front remains roughly as before. As soon as we came here most of the active fighting transferred itself to Bailleul and has remained there ever since.

Personally I expect a big push forward south soon from the French to relieve us. Everybody very confident that our turn is coming for we must have big reserves. When Fritz has used up most of his time to get through then it will be our turn.

Met Col Watson, CO 54<sup>th</sup> Bn yesterday. Last time I saw him he was CO one of the Depot Bn's, Liverpool.

The enemy has Bailleul. Civilians evacuated and the town is in flames or was before they took it.

Wytschaete and all our old pozzies have also gone.

#### **21.4.18 Daours**

A great change since 19.4.18. I have heard in the last two days that we have evacuated Paasschendale ridge which cost us so much last summer.

Locally we are holding a post at Bussy to which I proceeded last night and posted a holding party of one NCO (Fleischmann) and four OR. Today Fay with a small party proceeded to Blangy - Tronville to secure a small post there. Major Strachan, has taken C Tent subdivision complete to Bussy this afternoon. This post is no longer a walking wounded station as at first but now becomes the main rescue station and ADS in case of further retreat.

This post is no longer a walking wounded station as at first but now becomes the main dressing station & the ADS in case of a further retreat. There has been a considerable increase in shelling of the village today, probably owing to the fine weather and there has been a dozen or so casualties. Amongst them a French Gendarme. A fine day always increases the shell fire owing to the facility of aerial observation – give me the dull grey days every time. There are shells falling in the village as I write this about 300 yards across. We held a sports meeting behind the chateau this afternoon of some 15 items and the competition among the sections was very keen. B section won by 15 points as against 12 for A and 9 for C, Mechanical Transport 11. He was shelling the village most of the time and a good many of stray pieces came down on the ground. The races were run with the band playing and most of the spectators hugging in the side of the house for cover. Finally he put over an armour piercing Whizz bang with delayed percussion which landed three feet from one man literally in the middle of the crowd. No casualties. Luckily it was a small shell and exploded three or feet below the surface or he would have bowled over ten or twelve of us. It



14TH. AUST. FIELD AMBULANCE

DAOURS, SUNDAY 21/4/18

SPORTS  
PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

- 1.A. TUG OF WAR, HEAT
1. 100 YARDS
2. SACK RACE
3. 100 YARDS FOR OFFICERS
4. 150 YARDS
5. THREE LEGGED RACE
6. HIGH JUMP
7. 220 YARDS
8. POTATO RACE
- 8.A. OPEN 100 YARDS
9. 440 YARDS
10. LONG JUMP
11. HALF MILE
12. HOP, STEP AND JUMP
13. RELAY RACES
14. ONE MILE
15. TUG OF WAR, FINAL

STARTER: CAPT. R.P. WHEELER. M.C.

passed about 5ft over my head. The audience at once melted by about 50% but after waiting a little while to see if he really meant business we continued our sports and finished the remaining four items. Rather a foolish proceeding but nobody likes to give into Fritz.

He has just placed a fairly big one a few hundred yards behind the house.

Today they brought down the German crack airman, the boss of the famous red circus. A circus is a mobile unit of crack airmen and machines which Fritz moves about to different sectors of the line as required. Our chaps know them all and this chap is credited with knocking 80 or 90 of our machines so there is great elation in the camp.

By the sound of the shells at present landing he is well onto a battery in the rear of the village.

#### **22.4.18 Daours**

Camp routine. OO all day. In the evening we had a soirée with people down from the chateau, the DADMS 5<sup>th</sup> Div, Maj James and Maj Wootten, GSO2.

Peculiar to hear the music going and the feet dancing inside and outside the air be vibrating & the sky flashing with the heavy guns.

Major Sawes was in to the dinner and he is joining this division. Probably this unit, which means 4 majors and more work for the captains. A major is a drone in AMC who draws more pay.

There is a good deal of drinking goes on in the unit which does not do much good to anyone.

No shells all day.

#### **24.4.18 Bussy - les - Daours**

Last night intelligence came through to expect enemy attack at Villers Bretonneux objective 4 or 5 kilometres forward. To be preceded by two and a half hours bombardment. B and C Tent Subdivisions were warned to be ready to move forward at a moments notice. Water bottles were filled, rations issued and all preparations made. Turned into bed clothes and all after packing up my belongings but could not sleep owing to the vibration of the gun fire. Fritz put over 12 or 15 HE close enough at hand to hear the debris falling for what seemed a minute afterwards so at last I got the wind up and descended to sleep on the ground floor. Lieutenant Col Oakley who was a gassed patient did likewise. Got

to sleep but woke at 4 am to hear a murderous barrage going up forward. Far heavier than anything I have yet heard down here. Fell asleep and woke as he dropped an HE shell just beside the church opposite at 7.45 am. Then the fun began. He put 80 or 90 HE's, many of which fell up in the chateau one finally hitting our personnel's quarters just after we had vacated them on the way here. The bearers of B and C were ordered to proceed here to report to Major Strachan. Carried out without casualties. One man, Rowe, was wounded in the leg in the morning. As soon as we arrived here C Tent proceeded to a new site for ADS with transport so I am now here on my own with 37 men, all bearers under warning to proceed forward at a moments notice.

Oubigny was heavily shelled with gas shells yesterday and two of our cars disabled. A few men lightly gassed.

No reliable news of the results of this mornings attack yet to hand. All kinds of conflicting reports.

Later 9.30 pm – Things are very quiet. A few guns firing. Rumours of a counter attack tomorrow by one of our brigades. Still standing by but have turned in between sheets in spite of all. We are here a little independent unit of 40 odd men.

Three new majors due at the unit at Daours today, Majors C Parkinson, R North and Wells. We now have seven Majors and three Captains including the QM. The QM staff is in this place with me.

Enemy still shelling Daours spasmodically. It may be the turn of this place tomorrow but there is a fine large cellar.

A Section and B Camp are now at Daours. B and C bearers, QM staff and some cooks, postmen etc at Bussy. Sergeant and 8 officers at Blangy Tronville (with bearers) and C Tent with Major Strachan on the road 2 kilos from Daours with all or most of the transport. The chateau has been evacuated by our personnel as it is too hot. I have not heard what has become of the ladies. I presume the others looked after them.

I fully expect to be out with the battalion very shortly as I am now the junior officer in the Ambulance once again.

All this shelling was the preparation for a Bosche attack on Villers Bretonneux. He gained it but was driven out again by the 5<sup>th</sup> Div.

#### 25.4.18 – Bussy les Daours

Still standing to as it were with B and C bearers. Last night very quiet. The Sergeant from our squad at Blangy was over here this morning and says the old line from in front of Villers Bretonneux is practically restored. Spent the day reading and getting the camp fatigues, sanitary arrangements etc., in order. Finlayson, 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneers, Wellisch 5<sup>th</sup> Div. MG and Hellstrom 5<sup>th</sup> DAC (all the cushy jobs) are around here and drop in occasionally.

Reichthofen was the name of the crack German ace brought down. There was a bit of argument among a certain battery and some Lewis gunners, as to who brought him down and the boys have a song to the tune of "Who killed Cock Robin" then a poem starting "Who killed Reichthofen" (Rik-toffen).

I said the Aussie.  
From my little pozzy.  
I killed Reichthofen. .

Who killed Reichthofen.  
I said the battery.  
Oh! Cut out the flattery.  
I killed Reichthofen.

Chorus: And the bosch in the air.  
Fell a-sobbing and a-coughing.  
When we heard of the death of poor Reichthofen.

He had 20 bullets in his body and the British Wire News (which is sent around daily to units) stated this fact together with the fact that he had a seventy or more machines to his credit and ended up "It is but fitting that such a foe should have all his wounds in the front of his body".

Another yarn: Villers Bretonneux is a prosperous little city famous for its scent and woollen mills. One battalion fitted out all its men with jerseys from this place but picture the actual luxury of the Australian Billjim having his sore feet bathed in eau de cologne, a thing which actually happened.

Major C Parkinson according to orders joined the unit at Daours today and is posted to B Tent Subdivision.

#### 26.4.18

Heard that Major Metcalfe AAMC has been killed at Burnay. Congratulations orders are from HQ to the division on successful resistance and counter attack at

Villers Bretonneux. Gun fire has been quiet all day excepting a slight outburst at 8.00. Gas drill for one half hour for the boys. For the rest nothing exciting. Sent a parcel home, one of lace and a German gas mask. A doll for the baby a few days ago.

About 300 German prisoners passed here today from the attack on V.B.

#### **27.4.18 Bussy les Daours**

Camp duties. Find my own company here far more congenial than headquarters. There are now too many majors in the ambulance. Heard today that the 15<sup>th</sup> Bde was attacked four times at Villers Bretonneux but stopped every one though suffering heavily itself. Captain Anderson who relieved me at Brightlingsea dropped in today on his way up with 12<sup>th</sup> Bde to relieve 15<sup>th</sup> Bde. He is RMO 45<sup>th</sup> Bn. Has been very quiet all day.

The CO at present is very keen on the War Diary and tells me that I have to write up an account of my sojourn here and all our doings.

Since we left Daours I have had pretty heavy work with wounded. Many gassed patients. But in spite of all we have held Fritz up.

#### **28.4.18 Bussy**

Still here with 67 OR's, 11 of which marched in today. Things very quiet. An occasional barrage goes up down the VB way at evening. 5<sup>th</sup> DAC moved away from here today.

#### **29.4.18 Bussy**

Visited Daours this morning and saw tanks coming out of the line. The place is now much busier than formerly. One tank was pierced full of holes and the officer, the same who was stuck on our doorstep for four days, had a moving tale of 14 days in action every day and especially praised the exploits of the Whippets which he said slaughtered two or three companies of Germans. His tank had been knocked out and half the tank officers gassed. He had almost a complete new crew and seemed to have had a thoroughly rough passage.

CO visited the post today and acquainted one with the fact that more cases will come here in the future.

An exciting aeroplane duel took place directly overhead in which one German machine was driven down by 10 or 11 of ours. There is no chivalry in this game

now. With the glasses I could see the little bright spots of MG fire from each machine. Great cheering from the boys.

#### **30.4.18 Bussy**

Camp routine. 20 patients billeted today.

#### **2.5.18 Bussy**

Camp routine. 30 patients in hospital. Fatigues. Signpost erected. Road mended. Buckets improvised for hospital. A good deal of aerial activity today and some piece of AA shell came down in our ground. Two new ovens erected. More tanks passed up tonight.

#### **3.5.18 Bussy**

Great aerial activity today. Heard that we brought down 17 planes this morning. Nothing particular doing otherwise.

#### **5.5.18 Bussy le Daours**

Nothing much doing except that this afternoon we had a fine view of a strafe of Fritz's on a ridge four miles away behind VB. Spout after spout of earth flying up onto our poor batteries or somewhere near them. It kept up for about half an hour. A number of American engineers have settled down next door to us and it is rumoured will relieve us on this front.

Fritz still keeping his storm troops in the line opposite us so there is a probability of another push in front any day now. Other indications are increased aerial reconnaissance and artillery activity. GHQ evidently deems it probable for I was speaking to a British tank officer who told me his orders were with the others to go back a short way and wait six days to see if anything happens.

This hospital is progressing finely – 38 patients now. I have to write up a War Diary every day.

#### **9.5.18 Bussy**

Major Strachan left for Balford yesterday. Major Furber arrived yesterday to take his place. Major Parkinson evacuated sick today. Nothing of importance the last 3 days.

Had an unpleasant job today. An AVC officer shot himself a mile or so from here and I was called out to pronounce him dead. The poor chap lay on his back

Busey. 4/5/18

Picket Orders

To be handed on to each picket commander

1. To keep gas guard. In the event of gas either by shells or cloud, the gong will be sounded, orderly officers roused & picket will proceed systematically to rouse every billet. Whether these measures will be carried out is left to the discretion of the picket commander.
2. To watch for hostile aircraft. The alarm of aircraft overhead will be three long blasts on the whistle on which all ranks will secure cover from view.
3. To watch for fire & if such takes place at once to take necessary measures & rouse Ord Sgt & Ord Officers.
4. To act as directing & traffic control post at the main gate.
5. General :- The soldier on picket will not slouch or sit down on his tour of duty. He will salute all officers & conduct himself in a soldierly manner.

These orders will be read to each picket when they take over duty.

EW Trecker Capt

Offc Busey Post  
14<sup>th</sup> Hd Amb

with the muzzle of a revolver in his mouth with a hole blown in the back of his head. Altogether a gruesome sight. Why a man should commit suicide that way I don't know when he could go over the top and earn half a dozen VCs before he was knocked out and die a bit more gloriously than by blowing his own brains out. Had forty five patients in the hospital today. Everything still quiet. We are waiting for Fritz's next big attack which will probably be here.

Sent home "Eugene Aran" two days ago by book post.

Also "Two Chiefs of Dunboy" a few days later.

### **15.5.18 Bussy**

A vigorous night tonight. All day it has been bright and sunny and planes over all the morning. The sky has been literally studded with thousands of smoke puffs from AA shells. Tonight as the moon is four days old and it is fine and clear four successive waves of planes have passed over with their oom – oom – oom and the intermittent Boomp of bombs a mile or so away. The bang of Archies, the clatter of machine guns, now right in the village now miles away have filled the evening. Tracer bullets have been flashing across the sky and bright shells flash off amongst the stars.

In addition there is now a strafe on & our heavies nearby here in full activity to the violent agitation of doors and windows as I write I can hear one of our guardian planes buzzing over us, recognisable by his calm continuous tranquil hum.

An attack is expected in the morning.

Have had the influenza the last two days and am feeling not quite fit.

I put a man up for being drunk on guard this morning and had to fool about giving evidence all the morning. A rotten business but part of the game. He was acquitted.

### **19.5.18 Bussy**

Last night the enemy was up to his old games again vigorously shelling back areas. The nearest here was about 300 yards in front of the gate but all night at intervals our sleep was disturbed by the long drawn out wail of shells and the crash of explosives varied by dull thuds as occasional duds arrived. He finished off at daybreak this morning and all has been quiet. During the night bombs were dropped on our horse lines – four horses injured in neighbouring horse lines. One shell landed at the back of the officer's mess at Daours and blew a



large paving stone high up which came through the roof of the cook's quarters and landed between two of them. One Tommy was blown to pieces by the same shell. They could only find fragments of him to bury, poor devil. Rumour has it that a spy was caught here this morning.

Sent a book home yesterday "Travels in Italy and Palestine" and I am getting very hard up for reading matter as my books do not seem to arrive from London. The country just now is beautiful, brilliant green and the meadows studded with golden flowers. The air is hot and sunny and calls to mind those old hot summer Australian days which we hope to see again some day! Had a swim in a little backwater of the Somme yesterday, the first since I left home and it was quite enjoyable.

Later: Shelled again this afternoon. A number of shells this side of the village, two within 100 yards. He is getting closer. 5.9 Howitzers with a long crescendo wail terminating in a swish and a crash as the shell lobs. The pathetic part here is to see numbers of small French mites wandering about during the daytime in quiet spells looking at the shell holes with childish curiosity. They have all been issued with gas masks and the woman next door with four kiddies, none above five took shelter in our cellar this afternoon. It is a crying shame, they should be evacuated from the area.

This shelling to my mind forebodes an attack in the near future but I think he will get a good reception.

During the shelling this afternoon I got all the boys, patients and all, down into the ground floor for I surely thought one must come through our roof.

Tonight promises to be lively! I think I will keep my clothes on for once for he is sure to give us a few salvos during the evening.

### **22.5.18 – Nucleus Camp – CMDS – Amiens Road**

Continuing from my last. The same night was quiet with the exception that he dropped a couple of aerial torpedos on the top of the hill close by. I saw the holes later and one could put a bell tent inverted into the hole. They were dropped about 4 am. About 8 am I was pulled out of bed to attend to some wounded and discovered that Daours was being shelled and they had scored two direct hits on our hospital – a number of minor casualties. The second one hit the hospital just on the side of the operating theatre hastily improvised and in which Majors Furber and Wesley were amputating a chap's leg with the shells lobbing all around the building. Luckily it struck the outer wall directly over the spot where a partition wall joined it and did not come through. They were all only

shaken. It was decided to evacuate the Daours post to Nucleus Camp here with Bussy post as an HQ full stores, etc. So I was ordered to evacuate all my patients and proceed with C Section complete and B Section bearers to the Nucleus camp. Of the 32 patients in hospital 18 went back to their units and 14 evacuated. We marched out for the new camp at 10 am, A Section and HQ remaining at Bussy.

In the camp we have tentage for hospital and duty men, orderly room, etc and the personnel are dug in in banks, little dug outs like rabbit warrens. The officers have little shelves dug in a bank beneath a hedge. 30 yards from the main camp and here I am with a bank behind me and earth heaped up all around and two army blankets for a roof. The old stretcher to sleep on and all quite comfortable.

The first night here he came over en route for Amiens, that is, the night of the day we left Bussy. The search lights, of which, 13 or 14 flash up all around us, turned him back and he dropped seven bombs in the Bussy post missing the main building by 3 feet. Private Saunders killed and three wounded of our unit. A number of other casualties in other units.

As a result the Bussy post was evacuated and now the whole unit is in this camp. The second bomb dropped on the house next door in which the dentist had stored his gear. The house was utterly smashed flat, three men buried without injury and all dental gear blowed to Jericho so the dentist is now having a holiday.

The weather is extremely hot and quite pleasant out in the fields here so long as it does not rain. We have been very lucky for in Daours the shelling was extremely heavy and we escaped without a casualty of any gravity, only slight scratches to about half a dozen men. Majors Wesley and Furber were cut with flying glass.

Our pozzy here is pretty safe and I for one am far better satisfied out of these villages which are too good as targets. Here if shelled we can get out in the grass about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile and watch the proceedings for the country is just flat and rolling grass.

### **31.5.18**

Nucleus Camp, CMDS.

On the evening of 26.5.18 sent up to do 36 hours relief with 55<sup>th</sup>, stayed till 10 am on 28.5.18. On 26.5.18 8 bombs were dropped on the edge of the camp. One man of ours had his arm smashed. Radiator broken in car.

During afternoon motored to Abbeville where everybody has the wind up considerably for the place has been badly knocked about by bombs. We left at 9.30 pm and he dropped more bombs into the town the same evening.

Heard that Ces Allen has gone to No. 1 AGH in Rouen two days ago.

**5.6.18 Wednesday – Bois de Mai: between Querrieu and Allonville, five miles from the line.**

We were relieved at the Nucleus Camp by the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Amb. on 1.6.18 and marched over here – a beautiful camp in the heart of a thick wood of beech and elm full of foxes, cuckoos and rabbits. Quite a nature retreat. I believe we are out for 10 days and then go back. It is then our turn to run the front line. At present everything is nice and quiet though we can hear the shells going into neighbouring villages each night. The 14<sup>th</sup> Bn had 120 casualties from shells into Allonville the other night and so we have shifted out into the open country.

**11.6.18 Bois de Mai**

Have had a peaceful and enjoyable time in the woods. We move up to the line, Northern Corps Sector in two or three days. Fay received his MC yesterday and it was a very wet day. Visited the 56<sup>th</sup> that night.

### Notebook No. 3

#### **27.7.18 – Bologne Officers' Rest Club**

I have just returned from leave in England (13.7.18 – 27.7.18). Weather was rainy most of the time but had a fairly good leave at cost of 35 pounds or there about. Bought presents for all & sent home a parcel of books and p.c.'s. Trip was as follows: Up to Aberdeen after passing 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in London. From Aberdeen I had a trip via Ballater to Braemar. Thence from Aberdeen to Stirling where I stayed overnight seeing Stirling Castle in the evening. From there by train across Perthshire Highlands to Oban where I passed Saturday, Friday and Sunday having trips to Lochs Craven and Stive. Met Mr & Mrs Easterbrook and Miss E. On the Monday down via Callander to the Trossachs passing Loch Vennacha, Loch Acray, Loch Katrine and Loch Lomonde to Valloch. Thence by train to Edinburgh. Here I met Row, Nott and Howard, 8<sup>th</sup> Field Amb, inspected the Royal Edinburgh infirmary and went to Firth of Forth where I managed to get aboard the HMAS Australia. Met on board Sinclair of the SUS now an engineer lieutenant.

Returned to London for Thursday and Friday and had a gold crown put on a tooth at HQ Horseferry Road and then over by boat to Bologne today. Sleeping here the night and back to unit tomorrow up in front of Amiens somewhere. There is no scarcity of food in England. It is better than when I was over there last time. One hears such exaggerated reports. Of course meat coupons are used but one gets ample to eat.

#### **1.8.18 Heilly (Somme), Chalk Pit 14<sup>th</sup> AFAB**

Leaving Bologne by 7.47 am we reached Longpré about 4.30 pm after a long weary day in the train. From here we reached Ailly sur Somme and stayed the night with MacKnight, the camps Baths Officer with whom I had come up from London. Next morning by lorries and cars right up to the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Amb, who were still in line at ADS Frandilles. This was 29.7.18. On the night of 29.7.18 I was sent down with a section to take up billets at Poulanville, a small rail head village but only there a couple of hours and was recalled by car to HQ. On returning to HQ at the ADS I was ordered up to the 14<sup>th</sup> AFAB to relieve Captain Hellstrom, RMO who was going to give evidence at a DCM at Hazebrouch and I have been here in a chalk pit ever since. We move out to another spot tomorrow. The Ambulance moved out complete from the ADS yesterday morning and is now in rest where I hope to join them in a few days. The worst of a Bearer Captain's job is that one never knows when one's work is finished. There is the Division out and I am back once more still in it.

A merry crowd here. The flies are especially bad and we had a competition to see who could catch the most. The adjutant chipped in at last and his first catch (on the wing) would have been good only it happened to be a wasp with the usual result.

McGlashan received the MC whilst I was away for work in the last stunt which occurred whilst I was away or rather I find later for the 4<sup>th</sup> July stunt in which I was sent clear up to the front line.

### **3.8.18 With 14<sup>th</sup> AFAB, Blangy – Tromville on the banks of the Somme.**

We left on horse back for this place yesterday at 3.30 pm and rode across about 17 kilos. The last half it rained all the way and we had a helter skelter gallop to get under cover in some trees. On arriving here very wet and cold we found a bare flat alongside the river without cover of any kind. We had one tent and that was erected in the pouring rain on the wet ground. An AMC stretcher, food tea and pot and we were well set now unable to dig in for cover on account of the spongy soil. The place abounded with horse lines and is a pet spot for bombs and shells about 8000 yards behind the line. At 11 pm he came across with a few planes bombing, the rain having lifted a little but down it came same again before he got anywhere near us.

At 12.30 I woke up and listened to him putting big shells about 300 yards away up the flat. A nasty experience to be out in the open in a canvas tent listening to the shells rustling over and then crash! and the echoes ringing through the darkness for a minute or so. This was varied by a Phut! once or twice as a dud landed the smack being plainly audible. He sent about 20 big shells over in half an hour. A dugout for me by hook or by crook tonight.

The Colonel is taking the only available tent tonight and the alternative for the IO Signals and MO is a piece of canvas over a bit of trench. Though not as comfortable I will feel much safer. I am writing this seated in a field on my medical stores where I did the sick parade this morning. Everything is soaked. Horses wagons canvas covers stores etc. be around in profusion and the chilly wind rustles through the trees.

There is rumour of a big stunt the day after tomorrow with Australians, Yankies, Canadians and Jocks. Some army which will touch Fritz up a bit. Also another that Fritz is steadily retiring on the Aisme. Just my luck to get into this buckshee stunt every time I have a relief in a unit. If the report is true the Ambulance is likely to have but a very short spell out of the line. I quite expect we will be moving out of here this afternoon.

A pipe of good tobacco is an inestimable boon in these cold wet conditions and worst luck my pouch is running very low for I left the Ambulance under a very sudden notice and have not even a change of clothing with me.

#### **4.8.18**

Returned to Ambulance in camp in a wood near Poulanville. The big stunt is to be a fact.

#### **6.8.18 Halte Daours**

We left our camp near Poulanville last night at 8.40 pm. Major Beard and Captain McGlachan and 124 bearers to be attached to the 14<sup>th</sup> Bde. It rained heavily for the first part and altogether it is was a dark dismal march of 9 to 10 miles. The boys were in excellent spirit and made the dreary wrecked streets of Amiens resound with songs as we marched through. "Who were you with last night" "Old Soldiers never die" and other not quite so printable. Bye and bye they got tired and we settled down to a steady hike. Arrived outside Daours 11.30 pm. A hot drink was served out by our own cook and I set out on the GS wagon of equipment to pass through Daours to our billet in the railway station. Tanks were passing up to the front and these and lorries made a frightful congestion on the road, battalions moving up in the wet darkness threading in and out of the traffic. The shouts of the drivers and the glimmer of the star shells right up ward made a queer combination. Once an incendiary shell miles away lit up the countryside illuminating sweating figures of the soldiers, the pink pools of water in the road and the heavy clouds overhead. It took us an hour to go 800 yards passing our old hospital in the square with the gap in the wall where they hit it just before the Ambulance evacuated the town two months ago.

We came to the railway station at last, unloaded the wagon, billeted the bearers and set out through the slush to get in touch with the RMO's, pretty dog tired. We found the 56<sup>th</sup> had just marched in and posted a squad of bearers at each RAP. And so back to the billet to sleep on a springy bed of verminous rags of issue blankets. I have just finished picking the lice off my shirt. Still it was a case of shiver or be lousy and we are used to the latter.

It is now 3 pm raining heavily, quite miserable weather.

#### **7.8.18 Daours Railway Station – Y day**

All troops rested. We instructed our bearers in the duties required of them. They follow behind the respective brigades in extended order as they advance. In addition yesterday afternoon I gave them a little practical instruction in the field. Everything seems ready. The air is tense with expectation and the world seems

to hang waiting for the first gun. The roads are fairly full of transport by day and troops through the back areas waiting to leap frog the first Divisions. Our Division passed through the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Zero time is some time tonight at present unknown. So I presume we will not sleep here.

I heard that the 12<sup>th</sup> AFAB were down here so went to see Norm but was unfortunate in finding him away on duty up the line. Returning however I met him driving back along the road in a limber and we had yarn for five to ten minutes and he is coming up for a yarn tonight just before the battle, mother, as the old song has it.

He came up again in the evening and we had another long yarn till 9.30.

### **8.8.18 Warfusedé Abancourt**

Penetrated 400 yards into the German line. I am writing this seated in a valley thronged with our troops and transport now victorious over the Hun. This morning this was a centre of German activity three miles or so ahead of us and now we have it. All around are men preparing the evening meal hurriedly for we are only halted for one half hour and advance in pursuit again at 5 pm. The German is miles ahead and our brigade which is in reserve and is being steadily pursued by the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Bdes of our Div. Tanks, armoured cars, artillery and light horse are in full pursuit and give him no breathing space.

We have been afoot since 3 am this morning and the prospect of the same all night but the artillery has utterly squelched him. We keep passing his guns and dug outs nearly obliterated with dead Germans lying about.

Thousand of prisoners streamed back along the road and only one or two guns respond to our artillery. The German staff must be scratching for in some places we are 14,000 yards into his position.

An occasional shell burst in Warfusedé as I sit here.

Must have tea as we move on soon –

Tea over: sardines and bread cocoa and milk out of a tin. The men have had a hot drink all round. Some are cleaning their feet and changing socks for we have had a long march.

This morning a Fritz plane flew low over us machine gunning as it went but they brought him down. Our planes whirr overhead in dozens and protect us from

attack overhead. Queer tanks and armoured cars rattle about and squads of jubilant (mark you!) German prisoners march to the rear. It is the biggest advance we have made and all day the boys are souvenir hunting in the dugouts when they get a chance. Our balloons and anti aircraft have pushed ahead with us and the roads so lately Fritz's are now thronged with our traffic. This valley we are in was a nest of dugouts for Fritz but it is now a lamentable wreck of shell holes and is nearly wiped out. Everybody has their head down and their tails up and we are going as far as we can. Casualties have been exceptionally light. So far being with the reserve brigade I have not seen a case.

#### **9.8.18 Bayonvillers, in the cellar of a small house.**

Another stage in our advance. Our battalions are well out in front of us beyond the red line and it seems as if final objectives and blue lines have been gained. The cavalry has been thrown in.

Leaving the valley abovementioned yesterday at 5 pm we came straight across the side of Bayonvillers where the battalions camped out. I managed to procure two large cellars in the town for my bearers and one for myself and staff. A few shells, big black bursts, were crumping about but nothing to signify. Bayonvillers is an absolute wreck from our barrage which lasted 6 hours on this particular town. The billet we have slept in was occupied by Allemandes the night before. In some cases they got out so hurriedly that they left the meal frizzling in the frying pan and our fellows came in and ate the breakfast and drank the coffee! The walk across country to Bayonvillers is plain open country and untrenched for we are behind the trench area, no shell holes. A few dead men here and there and a few derelict tanks but otherwise a peaceful smiling rustic scene.

So here we are with our heads well down waiting for the next move. Breakfast is on the table and up and into it before orders come through to get going once more. It is great to be advancing. It feels like winning the war.

Beard and McGlashan are away on the left and so far we have managed to keep in touch very well. Rations and water come up this morning so everything is set.

Later 1.30 pm: Standing to in a field just behind Bayonvillers in touch with 54<sup>th</sup> Bn. We got the order to stand to about 11.30 am and have been here an hour. Today's programme includes an advance of 1000 yards on the divisional front, followed by the 1<sup>st</sup> and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> divisions leap frogging through and completing a great advance of about 9000 yards.

Everyone is jubilant in the extreme and enthusiastic about our artillery and airforce. So far I have not seen more than two dozen German shells and as I



write here seated on the grass our guns are tearing it in intermittently all over the country and retaliation is absolutely nil. All around artillery transport is massed in close columns, horses, men and galloping orderlies and the road close to us is thronged with two columns of transport going and returning. The air is full of our planes but not as many as yesterday. There never was such a war. All our chaps are loaded with souvenirs, German equipment bayonets maps etc. One interesting map showed nearly every medical position we have been in for three months past marked with a cross as a medical post and judging from his maps those places where we have been shelled have not been medical posts as far as his knowledge went.

For the first time the whole Australian Corps is in action all together. Many tales come through about yesterday. One armoured car penetrated 3000 yards beyond our line and planted the Australian flag in front of German HQ. Being interfered with they killed four German officers and then in company with another strolled down the street shooting at German officers seated at lunch, through the windows.

Another stopped a supply train and set it on fire. These armoured cars seem to have put the fear of God into the Bosche and we don't anticipate very strenuous resistance today. So far our brigade has not been in action and only under shell fire once for a couple of hours at the second assembly position.

A Fritz plane has just come over and one of our fellows is at him. We can hear the faint cackle of MG's. They are out of sight now.

Well it's grand war now, first class in fact and we should go a few miles yet before we can be stopped.

### **10.8.18 Bayonviller**

We stood down last night at 4.30 pm and marched back to our cellars in the town where luckily I had the forethought to leave men in charge and prevent them being taken by other troops. News came through that our total advance up to that time was 18,000 yards. Batches of German prisoners continued to come down the road in 50's and 100's and they say that the total is now about 5,000 for the 5<sup>th</sup> Div alone. Fritz's infantry seemed to be bolting at the first rush of our chaps but the artillery stood to their guns like men yesterday and caused us a good few casualties at point blank range. They knocked out most of our tanks but despite all we still seem to be progressing.

We are still in reserve. Last night He came over in a squadron of planes and bombed all around the village but not in it luckily for us for our little cellar would not stand much of a tap on the roof without caving in.

The ration party with a note from Major Beard arrived here sweating profusely for he dropped bombs all around them as they were crossing the open fields. He was going for the transport which, as I said, is parked in the fields all around the village. We passed through four casualties.

I now have the map locations of all of the medical posts on the sector and loading posts for Ambulance cars so we are well set.

There is a current rumour of an offensive up north against Nieuport and another down south of the French. I heard this morning that the Australian Corps is soon to be relieved by the Yanks but it is probably a furphy for we have only been in three days.

Last night big guns rumbled for the whole night long. Telegraph lines are being pushed ahead on poles, kite balloons on cars are gradually being dragged further and further ahead of our present position. He got one of our balloons here yesterday but the observers got out in parachutes alright. The balloon came down in flames.

(This balloon I heard later was knocked by one of our own planes in error).

In the village street here there is a huge gun captured by the 58<sup>th</sup> Bn and I hear that last night we got one of his 11 inch railway guns.

A full CCS with doctors and nurses was captured yesterday and by now we should have his Corps HQ in Framerville.

Most of the prisoners seem pretty jubilant at being out of the war and as one Boche shouted yesterday as he passed us "Finit la guerre pour moi!", that seems their attitude of mind toward the whole show.

The remarkable point about a big battle like this is the few dead men one sees. I have seen only about 20, most of them Germans.

It is five days since I had my clothes off and I am pretty "chatty" but chats are mere details.

The weather continues fine and dry and an artillery can go forward over the fields.

I am following the 54<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Bns and am responsible for the wounded but so far I have not seen a casualty from the brigade though we have followed up the offensive at about 2 – 300 yards. Shelling is extremely light. This is the way to

do things. Capture his artillery first hop off and then through him like smoke. We will probably take Peronne before very long.

### **11.8.18: Blangy Tronville N27c32 sheet 62 D**

Back into camp last night for we were relieved yesterday morning and there to proceed back to Villers Bretonneux Just before moving out he dropped a whole cargo of bombs on the other side of the village. At last we tailed to the 54<sup>th</sup> and moved out in artillery formation back across the fields. Passed a few dead men and our chaps were busy collecting souvenirs nearly all the way, home across the Boche's old front line and supports strewn with equipment, clothing, rifles, bayonets, MG's and stick bombs and caved in in many parts with our shell fire. Then across no man's land and past a poor Fritz who had been killed months before and lay a mere skeleton. Past two of our own boys who fell in the first rush, one still holding his Lewis gun fast in his hands, past a grave labelled "Here lie 3 Huns" and so on back to the point where we started some two days before but much different. No shells, no artillery peace and quietness. We had tea in the 56<sup>th</sup> Bn mess in a dugout nearby and then marched back through shattered Villers Bretonneux and finally got all the men on lorries back to this camp where all day the men have laid out in the sun resting and reading and well content to have the day off.

### **Supplementary to 8.8.18 – Z Day:**

Zero time at 4.20 am and we fell in near the station with our brigade moving off at 4.35 am. It was a long uneventful walk punctuated with long halts, but with our thoughts always ahead of our footsteps. From a misty dawn it gradually moves into a dull misty morning. No shell fire or bombs trouble us as we emerged into the valley alongside VB which was now chock full of big guns all belching shells. No retaliation at all. Each explosion of the guns sent long concentric ripples across the mist like a stone thrown into water. We stayed till after lunch and the only shells which came over were big black HE, 400 yards away. We moved off about 4 o'clock forward and finally billeted the men in Bayonvillers passing Warfusee en route. The destruction by our barrages was enormous. Our aeroplanes were excellent zipping and zooming above over our heads now high now so low that we could see the aviator wave his hand to us as we pressed onward.

The ground was littered with all the refuse of a big battle. All told it was quite a wonderful experience following up in the wake of a big advance.

### **Monday 12.8.18: Blangy Tronville**

Still out resting. The men lie around in the shade of the trees writing yarning and smoking and as scantily dressed as possible as the weather is exceedingly hot. Here I am under the shade of a little tree with tobacco, chocolate and a book, prepared to lounge away the afternoon. This morning I took all the bearers down for a bathing parade in the lagoon about 1000 yards away and it was excellent, though very hot walking to and fro.

News from the front continues to be excellent. The prisoners now total about 24,000.

The camp we are in is an orchard and every tree has its quota of scantily dressed men lying in its shade and there is a cool breeze blowing which takes the heat off the sun. Everything in the orchard is lovely!

Much cavalry passed the road in front of us last night on its way out and Fritz conducted one of his usual bombing raids in the town nearby.

HQ of the Ambulance has now moved up into Villers Bretonneux and we are remaining here 5 to 6,000 yards in the rear until needed i.e. all the bearers.

Whilst down with the bathers parade I met a tank corps officer who told me that his company had only three tanks left out of twelve but they must have saved innumerable lives by squelching the machine guns.

### **14.8.18: Near Caik**

Awaiting a stunt tomorrow to go on and capture Chquines about 10,000 yards up ahead of our present position. I am following up the 14<sup>th</sup> Bde this time with the bearers but this time the brigade is hopping over part of the first part for the second objective. Yesterday we pulled out of Blangy camp, marched five miles to Villers Bretonneux and had tea and hence into this place – a march of 15 miles. We are now camped in an old trench near our brigade and awaiting orders for the stunt. I wrote a letter to Vera just now and got it off.

### **15.8.18: Warfusee Abancourt Road: 3,000 yards behind Proyart**

Last night the usual air raid during which he dropped a bomb or two rather too close to our trench for comfort. Lazed away the day in comfort in the trench under an old blanket shelter out of the fierce sun until after lunch when orders came for a billeting party to proceed to another part further north as our little stunt was off. The division was moving further north. Mac and I tossed up and I lost so I went off on a horse with a pack on my back. The horse I could not ride

and the pack flopped over me so I swapped the horse for a bike with a 54<sup>th</sup> officer and went the rest of the way in comfort though hard work. As usual the ambulance was left by the billeting officer till the last and just by sheer luck I met the brigade major of our brigade who told me that the bearers were no longer moving with the brigade but were rejoining the Ambulance and were not moving until tomorrow when the whole Ambulance was moving up here. He wished me to return the 7,000 yards to the unit for the night to march back here with them tomorrow but I know a trick worth two of that so I sent a runner back on my horse with a note giving my location for them to pick me up here in the morning.

So I and my remaining three men are now the guests of a British Ambulance with the 52<sup>nd</sup> and I am at present in a DDO and at this identical moment Fritz is strafing around about outside with bombs and shells – a lively mad minute or so.

This afternoon sitting in the main road we could see the shrapnel from our batteries bursting over Fritz's front line about 3,000 yards away for the country is flat undulating green fields.

This place is an old CCS of Fritz's and is littered with his material abandoned in the retreat. It was in this place that we captured the whole medical staff and twelve nurses or so. It is quite a snug little place and on the face of things I should say that the 14<sup>th</sup> will be taking it over shortly.

The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Bdes and probably the 8<sup>th</sup> are moving into this sector tonight and evidently there is to be a stunt on in a few days. Bombing is very active tonight, he has just dropped a cargo 5 – 600 yards away on to our battalions I think.

It seems as if the stunt of brigading the bearers and letting each set of bearers follow their own brigade has now come to an end and we will be back with the ambulance soon. Since the beginning of this push Ambulance bearers and MO's have been going over the top a few hundred yards in the rear of the brigade. I will not be sorry if the stunt is over.

Whether our division is to be in reserve here or is to take an active part in the battle I do not know but the enemy has certainly brought up more artillery and men and stiffened his resistance considerably. It will be no Sunday School picnic like the Villers Bretonneux stunt.

So here I am awaiting orders to come from the Ambulance as to what I am to do. I hope I get a good night's sleep.

Map location: Rosieres Sheet Q3Oc33

### **17.8.18 Hamel – P3c51MAS**

I came back here from the last place on foot across country and on the way walked through Norman's camp and met the old chap once again. The night at the ADS up at Q30c33 was pretty vigorous – bombs and shells all night and just before dusk I met by chance the brigade major who told me that the orders for bearers to proceed with the brigade had been cancelled.

So here we are at the MDS in all probability for some little time. Norm was over again today. Had a very bad day with the Colonel today – he has beastly manners and does not know how to give an order like a gentleman. His sole idea is to bull rag me. Well "C'est la guerre" I suppose – to be under all kinds of nincompoops and different degrees of obnoxiousness.

### **18.8.18 Hamel - on the river bank.**

Today the bearers moved down from the river bank about 1,000 yards from the last location in dugouts and in an old trench system. This is a pretty good dugout about 8 foot square which I have with about 4 foot of earth on top of it.

A rotten arrangement of reliefs whereby each of the three bearers comes down here for 24 hours which means carrying bedding with you. We have most of us been as sore as possible today with the colonel who was in his most piggish mood – most of his moods are of that description but today was one of the worst. The sole qualification of this arrangement is as far as I can see that it displeases everyone. On the whole it has been a pretty miserable day.

Already the bearers have begun to build a new MDS in the new site and one Nissen hut is already completed.

### **21.8.18: Hamel**

Came back from bearer camp tonight that's 19/20.8.18. Hooray! the Colonel is going on a month's leave. Hope it improves his liver a bit. We are being relieved here tomorrow night at 10 pm and what happens after that is a mystery. I believe we all move down the riverbank and wait orders.

Norm was here again today for an hour or so.

The whole offensive seems to have quietened down a bit but there are rumours of a stunt in a couple of days by the Australians.

### 24.8.18 Hamel

We are now down at the bearer camp by the river among the trees – which sounds very nice but every night he has lodged bombs all around us. I am writing this in an old dugout and as I write I can hear his engines overhead. Half an hour ago he dropped a load two of which fell 50 yards on either side of us and wounded a horse just in front of my dugout. I heard a series of woomphs! each one closer. And one which nearly put my candle out. There are moments over here when one just sits tight, grits ones teeth and waits for it and this was one of them. At last a swish in the air, a crash outside and the series of half a dozen explosions each getting farther away. Thank goodness and then you realise your knees are shaking. But on with your boots and see if anyone outside is hit.

"Alright up there?" "All set sir no one hit" comes back a voice from the darkness. Other officers have done the other parts of the camp and the nett trouble is one horse wounded.

We go back to the dugout where some of them finish their whiskey and an interrupted game of bridge talking of all things they would do to that Fritz if they caught him. His fate would be an unlucky one.

Even now the oom! oom! oom! of his engines is plainly audible and as I came in the search lights were throwing vast fingers across the clouds searching for the intruder whilst now and again a crackle of machine gun fire bursts out over head as Fritz sweeps the banks of the river down here. Occasionally our guns, sharper and more staccato bark out from the ground and tracer bullets shoot upward like meteors across the sky.

It is the sort of night summed up by the official reports in the sentence. "Enemy bombing machines were active during the night".

Colonel Thompson went on a month's leave a few days ago. Major Sawers is now OC.

We have begun operations at the suggestion of one of the men on a new education scheme whereby series of lectures will be delivered by those qualified among the men in certain subjects to the others. General commercial and technical subjects will be embraced. This of course applies to times when we are out of the line. We had a meeting today with a tentative committee of five, three men, a WO and one officer, myself. It should be a good show if we can get it going.

At present we are supposed to be out of the line though the division is in reserve. Most of our battalions are pretty weak numerically after the recent stunts.

The Australian Corps has now been fighting steadily with only rests of a few days since the end of January 1918 but we are expected to get three to four months spell very soon. Men cannot endure this life forever.

### **25.8.18 Hamel**

It looks as if our little spell was coming to an end. Was up the line this afternoon visiting the reserve battalions and heard that there is probably a stunt brewing for the 5<sup>th</sup> Div. Major Sawers has been called up to the ADMS office this evening and we are anxiously awaiting the oil. Meanwhile I am getting my gear in order. Visited while up the line with the 55<sup>th</sup>, 56<sup>th</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Bns. One shell 60 yards away while at the 55<sup>th</sup>. I found the 56<sup>th</sup> and camped in the middle of a collection of buildings, well ministered to by Fritz. They were in a rickety house with a rickety piano salvaged from a Fritz dugout with two bottles of whiskey well pleased with the war and vamping out a duet about "the way to spell Woolloomooloo". They told a moving tale about a musical evening the night before interrupted by two bombs from Fritz at which they assumed the safe but undignified prone positions. Jim Stewart of the 54<sup>th</sup> was sitting in the trench having his hair cut and we chivvied one another.

### **12.9.18 – In rest Mesnel – 40 miles into the German lines and across the Somme.**

Most stirring times during the past fourteen days and tonight for the first time I sleep in comfort in my stretcher and in my pyjamas.

From Hamel to the present situation of 10,000 yards ahead of this we have had Fritz on the run beating him from place to place at very slight loss to ourselves, comparatively speaking. My job has been bearer Captain as usual. From Hamel we moved up across country to the old German ADS where I passed a few nights before going to Hamel. Saw Norm en route and he wished me luck and a good blighty.

At the ADS 8<sup>th</sup> Bde was in the line and I was to run the R sector. I went to live in the big dump 1,000 yards forward and bearers were posted at 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> RAPS. 56<sup>th</sup> Bn was here in reserve.

Had one bad half hour in the wood at 30<sup>th</sup> RAP. It was shelling like fun and we had a run for our money finished up in the middle of a battery of 18 pdrs which he was shelling. Out and on again into the RAP. Stayed here 40 minutes and ten minutes after we left a shell killed 8 men around it. Two, Yates and Smith, our



own men. Brown was severely wounded. Boots, the other member of the squad escaped unharmed.

Soon the Boche went back and we forward after him. Lace's and Wakely's squad had a very rough passage in forward posts just before this. The next day was up to the culvert. All our personal and medical material had to be transported forwards and I had a pretty busy time. Barely at the culvert an hour, I decided to push on further as our line was going ahead at a famous rate. Taking the car I pushed on with Captain Fay & Major Sawers to Fancancourt and up the rise beyond where we could find no trace of the war except a few dead Germans and much ruined village. No shells, all quiet. The road was blocked with fallen trees and coming back we struck a land mine which blew the car to pieces and the three of us, driver & orderly all over the road. We all escaped with a severe shaking and a fright but I am still a bit deaf from the concussion. The car was finished. Chassis and back axle broken, both wheels off and car body smashed to ribbons.

After this we walked back collected the bearers and started out again after this elusive Boche. Again all our medical supplies had to be put in a car and pushed ahead. I took a Sunbeam and went on to Estrees, another old German hospital. We were now on the old Somme battlefield of 1915 – 16 pitted and scarred beneath the green grass with shell holes. The village itself is absolutely razed to the ground and you could pass it and never see a village at all.

Here we lived in concrete shelters for one night. Some fool fired a few Fritz flares he found and one of our planes thinking he was over Fritzland dropped his load all around us.

Next day more advance as far as Belloy where I slept the night in an old dugout near brigade HQ and once more got the medical dump of stores up.

By this time it had been decided to brigade the bearers of each ambulance so first. having served the division we now had to serve our own brigade. Next day we marched with the brigade to a trench on E10d behind Barleux, the 14<sup>th</sup> brigade being in reserve waited in a trench the whole of that afternoon, the night and next morning. The 55<sup>th</sup> were in the trench and would not keep down off the skyline. Fritz soon spotted them and began to shell. The first 8 inch howitzer was 15 yards off our dugout and smothered us in dust and fumes. We cleared further along and his 2<sup>nd</sup> was two yards behind on the edge of the trench and buried Bowden, covering him with chalk from head to foot. Much wind up! Finally found a small deep dugout and risking a mine crawled down and spent the night in comparative safety but rare discomfort. McGlashan here got his Paris leave and left me alone with Major Beard. I envied him but he was honest

and said he was not sorry to go so we wished him luck with the best face imaginable.

At 12 noon next day the brigade set off up north in artillery formation. Fritz spotted them and the last we saw our wonderful boys were sailing ahead under a pretty thick barrage of shell.

This move was due to the fact that the 15<sup>th</sup> Bde had not been able to get across the river in front of Barleux and so we were sent up north of the river to make a flank attack down through Peronne and so give them a chance which we duly did.

When the battalions set out we decided to give them a start and avoid the shelling and hence passing around behind Flancourt where everything was perfectly quiet. We crossed the river at Feuillere, picked up the brigade again late in the evening and moved up with them to Clery with a Boche balloon terribly close staring straight down the road. He could see up plainly and just as the brigade cleared the village and we were in it on the railway line the storm burst. Shell after shell. I was with two sergeants and we dived for the only God sent dugout we had seen for miles. The brigade halted that night in cuttings in front of the village and he shelled heavily all night with the big stuff. Our casualties were pretty heavy. Bowden was again blown up and Harry Money was killed outright to everybody's regret.

For us all it was a fearful night. He put the candle out four times with big ones twenty or thirty yards off the dugout. It was a crazy affair at best and at times I gave up all hope and lay smoking waiting for the one that was going to finish us. We could hear the gun go off, the whistle of the shell gradually coming in a rapid crescendo ending in a frantic swishing shriek and a crash which made the dugout tremble and brought bits of earth all dropping in. At the end of a night of this my nerves were pretty stretched. But our boys were sleeping in an open trench and had just as a bad a time. One gruesome incident: A batch of 50 German prisoners were assembled at a cross road in the village when he put a shell of the heaviest calibre right on them. Heads, legs, arms and limbs everywhere. Ghastly! In the morning dead men dead horses shattered and torn buildings whilst up and down the road dashed the serried traffic of an advance. All became quiet about 9 o'clock and we sallied out and washed in the river, cooked some breakfast amongst the scenes of ruin and desolation and pushed ahead to locate the brigade which had advanced in the early morning.

A mile along the road in a cutting where an ambulance post was stationed an orderly brought me a note from RMO Captain James, 50<sup>th</sup> Bn stating that he had 10 wounded and no car. Borrowed Ford car and pushed right on another kilo to the RAP along a road beneath the nose of two Fritz balloons. Crowd of bearers

all followed. Fritz spotted the movements and just as the car loaded up and left a 5.9 lobbed 20 yards over us. Exit to the dugout. Established a forward post at this point and found dugout for self and personnel 100 yards back. Everything remained pretty quiet here and remained here a couple of nights whilst the brigade took Peronne. Established big dump of medical material here. Just before stunt came off I received locations of RMO's and organised a scheme of evacuation via Clery to Feulliere but after things quietened down a bit and our line was in front Peronne we side tracked the wounded across a bridge at Halle O24a, Ford post in rear of village and hence to ADS Herbecourt so that our sick now went to our division instead of to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div.

Whilst in this spot H13b26 we were just opposite Mons St Quentin and had the pleasure of watching him paste the empty village till all was blue. The Boche prisoners worked like Trojans carrying out our wounded which were plentiful. It was no uncommon sight to see a wounded German and Australian limping out arms around one another's necks for support joking and swapping souvenirs and cigarettes. Most of the prisoners seemed only too happy to be out of it.

We were relieved by 8<sup>th</sup> Bde and spent two days in rest on O17 on the river bank in enlivened by the whistling of rifle bullets over us all day from fellows shooting duck. One man was killed by such a stray bullet next door to us.

To our dismay we heard that the war was going on again with our brigade in support. So we marched one evening via Flaucourt to Eterpigny following in the wake of the brigade as usual. I pushed right up with the battalions and spent the night in a rat infested cellar at Eterpigny.

Next morning the Boche was still going back across the river on the ruins of a bridge demolished by the Huns.

6 Hun planes spotted us when the bridge was full of men and made things busy with their machine guns. Bullets were cracking about but I saw no one hit. I was 100 yards off the bridge and went to earth in a convenient cellar. Am afraid I am no brave soldier for all these infantry people just sat down, kept still and took their chance.

Hence on to Le Mesnil where we slept in a bombproof shelter of Fritz's just inside the village. Early in the morning word came that the brigade was moving again to my runner's intense annoyance "F – the Hun. Why doesn't he leave the war in one place a little while".

However we had a leisurely breakfast, a smoke and pushed on up to P16 Central where we found the companies of 53<sup>rd</sup>, also a few shells. Went to HQ at P15a39 and lived there for 2 days finally following the division out on being relieved by

the 4<sup>th</sup> Div. We have come back just behind Le Mesnel P16b28 with the brigade all around and here we are to rest for 3 weeks. I got tired of living in a trench so now have located a deep dugout where for the first time for weeks I can smoke write read and sleep in comfort and safety for he bombs a good deal around this area.

Many of the huts were mined. Precautions against mines – pulling out a wire, watch - hung on wall – nothing happened.

Such is the tale of the past few weeks briefly told but it had been full of incident and life & seems ages so that it is difficult to recollect the small happenings and incidents of dugout life.

I have recommended 8 men, 2 for DCM's and 6 for MM.

Beard told me he was recommending me for the MC – but there is an old proverb about chickens and hatching.

Re this new education scheme I have applied for the position of Education Officer for the AAMC of 5<sup>th</sup> Div. – a job that will afford me more interest than the one I have now.

Had a letter from Norm today. He is in hospital, No. 5 AGH, with gastro-enteritis, just recovering – & missed all the stunting.

#### **14.9.18**

We began our education classes today with great éclat.

Saw Billy Hughes pass in a car with all the diggers rushing out and shouting "Hello Billy. When are we coming out?" They thought it was a great joke.

Many of our 1914 men are going back, five more today. McGlashan went to a CCS yesterday. WO Hutton went to Mont Vigés as a QM, Kennedy to 4<sup>th</sup> field ambulance. We have a new Captain Brent and a new QM, Lieutenant Barber and a new Sergeant Manques. Great changes and a new WO Sword.

Great bombing activity here last night. Two planes brought down in sight by Archie fire.

#### **15.9.18**

Went down to Billoy by car today. Motored nearly 20 miles to get some chalk for the education classes and then got two sticks.

### 19.9.18: Behind Le Mesnel

Still in the same place. The attractions of this place are not numerous. The village is one mass of ruined desolation and rubbish heaps with a few decent huts erected by ourselves and Fritz at various times. The four battalions are in and around the village and the RMO's often drop in for a chat or a meal. James, 56<sup>th</sup>, was down tonight. The four RMO's in addition to the him are 53<sup>rd</sup>, Beath, 54<sup>th</sup> Stewart, 55<sup>th</sup> McKay at present relieved by a new man, Robertson.

We are camped in the open field at the back of the village studded with shell holes and wire. Three thousand yards back lies the river and away on the left, Peronne. Up forward the only sign of war by day is our balloons like specks in the distance and yesterday we saw one brought down in flames by the enemy. By night the sky is lit by the flashes of guns and often search lights. A few nights ago Fritz was over here and we brought down two. It is a great sight to see his planes in our searchlights with shells bursting around them.

The men have a recreation hut with books, games and a gramophone and with these, football and this education scheme we are managing to break the monotony for them.

There was a big stunt on up at St Quentin and the neighbouring front today. So far 3,000 prisoners and 60 guns for the Australian Corps, 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Div. only in the line. We are anxiously awaiting further news for on that depends whether we go back into the line or not.

There is some dissatisfaction at the attitude of the English newspapers which lately have persistently ignored the exploits of the Australians though a few days ago they went to the other extreme.

The correct opinion seems to be that the Corps is going out for the three months rest, only hope it is true. The division has been constantly on the line for the last 8 months excepting only 15 days, 10 days of which were in the Vois de Mas.

The day before yesterday Captain Brent left for the divisional wing under the most unsavoury circumstances, too disgusting to be particularised.

Only 3 MO's in the Ambulance at present, Wesley, Parkinson and myself, a new QM Barber and Wilcare, the dentist.

No news from Norm though I hear by letter that he had been in the hospital No. 5 general with Gastro-enteritis, missed the big stunt.

All 1914 are going back, 29 at present in the unit. Leave is very free just now so it really looks as if nothing big is intended for us for a while. With luck I should have leave again in another 8 weeks. Me for Italy and Nice.

The fortunes of war have been with us this summer, 175,000 prisoners to the allies on the western front since July 18. The prospects look rosy for an early peace next year.

There is a peace proposal at present by Germany but its purpose is political rather than genuine.

### **21.9.18 Le Mesnil**

Was visited by Lieutenant Col Long, Director of Education, yesterday. He professed himself very pleased with our scheme and in reference to my application for the position of Education Officer was kind enough to say that he would like to have one and left with the intention of interviewing General Howse to see if he would let me go. So at present I am awaiting the results.

Gave L/Cpl Turner a note of introduction to Vera as he is returning home on Australian leave.

Norm wrote today from No. 11 Convalescent Camp where he is convalescing from his attack of gastro-enteritis.

Am hoping I get this education job. It commences with six weeks training at Oxford but do not think there is much hope of them letting me go.

1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Div. to be relieved tonight after a very successful stint 3 to 4 days ago. American Army taking over. Rumours of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divs. going back into the line for a short stint but I do not think it probable from some of the correspondence in the OR today. Hope not. If we go in we are leaving all 1914 men out.

### **22.9.18 Le Mesnil**

Fay came back from leave today. The 54<sup>th</sup> Bn is being broken up tomorrow and the men are so sore they refused to go on parade today.

A Fritz plane came over this morning and lingered overhead for an hour despite vigorous A A fire.

The weather is now beginning to break and winter is once more approaching.

Still in doubt as to where the Australians are going next but hopefully it will be out for a rest.

Stewart, RMO 54<sup>th</sup>, is returning as Captain to this Ambulance on the breaking up of the battalion so we now have 3 Captains and 4 Majors.

Rations are being cut down again in a few days from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the immense disgust of the boys.

#### **24.9.18 Le Mesnil**

The Colonel came back from leave yesterday night.

The air is full of rumours which today have culminated in orders to post the bearers with battalions tomorrow morning so we are going into the line once more to crack our heads against the famous Hindenburg line. The heads apparently expect to break through and it looks as if we will be the division with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> to exploit any success.

The 54<sup>th</sup> was disbanded today owing to lack of reinforcements. I believe it was pathetic. The men came on parade and put all their heart into their drill. They were told that they were being disbanded and were about to march off to be distributed between the other three battalions.

FORM FOURS! RIGHT! So far every man moves with a click. QUICK MARCH! – Not a man moved nor would they even for the Brigadier. They stuck to their billets and refused to move. Their rations were cut off so they arranged with the men in the dump who are in sympathy to issue them and so they remain tonight, a loyal band who refused to leave their own battalion. NCO's and officers marched out but at least 50% still remain out on strike and I believe it is the same in other brigades in which they are disbanding one battalion.

Americans are at present holding the line, we are to take over so perhaps they will make the first attack and we will go through them when they are tired. Rotten luck! for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> are well and truly out in rest in Picquigny.

Probably this will be our last stunt in the line and we will be out for the winter.

#### **25.9.18 Le Mesnil**

The 54<sup>th</sup> Bn still remains defying all authority. They obey every command with the greatest alertness and precision so long as they are not asked to march out. I believe the 60<sup>th</sup> Bn 15<sup>th</sup> Bde is the same. It is a very peculiar position arising

from the esprit de corps which has arisen among these men in their years of fighting together and now they propose to destroy these traditions. One cannot help but be very sympathetic with the poor chaps. As one chap put it "I have been 54<sup>th</sup> Bn for three years and I'll be 54<sup>th</sup> Bn or nothing".

But these men remain without officers and very few NCO's drawing their rations secretly from the ASC and prepared to hang out.

The situation will need very tactful handling for they have the sympathy of all the battalion diggers.

There can be no question of force by Australians and any attempt by Tommies would lead to the most serious consequences.

I venture to predict that this will happen if they stick out. They will order the other three battalions into the line and then appeal to the 54<sup>th</sup> not to desert their cobbles and it will work too if I know the Australian. His code of morality is very rough but it does not countenance leaving one's pals in the lurch. He would sooner die than be suspected of shirking the line.

Still in my opinion the Australian is not getting a fair deal. They are 16,000 miles from home and in the hands of the heads. It is a case of driving a willing horse to death and here our own division has fought with only a few days rest ever since February 1<sup>st</sup> 1918. The battalions have grown smaller and smaller until they are too weak to act as battalions. What do they propose to do? Give us a rest? Yes! And after we do another hard stunt they will get these strong battalions by cutting up and distributing it amongst the rest. Probably, after that two battalions out of the three and so on so that they can send us home in one boat and so avoid the transport problem. I verily believe that if we had the reinforcements we would always be in the line. So for Australians sake I am glad the conscription was turned down.

It would mean Australia denuded of her very best and it is bad enough now. To slaughter all our men and leave ourselves manless and powerless after the war would be a very blind patriotism. We are prepared to do our share but not unless our boys get fair play as they have reached a certain human limit just now and need at least three months out.

It is a relief to write this even in a diary for manifestly an officer cannot express such opinions as these here. It would be the end of all discipline. I have heard the men say such things and endeavour to contradict them but without any inward conviction on my part.



The British newspapers recently have studiously ignored the achievements of our men during the last two months and class their achievements under the generic term "British Troops" though we have done more in terms of work and actual captives than any other single corps in the British Army. 21,000 prisoners, 2 – 300 guns and 106 villages have fallen before us in eight weeks, after seven months continuous fighting and they ask us to go into the line again.

It is taking advantage of the willing generosity of the Australian – such an action as this. Our boys will fight till they drop but they drive a willing horse to death. They are splendid chaps and worthy of better treatment.

Before I came to this war I had an admiration for all things English and British. The name of London now stinks to me for a cold inhospitable city, its streets swarming with immoral women who accost one at every corner and its people showing a deplorable looseness of morals in many ways. The theatre is prostituted to semi-indecent smutty plays and reviews in which the *ruè* attitude towards life is taken as the *sine qua non*.

I hate to write these things but I say "thank God I am an Australian"

### **26.9.18 Le Mesnil**

It is settled we are to do a stunt against the Hindenburg line. New maps are through and the place looks one maze of trenches, wire and deep tunnels to shelter the Germans.

It looks a tough problem but our boys will do it if it is possible. Brigade orders are now out but I have not seen them yet and do not know the exact part we will have to play. It will probably be the part of troops on reserve behind Americans to exploit any success once they are through the line – a repetition of the stunt on August 8<sup>th</sup> last.

The 54<sup>th</sup> Bn in view of the necessity of settling the dispute has won hands down. The battalion is reorganised and officers and NCO's have rejoined and the battalion diggers have their wish – they will go into action as a complete unit. Stewart, the RMO came back to the Ambulance today but had orders to rejoin the battalion tonight.

Their transport is a sight – like a veterinary sections stable – filled with sick animals and corks. For as soon as the news got around some days ago that they were to be broken up, everyone for miles around came in to swap sick horses. We tried but were too late.

So we are up against the Hindenburg line at last. This tough proposition has loomed up nearer and nearer for the last month and now "we are right into it". In one place he has a tunnel, the underground canal, where he can shelter a whole division of men.

It is a 25,000 yard march to get to the line from here.

Sergeant Morgan, L/Corp Grenners and Private Farelly were "mentioned in despatches" today, the latter two, two of the eight men I recommended for decoration so I presume the other six have received decorations though not yet notified.

Had a letter from Norm a couple of days ago. He is at a convalescent camp and enjoying life mightily.

The Colonel and Major Parkinson were up at the ADS site, a place called Templeux and came under shell fire on the road. Two observation balloons brought down up forward today.

### **28.9.18 Hervilly**

Yesterday at 6.30 we marched out of camp at Le Mesnil and junctioned with the 14<sup>th</sup> Bde at the starting point on cross roads 3 kilos up. There we waited an hour or so and hence pushed on. Major Parkinson had taken the bearers so I in the absence of Major Wesley set out with the tent subdivision at 6.30 pm. Major Wesley caught us up at the starting point so I crawled into an ambulance wagon and fell asleep on a bundle of food and woke at Hervilly.

In the morning I had been up with Captain Godfrey, staff captain of the brigade and been allotted billets so I left the ambulance and joined Major Parkinson at Hervilly where we are now. Has the usual ruined desolation of a war area village with ruined houses and mud everywhere. It is raining today which is unfortunate in view of the stunt which is coming off.

Good news! Bulgaria has sued for peace and been refused, Turkey decisively defeated in Palestine, our troops nearing Cambrae, a seven mile advance on a forty mile front down south with 5,000 prisoners by the French. The Times gives quotes from speeches published in German papers and it seems that all the leading people in Germany are trying to bolster opinion up to the highest fighting pitch whilst at the same time preparing them for reverses.

### **30.9.18 – In the Hindenburg line.**

In front of Bellicourt. Leaving Hervilly yesterday morning we marched out along the "black" road passed Herbecourt at the tail of the 14<sup>th</sup> Bde – a long march punctuated by frequent halts, I had about 20 men, a horse ambulance and water cart and limber with medical supplies. The horse ambulance was loaded with stretchers and blankets and the road got worse and worse so that by the time we got to Villeret they were done out. There was a long halt about 1200 yards before the village during which we watched him vigorously shelling the road we had to pass along as it cut into the village. The intervening valley was filled with artillery and transport but luckily he kept his shells well into the village.

At 1.30 pm the brigade moved on again but I decided to keep the transport back in this place to push on later. I passed an anxious afternoon with a most intense headache watching the shelling straight forward at intervals all the afternoon. At 4 o'clock I gave the order to fall in and we pushed ahead through the village bumping into the 56<sup>th</sup> again in a trench just the other side, whereas I had expected them to be well away forward. As I came up the enemy began to plant shells very adjacent to our vehicles who had no shelter and of course the men had to stand by their horses. A bit of furious thinking decided me to beat a retreat back to the previous stop so we all turned and marched back the 2 kilos to where all was quiet. It was bitterly cold, half dark and raining. We found weatherproof dugouts for all our bearers and made a hot meal of fried meat and tea. I crawled into a dugout with two American MG officers and had a fine warm nights sleep undisturbed except by rats.

Meanwhile all had not been going well up forward. The Americans got a bit disorganised and our brigades advancing behind had a bit of a rough up with an organised line of Germans who had emerged from dugouts after the Americans passed.

Next morning at 6.15 am I received a message by runner that I was wanted up at the 56<sup>th</sup> Bn. I emerged after hastily putting on my boots into a cold cruel and rainy world, collected the sergeant and set out towards Villeret again. We had a sticky walk up with a good many shells flying and finally found the 56<sup>th</sup>, only 500 yards ahead than yesterday and wondering what on earth had happened for they were not in touch even with the brigade HQ and could tell me nothing except that the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> had advanced into the line at 5 am and by that time had hopped over into the Bosch.

(I am writing with gas mask on as our kind friend the Bosch has just dropped a gas shell right into our roof).

While this news left me in a quandary as to whether to stick to the 54<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> whom I had with me or to follow on and try to pick up the other two.

I decided to leave the transport where it was and stay with the 56<sup>th</sup> myself awaiting developments. I got a couple of runners and a corporal up to the men and lay here all day receiving all kinds of rumours contradicting each other and not able to make anything out of them at all. The 53<sup>rd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> were in the line but where I could not find out. After a day of doubt and perplexity at 3 pm Major Parkinson came up and told me that he had located both battalions and gave me a location to push off to and establish a relay post at about 4 kilos across country and away up the "red" road.

So first of all back to the transport behind Villeret to collect the bearers. Major Parkinson took the transport off my hands back to BHQ and off we started across shell torn country for this place as near a bee line as I could steer. A few shells are lobbing in the village but none in the fields. He counter attacked whilst we were half way and our artillery got going to some order so that it was amidst some din and screaming of shells that we landed at our destination none from Fritz luckily in our direction.

I established this post here in a sunken road and Fritz has shelled it once or twice already (gas all clear, can take my mask off) so here we are actually in the Hindenberg line with our troops across it to the extent of a mile or so. The area is filled with Americans and we should fairly eat him tomorrow. Not so good as we had hoped but still good enough.

#### **1.10.18 – In the Hindenberg line (Same place Wiencourt sheet G3d57)**

We have been here in the same old dugout in the sunken road expecting to advance all day but nothing has happened. 53<sup>rd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> are on the left of Bellecourt 500 yards due east of us, 54<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> are on the northern end of Nauroy. All day long I have been in doubt as to what was happening in a state of dark obscurity as to my next move. I have not known whether to advance north or east for we are in the midst of a big salient. I did not know where our battalions expected to go into the line and consequently where to move myself. So I have stayed here all day shelled at intervals by Fritz in this sunken road. The Colonel visited us this morning and arrived in the middle of a holocaust of gas shells. He stayed and gave me the good oil so that I was able to make arrangements for rations, supplies etc. He told me how the stunt was going and that the front line ran east of Joncourt, west of Estrees and west of Le Catchet. As he was leaving I accompanied him up to the entrance of the dugout with Major James, DADMS 5<sup>th</sup> Div. A shell landed 8 yards away in the cutting and sprayed us liberally with mud whereat he made off.

So today has passed, the boys here have been in high good humour, just enough carries to keep them busy, a few shells to make it interesting and tonight a rum issue, rations, water, mail and medical stores all arrived together but no candles.

These are very scarce so tonight we made slushy lamps with all the grease we could collect. Cigarettes are at a premium also and in spite of all here we are home and dry – a happy crew.

The war has receded from us all day and tonight I sent a runner up to RAP's 53 and 55 who came back with the news that the battalions expect relief tomorrow and there is no news of a move forward. So all is gay on the western front.

The Colonel told me this morning I had been appointed Education Officer and leave for Oxford on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, the day after tomorrow. If only I can keep my head down till then. Five weeks at Oxford. Ye Gods & little fishes! After 12 months in France. Won't Vera be pleased!

I am going to try to get my batman across with me.

The road down here when we came up was littered with dead Yanks lying as they fell in the advance and only today they have begun to bury them. In this dugout lying on a bunk was a Yankee Sergeant, the whole top of his skull blown clean off and his brains scattered all over the wall, killed as I learned afterwards by one of his mates fooling with a German automatic pistol he did not understand. At first we thought it had been done by a booby trap left by Fritz as he lay so peacefully in his bunk with the Bible he had been reading in his hands. Roger Lowe was his name. So we carefully inspected all our bunks for traps and not till we spotted the bullet holes in the wall and in his skull could we solve the mystery. Also information we got from passing American soldiers.

This show has been a rare mix up as I will explain later. Cannot write it here in the line as the book might fall into Fritz's hands.

**4.10.18 Hotel Ivanhoe, London** – a home of peace and quiet after all the bustle and noise of a great battle.

The shell which nearly lobbed on the CO & self was a gas shell & the same night my eyes became very sore and I felt absolutely miserable. So much so that the CO coming up again on the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> told me I was to go out, pick up my pass for Blighty at the wagon lines and push off for England. I rushed out of the line, changed, packed, slept the night in the division wing near Peronne, next night in Boulogne and hence across to London today arriving at the hotel about 4 pm. Have just come back from "Shanghai" in Drury Lane where I saw Dorothy Brouton and Alfred Lester. What contrast we get out here. Last time I saw these two was in Sydney in the "Arcadians" with Vera and mother.

Re the stunt at Bellecourt The Yanks went over with too few officers and too many men so that things got frightfully mixed. Every time an officer was

knocked all his men came out with him and wandered about like sheep. The most remarkable part was this – the mopping up parties did not do their job and Fritz came out of his holes behind the Yankee line after it passed over and were engaged heavily by our 15<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Bde who walked into them in the fog at 40 yards range so we had Germans in front, then Yanks then more Germans and then the Australians. Our boys had a very busy time. Then the Yankee Q branch failed in the rationing and the Americans were wandering about on the loose end without rations or water. Their medical evacuations were rotten and mostly fell on us. The men fight with plenty of guts but their staff work is rotten. They will learn by grim experience. This has been lesson number one.

Fourteen of our own tanks halted on the brow of a hill behind the infantry and in ten minutes not one remained. They were all knocked out by 5.9's at short range, and blazing with petrol.

A ghastly death for the crews! Finally, the night of the day I left, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div relieved us but the poor 54<sup>th</sup> Bn was left in to do another stunt probably as a punishment for its insubordination.

Am writing in a snow white bed and it seems hard to believe I was dodging the big cromps only two days ago.

The Education School is at Cambridge, Christchurch College. I hope it indicates the end of my active period of war.

The casualties in the Ambulance in the last stunt were:

Hanson, Smith J.W., Wilson  
(Killed in Ballecourt at 53<sup>rd</sup> RAP)  
Lance Corporal Benham – Severely wounded  
Wardrop, wounded

I recommended the Benham & King for the military medal. The last Clery list is not out yet. I know I was up for the MC and am wondering whether I am to get it.

I don't think I ever mentioned that Lance Corporal Harry Morey was killed in Clery on the night of 30.8.18.

By the tone of the papers Germany is now getting dead scared.

### **6.10.18 – Hotel Ivanhoe – London**

All day yesterday spent the morning buzzing around Horseferry Road and the afternoon walking around London. Today went with 6<sup>th</sup> Bn Officer Coking to

Pinner and had an agreeable country walk. Lunch at Watford, afternoon tea at Pinner.

Off to Cambridge tomorrow at 8.45 am.

### **Cambridge 8.10.18**

The Education School is a fact. We are now in Cheshunt College about 40 of us and due for a three week's course when some of us go back to France and some remain in England. I wonder where I will go. It is a perfect haven of rest and quiet – no military air about the school, just lecture and more like the university course over again than anything else – a perfect haven of peace and quiet and intellectual thought. Discussions every day after the lectures and each afternoon off from 1 – 5.

Cambridge is a quiet university town full of old world nooks and cottages. I was in at the library today which has in it a copy of every book published in the UK. It is glorious and I can see where some of my time is going to be spent.

I am billeted with a Mr Dent, a musical genius who has given me the run of his house and very comfortable too. It's great. The best that I have struck since leaving home. I am beginning to feel how good it is to think.

### **Cambridge 9.10.18**

Enjoying the mental recreation and physical ease and relaxation from military life more than anything I can remember for a long time. I wish I could work in England on this scheme but I don't suppose my luck will extend that far.

HB Chidgey is in this school, a capital deep thinking chap and we wander around together.

There is no military atmosphere about this school. It is just an academic life in Khaki.

### **Cambridge, 77 Panton Street, 14.10.18**

The first week of the school is over and has been an A1 experience full of argument discussion and reading and some illuminating problems have been brought to light.

Today we had an address by a Mr Holmes Lane, an expert in Education of Criminal Children. His talk upon his little Commonwealth is one of the most fascinating lectures I have ever listened to. For the last week we have been on

the river twice but much of our leisure time has spent in the book shop and Cambridge Library which has a copy of every book published in the UK. They are sent on to them by copyright law.

### **Cambridge 17.10.18**

Another remarkable man addressed us today, a Mr Goodnough – a miner working in the pits and yet an authority on Labour and Labour Conditions in the modern world – a shrewd head.

It is a great pleasure to meet men of all trades equally on a basis in discussion.

Was on the river trying to punt today but it is more difficult than it looks. Did not fall overboard however.

### **Cambridge 29.10.18**

Have not written in my diary for some time for I have been indulging in a perfect orgy of reading of all sorts.

This School has been a wonderful success and personally I have enjoyed it far more than my last lonely leave. It is a great advantage to have contact with men of all trades and professions and to meet them on an equal footing in discussion of all kinds.

I have been appointed as Divisional Educational Officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Div which means living at Division HQ, 1/6 pay more per day and a motor bike and side car to run around in. My work will be to superintend the organisation of the show in the division.

Tomorrow we leave Cambridge with its boating, canoeing and punting and go to London. Two day's leave then back to France. It is hard to leave this comfy billet of Mr Dent's, 77 Panton Street, where I have been treated as an honoured guest.

### **7.11.18 5<sup>th</sup> Div HQ**

Took up my job here on 5.11.18 and was at first somewhat at sea as where to go and what to do. Am still more or less so but am gradually settling down. Have applied to get Norm as my Sergeant and am hoping it comes off. We are located at Oisemont, a fair size village.



### **10.11.18 Oisemont, 5<sup>th</sup> Div HQ**

These days are momentous in their historical importance. Germany now stands alone and within the last few days has sent plenipotentiaries to General Foch asking for armistice. She has until Monday 11 am, ie, tomorrow morning to decide whether she will reply yes or no to our conditions. It seems a foregone conclusion that the answer will be yes and the war will be over and the last shot fired for we may take it that the conditions will be so severe that never more will Germany recommence this war.

Cummins came into the mess with the current reports and reeled out in one string "The Kaiser has abdicated, the Crown Prince has cleared out. Prince Max is running the show for Germany and the 4<sup>th</sup> army cannot find the Bosch in front of them".

These rumours have now been confirmed so at least I was told.

It is marvellous how quietly everyone takes the end of the war.

There is very little enthusiasm but just a quaint kind of satisfaction now we have won.

Our education work will have to move rapidly now to keep pace with the times

There is a rumour of a move in the division next week to clear the area which is for demobilisation.

### **14.11.18 Oisemont**

On Monday 11.11.18 Germany signed the armistice and next day asked that peace negotiations be opened at once as she is in danger of a famine. A mild revolution seems to be taking place. The Kaiser has abdicated and fled to Holland. Rumour has it that the Crown Prince has been murdered by his own soldiers. For the last three days we have been living in peace. The question of the moment is what is going to happen to the Australian Corps. I am hoping that we go to Germany for at least a month or so for the allies are occupying Germany up to the Rhine.

### **24.11.18 Oisemont**

Tomorrow the division moves forward to near Landricies but whether we will stay there or move further forward into Germany nobody seems to know. It is very uphill work here as Divisional Education Officer, everything is so new and one's position in relation other departments is so undefined. So today is my last

day at Oisemont. I am going up in the Ford car belonging to the Comfort's Officer, Captain Sherwood.

### **28.11.18 Favril – about 20 kilos east of Le Cateau**

Came up here by motor lorry and we were three days on the road. Slept the first night at the Hotel du Commerce Amiens, the second night as a billet in Bohain only freed six week ago from the four year's tyranny of the Bosch. The madam could not do enough for us and poured into our ears a tale of woe, of fines, imprisonment, shooting of civilians for keeping pigeons, of bad treatment of prisoners, especially of the English. She plied us with coffee and nearly wept because she could not give us any blankets for "Messieurs les Boches ont pris tout". It was very interesting coming across all the ground now so peaceful, which we covered in the recent fighting Amiens – Villers Bretenneux – Warfusee – Faucanourt, Villers Carbonnel, Peronne, Roisel, Hargecourt, Bellecourt and hence via Le Cateau, Catillon to Favril where I believe we only stay for two to three days.

I have a fairly comfortable billet in a partially shattered house. There in this village the people tell the same tale of maltreatment by the Germans. The village was left in a filthy condition by them – they are filthy animals with no ideas of sanitation whatever – a living room with all the debris of food for four months heaped up in the corner – dead men and horses buried under only 12 inches of soil. Stables knee deep in manure.

The towns from here back to Villers Bretenneux are stripped bare and the people have been robbed of everything, cattle, fowls, pigs, farm machinery, furniture, blankets, metal, bedding. All gone. The consolation is he will have to pay the whole deal now.

### **20.12.18 Solre le Chateau**

We moved up here on the 18<sup>th</sup> and are now safely stopped for three months or more in this town. It is a fairly large place but at present indescribably filthy. Though the Germans do not seem to have despoiled it to the same extent as other places.

### **15.1.19 Solre le Chateau**

Education is now moving ahead. We have 300 men in technical schools & army workshops and about 4,000 men is classes in the division. About 12 cwt. of books have at last arrived and will be distributed out tomorrow.

The Central Divisional School is also in the embryo stage with about 60 students and it is a heartbreaking struggle trying to get instructors for everybody is on the qui vive to get the first boat home.

