

A Rifleman's Journal
1917

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A Rifleman's Journal - 1917

The source of the material from which this journal has been compiled is a small pocket diary in which brief entries were made daily throughout the writer's short spell on active service in 1917, together with a notebook containing miscellaneous data relating to the functions of sniper and observer and relevant personal correspondence.

In hospital, as soon as recovery permitted the use of a pen and before memory faded with the passage of time the diary was rewritten into a more comprehensive record. The events and incidents, both trivial and tragic, and the names of those who shared in the writer's experiences are authentic.

The writer feels he was not a noteworthy asset to the British Army - quite apart from the bouts of misfortune for which he accepts no responsibility. Be that as it may, he and others on the parade ground were frequently addressed by NCOs as "Sailor".

Ernest A Bates



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Introduction

Today would have been my dad's 120th birthday.

He died in 1966 when I was just 12 years old. His name was Ernest Alfred Bates - 'Ernie' to his friends and family.

I regret that I didn't have a chance to have grown up conversations with him about his experiences of life in the first half of the 20th century. I do however remember him as a kind, gentle person with a sometimes wicked sense of humour.

I also remember the terrible scars on his stomach and that the little finger of his right hand was missing. These were a testament to the wounds he suffered in the trenches in the First World War in 1917 - 100 years ago.

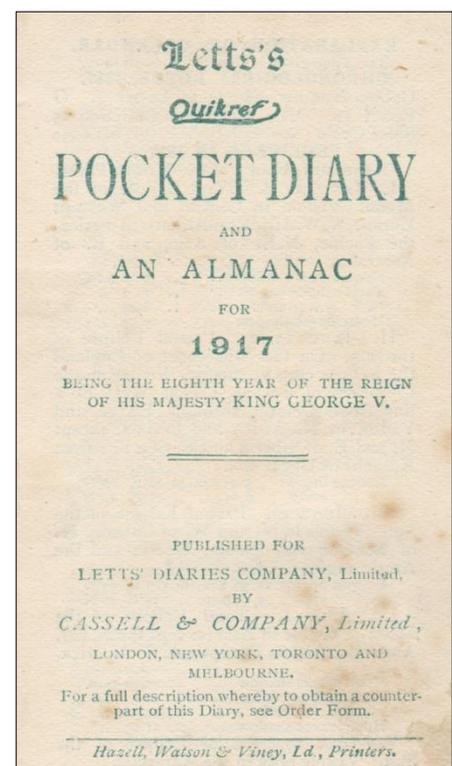
He kept a diary of his experiences during that year. These start from the day he signed up in London on 12th February 1917 to join the Queen's Westminster Rifles, through his training with the troops in England before embarking for France, the preparations for battle ... and his experience of being wounded by shrapnel in the trenches during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in Belgium in August of that same year.

He never spoke to me about his experiences in the war - and other family members confirm that it wasn't a subject that he was particularly open about with any of them.

However he did start to write up the brief notes from his diary as a journal ... as he recounted later.

"In hospital, as soon as recovery permitted the use of a pen and before memory faded with the passage of time the diary was rewritten into a more comprehensive record."

I was aware several times during my early childhood of him sitting down writing and updating what I later learned was this journal. I presume that he was aware that he was unlikely to be able to share his memories with



me directly and it was therefore a legacy that he wished to leave for me and for the rest of the family.

The first entry in his journal is for 12th February 1917, three days after his 20th birthday. Some days will not have an entry and some days only a very short comment ... however many entries do go into great detail and show something of the human side of those caught up in the horrors of war.

Since my dad had been in a reserved occupation as a junior clerk at the War Office during the early part of the war he could only originally sign up to attest his willingness to go on active service "when required". He wrote about this in the introduction to his journal and it can be found in the Prologue.

Tim Bates

9th February 2017

Prologue (1915 - 1916)

12th December 1915 - The Recruiting Centre in the local Town Hall was packed to the doors. Several hundred enthusiastic recruits were milling around - young men, old men and some who were mere boys. They came from all walks of life and wore either cap or bowler hat according to the status symbol of the times. There was no attempt at segregation into age groups, and no distinction between the fit and the obviously unfit. The sole purpose of the day was to ensure that every volunteer present was signed on for the duration - the sorting out would come later.

We took the oath as one conglomerate whole by repeating the words after an army captain standing on a raised dais. The operation was concluded by Army Sergeants obtaining each recruit's signature and presenting him with one certificate of attestation, one khaki armband emblazoned with a large red crown, and, of course the Queen's shilling.

The certificate read - *"The above named man has been attested and transferred to the Army Reserve until required for service, when he will be sent a Notice Paper informing him as to the date, time and place at which he is to report himself. Fourteen days' notice will be given"*.

(9 38 79) W 11367 - 1426 500,000 10/15 H W V (P 1103) 101061
2937 - 4148 300,000 (30) 114.5 Army Form W 3194.

Name Ernest W. Bates No. _____

Address ~~45 Winton Avenue~~
~~East Hill~~

Group Number 1.

Date of Attestation 12 Dec 1915

The above-named man has been attested and transferred to the Army Reserve, until required for service, when he will be sent a Notice Paper, informing him as to the date, time and place at which he is to report himself. Fourteen days' notice will be given.

N.B.—Any change of address should be immediately notified to the Recruiting Officer East Hill

Officer East Hill Station. [Signature] Signature.

12/12/15 Date. [Signature] Rank.

The following day with some trepidation I informed my Departmental Chief that I had enlisted. The elderly "Fuzzy" with the pointed beard and enormous mop of snow-white hair laughed rudely, and with some truth, but much to my discomfiture said, "You don't look the belligerent type". He went on to say that no harm was done since my civil employment was classified as a "Reserve Occupation" and I would not be released. The promised Notice Paper from the Army never came.

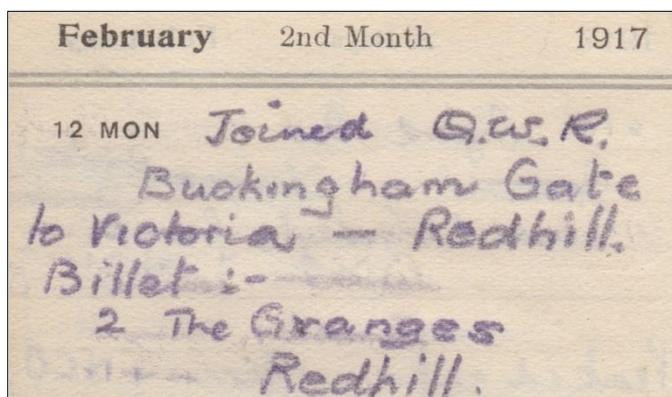
In those early days of the war Whitehall was still a hotbed of Recruiting Sergeants with their broad red sashes and cap ribbons of red, white and blue; whilst military bands marched up and down to the everlasting strains of Colonel Bogey. Misguided females, in an excess of patriotic fervour, served their King by sticking white feathers in the jacket lapels of every member of the male species whether he be 18 or 80! The centre of this activity was the Horse Guards Parade where the military might of Britain was on show and the Recruiting Sergeants pounced like hawks on the unwary. The Civil Servants, forbidden to take up arms, became the "Cuthberts" of Whitehall - those little rabbits tucked away safely in their burrows, as depicted by serial cartoons in every issue of the Daily Mail. Kitchener still pointed his accusing finger at us from every hoarding.

It was not until February 1917 that large numbers of Civil Servants were released for military service and by formal transfer from the Army Reserve were free to join the Regiment of their choice. Meanwhile in **November 1916** I attended the Central Recruiting Depot at Great Scotland Yard for a medical classification and here it was the Army handed out its first indignity. After a somewhat cursory examination, the principal requirement being an ability to hop the length of the large room on one foot, and then back again on the other, I was pronounced A1 by the medico.

Actually he said, with obvious lack of enthusiasm, "You'll do". My return through the crowded hall of nature in the flesh was made with all the dignity possible in the circumstances, but before the sanctuary of the cubicle was reached a voice called to me to halt. For the benefit of the whole assembled company the MO, remarked in an unnecessarily loud voice, "slightly knock-kneed", and that serious blemish to my person was duly recorded in my medical history for all time.

Training in England

12th February 1917



By 1917 the situation on the Western Front was grim. At home the flag waving had ceased long before and manpower was becoming desperately short. The London Territorial Regiments were anxious to retain their voluntary status and, in spite of their depleted ranks occasioned by the severe losses sustained on the Somme and subsequent battles, resisted for as long as possible the intake of men transferred from the County Regiments and the Conscripts.

A colleague who hailed from Dumfries was released from the service at the same time, and together, on the 12th February 1917, we made our way to Buckingham Gate where the respective headquarters of two London Territorial Regiments stood side by side. My companion, understandably, was intent on joining the London Scottish, a regiment of some renown, and as a final gesture of goodwill I accompanied him into the Scottish Drill Hall, where "H" was immediately welcomed as a blood brother by a burly Scottish sergeant. They chatted interminably until I became restless in the alien atmosphere. At length the formalities were completed and "H" was back with the Clan. The burly sergeant then turned to me with an invitation to sign on the dotted line. I politely declined, explaining that I was under the impression that the London Scottish were decidedly choosy on the matter of ancestry and that I personally could boast no blood nearer the border than Harwich - a little Irish, maybe but no Scottish! He gave an assurance that in 1917 they were not all that particular and, moreover, implied that he would willingly commit perjury on my behalf. I gathered that his idea was to transfer my grandmother's birthplace from Dublin to Edinburgh!

Against the persuasive powers of the two Scots, and the memory of my cousin who died at Loos whilst serving with the London Scottish I was sorely tempted. I tried to visualise my skinny person arrayed in swinging kilt and sporran but the picture faded as the findings of the Medical Board registered. From that moment the pattern of the future, for good or ill, was fixed by one pair of ungainly knock-knees. Casting sentiment to the winds I crept out and entered the adjoining building¹. The formalities were soon over - the Queen's Westminster Rifles were "not all that particular".



Queen's Westminster Rifles headquarters - 58 Buckingham Gate, London
(Peter Daniel Collection)

Having spent the greater part of the day in the Drill Hall, struggling with uniform puttees and equipment, a very ill-assorted and self-conscious bunch of recruits undertook an exhausting and embarrassing march to Victoria Station - all of one half mile - where we entrained for Redhill², Surrey, to join the 3rd Reserve Battalion there in training. Sergeant Kaye, a veteran in charge of the draft wore the ribbons of the Boer War. He was a kindly man and during the journey eyed us pityingly - maybe at the sight of

¹ Google Maps entry for 58 Buckingham Gate, London - <https://goo.gl/maps/RUcF4RkNo2s>

² Google Maps entry for Redhill - <https://goo.gl/maps/RbdwRF6qyCq>

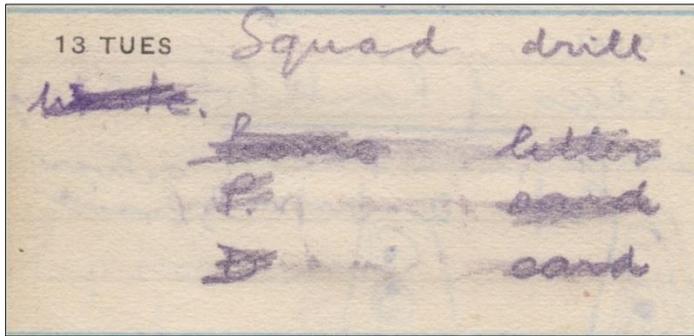
youth being prepared for the sacrifice or perhaps in despair at the quality of the material with which his beloved regiment was being adulterated. Most of the draft were youngsters of 18, but three days previously I had celebrated my 20th birthday, and that brought me within a different category. Almost apologetically he warned me that after six weeks training I would be "over there".

Marching through the main streets of Redhill was the next ordeal, when to our surprise and delight an order to right wheel took us straight through the doorway of a small Italian cafe especially reserved for the draft. Within minutes we were consuming plates of sausages and mashed potatoes washed down by pints of hot tea. This was our first meal provided out of army funds and if our hopes for the future were raised by that satisfying repast, they were soon to be dissipated once the Army cooks had favoured us with their culinary efforts.

Number 2, The Granges was one of several large empty Victorian houses, and here I shared a room with five other new boys. We made our 'beds'- low trestles, three planks and 'biscuits' filled with straw and one blanket on top. The fastidious, loath to give up the civilised habits of pre-army life, wore pyjamas. Having laid out our kit we toured the billet. The usual home amenities were cut off and boarded up. The ablutions and other creature comforts, primitive and soon to be snow-bound, were available at the end of the garden.

Left to our own devices by an uncooperative corporal in charge of the billet we learned our lessons the hard way. It was an error, for instance, to purchase an army issue jack-knife from the corporal even though he only charged nine pence, but our greatest mistake was to mark with indelible pencil our privately owned enamel tea mugs. The strong, sweetened tea was purveyed in large buckets by the cooks and we helped ourselves by dipping in the mugs. By the time the end of the queue reached the bucket the contents had acquired a brilliant violet hue, but even so the brew compared quite favourably with the active service concoctions of later days.

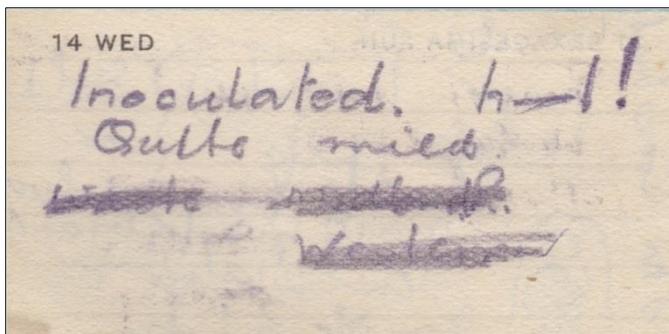
13th February 1917



Note that all entries in the diary regarding letters sent and received were censored at the time.

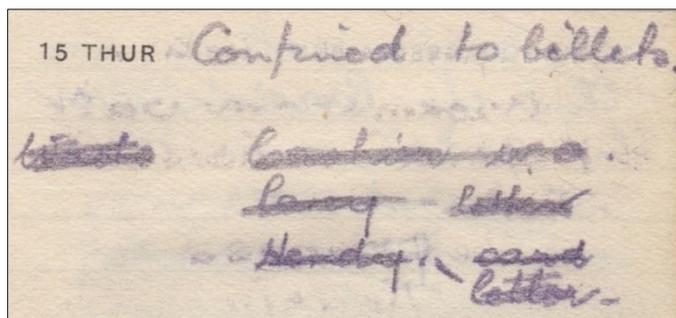
Our first effort at squad drill in the local park provided good cheap amusement for the old ladies peering through the iron railings until the sergeant, sensing our embarrassment, interspersed his commands with certain army expressions which, one might have expected, were unintelligible to elderly spinsters. Nonetheless the old dears departed abruptly and the awkward squad was left in peace.

14th February 1917



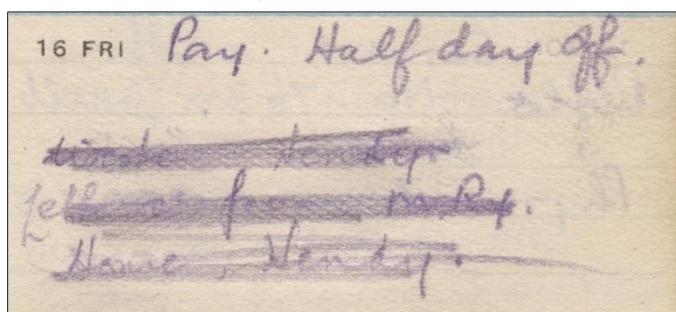
Mass inoculation left the whole draft mute and spiritless as the several anti-bugs performed their fell work and by mid-afternoon the doses had us stretched on beds. Night brought delirium.

15th February 1917



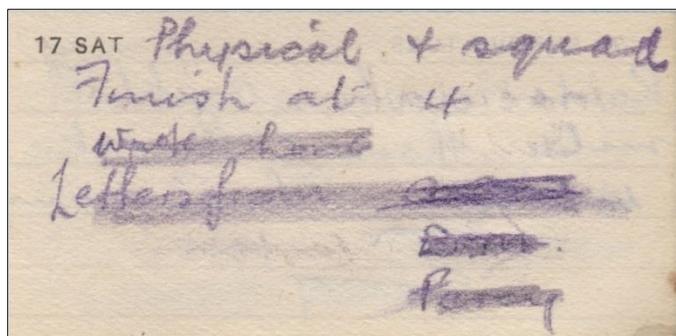
Confined to billets we lay in bed all day - food and drink held no attraction.

16th February 1917



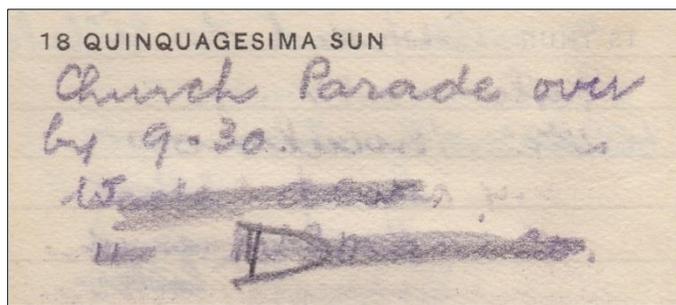
Pay parade was an essential, but the sickly looking draft were excused all other duties.

17th February 1917



Physical training and squad drill until 4 pm - we no longer wished to die.

18th February 1917 (Sunday)



Church Parade – over by 9.30

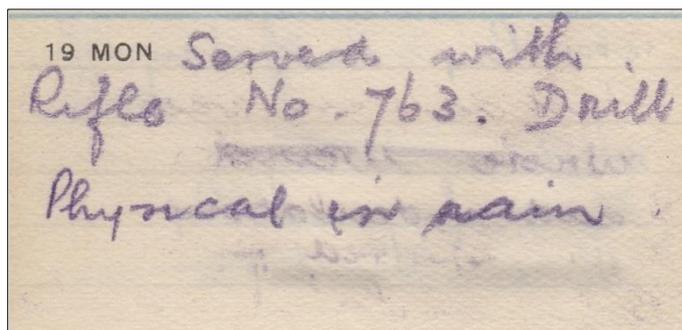
For the first week the new recruits were left almost entirely to the tender mercies of the NCOs - we were simply 'squads', but for Church Parade, as units of the entire 3rd Reserve Battalion we were allotted to the various companies. On parade the officers foregathered to inspect and sum up the new intake bequeathed to them for good or ill. That was fair enough since the responsibility of producing an effective part of the war machine rested largely on their shoulders.

Every officer appeared to have his own pet dog on parade. Dogs of all sizes and every known breed, from poodles to dalmatians sat and stared disdainfully at the rookies and one could almost read their thoughts! Each dog wore a silver collar engraved with the rank of 'rifleman' and his name. Whatever their breed, and in spite of their lowly rank, that canine motley were utter snobs. Any member of the battalion not wearing a Sam Browne¹ was eyed with contempt and fraternisation with the rank and file was obviously against orders. Stupidly perhaps, some of the men regarded their presence as an insult to the dignity of 'Rifleman'. Nevertheless, those canine soldiers deserved full marks for their obedience and bearing on parade. However, in the matter of status the RSM's Sam Browne had them foxed.

[St Matthews, Redhill](#) held a special morning service for the QWR, and at its conclusion by 9:50am the battalion was dismissed for the day. So ended the first week of army life. If training for the battlefield was to be compressed into the short period forecast by Sergeant Kaye one could only conclude that the Staff were unduly complaisant about the potentialities of the new intake or that the demand for cannon fodder in the raw was of paramount importance. With only five weeks to go we were not optimistic!

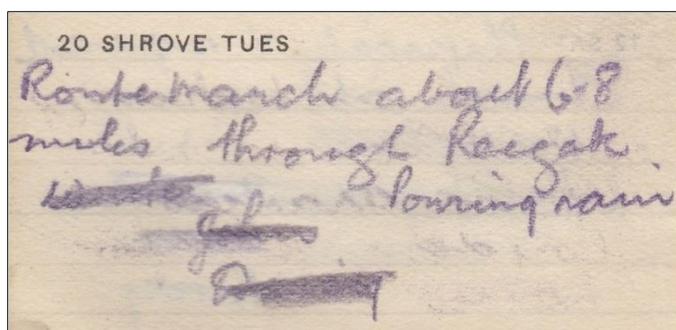
¹ A Sam Browne is a military leather belt - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Browne_belt

19th February 1917



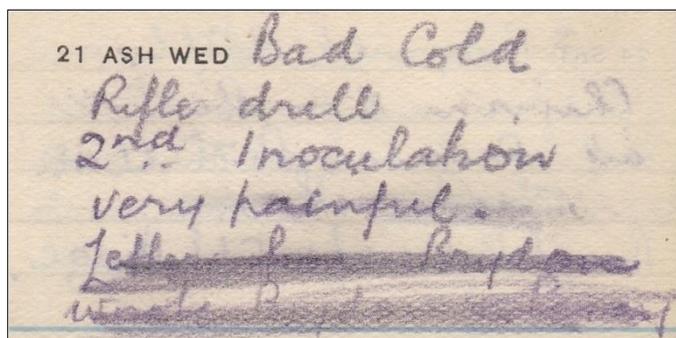
Rifle issued (number 763).
Physical jerks and squad drill in pouring rain.

20th February 1917



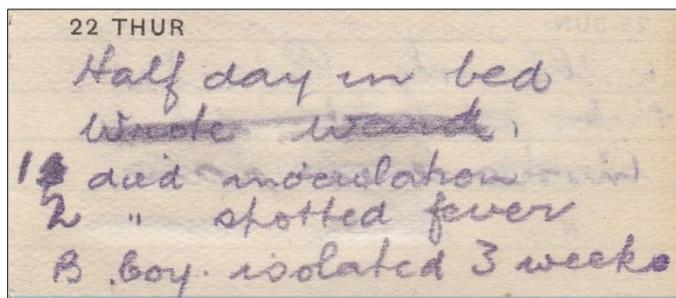
Eight mile route march through Reigate, again in pouring rain.

21st February 1917



Bad cold. Rifle drill. Second inoculation - very painful.

22nd February 1917

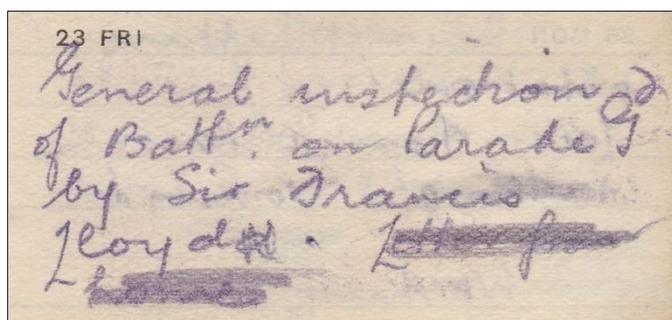


Half day in bed.

One died from the inoculation, two died from spotted fever.

B Company isolated for three weeks.

23rd February 1917

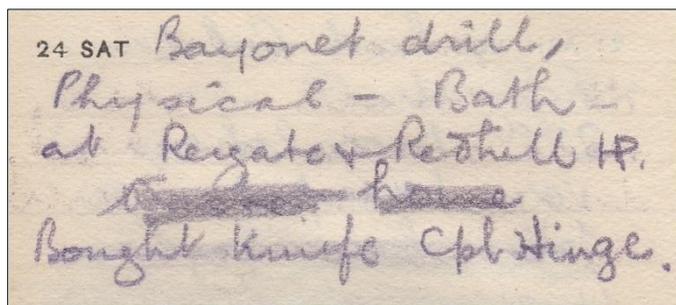


General inspection of the Battalion on the parade ground by Sir Francis Lloyd¹.



¹ Wikipedia entry for Sir Francis Lloyd - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Lloyd_\(British_Army_officer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Lloyd_(British_Army_officer))
Photograph in public domain.

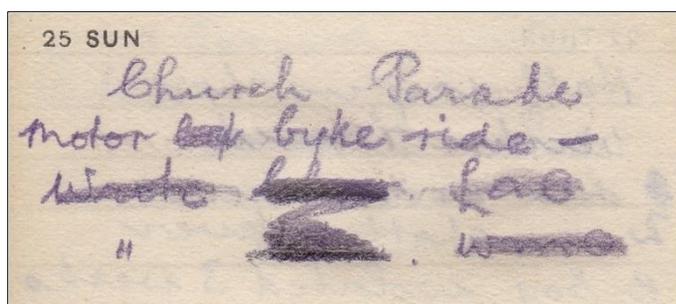
24th February 1917



24 SAT Bayonet drill,
Physical - Bath
at Reigate & Redhill H.
~~at home~~
Bought knife Cpl Hinge.

Bayonet drill, Physical - Bath at Reigate & Redhill.
Bought knife - Corporal Hinge.

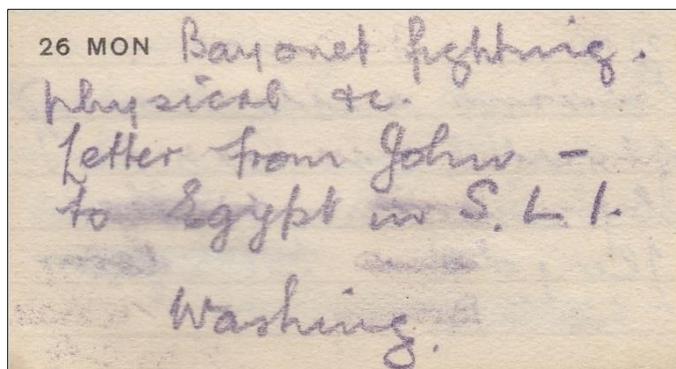
25th February 1917 (Sunday)



25 SUN
Church Parade
motor ~~by~~ bike ride -
~~Wrote~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~
" ~~Wrote~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~

Church Parade. Motorbike ride.

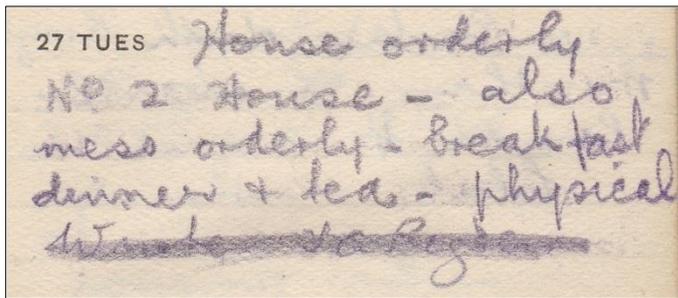
26th February 1917



26 MON Bayonet fighting.
Physical etc.
Letter from John -
to Egypt in S. L. I.
Washing.

Bayonet fighting, physical, etc. Washing
Letter from John (*brother*) - to Egypt in SLI (*Somerset Light Infantry*).

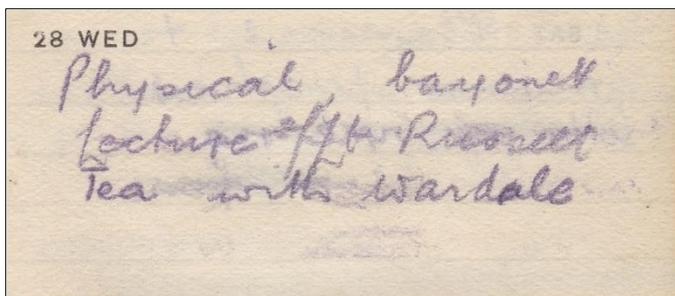
27th February 1917



27 TUES House orderly
No 2 House - also
mess orderly - breakfast
dinner + tea - physical
~~Wardale~~

House orderly for No. 2 House.
Also mess orderly for breakfast, dinner and tea. Physical.

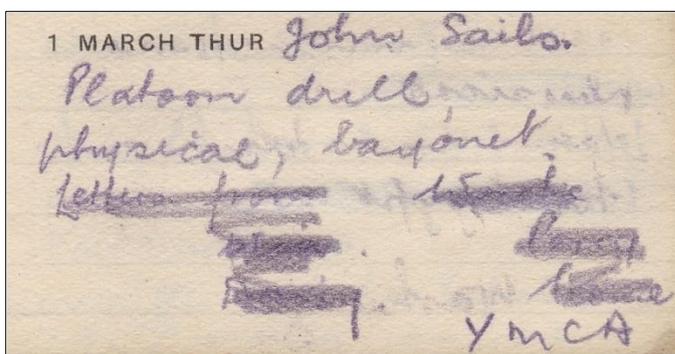
28th February 1917



28 WED
Physical, bayonet
lecture of Lt. Russell
Tea with Wardale

Physical, bayonet. Lecture from Lt. Russell. Tea with Wardale.

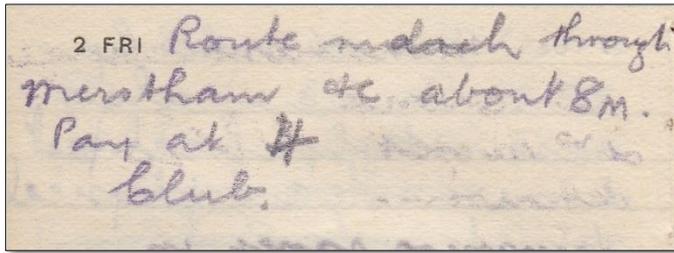
1st March 1917



1 MARCH THUR John Sails.
Platoon drill, physical,
physical, bayonet
~~Letters from~~
~~Wardale~~
~~Wardale~~
YMCA

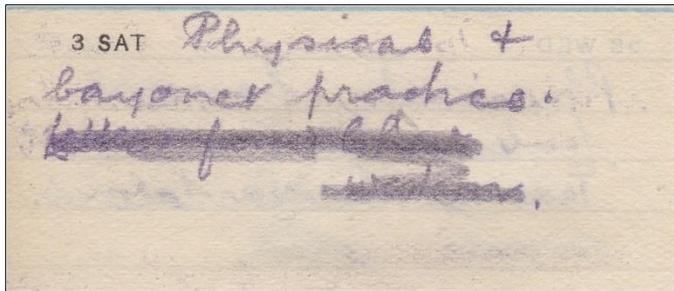
John sails.
Platoon drill, physical, bayonet.
YMCA.

2nd March 1917



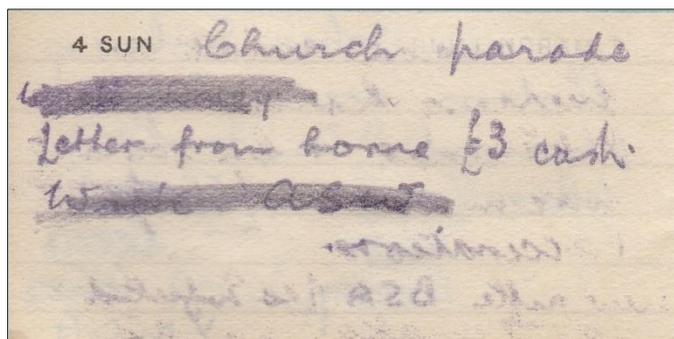
Route march through Merstham, etc about 8 miles.
Pay at 4pm. Club.

3rd March 1917



Physical and bayonet practice.

4th March 1917 (Sunday)

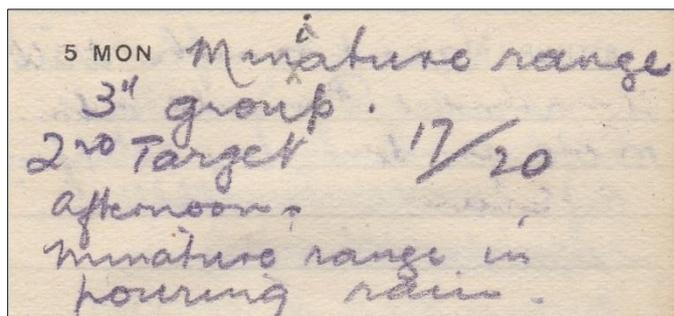


Church Parade. Letter from home with £3.

St Matthews was not large enough to accommodate the greatly augmented 3rd Battalion and the overflow, consisting of one or two platoons, were denied entry. There was much jockeying for the last position in the parade and the 'lucky' ones were dismissed for the day at the Church door. So far as the 'Other Ranks' were concerned their ambition to forego devotions was not an indication of a heathen attitude but mainly a problem of swagger sticks. These were not carried on Church parade but were compulsory with normal walking out dress and the billet was at the other end of the town. This was an irritation that could not be overcome. We thought we had found the solution by stuffing the thin cane sticks inside the trouser leg, supported by the closely bound puttees. The idea was good for standing on parade, even for marching, albeit with some difficulty – but the ear-splitting noise produced by the congregation on seating was disastrous.

Initiative in the ranks was not encouraged and the experiment proved expensive to both pride and pocket because it was necessary to seek replacements from the quartermaster and disclose our enormity and we had to pay for the replacements. The end of the day marked our half way period of training.

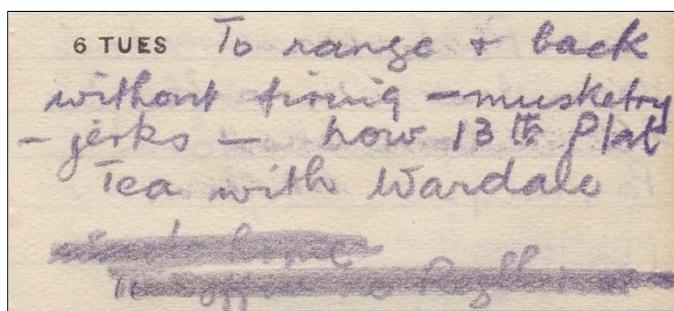
5th March 1917



5 MON Miniature range
3" group.
2nd Target 17/20
afternoon
miniature range in
pouring rain.

Miniature range - 3 inch group.
2nd target - 17/20
Afternoon - miniature range in pouring rain.

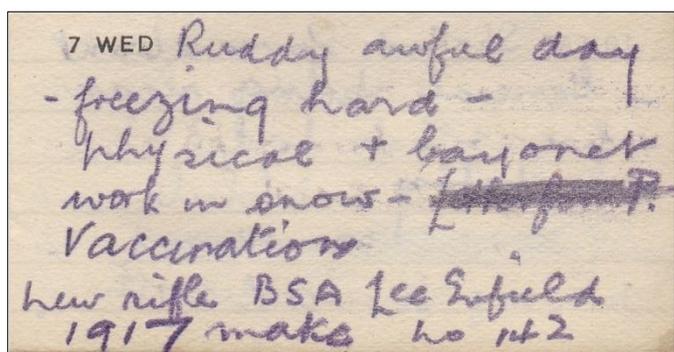
6th March 1917



6 TUES To range + back
without firing - musketry
- jerks - now 13th Plat
Tea with Wardale
~~Wardale~~
~~Wardale~~

To range and back without firing - musketry - jerks - now 13th Platoon.
Tea with Wardale.

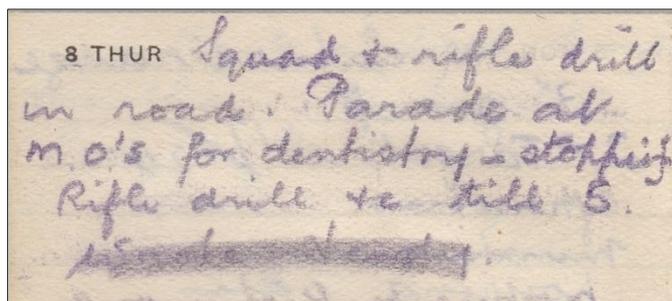
7th March 1917



7 WED Ruddy awful day
- freezing hard -
physical + bayonet
work in snow - ~~letter~~
Vaccinations
new rifle BSA Lee Enfield
1917 make no 142

Ruddy awful day - freezing hard - physical and bayonet work in snow.
Vaccinations. New rifle - BSA Lee Enfield 1917 make. No. 142.

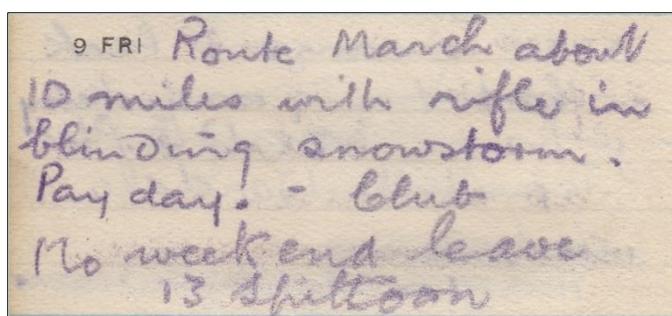
8th March 1917



8 THUR Squad + rifle drill
in road. Parade at
M.O.'s for dentistry - stopping
Rifle drill etc till 5.
~~Monday~~

Squad and rifle drill in road. Parade at MO's for dentistry - stopping. Rifle drill etc until 5.

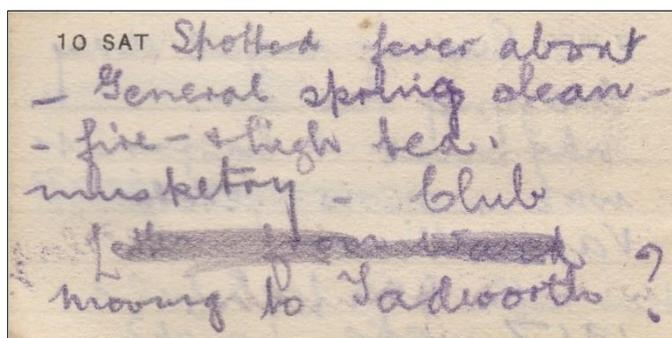
9th March 1917



9 FRI Route March about
10 miles with rifle in
blinding snowstorm.
Pay day. - Club
No weekend leave
13 Spilttoon

Route march about 10 miles with rifle in blinding snowstorm. Pay day. Club. No weekend leave.

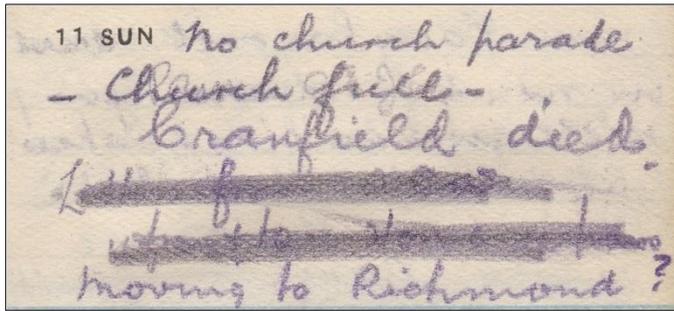
10th March 1917



10 SAT Spotted fever about
- General spring clean -
- fire - & high tea.
- musketry - club
~~Letter from home~~
moving to Tadworth?

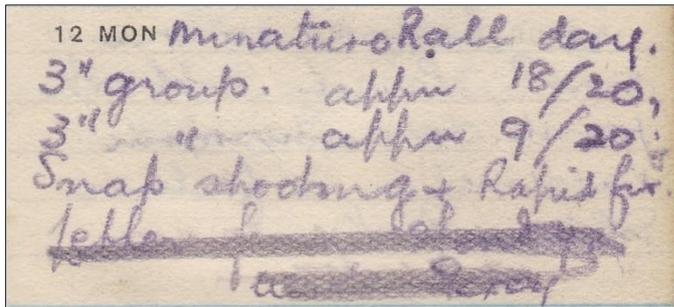
Spotted fever about.
General spring clean - fire - and high tea. Musketry. Club.
Moving to Tadworth?

11th March 1917 (Sunday)



No church parade - church full. Cranfield died. Moving to Richmond?

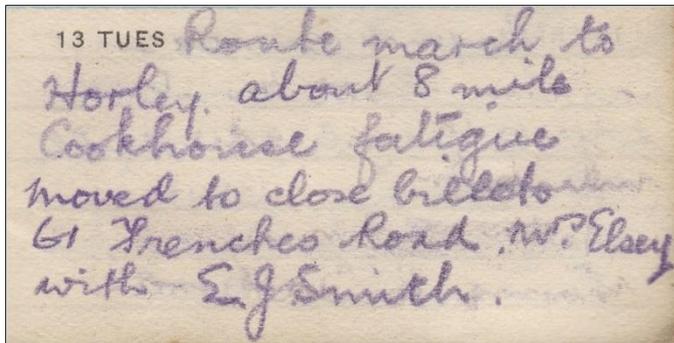
12th March 1917



Miniature range all day.

3 inch group application 18/20 - 9/20. Snap shooting and rapid fire.

13th March 1917



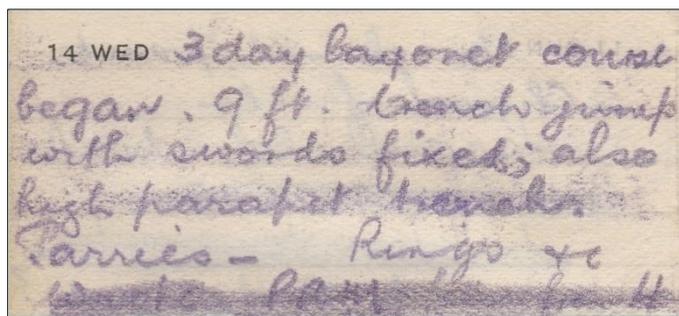
Route march to Horley, about 8 miles.

Cookhouse fatigue.

Moved to close billets - 61 Frenches Road¹, Mrs Elsey with E.J. Smith.

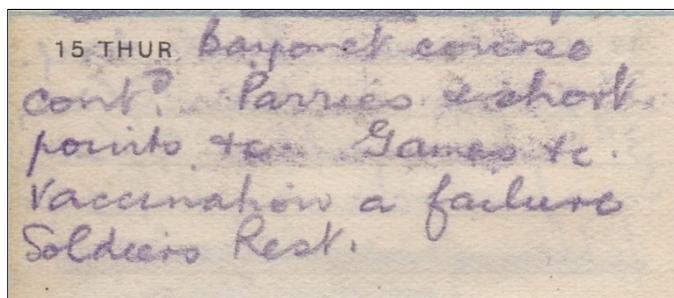
¹ [61 Frenches Road, Redhill](#) on Google Maps

14th March 1917



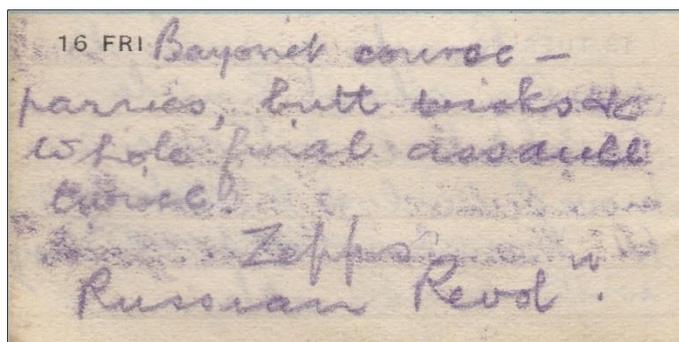
3 day bayonet course began.
9 foot trench jump with swords fixed; also high parapet trench.
Parries - Rings, etc.

15th March 1917



Bayonet course continues.
Parries and short points, etc. Games, etc.
Vaccination a failure.
Soldiers Rest.

16th March 1917



Bayonet course - parries, butt tricks, etc. Whole final assault course.
Zeppelins.¹ Russian Revolution.²

¹ Wikipedia entry for Zeppelin - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zepplin>

² Wikipedia entry for the Russian Revolution - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution

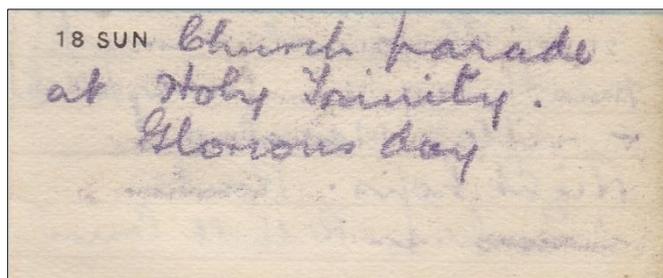
17th March 1917



Squad and physical.
Anti-gas.
Bapaume captured.¹

¹ The capture of Bapaume is described - <https://www.awm.gov.au/index.php/articles/blog/bapaume-to-bullecourt-the-fighting-in-france-1917>

18th March 1917 (Sunday)



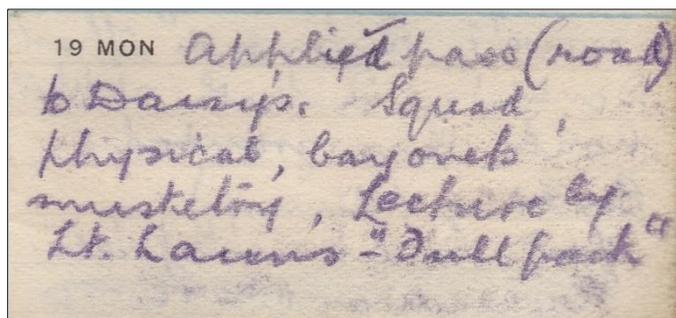
Church Parade at Holy Trinity. Glorious day.

The snow and ice of the past few weeks had practically disappeared and in brilliant sunshine the company fell in and marched to the assembly ground for church parade at Holy Trinity.¹

Church parade was always regarded as an occasion for emphasising 'Pride of Regiment' and spit and polish was at a premium. In due course the RSM reported all companies present and correct and ready to march off. The colonel followed by the adjutant, impressively mounted on glossy chargers, cantered briskly down the line and back to the head of the column adding a final touch to the dignity of the parade. In a few moments the band would strike up and the march to the town commence. D Company was positioned half way up the column and from the upstairs windows of the shops and buildings onlookers were watching the spectacle. Precisely as the colonel and adjutant passed by a chamber pot was lowered on a line strung from a first floor window. The perpetrators of this monstrous contempt were, in fact, certain members of B Company held in quarantine following an outbreak of spotted fever in the middle of February. That day they were untouchable but even quarantine would end in due course.

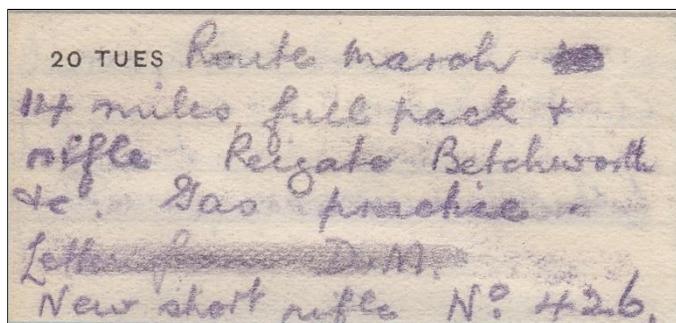
¹ Holy Trinity, Redhill - <https://www.htredhill.com/about>

19th March 1917



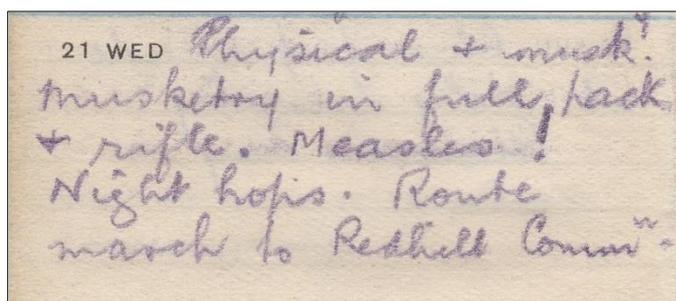
Applied pass (road) to Daisy's. [sister]
Squad, physical, bayonets, musketry.
Lecture by Lt. Larens [?] - "Drill pack".

20th March 1917



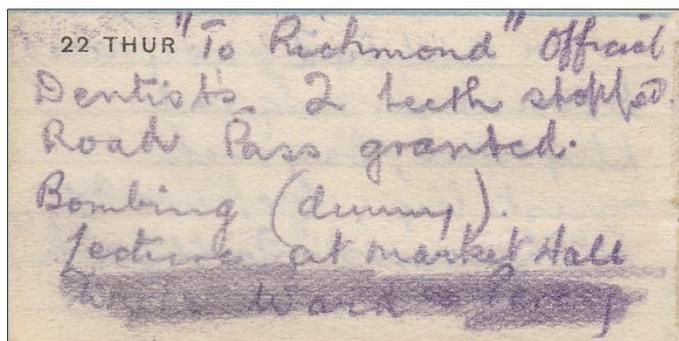
Route march 14 miles, full pack and rifle - Reigate, Betchworth, etc.
Gas practice.
New short rifle No. 426.

21st March 1917



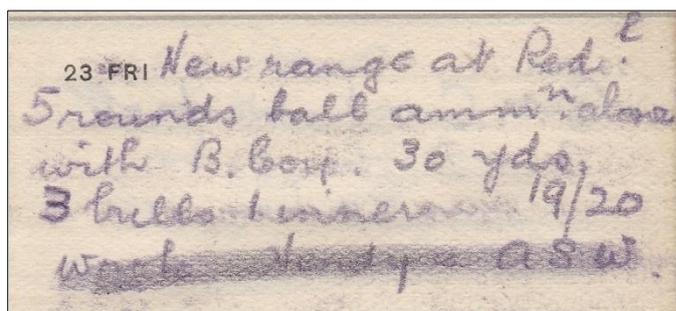
Physical and musketry. Musketry in full pack and rifle.
Measles!
Night hops.
Route march to Redhill Common.

22nd March 1917



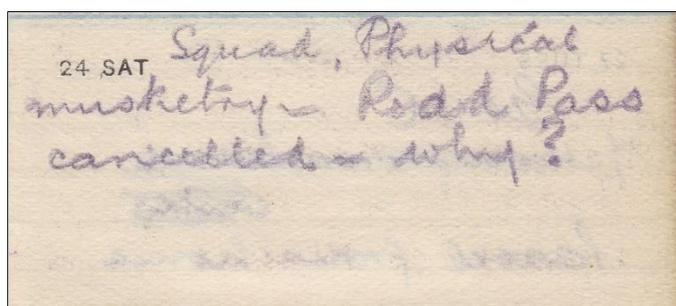
"To Richmond" is official.
Dentists. Two teeth stopped.
Road Pass granted.
Bombing (dummy).
Lecture at market hall.

23rd March 1917



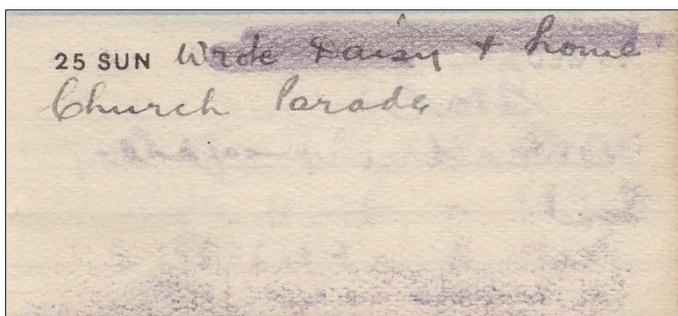
New range at Redhill.
5 rounds ball ammunition alone with B Company.
30 yards. 3 bulls, 1 inner. 19/20.

24th March 1917



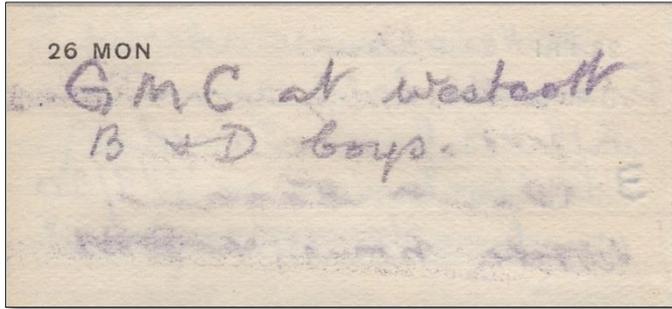
Squad. Physical. Musketry.
Road Pass cancelled - why?

25th March 1917 (Sunday)

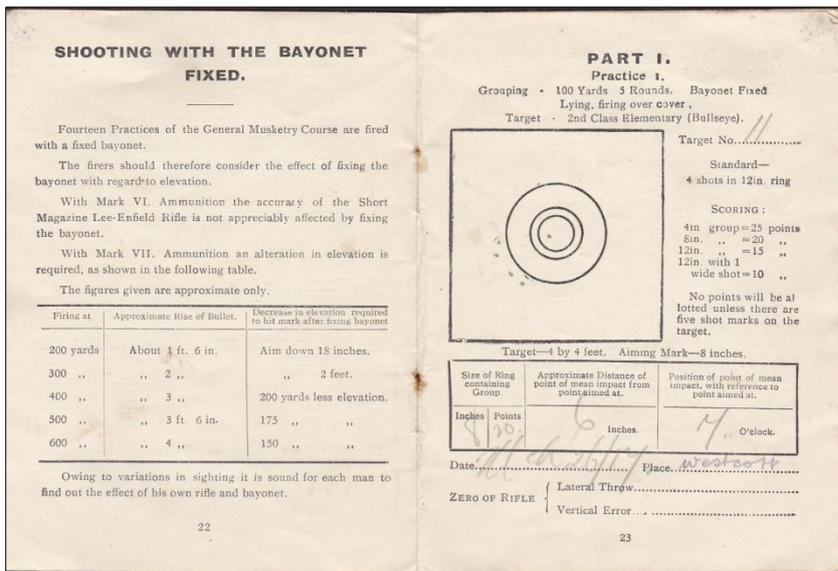
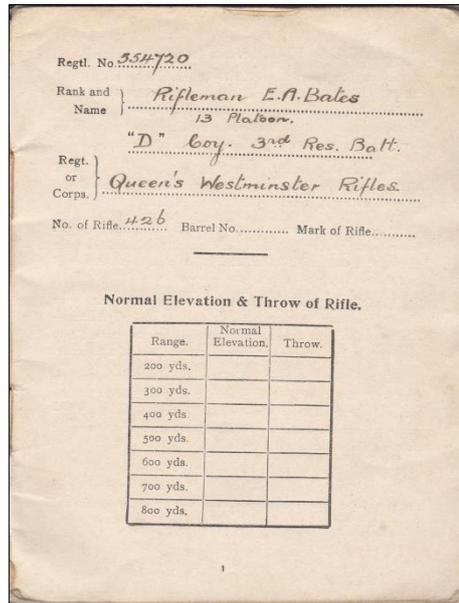
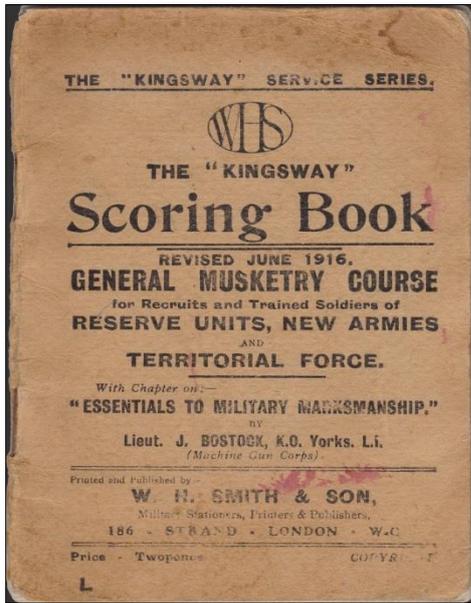


Church Parade. Wrote to Daisy and home.

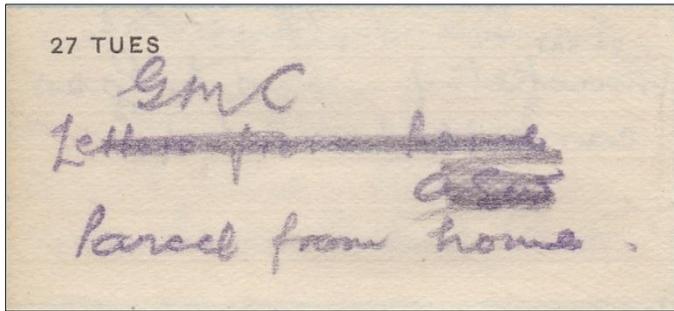
26th March 1917



General Musketry Course at Westcott.
B and D Companies.



27th March 1917



General Musketry Course.
Parcel from home.

PART I.
Practice 2.
Application - 200 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Lying. Slow. Firing over cover.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Standard—
5 shots on target or
10 points.

Target No. 23

AIM DOWN
15 inches with
fixed bayonet

Scores— Total. Notes:—

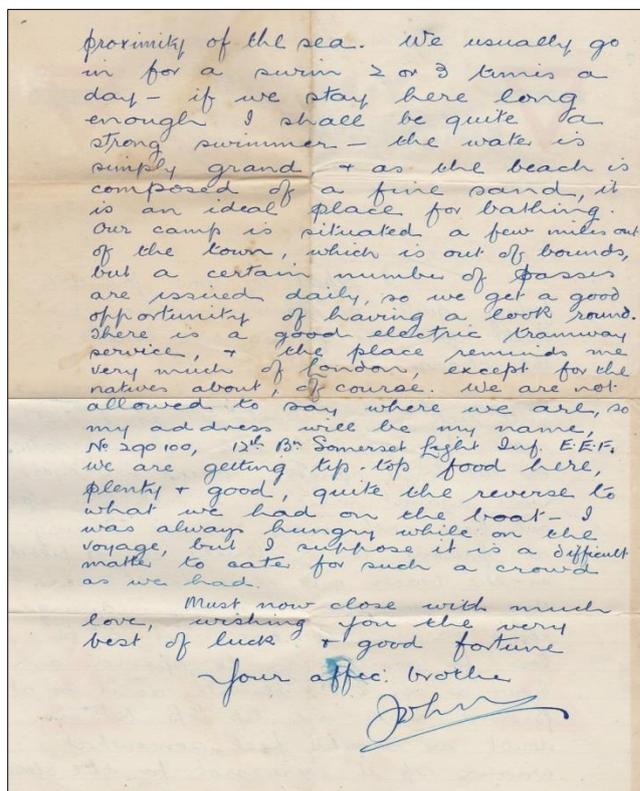
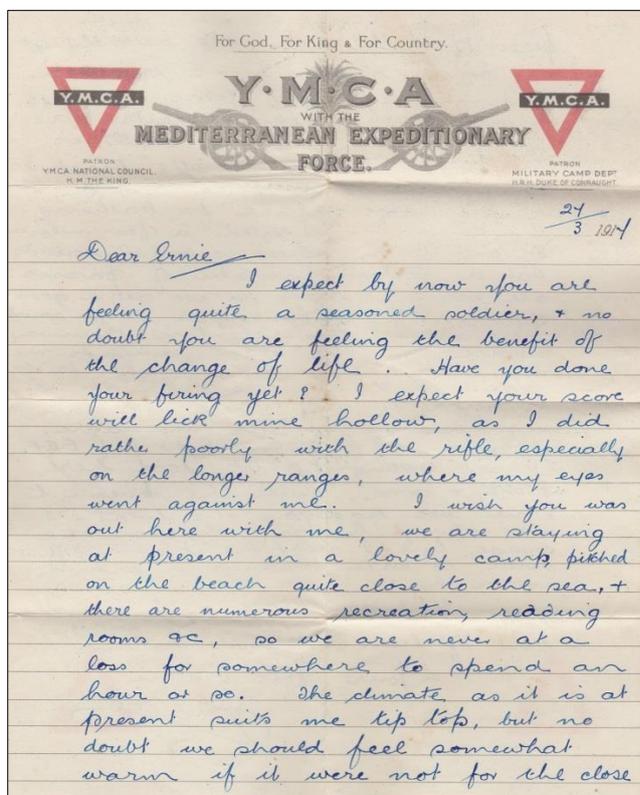
3	1	1	4	1	1

Place Date 27/3/17
Wind
Light
Elevation Used 200

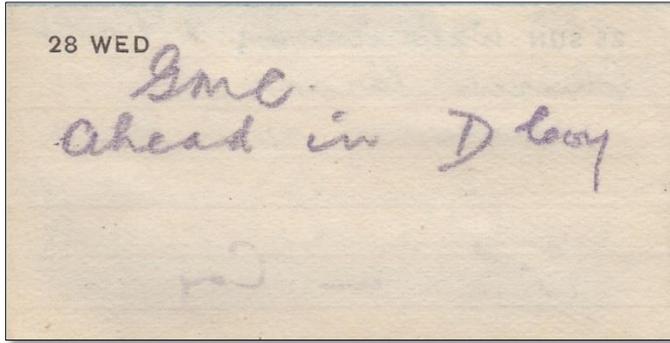
24

27th March 1917 - Letter from John

Letter from Ernie's older brother John, written on March 27th, postmarked March 31st and not received until in France.



28th March 1917



General Musketry Course. Ahead in D Company.

PART I.
Practice 3.
Application - 200 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Lying, firing over cover.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Standard—
5 shots on target or
10 points.

Target No. 11
AIM DOWN
about 2 feet with
fixed bayonet

Scores— Total. Notes:—
4 3 4 3 3 17

Place..... Date 28/3
Wind.....
Light.....
Elevation Used 300

25

PART II.
Practice 5.
Application - 200 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Lying.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Target No. 5
AIM DOWN
18 inches with
fixed bayonet

Scores— Total. Notes:—
4 1 3 1 3 4 17

Place..... Date 28/3
Wind.....
Light.....
Elevation Used 220

27

PART II.
Practice 6.
Rapid - 200 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Lying, firing over cover. Rifle to be unloaded and pouch
buttoned until the order "Rapid Fire" is given. Time 30 seconds.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Target No. 5

To be entered
before firing
to avoid
shooting at
the wrong
Target.

AIM DOWN
18 inches
with bayonet
fixed.

Scores— Total. Notes:—
4 2 3 2 4 16

Place..... Date 28/3
Wind.....
Light.....
Elevation Used 250

28

PART II.
Practice 7.
Rapid - 200 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Standing, taking cover in trench or behind wall, etc.
Rifle to be unloaded and pouch buttoned until the order "Rapid
Fire" is given. Time 30 seconds.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Target No. 8
AIM DOWN
18 inches with
fixed bayonet

Scores— Total. Notes:—
4 3 3 2 1 1 1 3

Place..... Date 28/3
Wind.....
Light.....
Elevation Used.....

29

PART II.
Practice 8.
Application - 300 Yards. 5 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Standing, taking cover in trench or behind wall, etc.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Target No. 8
AIM DOWN
about 2 feet
with bayonet
fixed.

To be entered
before firing
to avoid
shooting at
the wrong
Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—
3 3 2 2 1 1 1 1

Place..... Date 28/3
Wind.....
Light.....
Elevation Used 270

30

PART II.
Practice 9.
Rapid - 300 Yards. 10 Rounds. Bayonet Fixed.
Standing, taking cover in trench or behind wall, etc.
Target - 2nd Class Figure.

Target No. 8

Rifle to be
unloaded and
pouch button-
ed until the
order "Rapid
Fire" is given
Loading by 5
rounds from
pouch.
Time
1 minute.

In this prac-
tice all hits
inside the
inner circle
count 3.

Score: 1 Bullseyes and Inners. |||| Mags. |||| Outers. 15 Total Points.

Date 28/3 Place 20
Notes:—
275

31

29th March 1917

29 THUR *9mc.* *HMS MURPHY*
Beat Morgan & Reese
1st in D Coy
Class'n began.
~~Went to ...~~

General Musketry Course.
 Beat Morgan and Reese. First in D Company. Classification began.

PART III.
 (Classification Practices)
Practice 18.
 Application - 400 Yards. 5 Rounds.
 Lying round cover. Rifle to be loaded and 4 rounds in the magazine with the pouch buttoned before the command "Rapid Fire" is given. Time 30 seconds. Target - 1st Class Figure.

Target No. *8*

Sight adjustment at 400 yards
 400 to 450 = 3 inches
 450 to 500 = 12 inches
 400 to 500 = 14.5 in.

To be entered before firing to avoid shooting at the wrong Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—

<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>11</i>
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Place Date *29/3*
 Wind
 Light
 Elevation Used *450*

PART I.
Practice 4.
 Application - 400 Yards. 5 Rounds.
 Lying. Firing round cover. Target - 1st Class Figure.

Target No. *8*

Sight adjustment at 400 yards
 400 to 450 = 8 inches
 450 to 500 = 12 inches
 400 to 500 = 14.5 in.

To be entered before firing to avoid shooting at the wrong Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—

<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>11</i>
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Place Date *29/3*
 Wind
 Light
 Elevation Used *450*

PART II.
Practice 10.
 Application - 400 Yards. 5 Rounds.
 Lying. Target - 1st Class Figure.

Target No. *8*

Sight adjustment at 400 yards
 400 to 450 = 8 inches
 450 to 500 = 12 inches
 400 to 500 = 14.5 in.

To be entered before firing to avoid shooting at the wrong Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—

<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>11</i>
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Place *29/3* Date *29/3*
 Wind
 Light
 Elevation Used *450*

PART II.
Practice 11.
 Rapid - 400 Yards. 5 Rounds.
 Lying, firing over cover. Target - 1st Class Figure.

Target No. *8*

Rifle to be unloaded and pouch buttoned until the order "Rapid Fire" is given. Time 30 seconds.

To be entered before firing to avoid shooting at the wrong Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—

<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>
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Place Date *29/3*
 Wind
 Light
 Elevation Used *450*

PART III.
 (Classification Practices)
Practice 17.
 Application - 400 Yards. 5 Rounds.
 Lying. Firing round cover. Target - 1st Class Figure.

Target No. *8*

Sight adjustment at 400 yards
 400 to 450 = 8 inches
 450 to 500 = 12 inches
 400 to 500 = 14.5 in.

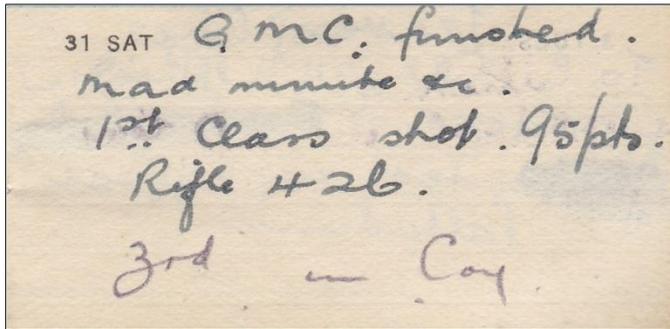
To be entered before firing to avoid shooting at the wrong Target.

Scores— Total. Notes:—

<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>14</i>
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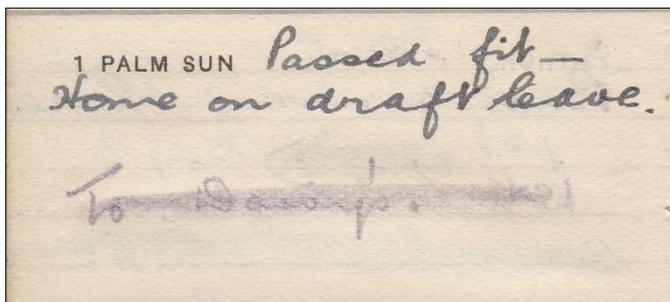
Place Date *29/3*
 Wind
 Light
 Elevation Used *450*

31st March 1917



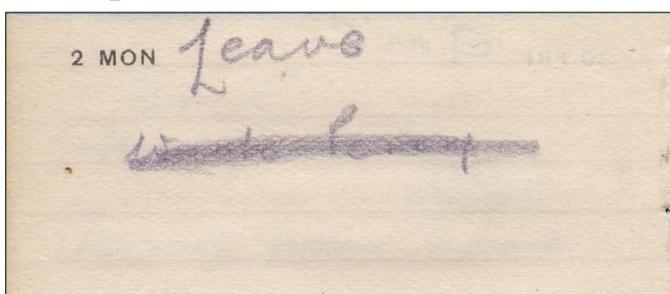
General Musketry Course finished.
Mad minute etc.
1st Class shot. 95 points. Rifle 426.
3rd in Company.

1st April 1917 (Palm Sunday)

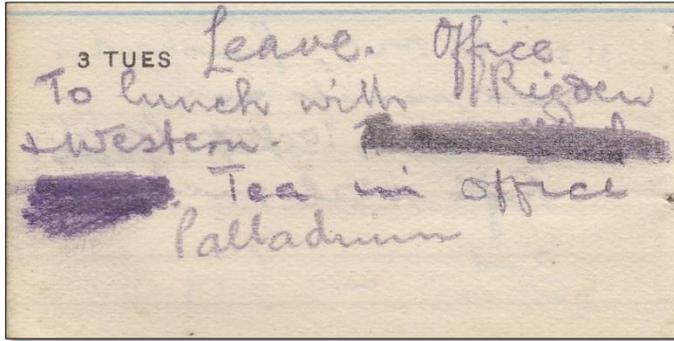


Passed fit.
Home on draft leave.

2nd April 1917



3rd April 1917



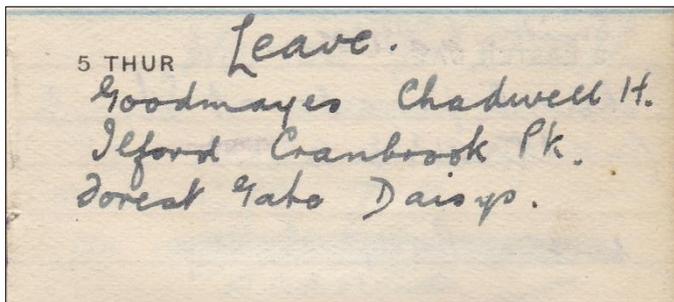
Leave.
Office. To lunch with Rigden and Western. Tea in Office.
Palladium.

4th April 1917



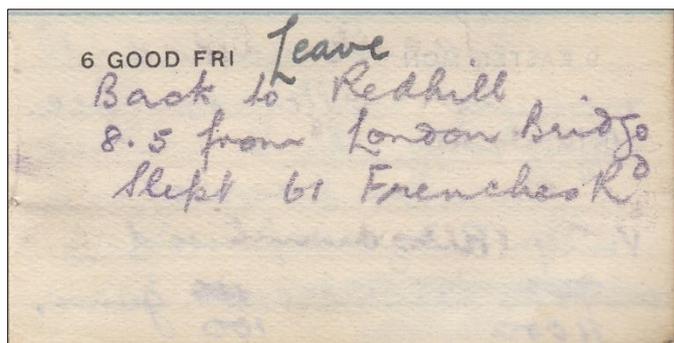
Leave.
Dug garden.

5th April 1917



Leave.
Goodmayes, Chadwell Heath, Ilford, Cranbrook Park, Forest Gate - Daisy's.

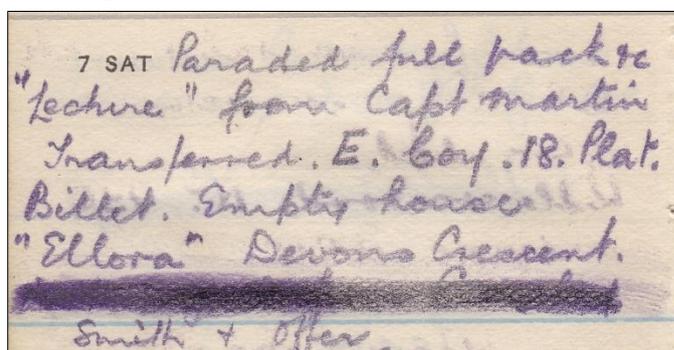
6th April 1917 (Good Friday)



Leave.

Back to Redhill. 8:05 from London Bridge.
Slept. 61 Frenches Road.

7th April 1917



Paraded full pack, etc.

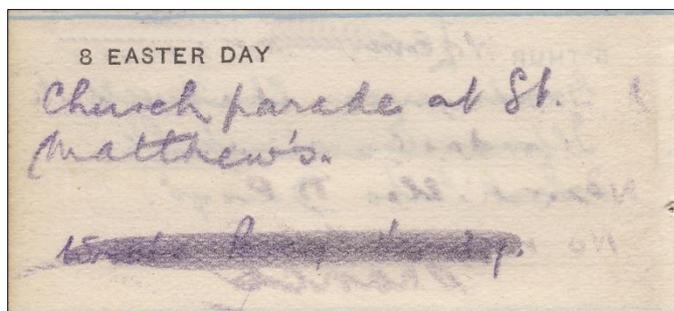
"Lecture" from Captain Martin.

Transferred. E Company 18 Platoon.

Billet. Empty house. "Ellora", Devon Crescent.¹

Smith and Offer.

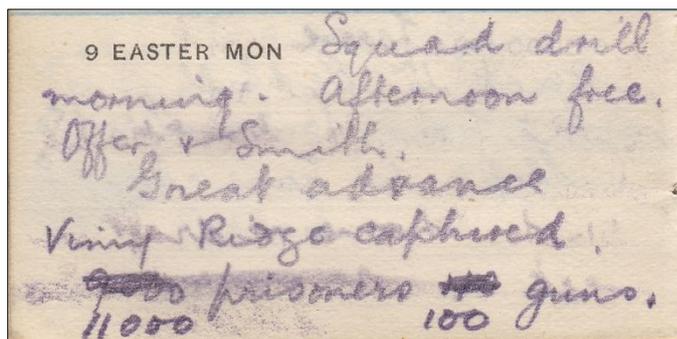
8th April 1917 (Easter Sunday)



Church Parade at St. Matthews.

¹ Google Maps entry for Devon Crescent - <https://goo.gl/maps/TdVo5Sih2iJ2>

9th April 1917



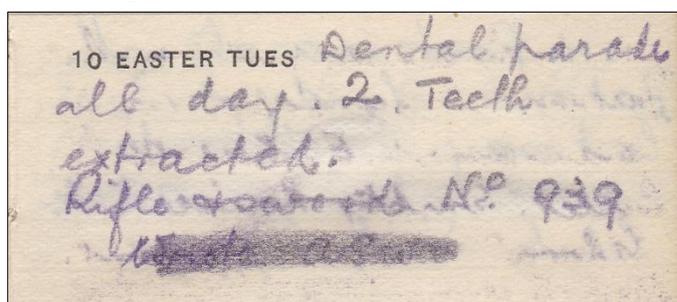
Squad drill morning.

Afternoon free.

Offer and Smith.

Great advance - Vimy Ridge captured. 11,000 prisoners, 100 guns.¹

10th April 1917

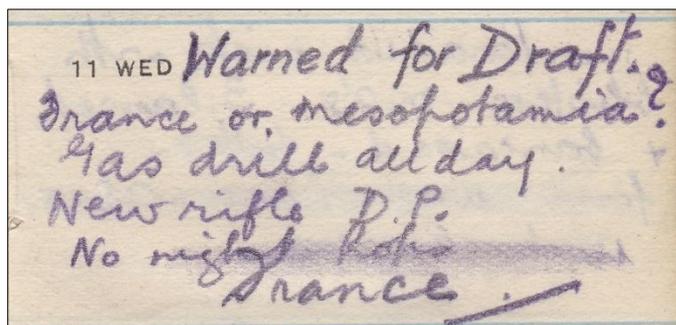


Dental parade all day. Two teeth extracted.

Rifle and sword No. 939.

¹ Wikipedia entry for Battle of Vimy Ridge - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vimy_Ridge

11th April 1917



Warned for Draft. France or Mesopotamia?
Gas drill all day. New rifle. D.P. No night hops.
France.

Our allotted 'six weeks' were up and at the first parade came the anticipated preliminary warning.

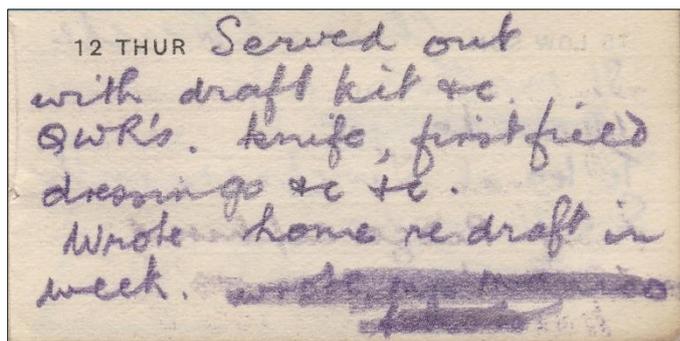
Those who fell out for the overseas draft were in theory highly trained men, physically fit and in all respects qualified to do battle with the foe. We ourselves had no doubt on the question of health and strength (that much at least was owed to the army) and it may be assumed that our youthful exuberance refused to admit any deficiency in the military sphere. On dismissal little groups of excited men foregathered to discuss the one overriding question – not when but where? The scheduled night hops were cancelled for the overseas men and apart from the issue of another new rifle we were free to ponder upon the future and to stock up on the minor necessities for travel that were not provided by army issue.

I took the opportunity to clear up a little matter that had bothered me for several weeks past. Before joining up I had purchased a wristwatch – “one which would stand up to really rough treatment”. Unfortunately the glass was soon broken in the course of training. Behind the counter of a small watch repairer shop a very old man with a long grey beard made several attempts to fit a new glass but regretted he had not one in stock. If I would return next week he would “contact the wholesalers for the correct size”. The watch was returned to the makers to be delivered next week. By the time I was free to visit the old man again we had been warned for overseas draft on the following day but the watch “had not been returned from the makers, the war you know”. I had been slow on the uptake but at last the penny dropped. My immature appearance was perhaps mistaken and I had been subjected to gross trickery. The little bit of Irish came to the fore and I demanded my watch immediately or I would “fetch the Gang”. Without a word the old man opened a drawer and handed over my watch complete

with fitted glass for which, incidentally, I refused to pay. I wonder how many Queen's Westminster's at Redhill went overseas never to return - with their watches still in the possession of that old man. I might perhaps add that my 'Cyma' with its solid steel case, now pitted with rust, gave sterling service and survived the mud of Flanders.



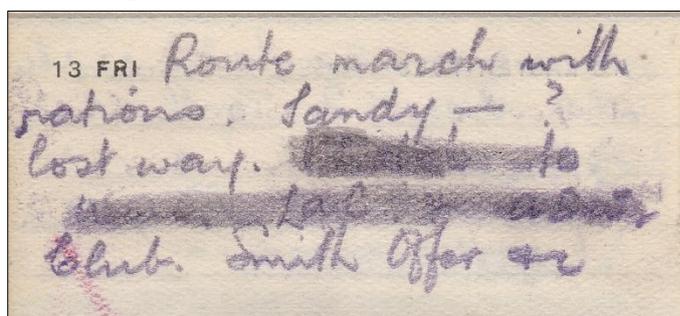
12th April 1917



Served out with draft kit, etc. QWR's. Knife, first field dressings, etc. Wrote home re draft in a week.

The issue of draft kit gave us the clue to our destination. Not for us the khaki shorts, the pith helmets or the sands of the deserts. The long woolly pants, the thick shirts and the overcoats could only mean the Western Front and with the newspapers making the most of the victory of the Rimy Ridge we had no qualms – the war was nearly over. The embroidered QWR shoulder flashes, the insignia of the overseas man, were sewn on with schoolboyish enthusiasm. The stiff Broderick cap was converted into the overseas 'soft' variety by removing the stiff wire with less enthusiasm. The packet of first field dressing complete with iodine phial was stitched up in the small pocket at the bottom of the uniform jacket.

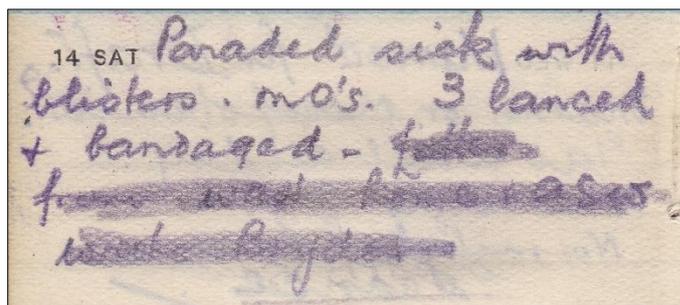
13th April 1917



All day route march with packed rations. Not a good day – the o/c misjudged the direction at a cost to the weary of several miles and blistered feet.

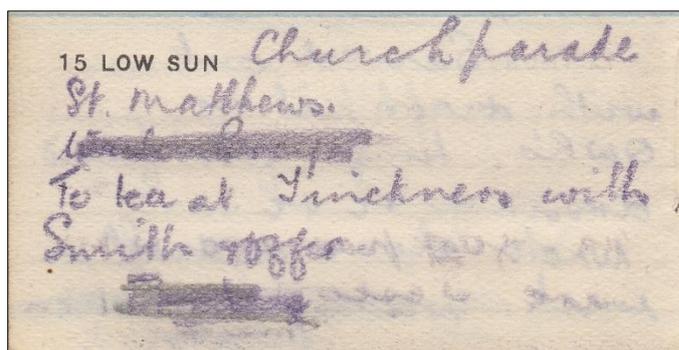
It was Friday 13th!

14th April 1917



Sick parade. Three blisters lanced and bandaged.

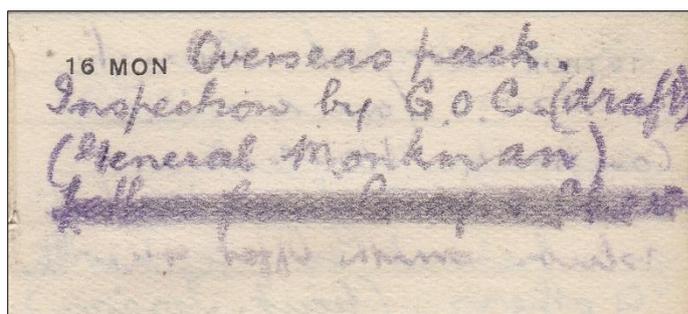
15th April 1917 (Sunday)



With the approach of the fateful day preoccupation with preparation for the coming journey resulted in a sparsity of entries in the diary.

It is recorded that church parade was held at St Matthews and also, for what it is worth, my good friends Smith and Offer entertained me to a farewell tea at 'Tickners'.

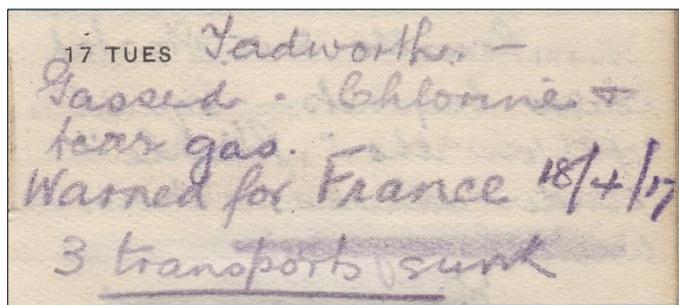
16th April 1917



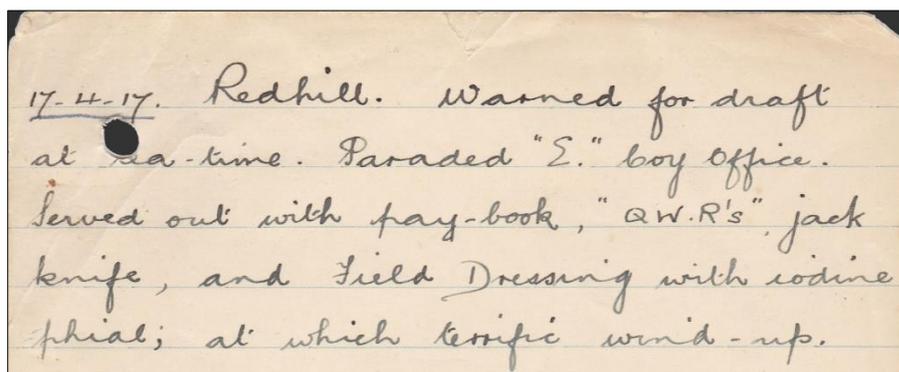
The draft paraded complete with overseas kit for inspection by General Monkman, GOC London District.

The purport of his speech apparently made no impact.

17th April 1917



17 TUES Hadworths -
Gassed - Chlornine &
tear gas.
Warned for France 18/4/17
3 transports sunk



17-4-17. Redhill. Warned for draft
at sea-time. Paraded "S." boy office.
Served out with pay-book, "Q.W.R.'s" jack
knife, and Field Dressing with iodine
phial; at which terrific wind-up.

First journal entry.¹

Three transports sunk in the channel.

Gas in modern warfare was one aspect of our military training which had so far been neglected apart from one afternoon wholly spent in putting on the masks by numbers. The deficiency was hurriedly attended to.

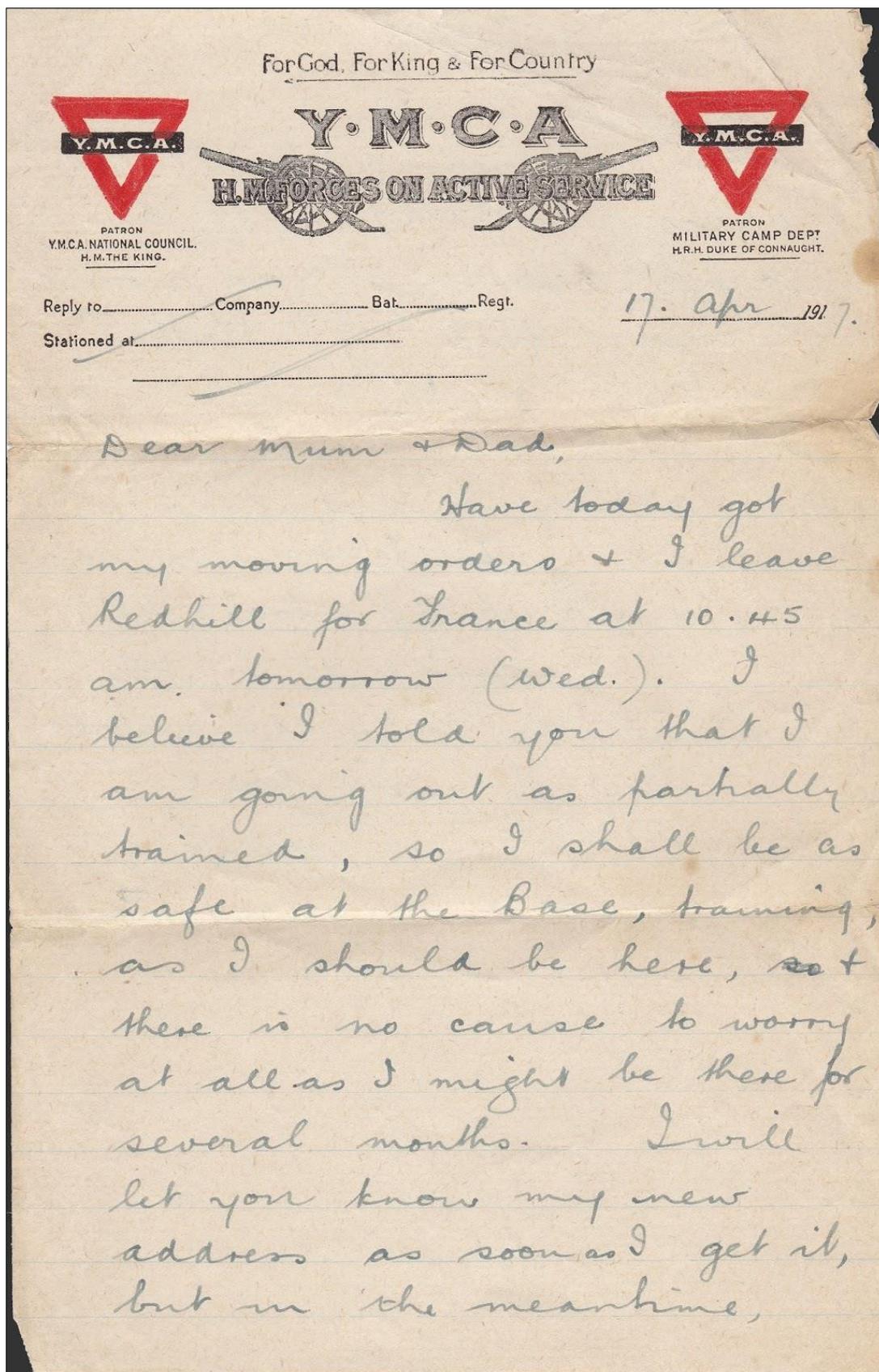
Gathered together in a sealed off tunnel, the box gas respirators were adjusted as per instructions followed by an examination by the NCO in charge who undoubtedly took much pleasure in his assignment. Having made much play with the errors and the tragedies which would ensue in the event of faulty adjustment he proceeded to turn on the gas. For a few moments we breathed deeply and all was well then tragedy threatened one of our companions who was obviously in trouble. His frantic signals could only be interpreted as a matter of a leaky mask. Any moment we expected to see the poor fellow writhing in his death agonies on the floor. Everyone dashed out of the tunnel and the unlucky individual was relieved of his mask. The victim, pale and sweating and weeping copiously, soon recovered. The incident was, of course, staged by the NCO to be a lesson and for the benefit of our morale – with perhaps an element of vicious

¹ Ernest wrote up these original journal notes soon after his return to England. He completed the final journal that comprises the main part of this document, and was based on these early notes, during his later years.

intent! The tear gas was quite harmless but he had tested our masks and his pupils.

At tea time we were warned for the draft to France on the following day. We paraded at the E company office and were served out with a pay-book, "QWR" jack knife and field dressing with an iodine phial – causing a terrific wind-up.

17th April 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad



letters addressed to the old
place (Redhill) will be
forwarded on; you should
however put "17th Platoon"
instead of 18th —

I'm sending home
a parcel of my private
muck (shirts &c.) & will
try & get it off tonight.

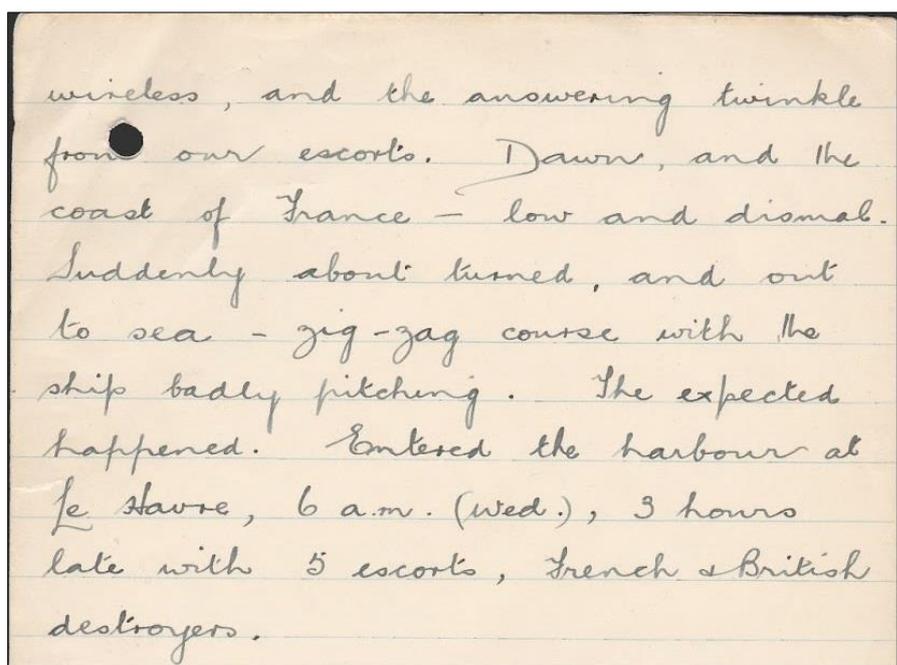
Goodbye for the
present & please don't worry,
much love
Ernie

Across the Channel to France

18th April 1917

18 WED Embarked 11.15.
Southampton 3.30 -
Sailed 8 pm (La France)
arrived 6 am. Wed. Havre
Liz - zag passage - 3 hrs
late. 5 escorts.
Latter part of the journey -

18.4.17. Marched to station to the
everlasting "Sarah": beastly wet +
miserable. Embarked 11.15 a.m.
Arrived Southampton Docks 3.30 p.m.
Strolled the quay. Embarked 8 p.m.
in "La France". Fearful crush,
and standing room only. Served
out with life belt, (second wind-up)
Down the Solent at dusk, and
the last sight of Blighty. Passed
a "Union Castle" liner hospital
ship - torpedoed. Picked up
escorts, (two destroyers) at the mouth
of Solent - into the Channel, now
pitch dark, with the wireless busy.
My weirdest experience - rough sea -
pitch dark - twinkling of our

A photograph of a handwritten diary entry on aged, lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and matches the typed text below. The entry describes the journey across the Channel, mentioning escorts, dawn, the coast of France, a zig-zag course, and entering the harbour at Le Havre at 6 a.m. on Wednesday, 3 hours late with 5 escorts, including French and British destroyers.

wireless, and the answering twinkle
from our escorts. Dawn, and the
coast of France - low and dismal.
Suddenly about turned, and out
to sea - zig-zag course with the
ship badly pitching. The expected
happened. Entered the harbour at
Le Havre, 6 a.m. (Wed.), 3 hours
late with 5 escorts, French & British
destroyers.

We marched to the station to the everlasting "Sarah" and entrained at 11:15am. It was beastly wet and miserable.

By 3:30pm on that miserable April day we strolled along the quay at Southampton Docks looking at the majestic liners at anchor, reminiscent of those troop ships which as a small boy I saw pictured in the Illustrated London News in the not so distant days of the Boer War. True the bunting was missing from the ships and there were no waving handkerchiefs or weeping relatives but, nevertheless, this was our moment and we relished it to the full.

At 8pm the draft embarked on a note of anti-climax. Our majestic troopship proved to be a miserable little paddle steamer named 'La France' which, prior to its promotion to sterner duties, no doubt conveyed 'les petits enfants' to sea at the holiday resorts. Lifebelts were served out and adjusted. Standing only was possible since the troops were packed in as closely as a football crowd at a cup-tie.

Down the Solent as dusk fell gave us a farewell and, to many, a final glimpse of England. Against the faint and murky shore a Union Castle liner lay at anchor, ghostly white except for the broad green stripe from stem to stern and the large, red cross just above the waterline. An ugly, jagged hole was a reminder that already we were near the danger zone.

At the mouth of the Solent our escort of two destroyers was waiting and full steam ahead we sped into the darkness. There was nothing to do but stand

and wait. The continuous spitting and sparking from the wireless aerial strung between the masts was eerie but comforting in so far as we still had some link with the Navy.

After a time the ceaseless chatter of the radio became somewhat disturbing in its possible implication. In addition I had to contend with worries of a strictly personal nature. The ship was plunging and rolling in the choppy sea and I was not a good sailor. Standing in such close proximity to my fellows there was no question of taking avoiding action. There was nothing I could do to solve the problem and the inevitable happened. Together with seventy five percent of the troops on board I passed the buck to the ship's company to deal with later as they thought fit.

At dawn the coast of France appeared out of the mist, low and dismal. But the promised land was not yet within our grasp. The ship suddenly turned about and pursued a zigzag course at full speed until the inviting coastline disappeared from view. At 6am precisely on Thursday 19th April, three hours overdue, 'La France' entered the harbour at Le Havre in company with our two British escorts and three French destroyers which, unknown to us, had joined in the night's fun and games. A miserable, depressed crowd of soldiers disembarked across the low decks of one of the destroyers much to the delight of the Royal Navy who had obviously enjoyed the night's proceedings and revelled in our discomfiture.

19th April 1917

19 THUR marched through
Le Havre (mud & filth)
Camp at Harfleur.
Issued with gas helmet &c. tent with
9 others. (Lieut. Ivison).

19.4.17. Le Havre. Everything busy
on the quay - the noisy tinkle
of the early morning trams. Disem-
-barked a few hours later. marched
through the Docks, and through the
back streets of Havre. First impres-
-sions of France - mud and filth.

"Deeskits". Through the village of
Harfleur, and into the camp.

No. 114 Camp - 4th Infantry Base
Depot - Billeted in tent with
nine others. Bromige, Williamson

Scammel, Stone, Dyball, Mansley,
Coombs, Forster. Issued with rifle,
sword, tin-hat, p.t.v. gas helmet,
box respirator, &c. Goodbye to
Lieut Ivison.

A few hours later we had disembarked and it was on the quay that I first met one Arthur Forster, another civil servant from Somerset House. We teamed up and soon found a common bond. By a strange coincidence, one of several that have bedevilled me whilst in the Army, our respective elder brothers were close colleagues in the City Tax Office.

The march took us through the docks into the grimy back streets of Le Havre¹. The early workers had already departed to the war factories and the dockyards on bicycles or on the tramcars with their tinkling bells, leaving behind the very old and the children. Almost everyone was dressed in black – mourning for the sons of France, mourning for France itself. If they deigned to look at us at all their stares appeared hostile. “Another contingent from L’Angleterre” but L’Angleterre had not suffered invasion at the hands of a ruthless enemy. The children ran wildly alongside the column demanding “booly biff” and “beeskits” whilst mongrel dogs scampered between our legs and departed only when addressed with appropriate terms in their own language.

Passing through the village of Harfleur² we arrived at Camp No 14, 7th Infantry Base Depot. Here the draft was housed in bell tents of which there were many hundreds spread over a vast slope. Nine soldiers were allotted to each tent and of my eight companions on that first day of active service five lived to make the return journey. The big fellow Scammel and the little chap Stone, men in their forties, friends of happier days, both received snipers’ bullets through the head. Bromidge survived after severe gassing and Williamson lost his life through an accident. Dyball, Mansley and Coombs were lost sight of but Forster and I remained in close companionship until the Boche broke up the partnership.

Sleeping in such close quarters was a problem. Heads on packs around the outer perimeter was comfortable enough but nine pairs of feet meeting at the centre meant that the latecomers were resting their toes halfway up the tent pole. In sloping lanes between the rows of tents were latrine buckets, each one shared between several tents – a useful if somewhat unsanitary arrangement. Unfortunately towards evening these receptacles overreached their capacity with disastrous results to the tent dwellers at the receiving end on the lower slopes. Hasty action with entrenching tools was called for and the competitive spirit entered into the exercise. The idea was to channel off into the adjoining tent before the occupants became aware of approaching danger – sometimes only to find that competitors from another quarter had meanwhile performed a disastrous outflanking movement.

On this day we were issued with rifles and sword bayonets, tin hats, PH gas helmets³ and box respirators. With the departure of Lieutenant Ivison, the

¹ Google Maps entry for Le Havre - <https://goo.gl/maps/1rX9TczMC9P2>

² Google Maps entry for Harfleur - <https://goo.gl/maps/ir72HDeKBS32>

³ Wikipedia entry for PH gas helmets - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PH_helmet

officer in charge of the draft, our last link with Redhill and the 3rd Battalion was severed.

20th April 1917

20 FRI Reveille 5.15. Started
course bayonets - squad
tc. on the "Pimple"
Under canvas - rations -
Wrote home - letter
Wrote letter
Packed postbag

20-4-17. Reveille 5.15. March to
the training-ground, the "Pimple",
or the Bull Ring. Bursed the
tin hat. Started course, bayonets,
squad, tc under the instruction
of the "Canaries". Dinner on
the training ground - first
experience of the "French" - bought
some so called cakes & sweets of
the old market people.

Reveille at 5:15am heralded the commencement of an intensive course of physical training and musketry that lasted for eighteen days on the 'Bull Ring' (or the 'Pimple') which was situated on a high plateau some distance from the camp. In blazing sun the daily march up to the Bull Ring was exhausting.

With the newly acquired tin hats the cord and hard leather lining bit deeply into closely cropped heads. At the top we were at the mercy of the 'Canaries', the base instructors in their bright yellow jerseys. Until late evening squad drill and bayonet work alternated with barely a break.

The midday meal was taken on the training ground and this was the signal for the influx of large numbers of elderly and decrepit market people to proffer their wares at exorbitant prices. I paid my franc and indulged in an orgy of saffron cakes. The high spot on these days on the Pimple came when the sun was beginning to sink in the West and the squad were lined up for the return journey to the camp.

Music played an important part in the life of the soldiers. Throughout the lengthy period of the march-off by the many hundreds of men the massed bands of the Guards played those military marches only the Guards could play until the last man had departed with the setting sun. I minded not how long our squad stood there awaiting its turn to march off and to this day martial music brings back a picture of the sun disappearing behind the 'Pimple' and hundreds of men passing one day nearer the unknown. In later days we marched to the music of our own Regimental Band – it was not quite up to the standard of the Guards but at times of depression and near exhaustion the first notes of the band striking up always revived our spirits and gave new impetus to reluctant feet. If the solo bugle produced a false note occasionally, which it did, our release from the cares and fatigue of the hour was enhanced.

The only occasion when little pleasure was derived from marching behind a band was when, still as part of the Brigade on draft, the column was led by the bagpipes of the London Scottish. Being a rifle regiment the QWR were trained to march at 140 steps to the minute and in the early days as recruits the pace seemed entirely beyond our capacity. Gradually, however, we became so used to 140 that we found difficulty in slowing down the tempo. In slow time the march behind the wailing bagpipes of the London Scottish was agony and possibly regimental pride suffered a little. There was a reason for this. Owing to the close proximity of the respective Regimental Drill Halls in London there existed a strong, not unfriendly, rivalry between the two regiments which was somewhat enhanced by the feeling that, in our opinion, the Scottish were regarded in Fleet Street as the blue-eyed boys of the London Territorials and received more than their fair share of publicity than was afforded to the other regiments of the 'Grey' brigade. The story goes that one day a QWR rifleman fed up with yet another picture in the daily papers glorifying the London Kilts walked into the drill hall in Queen's Gate, apologising for his intrusion, and said "Excuse me but is it really true that the London Scottish sank the Emden". No one could vouch for the truth of the story*, be that as it may, whenever the regiments came together on the march the London Scottish were unfailingly greeted with a chorus of "Who sank the Emden?".

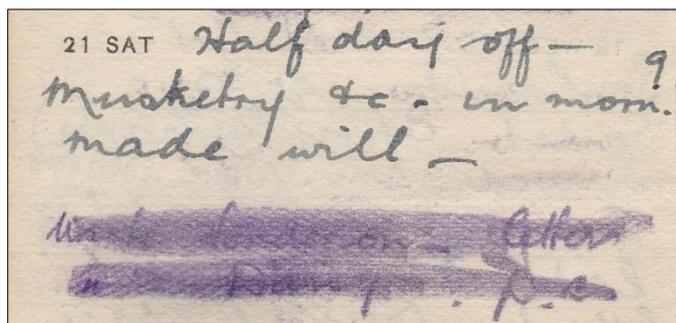
* *"... newsboys hawking papers on the streets of Britain did full-throated justice to two items of information, newly released by the Press Bureau, which appeared on their billboards in happy juxtaposition.*

'LONDON SCOTTISH IN ACTION!' they yelled. 'EMDEN SUNK!' It gave rise to a joke that persisted for months.

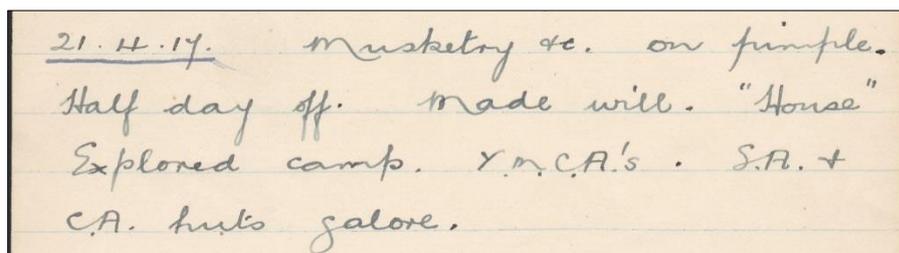
Question: 'Who sank the Emden?' Answer: 'The London Scottish'. The German battlecruiser Emden had been sunk by the Australian navy, and it was Australia's first spectacular contribution to the war effort"

1914: The Days of Hope - Lyn MacDonald - Penguin UK - ISBN 9780241972199

21st April 1917



21 SAT Half day off - 9.
Musketry etc. in morn.
made will -
~~Went to camp on 21st~~
~~at 10.30 p.m.~~

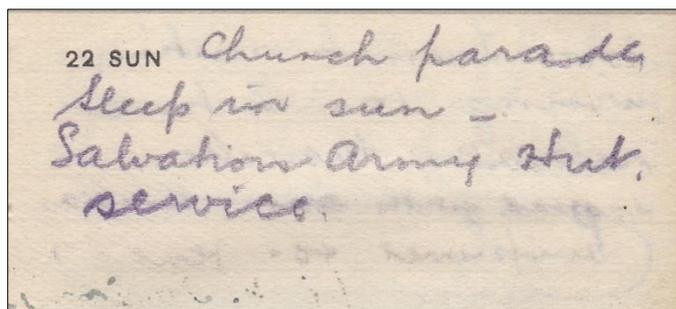


21.4.17. Musketry etc. on fimple.
Half day off. made will. "House"
Explored camp. Y.M.C.A.'s. S.A. +
C.A. huts galore.

Musketry and squad drill. The morning was spent on the 'Pimple' but this being Saturday we were unexpectedly granted a half day off. Having made my will by completing the relevant page in the Pay Book I gave attention to lighter matters.

The camp abounded with canteens run by the YMCA, Church Army, Salvation Army and some other bodies. Here we stocked up with the minor necessities of life. A good briar pipe cost only 1.50 francs, a pouch, about 50f, was purchased solely to take advantage of the free army ration of tobacco which bore the romantic name of 'Verbena mixture'. In addition we also received a free issue of cigarettes variously named 'Ruby Queen', 'Red Hussars' and 'Trumpeter Brand'. I was fairly new to smoking and my requirements were small but the addicted were unsatisfied with the ration even with the 'spares' which were always passed round. In harder times dried tea leaves were a revolting substitute. Other purchases included a safety razor in place of the army issue cutthroat made of soft iron and the necessary tinder lighter that smouldered until extinguished by a little ball and chain. The only gambling game permitted was 'Housey-Housey' (Bingo) and the compound was covered with little schools of devotees most of whom played out of sheer boredom. In the darker corners of the camp the real gamblers indulged in 'Crown and Anchor' and more rewarding card games. From them in later days I learnt to play 'Slippery Sam' and Brag - a necessary accomplishment for anyone who lived with the troops.

22nd April 1917 (Sunday)

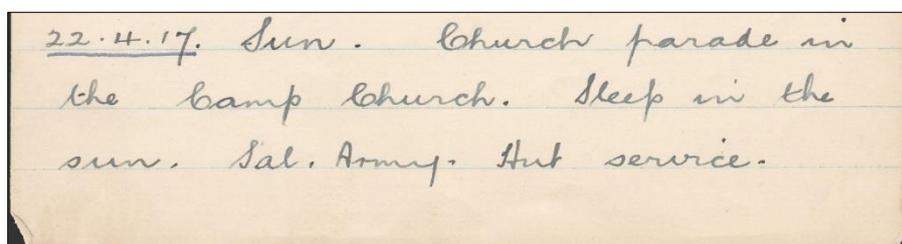


22 SUN Church parade
Sleep in sun -
Salvation Army Hut
service.

Church Parade.

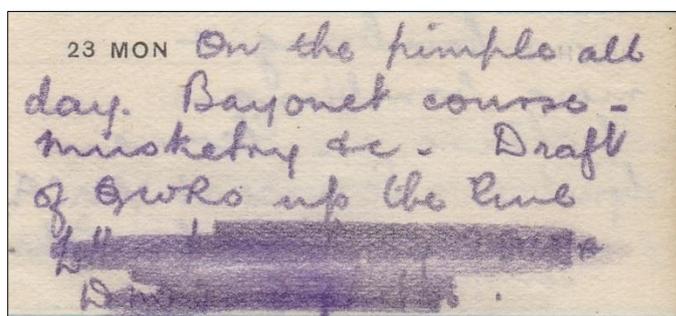
Sleep in sun.

Salvation Army Hut service.



22.4.17. Sun. Church parade in
the camp church. Sleep in the
sun. Sal. Army. Hut service.

23rd April 1917

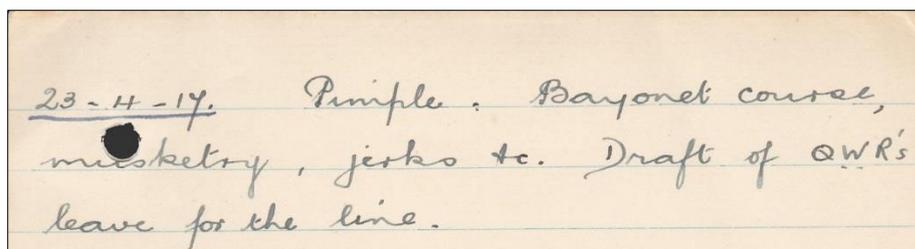


23 MON On the pimple all
day. Bayonet course -
musketry &c. Draft
of QWRs up the line
~~to the line~~
~~to the line~~

On the Pimple all day.

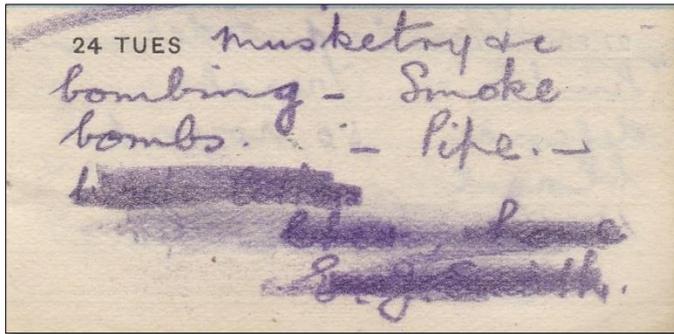
Bayonet course, musketry, etc.

Draft of QWRs up the line.



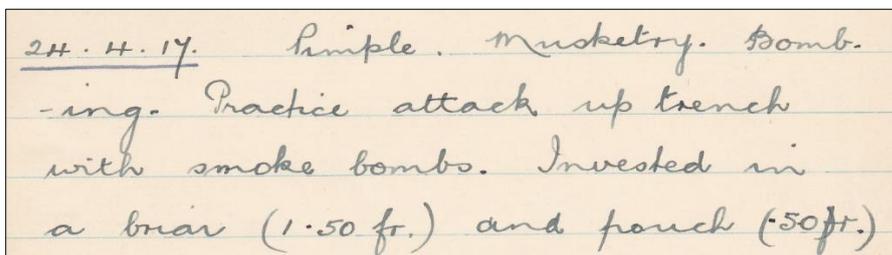
23-4-17. Pimple. Bayonet course,
musketry, jerks &c. Draft of QWR's
leave for the line.

24th April 1917



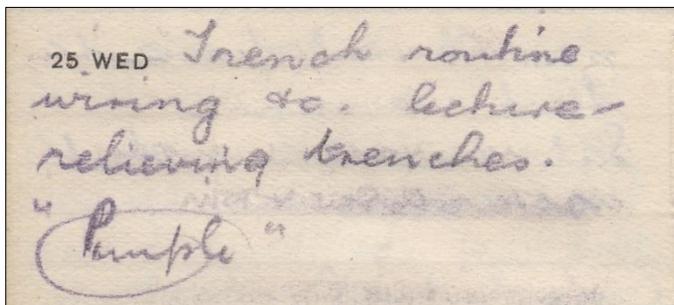
24 TUES musketry &c
bombing - Smoke
bombs. - Pipe. -
~~_____~~
~~_____~~
~~_____~~

Musketry, etc.
Bombing - smoke bombs.
Pipe.



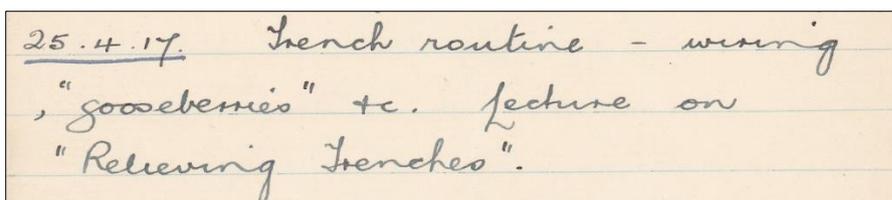
24.4.17. Pimple. Musketry. Bomb.
-ing. Practice attack up trench
with smoke bombs. Invested in
a briar (1.50 ft.) and pouch (.50 ft.)

25th April 1917



25 WED Trench routine
wiring &c. lecture -
relieving trenches.
"Pimple"

Trench routine, wiring, etc.
Lecture - Relieving Trenches.
"Pimple"



25.4.17. Trench routine - wiring
, "gooseberries" &c. lecture on
"Relieving Trenches".

26th April 1917

26 THUR Bombing +
more bombing on
lecture on German
bombs. Service at YMCA.
Pimple ~~Letter to John~~

Bombing and more bombing.
Lecture on German bombs.
Service at YMCA.
Pimple.

26.4.17. Bombing. Lecture on
"German Bombs." Egg bombs,
and stick bombs. Y.M.C.A.

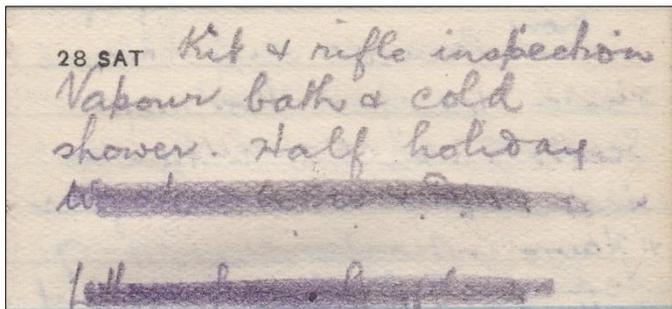
27th April 1917

27 FRI Extended order on
"Pimple" Trench
defence. 50 rounds
blank
~~Letter to John~~

Extended order on "Pimple".
Trench defence.
50 rounds blank.

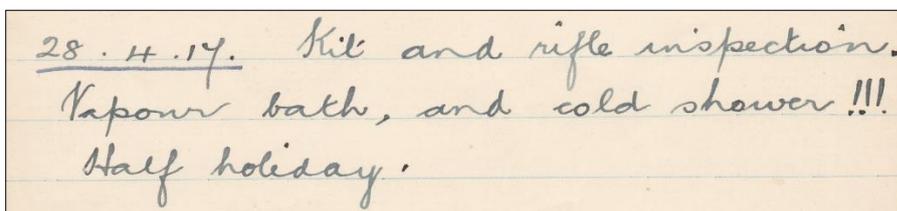
27.4.17. Extended order.
Trench defence. Thoroughly
enjoyed blazing away 50 rounds
blank.

28th April 1917



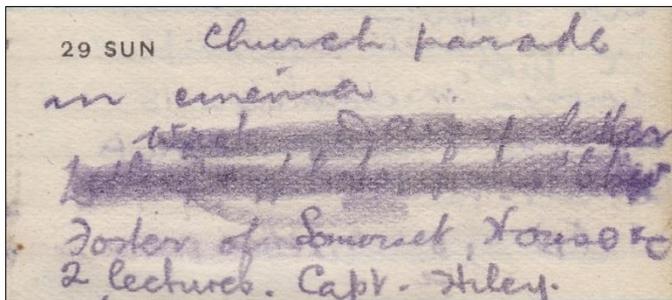
28 SAT Kit & rifle inspection
Vapour bath & cold
shower. Half holiday.
~~Went to cinema.~~
~~Let [unclear] [unclear]~~

Kit and rifle inspections.
Vapour bath and cold shower.
Half holiday.



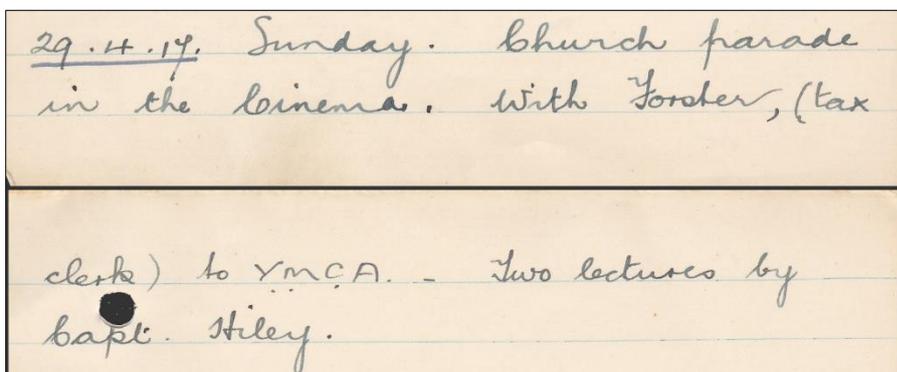
28.4.17. Kit and rifle inspection.
Vapour bath, and cold shower!!!
Half holiday.

29th April 1917 (Sunday)



29 SUN Church parade
in cinema.
~~Went to [unclear] [unclear]~~
~~[unclear] [unclear] [unclear]~~
Foster of Somerset House etc
2 lectures. Capt. Hiley.

Church parade in cinema.
Foster of Somerset House, etc.
Two lectures. Captain Hiley.



29.4.17. Sunday. Church parade
in the cinema. With Foster, (tax
clerk) to Y.M.C.A. - Two lectures by
Capt. Hiley.

30th April 1917

Mon
1 TUES
G.G.
Gas all day - chlorine
3 times tear gas - Box resp.
Sergt. J S Hunt of E. Ham as
instructor - Pass to Harfleur
& Havre - Montvilliers 4-9
tea at Salvation Army hut
with Foster

Gas all day - chlorine. Three times tear gas. Box respirators.
Sergeant J S Hunt of East Ham as instructor.
Pass to Harfleur and Havre - Montvilliers¹.
4-9 Tea at Salvation Army Hut with Foster.

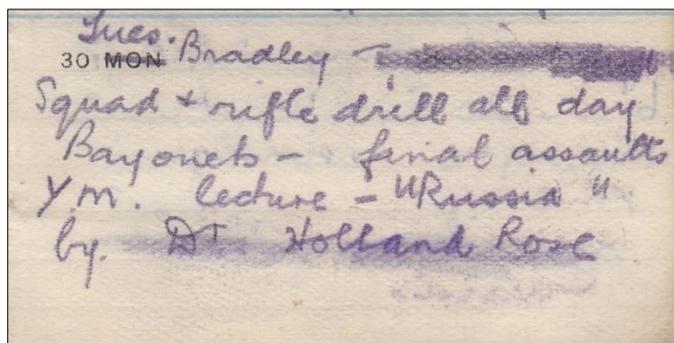
30.4.17. Gas all day, under the
instruction of Sergt. J. S. Hunt,
Grenadier Guards, late school-teach-
-er, Sandringham Rd. School,
East Ham. Chlorine, tear-gas,
three times. Pass to Harfleur
and Havre, from 4 pm to 9 pm.
with Foster. Harfleur, dirty
little village. Harfleur church,
sandbagged up, windows extracted
and boarded up. Visible from the
camp. Tram into Havre (.25 fr.)
Trailer cars, crowded - rode on
tail board. Up the main street -
fine shops + buildings, and
round the Quay. Back to the
town, and tea at a French

¹ Google Maps entry for Montvilliers [here](#)

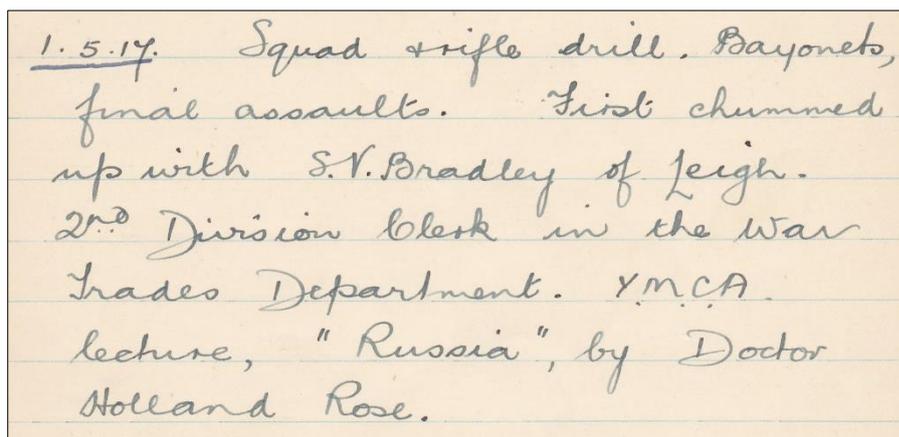
Salvation Army Hut. Through
a small park, and round the
Municipal Buildings. Up the

Rue de Strasbourg & the boulevards
to the sea. Back to the centre of
the town, and tram back to
the camp. Impression - a town
of mourning.

1st May 1917



30 MON S.V. Bradley
Squad + rifle drill all day
Bayonets - final assaults
Y.M. lecture - "Russia"
by Dr. Holland Rose



1.5.17. Squad + rifle drill. Bayonets,
final assaults. First chummed
up with S.V. Bradley of Leigh.
2nd Division block in the War
Trades Department. Y.M.C.A.
lecture, "Russia", by Doctor
Holland Rose.

Squad and rifle drill were the order of the day concluding with numerous assaults on the bayonet course. The latter was a hazardous undertaking. In close formation, with swords fixed, we were bullied and coerced into climbing and vaulting high barricades with unexpected wide trenches and other obstacles on the farther side, completing the exercise with vicious jabs at swinging sacks and prone 'bodies' made of straw. The target was always the solar plexus, the most vital spot in the human body. The danger, we were told, was that if the bayonet was plunged in too deeply human strength would not be able to withdraw it.

The sudden crack of a rifle meant that someone had unconsciously left 'one up the spout' and in his exertions at the top of the barricade had triggered off. The culprit was a tall, scholarly looking individual with bent knees and a pronounced stoop and elderly by our standards. His persistent clumsiness made him the butt of the draft and the despair of the Canaries. What penalty was meted out to him we never knew because from that day forward he disappeared from our ken. I like to think he was found some nice quiet job at the Base more in keeping with his talents and no longer a menace to himself or his comrades.

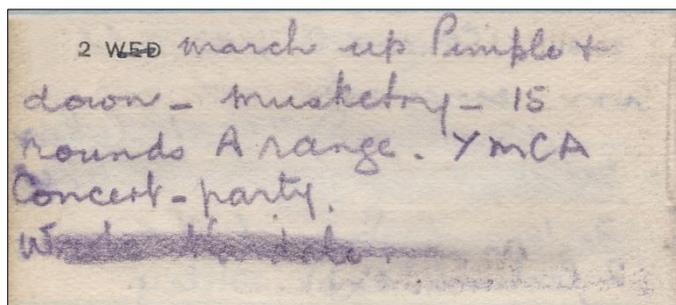
The evening was spent at the YMCA where the well-known historian, Holland-Rose¹, gave a talk on Russia. The lecture was undoubtedly both interesting and instructive but the golden opportunity for a quiet nap with a modicum of comfort was irresistible. It was here that I first met Stanley Victor Bradley. On my way back to the billet a short tubby figure joined me. The beaming smile was Bradley's but the curious and shapeless jacket of greenish hue with no pleats to its bulging breast pockets could only be blamed on the quartermaster's stores. Bradley, I learnt in good time, was not one to be worried by the niceties of dress and I soon became aware that his main preoccupation was the enjoyment of life to the full under all conditions with goodwill to all men.

Time was short in 1917 and we soon became acquainted with each other's relatively brief life histories. At 25 he was five years my senior, a civil servant in the War Trades Department of the Board of Trade. He had been at school with my cousin who had died at Loos, had a passion for tennis and was a fervent Wesleyan. He was also a teetotaler and a non-smoker. I never heard him utter the mildest of swear words except on one never to be forgotten occasion. From that day forward Bradley, Forster and I were inseparables except on those occasions when the duties of the day broke up the trio. In later years of peace I have sometimes pondered why in such close relationships the use of Christian names was rejected. The answer I believe lay in some inner consciousness which refused to admit that friendships born and nurtured on the battlefield could be anything but transient and that by some curious quirk of the mind we were facing up to the inevitable.

The trio was now complete and though we enjoyed the company of many other good friends we were never content unless we three were together.

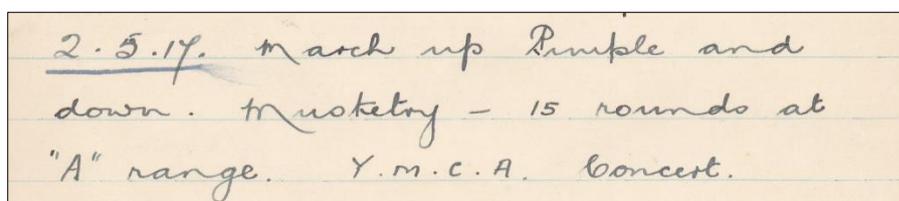
¹ Wikipedia entry for Professor Holland-Rose - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Holland_Rose

2nd May 1917



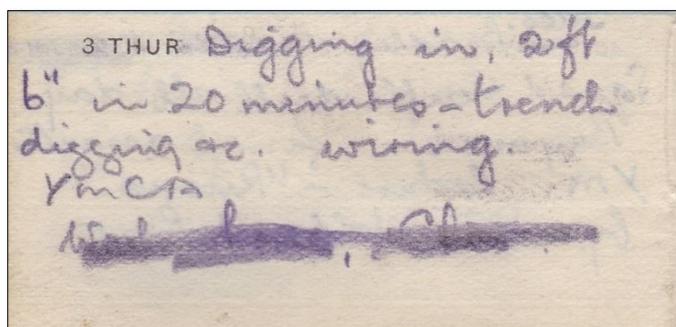
2 WED march up Pimple +
down - musketry - 15
rounds A range. YMCA
Concert - party.
~~Went to the~~

March up Pimple and down.
Musketry - 15 rounds, A range.
YMCA concert party.



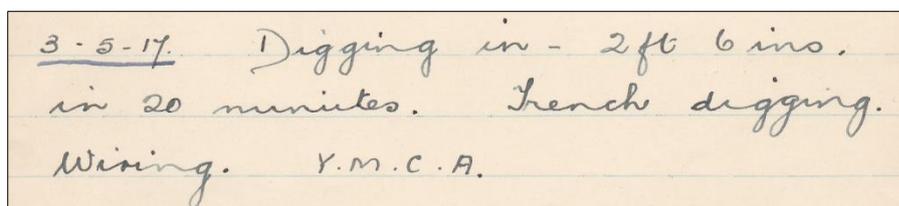
2-5-17. march up Pimple and
down. musketry - 15 rounds at
"A" range. Y.M.C.A. concert.

3rd May 1917



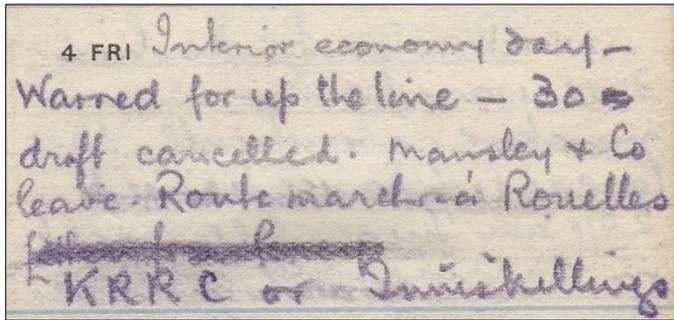
3 THUR Digging in, 2ft
6" in 20 minutes - trench
digging etc. wiring.
YMCA
~~Went to the~~

Digging in, 2ft 6in in 20 minutes.
Trench digging, etc. Wiring.
YMCA.



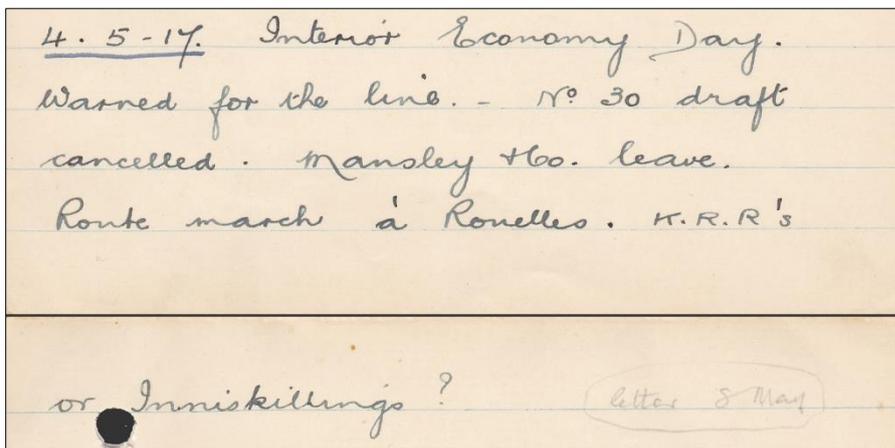
3-5-17. Digging in - 2ft 6 ins.
in 20 minutes. Trench digging.
Wiring. Y.M.C.A.

4th May 1917



4 FRI Interior economy day -
Warned for up the line - 30th
draft cancelled. Mansley & Co
leave. Route march to Rouelles
~~for the line~~
- KRRC or Inniskillings

Interior economy day.
Warned for up the line - 30 draft cancelled.
Mansley and co leave.
Route march to Rouelles¹.
KRRC² or Inniskillings³?



4.5.17 Interior Economy Day.
Warned for the line. - No 30 draft
cancelled. Mansley & Co. leave.
Route march à Rouelles. K.R.R.'s

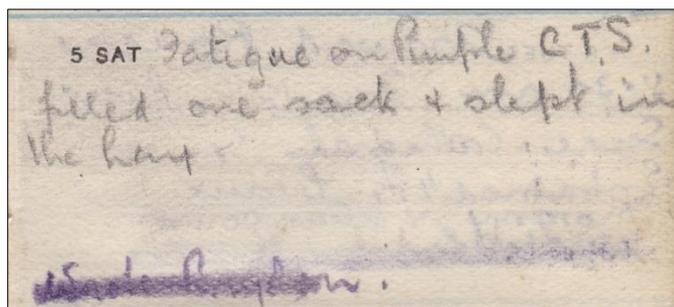
or Inniskillings? (letter 8 May)

¹ Google Maps entry for Park Rouelles - <https://goo.gl/maps/f6fPQ3hokaB2>

² Wikipedia entry for KRRC (King's Royal Rifle Corps) -
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King%27s_Royal_Rifle_Corps

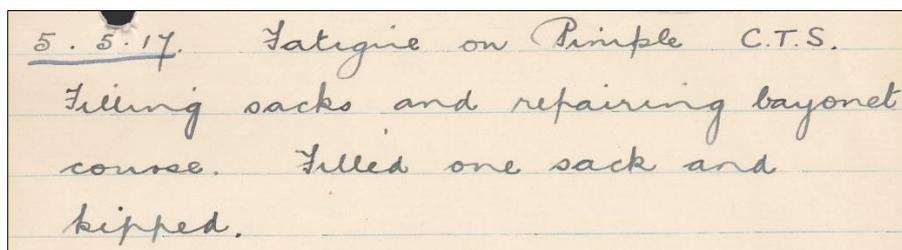
³ Wikipedia entry for Inniskillings (Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers) -
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Inniskilling_Fusiliers

5th May 1917



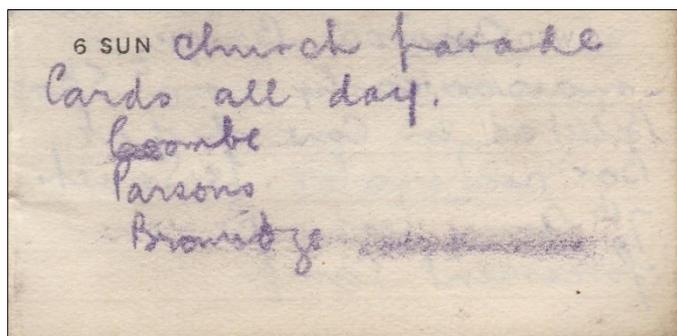
5 SAT Fatigue on Pimple C.T.S.
filled one sack + slept in
the hay.
~~Went to the hay.~~

Fatigue on Pimple. C.T.S.
Filled one sack and slept in the hay.



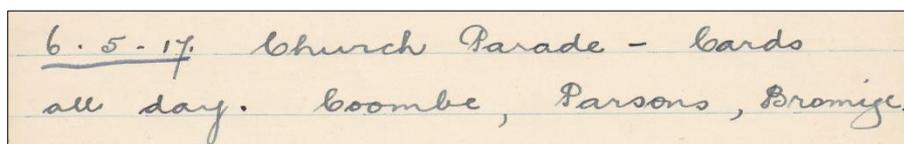
5.5.17. Fatigue on Pimple C.T.S.
Filling sacks and repairing bayonet
course. Filled one sack and
kipped.

6th May 1917 (Sunday)



6 SUN Church parade
Cards all day.
Coombe
Parsons
Bromidge

Church Parade.
Cards all day. Coombe, Parsons, Bromidge.



6.5.17. Church Parade - cards
all day. Coombe, Parsons, Bromidge.

7th May 1917

7 MON Warned for the line
Full war pack —
mucked about all day
Paraded 6.30 entrained
2 1/2 am Tues. all night
in carriage of soldiers

Warned for the line.

Full war pack.

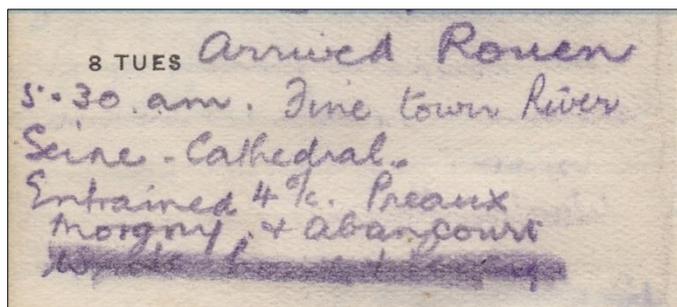
Mucked about all day.

Paraded 6:30pm, entrained 2am Tuesday.

All night in carriage. Nine soldiers.

7.5.17 Warned for the line. Full
war pack — mucked about all day.
Paraded 6.30 p.m. Band to Harfleur.
Through the back streets of Havre —
swollen ankle — to the quay.

8th May 1917



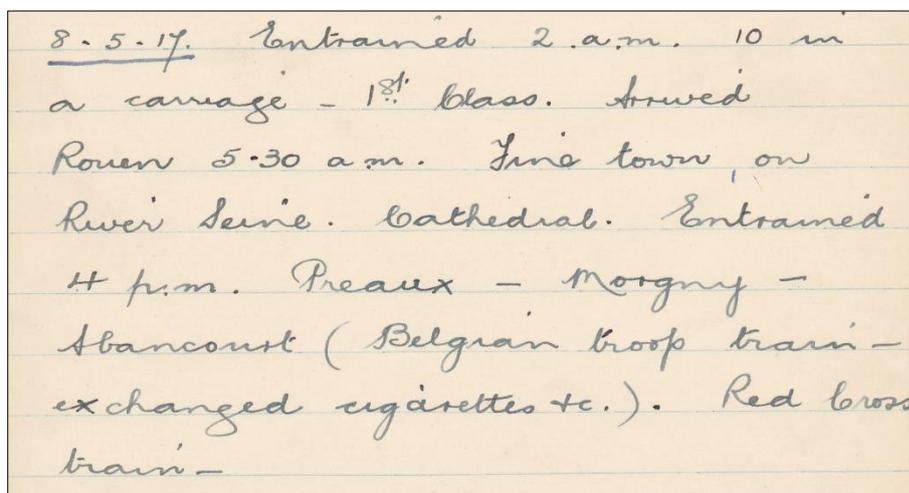
8 TUES Arrived Rouen
5:30 a.m. Fine town River
Seine - Cathedral.
Entrained 4 p.m. Preaux
Morgny, + Abancourt

Arrived Rouen¹ 5:30am.

Fine town. River Seine - cathedral.

Entrained 4pm.

Preaux², Morgny³ and Abancourt⁴.



8.5.17. Entrained 2 a.m. 10 m
a carriage - 1st class. Arrived
Rouen 5:30 a.m. Fine town, on
River Seine. Cathedral. Entrained
4 p.m. Preaux - Morgny -
Abancourt (Belgian troop train -
exchanged cigarettes etc.). Red Cross
train -

¹ Google Maps entry for Rouen - <https://goo.gl/maps/msa4f5ct7d22>

² Google Maps entry for Preaux - <https://goo.gl/maps/AnvRom3nPwr>

³ Google Maps entry for Morgny - <https://goo.gl/maps/5qGhZSn7AUS2>

⁴ Google Maps entry for Abancourt - <https://goo.gl/maps/hZY5emfXTKs>

9th May 1917

9 WED Arrived Bouque-
-maison early morn^g 5pm
Billeted in Cow shed at
Box respirator. Le Souich
7th Army Corps Re-in-
-forcement Camp.

9.5.17. Arrived Bouquemaison
in early morning. (5.am.) .

Drew iron rations, etc. March
to Le Souich - "This is a
clean village." Look over billets -
Broken down cow-shed - stable
at side - estaminet opposite,
cess-pool in the centre. Issued
with box respirator. Address :-
7th Army Corps Re-inforcement
camp.

At 5am we detrained at Bouquemaison¹, a little town in open farming country some twenty miles to the west of Anas and proceeded on foot to Le Souich² two miles nearer to the big town.

A few hundred yards along the road the column was halted in front of a small wooden building and Lieutenant Hooper, in charge of the draft, addressed us in the following terms.

"We are about to draw iron rations. Each man will be issued with a canvas bag containing one tin of bully beef, one tin of tea and sugar mixed, six biscuits and one bar of chocolate. These rations are for emergency use only

¹ Google Maps entry for Bouquemaison - <https://goo.gl/maps/5LPMkmhqLmN2>

² Google Maps entry for Le Souich - <https://goo.gl/maps/8LRQa4iKXGJ2>

and must not be consumed except in times of great extreme – for example if you find yourself cut off from your unit by enemy action and unable to draw rations in the usual way. Any man found guilty of misusing iron rations will be court-martialled and subject to severe punishment. You will now proceed in single file and the Quartermaster will issue one iron ration to each man.”

Having drawn the iron rations and stowed them away in haversacks we continued the march along the dusty road between the barren fields until on the immediate outskirts of Le Souich the column was again halted in front of another wooden building. In a loud voice Hooper again addressed us – “Now men, we are about to draw iron rations. You have already been instructed what you will incur if you misuse them”. Raising his voice again - “you will now proceed to the Quartermaster who will issue one iron ration per man.”

We had received our first lesson in the art of soldiering as practised by the old sweats throughout the ages from one who had himself served in the ranks and whose heart, I suspect, was still with the boys. Poor Hooper was killed in the battle of Cambrai in the following November.

That night we had a brew up and by the time ‘lights out’ sounded every man was replete and yet fully equipped with one iron ration according to the requirements of King’s Regulations.

Le Souich was the usual nondescript French village but one with a particular sense of civic pride. Across the village street was strung a high banner bearing the words “Le Souich – this is a clean village keep it so”! We took over our quarters, one odorous, broken down cowshed with stables adjoining. Across the road was a disused estaminet¹ and the usual midden encroached in all directions. We were now the 7th Army Corps Reinforcement Camp and here were issued box respirators², the PG gas helmet having been supplied at an earlier date. We did not appreciate this additional burden to our over weighted bodies, although I personally had good cause to be grateful for it at a later date.

¹ estaminet = café

² Imperial War Museum example of a box respirator -

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30013603>

10th May 1917

10 THUR Le Souich.
Parade ground
musketry + bayonets.
Aftⁿ feet inspecⁿ
YMCA concert
Lt. Hooper
~~W...~~

Le Souich.

Parade ground musketry and bayonets.

Afternoon - feet inspection.

YMCA concert.

Lt. Hooper officer in charge.

10.5.17 Le Souich - March to
parade ground through cornfields.
musketry and bayonets. Lieut
Hooper of ic. (of D. Coy. Redhill).
Feet inspection. Y.M.C.A. "concert."

11th May 1917

11 FRI Bath - 5 miles away
Lucheux. Aftⁿ - medical
inspecⁿ
~~W...~~

Bath! Lucheux¹ - 5 miles away. Medical inspection.

11.5.17. Bath! St Lucheux, 5
miles away. medical inspecⁿ

¹ Google Maps entry for Lucheux - <https://goo.gl/maps/mcsmF2XEC442>

12th May 1917

12 SAT Bayonets, physical
musketry, etc. Half day
off. Concert (Regtl.)
at the Chateau

Bayonets, physical, musketry, etc.
Half day off.
Concert (regimental) at the Chateau.

12. 5. 17. Bayonets, physical,
musketry etc. Half day off.
Concert at the chateau, interrup-
ted by an air-scrap above the
clouds.

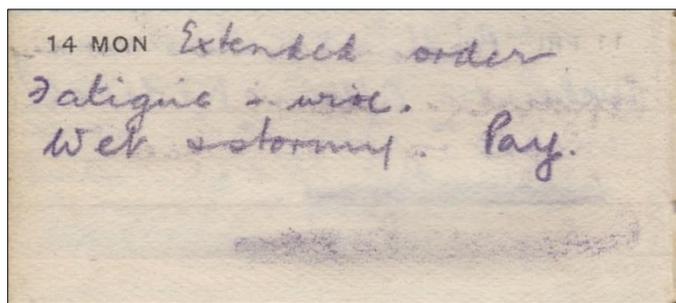
13th May (Sunday)

13 ROGATION SUN Mess orderly.
Church Parade. Field S.
~~Church Parade~~
" ~~Church Parade~~
" ~~Church Parade~~

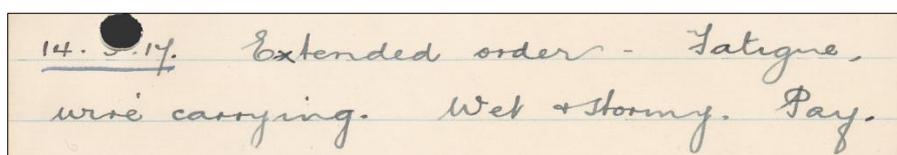
Mess orderly.
Church Parade. Field Service.

13-5-17. Mess Orderly - Church
Parade, Field Service.

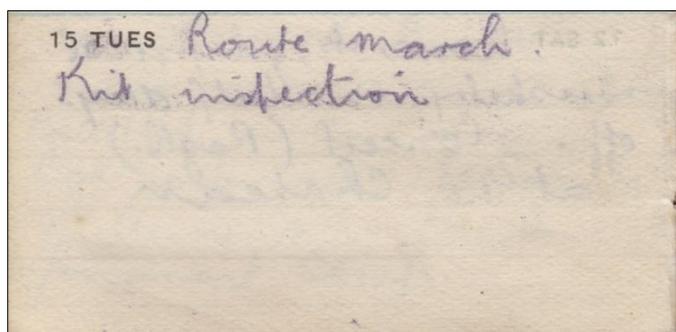
14th May 1917



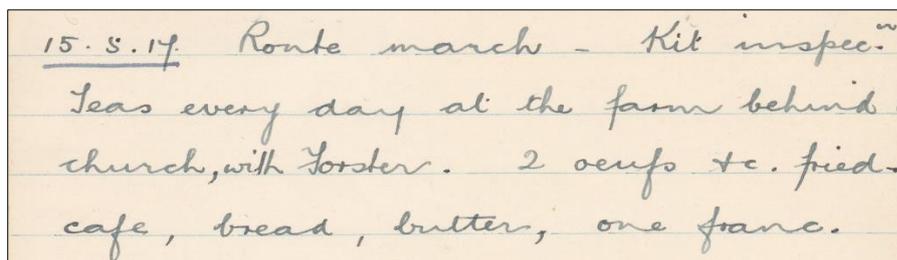
Extended order. Fatigue - wire carrying.
Wet and stormy.
Pay.



15th May 1917



Route march.
Kit inspection.



15th May 1917 - Postcard home to Mum



Dear Mum¹

I'm still in the little village right behind the lines and quite well. No new address to give you. Will write a letter in a day or two.

Much love

Ernie

¹Ernie's mother's address at 4 Cambeys Road, Dagenham, Essex on Google Maps - <https://goo.gl/maps/gS1mGDdgVV32>

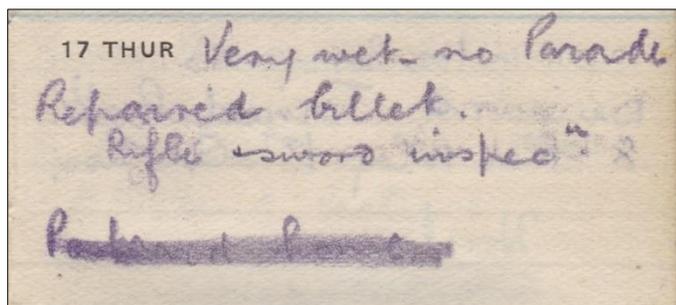
16th May 1919

16 WED Paraded sick with
foot. Fatigue - bury cow
in field: Bath
~~parade~~
Wet & cold

Paraded sick with foot. Fatigue - burying cow in field.
Bath.
Parade.
Wet and cold.

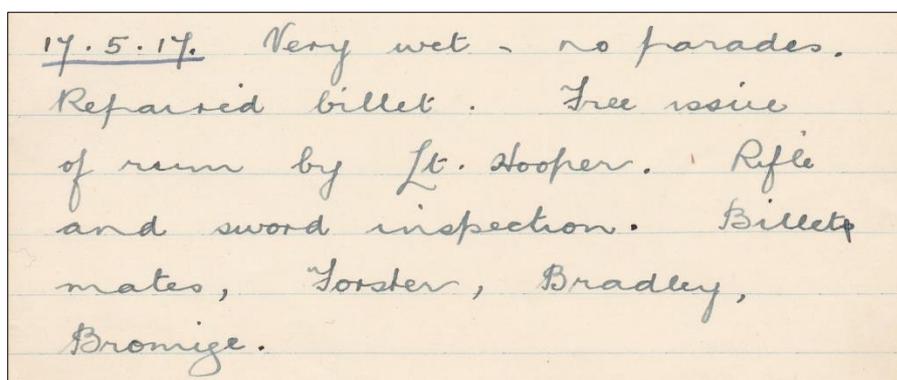
16.5.19 Paraded sick with
swollen foot. "Light duty". Fatigue,
bury cow, (in field,) which had
died outside the officers' mess.
Thirsty job. The old boy supplies
beer, and carries out post -
mortem examination. Bath
parade. Wet and cold.

17th May 1917



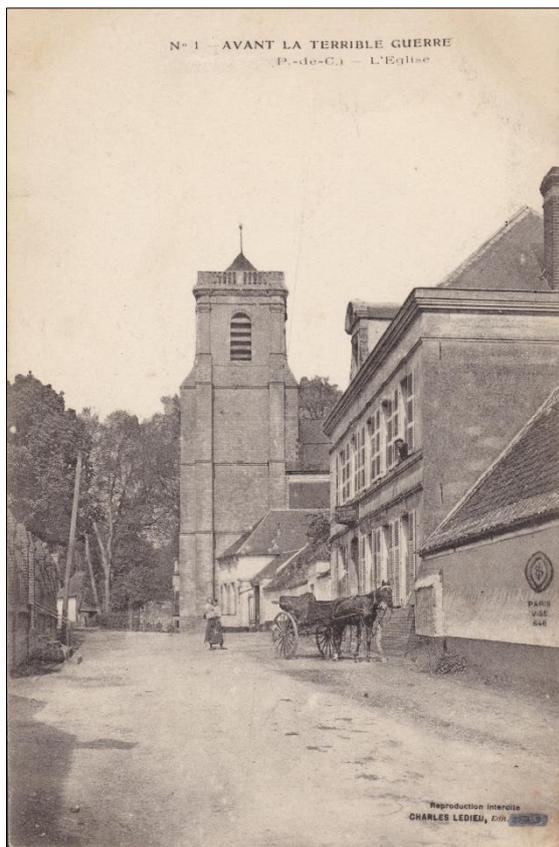
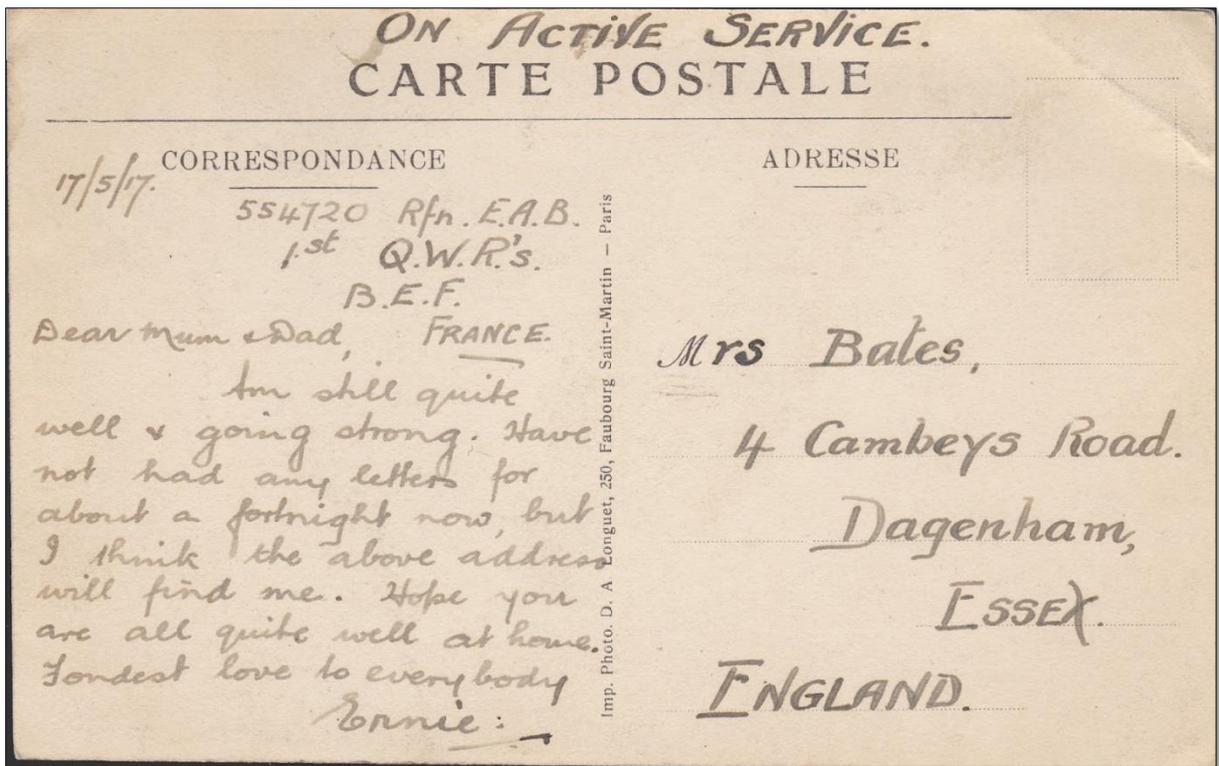
17 THUR Very wet - no parade
Repaired billet.
Rifle & sword inspected.
~~Patrol~~

Very wet - no parade.
Repaired billet.
Rifle and sword inspection.



17.5.17. Very wet - no parades.
Repaired billet. Free issue
of rum by Lt. Hooper. Rifle
and sword inspection. Billets
mates, Forder, Bradley,
Bromige.

17th May 1917 - Postcard home to Mum and Dad

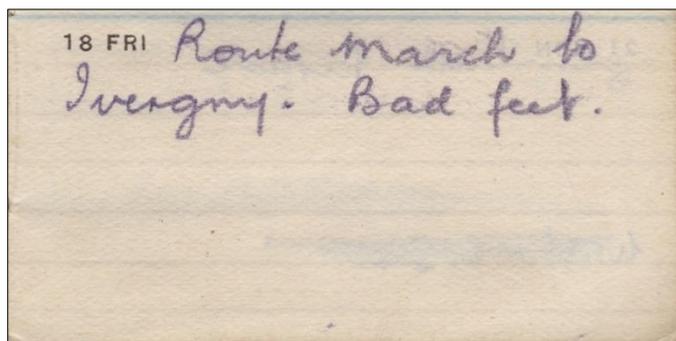


Dear Mum & Dad,

Am still quite well and going strong. Have not had any letters for about a fortnight now, but I think the above address will find me. Hope you are all quite well at home. Fondest love to everybody.

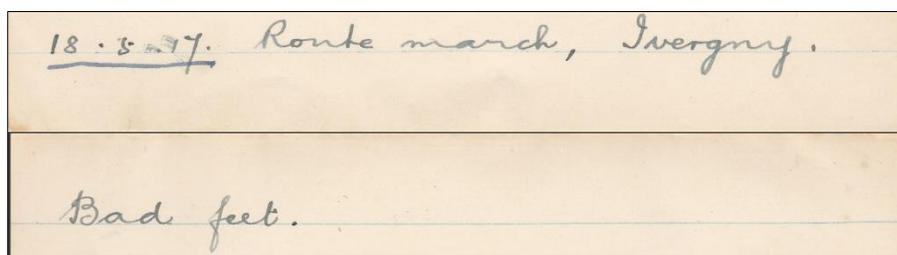
Ernie

18th May 1917



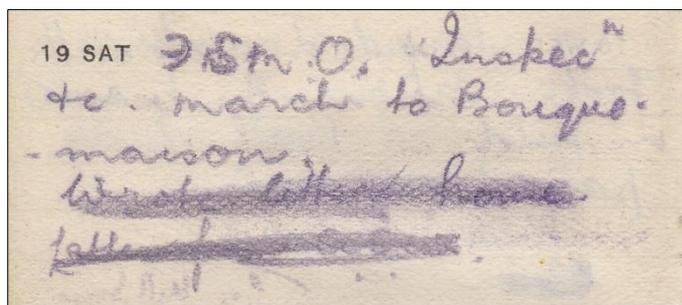
18 FRI Route march to
Ivergny. Bad feet.

Route march to Ivergny.
Bad feet.



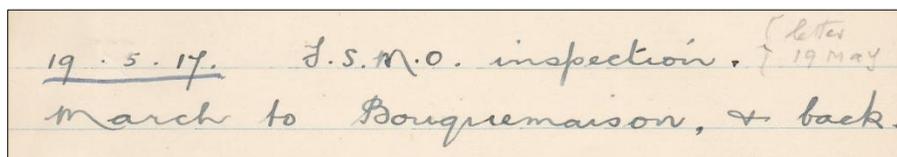
18.5.17. Route march, Ivergny.
Bad feet.

19th May 1917



19 SAT FSM O. Inspeⁿ
etc. march to Bouque-
maison.
~~Wrote letter home~~
~~Tell of ...~~

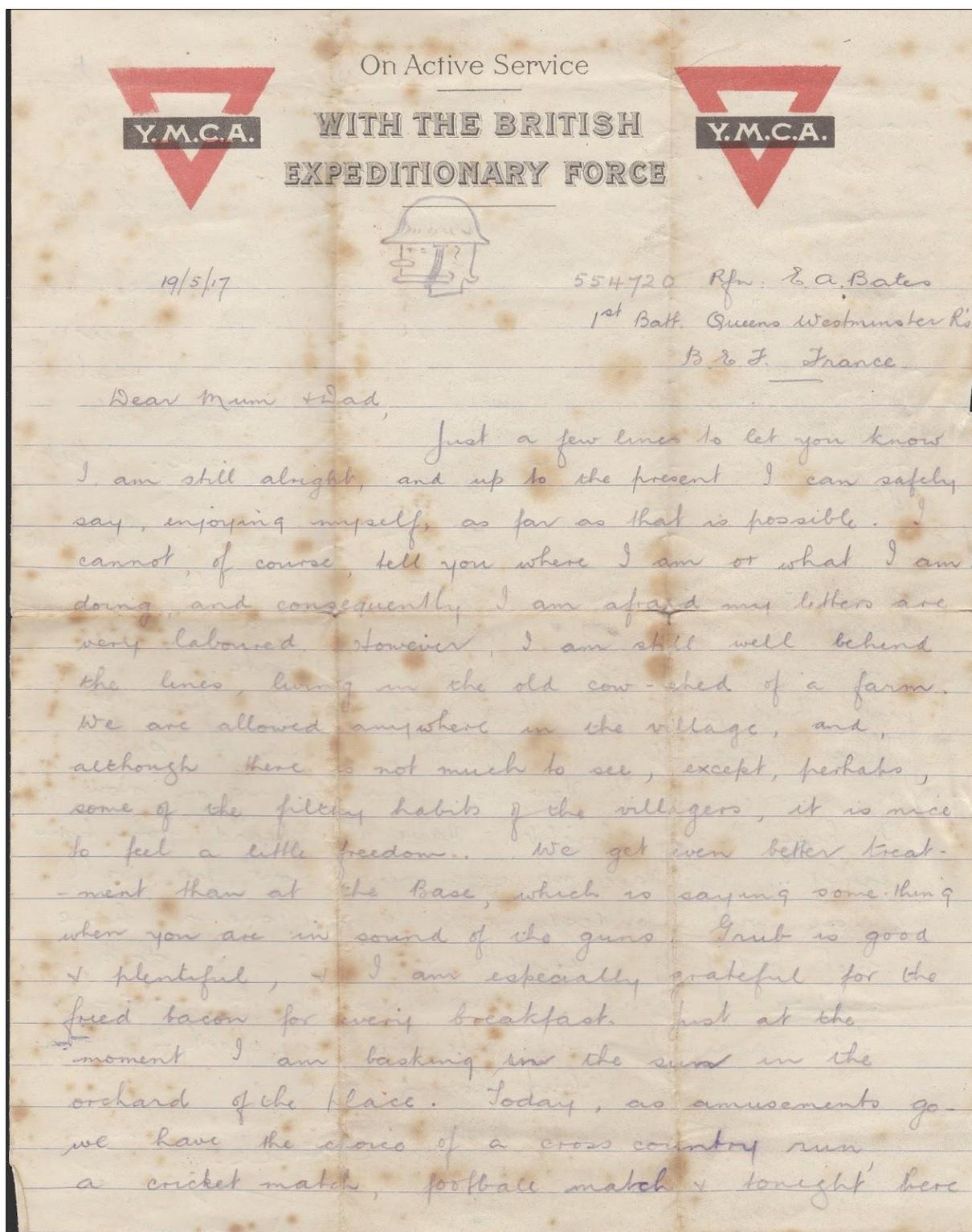
FSMO¹ inspection, etc.
March to Bouquemaison.



19.5.17. F.S.M.O. inspection. (letter 19 May)
march to Bouquemaison, & back.

¹ FSMO - Full Service Marching Order

19th May 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad



is a Regt. Concert - I feel about energetic enough for the concert & that's all. I had to go sick with a swollen foot the other day - & though it saved me a parade, I had the unique experience of burying (with the help of 2 other sick men) the remains of a deceased cow. This I didn't mind, but the owner of the beast insisted on skinning it & making a post mortem examination only three feet from where we were digging the grave. I felt "off" bully stew that day.

How is everyone at home. I've had no letters for a fortnight now from anybody, but expect I shall get them all in a bunch very soon - I hope so, at any rate - Have just had a letter this very second, from the office & dated 1st of May, so I spoke too soon.

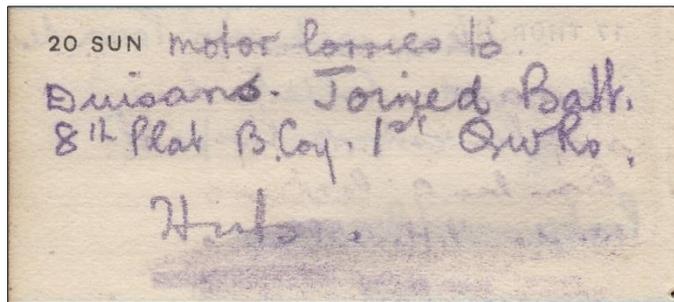
How is John getting on now? I hope he is alright. - Have you heard from him lately?

Have no more news now, so will close with fondest love to everyone at home not forgetting Kenneth & wife - I don't suppose I should know Kenneth by now - Tell Daisy I will write her very shortly -

Your loving son

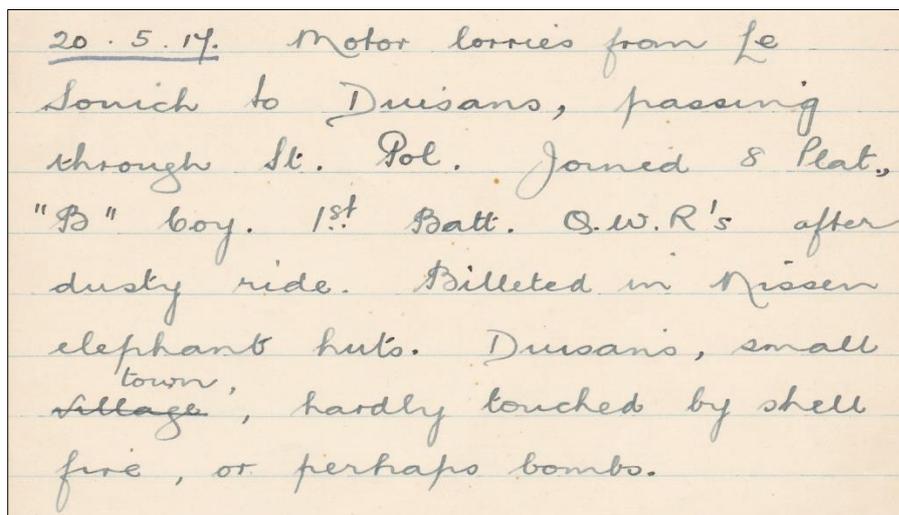
Ernie.

20th May 1917 (Sunday) - Joining the Battalion at Duisans



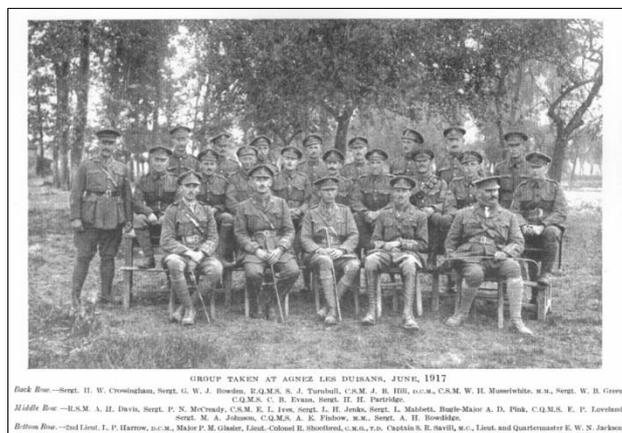
Motor lorries to Duisans.

Joined Battalion, 8th Platoon, B Company, 1st QWRs. Huts.



"When the Battalion came out of the line after the Battles of Arras, it was very weak in numbers, and it had lost the majority of its officers; but nine officers and a large draft of men arrived at Duisans on May 20th. Shortly afterwards the Battalion was up to strength."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918" [ISBN 1-84342-610-2]



21st May 1917

21 MON Bath Parade
~~Wrote...~~

Bath. Parade.

21.5.17. Bath parade, other end
of town.

22nd May 1917

22 TUES Wet.
Detailed as bomber
Service by Chaplain
~~...~~
by W^r Smith

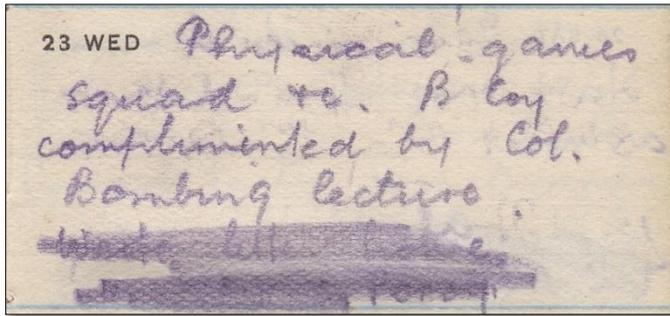
Wet.

Detailed as bomber by 2nd Lt. Smith.

Service by Chaplain.

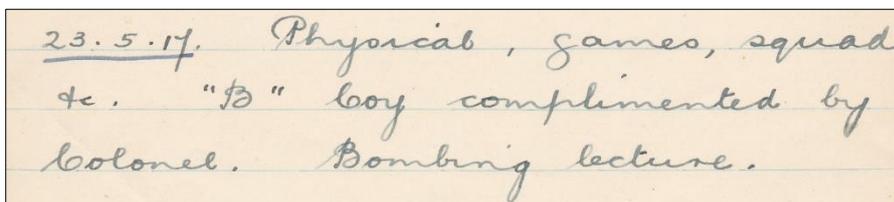
22.5.17. Wet. Detailed as bomber
by 2nd Lt. Smith. Service by
Chaplain.

23rd May 1917



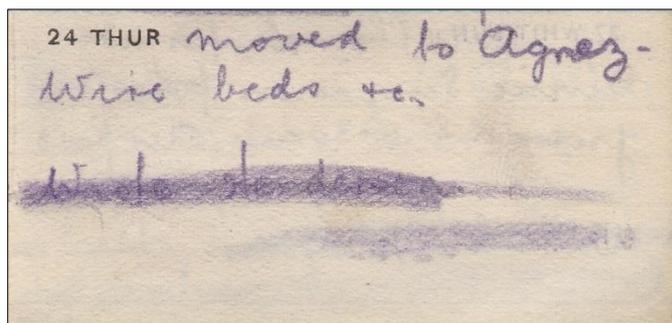
23 WED Physical games
squad etc. B Coy
complimented by Col.
Bombing lecture.

Physical, games, squad, etc.
B Company complimented by Colonel.
Bombing lecture.



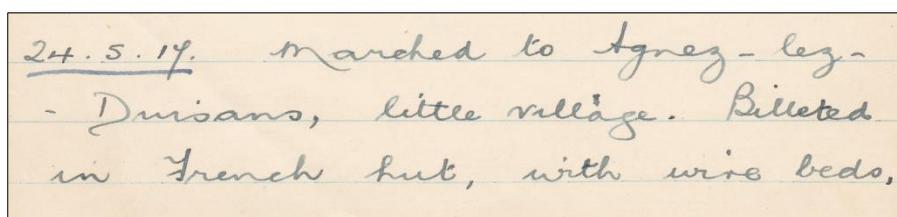
23.5.17. Physical, games, squad
etc. "B" Coy complimented by
Colonel. Bombing lecture.

24th May 1917



24 THUR moved to Agnez-
Wires beds etc.

Moved to Agnez(-lès-Duisans)¹. Wire beds, etc.



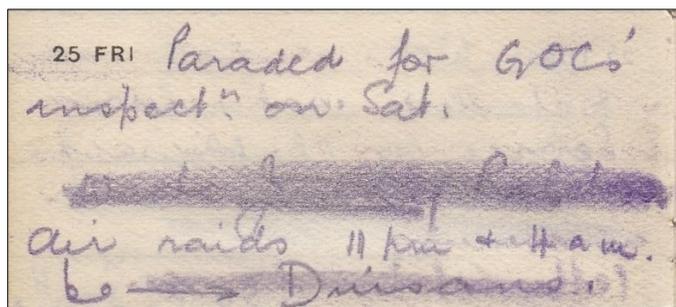
24.5.17. marched to Agnez- lez-
- Duisans, little village. Billeted
in French hut, with wire beds,

We halted in front of the billet and on dismissal the usual scramble for the best places ensued. The quarters consisted of the usual barn but with a variation. Two tiers of bunks had been erected around the four walls and we slept on chicken wire instead of the cold stone floor to which we later became accustomed.

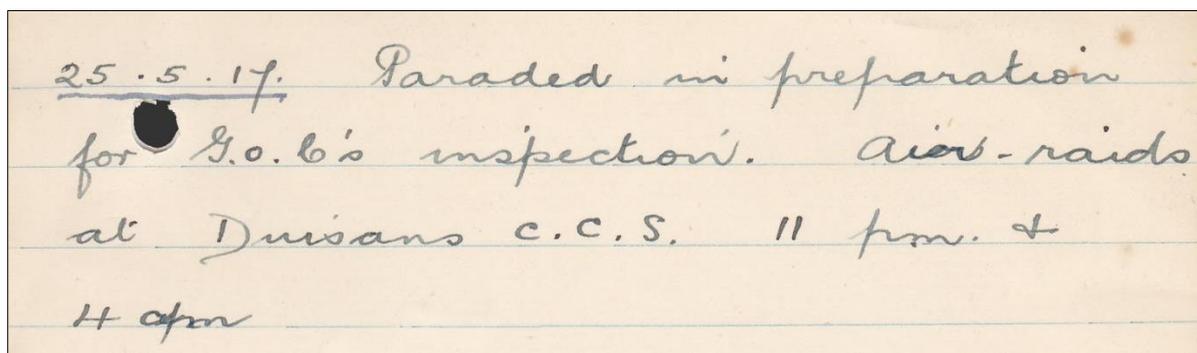
Since the lower tier was more easily accessible and had obvious advantages for manipulating equipment and other gear the first comers naturally took possession. I was in the first rush and immediately staked my claim by depositing pack, rifle and other impediments on the ground floor. My satisfaction was short lived. Uncles (his real name) was, at a guess, a well domesticated bachelor with an overwhelming passion for evening cocoa. Climbing into the upper bunk he neatly arranged all his goods and chattels; set up an abominable primus stove of sorts and balanced his mess tin precariously on the top. I lay on my back apprehensively watching events through the slackened chicken wire above my head. That was the one night Uncles went without his cocoa. A few extra stains on my uniform was not of great import but the full contents of one mess tin of boiling mixture on the chest was not to my liking.

¹ Google Maps entry for Agnez-lès-Duisans - <https://goo.gl/maps/eFDehhesdkP2>

25th May 1917



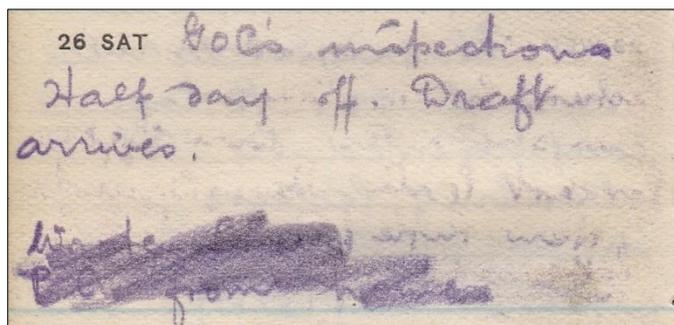
Paraded for GOC's inspection on Saturday.
Air raids - 11pm and 4am.



'Battalion Orders' we rarely found exciting or amusing - except sometimes, as on the occasions when it was announced that the Colonel had for disposal at cost price a number of high class razors which could be purchased at the canteen.

However commercialism was forgotten and, in his best parade ground manner, the Colonel announced that on the following day the GOC himself would be undertaking an inspection of the regiment. There would be no formal parade since the great man had intimated that he preferred to see the Battalion actually in training according to the routine of the day. There followed a long harangue on the pride of the regiment renowned for its rifle drill and smartness on and off parade, etc. Any man found guilty of offending the code would, in army parlance, be 'for the high jump'. The battalion toiled and sweated as it had never done before. We were not even permitted a good night's rest. At 11pm and again at 4am heavy air raids on the casualty clearing stations at nearby Duisans disturbed our slumbers.

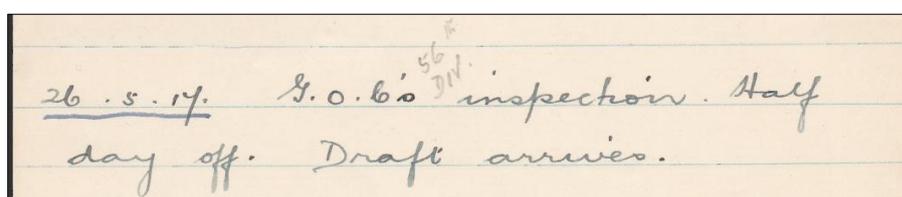
26th May 1917



GOC's inspections.

Half day off.

Draft arrives.



The general was late – a prerogative exercised by the top brass. From an early hour the company were hard at it - squad drill, rifle drill, more squad drill, rifle drill, marching and wheeling in formation interminably until officers and men were sick and weary with the continuous performance. Lunch would be late. Platoons were detached for individual squad drill and Lieutenant Smith manoeuvred No. 8 into a secluded position at the rim of the perimeter. Here we continued our labours until Smith, in desperation, said "Hold it – I'm fed up with this lark let's play strap-ass".

Strap-ass is a simple game. I have forgotten the precise rules but for the purpose of this chronicle the title itself is explanatory and all embracing. Briefly, the participants stand in a circle facing inwards. Each man in turn has the privilege of using a heavy leather belt, any man at the receiving end has to chase around the ring to avoid the buckle end and resume his position. We became thoroughly immersed in the enjoyable break from routine, not excluding the worthy Lieutenant himself who in the excitement of the chase was prancing around like a schoolboy and generally behaving in a manner unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman, at least on the parade ground.

No. 8 Platoon were having the time of their lives when a voice from the ring spoke. The Colonel, not only the Colonel but also the Brigadier, standing not many yards away were interested spectators. Whatever our

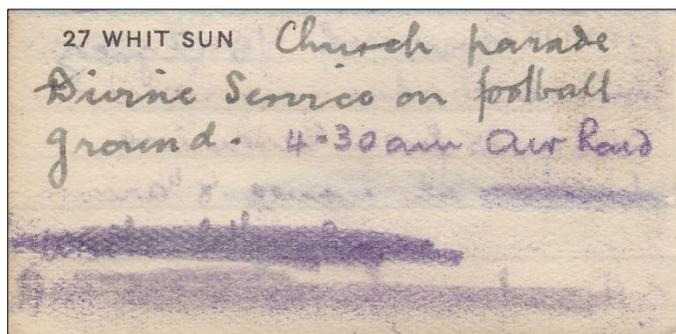
distinguished visitors may have thought about our military antics No.8 Platoon and the officer responsible for them, Smith's reaction to the unexpected and his demonstration of quick thinking should at least have earned him a few marks. After one, quick obscene exclamation he said, in effect, "Carry on with the strap-ass, we can't stop now you've got into it and for God's sake don't let me down". I am sure the Brigadier had never before seen such a rip-roaring display as we put on that day for his edification. To our great surprise the great man congratulated Lieutenant Smith on his enterprise and the men of No. 8 Platoon on their spirited exhibition.

The battalion was under strength and a further draft arrived in the afternoon.

"On May 26th, the G.O.C., 56th Division (Major-General Sir C.P.A.Hull) inspected the Battalion, and thanked and congratulated it on the part it had played in the Battles of Arras. In the course of his speech he impressed on all ranks the need for greater reliance on the rifle; and it is of interest to note that, in the fighting in the autumn and afterwards in the spring of 1918, the Battalion specially distinguished itself by the effective use it made of this weapon."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

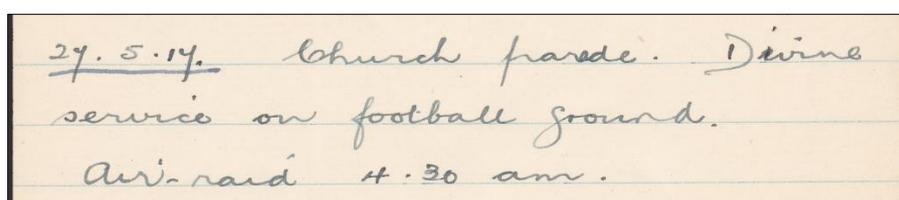
27th May 1917 (Whit Sunday)



Church parade.

Divine service on football ground.

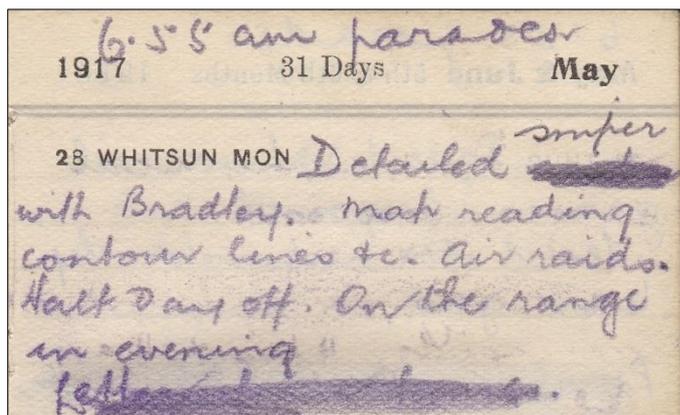
4:30am air raid.



Drumhead service on the football ground was a change from the exertions of the previous day although to me the regimentation of the Church service smacked of religion by numbers. Standing at attention in the boiling sun I could not attune myself to the pious attitude the occasion demanded nor enter wholeheartedly in the many appeals to the Almighty to bless our cause and our arms. The ceremony failed to provide the necessary uplift which the spirit demanded and I became depressed and ashamed of my heretical outlook.

In the weeks that followed I learnt to know the meaning of Christianity without frills from all those men with whom I spent every hour of every day. I owe them much.

28th May 1917



6:55am parades.

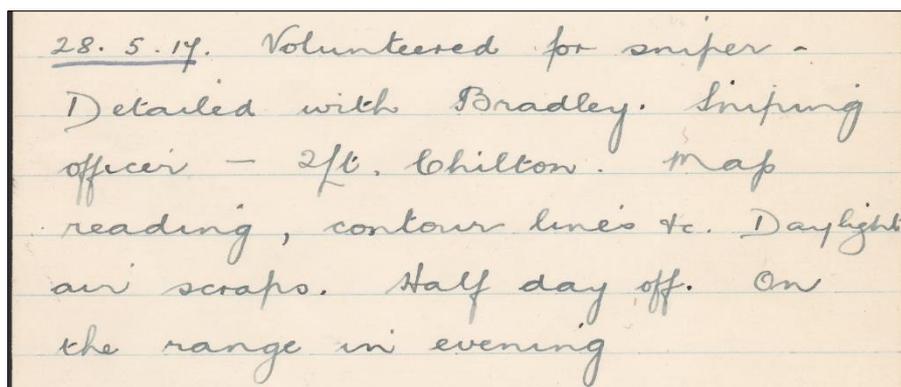
Detailed sniper with Bradley.

Map reading, contour lines, etc.

Air raids.

Half day off.

On the range in evening.

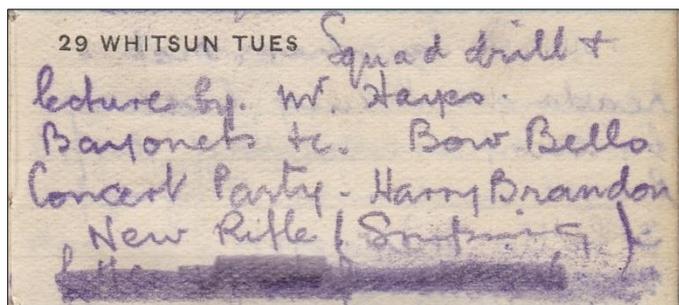


The allocation into sections of the men of the new draft in their respective platoons was now essential and B Company was paraded with all the officers present.

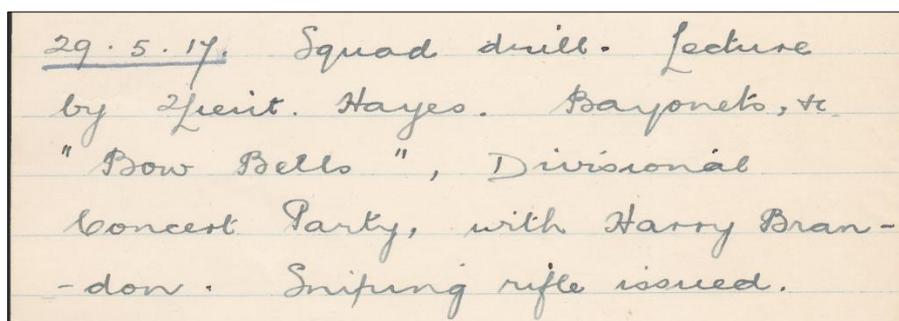
Snipers required special qualifications and were chosen first. Volunteers were called for – “Any marksmen?” – there were none. “First class shots?” – I looked at Bradley and raised my eyebrows. He responded by whispering – “No fatigues!”. Simultaneously we took one step forward and were thereupon nominated as Platoon Snipers.

Poor Forster was nowhere in the running when it came to shooting and gloomily foresaw the break-up of the trio. I am glad it did not work out that way.

29th May 1917



Squad drill and lecture by Mr Hayes.
Bayonets, etc.
Bow Bells concert party - Harry Brandon.
New rifle (sniping).



The silent enemy legions struck suddenly as we three lazed in the long grass minding our own business. Bradley was deeply absorbed in a book but in the hot atmosphere Forster and I were content to sit and ruminate. Jackets were removed and then shirts. Forster said "I've got prickly heat". It was in fact something more tangible and he and I spent the next hour probing the hundreds of lice comfortably ensconced in the cells of the thick, grey woollen vests so thoughtfully provided by the army. The camouflage was perfect and it was only those who had partaken of their fill that could be readily identified by the contents of their little semi-transparent bellies.

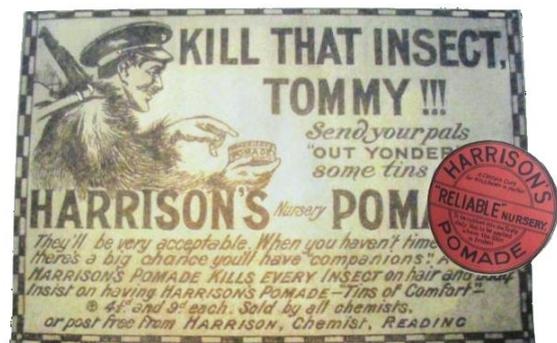
Bradley was disgusted and said so in no uncertain terms. How could fellows of decent upbringing allow their bodies to become so filthy - cleanliness being next to Godliness, etc. With mutual understanding Forster and I listened to his diatribe in silence and at length abandoned the exercise for the day. Bradley stoutly refused to admit to harbouring lice, fleas, bugs or any other form of parasite but just to satisfy our curiosity he removed his clothing. We returned from tea in about an hour to find poor Bradley still searching busily!

So far as the infantryman was concerned lice were his blood brothers. True we had an occasional "bath" usually by means of primitive contraptions consisting of horizontal pipes irregularly spouting drips of boiling and ice cold water onto the heads of the naked bodies underneath. We dried ourselves feeling moderately refreshed and more often than not re-clothed with the same lousy undergarments we had taken off.

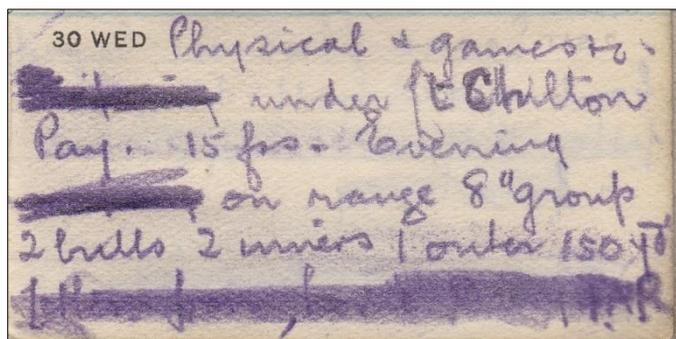
The billets and dusty, straw "beds" which had been occupied by thousands of men who had passed that way before were the main breeding grounds but no man could pretend that he himself made no contribution to the grey battalions!

My mother, aware of the disgusting state of her son, sent out many preparations guaranteed to exterminate all kinds of vermin. I remember "Harrison's Pomade" which certainly helped but one would have needed a gallon jar to do the job properly and besides, it was very messy. On one occasion I received from home a large cardboard box which

contained, according to the accompanying letter, one home-made cake together with a large packet of insecticide. I opened the box expectantly to find a mixture of cake, currants, and carbolic. The most effective weapon against lice proved to be the lighted candle along the seams of the garments but even that method had its limitations.

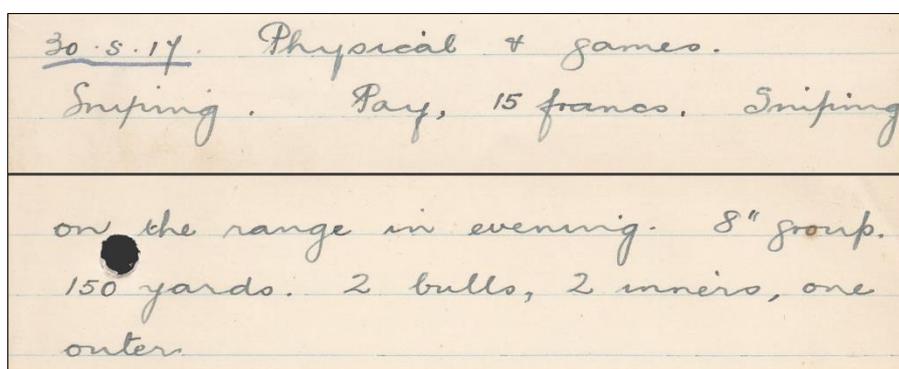


30th May 1917



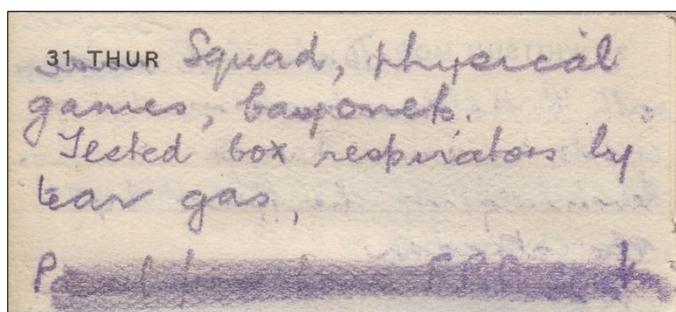
30 WED Physical & games etc.
~~_____~~ under Lt Chilton
Pay. 15 frs. Evening
~~_____~~ on range 8" group
2 bulls 2 inners 1 outer 150 yds
~~_____~~

Physical, games, etc under Lt Chilton. Pay - 15 francs.
Evening on range. 8 inch group, 2 bulls, 2 inners, 1 outer - 150 yards.



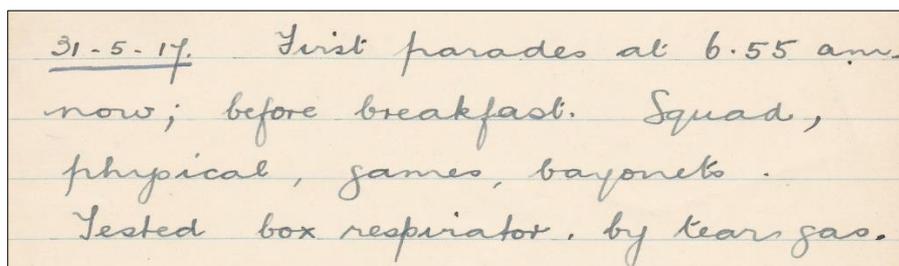
30.5.17. Physical & games.
Sniping. Pay, 15 francs. Sniping
on the range in evening. 8" group.
150 yards. 2 bulls, 2 inners, one
outer.

31st May 1917



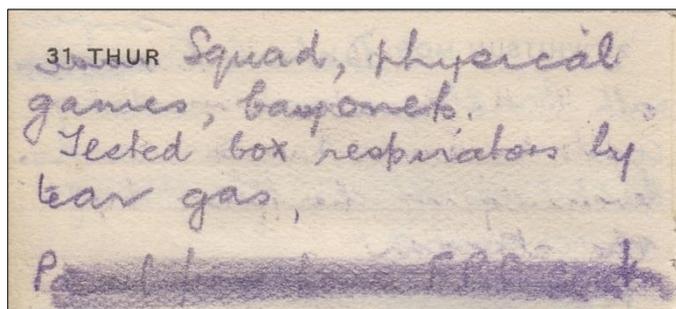
31 THUR Squad, physical
games, bayonets.
Tested box respirators by
tear gas.
~~_____~~

Squad, physical, games, bayonets.
Tested box respirators by tear gas.



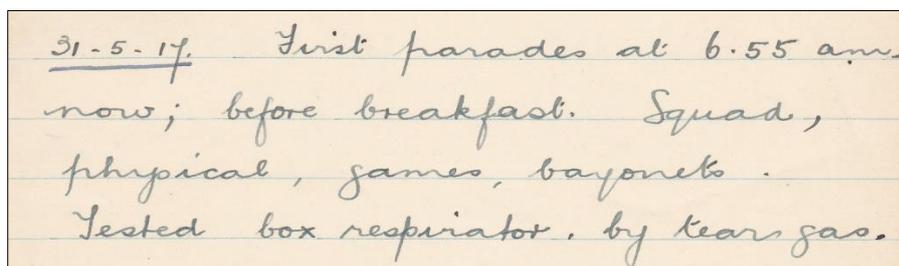
31-5-17. First parades at 6.55 am.
now; before breakfast. Squad,
physical, games, bayonets.
Tested box respirator, by tear gas.

1st June 1917



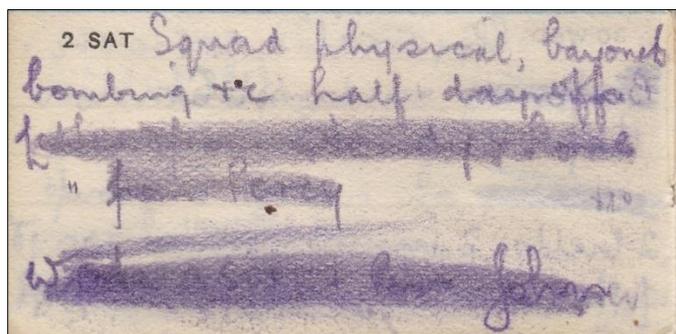
31 THUR Squad, physical
games, bayonets.
Tested box respirators by
tear gas,
~~Parade~~

Squad, physical, games, bayonets.
Tested box respirators by tear gas.



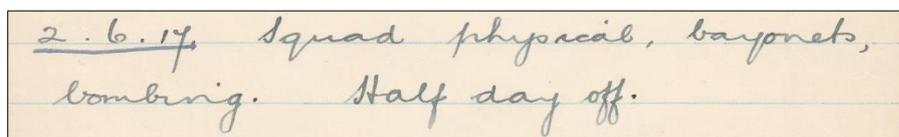
31-5-17. First parades at 6.55 am.
now; before breakfast. Squad,
physical, games, bayonets.
Tested box respirator, by tear gas.

2nd June 1917



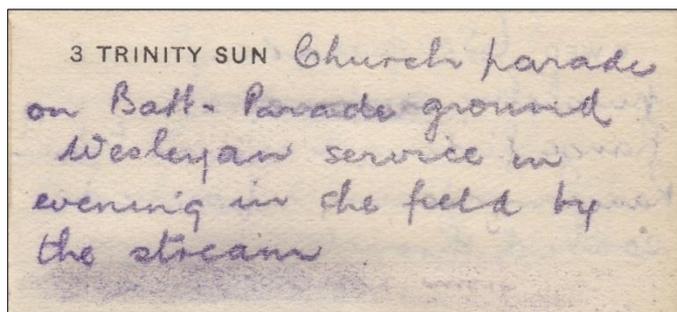
2 SAT Squad physical, bayonet
bombing etc half day off
~~Tested box respirator~~
" ~~Tested box respirator~~
~~Worked on bayonet~~

Squad physical, bayonets, bombing, etc.
Half day off.

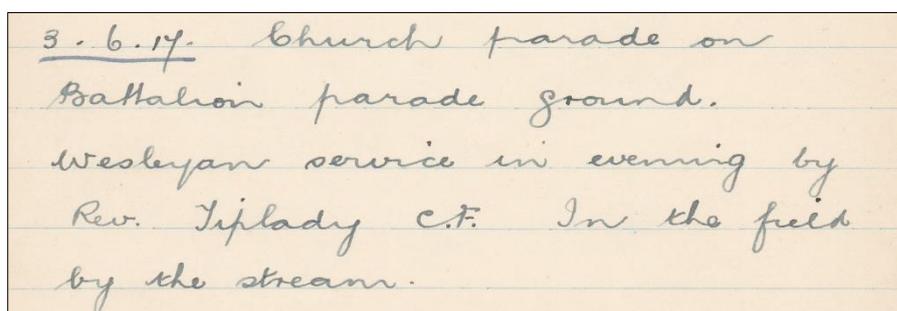


2.6.17 Squad physical, bayonets,
bombing. Half day off.

3rd June 1917 (Sunday)



Church parade on battalion parade ground.
Wesleyan service in evening in the field by the stream.



The Church service on the parade ground was, I decided, sufficient religion for the day but Bradley had other ideas about my spiritual welfare.

As we strolled along lanes together on a perfect June evening, we came to a little green meadow surrounded by the ubiquitous poplars. There we settled down comfortably by a running stream. The setting was idyllic and away from the motley. I felt at peace with the world - so much so that when Bradley told me that the little green field was the venue for a Wesleyan service that evening I readily stayed.

The small congregation of Wesleyan faith and others sat around on the grass. We heard no sermon; the padre just chatted and encouraged us to talk. In so doing we found ourselves in complete harmony with one who fully understood our problems and heartaches and one who would not spare himself on our behalf. He closed the meeting by inviting every man to help himself from the vast pile of literature suitable to every taste which he presumably carried around with him. The Rev. Tiplady CF was a great man.

"In World War I, Rev. Tiplady was a chaplain with the Queen's Westminster Rifles in the Somme and Arras campaigns in France. There he caught "trench fever," which laid him up for some time; after recovery, he was stationed at Abbeville until

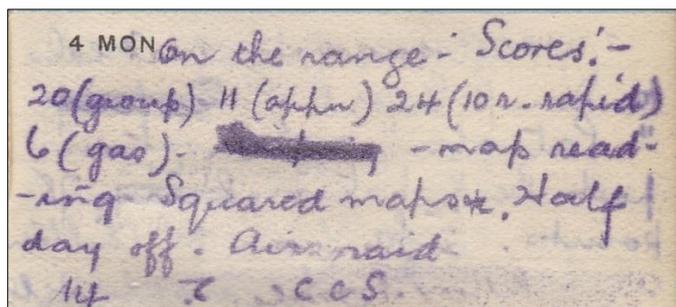
the war's end.

Following the war, he conducted a five month speaking tour in America. Upon return to England, he was appointed to the Buxton Road Church in Huddersfield, then became Superintendent of the Lambeth Mission in London in 1922, and was there 32 years.

In addition to writing over 250 hymns, Tiplady pioneered the use of films in evangelism, helping found the Religious Film Society of London. In 1931, he visited America as a delegate to the Ecumenical Conference of Methodism in Atlanta, Georgia ..."

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/t/i/p/tiplady_t.htm

4th June 1917



4 MON On the range:- Scores:-
20 (group) 11 (app) 24 (10 r. rapid)
6 (gas) - ~~map reading~~ - map read-
-ing Squared maps etc. Half
day off. Air raid
14 CCS.

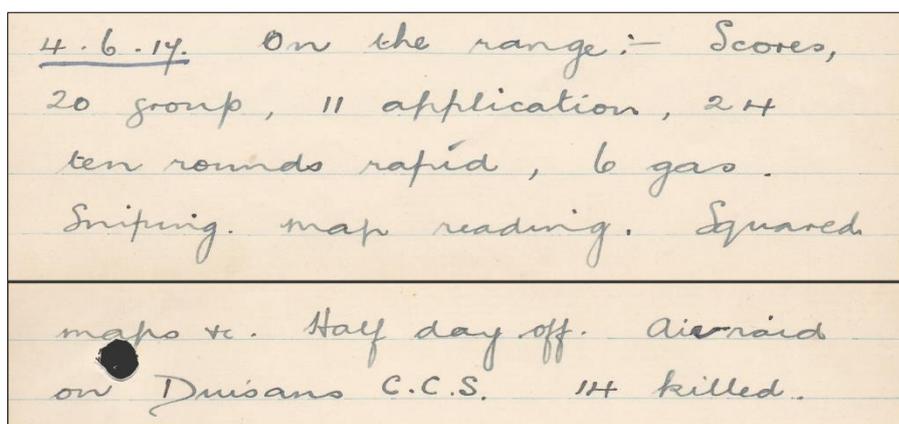
On the range.

Scores - 20 (group), 11 (application), 24 (10 rounds rapid fire), 6 (gas).

Map reading. Squared maps, etc.

Half day off.

Air raid on Duissans CCS. 14 killed.



4.6.17. On the range:- Scores,
20 group, 11 application, 24
ten rounds rapid, 6 gas.
Sniping. map reading. Squared
maps etc. Half day off. Air raid
on Duissans C.C.S. 14 killed.

Sniping

1st Target - Enemy snipers

Continuous observation necessary for any movement. Look for flash of rifle, gas from rifle, dust raised by firing, relief of enemy snipers - usually very early morning, use of dummy figure and periscope, direction of bullet holes in sand.

2nd Target - Enemy loopholes (usually numerous)

Fire to be withheld unless the presence of a sniper behind loophole is a certainty. Armour piercing bullets.

3rd Target - Enemy exposed

End of communication trenches, cooking places, low parts on parapets.

Best time for targets -

Meal times (reliefs), misty weather (carelessness), after heavy rain or bombardment (parapets exposed).

Snipers in attack -

Smash enemy periscopes during bombardment and aim for enemy exposing himself. Advance with attack and establish an OP in shell-hole about 100 yards in front of line (this in case of a creeping barrage only). In an ordinary barrage snipers to go forward and take up their positions before the attack starts.

Duties are -

Cover bombers in attack.

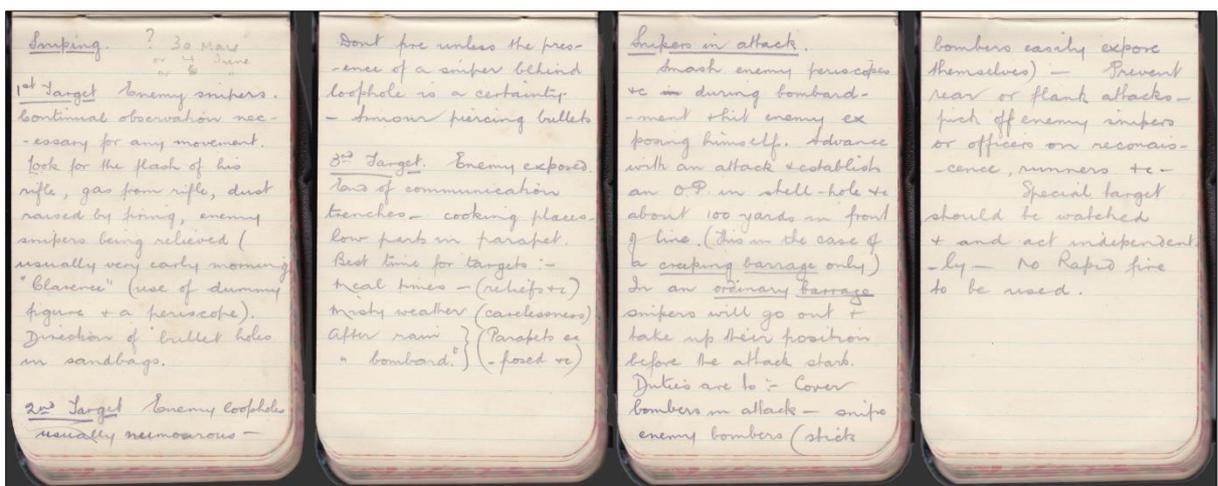
Snipe enemy bombers ('stick' bombers easily expose themselves).

Prevent rear or flank attacks.

Pick off enemy snipers, officers on reconnaissance, runners.

Special targets should be watched and independent action taken.

No rapid fire should be used.



“Clarence” was a distinguished member of the battalion whose battle-scarred features were beloved by every Westminster. At the date of our introduction he was obviously war-weary and with the passing of the long drawn out trench warfare of the earlier years his usefulness as a front line combatant was on the wane. His iron frame was creaking at the joints and his wooden head bore the holes of many an encounter with the enemy. True, the holes had been skilfully patched but it seemed doubtful whether he would again take up his post in the line.

The newcomers had no opportunity of making use of “Clarence’s” services but his modus operandi in action was explained to the sniping squad.

“Clarence” would lurk below the parapet until such time as our enemy snipers became troublesome. By a mechanical contrivance the poor lad was then slowly raised until his head was exposed and Jerry gleefully notched up another victim. He was casually lowered, a compass bearing taken through the hole in his head and duly marked on the trench map on which his new position was already located. “Clarence” was then hurried several hundred feet along the trench, his martyrdom repeated and the second compass bearing duly recorded on the map. At the point of intersection of the two bearings the map showed the exact position of the enemy sniper and the range could be measured. The rest was in the hands of the British mortars.

Although we never made use of “Clarence” we did have the company of the Stoke’s Mortar boys¹ in the trenches at Arras. We hated their activities. Having pooped off half a dozen rounds in quick time they would hastily depart.

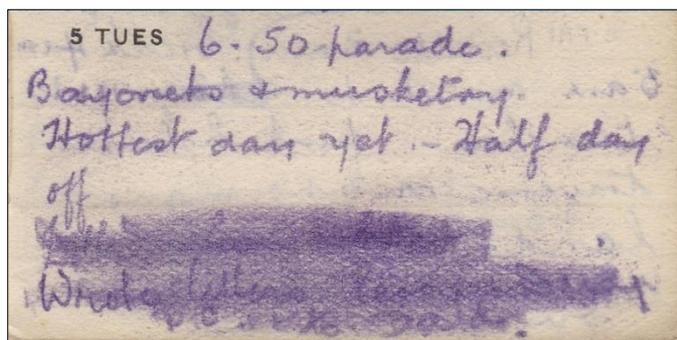
Soaked to the skin, weary and dirty, I returned to the billet wondering why I had volunteered to be a sniper. The rest of my billet companions, having been excused afternoon and evening parades, were already bedded down for the night; their raillery did nothing to improve my ill humour. My dishevelled appearance could easily pass muster on the morrow but the rifle was a different matter. Something has to be done quickly. With considerable distaste I peered down the barrel of the “soldier’s best friend”. Out from the butt came oil bottle, pull-through, wire gauze and a piece of flannel “4x2”. Innumerable times I went through the barrel, all to no purpose. It remained as dirty as when I had started and worse still, the first signs of rust were evident. Then came the brilliant idea. Carefully arranging a broken matchstick inside the gauze and flannel in order to provide more resistance I got to work again, but the improvisation resulted in disaster. When halfway through the pull-through stuck and refused to budge another inch. Immediately above my head were the rafters of the barn and, tying the pull-through to the crossbeam, I hung on to the rifle and grimly raised my feet – the pull-through cord broke halfway through the barrel.

It was now getting late and outside the billet all was quiet and deserted. Scouting around in the semi-darkness, dodging the sentries, I at length came upon a small hut with the forbidding words “Armourer Sergeant” in large, white letters on the door. With trepidation I knocked and entered. A polite voice said “Good Evening”. Speechless I handed over the offending

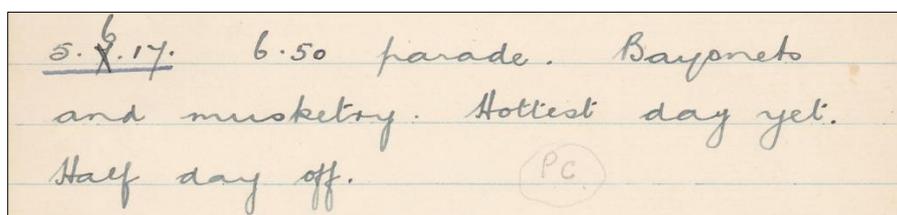
¹ Wikipedia entry for Stoke's Mortars - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stokes_mortar

weapon. By manipulation of a long instrument made to fit the rifling of the barrel, Sergeant A G Fulton¹, Armourer Sergeant and King's Prize man, screwed out the obstruction in a matter of minutes. Slowly unravelling the gauze and the flannel the matchstick came into view. Holding up the offending object he wagged his finger at me, which was the full extent of his admonition. Escorting me to the door he said goodnight and a very chastened, but grateful, rifleman crept quietly back to his billet with a clean rifle and a brand new pull-through.

5th June 1917

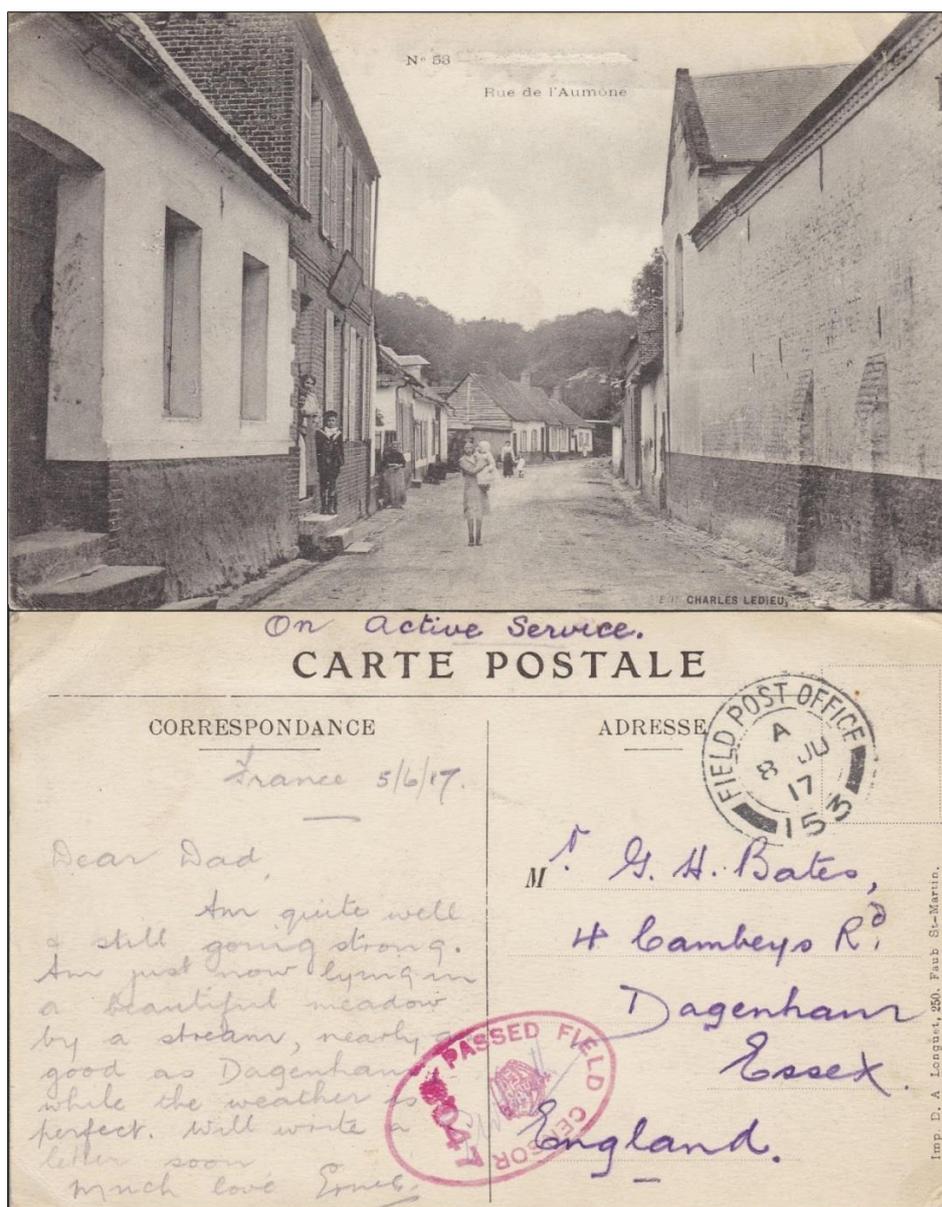


6:50am parade.
Bayonets and musketry.
Hottest day yet.
Half day off.



¹ More on the Fulton family - <http://www.fultonsofbisley.com/about-us/history/the-fulton-family>

5th June 1917 - Postcard home to Dad



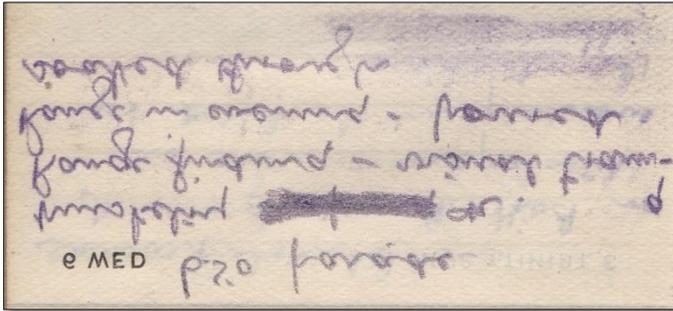
Dear Dad

Am quite well and still going strong. Am just now lying in a beautiful meadow by a stream, nearly as good as Dagenham, while the weather is perfect. Will write a letter soon.

Much love
Ernie

The same scene of Pas-en-Artois, France in 2008 on Google Streetview - <https://goo.gl/maps/BopxCiPjcyj>

6th June 1917

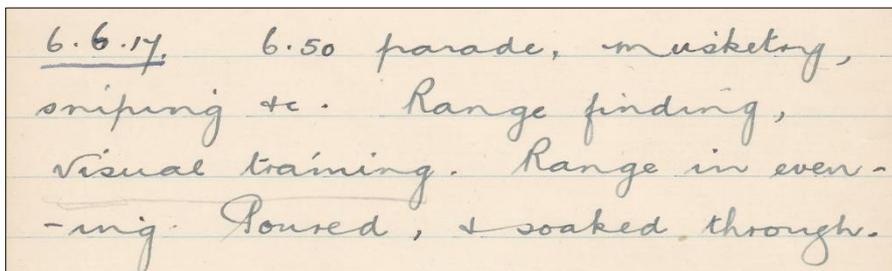


6:50am parade.

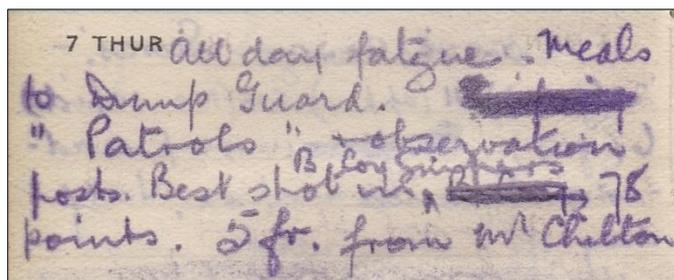
Musketry, etc.

Range finding - visual training.

Range in evening. Poured, soaked through.

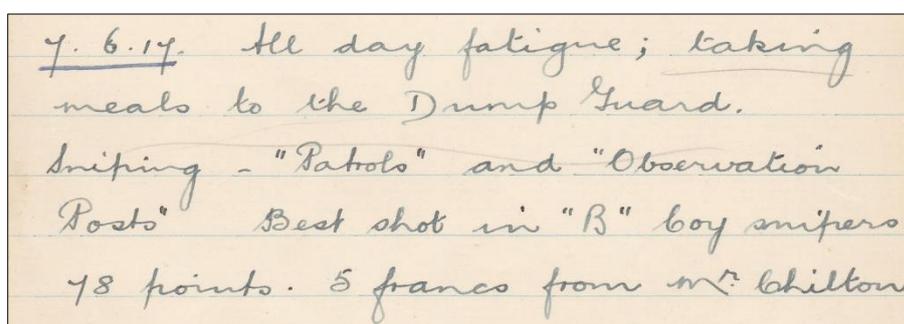


7th June 1917



7 THUR all day fatigue. Meals
to Dump Guard. ~~Patrols~~
"Patrols" and "observation
posts. Best shot in B
points. 5 fr. from Mr Chilton

All day fatigue. Meals to Dump Guard.
"Patrols" and "Observation posts".
Best shot in B Company snipers - 78 points.
5 francs from Mr Chilton.



7. 6. 17. All day fatigue; taking
meals to the Dump Guard.
Sniping - "Patrols" and "Observation
Posts" Best shot in "B" boy snipers.
78 points. 5 francs from Mr Chilton

Bradley's theory that snipers were excused all mundane fatigues did not work out in practice. In addition to patrol work and the construction of observation posts, my spare moments were sacrificed in taking food to the Duty Guard.

With the best will in the world I am sure the Company cooks made the most of the miserable rations provided and it was not their fault if the meals were consistently inedible except to starving men. My own particular bête noire was the bull beef stew with the addition of swedes and sweet chestnuts – a dish which appeared with unfailing regularity. On this particular day the cooks produced their pièce de résistance which, incidentally, was the cause of an interesting conflict with high military rank.

My companion and I were in the process of conveying from the field kitchen to the dump guard a large and heavy iron container with the midday dinner. The road was completely isolated except for one solitary figure approaching from the opposite direction. Swinging a cane, he appeared to be deep in thought and as he drew level we identified him as the Colonel commanding the London Brigade. We gave him the "eyes left"

which he acknowledged with a pleasant smile, exclaiming "I say, that really looks delicious, what is it?" I replied that our cooks called it "steak pie". The colonel was not to be put off however and insisted on having the full recipe in order, he said, "that the L.R.B. cooks should receive some instruction in the culinary arts of the Q.W.R's". He was most charming, thanked us profusely and departed on his way, albeit still with a thoughtful air. The concoction, for what it was worth, was stewed bully beef covered with a crust made from powdered army biscuits and baked in the ovens – it was revolting.

The evening was more rewarding. Chilton had arranged a shooting competition on the range for B Company snipers. We took up our allotted positions, the rest of the section having been detailed to act as markers in the butts, whilst an NCO, by the side of each competitor, recorded the scores signalled after each shot.

To my intense surprise Forster had somehow managed to infiltrate the sniping squad by persuading the officer that he was a suitable entrant. Just what underhand methods he adopted in order to be with his pals I never found out but I was delighted to see him at my side. We shot off our rounds and I was content with the number of bulls and inners signalled by the marker, a total of 78 points. Forster was still shooting, cards were collected and in due course Chilton presented me with a five franc note for the top score.

We all relaxed. Forster came up with his congratulations which were sincere but with a woebegone face he added "I had three signalled right off target." I said "Nonsense, you can't be all that bad, let's go up to the butts and see what happened". It was indeed a poor effort, quite apart from the fact that three shots were missing. Then came the awful thought. Sure enough my own target showed three more hits than I had fired. In his hurry to complete the shoot Forster had shot onto my target for his last three shots. They were outers and clearly identifiable because my marker in the butts, having pasted over the full quota of hits from my rifle, had naturally given up his labours. This put me in a quandary because, although morally I knew I had earned the five francs, conscience told me that authority would take a different view. I pondered for a while and, when I declared my intention of speaking to Chilton, poor Forster pleaded desperately that I do no such thing. His despair was understandable since shooting at the wrong target on the range was a crime of some magnitude. With the noblest of gestures I stifled my conscience for Forster's sake and pocketed the five francs.

Into the Trenches - The Battle of Arras

8th June 1917

8 FRI Telegraph Hill
Reveille 3 am. break 4 am
5 am march to ~~the~~ 9.30
trenches - funk hole in
traverse on no mans
land. First sight of
the line. Several heavies
over.

Reveille 3am. Breakfast 4am. 5am march to Telegraph Hill.
9:30am trenches - funk hole¹ in traverse on no mans' land.
First sight of the line.
Several heavies over.

8.6.17. Reveille 3 a.m. Breakfast
4 am. Leave Agnez, 5 a.m. march
through Duisans, Beauvrain, &c
to trenches on Telegraph Hill, 9.30 a.m.
First sight of the line. High up,
overlooking the ruined villages of
Tilloy and Neville Vitasse.
British batteries below, & the
flashes from the German batteries.
Several heavies over during the
night, and a few casualties.

¹ Dictionary entry for "funk hole" - https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/funk_hole

Reveille sounded at 3am, breakfast taken an hour later.

By 5am the sleepy-eyed battalion left Agnez-sur-Duisans via Duisans and the piles of rubble which used to be the village of Beaurains¹.

We took over the trenches up on Telegraph Hill at 9:30am. For the first time we were in range of the enemy guns.

So far the army life had been reasonably endurable, at times even enjoyable. Naturally, during the weeks of training a great deal of thought had been given to the question of individual behaviour in the face of danger. What, for instance, would our reaction be to the sight of human bodies torn to shreds by high explosives? Would we be able to thrust our bayonets into the solar plexus of the Hun as we had so often done to those straw stuffed dummies on the training grounds? This manoeuvre disturbed me greatly and I was determined always to keep one round up the spout. Would we vomit, faint, lay down and cower or, heaven forbid, just scream? We were afraid of being yellow or, worse still, showing it. Strangely enough, when the time came for initiation into the horror and carnage of war most of us were prone to none of these emotions. I have no doubt that the 'rookies' owed a tremendous debt to the few remaining pre-war veterans of the Battalion Territorials, who, by the process of attrition, were by 1917 either NCOs or held commissions. Their behaviour and coolness under fire and, moreover, their understanding of what we rookies were going through served as an example that just could not be denied.

It was during the march from Agnez that two incidents left their mark.

At the side of the road in the debris around Beaurains was a gun limber and spread-eagled across the wheel a British soldier was shackled. The unexpectedness of this sideline to active service with the British Army came as a shock and we speculated on the nature of the crime which called for such barbaric treatment.

The second incident was more revolting. Face down over a pile of debris lay the body of what appeared to be a dead Highlander. His kilt had been pulled up over his back and into his buttocks had been plunged rifle and bayonet.

¹ Google Maps entry for Beaurains - <https://goo.gl/maps/Yi9u1Vrupv62>

Telegraph Hill, high above the plain, overlooking the ruined villages of Tilloy-lès-Mofflaines¹ and Neuville-Vitasse², gave a splendid view of the vast network of trenches which formed part of the Hindenburg Line. As darkness fell the flashes from the British batteries tucked away at the foot of the hill immediately below held our attention. We were not yet in the real target area and consequently our duties were negligible. A few stray heavies landed on the Hill during the night which drew blood but mainly the damage was confined to the nearby British cemetery. The casualties were the packs which had been dumped in a pile pending the completion of our spell in the line.

"On June 8th, the Battalion paraded at 5:30am and marched via Dainville, Achicourt and Bauerrains to Telegraph Hill, arriving there at 9:30am. The day was spent in the German trenches in the Harp system, which the Battalion had occupied on April 28th."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

¹ Google Maps entry for Tilloy-lès-Mofflaines - <https://goo.gl/maps/zgzfiq1X5642>

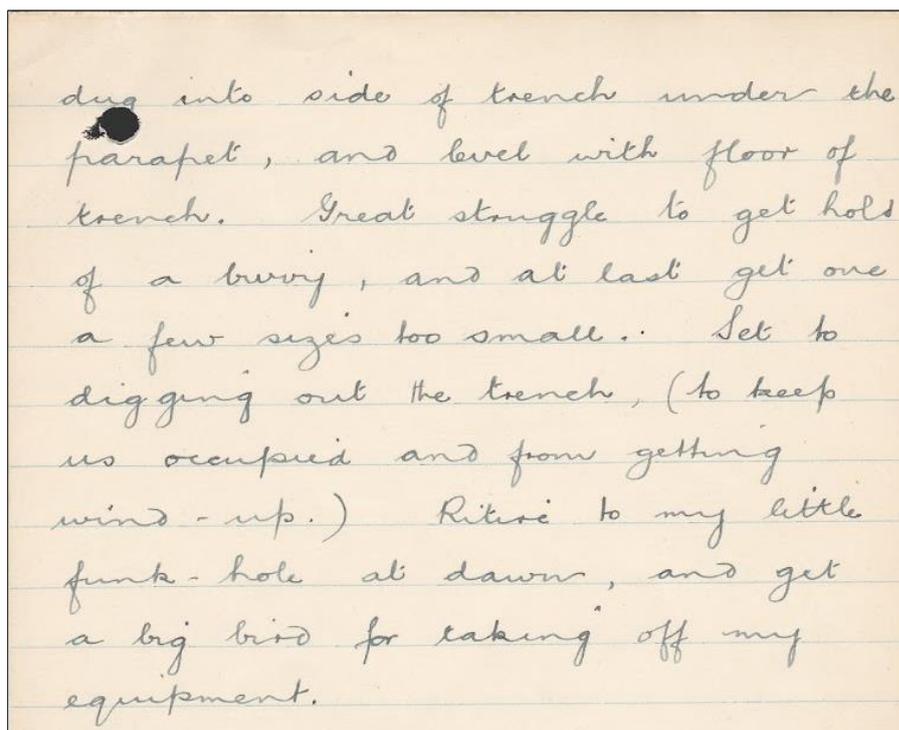
² Google Maps entry for Neuville-Vitasse - <https://goo.gl/maps/2CF95GWByLz>

9th June 1917

9 SAT Rose at 9am!
mucked around
up the line. In the
trenches. Up all night
~~Supports.~~
~~Supports.~~

Rose at 9am!
Mucked around up the line.
In the trenches.
Up all night. Supports.

9.6.17. Rose at 9 a.m. Wandered
around all day. Left for the line
about 5 p.m. Along the tracks to
the left of Neuville Vitasse; past
the British heavis. Through the
sunken road and into the trenches.
Hard work to keep in touch with
the man in front; each man
carrying two panniers of Lewis
Gun ammunition besides his full
kit (less packs, left behind on
Telegraph Hill, near the British
Bemetry). Passed two disabled
tanks, and into the support
trenches lying to the right of
Wancourt, with sunken road
between. Fairly deep trenches
composed almost entirely of chalk,
with "bivvies" or "funk holes"

A photograph of a handwritten diary entry on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and describes a soldier's experience in a trench, mentioning a struggle to get a bivvy, digging to keep occupied, and a fox-hole at dawn.

dug into side of trench under the parapet, and level with floor of trench. Great struggle to get hold of a bivvy, and at last get one a few sizes too small. Set to digging out the trench, (to keep us occupied and from getting wind-up.) Retired to my little funk-hole at dawn, and get a big bird for taking off my equipment.

A day of waiting until 5pm. The battalion moved forward along a well-defined track to the left of the remains of the village, Neuville-Vitasse. Through a deep cutting above which an unexpected salvo from the British Heavies wrought havoc with our nervous systems, we reached a maze of deep trenches - the beginning of the massive defensive works of the Hindenburg Line.

Laden as we were with additional burdens consisting of panniers of ammunition for the Lewis guns, barbed wire, pickets and other miscellaneous war material the going was heavy and fatiguing. From the guides at the head of the column a constant stream of directions was passed back from man to man - "Mind the wire", "Don't lose touch in the rear", etc. The journey seemed unending; inevitably large gaps appeared in the line of men struggling forward. This was a golden opportunity for the humourists of the company and by the time the garbled messages reached the rear portion of the column the orders were not only incomprehensible but quite unprintable.

The support line, located in front of Wancourt¹ with a sunken road between, was eventually occupied by B Company. As we took over the previous occupants departed hurriedly with the usual soldier's farewell.

¹ Google Maps entry for Wancourt - <https://goo.gl/maps/15sQLudtEM32>

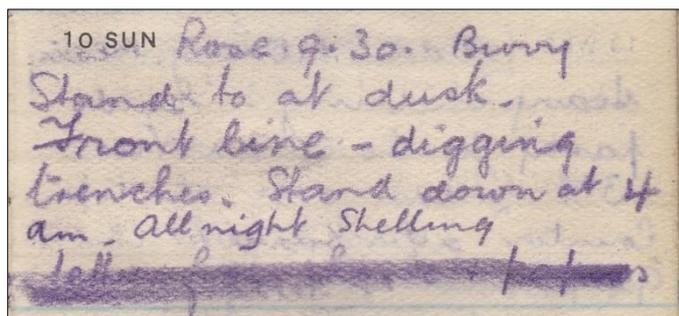
The trenches were six feet deep in solid chalk with communication trenches, saps and bays branching in all directions, well-constructed by the Germans. There were no dugouts but every few yards 'bivvies' or 'foxholes' had been excavated from the side of the trench at floor level below the parapet. Each bivvie would just allow one man to obtain a little cramped comfort, if not privacy and an ostrich-like sense of security from the attentions of the enemy.

However we were allowed no time in which to take stock of our new home. Spades were distributed with orders to deepen the trench. Since the tallest head was already six or more inches below the parapet we assumed the operation to be purely psychological. After scraping away at the iron hard chalk for several hours the trench had not visibly deepened. One hour before dawn we 'stood to' after which we retired to put our respective 'houses' in order and get a little sleep. Off came my equipment but within seconds it was on again. Precisely what the NCO said is best not recorded.

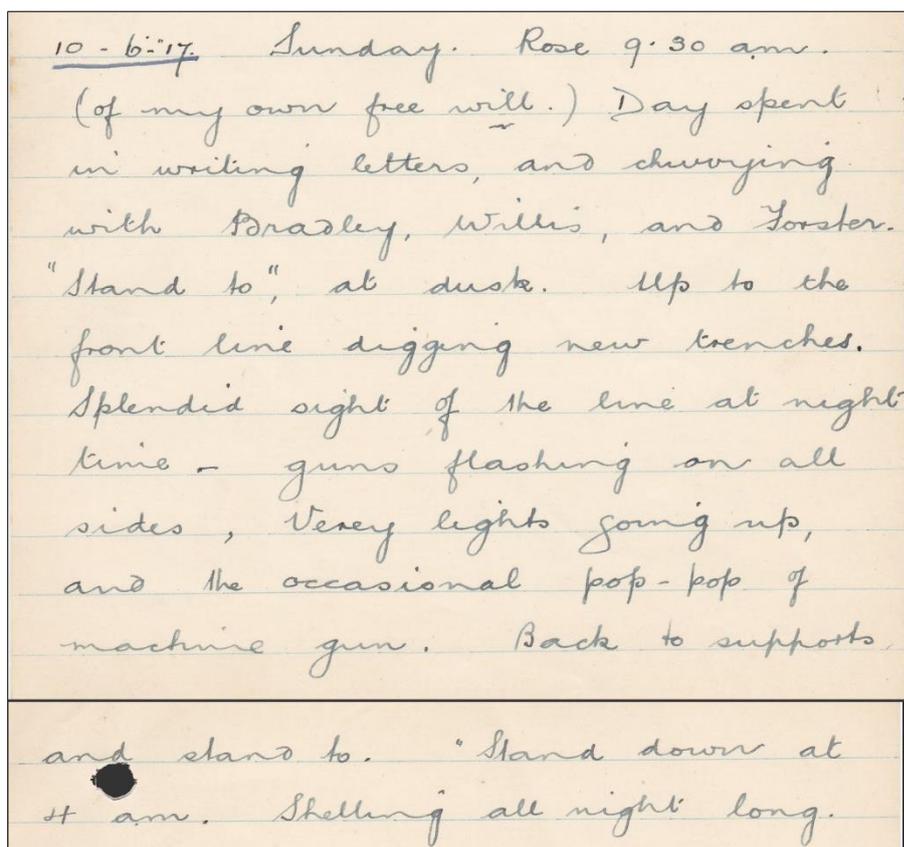
"On the following night [June 9th] the Battlion moved up to the front line, where it relieved the 6th Somerset Light Infantry (14th (Light) Division) in trenches astride the railway about 1000 yards north of Cherisy. The trenches in this area had been named after animals or birds. C Company held the Jackdaw trench, south of the railway, and D Company occupied Spoor and Ape tranches north of the railway. B Company was in support in Boar and Bison, about 400 yards in rear of the front line; and A Company was in reserve in Buck and Lion, another 400 yards further back. These trenches were for the most part old German defences. They had been hastily dug and were in bad order, and there was practically no wire in front of them. A great deal of work was done by the Battlion, during its tour of the sector, in widening and deepening the trenches and in putting up barbed-wire entanglements."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

10th June 1917 (Sunday)



Rose 9:30am. Bivvy.
Stand to at dusk.
Front line - digging trenches.
Stand down at 4am.
All night shelling.



Fortunately that first night in the trenches was quiet, maybe the Boche was also engaged in relieving his front line troops and was not inviting trouble. I awoke to the glorious song of the skylark high above in the clear sky and experienced a strange feeling of elation. Under the hot sun with no responsibilities of a personal nature, good friends on either side, I was happy with a new-found freedom – tomorrow could wait!

Together we peered over the parapet towards the enemy trenches in the hazy distance – fascinated by the vast white expanse of the chalky landscape covered with millions of brilliant red poppies under the deep blue sky. “In Flanders fields where poppies grow”^{*} – but this was Picardy; we saw no poppies in Flanders.

With Forster, Bradley and Willis the day was spent happily conversing and writing home. Letter writing was a problem. Conscious always of the censor’s blue pencil hovering in the background, it was impossible to relate anything but the most trivial activities of the daily routine and difficult to express one’s personal feelings. My own correspondence was stilted in the extreme and consisted of a stream of white lies which bore little resemblance to actuality in my earnest endeavours to allay the fears of those at home. I now know that I underestimated the perspicacity of my mother who often tramped the deserted Essex fields in the dead of night listening to the murmur of the guns across the water. The printed field service cards were a blessing. By the deletion of a few lines of print the troops were able to send out frequent, brief messages to those at home that all was well. Moreover the censors were relieved of much labour and, it must be admitted, so were the writers.

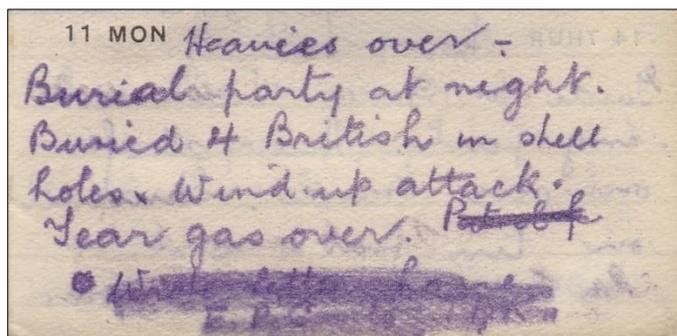
** In Flanders Fields is a war poem, written in 1915 by Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae.*

*In Flanders fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

11th June 1917



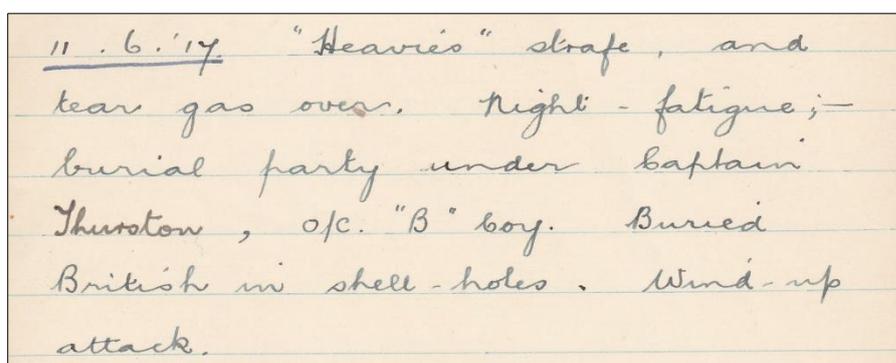
Heavies over.

Burial party at night.

Buried four British in shell holes.

Wind up attack.

Tear gas over.



From the early hours and throughout the day 'Boar' and 'Bison' were subjected to heavy but intermittent shelling. The shattering noise and the black bursts from the 'Jack Johnsons'¹ left us quivering but, in our sector, the occasional near misses did no more than shower tin hats with fragments of hot metal and chalk which dropped from the skies. To add to our discomfort Jerry mixed tear gas shells with his blessings and this was immediately interpreted as evidence of an impending attack. Although none developed, the variation doubtless had its nuisance value, particularly where fresh troops were at the receiving end.

During the height of the bombardment Forster was a near casualty. In the initial scramble for bivvies Bradley and I had succeeded in acquiring adjoining foxholes and Willis took over the remaining empty one next to me. Forster had been slow in his endeavours to join us and was obliged to

¹ A 'Jack Johnson' was the British nickname used to describe the impact of a heavy, black German 15-cm artillery shell. Jack Johnson was the popular U.S. world heavyweight boxing champion who held the title from 1908-15.

accept the only bivvy for which there were no takers. He settled in about 20 yards further along the trench. On the parades behind him was the latrine bucket. The presence of this article we regarded as an unnecessary refinement in trench life but orders had to be obeyed even at the cost of exposing oneself to the distant sniper. A heavy explosion in the direction of Forster's side brought Bradley and I to our feet and dashing to his aid. We feared the worst. Forster was shaken but unhurt and we rejoiced that he was safe if no longer fragrant! His dilemma, however, made no appeal to one's sense of humour. We were only too conscious of the spectre of death lurking just round the corner to appreciate the jolly atmosphere of the Western Front as portrayed by Bruce Bairnsfather cartoons¹ drawn for home consumption. Behind us in the open ground still lay the bodies of many who had died in the Easter massacre during the battle of Arras.

As night fell a burial party sallied forth under the direction of Captain Thurston, the Company OC. The operation was conducted speedily and with scant ceremony. Identification was the first essential; the Corporal removed one of the red and green identification discs which hung from the dead man's neck. From the pockets of his uniform a paybook and a few personal belongings were quickly extracted and stowed away. Preliminaries over, the squad, working in pairs, dealt with the disposal of the remains.

I grabbed the ankles of the nearest corpse and my companions lifted it by the shoulders. We heaved together and our burden parted in the middle. That was an unfortunate beginning but we were concerned solely with the unsavoury nature of the task. I am ashamed to say that sentiment did not overrule the annoyance at choosing the wrong victim. Eventually with the help of spades we deposited the remains in the nearest shell hole and lightly covered them with the broken chalk which abounded. The final act, adding the only touch of dignity to the ceremony, was the planting at the head of the mound the victim's rifle, sword and tin hat.

We looked around for the next body and got to work. In all the squad disposed of 25 to 30 bodies in this way. A squalid exercise but no doubt good training for those of us who had not acquired the callous outlook that was demanded.

¹ Wikipedia entry for Bruce Bairnsfather - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Bairnsfather

For many days the sweet cloying scent of death clung to our bodies and saturated our clothing. A suggestion was made to the Captain that the unsavoury nature of our duties called for small issue of rum – it met with no response.

11th June 1917 - Postcard home to Mum and Dad



Dear Mum and Dad

Just a postcard to let you know I am still well and chirpy - otherwise nothing very exciting. Will write a letter shortly.

Much love
Ernie

Same scene of Arras, France on Google Streetview - <https://goo.gl/maps/84b3qp2XmPD2>

12th June 1917

12 TUES Rose 10.30 Harrison's
pomade from home. Guide
party at night for the
Queen Vics. Heavy shelling.
Patrol fights - QWRs take
a prisoner - Prussian Guard.

Rose 10:30am.

Harrison's pomade from home.

Guide party at night for the Queen Vics.

Heavy shelling. Patrol fights.

QWRs take a prisoner - Prussian Guard.

12.6.17. Rose 10.30. Post in from
home. Guide (with Bradley) for
the Queen Vics. working party.
To the left from "B." Coy., through
"Lion trench", "Tiger trench",
"Jungle Alley", and "Shikar
Lane". Met 2. V. R's. at the
Dressing station, & guided them to
the front line, past the two
tanks, and in front of 2. W. R's
Lewis Gun Post, situated in
a copse by the river Scarpe's
tributary. Return on our own
to supports. Heavy shelling that
night. Patrol fights. 2. W. R's.
take a prisoner for intelligence
purposes; Prussian Guard, and
terrific wind-up.

Having slept in the bivvy from stand down until 10:30am, I was awakened by delivery of post from home. A trivial matter for the record perhaps but an outstanding event for those on active service.

The defences in the 'Harp' system were sadly in need of repair and reinforcement. Willing parties from all Companies spent most of the night-time in no-man's land screwing in heavy pickets and unwinding recalcitrant rolls of barbed wire. To help in this work the services of the Q.V.R., located in the reserve trenches at the rear, were co-opted and it fell to the lot of Bradley and myself to act as their guides.

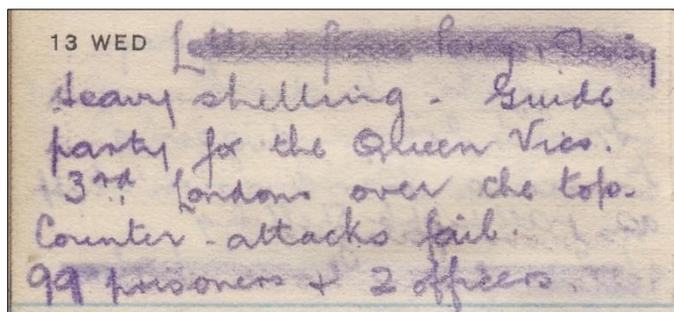
Our way lay to the left; leaving Boar Trench we negotiated the devious route via Lion Trench, Tiger Trench, Jungle Alley and Shikal Lane and arrived at the field dressing station which was to be our rendezvous with the Queen Vics. From here the way led past the two derelict tanks, round the QVR Lewis Gun post, snugly tucked away in a small copse by a tributary of the River Scarfe. There in no-man's land beyond the front line trench the Queen Vics were left to toil with their pickets and barbed wire. Their guides returned leisurely to their own quarters only to find that during their comfortable stroll with the Queen Vics the rest of B Company had departed to the front line and were also engaged in navvying.

The trenches nearer to the region of the Scarfe had shown evidence of much wear and tear from the attentions of the enemy. In places the damage to the parapet had obviously been repaired hurriedly and here and there a hand or a foot in various stages of putrefaction protruded grotesquely from the side of the trench. In one spot the parapet had been blown away to the extent of about one square foot thus leaving the head of the casual passer-by completely exposed to the German snipers rifle, no doubt already clamped in position. A couple of sandbags would have cancelled out the danger but the ways of the army are past understanding. The solution to the problem was the erection of a painted board which read "Keep your head down"!

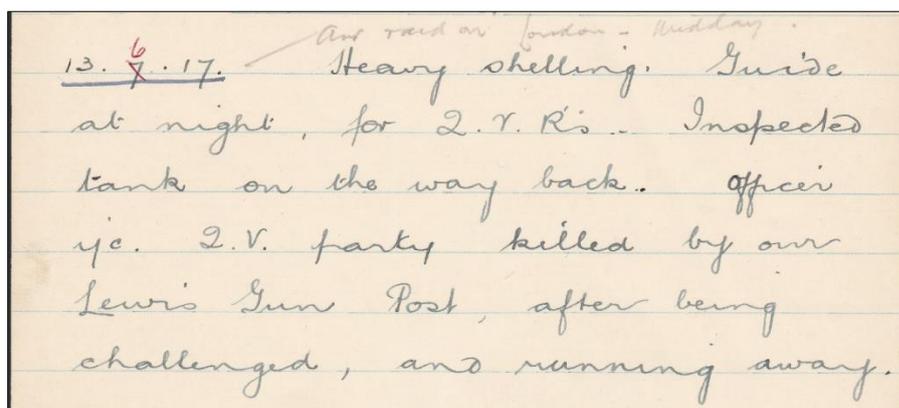
Towards the dawn shelling commenced and the rattle of small arms fire not far away suggested that the QVR were engaged with the Boche at close quarters. A sudden commotion to the right brought us to our feet and a voice urged everyone to "make way there". Pressing closely to the wall of the trench two heavily built NCOs appeared pushing and pulling through the crowd of men one undersized, pale faced German wearing the large, round-lensed spectacles which, to the Hun, appeared to be an accepted part of his general issue. Fear and apprehension were commonplace enough on the battlefield; we were all subject to those emotions in times of stress but

most men succeeded in disguising their weakness. Stark terror, however, cannot be concealed and the white face, staring eyes and slavering mouth of the trembling Hun were distressing to see. As he was rushed past the onlooking troops he piteously held out to every man in turn a large, turnip watch dangling from a silver chain. What he hoped to gain by the offer of this precious gift nobody could guess. I was glad to note there were no takers. Clearly he regarded the British as barbarians prepared to submit their captives to every conceivable atrocity, an attitude of mind probably inspired by the German General Staff. I personally found no joy in the capture of that little man.

13th June 1917



Heavy shelling.
Guide party for the Queen Vics.
3rd London over the top.
Counter attacks fail.
99 prisoners and 2 officers.



At 9am precisely the morning strafe commenced as usual. Heavy shelling of the support lines continued at intervals throughout the day but the range was poor and, apart from a few near misses, so far 8th Platoon were lucky.

By afternoon news reached us of an air raid on London.

At night Bradley and I were again engaged on our conducted tour on behalf of the QVR who, as before, returned from their labours under their own steam.

14th June 1917

14 THUR Heavy shelling.
Guide for Queen Vics. work-
-ing party. Heavy strafe
on our trench. Shrapnel
on tin hat & arm.
Bivvies blown in.

Heavy shelling.
Guided for Queen Vics working party.
Heavy strafe on our trench.
Shrapnel on tin hat and arm.
Bivvies blown in.

14. 6. 17. Dawn. 3rd Londons
make an attack on our left,
straightening out the line - (before
which, 2.W.R. position formed a
nasty salient). They take 99
prisoners, 2 officers. All counter
attacks by Fritz smashed by
artillery. night, heavy shelling
Guide for 2.V.R.'s. Water from
the "Scarpe", or "Sensee". Heavy
strafe on supports, Shrapnel on my
hat, & several bivvies blown up.

The position held by the QWR formed a dangerous salient and to prevent exploitation of this by the enemy it was deemed necessary to straighten the line. This task fell to the lot of the 3rd Battalion of the London Regiment, Royal Fusiliers.

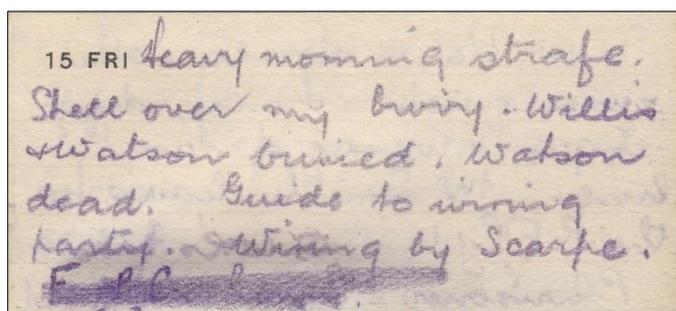
At dawn the attack on our left was begun. The action was noisy but brief. Word came through by the grapevine that the operation was a complete success. Ninety-nine prisoners taken and all counter attacks smashed by

the British guns. This was cheering news but the Hun artillery retaliated strongly on the QWR lines as a quid pro quo.

Since Bradley was employed on other duties, I sallied forth on my own for the nightly jaunt. At the rendezvous the QWR party were already waiting. They appeared ill at ease, the young Lieutenant in charge was a newcomer and was himself decidedly edgy. We had not gone far when he volunteered the information that he was scared stiff and told me why. Lieutenant X was dead. It appeared that on the previous night when returning in the half-light before the dawn, no doubt uncertain of his direction, had gone ahead of his party. On being challenged by the QWR Lewis Gun post by the copse he panicked and ran. Tragically a burst from the gun killed him.

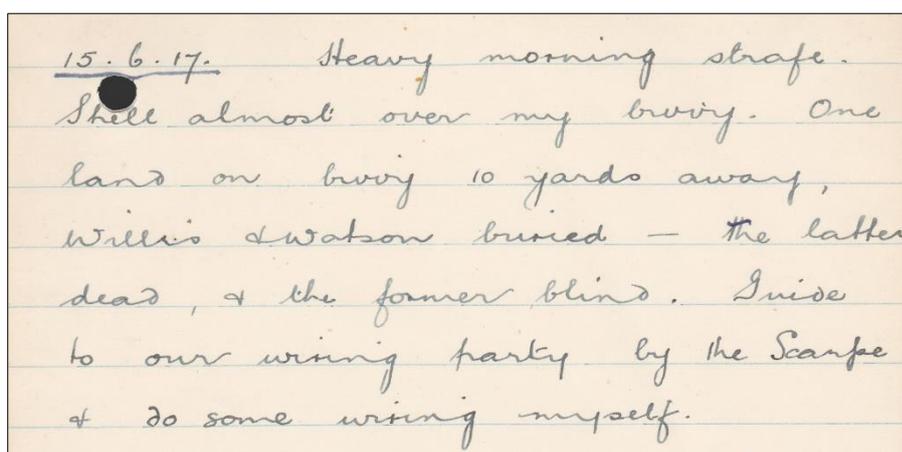
The security of the water ration was now acute. Three quarters of a water bottle per man was quite insufficient in the boiling heat. Shaving and washing were quite out of the question. It was therefore natural that during the lonely hours of the night after guiding duties were finished and the rest of the Company were doing their stint in the front line my thoughts should dwell on the cool streams flowing freely near the Lewis Gun post by the copse. I succumbed to the temptation and, retracing my steps, filled my water bottle to the brim. By the end of the spell in the support trenches my nightly pilgrimage was loaded with a dozen or more bottles filled with the polluted streams which oozed their way through every known abomination covering the battlefield for miles around. My companions were most grateful and I left it to each man's discretion as to how he used it. I just used mine for shaving. An inexplicable outbreak of impetigo afflicted a number of men in the 8th Platoon on or about the 1st July.

15th June 1917



15 FRI Heavy morning strafe.
Shell over my bivvy. Willis
& Watson buried. Watson
dead. Guide to wiring
party. Wiring by Scarfe.
~~F. C. Scarfe~~

Heavy morning strafe.
Shell over my bivvy.
Willis and Watson buried.
Guide to wiring party.
Wiring by Scarfe.



15.6.17. Heavy morning strafe.
Shell almost over my bivvy. One
land on bivvy 10 yards away,
Willis & Watson buried - the latter
dead, & the former blind. Guide
to our wiring party by the Scarfe
& do some wiring myself.

At 9am the Hun commenced his regular morning strafe on the support lines and the heavy shells bursting either side of the trench evidenced the accuracy of his gunnery. We anxiously awaited the direct hit which seemed inevitable, at the same time not oblivious to the possibility of an attack following the long, intensive bombardment.

Suddenly the racket stopped and from our crouching position we rose up to the alert. At once our NCO dashed up shouting "first six men, this way - quick as hell". Grabbing rifles and swords we ran, anticipating we knew not what. The NCO said "Put those bloody rifles down, you won't need them". After some ten or fifteen yards our progress was barred. Straddling the trench was an enormous mound of huge boulders of solid chalk. The shell which had caused the damage had burst some yards in front of the parapet splitting a seam in the iron hard ground so that the trench collapsed. Ten or twelve feet below that mountainous heap of chalk one of our company was known to be in his bivvy and a second man was missing. Throughout

the rest of the day relays of men laboured with pick and shovel in the boiling sun until by evening the crushed and broken body of young Watson was discovered. The other man, whose name I have forgotten, was alive but was said to have been blinded.

In due course our spell in the line was over and we were back in billets. Naturally letters and parcels from home were our first concern. In a corner of the barn stood a massive tea chest addressed to Rifleman Watson. In private life Watson had been employed by a large grocery firm and they had generously despatched to him that enormous crate of comestibles which by wartime standards were luxuries indeed. Why the army accepted such a huge consignment for delivery to the front intrigued us. In accordance with custom the platoon had no compunction in sharing out the contents. Our susceptibility to the tragedy of war was already becoming blunted.

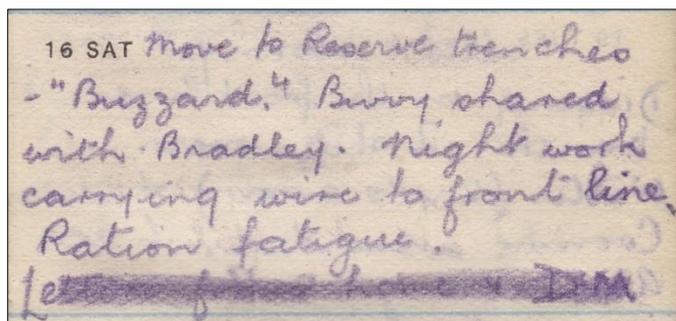
During the night B Company was fully engaged in the wearisome task of erecting more barbed wire entanglements by the tributaries of the Scarfe and before the dawn various companies were moved to exchanged positions. B Company now found itself located in Buzzard Trench in the reserve line. This was an improvement in many respects to the support position although the night trips to the front line, laden with all the paraphernalia of war, were longer and more exhausting.

It was during this spell that an unusually solemn Bradley paid me a visit. "I've been detailed as Gas Guard. What does that mean?" I said, "Fine, you have nothing to do but sit on your bottom all day by the Gas Gong (a shell case suspended on a bracket at the side of the trench) and sniff – you beat the gong with your entrenching tool handle, that's all". He replied, "That's alright but I can't smell!" Pointing to a small red mark on the bridge of his nose he explained that ever since a fall off a bike when he was a schoolboy his sense of smell had been non-existent. He was very sensitive about this and I promised to respect his confidence and also act as his 'nose' during his spell on duty. Actually I had been fully aware of his disability for some time but as he took such pride in his physical wellbeing I had kept the knowledge to myself.

During the trips we made together whilst guiding the Queen Vics wiring parties to the front line it was our custom to rest for a few minutes on the way back to our trench in order to partake of a little refreshment. Invariably Bradley, who, by virtue of his additional years liked to be the leader, would dispose himself happily on the most revolting heap of cadavers, or perhaps the remains of some latrine, to open his bread and

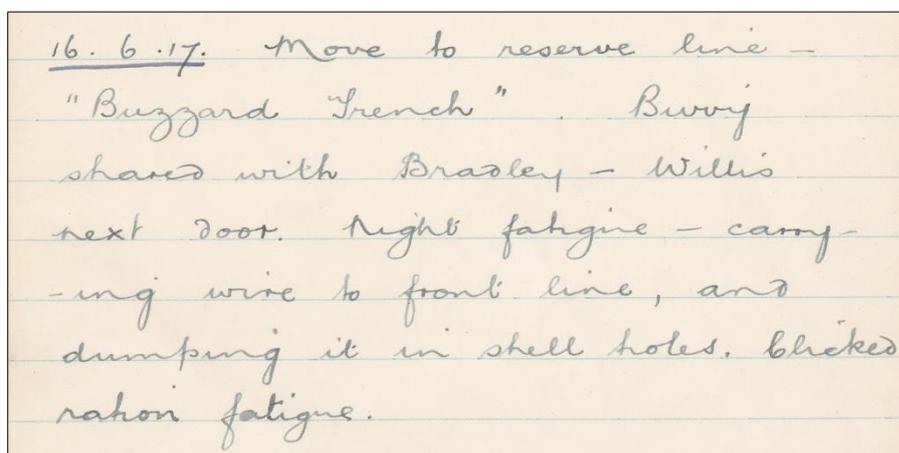
jam! Tactfully I usually managed to get him to a less unsavoury spot, although there were not many to be found in that region.

16th June 1917



16 SAT Move to Reserve trenches
- "Buzzards." Bivvy shared
with Bradley. Night work
carrying wire to front line.
Ration fatigue.
Let [unclear] [unclear] DM

Move to Reserve trenches - "Buzzards".
Bivvy shared with Bradley.
Night work carrying wire to the front line.
Ration fatigue.

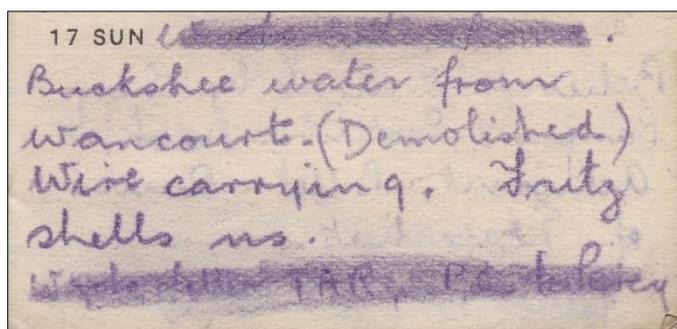


16. 6. 17. Move to reserve line -
"Buzzard Trench". Bivvy
shared with Bradley - Willis
next door. Night fatigue - carry-
-ing wire to front line, and
dumping it in shell holes. blaked
ration fatigue.

The day passed quietly. In the reserve trenches there was ample opportunity to survey and actually investigate the immediate surroundings. Every ration fatigue was a welcome break since the rendezvous with the supply column brought one to the outskirts of the ruins of Wancourt where the Battalion suffered grievous losses during the Easter fighting.

The night's fatigue entailed the manhandling through the narrow and winding trenches, at the cost of considerable laceration of the flesh, those cumbersome contraptions of heavy timber and barbed wire known as 'knife rests'. These were dumped in the shell holes of no man's land with the pious hope that one day Jerry might encounter them under less favourable conditions.

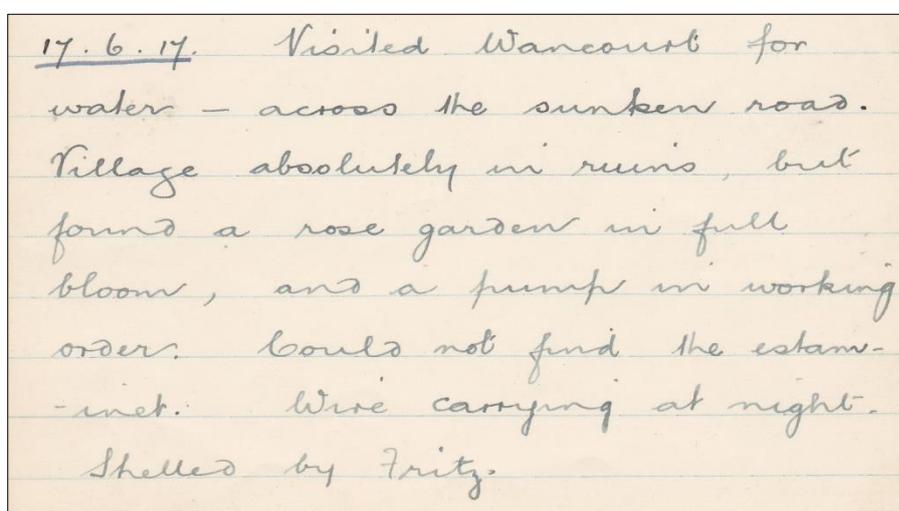
17th June 1917 (Sunday)



Buckshee water from Wancourt (Demolished).

Wire carrying.

Fritz shells us.



The comparative freedom of movement during the daylight hours invited liberties and Bradley and I soon found ourselves crossing the sunken road dividing the vast trench system from the rubble and masonry which had once been the village of Wancourt. The devastation was not equal to the shambles of Beaurain and here and there remnants of buildings had survived the enemy guns. Poppies abounded in the region but one hardly expected to see roses shining in Picardy¹. On the far side of the road there was a garden encircled by a low brick wall surmounted by high iron railings. A tall wrought iron gate gave entrance to what must have been the carefully tended rose garden of a house of some distinction. The house, alas, was no more but the roses still flourished in colourful abandon.

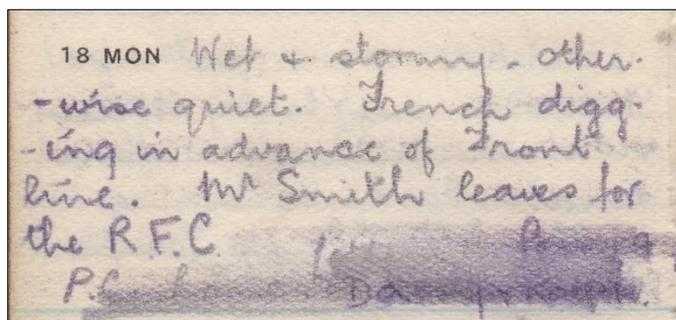
Our main occupation was, however, to satisfy the urge to pour water down our parched throats and we were lucky. Along the road a crowd of men

¹ Wikipedia entry for "Roses of Picardy" - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roses_of_Picardy

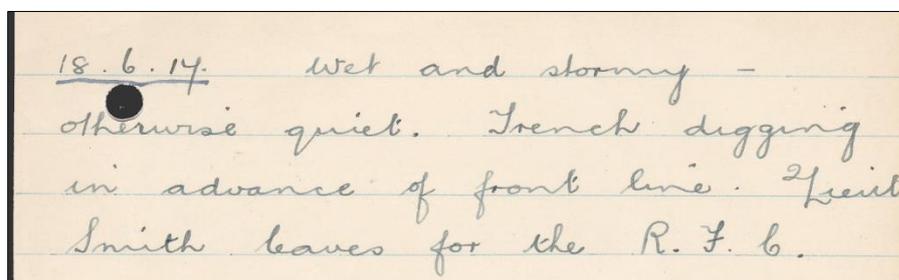
from various units of the Brigade were milling around an ancient pump from which gushed a never-ending stream of water. We filled our bottles and beat a hasty retreat before authority came upon the scene.

Night brought the usual wire carrying fatigue with a modicum of indiscriminate shelling from the other side, but the Company returned unscathed.

18th June 1917



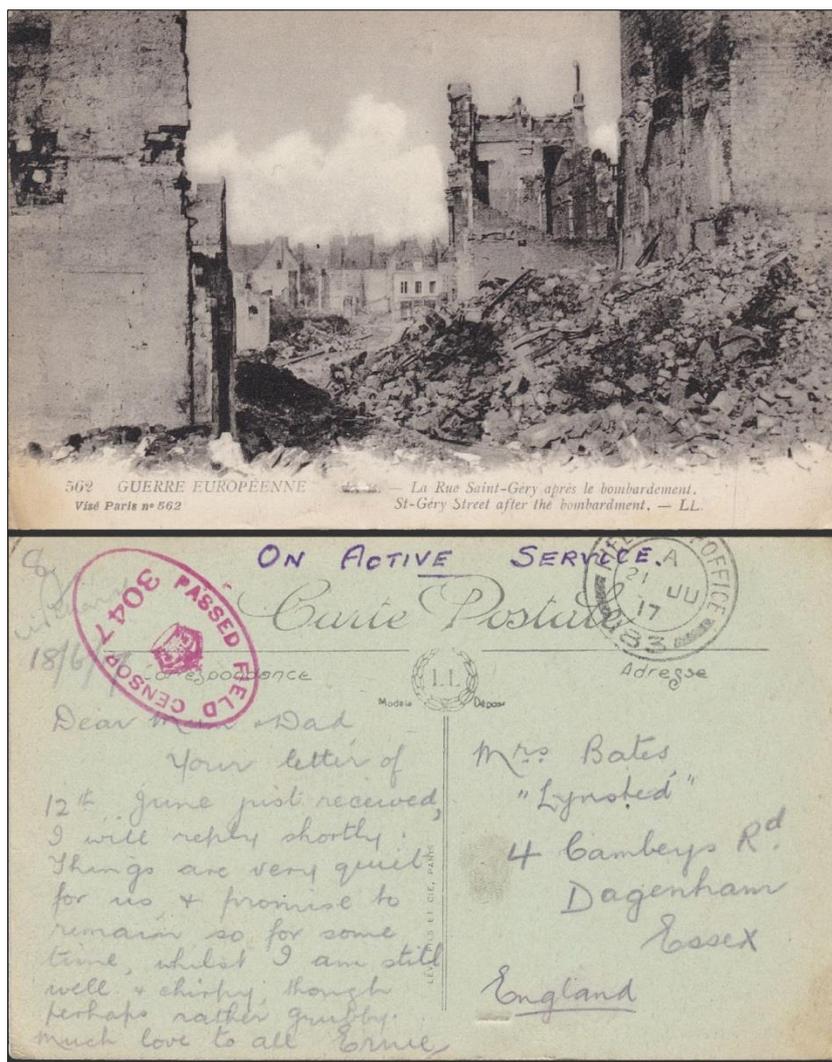
Wet and stormy - otherwise quiet.
Trench digging in advance of front line.
Mr Smith leaves for the RFC¹.



The day broke wet and stormy. Bivvies gave but little protection from the unending torrents and the glamour of those first few days in the line was no more. The sodden chalky trenches became treacherous underfoot. Burdened with picks and shovels the nightly stint was the construction of a new trench some yards ahead of the front line position. The results were meagre and unrewarding but nobody seemed to mind.

¹ The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was the air arm of the British Army before and during the First World War, until it merged with the Royal Naval Air Service on 1 April 1918 to form the Royal Air Force.

18th June 1917 – Postcard home to Mum and Dad



Dear Mum and Dad

Your letter of 12th June just received, I will write reply shortly.

Things are very quiet for us and promise to remain so for some time, whilst I am still well and chirpy, though perhaps rather grubby.

*Much love to all
Ernie*

18th June 1917 - Letter to sister Daisy and her husband Ralph

France.

June 18 - 1917.

Dear Daisy + Ralph,

Very many thanks for letter of the 21st May, - I am glad to hear that you are all quite well at home, + everything O.K. Was rather concerned to hear yesterday about some daylight raid on London in which rumour said 90 people were killed - Is this so, + did you see anything of it. Its a beastly shame if they are going to allow that sort of thing to take place. Will you let me know soon, just a card will do if everything is alright. I dont think I shall mind the Zepps any more - I have been under shell fire at last - quite an amusing experience if you like that sort of thing, and keeps you busy speculating as to whether the next one will land on your funk-hole or not. Im glad to say however, we have been pretty lucky this time, + are now out of the front line again. I have a fairly decent bivvy (a little hole in the side of a chalky trench) + were it not for a little inconveniences, such as beetles of weird varieties, ants, flies, lumps of the funk-hole falling down my back, + the fact that I haven't

washed or shaved for 9 days I should be quite comfy. Grub of course is none to good in the line, & bully and ~~biscuit~~ biscuit play a prominent part in our daily bill of fare, while there is a fair abundance of Maconochie's famous plum jam of the petrol flavour. Of water we only had about a mugful per day, also delightfully flavoured (petrol + chlorinated) but now we are further back we are better off. Have not had much to do with the Big Boss, I think Fritz is more concerned with that, but I know there are beautiful ~~no~~ rumours of peace floating around here, though what hopes there are I don't know - anyhow I have been conjuring up splendid visions on the strength of them - I suppose it is still as far off as ever? French life is ideal for promoting that fed up feeling & I am anxious to sample some of those Dagenham crops this year and to see "Lynded" in all its new glory. I think I'll take on the job of amuser-in-chief to young Kenneth after the war; though perhaps

you would think that a more strenuous
job than my present one? I'm glad
to hear he is quite well & cheery &
that Ralph's labours are not so tedious.
By the way, Ralph your knocking off
hour is just the time my labours at
present commence each day. I don't
think I have any more to say just now
- my foot is quite well now thanks, &
I am only waiting for the day when
the fireworks go up, & John & Pizzie
keep their famous oath (if that
be possible in these days of prohibition).

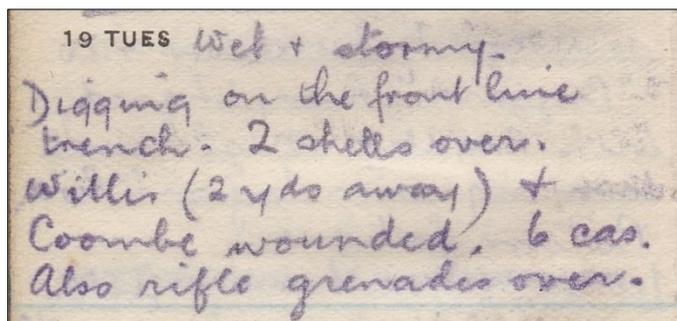
Sondist love to everybody,
Your affec brother

George

Dearank

Has anything been received from
John lately?

19th June 1917



19 TUES Wet + stormy.
Digging on the front line
trench. 2 shells over.
Willis (2 yds away) +
Coombe wounded, 6 cas.
Also rifle grenades over.

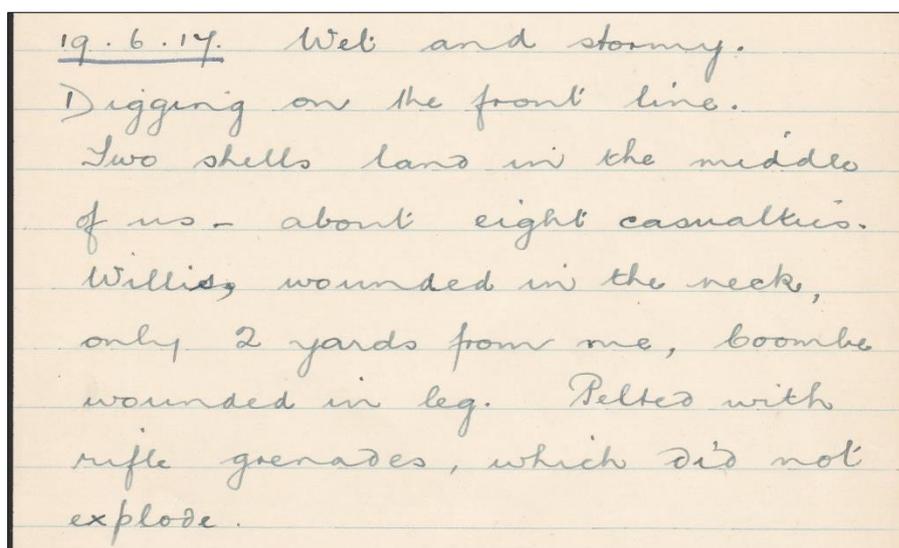
Wet and stormy.

Digging on the front line trench.

Two shells over. Willis (2 yards away) and Coombe wounded.

Six casualties.

Also rifle grenades over.



19.6.17. Wet and stormy.
Digging on the front line.
Two shells land in the middle
of us - about eight casualties.
Willis, wounded in the neck,
only 2 yards from me, Coombe
wounded in leg. Pelted with
rifle grenades, which did not
explode.

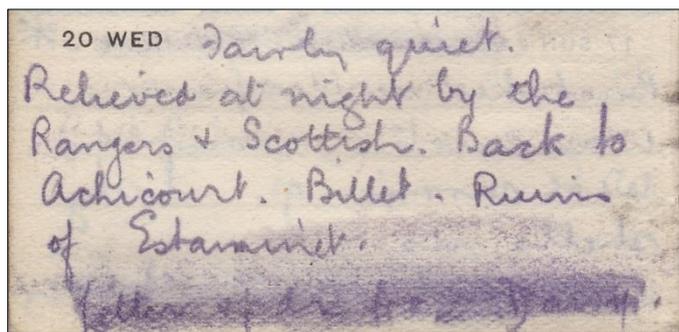
The rains persisted but apart from the usual 9am strafe the Hun was content to send over the occasional salvo during the rest of the day. At dusk the company resumed its labours with pick and shovel in no-man's land. The light in the western sky was still sufficient for the NCO to keep our labours going. I was busy, spade in hand, when a series of strange 'plops' sounded nearby. On turning to seek enlightenment from my companions not one was to be seen and I was alone in the wilderness until one after another they slowly rose from the ground. Thirty-four little 'plops' were, in fact, caused by a shower of rifle grenades with their steel rods sticking up like a fence surrounding me. Fortunately they failed to explode. I seemed we were not invisible from the German lines since a few minutes later several shells of 5.9 calibre exploded in the middle of the working party causing eight minor casualties. Willis, who was shovelling

the products of my pick, received a splinter in the neck and Coombe a slight wound in the leg. Stretcher bearers appeared at the double and the casualties, most of whom were quite capable of walking back to the dressing station, were carted away at top speed. This was textbook warfare, neat and tidy, and reminiscent of those thrilling battles which, with the help of Mr Britain's magnificent redecorated lead soldiers¹, my brother and I used to play on the kitchen table in the days when Queen Victoria was on the throne.

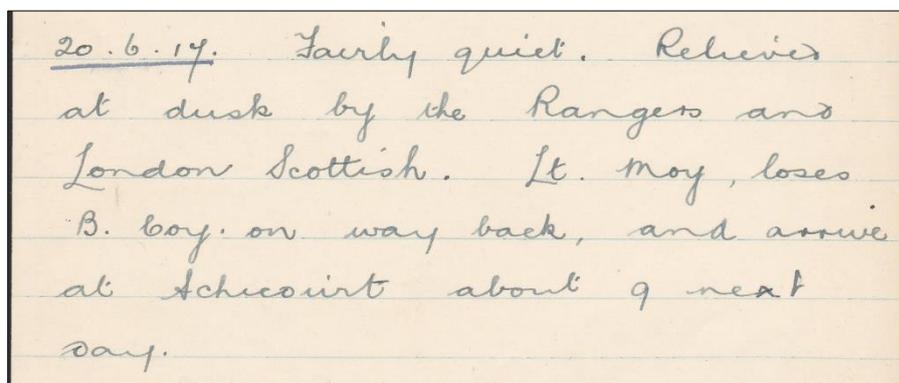
We were not unduly worried by the casualties but the sequel several minutes later really had us bothered. Young C-----, normally a cheerful little cockney, had evidently brooded on the incident. Suddenly losing his self-control he jumped into the air shouting "Mother" and dashed off to the rear as fast as his little legs could carry him. Several men attempted to restrain him but he was too quick and disappeared in the gathering mist. The incident was probably nothing new to the NCO in charge of the party and his remark was simply, "Let him go, he'll be back". The truant was not in the trench when we returned from our labours. Desertion in the face of the enemy was a crime which we understood could attract the supreme penalty and our concern for the popular little cockney was great. In the afternoon of the following day he sheepishly returned to the fold. We youngsters were always conscious of the sympathy and understanding displayed by the pre-war Territorial NCOs and once again we were not disillusioned. "C-----, if you do that again I will kick your backside so hard you won't dare sit down for weeks – get back to your post". The incident was finished and thereafter young C----- kept his two feet on the ground and eventually received the honourable scars of battle.

¹ Wikipedia entry for Britains - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britains>

20th June 1917



Fairly quiet.
Relieved at night by the Rangers and Scottish.
Back to Achicourt. Billet.
Ruins of estaminet.



The day was quiet and as soon as darkness fell the QWRs were relieved by the Rangers and the London Scottish.

The whole of the area being a maze of deep trenches the way back was complicated and tiring. In single file we negotiated the contours of the communication trenches by walking along the parapets and parades, occasionally crossing over the six-foot drop between in order to cut off corners. Suddenly my foot caught in a section of telephone wires and I pitched headlong into a deep trench. I was not badly hurt but two nasty gashes were bleeding on forearm and hip. Cuts and wounds were a matter of daily occurrence, especially when handling the masses of German barbed wire which still created pitfalls for the unwary. No doubt we had to thank the abominable A.T. injections by RAMC¹ for the fact that such untended mutilations of the flesh healed without any sign of festering.

¹ Anti-tetanus injections by the Royal Army Medical Corps

We plodded on for hours but the awaited road in the back area, which would take us to food, rest and sleep, failed to materialise. B Company, Lieutenant May in command, was lost!

21st June 1917

21 THUR Arrived early morn^g
Achicourt. Rifle inspection
only. Service in French
Protestant Church ruins.
~~Westminster~~
~~Arras~~

Arrived early morning Achicourt.
Rifle inspection only.
Service in French Protestant Church ruins.

21.6.17. Achicourt - ruins -
a few miles outside Arras.
Previously visited by Westminsters
when the whole town was vis
shelled to blazes, many casual-
ties, especially in the Town Hall.
Cemetery of Westminsters, just
outside the town. Billeted in
the ruins of an estaminet.
Rifle inspection by 2/Lt. Marsh
only. Service in the ruins of
a French Protestant church.

Not until 9am on the morning of the 21st did we reach the ruins of Achicourt¹, formerly a small town a mile or so to the west of Arras. It was here we were told that the QWR had suffered heavy casualties when a surprise bombardment during the battle of Arras reduced the whole side to a shambles. The Battalion losses were particularly heavy in the Town Hall and a QWR cemetery was sited outside the town. Apart from the rifle and kit inspection there were no parades but we all attended a memorial service at a French Protestant church.

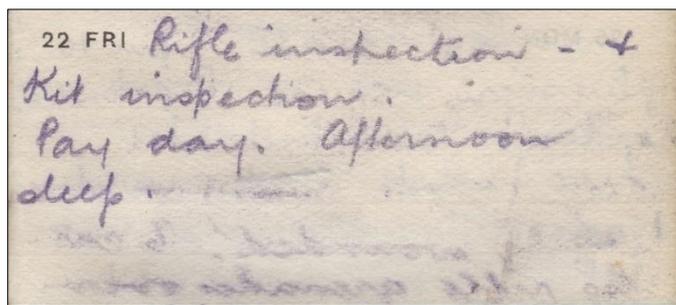
¹ Google Maps entry for Achicourt - <https://goo.gl/maps/UoteCFUnjRx>

Kit inspection was the usual pantomime as performed, no doubt, by the British soldier throughout the ages and we have it on good authority that the time honoured practice still exists. In two ranks facing, each man displayed his kit on the ground before him whilst the platoon commander with NCO in attendance gave individual attention to the articles set out for inspection. Since few men could produce their full quota of army issue, especially after a spell in the line, it was necessary to employ a little ingenuity if beer money was not to be wasted in making up discrepancies. At the commencement of operations frantic signals passed from one rank to the other after which socks, brushes, cutlery and other miscellaneous articles flew through the air to the other side. On the return journey of the inspecting officer down the other rank the borrowed articles were returned in like manner, together with any additional articles requested by sign language. The whole blatant exercise was carried out with much joyous abandon. It seemed impossible that the inspecting officer and NCO were not aware of the farce being performed under their very noses. There can only be one possible explanation.

8th Battalion was billeted in the ruins of an estaminet open to the sky which on the day was gloomy and depressing. On dismissal for the day our final injunction was to get "cleaned up". I tackled the job with little enthusiasm. By the time rifle and sword were cleaned, boots Dubbin'ed¹ and the assorted lumps of chalk from the Arras trenches, together with candle ends and other miscellaneous treasures, removed from the box respirator it was time to turn my attention to my puttees which were in a sorry state. Those night excursions to the river for water had resulted in a layer of dried mud a quarter of an inch thick and hard as iron. By this time the rest of my billet companions had given up their labours and were stretched out for the night on the hard stone floor. I quickly followed their example.

¹ Wikipedia entry for Dubbin - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubbin>

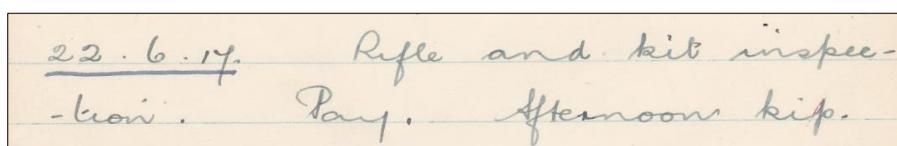
22nd June 1917



Rifle inspection - and kit inspection.

Pay day.

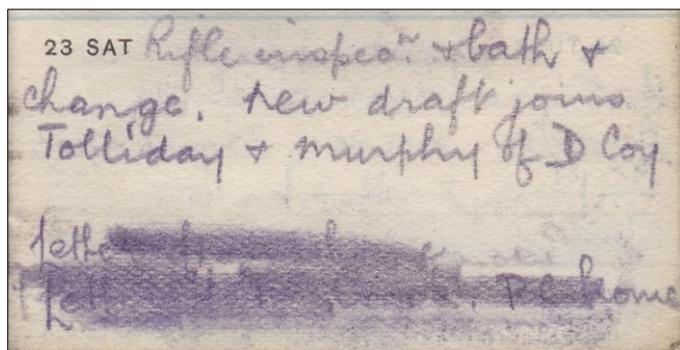
Afternoon sleep.



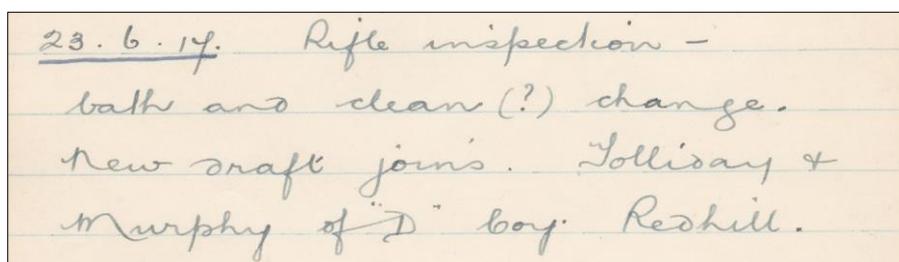
Morning came and the problem of the puttees was quickly solved by winding them on inside out. If the M.O. had been present he would probably have diagnosed elephantiasis but to the casual observer I had the cleanest pair of puttees on parade.

Unfortunately the R.S.M. himself decided to take the parade that morning and 'Spiky' with the waxed moustaches was a fearsome being to the lowly rifleman. He, with Sergeant Partridge in attendance, passed slowly along the ranks - "Do that button up" - "Take that muck out of your pocket" - "Put your belly in" - and similar remarks dear to the hearts of all sergeant majors. At last he was level with me - a quick glance up and down, a slight hesitation and the great man himself bent down and quickly turned down one fold of a puttee. He said exactly what one would expect. For some unaccountable reason Sergeant Partridge found difficulty with his notebook and by the time his pencil was poised the R.S.M. had moved on several yards. In a quiet voice 'Birdie' spoke, "I know your name, you're Polkinghorne" and hastily scribbled something in his book. Needless to say the mythical Polkinghorne never appeared on a charge but he spent the rest of the day removing all traces of mud from his person.

23rd June 1917



Rifle inspection and bath and change.
New draft joins.
Tolliday and Murphy of D Company (Redhill).



We were now due for a quiet spell away from the line. The half trained men who filled the gap after the slaughter of Easter Monday were good enough to man the trenches in the Arras sector during the lull after the storm. Apart from casual parades for inspection, a bath of sorts and the issue of clean underwear, the only event of any importance was the arrival of a fresh draft from Redhill. I was glad to welcome many old friends from D Company including rotund and jovial Tolliday who, alas, failed to make the return journey.

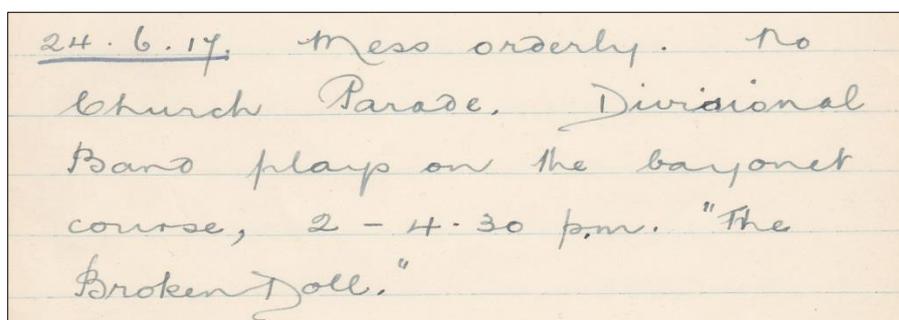
24th June 1917 (Sunday)



Mess orderly.

No church parade.

Divisional Band 2-4:30pm. "The Broken Doll"¹



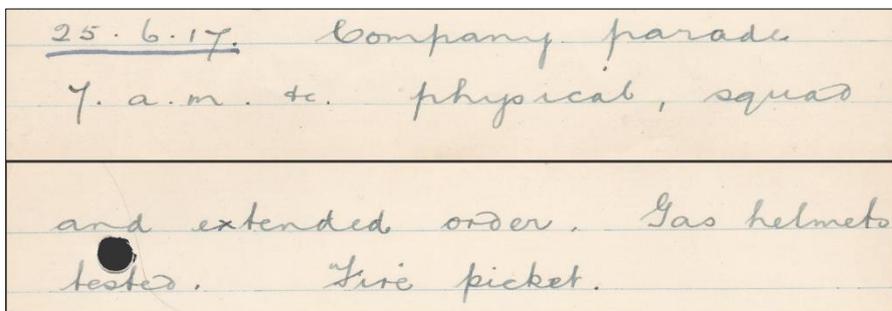
The Battalion was now completely 'at rest'. Not even Church Parade with its inevitable regimentation. Unfortunately the day was spoilt for me when detailed as mess orderly. A duty all detested, although if the cooks were in a good mood it had its compensations. The worst part of cookhouse fatigue was the cleansing of innumerable pots, bins and other utensils without the aid of either hot water or cleansing materials. Gritty earth and newspaper had to suffice for the removal of half an inch of cold, solid grease and the Sergeant expected miracles. The only bright spot of the day was cheerful music played on the bayonet course by the Divisional Band from 2 until 4:30 pm.

¹ 'A Broken Doll' - a song popular during World War 1. Written by Clifford Harris and composed by Jas W. Tate. 1916.

25th June 1917



Company parade.
7am physical, squad and extended order.
Gas helmets tested.
Fire picket.



25th June 1917 - Postcard home to Mum



Dear Mum

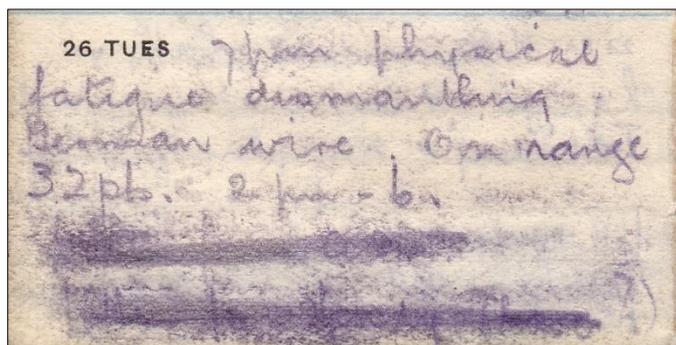
Many thanks for the letter dated 18th.

Am quite well and chirpy - otherwise not much important news, except that I am still out of the line.

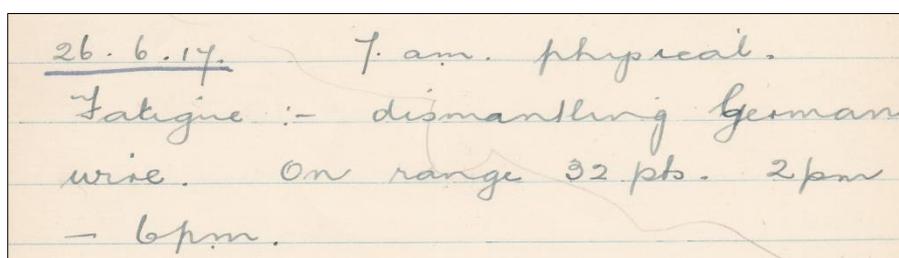
Much love to all
Ernie

The photo is of the town of Arras.

26th June 1917



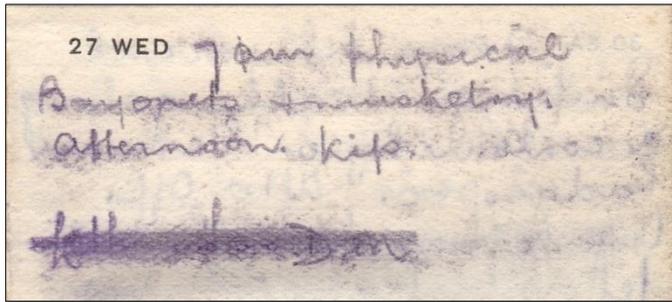
7am physical fatigue dismantling German wire.
On range. 32 points. 2 - 6pm.



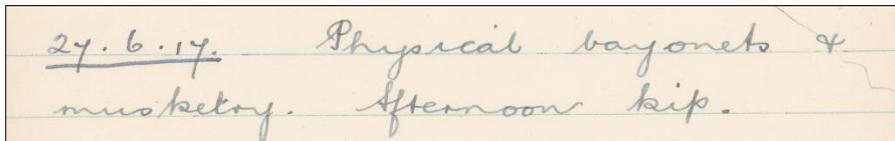
The evening was dry and a session on the range was welcomed by the snipers of B Company but not by the markers assigned for duty fiddling with paste pot and little pieces of paper whilst others had the fun of an attractive pastime. The exercise became even more arduous when the Lewis Gun team held a practice shoot because there was always the chance of ricochets. The weather being fine the Officers of B Company strolled up to watch and also to pop off a few shots with their Webleys.

At the end of our shoot the markers were relieved of their duties and the snipers moved down to the butts, a degrading duty we thought for specialists of our calibre but the man on the next target to mine was quite pleased with the opportunity unexpectedly presented. He was a truculent individual and it was apparent that his rebellious attitude to Army discipline had not gone unnoticed in the past. The Officers produced their Webleys and a running commentary by my friend on the right went somewhat as follows. "Who's this - it's that old bastard X, got an 'inner' has he - I'll give him an 'outer'. Here comes Lieutenant Y - first one an 'outer' - nice fellow Lieutenant Y - I'll give him a 'bull' - no, mustn't overdo it - give him an 'inner'." 'Rebellious' continued in the same strain for all his customers and at the finish he was eminently satisfied having blasted several reputations in the Mess and provided a minor boost to the morale of the less competent.

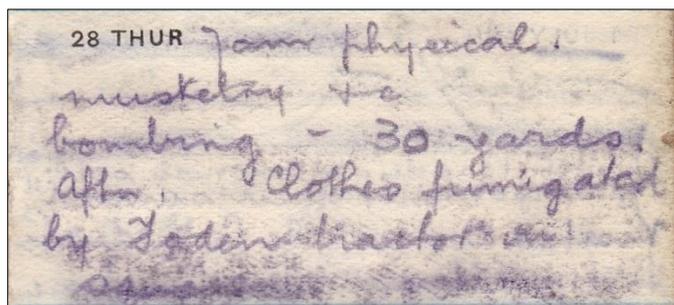
27th June 1917



7am physical, bayonets and musketry.
Afternoon kip.



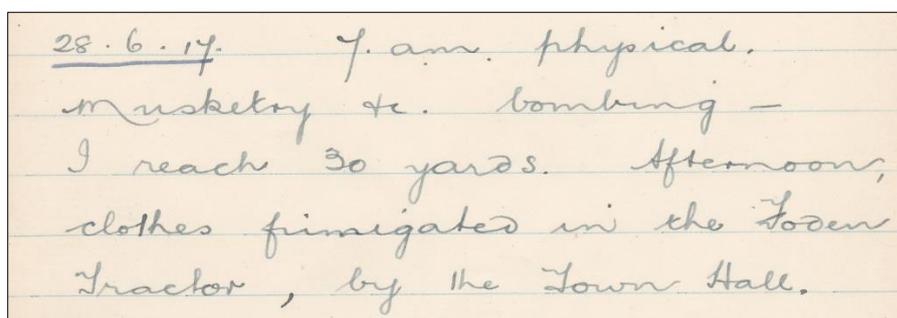
28th June 1917



7am physical, musketry, etc.

Bombing - 30 yards.

Afternoon, clothes fumigated by Foden tractor.

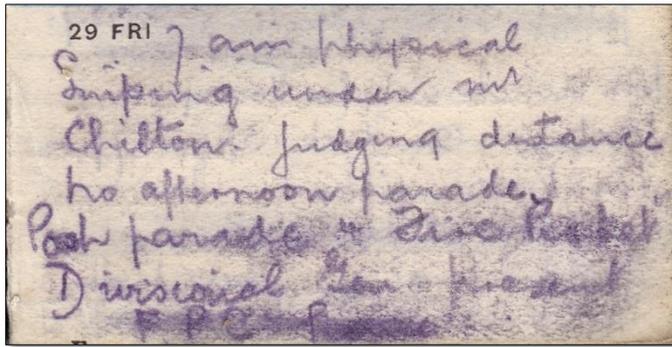


From 7am the usual round of P.T., bayonet work on the sacks and 'bombing' continued for five hours without a break. The throwing of hand grenades was a cunningly planned exercise guaranteed to provide the necessary incentive to maximise effort. Two teams faced each other at a carefully judged distance of thirty yards. At the word of command everyone let fly at their opposite numbers. There were no rules to the game and thereafter it was every man for himself. The heavy missiles flew through the air at all angles. Self-preservation demanded a quick eye and fleetness of foot and a fighting spirit. Fortunately the grenades were not live otherwise the damage to personnel would have been great, as it was we thoroughly enjoyed it.

In front of the ruins of the Town Hall of Achicourt the Battalion, dressed in clean fatigue, was drawn up on parade. Spit and polish was called for and the presence in the Square of the large Foden Steam Wagon, together with several ancillary boilers on wheels had the troops puzzled until, with one accord, they were ordered to strip - 'Operation De-louse' had commenced. In happier times the sight of several hundred bodies lined up in a complete state of nature would have been a fantastic spectacle for the worthy citizens of their ancient and, no doubt, dignified town but they had long since departed and we, if not they, were spared much embarrassment.

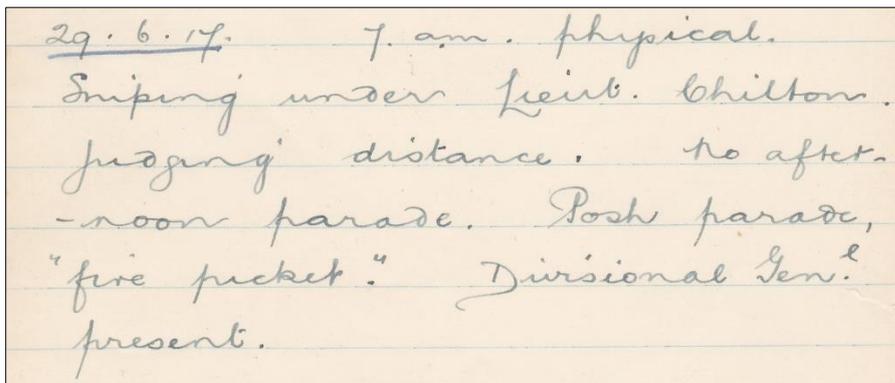
Every stitch of clothing was removed and each bundle tied with string to which were attached our identity discs. The bundles were then thrown into the steam chambers and, cold and miserable, we waited interminably for the Army Launderette to discharge our particular consignment. However it was all in a good cause and we consoled ourselves with the prospect of being clean and wholesome once again. We opened our bundles joyfully anticipating the sight of massive slaughter. The treatment must have been intense for the moulded black buttons on crumpled uniform jackets had not only lost all trace of the regimental crest but were misshapen lumps of ebonite. The coarse woollen vest and pants were examined but there were no corpses. The families which had attended on us for their food and lodging over the past months were still with us, a little excited perhaps and hungry, otherwise they appeared as happy as Larry and thereafter continued to thrive.

29th June 1917



29 FRI
7 am physical
Sniping under Mr
Chilton. Judging distance
No afternoon parade.
Posh parade "Fire picket"
Divisional Gen. present

7am physical.
Sniping under Mr Chilton. Judging distance.
No afternoon parade.
Posh parade "Fire picket".
Divisional General present.



29.6.17. 7. am. physical.
Sniping under Lieut. Chilton.
Judging distance. No after-
-noon parade. Posh parade,
"fire picket." Divisional Gen.
present.

30th June 1917

30 SAT 7am physical
Sniping - walking along
a contour line - "German
badges etc." after off.
~~Afternoon off.~~
~~Letter to home.~~

7am physical.
Sniping.
Walking along a contour line.
German badges, etc.
Afternoon off.

30.6.17. 7. am. physical. -
Sniping etc. walking along a
contour line. Lecture - "German
Badges etc." Afternoon off.

30th June 1917 - Postcard home to Dad



Dear Dad

Many thanks for the photo; the sight of it does one good out here.

The old shed looks quite posh once more, I only wish I was there to help put it up.

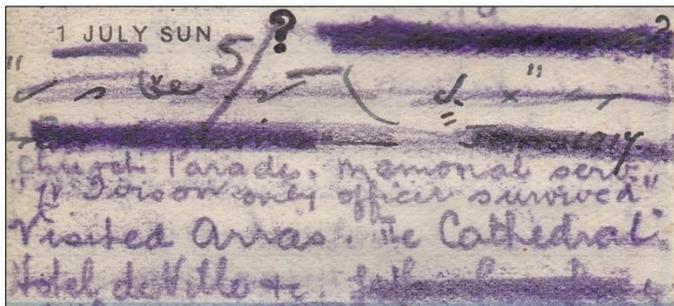
I'm quite well and things quiet.

Much love

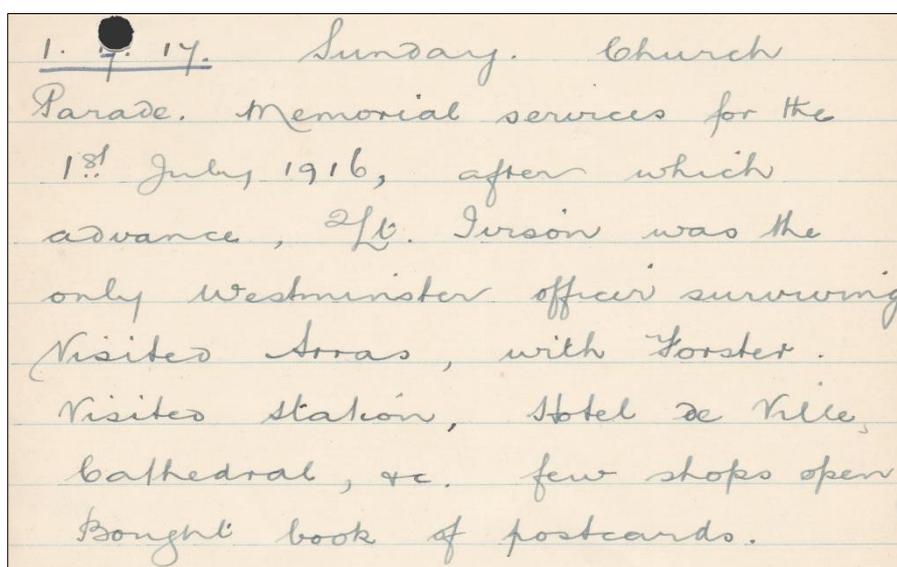
Ernie

Same scene of Arras, France on Google Streetview - <https://goo.gl/maps/PBWnrn4aZDt>

1st July 1917 (Sunday)



Church parade - memorial service. Lt Iverson "only officer survived".
Visited Arras. The cathedral. Hotel de Ville, etc.



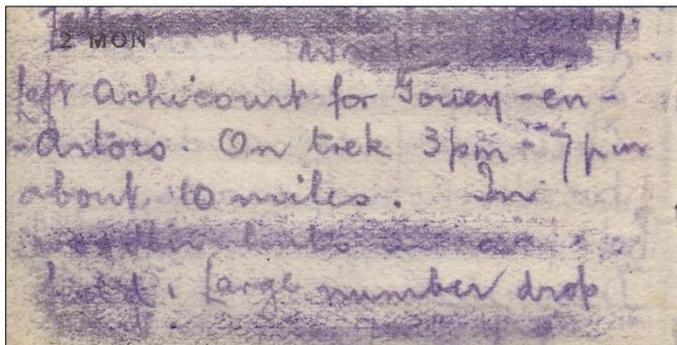
The memorial service marked the actions of the QWR on 1st July 1916 at Gommecourt during the Battle of the Somme.

"... out of the 750 officers and men who went into action, 600 were killed, wounded and missing, and it is believed that not a single Queen's Westminister Rifles fell into enemy hands.

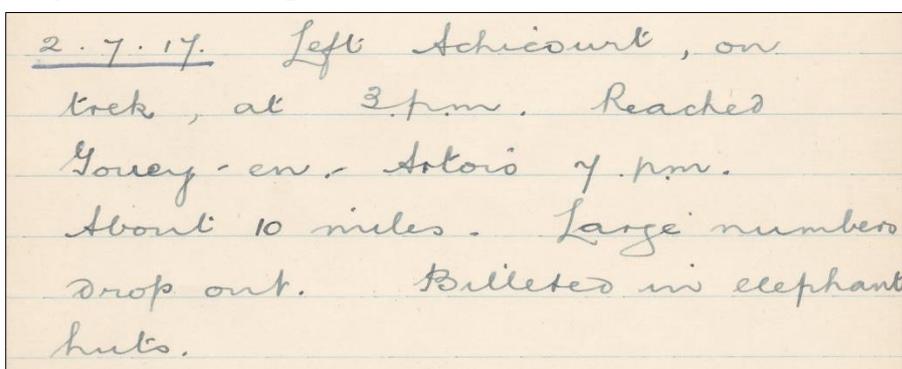
Of those who fought and died on July 1st, 1916, Lieut.-Colonel Shoolbred writes with a full heart: 'I do not feel able to do justice to them. It is impossible to pay the individual tribute which is their due to the many Westminsters who gave their lives this day in the service of their King and Country and of their Regiment.'"

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminister Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2] (page 99)

2nd July 1917



Left Achicourt for Gouey-en-Artois.
On trek 3pm - 7pm. About 10 miles.
Large number drop.



At 3pm the Battalion was on the march bound for Gouy-en-Artois which we reached at 7pm. The trek of some 10 miles with full pack in fearful heat was too much for the faint of heart and many fell by the wayside. Most were genuine casualties but others, unaware that the NCOs were following in the rear as 'moppers up', were allowed no time in which to finish their beer in the occasional wayside estaminet. The rest of the Company was comfortably billeted in elephant huts by the time the stragglers arrived.

3rd July 1917

3 TUES On trek again 2pm to 6.30. about 9 miles to Sus. St. Léger. Billeted in old barn. Wire beds. Dozens drop out. Fearful heat.

On trek again 2pm-6:30pm.
About 9 miles to Sus-Saint-Léger.
Billeted in old barn. Wire Beds.
Dozens drop out. Fearful heat.

3. 7. 17. On trek again at 2 p.m. Reached Sus. St. Léger at 6.30 p.m. about 9 miles. Fearful heat, and still more drop out. Billeted in old barn, opposite cow shed + estaminet. Wire beds. Nice little village, with good feed shops.

At 2pm the trek was continued for a further 9 miles to the pleasant village of Sus-Saint-Léger¹. The day was again hot and the estaminets undoubtedly suffered from lack of custom. I was not feeling too good in the boiling heat and turned my head to seek moral support from Bradley on my left only to find he was in a worse condition. With chin resting on his chest, body drooped, legs faltering; he began to stagger like a drunk. Murmuring a few words, I know not what, he departed at a tangent. My last glimpse was the soles of his boots protruding from a hedge at the side of the road. Overcoming a strong inclination to join him I gathered my resources and struggled on, having first discounted the pleasant idea that lorries might be provided by a thoughtful RSM to gather in the fallen. By 6:30pm in the evening the main body reached the billets in Sus-Saint-Léger which were

¹ Google Maps entry for Sus-Saint-Léger - <https://goo.gl/maps/xYovLN3cWrp>

home for the next days. In the broken-down cowshed with pigsty adjoining we dropped to the floor, every man too exhausted to remove his 95lb pack. I spent the next few minutes marvelling at the fact that the mileage performed in the two days exactly coincided with the extreme limit of my powers of endurance. I said nothing on earth could make me take another step. I was quite wrong of course. Nemesis with the three stripes on his sleeves appeared with notebook in hand and within minutes I was "jumped to it" on cookhouse fatigue. Bradley rolled in later in the evening thoroughly dejected as a result of his performance.

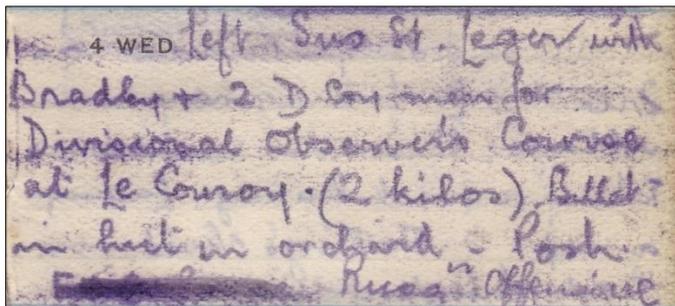
The excitements of the day were not yet over. With some apprehension Bradley and I reported at Company Office to which we had been peremptorily summoned. There was always the chance that some peccadillo contravening King's Regulations had been spotted but after much heart searching we judged ourselves blameless. To our great relief we were instructed to proceed to Divisional Headquarters Le Cauroy¹ some two kilometres away to undergo an observers' course. This was indeed a gift from heaven. True, the Battalion was now 'at rest' and expected to remain so for several weeks, but as every soldier knew, 'rest period' was a misnomer. Moreover, the Colonel, having taken a very dim view of the Battalion's poor showing on trek had ordered route marches with full pack on every evening for the next seven days. Instructions from Company Office were to travel light under our own steam immediately after first parade on the following day. One final inspection by the Sergeant and he pounced. Pointing to a small sore spot on my face he said "Impetigo", unless you get that treated it will spread all over your face in no time. "Sick parade for you tomorrow morning my lad and we'll see what the MO has to say."

"On July 2nd the Battalion marched, via Wailly, Beaumetz and Monchiet, to Gouy en Artois, and on the following day, via Barly and Sambrin, to Sus St. Leger. The weather was exceedingly hot and a good many men fell out on the march. This could not be tolerated in a Battalion which had always prided itself on its march discipline; and the men who had fallen out, most of whom belonged to a large draft which had recently arrived, were sent for a series of route marches during the hours when the estaminets were open. This proved a most effective cure for bad marching, but it must not be thought that the estaminets had been in any way responsible for the men falling out."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

¹ Google Maps entry for Le Cauroy - <https://goo.gl/maps/9rqqPSnC57zs4w5M6>

4th July 1917

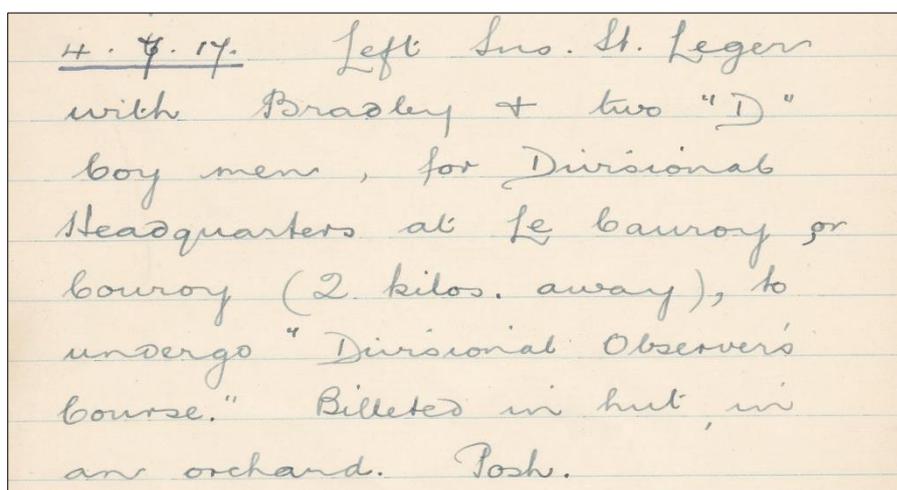


4 WED Left Sus St. Léger with
Bradley + 2 D Coy men for
Divisional Observers Course
at Le Cauroy (2 kilos), Billet
in hut in orchard. Posh.
Russian offensive

Left Sus-Saint-Léger with Bradley and two D Company men for Divisional Observers' Course at Le Cauroy (2 km away).

Billet in hut in orchard. Posh.

Russian offensive.



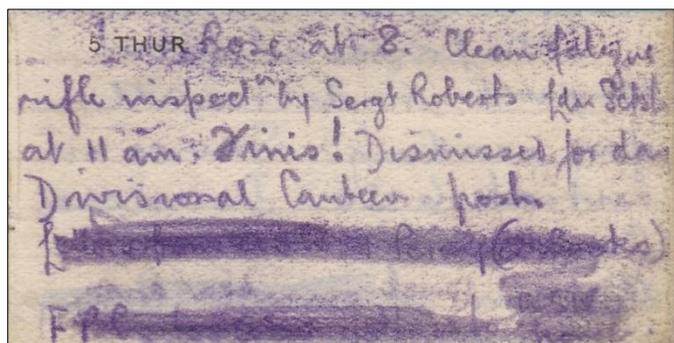
4. 7. 17. Left Sus. St. Léger
with Bradley + two "D"
boy men, for Divisional
Headquarters at Le Cauroy or
Cauroy (2 kilos. away), to
undergo "Divisional Observers
course." Billeted in hut, in
an orchard. Posh.

The MO never had a chance to say anything, even before reveille and foregoing breakfast Bradley and I were on our way, later to be joined by two D Company men also nominated for the course.

Divisional Headquarters, seat of the mighty, was to a couple of riflemen just heaven¹. It is true we saw the Brass Hats from a distance only but that arrangement was no doubt mutually satisfactory to all concerned. Our billets were situated in a delightful orchard and the select company on the course enjoyed the pleasure of sleeping on blankets for the first time for several months. The classrooms and mess were nearby and the Divisional canteen provided luxuries which the average soldier had forgotten existed. Work was not even mentioned on that first day.

¹ Google Maps entry for The Château du Cauroy - <https://goo.gl/maps/cKzHDCQUZZu>
(presumed to be the location of divisional HQ)

5th July 1917

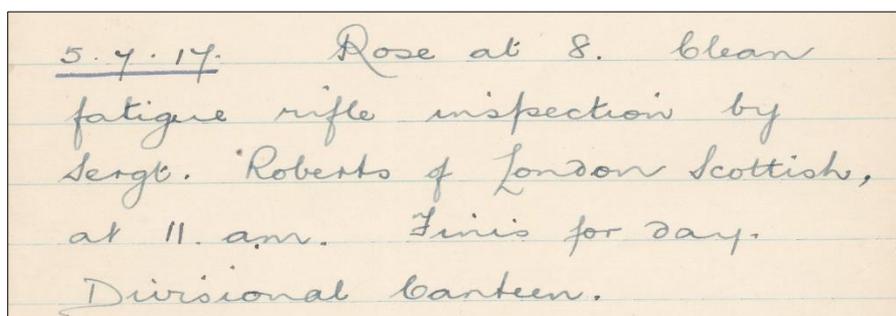


Rose at 8am.

Clean fatigue rifle inspected by Sergeant Roberts, London Scottish at 11am.

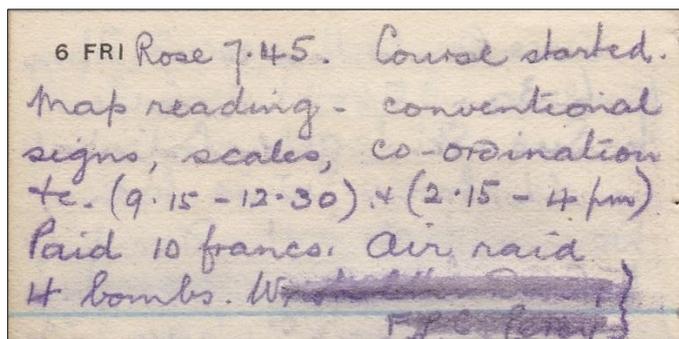
Finis! Dismissed for day.

Divisional canteen posh.



At 11am in clean fatigues we paraded for rifle inspection by Sergeant Roberts of the London Scottish after which we were left to our own devices for the rest of the day. It soon became evident that discipline in the strict army sense was not taken seriously and even lowly riflemen were treated as honoured guests. With the battlefield only 20 miles away the peace and atmosphere of unhurried calm was difficult to believe.

6th July 1917



6 FRI Rose 7.45. Course started.
Map reading - conventional
signs, scales, co-ordination
etc. (9.15 - 12.30) & (2.15 - 4 pm).
Paid 10 francs. Air raid
4 bombs. ~~Went to the cinema~~
F.P.C. (P.O.?)

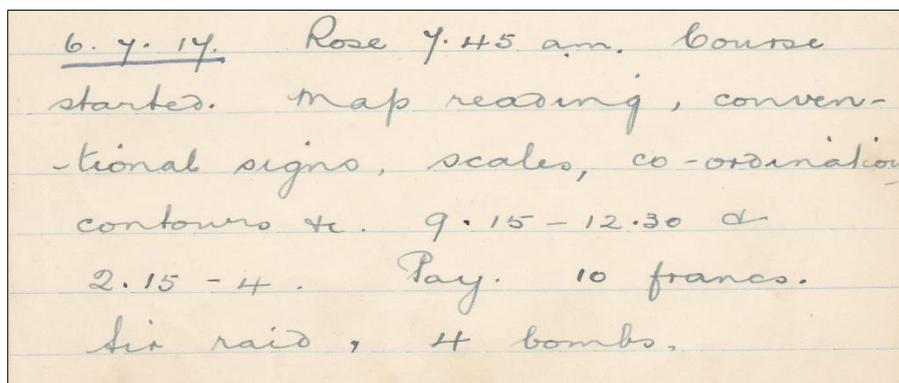
Rose 7:45am.

Course started.

Map reading - conventional signs, scales, co-ordination, etc. 9:15-12:30 and 2:15-4pm.

Paid 10 francs.

Air raid. 4 bombs.

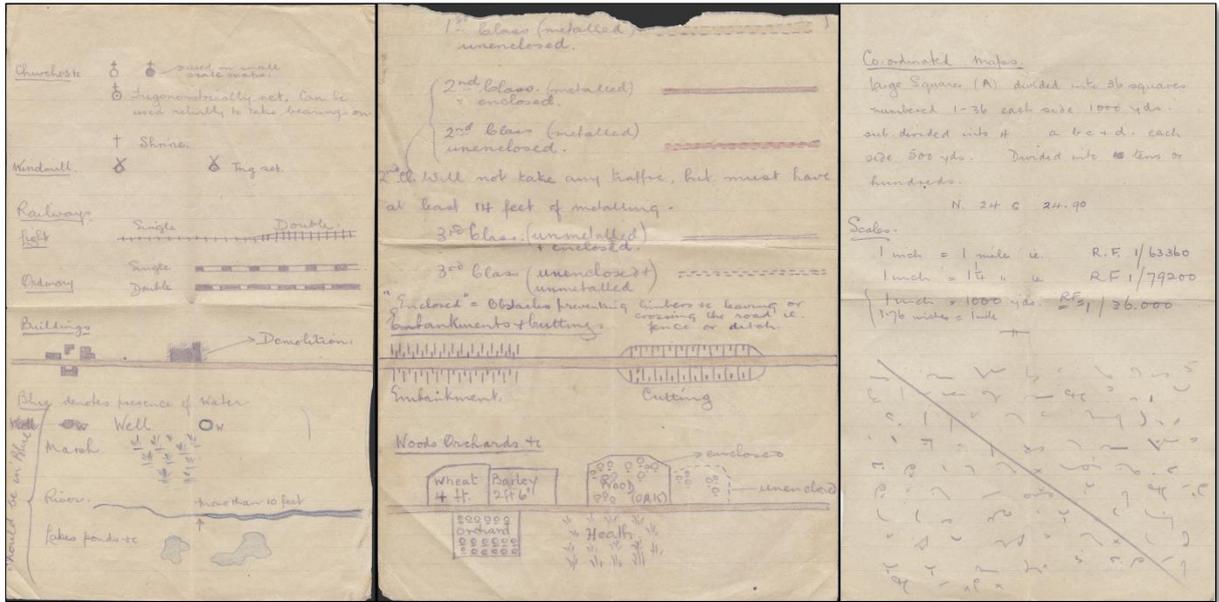


6. 7. 17. Rose 7.45 am. Course
started. map reading, conven-
-tional signs, scales, co-ordination
contours etc. 9.15 - 12.30 &
2.15 - 4. Pay. 10 francs.
Air raid, 4 bombs.

Anxious to enjoy our newly found freedom and with the promise of a hot sunny day we were out and about at 7:45am only to find that classes did not start until 9:45am.

The instructor, Sergeant Roberts, dealt adequately with the elementary map reading, conventional signs, scales, co-ordination, contours, etc - all of which we smoothly regarded as schoolboy stuff. Lessons ceased at 12:30 for lunch, to be resumed at 2:15.

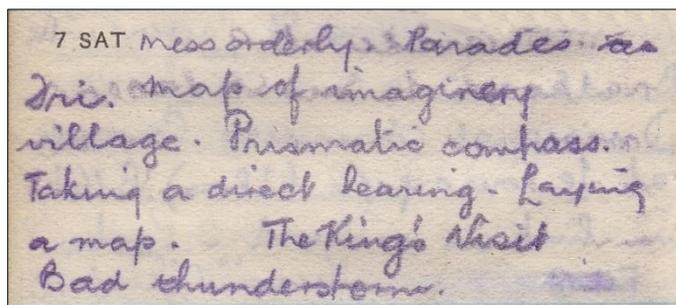
At 4pm we were issued with 10 francs pay and dismissed for the rest of the day.



Notes from observers' course

That night Jerry paid a visit to Divisional H.Q. and dropped four bombs. Little damage was done but we on the course took a sneaking delight in the momentary discomfort of the Brass Hats – how mean one can become!

7th July 1917



7 SAT mess orderly. Parades. as
Fri. map of imaginary
village. Prismatic compass.
Taking a direct bearing. Laying
a map. The King's visit
Bad thunderstorm.

Mess orderly.

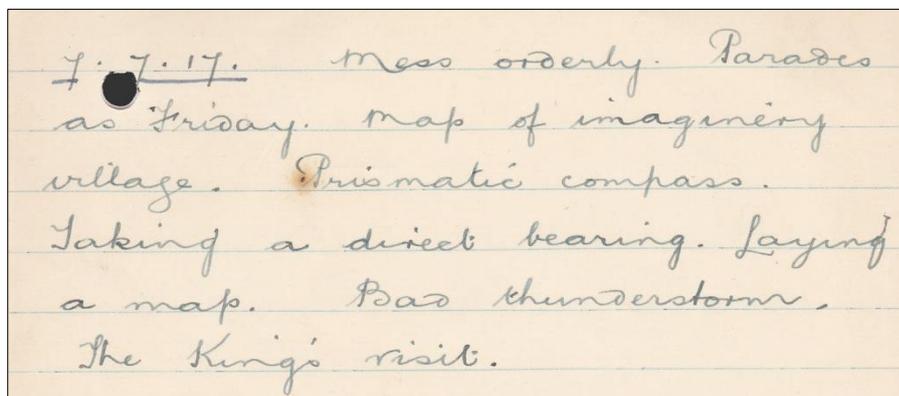
Parades as Friday.

Map of imaginary village. Prismatic compass. Taking a direct bearing.

Laying a map.

The King's visit.

Bad thunderstorm.



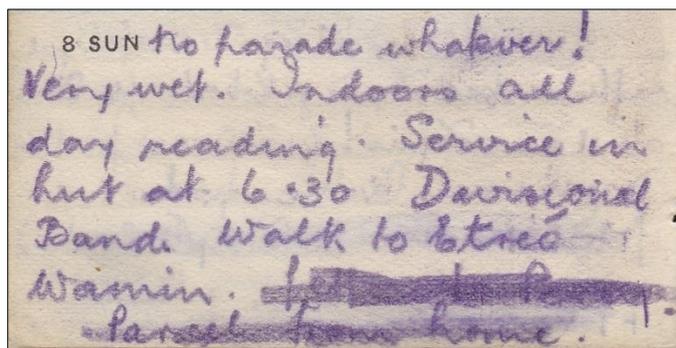
7.7.17. mess orderly. Parades
as Friday. map of imaginary
village. Prismatic compass.
Taking a direct bearing. Laying
a map. Bad thunderstorm.
The King's visit.

On appointment as mess orderly for the day my self-esteem was slightly tarnished. I expected better treatment at Divisional H.Q.

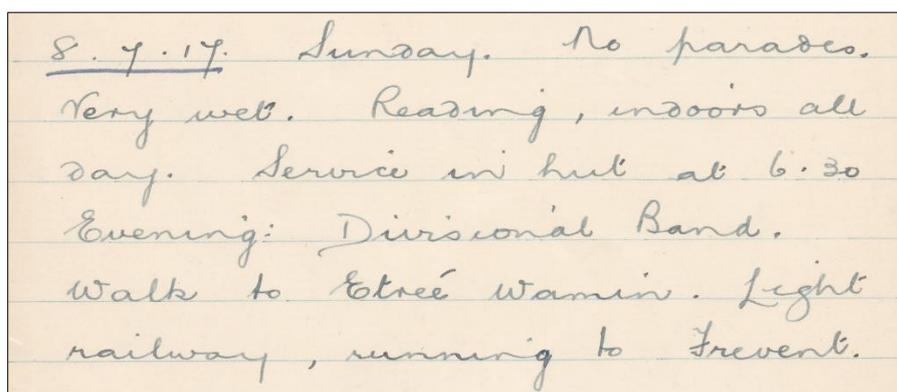
The course covered map reading which required an elementary knowledge of mathematics and a certain ability with drawing instruments. The day passed quietly in mastering the use of a prismatic compass, taking direct bearings and laying a map.

The day ended with a bad thunderstorm and torrential rain.

8th July 1917 (Sunday)



No parade whatever!
Very wet. Indoors all day reading.
Service in hut at 6:30pm.
Divisional band.
Walk to Estrée Wamin.

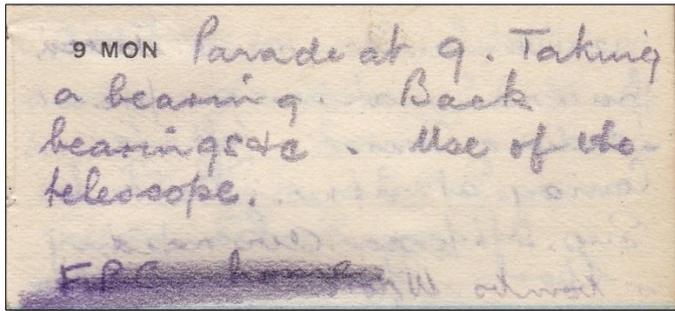


H.M. King George V was due at Le Cauroy to attend a Divisional Church Parade which was cancelled owing to the wet weather. Presumably as 'odds and bods' we would not have participated in the show anyway. Instead, most of our day was spent reading and writing, apart from a Church Service in the hut at 6:30. Meanwhile the Brass Hats took dinner to the sound of music played by the Divisional band.

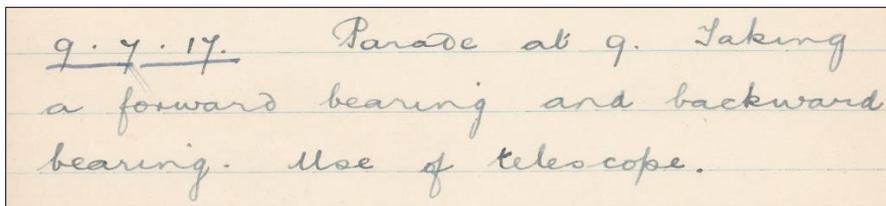
Oddly enough the easy life began to pall. Feeling the need for exercise Bradley and I tramped the roads in pouring rain to Estrée Wamin¹ alongside the light railway which ran to Frevent.

¹ Google Maps entry for Estrée Wamin - <https://goo.gl/maps/ZwPxeGzse7m>

9th July 1917



Parade at 9am.
Taking a bearing. Back bearings, etc.
Use of the telescope.

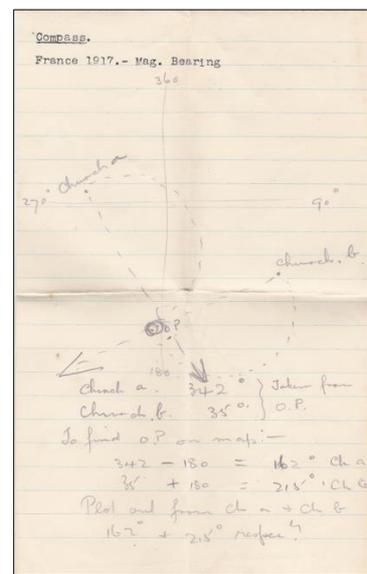


Parading at 9am we mastered the art of taking forward and backward bearings and the use of the telescope. By now my impetigo was spreading nicely but nobody of any consequence commented on my appearance.

Compass. --Forward Plottings.--
France 1917. Mag. North- 12.00 degrees west of true North.

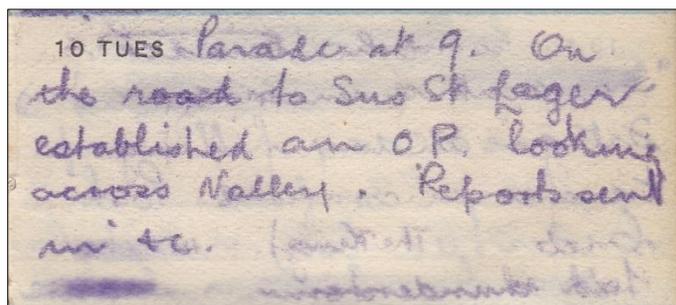
If you have got a map with true grid lines and you are given the magnetic bearing forward, you would take the protractor, place the centre over the point, and get the 0 on the protractor and the 190 parallel with the N. and S. grid lines. Measure off the angle required, and rule a line forward, first subtracting the magnetic variation- (12.00).
IN some maps the grid lines are not true N. and S. & if they are not you will find a note to that effect on the right hand margin of the map. If there is no note you can assume that the grid lines are true N. and S.
--Backward Plottings.--
(Finding your exact position on the map).
Pick up a couple of obvious landmarks, such as a church spire, cross-roads or crest of a hill, and take bearings with a compass on these two spots, which are marked plainly on

the map. Imagine you walk round a half-circle, from your O.P. to each landmark, (Church A, AND B.), and take a forward bearing from the church to the O.P. In doing so you would add 180 degrees. The same result would be obtained by plotting forward bearings on the churches and adding or subtracting 180 degrees to the results. The mag. variation will of course be taken from the result. (12.00).



Notes from observers' course

10th July 1917

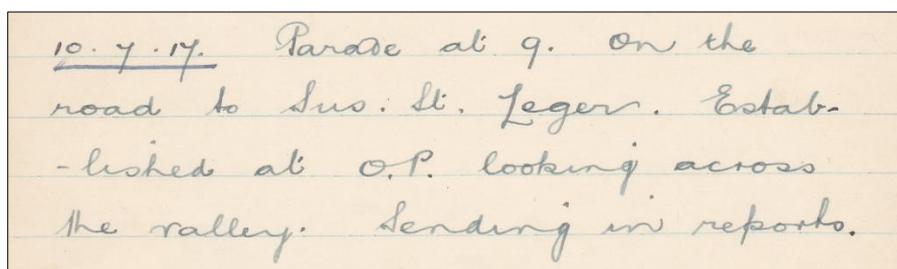


10 TUES Parade at 9. On
the road to Sus St Léger
established an O.P. looking
across Valley. Reports sent
in etc. (and etc) etc
etc etc etc etc

Parade at 9am.

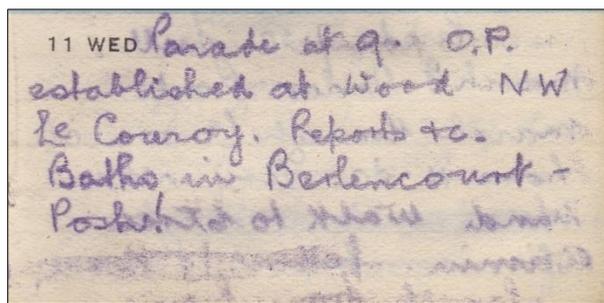
On the road to Sus-Saint-Léger. Established an OP (observation post) looking across the valley.

Reports sent in, etc.



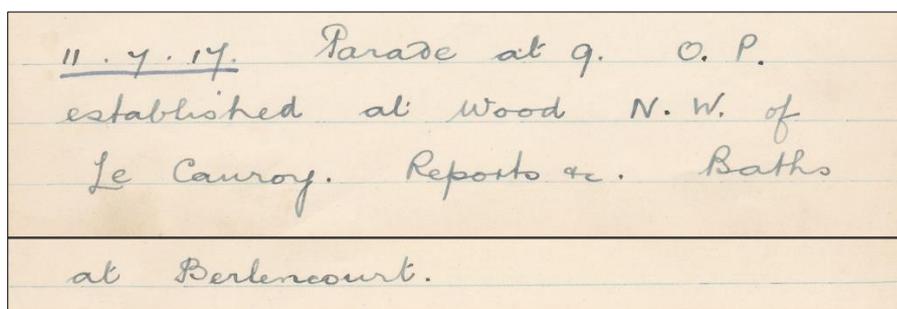
10.7.17. Parade at 9. on the
road to Sus. St. Léger. Estab-
-lished at O.P. looking across
the valley. Sending in reports.

11th July 1917



11 WED Parade at 9. O.P.
established at wood NW
Le Cauroy. Reports etc.
Baths in Berlencourt -
posh!

Parade at 9am.
OP established at wood NW of Le Cauroy.
Reports, etc.
Baths in Berlencourt - posh!



11.7.17. Parade at 9. O.P.
established at wood N.W. of
Le Cauroy. Reports etc. Baths
at Berlencourt.

12th July 1917

12 THUR Parade 10.30 ~~F.M.O.~~
for examinations on pre-
ceding course. Left Le
Cauroy at 3pm. Back to
Sus. St. Léger. Company
Sports. ~~Left for~~

Parade 10:30am.
Examination on preceding course.
Left Le Cauroy at 3pm.
Back to Sus-Saint-Léger.
Company sports.

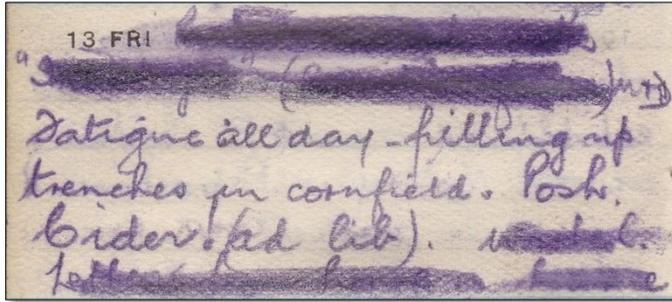
12.7.17. Parade 10.30 for exam-
-ination on course. Left Le
Cauroy at 3 pm. Back to
Sus St. Léger. Company sports.

56th Divisional Headquarters, Le Cauroy.
Examination Paper for Battalion Observers. 12 July 1917

- (1) Explain briefly how a map is set by compass.
- (2) Knowing approximately your position, how would you set a map without using a compass on a sunless day?
- (3) Give exact co-ordinations of the following points:
(a) Cross road 2100 yards S.S.W. of Maizières Church
(b) S.E. corner of wood 2800 yards S.S.E. of
Tingnes Church
(c-f) ^{similar} Questions relating to ^{other} ~~similar~~ map locations.
- (4) Would a flag 3 feet high at H. 30. 4. 5. 4 be visible to a man lying prone on road at H. 35. 4. 0. 2?
- (5) Give co-ordination of Observation Post from which following magnetic bearings were obtained:-
Villers Sur Simon Church $94^{\circ} 35'$
L'égneuxville Church $158^{\circ} 5'$
- (6) Draw a map of not more than 1 in 36360 scale including the following Conventional Signs:-
Church, 1st Class Road, &c. &c.

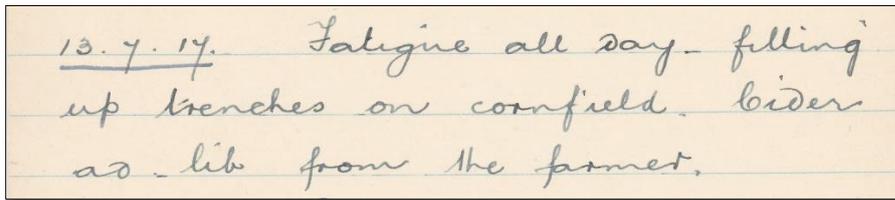
Examination Paper

13th July 1917



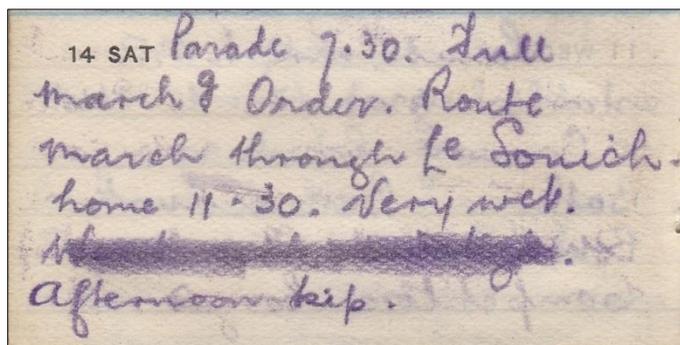
13-FRI
Fatigue all day - filling up
trenches in cornfield. Posh.
Cider (ad lib).
Letter home

Fatigue all day - filling up trenches in cornfield.
Posh, cider! (ad lib from the farmer)



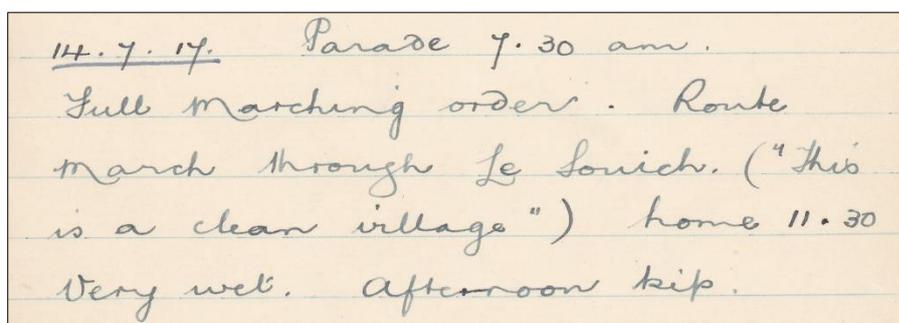
13.7.17. Fatigue all day - filling
up trenches on cornfield. Cider
ad lib from the farmer.

14th July 1917



14 SAT Parade 7.30. Full
march & Order. Route
march through Le Souich.
home 11.30. Very wet.
~~Afternoon kip.~~
Afternoon kip.

Parade 7:30am.
Full march order.
Route march through Le Souich.
Home 11:30am. Very wet.
Afternoon kip.



14.7.17. Parade 7.30 am.
Full marching order. Route
march through Le Souich. ("this
is a clean village") home 11.30
Very wet. afternoon kip.

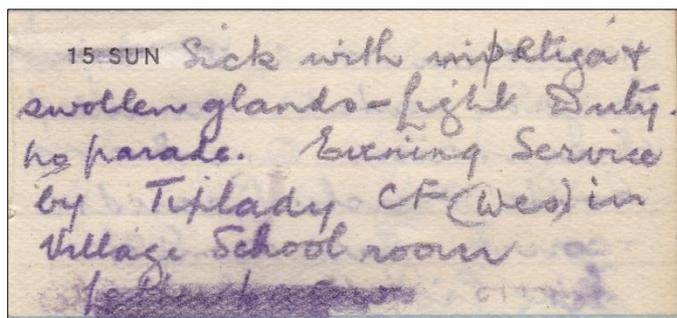
The trek went on and on. With each mile the 95lb pack became heavier and heavier. Feet were sore, back ached, knees felt none too secure and I was thirsty. No one could spare the effort to sing and the only sound was the incessant beat of iron-shod boots on the hard French roads. My thoughts wandered back to pleasanter days until the immediate surroundings gradually faded and I became a complete automaton – Rifleman 554720 was asleep!

For how long he remained in that blissful state I shall never know but the awakening was sudden. A loud voice from the rear of the column was shouting and his words were far from complimentary. Someone was obviously heading for trouble. Quickly assessing the position I found myself still in line with the man in front, properly in step and a quick sideways glance confirmed that I was well dressed by the left. Nothing to worry about. Clearly I was not the object of wrath from that noisy person behind. My first uneasy sense of guilt evaporated but the accusing voice came nearer. The Band struck up the Regimental March which meant that the column was approaching habitation, a town or village. Then the light

dawned. During my very pleasant nap the Battalion, according to custom, had been ordered to march to attention and there I was comfortably marching 'at ease' with the rifle sling over my shoulder, thumb comfortably entwined. I quickly came to the 'trail' but found the voice still coming nearer. He had noticed the discrepancy in the ranks from way back but was unable to identify the culprit. He demanded to know who it was but no one told him and, remembering the old axiom, I did not volunteer.

Unfortunately, in his haste to properly fulfil his duties, my persecutor came to grief. With eyes glued sideways on the ranks he tripped and sprawled face downwards in a foul, muddy pond by the wayside. We had arrived at the 'clean village' of Le Souich. I heard no more of the incident and have long since forgiven the NCO concerned for all those improper names he called me on that tiring afternoon in July 1917.

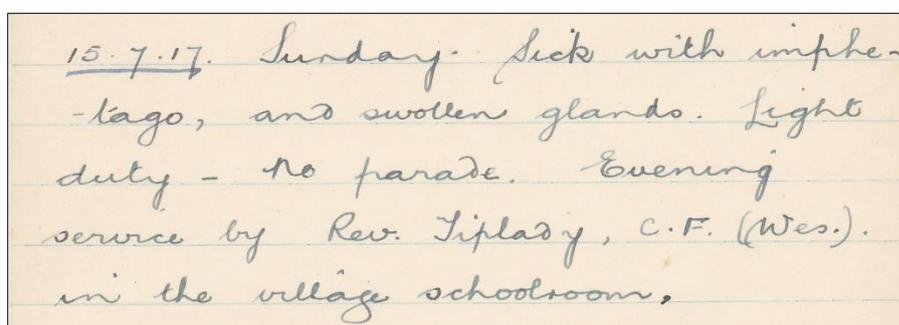
15th July 1917 (Sunday)



Sick with impetigo and swollen glands.

Light duty. No parade.

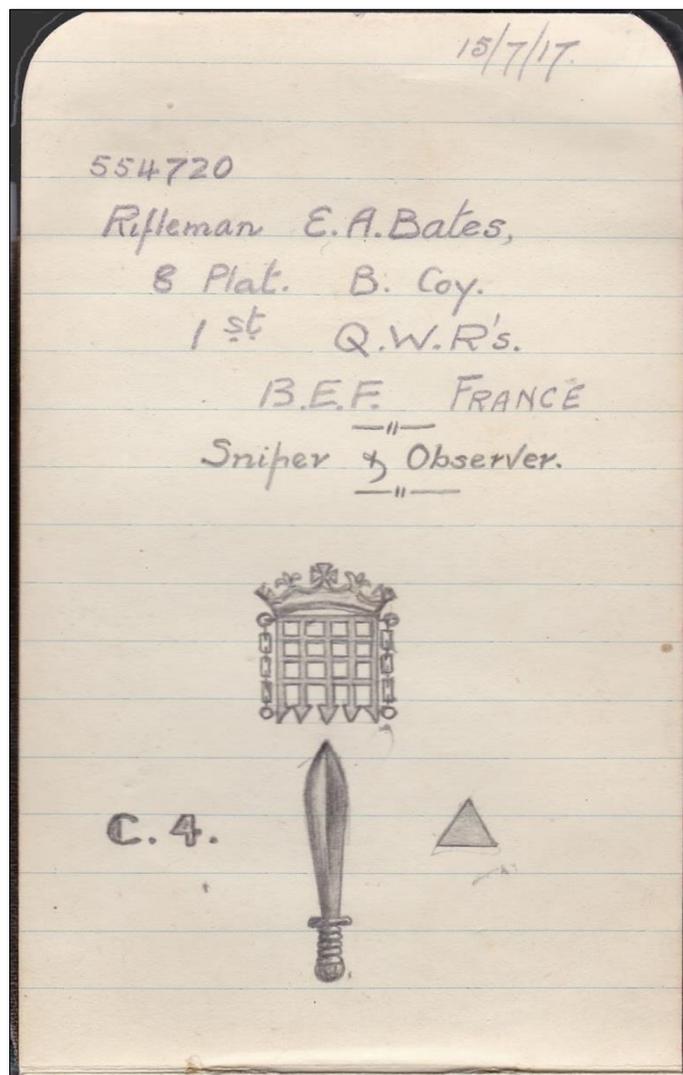
Evening services by Tiplady CF (Wesleyan) in village school room.



Sick parade was unquestionably something to be avoided if possible. It was always the first parade of the day and was held at an ungodly hour which deprived one of breakfast. Those with minor ailments were likely to get "Medicine and Duty" which helped them not at all, or "Light Duty" which, in its performance, could very often prove more arduous than duty in the ranks.

The impetigo on my face had now spread to such an extent that my neck glands were swollen and painful. Reluctantly I paid my first visit to the MO. Inside the first aid tent a Corporal was treating a line of patients for a variety of minor ailments. He adopted the moving belt system. As the line moved forward the Corporal, using one jar of Iodine and one brush, quickly painted over sores, pimples, cuts and bruises, etc from toenails to tonsils. My own case called for special treatment. The MO ignored the swollen glands and the filthy scabs of the impetigo were pulled off with tweezers together with any beard which I had succeeded in growing in my youth. The open wounds were then smeared with what I believe was sulphur ointment. In order to avoid a repetition of similar visits during the weeks that followed I should perhaps anticipate and mention that as the heat of the day caused the ointment to run over the unaffected parts of the face, the impetigo, loath to be ignored, spread with it. On this occasion I was given

“Light Duty” and told to report again for medical treatment the following day.



16th July 1917

16 MON Sick again + missed
sniping parade. Route
march full pack 8.30 - 11.30
Brigade sports. Grand Rullecourt
The col. a first. QWR Cookers
2nd. Both suffer

Sick again and missed sniping parade.
Route march full pack 8:30am-11:30am.
Brigade sports. Grand Rullecourt¹.
The colonel a first. QWR Cookers second.

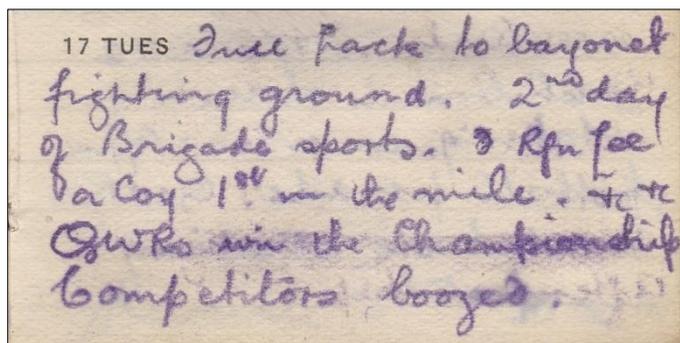
16.7.17 Sick - missed sniping
parade. Route march, full pack,
8.30 - 11.30. Brigade sports in
the Chateau grounds at Grand
Rullecourt. Col. Shoobred, 1st
prize for riding. 2. W. R. bookers
2nd prize. (L. R. B's. 2. V. R's,
2nd London's, Cheshires = 169 Brigade.)
2. V. R's leading in points at end
of the day.

"The Battalion sports were held in the grounds of the Chateau at Grand Rullecourt on July 14th, and these were followed by a Brigade horse show on the 16th, and by a Brigade sports meeting on the next day. A spirit of enthusiasm and light-heartedness, which is difficult for those who have not experienced the ups and downs of war fully to realise, was in the air, and never was a series of entertainments more thoroughly enjoyed."

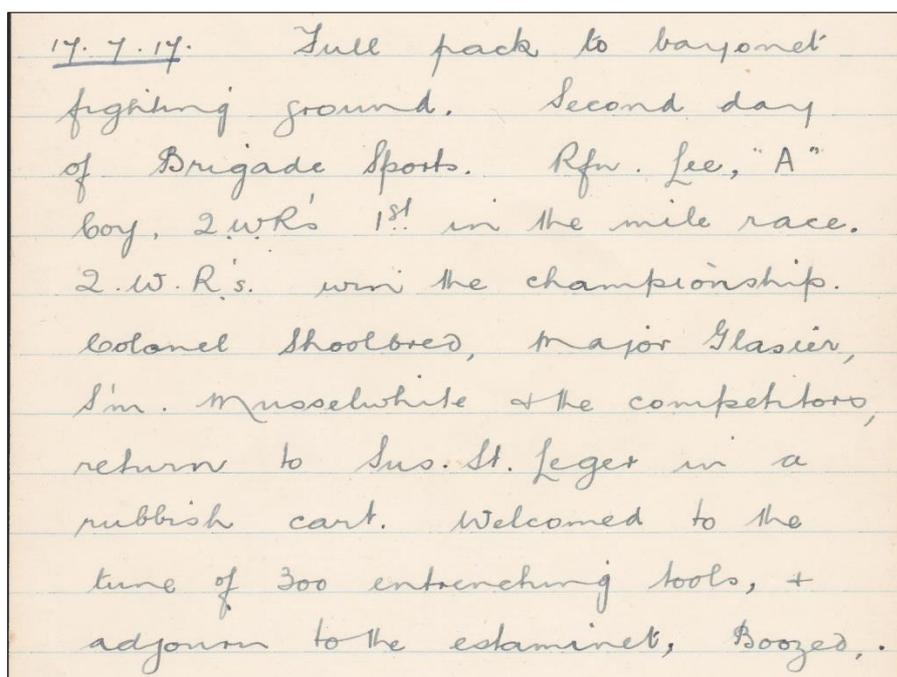
Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

¹ Google Maps entry for the Chateau de Grand Rullecourt - <https://goo.gl/maps/BajBtk616p>

17th July 1917



Full pack to bayonet fighting ground.
Second day of brigade sports.
Rifleman Lee of A Company first in the mile.
QWRs win the championship.
Competitors boozed.



"The climax was reached when on July 17th the Queen's Westminsters, after a very keen struggle, won the Brigade Athletic Championship for the second year in succession.

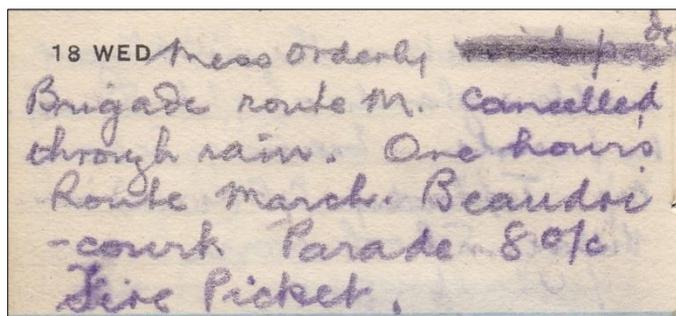
Amongst the events won by the Battalion were the hundred yards and the mile. The latter provided the finest race of the day, and it was won by Rifleman J. Lee of the Transport, who finished 80 yards in front of the favourite, Lance-Sergeant Winterbourne of D Company, the runner-up in the event in the previous year. Rifleman J. Stanton of Transport was second in both the high jump and the long jump, and Lance-Corporal Smith won the bomb-throwing. In the tug-of-war the Battalion team was placed second.

The arrangements on the ground were excellent. In addition to the Divisional band, there were numerous side-shows, amongst which the 'Bow Bells' entertainment and a 'coconut shy' were specially popular. Tea was served in the grounds, and a 'wet' canteen did a roaring trade. Throughout the day the mounted competitors provided themselves and all spectators with plenty of amusement, and one notable race was won by Captain Mackenzie, the transport officer of the Q.V.R., who rode one of the Battalion's mules. At the end of the meeting the prizes were presented by the Comtesse Kergolay, and in the evening the winners of the championship returned in triumphant procession to Sus St. Leger.

The procession was headed by the bugle band, next came the mounted officers, followed by the regimental sergeant-major and the competitors, who rode in G.S. wagons. Many members of the Battalion brought up the rear on foot. On entering the village the victors were hailed by the rest of the Battalion with cheers and confetti, the guard turned out and presented arms, and the competitors were carried shoulder-high to the transport lines, where celebrations of the day's success were continued until the early hours of the morning."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

18th July 1917



18 WED Mess orderly ~~cancelled~~
Brigade route m. cancelled
through rain. One hour's
Route march. Beaudricourt
-court Parade 8⁰/₁₀
Fire Picket.

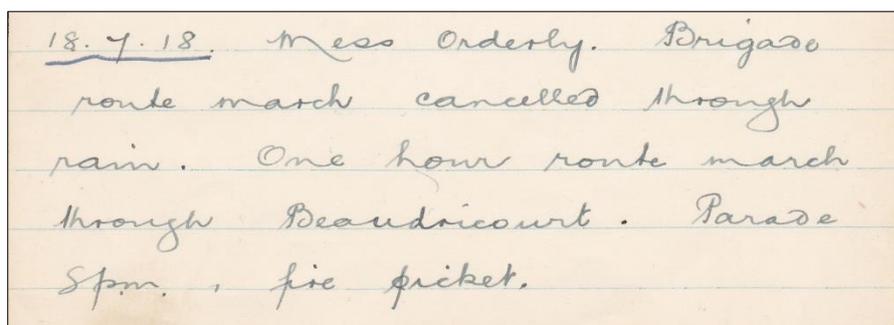
Mess orderly.

Brigade route march cancelled through rain.

One hour's route march. Beaudricourt¹.

Parade 8pm.

Fire picket.



18.7.18. Mess orderly. Brigade
route march cancelled through
rain. One hour route march
through Beaudricourt. Parade
8pm. , fire picket.

¹ Google Maps entry for Beaudricourt - <https://goo.gl/maps/1DziYTXK8ik>

19th July 1917

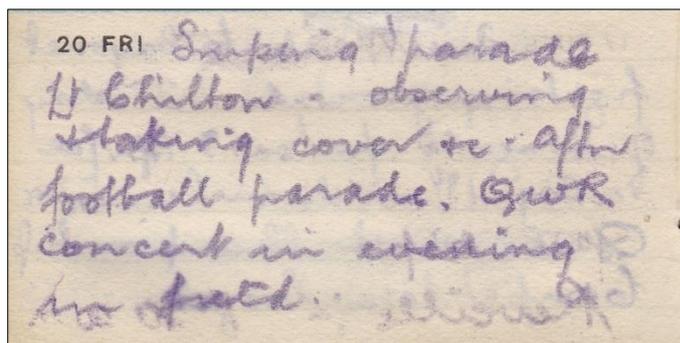
19 THUR Brigade route m.
about 8 miles through
Sombrin etc. After parade
for football match.
~~back home.~~

Brigade route march about 8 miles through Sombrin¹, etc.
Afternoon parade for football match.

19.7.17. Brigade route march,
8 miles, through Sombrin etc.
Afternoon parade for football match.

¹ Google Maps entry for Sombrin - <https://goo.gl/maps/TXW8jLBy44L2>

20th July 1917



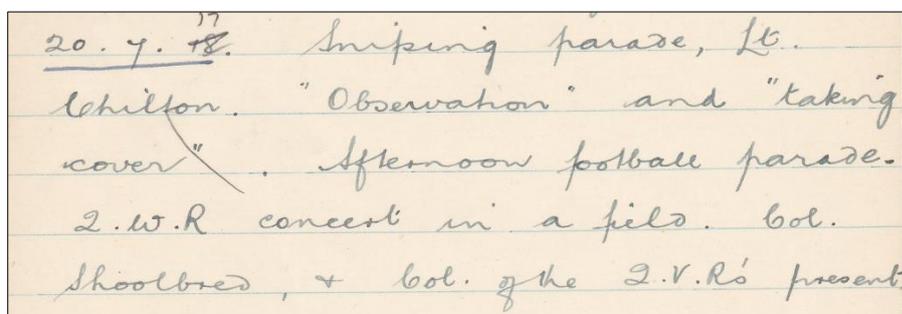
20 FRI Sniping parade
Lt Chilton - observing
& taking cover etc. after
football parade. QWR
concert in evening
in field.

Sniping parade.

Lt Chilton - observing and taking cover, etc.

Afternoon football parade.

QWR concert in evening in field.



20. 7. 17. Sniping parade, Lt.
Chilton. "Observation" and "taking
cover". Afternoon football parade.
Q.W.R. concert in a field. Col.
Shoolbred, & Col. of the Q.V.R.'s present.

Route marching, squad drill and sundry other forms of hard labour which were normally the lot of the foot slogger had no attraction in the broiling heat of the day.

It was with considerable relief that B Company snipers were paraded separately for their specialist training. The art of sniping and observing involved a considerable amount of time spent in the prone position and that was always acceptable. On this occasion Lieutenant Chilton led his charges into the sunlit fields well away from the unfortunate squads on the bayonet course who were jumping trenches and prodding synthetic Huns in the solar plexus. Moreover we were completely out of sight of those in higher authority. Lolling comfortably in the hay we listened to Chilton discoursing amiably on "Taking Cover" and "Observation" as well as many other subjects not to be found in the military textbooks. A little practical work followed the "lectures" but on the whole it was a pleasant morning's work.

Back with the Battalion the afternoon was given up to "football parade" but I have no recollection of participating.

A regimental concert booked for the evening held the promise of a happy ending to a perfect day but, in the event, the stage was set for a finale which left us in a state of gloom and despondency. The performers did their best but their style was cramped by the presence of the Colonel himself¹ seated on the hastily erected stage and beside him, his guest, the Colonel of the Queen Victoria Rifles. It was patently obvious to performers and audience alike that the Queen's Westminster Rifles were on show and woe betide any man who sullied the fair name of the Regiment. To the youngsters of the 8th Platoon "Spindleshanks"² was not held in great affection. To us he was a remote figure lacking the common touch and, because of his addiction to 'spit and polish' both on and off the parade ground, someone to be avoided whenever possible. I myself spent one miserable day in the back area solely because the small piece of red flannel, which should have been in place behind the black cap badge, had disappeared. That was a crime! The Colonel was well in evidence that day so after making numerous details around the village to avoid his eagle eye I retired to my billet and sulked in solitude.

The concert proceeded with unaccustomed decorum but the troops soon wearied of the everlasting "Eleanor" and "My Old Shake". Suddenly the Sunday School atmosphere changed like magic when Rifleman X, quite oblivious to the presence seated immediately behind him, launched out with a 'humorous' song with a decided element of the bawdy. The audience applauded but the Colonel did not appreciate the subtleties of the rendering. There were no doubt many verses to this masterpiece of obscenity but we were not permitted to hear the complete version. In the middle of one verse "Spindleshanks", with tight lips, raised his hand and stopped the show. Moving forward he addressed the assembled Company somewhat as follows.

"Now men, you have had your bit of fun but we must now turn our thoughts to the sterner times which lie ahead. In a day or so the Battalion will be moving off to another sector. We shall trek northward and when I tell you that the fighting there will be grim and bloody you can perhaps guess our destination. We are in for a tough time. I suggest you now return to your billets and get all the sleep you can. Goodnight."

We knew without being told that "sterner times" must necessarily be our lot in the not far distant future and it was now clear that the promised trek

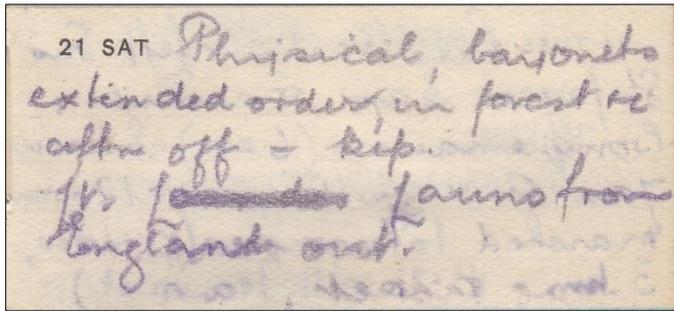
¹ Lieutenant-Colonel R Shoolbred

² A "spindleshanks" is a person with long, slender legs

northward could only mean the dreaded Ypres Salient. So far our reaction to warfare had been to 'live for the day and to Hell with the future'. Indeed, no different attitude of mind was conceivable if we were to retain our sanity. A few words of encouragement from the Colonel was the least we expected. In effect all that he said was "you're for it". The apostle of doom departed with his guest – his men were silent.

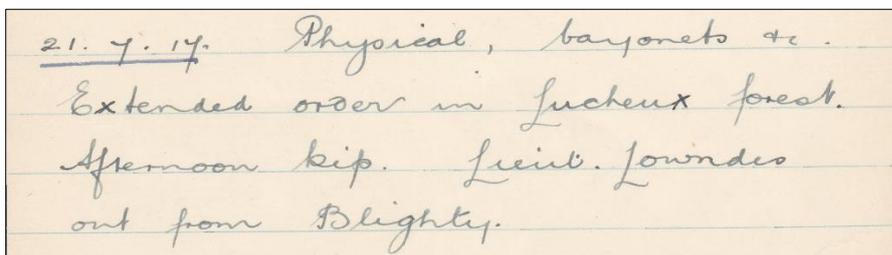
Such were the immediate feelings of the men on the 20th July. But on reflection came the realisation that youth, so far untried and untested, had failed to recognise the sorrow and bitterness of an elderly Colonel who had borne the immense tragedy and disillusionment of seeing his beloved Regiment decimated on more than one occasion. The Colonel was a sick man both in body and spirit.

21st July 1917



21 SAT Physical, bayonets
extended order in forest etc
after off - kip.
Lt Lowndes out from
England out.

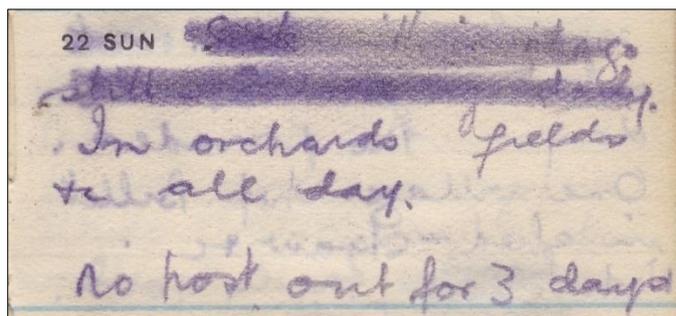
Physical, bayonets extended order in forest, etc.
Afternoon off - kip.
Lt Lowndes out from England.



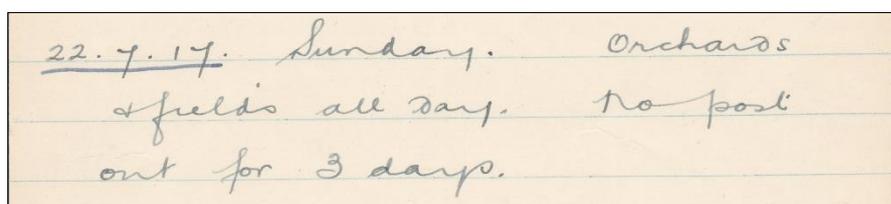
21. 7. 17. Physical, bayonets etc.
Extended order in Lucheux forest.
Afternoon kip. Lieut. Lowndes
out from Blighty.

A hard morning spent on physical and bayonet work including a practice advance in extended order through the dense greenery of Lucheux Forest nearby was, perhaps, the best medicine for dispelling sombre thoughts. With the afternoon free from all duties the platoon bedded down at an unconscionable early hour.

22nd July 1917 (Sunday)



In orchards, fields all day.
No post out for three days.



The day was hot and cloudless as we lay in the fields and orchards of the quiet countryside around Sus St Leger. There were no parades, a disturbing portent in itself, and we had all the time in the world in which to ponder over the Colonel's homily of the previous Friday. Moreover, no post from home had been delivered for some days and our spirits were low. This was the mood in which Forster, Bradley and I wandered that evening along the deserted road to Ivergny towards the blood red sun sinking in the west.

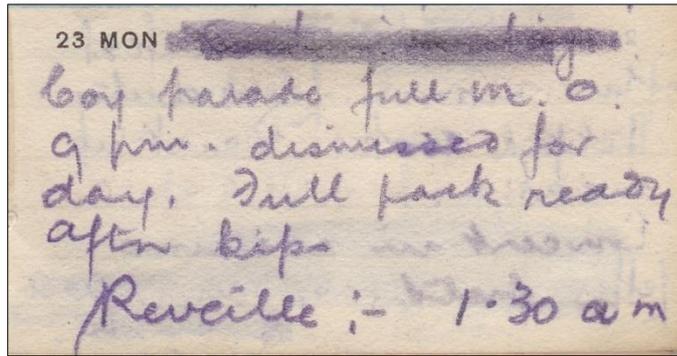
We were completely alone in the silence except for an ominous rumble far away to the north. We kept our thoughts to ourselves and no word was exchanged until at length the sun tipped the distant horizon and we rested awhile by a five barred gate leading into the deserted Picardy fields. I said "I wonder where we three will be in a month's time". The other two made no response and I blundered on. I spoke of all the possibilities the future held and felt much better for having aired my hopes and fears. On the assumption that one's chances of getting through unscathed were slight I suggested a preference for the little finger of the right hand.

Bradley's reaction was immediate. His face registered anger and bitterness such as I would never have dreamed possible. He spoke at last and his words shocked me to the core. "I want no 'blighty'¹. I won't have those bloody bastards over there mutilate the body God gave into my keeping. If

¹ A 'blighty' wound was one which was sufficiently serious to merit being shipped home to England.

they do get me I want complete oblivion.” Forster and I accepted this outburst in silence. There was nothing more to be said. Anyway, I regretted opening my big mouth in the first place. The incident in itself was not one ever likely to be forgotten but the aftermath, some few months later, not only registered the memory of that day for all time but created in me a sense of wonderment which in my lifetime on this earth will never be resolved. We returned to Sus St Leger in complete silence. It was dark by the time we reached billets and the subject of the day was thereafter taboo.

23rd July 1917



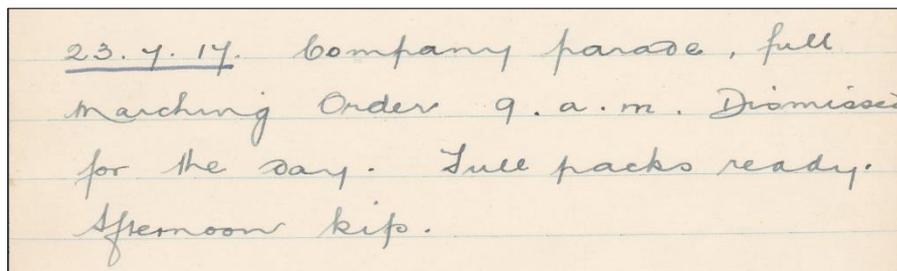
Company parade full marching order.

9am dismissed for day.

Full pack ready.

Afternoon kips.

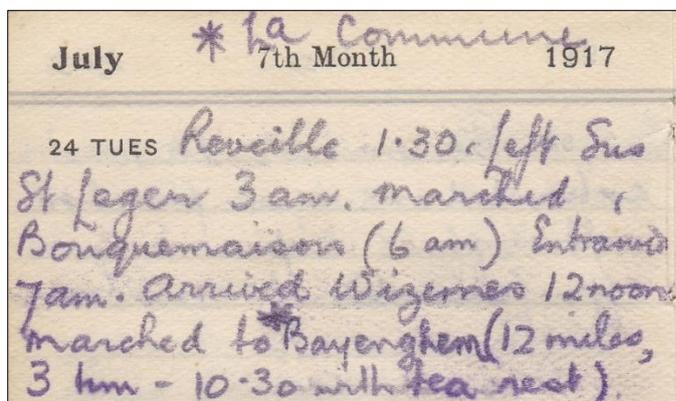
Reveille - 1:30am.



In full marching order the Battalion paraded for inspection at 9am and were then dismissed for the day. With packs at the ready most of us were bedded down by early afternoon. Bradley was once again his usual, cheerful self.

Heading North to Ypres

24th July 1917



Reveille 1:30am.

Left Sus-Saint-Léger 3am.

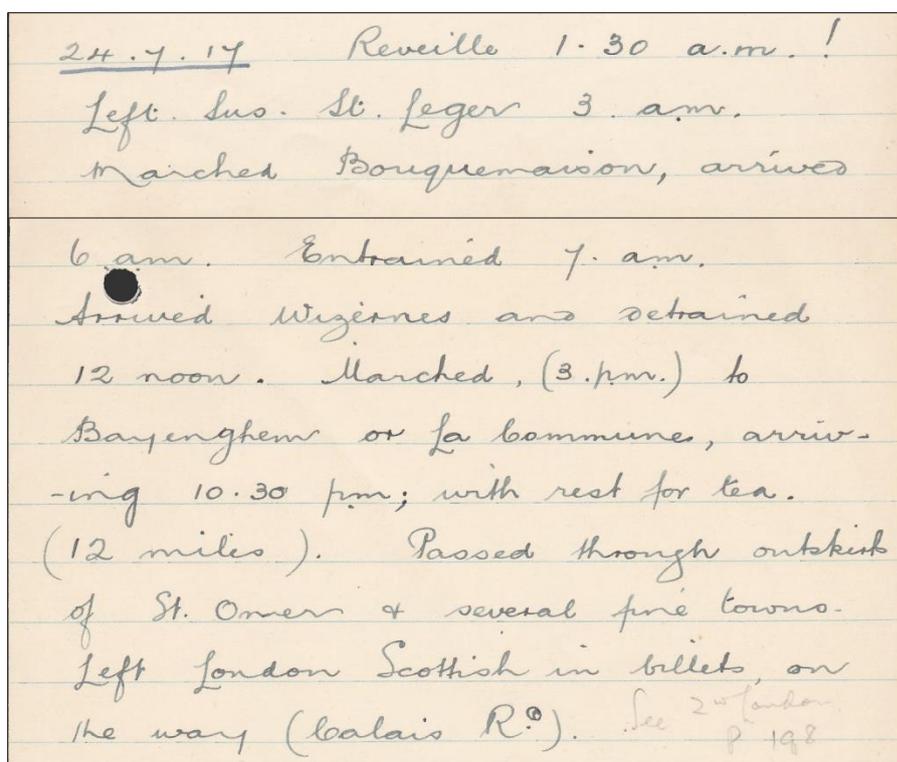
Marched Bouquemaizon (6am).

Entrained 7am.

Arrived Wizernes 12 noon.

Marched to Bayenghem (La Commune)

(12 miles, 3pm - 10:30pm with tea rest.



Reveille sounded at 1:30am and by 3am the Battalion was on the first stage of the long trek northwards to the grim and bloody region promised by the

Colonel. Bouquemaision was reached by 6am and an hour later the Battalion entrained for Wizernes¹. Standing room only on the French cattle trucks was a pleasant change from pounding the French roads for mile after mile with shoulders drooping under the heavy burden of pack and equipment. Moreover, by train it was possible, by the good graces of the aged French engine driver, to indulge in the occasional brew-up. The train stopped frequently for lengthy periods and at the first sound of squealing brakes hordes of khaki clad figures chased up to the front where the kindly driver obligingly turned on a tap and boiling water poured lavishly from a pipe below the engine cab.

The train ride, acceptable as it was, unhappily conveyed its sombre message. Those frequent stoppages and side trackings were due to the priority given to urgent traffic on the line coming from the opposite direction. Silently we watched all too many trains thunder by, every carriage bearing significantly the large symbol of the Red Cross. We detrained at Wizernes at 12 noon having covered the distance in exactly five hours.

Three hours later packs were humped on shoulders and the long trek northward recommenced. The route took us through several largish towns and on the outskirts of St Omer² we broke off for a short rest at the side of the street. It was a crime to drink on trek. It was permissible to take one sip from water bottles provided the liquid went no further than the mouth. Any man caught in the act of swallowing was booked by the lynx-eyed NCO.

Near at hand was a little shop with various oddments displayed in the window and the NCO grudgingly gave me permission to make a purchase. Suspiciously he watched my movements and made no comment when I came out with a bundle of picture postcards of St Omer and an innocuous bag of sweets. The postcards were bought for a purpose. Although "St Omer" would be deleted by the censor, I cherished the hope that the receipt of a never-ending stream of photographs of a large and attractive French town (probably taken in 1901!) might perhaps set my mother's mind at rest, disturbing her less than the rather forbiddingly worded 'Field Postcards'.

As for the sweets, even Bradley didn't guess that the innocent looking chocolates contained alcohol – so I was responsible for him breaking the pledge for the first time in his life. As thirst quenchers they were a failure

¹ Google Maps entry for Wizernes - <https://goo.gl/maps/jyQixBCrnmm>

² Google Maps entry for St Omer - <https://goo.gl/maps/dc5xDqAteWn>

but our spirits were fortified for the rest of the journey to Bayenghem¹ (La Commune²) where the twelve mile trek ended at 10:30pm.

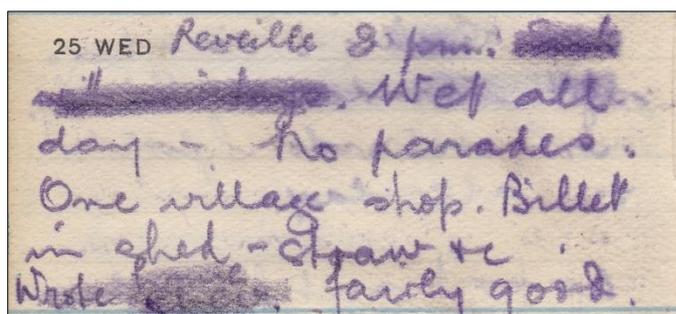
"On 24th July, the Battalion left Sus St. Leger and moved to La Commune, about seven and a half miles north-west of St. Omer and in the Fifth Army area. The Battalion paraded at 2:30 in the morning and, after tea had been served out to the men from the cookers of the Q.V.R., marched to Bouquemaision station. Here the Battalion entrained, and, after a five hours' journey, attended by the usual discomforts of the cattle trucks, reached Wizernes, three miles from St. Omer, about noon. Dinners were served in a field near Wizernes station, and at 3:15pm the Battalion paraded again and marched to La Commune, where it arrived at ten o'clock at night. The total distance marched during the day was about eighteen miles."

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[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

¹ Google Maps entry for Bayenghem - <https://goo.gl/maps/4GgfpsYqPB52>

² Google Maps entry for La Commune - <https://goo.gl/maps/Yc7oKilga1r>

25th July 1917

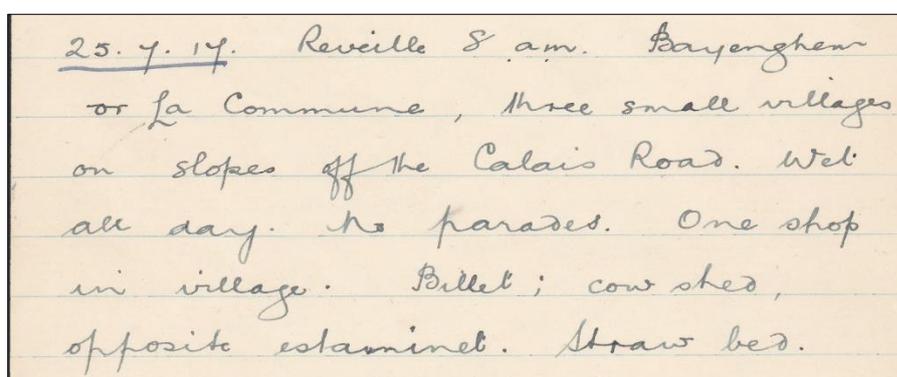


25 WED Reveille 8 am. ~~Wet~~
~~Wet~~ all day - no parades.
One village shop. Billet
in shed - straw etc.
Whole day fairly good.

Reveille 8am.

Wet all day - no parades. One village shop.

Billet in shed - straw, etc. Fairly good.



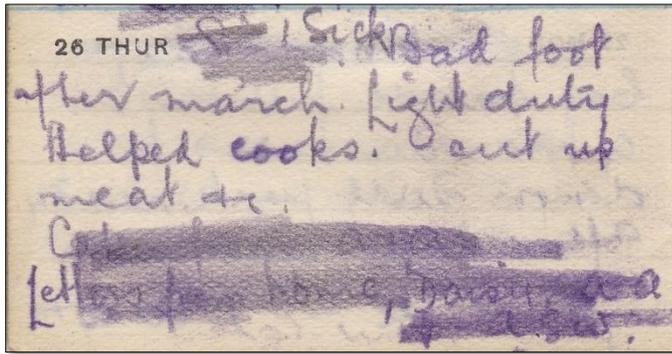
25. 7. 17. Reveille 8 am. Bayenghem
or La Commune, three small villages
on slopes off the Calais Road. Wet
all day. No parades. One shop
in village. Billet; cow shed,
opposite estaminet. Straw bed.

Reveille was not sounded until 8am - some small recompense for the fatigue of the previous day. Bayenghem was one of a small cluster of villages astride the Calais Road. Formal parades were excused but heavy and persistent rain kept us immobile for the day. Bored in the extreme we lay on filthy bundles of straw in yet another cowshed.

We rarely had any contact with the French people. Indeed, in the small villages where billets were invariably unused cowsheds, the inhabitants kept out of the way. This was understandable enough since three years of war made the presence of British troops in their midst emphasise the miseries and desolation that still lay ahead for France. On this night, to our surprise, we had visitors. Standing in the doorway, shyly peeping in at 'les Anglais' stood a quaint little party of village folk. The head of the household was a very old man with long white whiskers. Two old women and two very small girls about four years of age were no doubt the instigators of the expedition. Timidly and silently they watched, ready to scuttle if their reception by the soldiers was unkindly. The situation was easy to understand - grandparents caring for the tiny tots while father was away fighting the hated Boche and mother was away slaving in the fields for the sake of France and a small pittance to keep the family from starvation. We

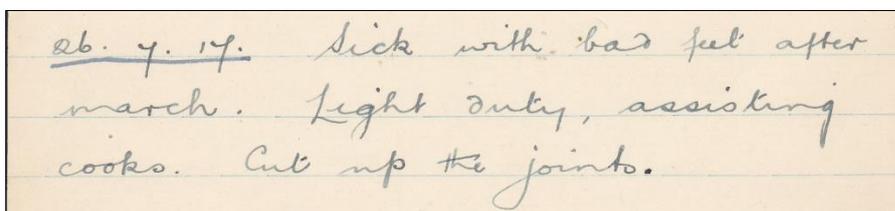
had no food to give them until someone remembered that when army rations were scarce the Quartermaster resorted to his precious reserve stock and the issue of one particular commodity came all too frequently. Canned pilchards in tomato sauce were no doubt nourishing food but as a routine diet the stomach revolted. Even so we were loath to destroy food of any kind and we stowed each issue out of sight at the bottom of our packs. Hurriedly every man delved – and between us we produced a dozen or more cans. Even war has its moments and the look of sheer joy on the faces of the little group as they tottered off with their treasure was unforgettable. Knowing our worthy Quartermaster was what he was, I am sure that had he witnessed the offence against army regulations by 8th Platoon B Coy he would have turned a blind eye.

26th July 1917



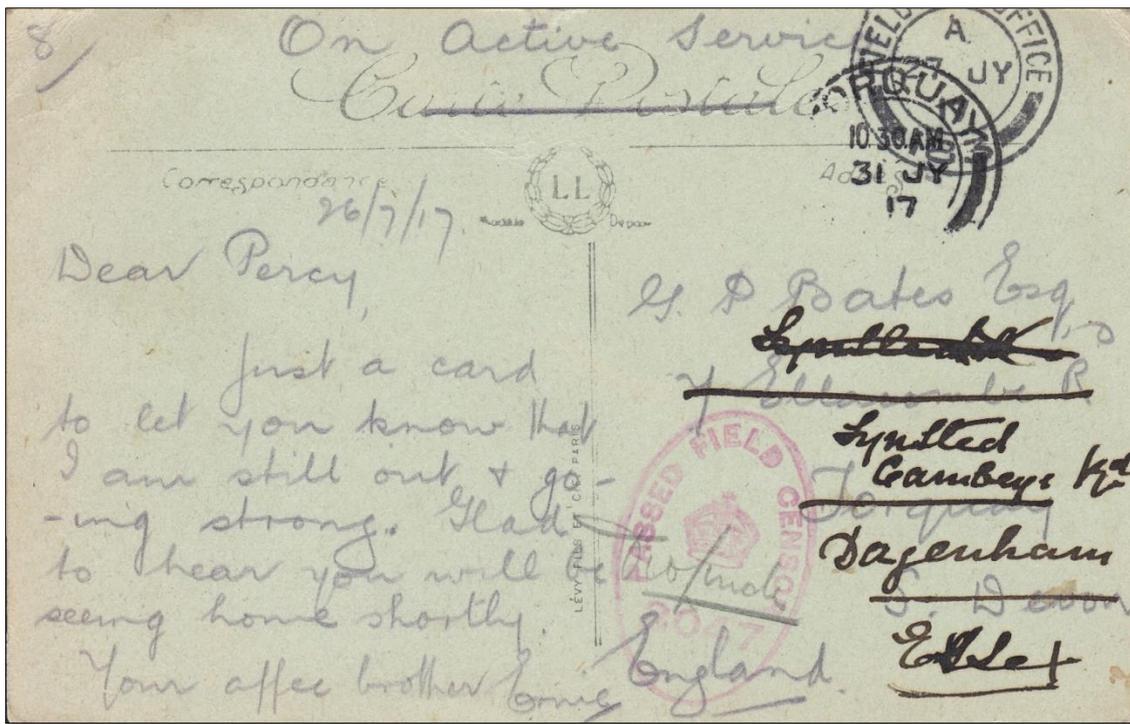
26 THUR Sick Bad foot
after march. Light duty
Helped cooks. Cut up
meat etc.
Cut up
Letters for home, [unclear]

Sick. Bad foot after march.
Light duty. Helped cooks. Cut up meat, etc.



26. 7. 17. Sick with bad foot after
march. Light duty, assisting
cooks. Cut up the joints.

26th July 1917 – Postcard to Ernie's brother Percy



Dear Percy

Just a card to let you know that I am still out and going strong. Glad to hear you will be seeing home shortly.

*Your affect. brother
Ernie*



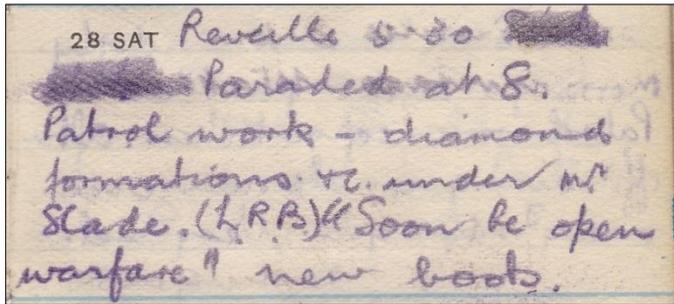
27th July 1917

27 FRI [redacted] 1 hours
march. Coy. do extended
order over crops. [redacted]
[redacted] (2nd day)
[redacted]
[redacted]

One hour's march.
Company do extended order over (growing) crops.

27.7.17. One hours march.
Coy. practice extended order
over growing crops.

28th July 1917



28 SAT Reveille 5:30
Paraded at 8.
Patrol work - diamond
formations, etc. under Mr
Slade. (L.R.B.) "Soon be open
warfare" new boots.

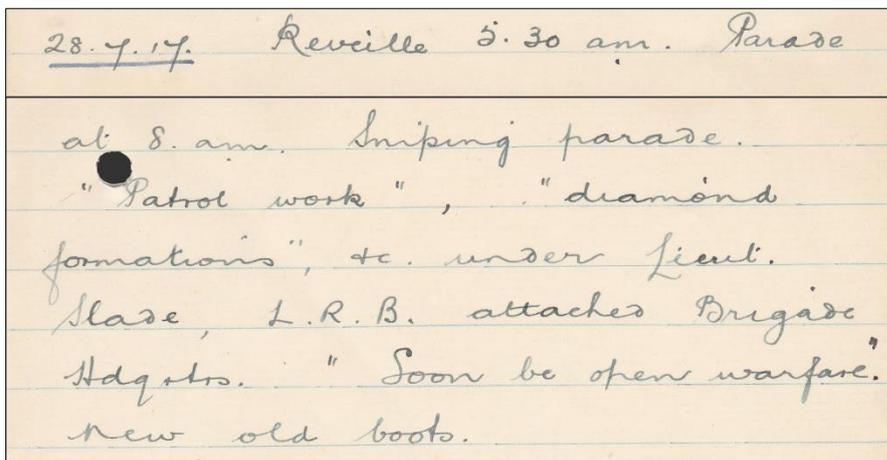
Reveille 5:30am.

Paraded at 8am.

Patrol work - diamond formations, etc under Mr Slade (LRB¹).

"Soon be open warfare"

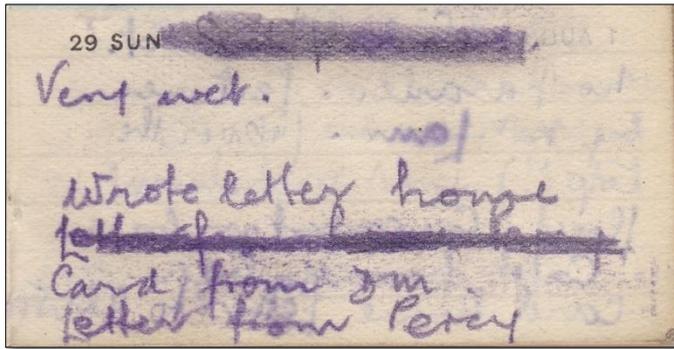
New boots.



28.7.17. Reveille 5.30 am. Parade
at 8. am. Sniping parade.
"Patrol work", "diamond
formations", etc. under Lieut.
Slade, L.R.B. attached Brigade
Hdqtrs. "Soon be open warfare."
new old boots.

¹ London Rifle Brigade

29th July 1917 (Sunday)

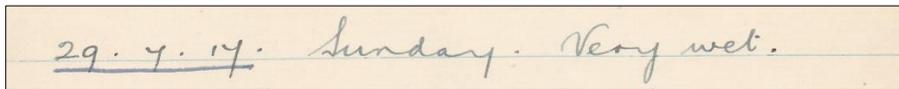


Very wet.

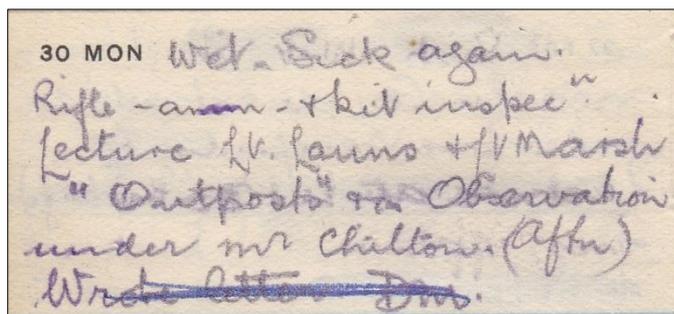
Wrote letter home.

Card from DM.

Letter from Percy. (see postcard on 26th July)



30th July 1917



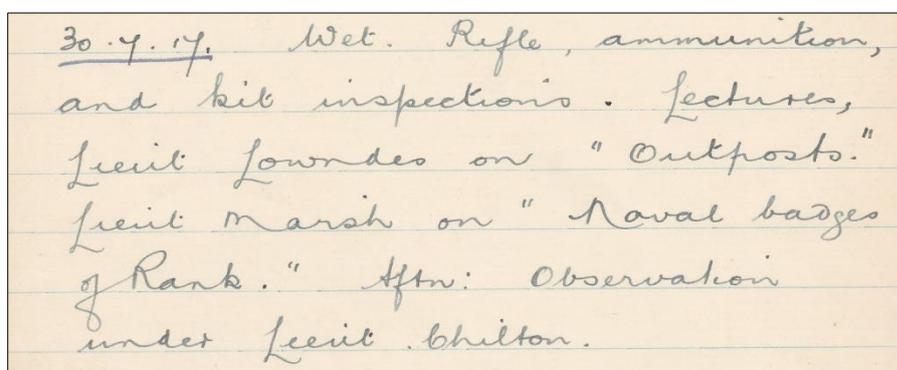
30 MON Wet. Sick again.
Rifle - amm - + kit inspecⁿ
Lecture Lt. Lowndes + Lt Marsh
"Outposts" + Observation
under Mr Chilton (Aftn)
~~Wrote letter Dms.~~

Wet. Sick again.

Rifle, ammunition and kit inspection.

Lectures Lt Lowndes and Lt Marsh - "Outposts".

Observation under Mr Chilton in afternoon.



30.7.17. Wet. Rifle, ammunition,
and kit inspections. Lectures,
Lieut Lowndes on "Outposts."
Lieut Marsh on "Naval badges
of Rank." Aftn: Observation
under Lieut Chilton.

Another wet morning and, after the usual makeshifts involving rifle, ammunition and kit inspection, preparation for battle was further improved by more lectures. Lt Lowndes, who always knew his subject, spoke about "Outposts" but Lt Marsh on "Naval Badges of Rank" raised little enthusiasm. We deduced that those in authority were running out of subject matter.

In the afternoon, under Lt Chilton, the company snipers established outposts with a view to observing movements some half a mile away across a valley. Each post was manned by two snipers; in theory one man kept his eye on the telescope whilst the other noted down each incident as it took place. In practice Rfn. P.E. Walter and I devised a less exhausting scheme. The job we dreaded could easily be done by one person and taken in short spells whilst the other was free to doze or gather the wild strawberries which abounded in the woods behind us. We were later commended on the accuracy of our report!

1:57	Shot fired.
2:05	Man appears at left hand end of trench.
2:10	Shot fired.
2:11	Running man, left of trench.
2:12	Shot fired from extreme left.
2:14	Signs of digging, left end of trench.
2:15	Shot fired.
2:16	Man appears in shirtsleeves, handkerchief on head, smoking and carrying sandbag at left of trench.
2:17	Second man, rifle at the trail, enters trench at point where parapet repaired.
2:18	Signs of digging at same spot. Two men appear repairing parapet.
2:20	Sniper's post erected. Men disappear.
2:21	Signalling from sniper's post.
2:24	Tin hat fixed on parapet.
2:25	Tin hat removed. Signalling from sniper's post.
2:26	Shot fired from right of sniper's post.
2:27	Shot from sniper's post.
2:28	Man appears from top of hill and disappears into sniper's post.
2:29	Shot from sniper's post.
2:32	Hat-less and carrying coat, man appears left of sniper's post, runs towards hill and disappears in trench.
2:34	Same man, apparently, returns to sniper's post.

The value of the exercise was dubious. Normally telescopes and telescopic rifles were safely locked up in Quartermaster stores and there they remained out of harm's way when the Battalion was in the line.

O.P. established 1650 pm 30/7/17

1.57 Shot fired.

2.5 man appears at left hand end of trench.

2.10 Shot fired.

2.10 man appears running up left hand end of trench.

2.12 shot from extreme left.

2.14 Signs of digging at left hand of trench.

2.15 shot fired.

2.16 man appears in shirt sleeves handkerchief on head, smoking carrying sandbag at the left of trench. Builds up parapet in the centre of trench.

2.17 Second man with rifle at trail enters trench at point where parapet is repaired.

2.18 Signs of digging at same spot. 2 men appear repairing parapet.

2.20 Snipers post erected - men disappear.

2.21 Signalling from snipers post.

2.24 Tin-hat fixed on parapet.

2.25 Tin-hat removed. Signalling from S.P.

2.26 Shot fired from right of S.P.

2.27 Shot fired from S.P.

2.28 man appears from top of hill, + disappears in snipers post. Shot from S.P.

2.29 Shot from S.P.

2.32 man appears, hatless, carrying coat, left of S.P., runs towards hill + disappears in trench.

2.34 Same man apparently returns to S.P.

McDermott
Parapet

Original observation report

31st July 1917

31. TUES Sick mess orderly.
Morning: Snipers parade. S. S.
Patrol work - copse taken. After
off. Firing on the range in
even^g. 200 yds. Very wet.

Sick. Mess orderly.
Morning - snipers parade.
Patrol work - copse taken.
Afternoon off.
Firing on the range in evening. 200 yards.
Very wet.

31. 7. 17. Mess Orderly. Snipers
parade. Patrol work; copse taken,
across balais Road. After. off.
Sniping practice on 200 yards
range in evening. Very wet.

The Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele)

The battle opened at 3:50am on July 31st, and in the north considerable progress was made; but 'the difficult country east of Ypres, where the Menin road crosses the crest of the Wytschaete-Passchendaele Ridge, formed the key to the enemy's position, and here the most determined opposition was encountered.'

(see Sir Douglas Haig's despatch of January 8th, 1918)

In this area the German first-line system (which included Shrewsbury Forest, Sanctuary Wood, Stirling Castle, Hooge and Bellewarde Ridge) was captured; but the advance was held up in two small woods, known as Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood. These woods were destined to be the scene of the fighting in which the Queen's Westminsters were engaged twelve days later.

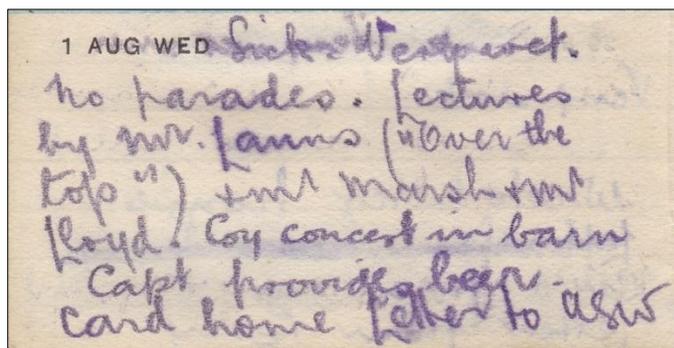
The weather broke a few hours after the attack, and for four days the rain came down in a ceaseless torrent. No words can adequately describe the awful condition to which the ground was reduced.

'The low-lying, clayey soil, torn by shells and sodden with rain, turned into a succession of vast muddy pools. The valleys of the choked and overflowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except for a few well-defined tracks which became marks for the enemy's artillery.'

(Sir Douglas Haig's despatch.)

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminister Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

1st August 1917



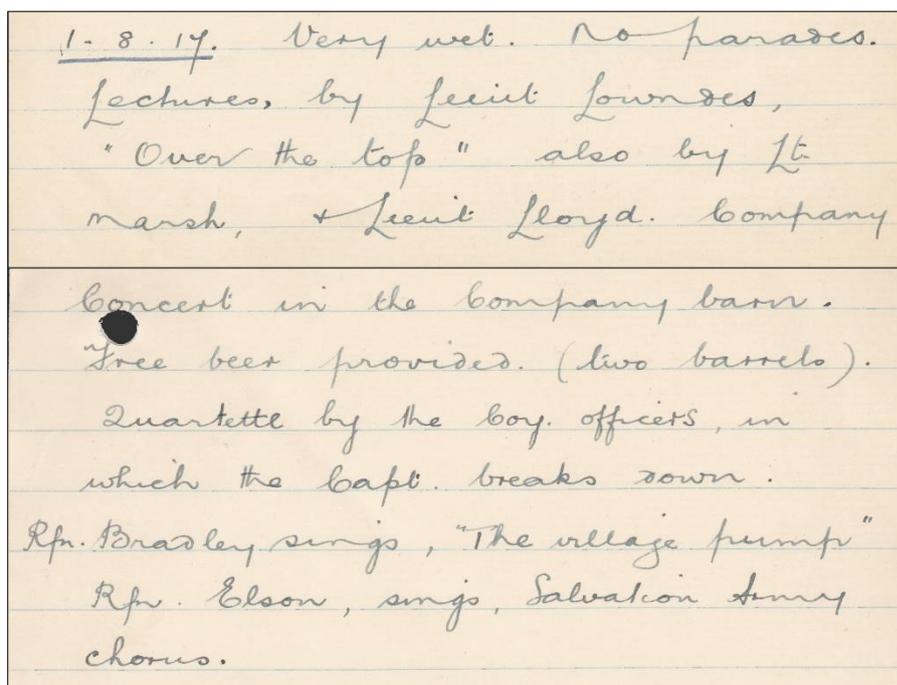
Sick. Very wet. No parades.

Lectures by Mr Lowndes ("Over the top") and Mr Marsh and Mr Lloyd.

Company concert in barn.

Captain provides beer.

Card home.

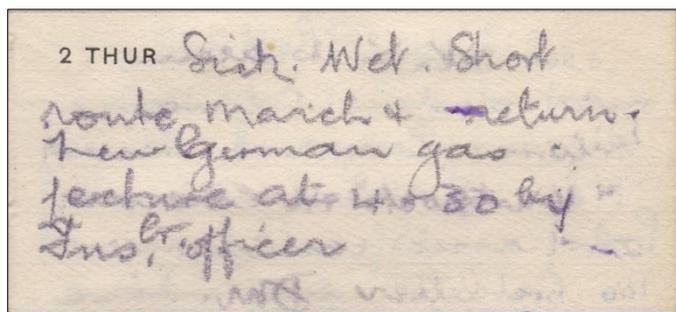


The rainy season had now set in with a vengeance and in lieu of the usual activities in the field we were treated to a further series of lectures in the Company barn. Lt Lowndes chose for his subject "Over the Top" but Lts Marsh and Lloyd contributed less exhilarating subjects. We were a somnolent crowd by that time and everyone was patently bored with the proceedings. Suddenly large barrels of beer appeared from nowhere and the whole atmosphere changed. The Company Officers who provided the liquor opened the offensive with a quartet but the Captain unfortunately failed to reach his objective. Bradley obliged with "The

Village Pump” but the weak French beer was slow in promoting the jollity the occasion demanded.

The day was saved by one Rifleman Elson, a quiet and self-effacing little man who appeared to have no particular friends. Surprisingly Elson expressed his willingness to lead the Company in ‘a few choruses’ but explained with some diffidence that he was a member of the Salvation Army band in private life so his repertoire was somewhat restricted. Elson was the success of the evening. His audience was well acquainted with the Salvation Army tunes and joined in lustily – however the words they sang were not those normally heard with tambourine accompaniment performed by that other army on street corners back in England. Elson was a great sport, he entered into the spirit of the occasion with tremendous verve and the whole of B Company agreed that the performance was worthy of at least a couple of stripes!

2nd August 1917



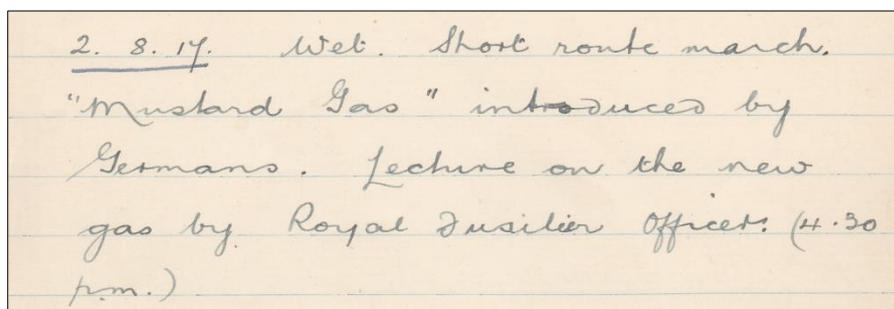
2 THUR Sick. Wet. Short
route march & return.
New German gas
lecture at 4:30 by
Fus. officer

Sick. Wet.

Short route march and return.

New German (mustard) gas*.

Lecture at 4:30pm by Royal Fusilier Officer.



2. 8. 17. Wet. Short route march.
"Mustard Gas" introduced by
Germans. Lecture on the new
gas by Royal Fusilier Officer. (4.30
p.m.)

*** Mustard Gas**

"The most widely reported chemical agent of the First World War was sulfur mustard, known as "mustard gas". It is a volatile oily liquid. It was introduced as a vesicant by Germany in July 1917 prior to the Third Battle of Ypres. The Germans marked their shells yellow for mustard gas and green for chlorine and phosgene; hence they called the new gas Yellow Cross. It was known to the British as HS (Hun Stuff), and the French called it Yperite (named after Ypres).

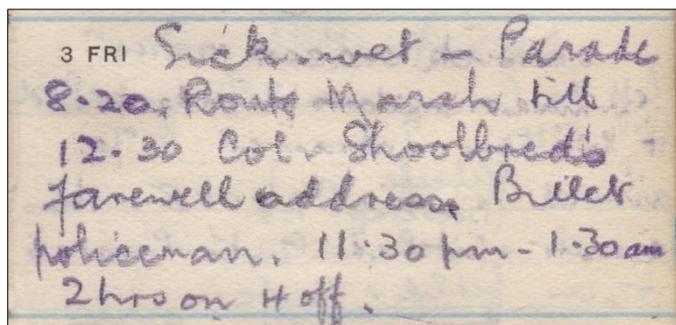
Mustard gas is not an effective killing agent (though in high enough doses it is fatal) but can be used to harass and disable the enemy and pollute the battlefield. Delivered in artillery shells, mustard gas was heavier than air, and it settled to the ground as an oily liquid. Once in the soil, mustard gas remained active for several days, weeks, or even months, depending on the weather conditions.

The skin of victims of mustard gas blistered, their eyes became very sore and they began to vomit. Mustard gas caused internal and external bleeding and attacked the bronchial tubes, stripping off the mucous membrane. This was extremely painful. Fatally injured victims sometimes took four or five weeks to die of mustard gas exposure."

Excerpt from Wikipedia entry -

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical_weapons_in_World_War_I

3rd August 1917



Sick. Wet.

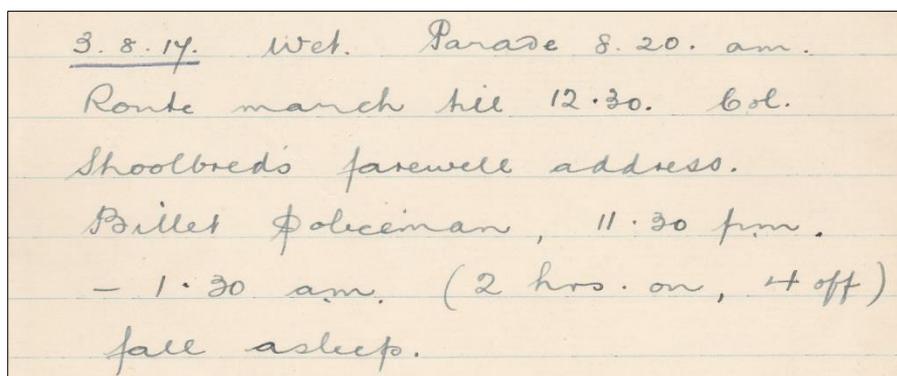
Parade 8:20am.

Route march until 12:30pm.

Colonel Shoolbred's farewell address.

Billet policeman 11:30pm-1:30am.

2 hours on - 4 hours off.



The heavy rain, which had poured continuously for the past week, continued with rarely a break. The frequent lectures were no substitute for the active training of men soon to face the bitter fighting in the Salient. Toughening up measures were called for and at 8:20am with full packs and equipment we took to the road. The only protection from the drenching rain was the 'ground-sheet' slung across each man's shoulders and for mile after mile we trekked in misery – our mood in complete harmony with the weather. When marching 'at ease' the old, cheerful, bawdy army songs of the recent past were heard no longer. If we sang at all it was invariably to the haunting strains of "There's a long, long trail a-winding into the land of my dreams". Hardly a tune suitable for the rifle step of 140 to the minute but we rarely achieved that pace in Flanders. The Battalion arrived back at 12:30pm soaked to the skin and completely demoralised.

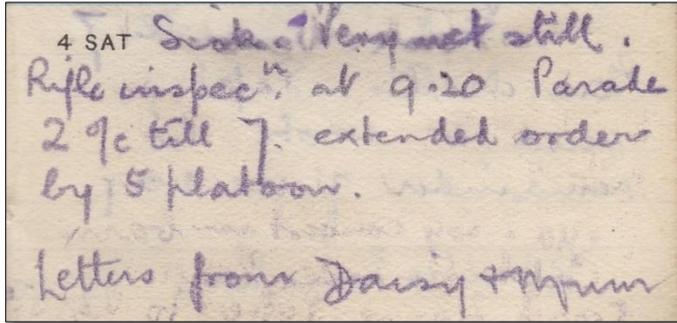
Billet policemen were appointed for the night – an unusual refinement so far as B Company was concerned. Each man performed his allotted stint

for two hours on and four hours off along a defined stretch of road near the billet. I took my position at 11:30pm by which time the rest of the Platoon were blissfully enjoying their slumbers. I had long since learned the art of sleeping whilst in the upright position and this occasion was no exception. I woke with some feelings of guilt but, after standing perfectly still for some moments, I turned as nonchalantly as possible and paced the beat. B Company were in safe hands once again!

"On August 3rd, Lieut.-Colonel Shoolbred paraded the Battalion for the last time as its commanding officer. He had been an officer in the Regiment since 1888, and had succeeded Lieut.-Colonel C.A. Gordon Clark in the command in February, 1911."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

4th August 1917

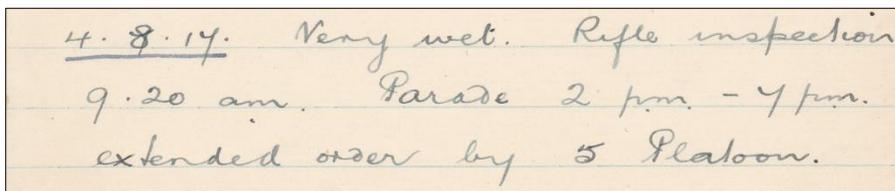


4 SAT Sick. Very wet still.
Rifle inspecⁿ at 9.20. Parade
2 to till 7. extended order
by 5 platoon.
Letters from Daisy + Mamma

Sick. Very wet still.

Rifle inspection at 9:20am.

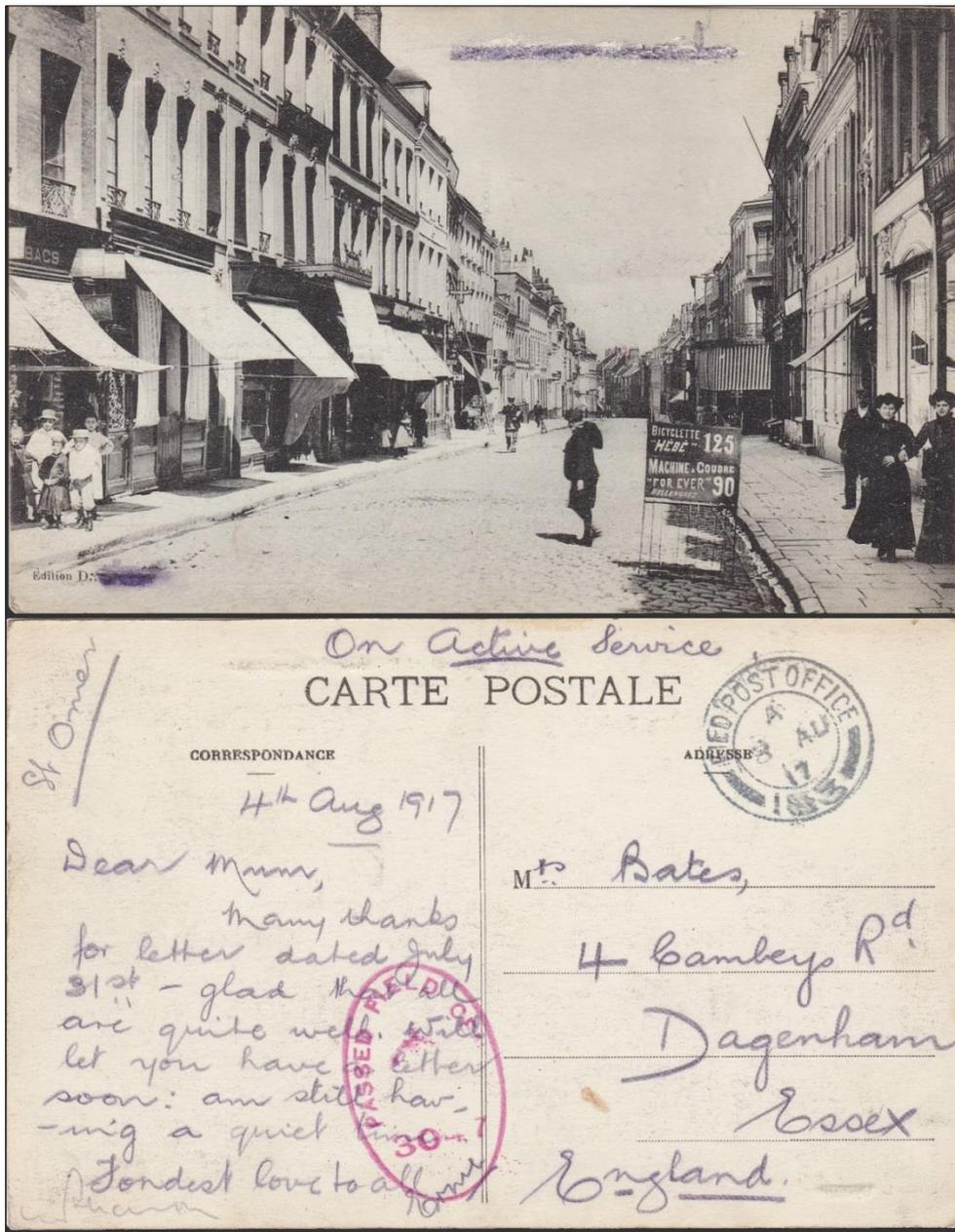
Parade 2pm until 7pm. Extended order by 5 platoon.



4. 8. 17. Very wet. Rifle inspection
9.20 am. Parade 2 pm. - 7 pm.
extended order by 5 Platoon.

The rain still poured down. Following a brief parade at 9:30am came dismissal but our vision of a lazy day in billets was brutally dispelled at 2pm. From that hour until seven in the evening, in extended order, swords fixed on rifles, we "attacked" some unknown objective through the ripe cornfields already flattened by the deluge from the skies. A costly exercise in the light of the compensation payable to the French farmers for damage to their crops.

4th August 1917 - Postcard home to Mum



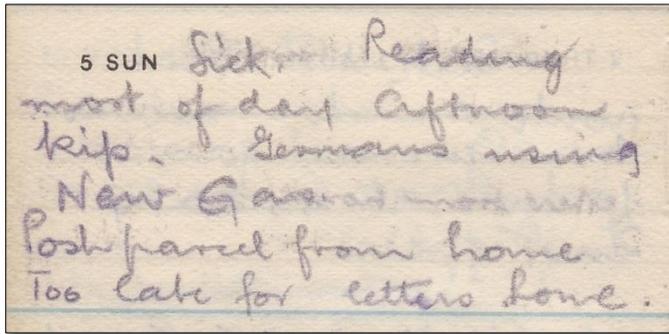
Dear Mum

Many thanks for letter dated July 31st - glad that all are quite well, Will let you have a letter soon; am still having a quiet time.

Fondest love to all
Ernie

The photograph on the postcard is of Rue de Dunkerque, Saint-Omer, France

5th August 1917 (Sunday)



5 SUN Sick. Reading
most of day. Afternoon
kip. Germans using
New Gas. Posh parcel from home.
Too late for letters home.

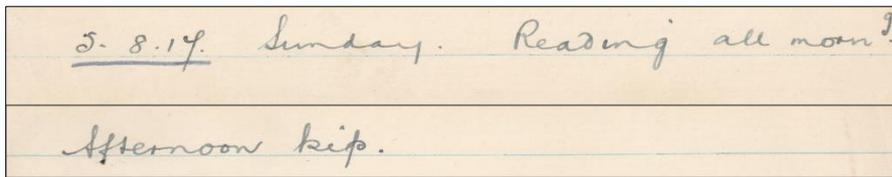
Sick.

Reading most of day.

Afternoon kip.

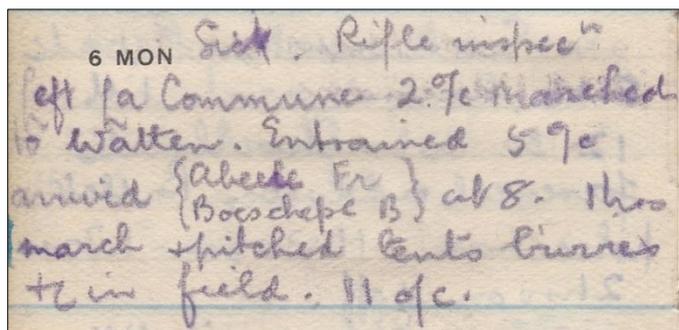
Germans using new gas.

Posh parcel from home. Too late for letters home.



5. 8. 17. Sunday. Reading all morning.
Afternoon kip.

6th August 1917



6 MON Sick. Rifle inspectⁿ
left La Commune 2.7c marched
to Watten. Entrained 5.9c
arrived {Abeele Fr
Boeschepe B} at 8. Tho
march pitched tents busses
+c in field. 11 o/c.

Sick.

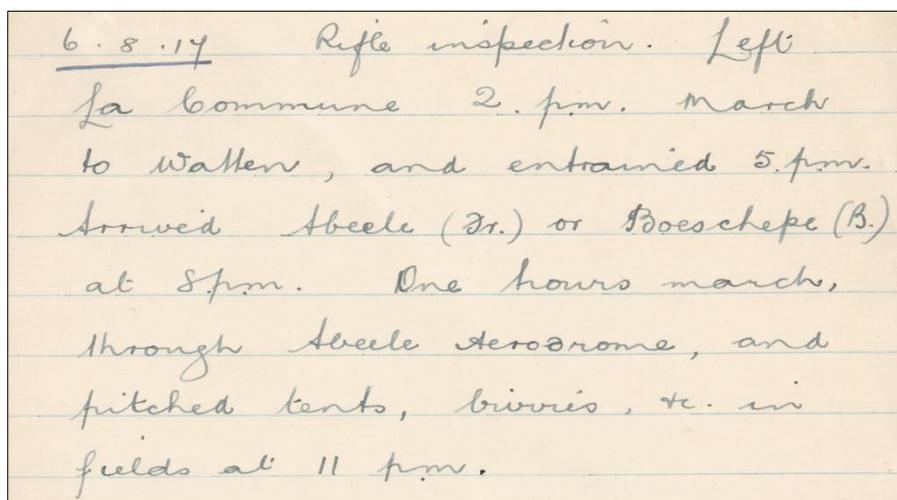
Rifle inspection.

Left La Commune 2pm, marched to Watten¹.

Entrained 5pm, arrived Abeele (French) / Boeschepe (Belgian)² at 8pm.

One hour's march (through Abeele aerodrome³).

Pitched tents, bivvies, etc in fields at 11pm.



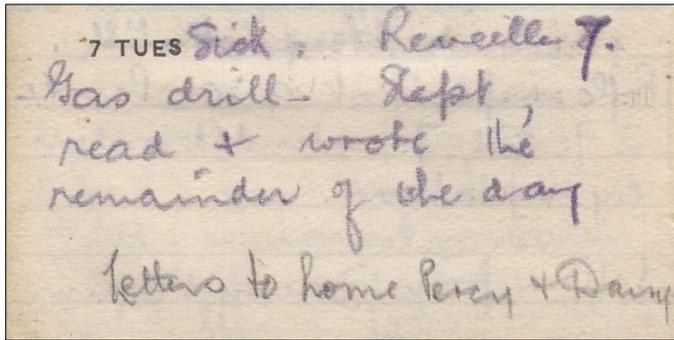
6.8.17 Rifle inspection. Left
La Commune 2. pm. March
to Watten, and entrained 5. pm.
Arrived Abeele (Fr.) or Boeschepe (B.)
at 8 pm. One hours march,
through Abeele Aerodrome, and
pitched tents, bivvies, etc. in
fields at 11 pm.

¹ Google Maps entry for Watten - <https://goo.gl/maps/AMw99a6GJmk>

² Google Maps entry for Abeele (French) / Boeschepe (Belgian) - <https://goo.gl/maps/1GD7sqpKnU82>

³ Google Maps entry for Abeele Aerodrome - <https://goo.gl/maps/jrpiXtzorcfrdTuy9>

7th August 1917



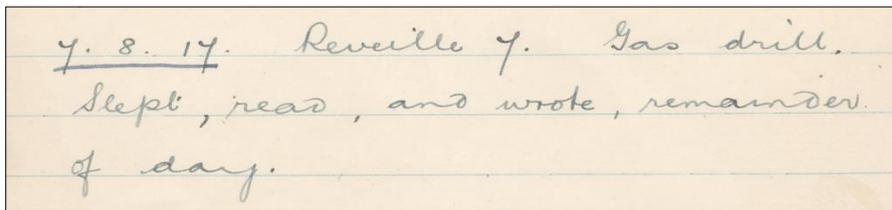
7 TUES Sick. Reveille 7.
Gas drill - Slept,
read + wrote the
remainder of the day
Letters to home Percy + Daisy

Reveille 7am.

Gas drill.

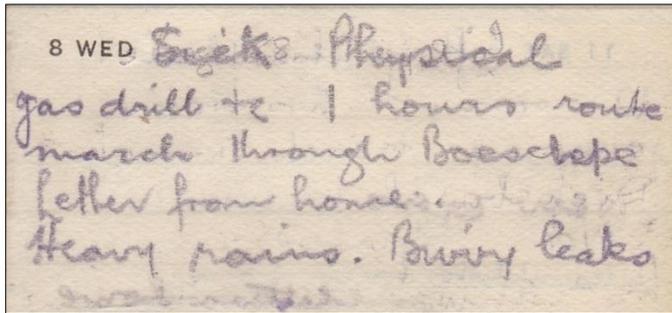
Slept, read, and wrote remainder of day.

Letters home.



7. 8. 17. Reveille 7. Gas drill.
Slept, read, and wrote, remainder
of day.

8th August 1917



8 WED. Sick. Physical
gas drill etc. 1 hours route
march through Boeschepe
letter from home.
Heavy rains. Bivvy leaks

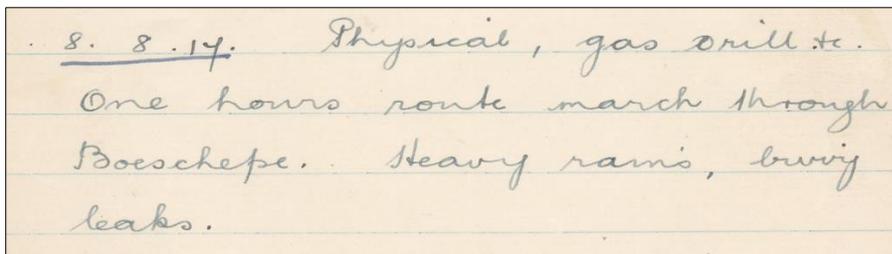
Sick.

Physical, gas drill, etc.

One hour's route march through Boeschepe.

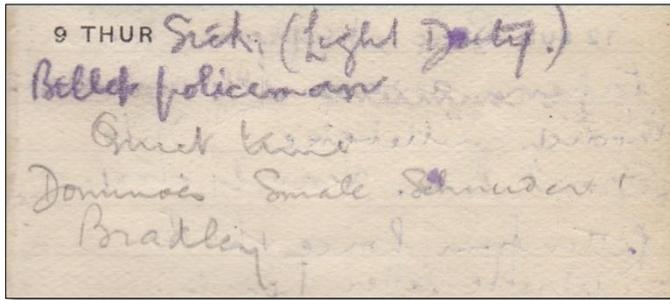
Letter from home.

Heavy rains. Bivvy leaks.



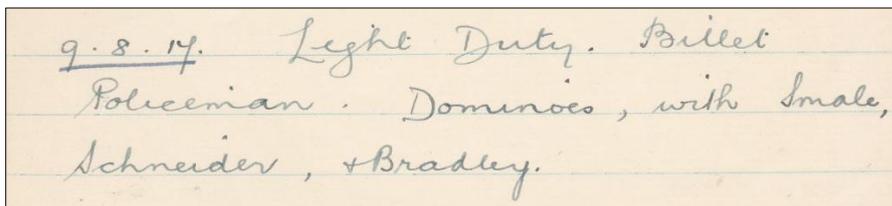
8. 8. 17. Physical, gas drill etc.
One hours route march through
Boeschepe. Heavy rains, bivvy
leaks.

9th August 1917



9 THUR Sick. (Light Duty.)
Billet policeman
Quiet time
Dominoes Smale Schneider
Bradley

Sick. Light duty.
Billet policeman.
Quiet time.
Dominoes with Smale, Schneider and Bradley.



9.8.17. Light Duty. Billet
Policeman. Dominoes, with Smale,
Schneider, + Bradley.

9th August 1917 - Letter to sister Daisy and husband Ralph

Belgium
9th August 1917.

Dear Daisy + Ralph,

Very many thanks for your welcome letters - I was jolly glad to hear you were on holidays, down by the sea once more - there is nothing like fresh air + a good change + rest in these strenuous days, + I expect you find London extremely dull + smoky these August days. I know I used to in the old days of pen-pushing, but I am beginning to think that one can have too much of a good thing now. I suppose by now however you are once more back on your arduous duties in the daytime, + on the old cabbage plot in the evening. I'm looking forward to sampling some of this home grown produce one hears such wonderful tales about before.

(2)

winter comes in. How is Chubby getting along now - I suppose he is quite changed since I saw him last - I don't suppose he will even know me when I do turn up. I can hardly believe that I've been out here just on 4 months now, although the old days at Redhill seem to be memories of years ago. What do you think of John's new job? It certainly sounds cushy & I sincerely hope it is. So long as he keeps muddy boots out of the stew now he might stick to the job. Have not yet taken part in the offensive & can't say that I'm anxious to learn how - still if it does come it will be an experience. However, cheers -

Hoping you are all quite fit & well, with fondest love,
Your affec. brother
Gennie

10th August 1917

10 FRI Sick and Route march
11 till 1-30. Physical etc
Afternoon kip. etc.
Dominoes

Sick.

Route march.

11am until 1:30pm physical, etc.

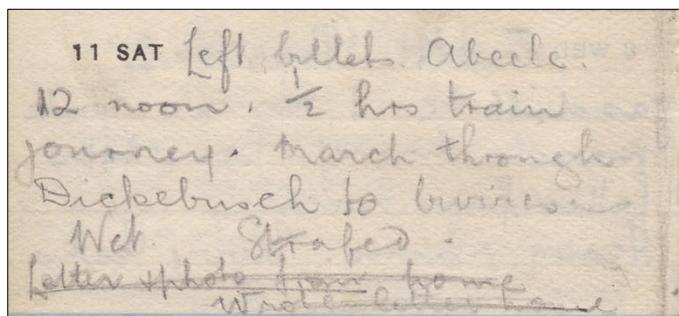
Afternoon kip.

Dominoes.

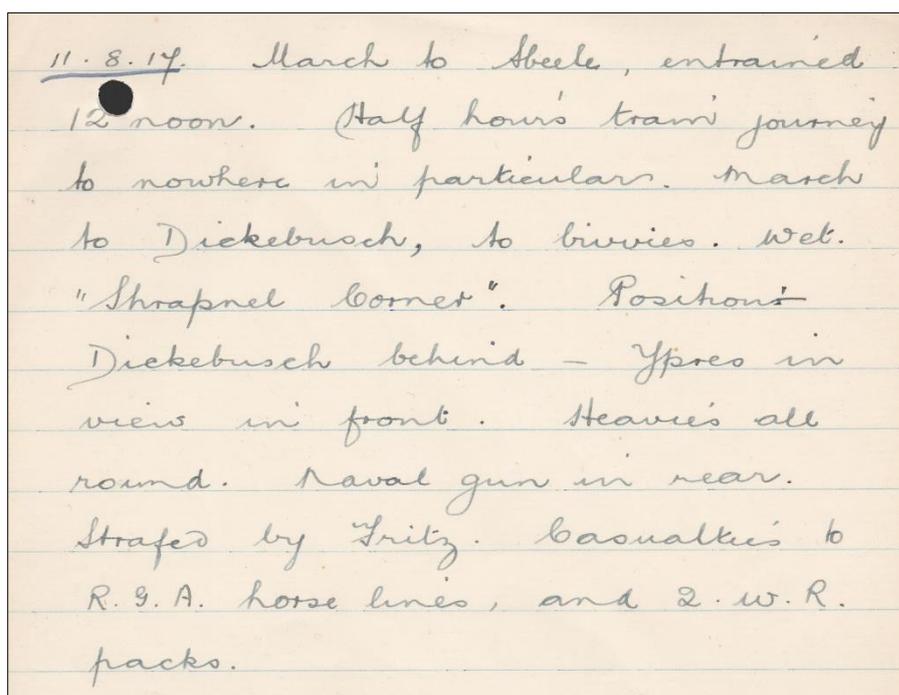
10. 8. 17. Route March. 11. till 1.30
pm. Physical etc. Afternoon
kip. Dominoes.

Into the Trenches – The Third Battle of Ypres

11th August 1917



Left billets in Abeele at 12 noon.
Half hour train journey.
March through Dickebusch¹ to bivvies.
Wet. Strafed. ("Shrapnel Corner")



¹ Google Maps entry for Dickebusch (Dikkebus) - <https://goo.gl/maps/FmgvHUWfCHU2>

"On August 11th, the Queen's Westminsters moved by train from Abeele to Ouderdom¹ (about seven miles south-west of Ypres²), and then marched to Chateau Segard³. Here they bivouacked for the night in a muddy field, with no better cover than could be obtained from their ground-sheets rigged up into rough shelters. In spite of the discomfort and continuous shelling throughout the night, the men were in good spirits and were kept interested by the guns of the 8 inch Howitzer batteries which were in action all around."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

¹ Google Maps entry for Ouderdom - <https://goo.gl/maps/QcNapvJJ7HC2>

² Google Maps entry for Ypres - <https://goo.gl/maps/opfddNTqhA42>

³ Google Maps entry for Chateau Segard - <https://goo.gl/maps/hSNdQZxVLau>

12th August 1917 (Sunday)

12 SUN Rose at 9 am. Packs
taken away. Left 2 am
through Lillebeke. Into
front line. Heavily strafed
Letter from home with photo.
Wrote letter home.

Rose at 9am.

Packs taken away.

Left 2pm through Zillebeke. Into front line.

Heavily strafed.

Letter from home with photo. Wrote letter home.

12. 8. 17. Rose 9 am. Packs dump-
-ed. Left. 2 p.m. march half
right, behind "heavy" positions.
Round Lillebeke Lake, and past
Light Railway. Strafed. 2 V.R.'s
following up, here lose one
whole platoon. Rested to the
left of Hooze. Shells falling in the
ruins; R.F.A. men scamper off.
Smitz's observation balloon rises
over the crest, & spots the Battⁿ.

Strafed. No casualties. make a
shift. Through Hooze. Into front
line. Position - Ypres to the
left. ^{Glucose Wood} Inverness Copse immediately
in front: Sanctuary Wood
immediately behind. (Support
line.). Heavily strafed. "Minnies"

Heavy rain was still falling when reveille sounded at 9am and the morning was spent in dumping heavy packs, which by rights should have contained all possessions likely to be of interest to German Intelligence. My own breast pockets remained stuffed with diary and notebook. The front page of the latter bearing the regimental crest, proudly proclaiming that the owner was a 'Sniper Observer'. What my fate would have been had I been taken prisoner was never put to the test but rumour had it that the Boche was not too kind to the Sniper fraternity.

At 2pm we moved off behind the "heavy" positions along the edge of Zillebeke Lake¹ past the light railway. This well-defined track confined between marsh and lake was a well-favoured target of the German long range guns. As a precaution the Companies proceeded in single file, two yards between each man. Following behind were the Queen Victoria Rifles who, according to the grapevine, lost one whole platoon when the German guns suddenly plastered the rear area with high explosive. To the left of Hooge² we waited and rested, watching the continuous stream of shells pounding the Menin Road, making rubble and dust of what used to be a town. Behind the distant ridge an enemy observation balloon rose high in the sky and from the dust and smoke ahead a battery of R.F.A. came straight towards us driving hell for leather. The pounding hoofs, swaying guns and limbers' wheels bumping three feet off the rough shell pocked ground was exhilarating to the onlooker but dangerously close for comfort.

At dusk the Battalion moved on through Hooge, from whence the R.F.A. had come and guides led us into the front line position at the base of Glencorse Wood. All through that night the Battalion crouched and endured on the edge of the numerous deep shell holes brim-full with the filthy slime of mud and flesh. Intense shelling went on continuously throughout the night and the torrential rain never ceased. The shattering noise of the 'minenwerfers' created havoc to the nervous system. In the trenches at Arras the light of the 'minnies' fuses approaching could be spotted and in daylight the "Flying Pigs" themselves could be seen tumbling over and over through the air. In the deep uncluttered trenches of the Hindenburg Line there was room to move and with luck it was possible to take evading action. At Ypres we could only hold on to our slippery perches and wait. The slightest movement and men ran the risk of slipping over the edge of the six-foot deep craters of mud. Weighed down with their heavy equipment they had little chance of ever emerging.

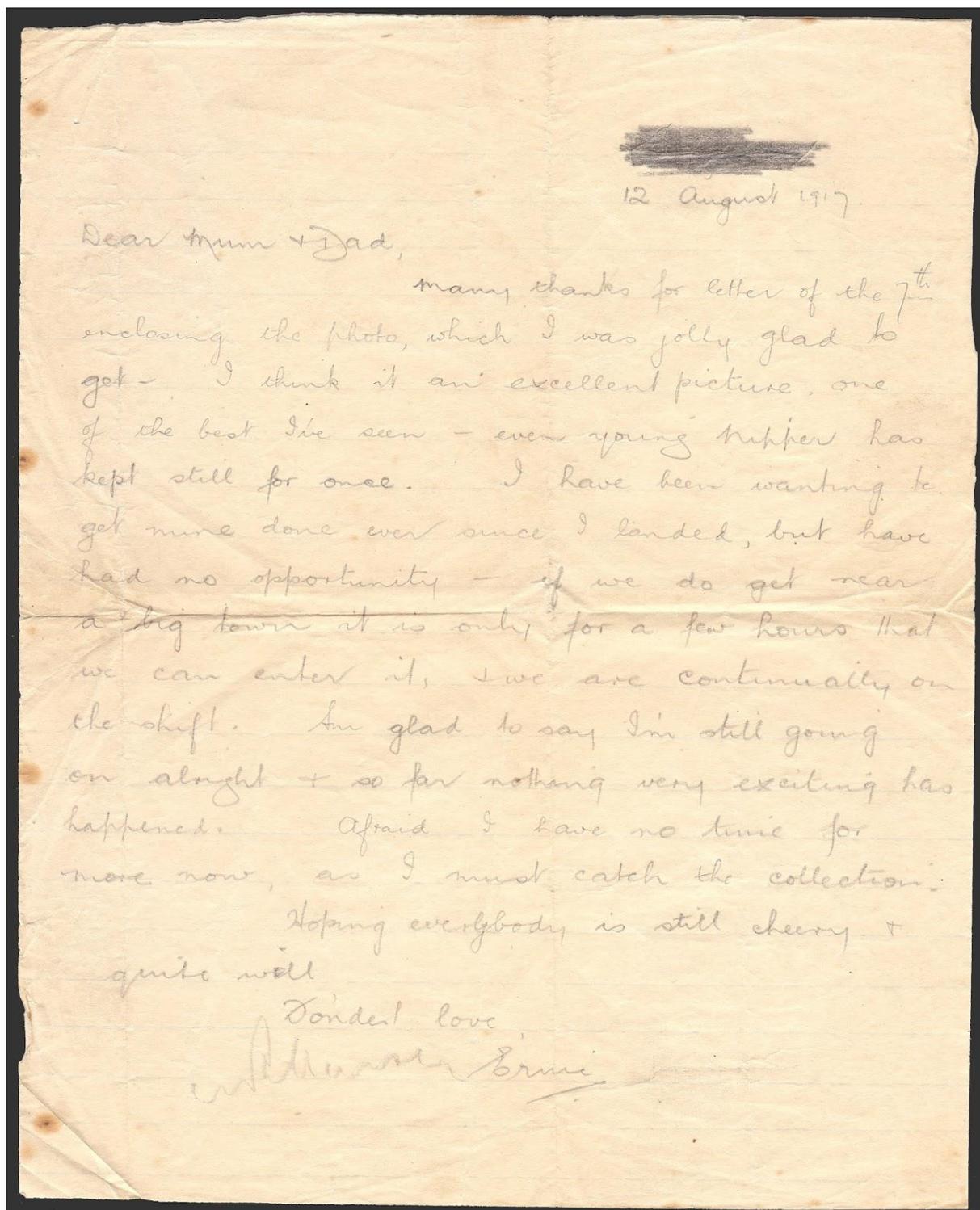
¹ Google Maps entry for Zillebeke Lake - <https://goo.gl/maps/WoHC7F4NSTR2>

² Google Maps entry for Hooge - <https://goo.gl/maps/y6Pxxw6r7Mpx>

"The next afternoon (August 12th), the Battalion moved forward by cross-country tracks to Yeomanry Post, on the west of Sanctuary Wood and about 1000 yards north-east of Zillebeke Lake. It arrived there about 5:00pm, and three hours later guides led the companies forward to relieve the 6th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment (53rd Infantry Brigade, 18th Division), in the left sector of the front line west of Glencorse Wood. The state of the ground and the incessant shelling had stopped all attempts to consolidate the position; there was no cover from shell-fire, and the British and German dead were still lying out in the open. The 'line' was roughly that reached on the first day of the battle and was quite indefinite. It consisted merely of convenient shell-holes, with here and there a disconnected length of trench, and in these the companies with their supports were distributed in two rough lines. A Company was on the right in touch with the Q.V.R., and B Company on the left in touch with the 7th Middlesex (167th Infantry Brigade), with C Company in support north of the Menin Road, and D Company in reserve in a trench north of Yeomanry Post."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

12th August 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad



13th August 1917

13. 8. 17. On and off sentry duty all day. Inverness bopse one mass of fallen trees, and splinters. Fine view of shells bursting on supports. "D" boy there suffer heavy casualties. Evening: Visited by Lieut Marsh. Skunt on, 9 pm. "Inverness bopse" to be taken in a few days by us, the attack being made from an advanced position dug by "B." boy tonight. Trench to be dug by Rfn., Rifle Grenadiers, and bombers, at

an estimated depth of ¹⁰⁰200 yards in front of present front line trench. This position will be well in Inverness bopse, and on the foot of the slope. Snipers to take up positions in outposts of two, at a distance of 100 yards in front of the working party on the new trench or ²⁰⁰~~300~~ yards in front of original front line. Lewis gun posts

served out with two Mills bombs,
and an additional 100 rounds.
Start off a 9 p.m. under
corporal Johnson; surprisingly
setting up the background.
Reach ~~300~~²⁰⁰ yards limit, bombers
&c. following behind. Fritz
opens up. 1st machine guns,
2nd Versey lights and snipers,
3rd Minnies, 4th Green & red

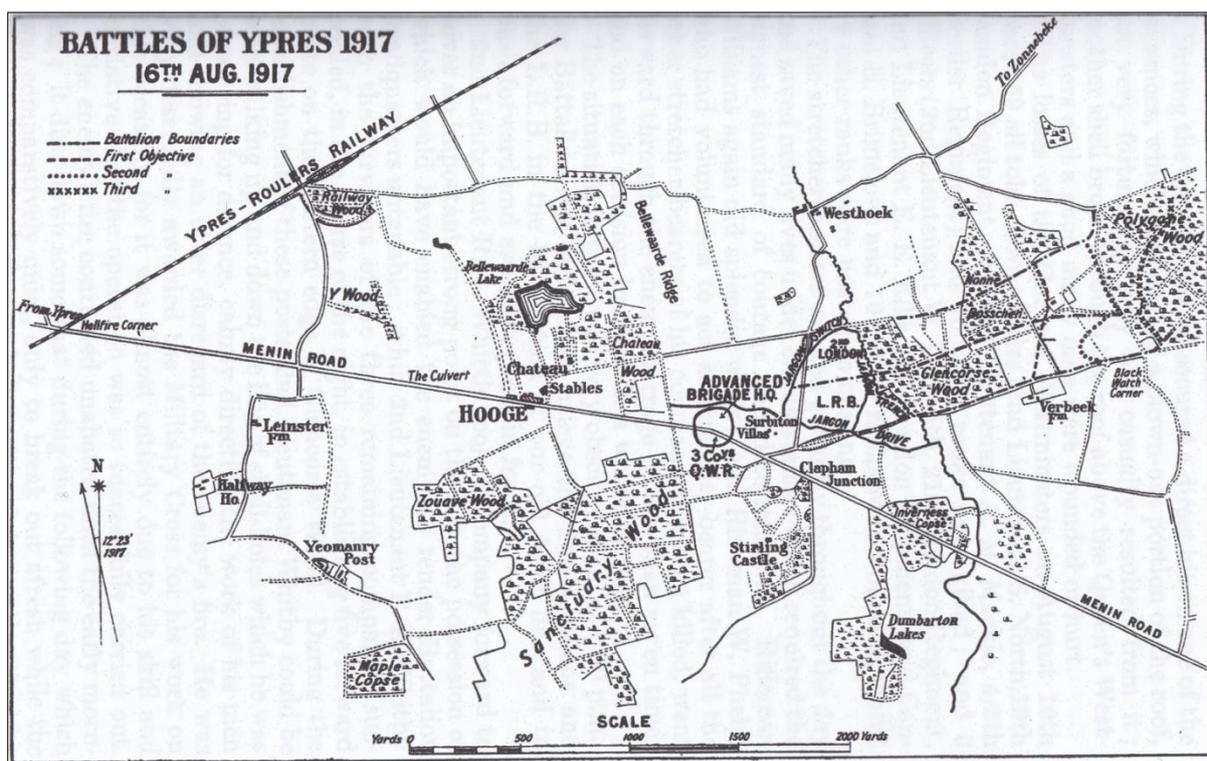
lights, 5th Artillery. Terrific strafe
for half-an-hour. Company digging
on right suffer heavy casualties.
"B" boy. lose Killick, missing.
my party lay behind mud and
squish in mud; and lose Robinson
(missing). Robertson, Versey light
between his legs. Position too
warm through machine gun fire.
Corp. Johnson orders a retirement
for about 50 yards. Retire to a
few yards in front of digging party,
which is busy making the new
trench in a stream. Walk
through stream up to thighs. Take
up outpost position with Forster.
Alone. Forster, fidget-ass. Some-one

calling for help in front. Cannot go.
Lieut. Van der Lind comes out. We
are to return to original line,
B. Coy., and guide a ration
party out to the new line. Three

of us return and lose ourselves.
Party approaches, turns out to be
Lt. Lloyd with working party. Says
he has been chased - rejoice.
Directs us back. Reach dugout
headquarters of front line. Go inside.
Lt. marsh asleep, & a few batmen.
Ration party not yet arrived.
Lt. Lloyd returns; says he's had
an awful time - left his men
to it. Not room for me so go
outside with Forster. Time 3 am.

Not until the dawn could we assess our true situation. Supposedly we were holding Jargon Trench but the guns had destroyed all vestige of cover. The diary refers to "Inverness Copse" which is what we were told was our position on taking over. The shattered remains of Glencorse Wood¹ consisted of the stumps of broken trees, shell holes and marshland. The British line was in full view of the Germans comfortably ensconced on the ridge at the top of the slope. Behind, some half a mile away, we could see the murdered trees of Sanctuary Wood where the troops in support must have suffered badly from the heavy bombardment then in progress.

¹ Google Maps entry for location of Jargon Trench and Glencorse Wood - <https://goo.gl/maps/Jwn5gMzE93p>



From "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
 [ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

Owing to the weather, aerial cover was non-existent but during the afternoon one solitary enemy plane suddenly appeared from the right and low down, machine-gunning the line from end to end. We raised our rifles hopefully; anxious for the opportunity to take some action against the Boche but the order "no shooting" was passed along in case we gave away the British position! Since the Hun airman could see his prospective victims squirming in the mud the order seemed incomprehensible. The opportunity of a minor boost to our morale was denied. Having completed the trip and again sprayed us with hot metal from end to end he disappeared back to his home ground.

Some fifteen minutes later a single British plane trundled up from the rear and, believing it to have been called up to deal with the marauder we cheered quietly in derision. In after years, having seen the remarkable aerial pictures of Glencorse Wood taken at that time, it could have been a British airman purely on a photographic mission.



Aerial view of Glencorse Wood in 1917

Bradley suggested a brew. We had received no rations for 24 hours and he thought that with a piece of '4x2' and rifle oil we might be able to boil water from the rain filled shell hole which lay between us. He dipped his canteen deeply to avoid the green scum but when a ghostly figure dressed in field grey floated gently to the surface 'tea for two' was abandoned forthwith. It was many hours before we were to see food and drink.

At dusk Lieutenant Marsh crawled along the length of B Company to explain that within the next day or so an attack was to be made from a new position on the lower slopes of Inverness Copse. In preparation for this a line of posts were to be established at a distance of 100 yards in front of Jargon Trench. Under cover of the posts a new trench was to be dug by one section of Riflemen, Rifle Grenadiers and bombers. Snipers would take up positions in outposts of two, 100 yards in from of Jargon Trench. Two snipers were issued with an additional bandoleer of 100 rounds and two Mills Bombs¹. The preliminary operation would take place that night. The strictest silence was essential. Zero hour was 9pm and we sallied forth with

¹ Wikipedia entry for Mills Bombs - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mills_bomb

the faint glow of the western sky behind us. The outpost with Corporal Johnson in charge left the digging party behind, about to attempt the impossible task of constructing a new trench in the terrible morass caused by the swollen streams, further disrupted by the constant pounding of the guns.

Judging distances and directions around the shattered tree stumps and through marshy ground in the pitch-blackness of the night was a chancy undertaking. We had no idea how near the German lines might be but without question every step took us nearer to the terrors of the unknown. Before we had found a suitable spot, which offered a modicum of protection from small arms fire if nothing else, the enemy revealed his own state of tension when a cluster of star shells burst high above, lighting up the whole grisly scene. According to the drill book we should have stood perfectly rigid, even though one foot be raised off the ground, until the blessed darkness again covered up the moving targets. With one accord we ignored the theories of the experts and quickly flung ourselves down into the slush. "Grandmother's Footsteps" in the middle of Glencorse Wood was not a practical proposition. The Boche machine guns opened up at once. Clearly the enemy was as jittery as ourselves and in response to their red and green rockets and the orange flares which spread over the sky like golden rain all hell was let loose.

After the machine guns came the mortars, 'minnies' and finally the 5.9s and the heavies joined in. The really big stuff concentrated on Jargon Trench behind us. Since the outpost was in the foremost position its greatest danger was from the spitting machine guns as we pressed faces and bodies into the mud with tin hats tilted backward in the hope that the stream of bullets passing inches above our heads would be deflected if Jerry lowered his sights. In such conditions time was indeterminate but it seemed an eternity. For a brief period the heavy bombardment eased but one very persistent machine gun slowly traversed the entire wood through an angle of ninety degrees. As the sound receded with each sweep we breathed again, then as the sound came nearer on the return journey bodies were pressed yet deeper into the mire.

Against the continuous flashes from the guns along the whole front I at length ventured a peep at my companions spread-eagled around me so quiet and still and a terrible sense of loneliness came upon me. But the dead do not speak and to my immense relief a hoarse whisper from Corporal Johnson ordered the outpost to retire to a position less exposed to the harassing fire by then increasing in volume. We rose, all that is except poor Robinson, and quietly moved back some 50 yards nearer to the

digging party. Here the outpost was established but the snipers were not yet in their allotted positions 100 yards in front of the post.

With beating hearts, bulging pockets and extra bandoliers, Forster and I attempted to retrace our steps back to square one. We were soon in difficulties, for the marsh, which in places covered our thighs, had not been encountered in our first expedition and with little or no sense of distance or direction two very worried riflemen came to the conclusion that they were completely lost in the evil wood. Clearly we had digressed but the terrifying thought was to decide in which direction and to what extent we had overshot the mark, maybe wandering dangerously near to German outposts. Any further advance on our part would have been inviting disaster. In one sense we were better off than our companions back in Jargon who were still at the mercy of the incessant shelling from the enemy artillery. By the same token, however, the mere fact that the centre of no-man's land was an oasis safe from the heavy bombardment proceeding on the lower slopes conjured up other perils.

The machine guns were ominously quiet at last. In these conditions the possibility of German patrols prowling in the neighbourhood could not be dismissed and frequent quick glances betrayed the state of our nerves. We saw nothing except those creeping figures in field grey that came from our imagination. We had not been told what was expected from us in the event of contact with the Hun but we were under no illusion. We were the stooges. Our main function being to provide ample warning to the Company behind when trouble was afoot. We ourselves had little faith in our ability to annihilate the enemy if and when he showed up, even overlooking the fact that our most potent weapons were still reposing in our pockets. This forgetfulness was not surprising since until zero hour on that day we had had no opportunity to handle a live Mills Bomb, let alone throw one.

During the lonely vigil in that accursed wood we experienced one very disturbing moment. Out of the darkness far away to the right came a distant cry of "Help". However the voice did not convey the impression of a man sorely wounded. The intonation was wrong and the casualty, if such it was, had very sound lungs. We listened carefully for the cry to be repeated but none came in the now silent wood. Huddled together, we discussed in whispers what action, if any, was required of us in the circumstances. We thought of every reason why we should do nothing except the really valid one. We concluded that since we were in the most forward position of the entire Company it seemed unlikely that one of our own men had strayed so far from the fold. We could also not dismiss the thought that Jerry might be

attempting to lure some unfortunate Englander to give away the position. The enemy were patently aware that something to their disadvantage was brewing and the capture and interrogation of a British soldier would have been invaluable. Finally it was decided that any attempt to find one lost soul in the dense blackness was doomed to failure anyway. Our reasoning told us that any investigation on our part would be tantamount to deserting our post whilst on active service even though it was questionable whether anyone in the rear knew exactly where the said post was located.

Time passed slowly. Many hours passed and we had no idea when and how we were expected to return to the Company. Release came suddenly – although by the manner of its coming it added yet one more ‘butterfly’ to those already circulating in our insides. Somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood was a prowler and, as the rustling grew close, fingers on triggers took the first pressure. Lt Van der Lind, a brave man, had undertaken the difficult task of finding in the pitch darkness the two jittery youngsters who themselves had little idea of their location. His mission was to escort us back to Jargon Trench for the purpose of guiding a ration party to the outposts and the trench diggers. The officer’s initial success in finding us was miraculous but he was not confident about the return journey.

There were now three of us lost in the wood. Each had different ideas on direction and we wandered on aimlessly until at length sounds of a body of men approaching came from the right. Silently we waited, stretched full length in the slime. The intruders were a noisy crowd, spades and other implements clanged and the sound of muffled voices came nearer. As the intruders came nearer, tripping over the broken ground, the mutterings and oaths were, to our great relief, not spoken in the guttural German tongue. On the other hand it was not pure English as taught at school, but there was no misunderstanding the thoughts expressed so colourfully by those simple British soldiers. It was in fact our own digging party with Lt Lloyd in charge. It soon became apparent that we three were not the only QWRs lost in that blasted wood. We breathed again, but the danger was not yet over. In the jumpy atmosphere disclosure would have been utter folly – so, lying doggo, we let our noisy friends pass by almost within arm’s length.

Our discussions were renewed but the only point on which we reached agreement was that Lt Lloyd was leading his men in the wrong direction. The natural slope of the wood away from Jerry’s enviable position on the ridge was of no assistance in the dark owing to the uneven terrain, the bogholes and the broken trees which had to be negotiated – all resulting from the myriad shells which had pounded the area for days on end. We

had no compass. Even the enemy was not prepared to be co-operative since his star shells were no longer bursting in the heavens. We continued to grope in circles. Actually "home" was nearer than we thought and it was Lt Lloyd and his diggers who eventually put us on the right path to HQ. During the homeward journey we did not come across any signs of the night's trench digging.

HQ was located in a few yards of a one-time trench that had miraculously survived the bombardment. The roof consisted of a few lengths of wood planking across the ditch that supported a piece of corrugated iron. Roughly fashioned doors completed the erection. In occupation of this doubtful refuge, christened the "Dugout", we found Lt Marsh, Lt Lloyd (who had returned to report progress), a few batmen, Company runners and stretcher-bearers. In fact everybody except the ration party which had not materialised and, I suspect, never did.

Forster and I duly reported and, sensing that our presence was not welcome, gladly removed ourselves from the overcrowded hole. We took up a position in the comparatively fresh air a few yards in front of Jargon Trench. I looked at my watch. It was precisely 3am – we had spent six hours in that accursed wood with the prospect of a further voyage of discovery if and when the rations were delivered.

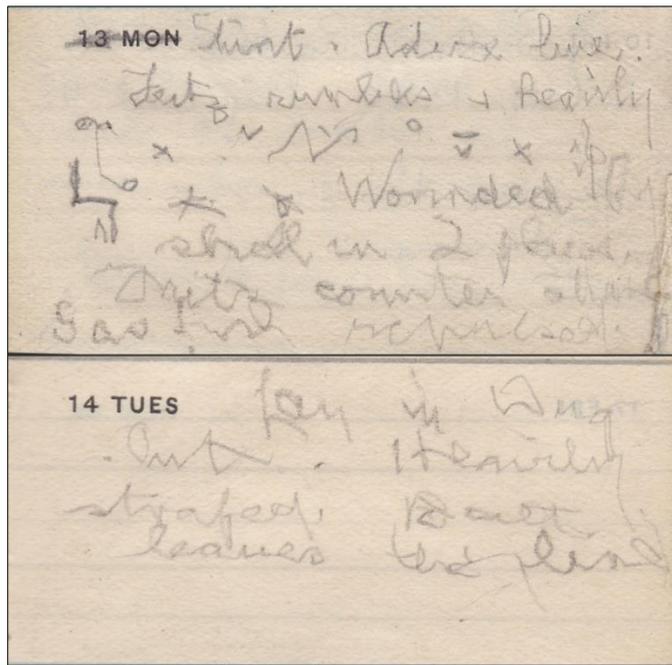
"On the night of August 13th, the 169th Infantry Brigade attempted to gain a little ground by establishing a line of posts in a ride in Glencorse Wood, one hundred yards in front of the position. The intention was for six posts to be established by the Q.V.R. on the right, and three by the Queen's Westminsters on the left, with an additional post if necessary, in order to keep in touch with the 176th Infantry Brigade on the Battalion's left. Each post was to be manned by one section.

The advance was timed to commence at 9:00pm. At that hour A Company and the Q.V.R. on the right were being heavily shelled and their advance was delayed, but on the left B Company succeeded in establishing a post. Seven minutes after the advance started the enemy put down a heavy barrage on the British front line; and that, together with the counter-barrage which had been called for by lamp signal, had prevented any progress being made by A Company and the Q.V.R.

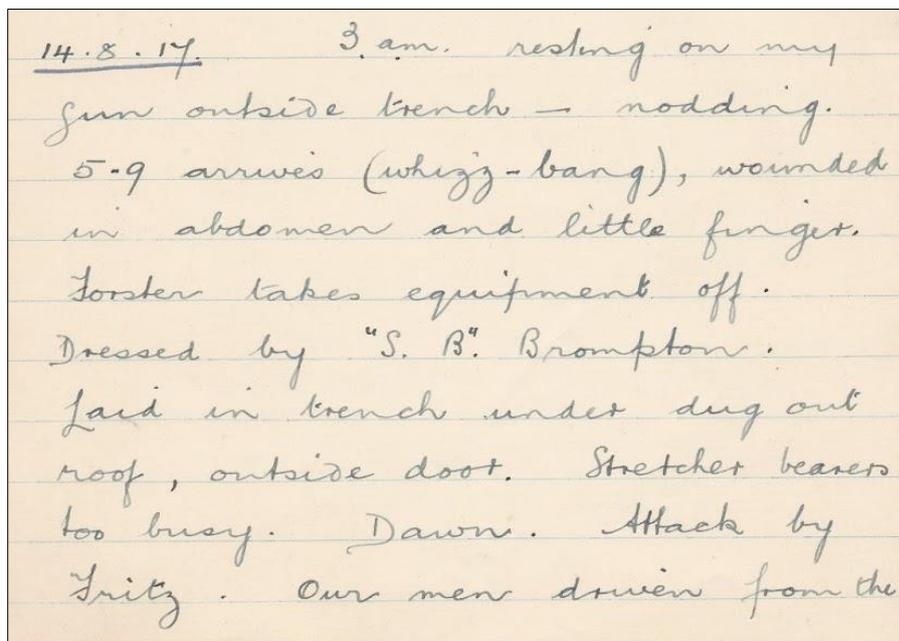
Continuous and heavy shelling went on all through the night, and, through it all, men hung on to their lonely shell-holes with an heroic endeavour that is beyond all praise."

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminister Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

14th August 1917



Stunt ...
Fritz ... and heavily
Wounded by shell in 2 places.
Fritz ... Gas ... repulsed.
Lay in dug-out.
Heavily strafed.
Battalion leaves the line.



advanced position to front line trench.
Corporals Taylor and Johnson wounded
in legs. Schneider wounded in
chest, and brought in by Sgt.
Yarnold. Gas alarm. Attack
down off and smashed. Sniping
from trench continues. Transferred
to shelter with Corp. Taylor. Heavy
strafing. Sgt. Yarnold refuses to
take out a party in broad day-
-light, to hold the advanced
Lewis Gun post, as ordered by
"Coq. office," in supports. Shell
lands on "Coq. office" dug-out,
O.C. Coq, Lieut Mackyll, killed,
Adg. Sm. Priest killed.
Evening: 2.W.R. relieved by
2nd Londons.

Forster and I were bemoaning our lot when the 5.9 shell¹ burst not many yards to my right. My companion was untouched but I felt a slight clip on my right hand and another in the solar plexus. My first thought was to get rid of the hitherto forgotten grenades that I now regarded as a menace. Forster removed them from my pockets and expected me to tell him what to do with them – my reply was not in the best of good taste. Stretcher-bearer Brompton was soon on the spot and I offered him the packet of field dressings, which each man had sewn into the bottom edge of his tunic. "Mustn't use that stuff old boy, just had information from top brass that iodine on open wounds destroys the tissues." This was a remarkable discovery by the medics after three years of bloody warfare but it gave me the opportunity to add one ampoule of iodine to my collection of souvenirs. Brompton applied his own brand of antiseptic before he left to get stretcher

¹ Wikipedia entry for German heavy field howitzer - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15_cm_sFH_13
The British referred to these guns and their shells as "Five Point Nines" or "Five-Nines" as the internal diameter of the barrel was 5.9 inches (150 mm).

help. He instructed me to lie quite still and on no account to eat or drink. Meanwhile the shelling increased and the promised stretcher never came. Someone, I know not who, laid me in the ditch inside the "Dugout" and thoughtfully covered me with an enormous field grey overcoat. It was here that Bradley, cheerful as ever, sought me out and kept me company as long as he dared. I was never to see his beaming face again.

Throughout the remainder of the night Jargon Trench was subjected to intense bombardment rising to crescendo at dawn when the Germans attacked. By this time, as a result of the continuous explosions, the shelter had disintegrated and collapsed. I was buried under a mass of wooden planks, corrugated iron and mud. I buried my head like an ostrich. From Jargon Trench came the continuous rattle of machine gun and rifle fire. Our men were soon driven back from the advance position and Jargon Trench became cluttered with men and casualties. Corporals Taylor and Johnson, both wounded in the legs, joined me but what happened to them afterwards I never found out.

Sometimes in the melee shouts of "Gas" were passed along. I reached for my respirator and realised for the first time what a blessing that encumbrance had proved to be. The iron canister, from which dribbled what appeared to be carbon granules, had taken the sting out of the shell splinters. The hole at entry of the container was the size of a penny – the exit hole was the size of an orange. Later, when my belongings were removed from my breast pockets, I found that a steel mirror, a fountain pen and other miscellaneous objects had also helped in the good work. I threw the respirator away. There was no gas.

From my prone position I could see but little of what was happening but I knew without question that many of my companions would never return from that morning's work and for the first time in my brief military career I experienced a strong urge to kill. Not perhaps the thirst for blood which the 'Canaries' of Harfleur had tried to instil but an overwhelming desire to revenge the slaughter of those I had so quickly learned to regard as my brothers. In the event my training had gone for nought and there was I, a qualified sniper, denied the opportunity of even one pot shot at the Hun. Today, fifty years later, I still do not know whether to be glad or sorry that, by force of circumstances, I fired no shot in anger.

The enemy attack was eventually beaten off but the concentrated bombardment of Jargon continued unceasingly until, with every burst, my hopes of survival receded further and further. It was during the German attack that someone, whose voice I recognised, panicked and, shouting "we

shall all be killed”, trampled over my now camouflaged body a number of times. Sergeant Yarnold came to my rescue but just what he said to the offender is best omitted from the record.

With every new explosion following each other in quick succession came an uneasy sensation of being slowly raised some distance from the ground, suspended in mid-air for a few seconds, then gently lowered down to earth. Although the shelter was by now virtually destroyed, by some miracle the field telephone and the wire remained intact. I became aware of a heated argument in progress between Sergeant Yarnold and B Company located in the support trenches. In the course of the conversation I gathered that Yarnold had been instructed to send out a party of men in broad daylight for the purpose of establishing an advance Lewis Gun post. His refusal to order men to undertake an operation which could only result in almost certain death was both emphatic and colourful. The consequences arising from his refusal to obey an order whilst on active service was never put to the test because the line went dead. It transpired later that a shell had landed on the Company HQ and Lt Mackle and Sergeant Priest were both killed. The story would not be complete without mentioning that the valiant Sergeant Yarnold made several journeys by himself in daylight in the face of intense rifle and machine gun fire and successfully brought in a number of wounded survivors, including my friend Schneider with a bullet wound in the chest.

Whether or not the Brigade headquarters had reason to believe that the enemy attack had been successful and that the Germans again occupied Jargon Trench is not on record but for some reason the British ‘heavies’ now lowered their sights. Unfortunately for the QWRs their shooting was accurate and Jargon was at the receiving end from both friend and foe. Communication by telephone was out of the question and a call went out for volunteers to take, in broad daylight, the hazardous journey across open ground bearing, I hoped, rude messages for the British gunners. Three times the call for volunteers was heard but it was long after the third runner was despatched that the enemy was given a free field.

When darkness fell the QWR were relieved by the 1st Battalion of the Second London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers). As they quietly made way for the newcomers I was placed on a stretcher but the relief at the prospect of leaving that cruel and bloody region was short lived. After a journey of a few yards a voice came out of the darkness, “Put that man back”. Within seconds the QWRs disappeared into the blackness and I was left to my own devices. Admittedly it would have been difficult and dangerous for heavily burdened stretcher-bearers to negotiate the slippery edges of the deep

water-filled shell holes in the pitch darkness and speed was essential. However it could be equally disastrous for a wounded man with only one free hand to make such a perilous journey by himself. Anxious as I was to get away from the terrifying explosions the thought of drowning was equally frightening. It seemed the odds were even and, taking the easiest way out of my dilemma, I buried myself in the mud and tried to forget everything.

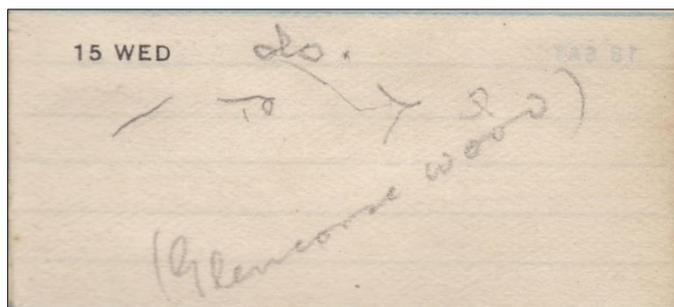
"The story of one small band of Queen's Westminsters may be told; it is typical of what was happening all along the fighting front.

Corporal Skeate and seven men were holding a small post in front of the line, and, cut off from all communication with their company, without rations and exposed to the full fury of the enemy's artillery and machine-gun fire, their position seemed hopeless. Their orders were to hold the post, and for over thirty hours they clung on expecting to be overwhelmed at any moment. The situation was reported to the Brigade, and orders were received that the post was to be withdrawn. Sergeant E. Yarnold, M.M., then volunteered to make an attempt to take the message forward; and with conspicuous courage he made his way across the open, exposed to machine-gun fire at a hundred yards' range, and succeeded in reaching the post in safety. The party then withdrew, and on their way back to the front line five men out of the eight were hit and lay helpless where they fell. Sergeant Yarnold bore a charmed life, for he got back unwounded, though his clothing was pierced with bullets. Calling for volunteers, as soon as he regained the line he went out again with a few brave men and brought in the wounded.

In the evening (August 14th), the Battalion was relieved by the 2nd Londons and moved back to the trenches at Half-way House. During the day and the preceding night its losses had amounted to 24 other ranks killed and 54 other ranks wounded"

Excerpt from "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]

15th August 1917

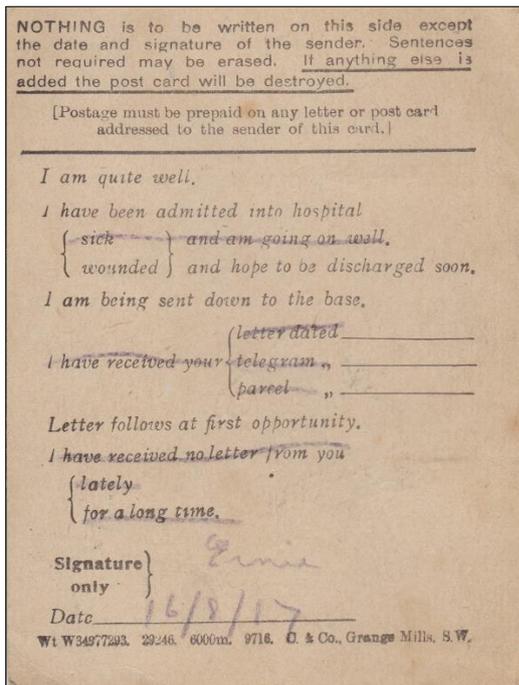


15. 8. 17. Spent whole day in dug
out. 2nd Londons advanced Lewis
gun post wiped out. Heavy
shelling by Fritz. British guns
falling short; & dropping in
front line trench. No grub.

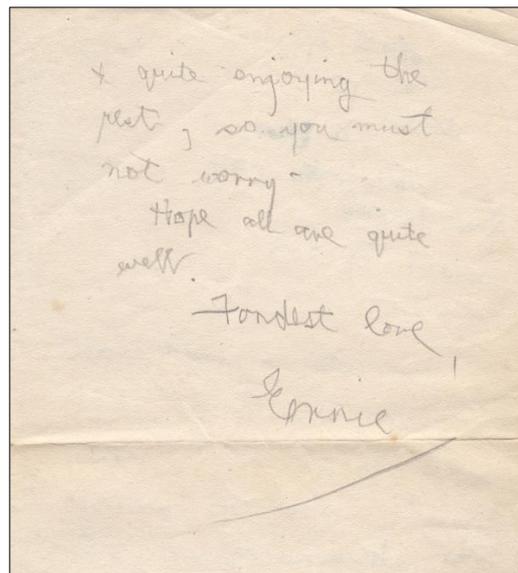
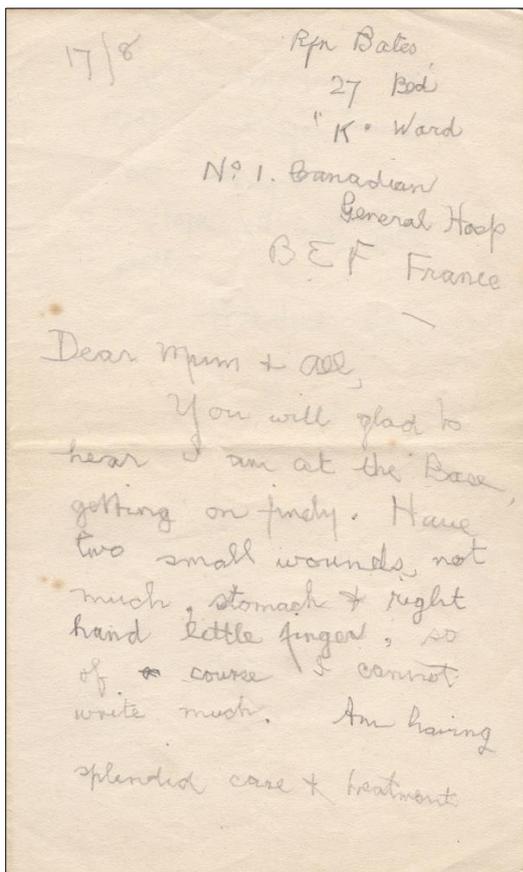
When daylight came I was shocked to find that most of those around me were thin, pale faced youths, eighteen years of age and maybe younger.

The 2nd Londons failed no better than the QWRs and the tragic lessons of the past few days had to be learned from scratch. Their advance Lewis Gun posts were soon wiped out and intense shelling throughout the day continued to pound the mutilated flesh.

News sent back to England



Postcard home to Mum (17th August 1917)



Letter home to Mum and the family (17th August 1917)

NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

I am ~~quite~~ well.

I have been admitted into hospital
 { ~~sick~~ } and am going on well.
 { wounded } and ~~hope to be discharged soon.~~

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your ^(letter dated _____) telegram „ _____
 „ ^(parcel _____) „ _____

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you
 { lately }
 { for a long time.

Signature }
 only } _____

Date _____

Wt W34977203. 29x46. 6000m. 9718. Q. & Co., Grange Mills, S.W.

A.F.A. 2042.
 114/Gen.No./5243.

FIELD SERVICE
 POST CARD.

19 18
 17 14
 11

The address only to be written on this side. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

G. P. BATES Esq
 7 Ellacombe R
 TORQUAY
 S. DEVON

[Crown Copyright Reserved.]

Postcard home to brother Percy (19th August 1917)

France

21/8/17

Dear Mr. Bates

I regret to inform you that your son (E.A.)
(?) Arthur was wounded by shrapnel during
action last week. I understand that he
was wounded in the abdomen & the hand
but that the wound, although it must
have been painful, was not in any way
dangerous & would have no permanent
ill effects.

I saw Arthur the next day when he
joked quite cheerily. In fact he kept in
such good spirits that his pluck was
remarked upon by at least one officer in
my hearing as well as riflemen. Not that
we had ever doubted his pluck for he
had never been one of the nervous, or as
we term it - "windy" fellows & had always
responded readily to the call of duty.

Moreover he was very popular
with the Platoon & we all join in
wishing him a complete & speedy

Note that it was usual for those serving together to call each other by their last names, and so Bradley wasn't aware of Ernie's first names or how he was known by his family.

recovery, trust that Mrs Bates & yourself will have no cause for anxiety.

A parcel addressed to Arthur has been received, & in conformity with the general practise the contents were distributed round the Platoon & much appreciated, although of course we received such articles with mixed feelings & happy memories of the past. It is impossible to forward parcels or letters as the addressed of wounded men is not known by anyone in the Battalion. The regiment loses trace of them as soon as they leave the field dressing station. For that reason I can give you no further particulars respecting the progress of the wound.

Yours very sincerely,

Victor Bradley
Q.W.R.'s

Letter to Ernie's Dad from his best friend Bradley (21st August 1917)



No. 16. 5753
23/8/17

(If replying, please quote above No.)

Army Form B. 104—81.

Record Office,
I. F. RECORD OFFICE
4, LONDON WALL BLDGS. E.C. Station.

23. 8, 1917.

SIR,

I regret to have to inform you that a report has this day been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 554720

(Rank) N/C (Name) Bates, S. A.

*Strike out words that do not apply.

(Regiment) 10th Bn. REGT. 10th W. DIV. was

}	*dangerously
	*severely
	*slightly

wounded in action at Sturpaul Wood Ham & admitted to 1 Canadian General Hospital
on the 17 day of 8 1917

I am at the same time to express the sympathy and regret of the Army Council.

Any further information received in this office as to his condition will be at once notified to you.

I am,

SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

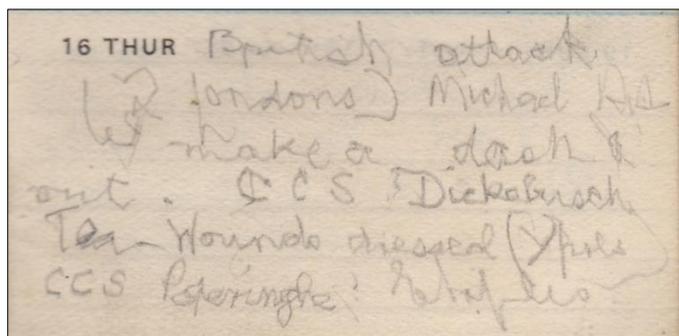
G. F. Bantlett Majr for COL
Officer in charge of Records.

W. 6938—2691. 600,000. 8/15. C.F.R. Forms/B. 104—80/2

Official notification (23rd August 1917)

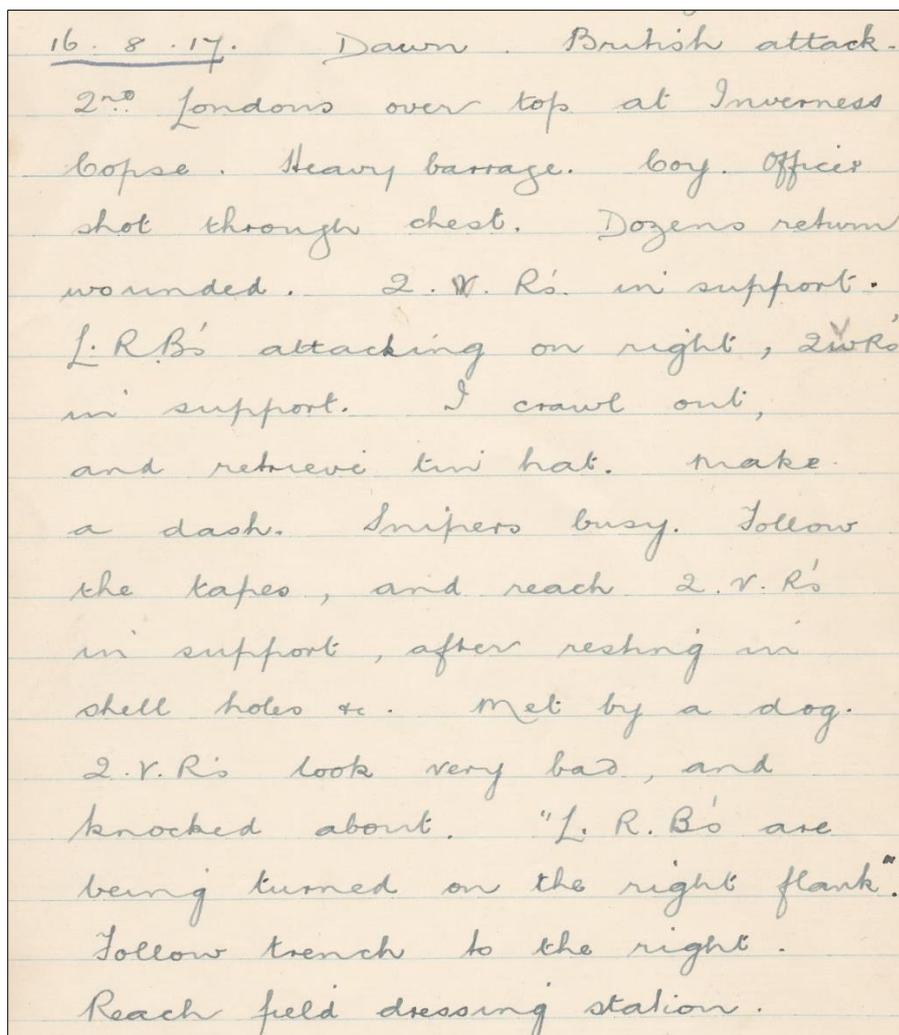


16th August 1917



16 THUR British attack
(2nd Londons) Michael ...
make a dash &
out. CCS Dickebusch
Tea - Wounds dressed (Ypres)
CCS Poperinghe
Etaples

British attack (2nd Londons).
Michael ... makes a dash out.
CCS (*Casualty Clearing Station*) Dickebusch.
Tea. Wounds dressed (Ypres).
CCS Poperinghe.
Etaples.



16.8.17. Dawn. British attack.
2nd Londons over top at Inverness
Copse. Heavy barrage. boy. Officer
shot through chest. Dozens return
wounded. 2.V.R.'s in support.
L.R.B.'s attacking on right, 2.V.R.'s
in support. I crawl out,
and retrieve my hat. make
a dash. Snipers busy. Follow
the tapes, and reach 2.V.R.'s
in support, after resting in
shell holes &c. Met by a dog.
2.V.R.'s look very bad, and
knocked about. "L.R.B.'s are
being turned on the right flank."
Follow trench to the right.
Reach field dressing station.

Too busy, so do not stop. Shelter
under remains of a tank.
Reach a pathway. Trenches

filled with German dead. Scores
of German prisoners, carrying
stretchers, and helping wounded.
Pass more field posts. Shrapnel
bursting overhead. Cut off to
the left, & try to follow the tapes.
Reach the Menin Road. Move
with walking wounded. No
Westministers. Reach Field
Dressing Station. Heavy strafe
on. Scramble on motor am-
-bulance, with British and
German wounded. Reach remains
of village. Drivers seat on a
lorry of wounded. Rough travelling.
Through town of Ypres, by
the old cloth Hall. Dickelbush
C. C. S. Two punts of tea,
gout, chocolate, and cigarettes.
Thousands waiting. Relieved
of tin hat. In nasty mess,
covered in mud and blood, sleeves

split up to shoulders by force of
explosion, hole in tunic, puttees
round ankles. Singled out and
wounds dressed. Wounds black.
Dose of germs. motor tory to
b. b. s. Poperinghe. n. 7. bar.
Pass scores of prisoners. Gub
and dope. Sleep in tent.
French ambulance train - converted.
Wounds dressed on train. Gub.
Etaples. Motor charabancs to
No. 1. Canadian General Hospital.
"Bath." Bed No. 27. "K" ward.
collapse.

Just before dawn the men were issued with a generous ration of rum. Too generous - a few of the lads, no doubt unused to such potent drink in large doses, appeared to be unaware of their surroundings or the purpose for which they were there. In the light of what followed to many of them one could only hope that the agonies of the spirit and the flesh were to some extent alleviated by the blessed state induced by the strong liquor. One lad offered me a generous part of his ration, for which I was grateful but I dare not risk more than a tiny sip.

At dawn, to the shrill blast of the whistle, 2nd London rose as one man and scrambling forward into Glencorse Wood, scorned the murderous fire of the German machine guns from the heights above. In a matter of seconds Jargon Trench was again cluttered with the wounded and the dying. The first casualty being the Platoon Commander who, with arm upraised in the act of waving his men forward to the attack, fell backward and lay beside me with his lifeblood spouting from a bullet wound in his chest.

No pen can adequately convey the supreme heroism of those young lads of the 1st Battalion of the 2nd London Regiment. As a helpless onlooker it is possible only to record, with deep feeling, the slaughter of the innocents I

witnessed that early morning of 16th August 1917. It was the most heart-rending experience I endured during my brief spell in the line. They were mostly teenagers, barely out of school, whom fate had brought into the world just one year too soon. Bitter as my feelings were to those 'bastards' on the ridge, I found time to direct a few uncomplimentary thoughts to the British top brass, far away from the smoke and flames, who were responsible for the bloodbath of Glencorse Wood without having the remotest idea of the unspeakable condition of the terrain or the utter futility of the operation.

With Jargon Trench a shambles and many badly wounded men requiring urgent attention, my position was desperate. Lack of food, drink and sleep for the best part of four days and loss of blood had taken their toll. I resisted the impulse to try to escape from that hell. The shooting was now mainly concentrated on the upper slope and the hazards of crossing this vast area within the Salient were considerably lessened but the body refused to obey the natural instinct of survival. I lay supine, content to await the next turn in the wheel of fate.

The return to reality and reason came suddenly. The advance was not proceeding too well for the gallant 2nd Londons and many of those who survived were falling back to the relative safety of the jumping off ground. The time had come to move and, retrieving tin hat, I crawled out on hands and knees and, carefully negotiating the craters, commenced the long haul back. The enemy were too busily employed nearer their home ground to bother with one lone figure on the way out, although for the first hundred yards rifle and machine gun bullets hit the mud with disturbing 'plops'. Meanwhile, on the slopes behind, the massacre continued and the farewell and faintly disturbing message from my companions of the last few days was simply "the LRBs have been turned on the right".

The white tapes, which had been laid out for the guidance of the incoming troops to the jumping off position for the attack, had disappeared except for a few shreds sticking out of the mud here and there. However, in daylight the general direction to safety was clear enough. Progress was slow but sure and occasional rests on the edge of waterlogged craters gave me the opportunity to survey the whole grim picture of the Salient for the last time. Sitting thus after a journey of perhaps half a mile without seeing a living soul I became aware that in the adjoining crater not three feet away lay the body of a German soldier – arms outstretched, glassy eyes wide open to the skies and legs partly submerged in the waterlogged shell hole where he was taking his final rest. There was no sign of mutilation of the flesh and the calm features showed none of the anguish of suffering. His

release from the earthly hell must have been quick and I was glad. I kept him company for several minutes until gradually my hatred of the German hordes began to evaporate. Indeed, owing no doubt to physical weakness, I became soft and maudlin in my attitude toward that piece of rotting clay. A mental picture of the Hun in his home in the Fatherland, his family, maybe young children, came before me and I lost all sense of reality. Pulling myself together came the realisation that he was away from it all while I was still alive with a long way to go.

Glencorse Wood behind was still an inferno and "the LRBs had been turned on the right". That right flank on the southern slopes by Inverness Copse was not far distant and presented a threat that could not be denied. I moved on.

I remember passing one First Aid Post, hurriedly erected since the commencement of the advance on 31st July. Nearby was a disabled tank. A number of walking wounded were hanging about but since no ambulance could travel over the shell-pocked ground there was little point in my joining the queue. The kind, garrulous Brompton had administered first aid days and nights previously and with the threat of gangrene time was my only enemy.

The vast expanse of open ground which lay ahead appeared deserted and the complete aloneness in the strange world around was uncanny. The emptiness of the landscape was not entirely surprising since the whole area was now overlooked by unfriendly eyes from the high ridge towards Passchendaele – watching every move by the British Army along the Menin Road and the remains of the tracks leading to the frontline positions. It was across this ground that on 31st July the British attacked and the Third Battle of Ypres commenced. On that very day the heavens opened and torrential rain continued incessantly through day and night until the deep craters filled to overflowing, transforming the whole low-lying area into one vast swamp through which we floundered twelve days later.

Where were the dead? Apart from an occasional khaki or field grey figure grotesquely spread-eagled in the mud there was no real evidence of the slaughter on both sides. Progress was slow for perhaps another quarter of a mile but at length the dead came into view. They lay in one long mound which, straight as an arrow, stretched away to the north as far as the eye could see. The spectacle of that mangled pile of humanity, gruesome as it was, by its very magnitude failed to stir the emotions as did the little German in the shell hole. The temporary resting-place of those thousands

of khaki and field grey together was, I believe, the road to Westhoek¹. One thing was certain, I had no recollection of negotiating that mountainous heap on the way in and with the realisation that I was off course I veered to the left.

Progress was very slow and the effort painful but at length the first evidence of sanity in those troubled fields singled me out for special attention. In the far distance a tiny moving object was approaching at great speed. I sat down and waited for the visitor. Bubbling over with the sheer joy of life, free from the hates and bitterness that beset his masters, the affectionate, if boisterous, greeting of that little brown mongrel put new spirit into the weary traveller. Having completed his mission he scampered off in the direction from whence he came and where he led I followed. He was already home and waiting for me at the support trenches where a long line of faces peered apprehensively over the parapet towards the smoke and flame to their front. Here were the QVRs awaiting the order to advance to the support of the LRBs. To their shout of "How's it going up their chum?" one could only repeat the parting message of the LRBs that they had been turned on the right. Cold comfort with the prospect of a dim future for the lads of the QVR who by all appearances had already shared in the slaughter of that futile operation. The Germans knew very well the precise location of the British support lines and we ourselves had witnessed the intense bombardment of that region from our own position in Jargon Trench.

I shuffled along until in the far distance, away to the right, I espied a party of twenty or thirty men trudging slowly back towards the British rear. As we converged I was intrigued to notice that every other man was carrying on his shoulder what appeared to be a long pole. They could hardly be walking wounded and my guess was that a party of pioneers was leisurely returning from some task in the field. As we drew closer I was spotted and immediately half a dozen broke away from their party and raced towards me. At last I was face to face with the enemy! Flinging their rolled up stretchers to the ground and quickly opening them up they arranged blankets and I was invited to take my pick. Competition for my patronage was keen and I was bewildered by the verbal onslaught and gesticulation of those half dozen unarmed and unwounded Germans. No doubt they were more concerned with their own safety than my immediate wellbeing since unescorted Germans in process of surrendering to the enemy were treading a dangerous ground. I was to be their insurance, their passport to safety. What additional benefits they may have thought would accrue from

¹ Google Maps entry for Westhoek - <https://goo.gl/maps/Spj6RBXKUXh8pxrz8>

their synthetic display of humanity is a matter of conjecture. This was not the moment for fraternisation. We spoke no common language but a few well-chosen words in good British Army language sufficed. Quite unperturbed they bundled up their stretchers and hurried back to their companions. Incidentally, not one of my visitors wore the brassard of the Red Cross.

So far the way back had been comparatively peaceful, if slow and tortuous, but now there was the smoke of bursting shrapnel in the dull grey sky. Although hitherto there had been no path or track in the wilderness there now appeared the remains of the white tapes laid out for the advance to the infamous Menin Road. As I progressed I was overtaken, walking wounded began to appear from all directions. A crowd of several hundred weary, dishevelled and bloody remnants staggered along until the ambulances were reached at a spot beyond which no vehicle dare venture in daylight.

Just as I arrived, one crowded ambulance drove off at breakneck speed in the direction of Ypres. The second one, crammed with screaming Huns was ready to move off whilst many patient British 'Tommies' sat around awaiting their turn. Overhead the vicious whiplash crack of bursting shrapnel showered its deadly splinters from the air amongst the crowd of waiting men. Jerry had got the range to a 'T'. I was not so patient as the rest. I took exception to the priority the wounded Germans were receiving. I took further exception to the brusque manner of the RAMC Corporal when in reply to my request he looked at my bandaged hand and said "You can walk". When I explained that it was not my intention to do any more walking he softened. "All right chum, we are full inside, you can sit with the driver." I sat with the driver. Speed was sacrificed to comfort as was essential having regard to the mounting casualties continuously filtering along through the Menin Road to Ypres.

At last the Ancient Cloth Hall came into view. We had reached Field Ambulance Station number 55 at Dickebusch. The journey was rough and long and with every bump and lurch of that primitive conveyance I felt my body was breaking into pieces. So far as I know Dickebusch was the first substantial Field Ambulance Station at which the casualties from the battle area could receive proper attention to their wounds. The fact that Dickebusch lay some miles from the battle area of Glencorse Wood was an indication of the complete domination of the Ypres Salient from the heights above and it follows the only justification for launching the Battle of Langemark. However I am no historian and my theories are derived from a purely personal interest. It was a hell of a long way back.

At Dickebusch the constant stream of bloody and exhausted wounded were directed to a large hut inside which were rows of long trestle tables and forms. Unlimited supplies of bully beef sandwiches, chocolate and cigarettes were laid out and orderlies repeatedly filled mugs with hot, sweet Army tea. I had not eaten or drunk for over three days and set to with a will. My thirst was insatiable. Feeling decidedly better and resting on the hard forms, my thoughts dwelt on the good fortune that had been my portion in that hell which lay behind. "Lay quite still and on no account eat or drink". Brompton's parting message, which I had quite forgotten, gave me a few moments anxiety but feeling none the worse for that overdue repast I was past caring anyway – though Brompton could have been right.

It was time to move this dirty, ragged individual with uniform in shreds, puttees trailing away behind, jacket in ribbons and jacket sleeves ripped from the wrists to the shoulders by the blast of the 5.9. Outside the canteen three or four queues of Tommies stood patiently in single file whilst in the distance could be seen a cluster of white buildings which proved to be Field Ambulance Station number 55. I attached myself to the nearest queue and prepared for a long wait. Nobody talked. All stood quietly, immersed in their own thoughts, waiting for some relief from the pain and exhaustion. I indulged in a little mental arithmetic. Assuming there were at least 200 men in that long line before me and, say, four doctors available for each queue, my potential would be decreased to 50. Allowing an average of 15 minutes for each patient for jabs, cleaning, surgery, bandaging and recording formalities, I might expect to enter the portals of that distant building in about 12 hours. Hopefully deciding that my working hypothesis must be faulty the mental exercise was abandoned. Meanwhile the queue continued to lengthen behind and the forward movement was negligible.

The pain in the stomach and hand was excruciating and with every beat of the heart the finger pumped in unison. By now the outside of the bandage was jet black with dried blood except for an unpleasant sheen of phosphorescent green in places. The whole ensemble was the size of a toy balloon and as hard as iron. Considerable relief was obtained by resting the packet on the top of my shoulder and thus I was standing when a white spot emerged from the distant building. As it came nearer the white spot proved to be a young surgeon, obviously fresh from the operating table from the bloody state of his white gown. He was no doubt on the way to a rest and food. His eyes were red-rimmed with lack of sleep and his step was weary. He plodded down the line with now and again a quick glance at those who stood and waited. He passed by me but after a few steps he was back. Pointing to the black bundle on my shoulder he said "How long have

you had that?" I told him two and a half days. "Come with me" – and retracing his steps he walked all the way back to that far off building. I had jumped the queue by about 200 places!

Inside I sat at a rough wooden table and was inflicted with 75cc A.T. The hand was immersed in a large enamel trough filled with hot antiseptic and the process of unwinding the lengths of coagulated bandage and gauze commenced. For the first time I saw what Jerry had done to my finger, from the knuckle to the nail it was split exactly down the centre with splinters of white bone at right angles resembling the skeleton of a fish. With infinite care and patience the MO slowly unthreaded the interwoven gauze and bound it up. He commenced to write in the details on my Field Medical Card. I asked him about the other wound, pointing to my stomach. His profanity was excusable in the circumstances and yet with the same care and attention he cleaned and plugged and bandaged. With my Medical Card in a waterproof cover he wished me good luck and was out of the door in no time. I trust he kept his eyes averted during his second attempt to reach his own particular refuge.

The diary records that lorries conveyed the casualties from Dickebusch to No. 7 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station at Poperinghe passing hundreds of German prisoners on the road. After food, drink and a second inspection I slept in a tent. However, today, I have no recollection of that part of the journey.

Army Form W. 3118.	
FIELD MEDICAL CARD.	
A.T. Serum Dose and date	1st 750 - 16 ^S 17
	2nd
FIELD AMBULANCE NOTES	
Morphia Dose and time	
Date of wound or onset of illness	16/9/17
Religion	C.E.
No. 554720	Rank Pfc.
Name	Bates, E. C.
Unit	1/16 London
Battle Casualty	Accidentally Wounded "Sick"
(Strike out description which does not apply).	
No. of F.A.	55
Date of admission	16/9/17
F.A. diagnosis	Shall and R. Hand - Abdominal pain
Additional F.A. Notes to be written on back of card.	
C.C.S. diagnosis (if altered from above)	
Base Hospital diagnosis (alterations or additional)	
W3159/M2063. 1,750M. 6-17. M. & H., Ltd. (M65413).	

Date of entry and medical unit admitting must be recorded immediately on admission. Brief clinical notes to be added later and signed by M.O.

No. of C.C.S. Date of entry <i>16/8/17</i>	No. of Hospital Date of entry <i>Wounded 14.8.17</i> <i>Drd x sb. gbl. ls</i> <i>breaching stomach</i> <i>until 16.8.17</i> <i>Small haem. wd lower</i> <i>end of sternum.</i> <i>Laev. stern. Cl. little finger</i> <i>18.8.17. A.S. 760 units given.</i> <i>22.8.17. Wd. very clean cleaned & B.B.</i> <i>amputated left little finger.</i> <i>coloured & T.T. given.</i> <i>28.8.17. Coudeleoni food</i> <i>R. R. R. R. R.</i>
-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------



This F.M. Card must not be destroyed, and it must be transmitted with the patient if he is evacuated to U.K. Temperature charts or additional clinical notes may be sent with it, either in the same or in another envelope attached to the patient.

Field Medical Card

Army Form 2018A

DIARY OF TRANSPORT

3. Every F.M.C.C.S. and Hospital through which the patient is passed must be shown on the diary of transport upon the F.M. Card being continued. A second F.M. Card may be used when necessary.

4. Every Ambulance Train, or its equivalent Convey, will be shown on the space below on this envelope which must not be destroyed or removed from the patient until his final disposal is effected.

5. Notes calling attention to special needs in transport may be entered on the blank space below.

No. of Amb. Train and date.

No. of Amb. Train and date.

(N.B. The inner retaining flap of the envelope must be raised before placing any card inside, and then folded down over the contents.)

No. *55472a Rank Rgn.*

Name (Block letters to be used) *BATESE, L.*

Unit *1/16 Lds*

(Above to be filled in by earliest unit possible.)

SHIP LABEL

The following details, and also the above if not already completed, to be filled in at the last Base Hospital, assisting date and name of ship, which will be entered on board ship.

Diagnosis (briefly).

SLIGHT
OF
SEVERE

Special situation needed to transport.

Name of Ship.

Date of admission on board.

Special Destination.

I awoke from what I suspect was an induced sleep to find myself on the luggage rack of an ancient French railway carriage converted for use as an ambulance train. We were ambling along at a steady pace. Periodical stops were made at wayside British Army halts where our wounds were inspected, food and drink administered and, of course, the ever ready hypodermic was in action. For every inspection the Medical Card should have been noted accordingly but mine shows a complete blank except for the AT prod I received at Dickenbusch. I remember peeing out of a top window at one of these halts. Several elephant huts jutted on the line whilst in front beautifully tended gardens ablaze with the colourful flowers of late summer were enclosed with freshly painted white fencing heralding the first promise of approaching civilisation and comfort.

We detrained and ambulances completed the journey to No 1 Canadian General Hospital at Etaples on the coast. Around my neck still hung the Field Medical Card reporting a battle casualty resulting in "shell wounds to right hand and abdomen". The ward sister arrived. "What happened to you number 27?" I reported the diagnosis on the card. She said "Don't be silly, boy, that's not your abdomen that's your belly". Lt A V Ledger RAMC of No. 55 Field Ambulance Station may have slipped up in his anatomy but he dealt with me handsomely.

The tattered remains of my uniform having been removed with scissors, my body washed down by an RAMC orderly, clothed in a night-gown of sorts and blanketed, I was carted away on a stretcher tightly clutching the little red bag containing my personal treasures. Entering an enormous marquee labelled K Ward, bed number 27 brought me to the end of my day.

17th to 21st August 1917

For the next fourteen days I lost my identity. In due course I was able to turn my head and take stock of my surroundings. The man on my left was in a very bad way. His right arm had been blown off at the shoulder and for most of the time he was delirious. On my right was a little artillery man whose chest was no more than one pulpy mass of raw flesh caused by the searing liquid from a gas shell that has burst at his feet. He was a cheerful soul although his agony must have been acute. The only other patient within my view was a very young Canadian in the bed opposite who continually groaned and called loudly for the sister. Experience had taught us that dangerously wounded men lay quiet and still and by the same token the noisy ones are, to say the least, not on the danger list. It is pertinent to note that in K Ward with perhaps forty to fifty occupied beds almost complete silence reigned throughout the day and night except for occasional outbursts from the young Canadian.

Although I had to remain flat on my back I was reasonably comfortable, but the hours passed slowly and I had all the time in the world in which to review the happenings of the last few months. I recalled particularly that sun-drenched Sunday evening on the road to Ivergny when much to Bradley's disgust I had opted for a blighty. The gods had been good to me – they had met me halfway with a gentle reminder by way of the solar plexus that it was not for mere mortals to strike a bargain. I remembered the impetigo that on the 16th August practically covered the whole of my face despite the efforts of the Regimental MO. My fingers explored the affected parts and I was surprised to find the skin completely free from those nauseating scabs. Clearly the art of bloodletting as practised in the 18th century still had something to commend it!

Remembering Bradley, Forster, Willis, Killick (who loved to talk of his wife and two small girls) and a host of others I had left behind and wondering if I should ever see them again I felt helpless and alone.



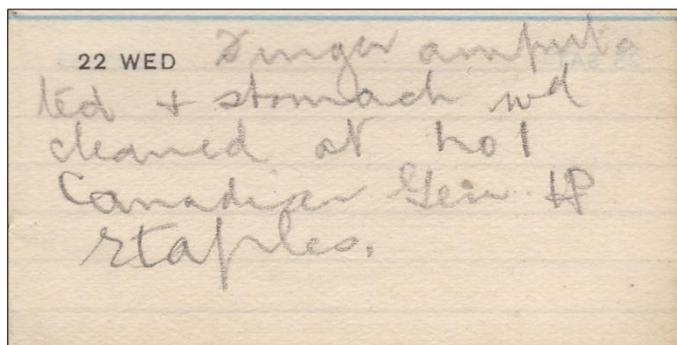
Dressings began at a fantastically early hour and my purgatory usually lasted for about three-quarters of an hour. The hole in the stomach was

cleaned and after much probing with tweezers the sister proceeded to stuff it with masses of cotton wool, plugging into all corners with a gold probe. Next came the placing of four rubber "Canoll tubes" over the wound and these were tightly secured with many layers of rat-tailed bandage. The other end of the tubes broadened out into little funnels which were attached at the neck by adhesive tape. The next operation, repeated every few hours, was less painful but incommoding. One half pint of warm Lysol was poured into each funnel, reached its allotted target and overflowed in all directions. Occasionally the sister, a hefty Scottish Canadian woman, would change the bed by lifting me bodily with one arm, whipping out the sodden sheets and replacing them with dry ones – only to return shortly afterwards to pour in two more pints of Lysol.

For those who were fit to take everything on the menu the food was superb. Breakfast usually consisted of boiled eggs which often had pencilled on them get well messages with names and addresses of kind old ladies back in England. For elevenses one glass of Guinness together with jelly and blancmange. A second glass of Guinness preceded a chicken lunch. Most of the men were hand fed by the one ward sister who attended to all the dressings and it was not until evening that her duties were finished. Tremendous effort by a wonderful person. Occasionally an RAMC orderly would assist in the more menial tasks but his appearances on the ward were rare.

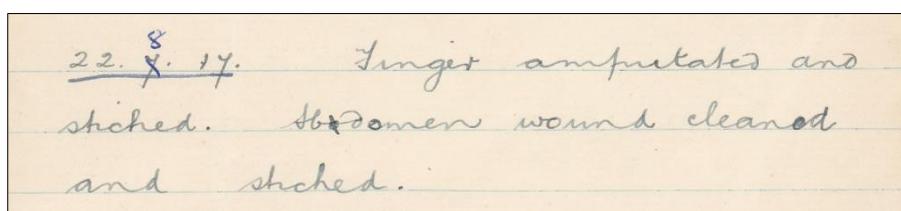
As darkness fell the night sister took over. Lights were extinguished except for two low powered bulbs at either end of the marquee. With a hurricane lamp more appropriate to the days of Florence Nightingale the sister walked down the quiet ward and briefly inspected each patient who should by then have been asleep. On the third night she stopped at my bed, held up the lamp and said "Why aren't you asleep number 27?" I could think of no reason and she promised to find something to send me off. She returned with a large glass of rich ruby port, a most efficacious draught! The next night and the following night number 27 was again wide awake. The same question and the same comforting glass of port ensued. After several nights of this the sister wearied of making a special journey back to the dispensary and during the rest of my stay in K Ward she came on duty with the hurricane lamp in one hand and a glass of port in the other. I was invariably awake. We both understood the situation perfectly. There was no need for conversation.

22nd August 1917



22 WED Finger amputated
+ stomach wd
cleaned at No 1
Canadian Gen. H.
Etaples.

Finger amputated and stomach wound cleaned.
No 1 Canadian General Hospital, Etaples.



22. 8. 17. Finger amputated and
stitched. Stomach wound cleaned
and stitched.

Across the courtyard was the operating theatre and here no time was lost in getting down to the business in hand. The anaesthetic was applied and long before it was given a chance to function I was on the slab surrounded by white gowned figures in masks, the surgeon with scalpel at the ready. I heard the sister say "he's off" and fearful lest the bloody work should commence at once I wagged my hand furiously.

Back in bed number 27 I awoke to see the big moonface of the day sister grinning at me from the end of the bed. I asked for my tea and was told not to be silly, teatime was finished hours ago. I had to be satisfied with one sip of water and two kidney basins for which, to her surprise, I had no use. I was annoyed because, so I thought, the shattered remains of my finger had not been amputated – I could move it under its wrappings. It was not until the 28th August when the bandages were removed that I was duly convinced.

For some days I had been fidgety to get back to England but the weather was stormy and I was told that with the rough seas in the Channel the danger of peritonitis could not be risked.

23rd August 1917 - Letter from Mum

4, Lambey's Rd,
Dagenham
Aug 23rd Essex

My dear Eric,

We were relieved to get your letter this morning, we had a field card yesterday and also a letter you had written on the 12th. We do hope your wounds are not very bad, but I can tell you I was truly thankful to hear you were out of the fighting, for this past week I knew something had happened to you. If you are able to write a few lines to me often I will let the others know. I wish you had been sent to England, for then we could see you, is your finger much injured? I had sent you off another parcel about 10 days ago. I suppose it will come back to me. I had put you in some very hard pears and gapes that would be ripe by the time it reached you, so am afraid by now, they will be mixed with the sweets and biscuits, but never mind so long as you are getting well and you are kept away from the front for a long time I have sent to D. and P. -

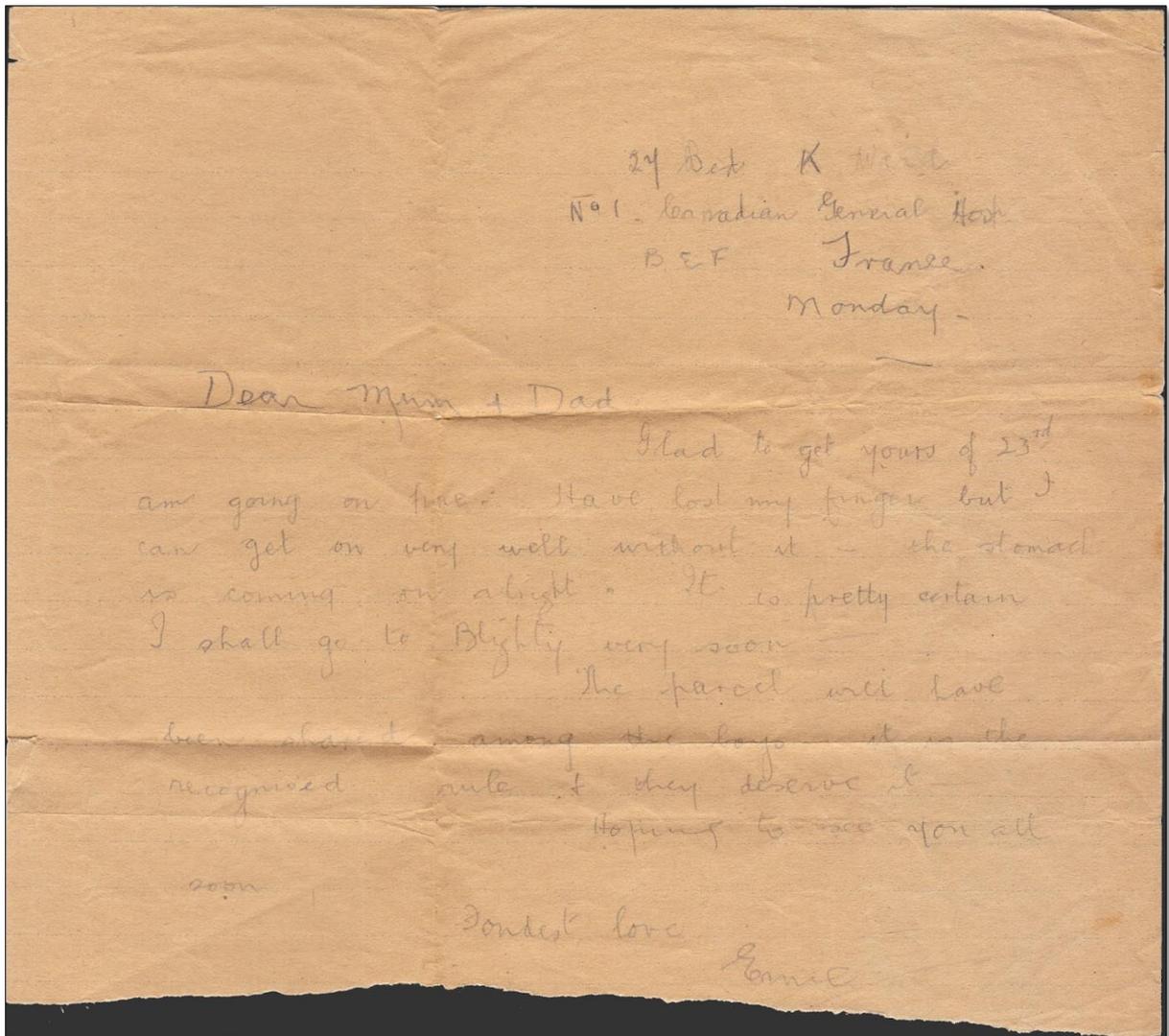
Dad and I send fondest love, glad you received the photo.

Your loving Mother



Anna Elizabeth Bates

27th August 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad



29th August 1917 - Letter from Mum

Did you receive my last letter.

4 Lambey's Road
Dagenham
Aug. 29th Essex

My dear Ernie,

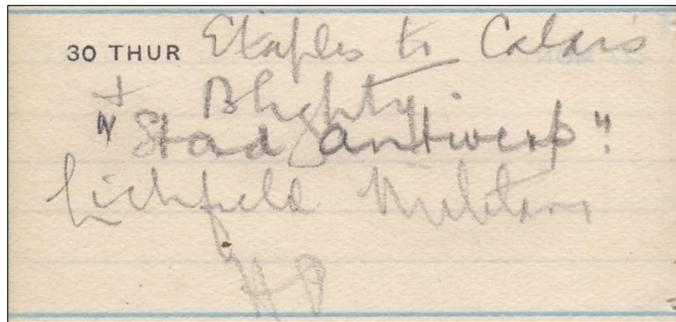
We are anxiously waiting to hear how you are getting on - but are hoping that no news is good news - We received a notice from the record office to say you had been wounded on hand and gave the hospital address as Etaples so I am sending this on chance - They give the date as 1st but your field card says 15th. Were you at Lens? We have this morning recd a letter from Victor Bradley - telling us of your wound but they have no idea where you had been sent - They had recd your parcel and according to practice the contents were shared between the platoon and much appreciated - he says we recd such articles with mixed feeling and happy memories of the past - They all join in wishing you a complete recovery - He has sent a very nice letter as to your pluck and good spirits, which one of your officers and numerous of us had remarked upon. We are all well and trust and hope that you are getting better, though we are in hopes you will be safe from the fighting for some time. With fondest love

Your loving Mother

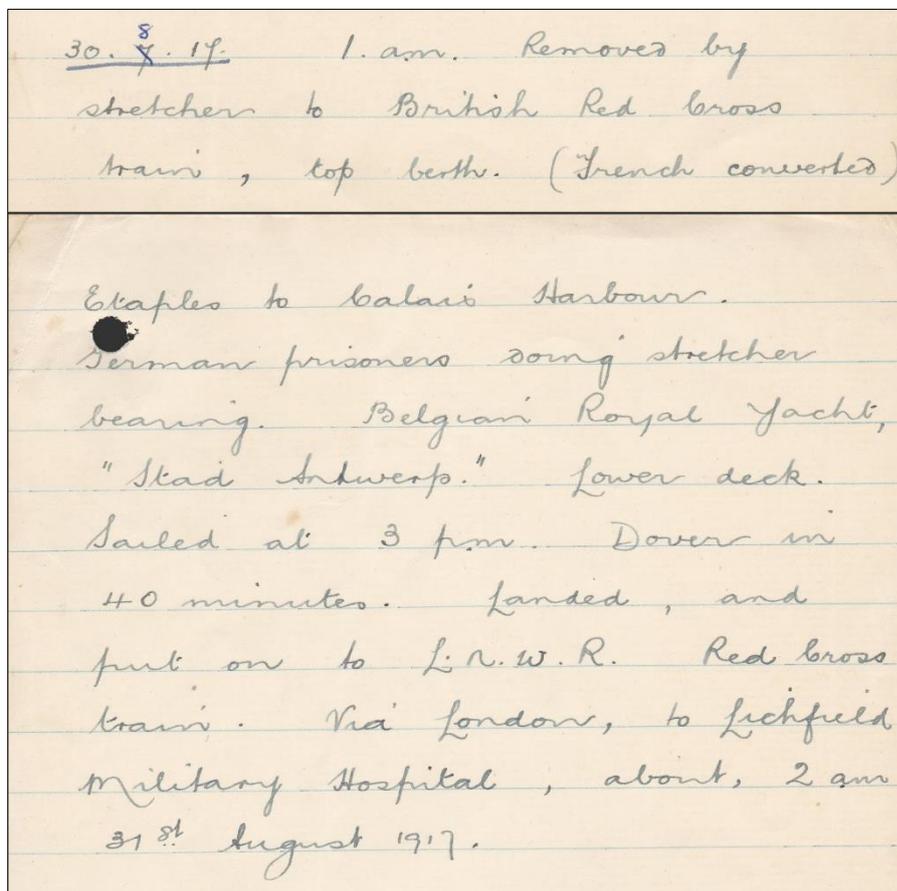
From E. R. Bates
~~24~~ Recd 1/6 Lond. P.F.F.
 Parcel 1/6
 Recd by General Hospital
 Etaples
 E. R. Bates
 1/6 London Regt (T.F.)
 England
 29/8/17
 France

Back to England

30th August 1917



Etaples to Calais and Blighty.
"Stad Antwerp".
Lichfield Military Hospital.



At 1am I was awakened by the light of the hurricane lamp and the sister whispering in my ear that I was being transferred to England. As the two bearers adjusted the blankets on the stretcher I hurriedly appropriated the Field Medical Card which hung at the head of the bed and popped it inside my little red bag of personal belongings. The quest for souvenirs was still

strong. On that night I alone made my final goodbye to K Ward No. 1 Canadian General Hospital, leaving behind in that grim marquee many desperately ill men, most of whom I feared would remain in France forever.

On the 19th April 1918 the newspapers reported as follows – “Two squadrons of Gothas attacked British hospitals at Etaples causing over 300 casualties.” Among the published list of Canadian nursing service killed in the bombing I was shocked and saddened to read of the names of those two nursing sisters from whom I had received so much kindness and attention in K Ward.

For some reason which I could never understand the only article of uniform and other clothing which the RAMC considered should remain in my possession was that terrible pair of boots, size 8 and size 9 respectively. To my disgust they were placed on the stretcher close to my feet. The night was dark and the arc lamps strung high above the compound gave only a glimmer of light. The distance to the Red Cross train was considerable and the RAMC men congratulated each other on the fact that the burden was lightweight. Determined those boots should never reach England I took advantage of the good humour of my bearers and gently edged number one boot off the stretcher. It fell with a plop on the concrete. “Did you drop something chum?” I answered in the negative. Acting on the assumption that the greater the distance between the two boots the less likely my bearers would be inclined to make the journey back to recover number one, I waited until we were nearer our destination to dispose of number two in the same way. It hit the ground with a crash but my bearers made no comment.

Once again I was in the top berth of a French Ambulance train but I remember nothing of the journey to Calais harbour.

It was now broad daylight and the scene was one of immense activity of German prisoners, with their soft round hats and large coloured patches on the back of their jackets, who were stretcher bearing from the train to a magnificent white steam yacht moored at the quayside. From the top deck of the Belgian Royal Yacht “Stad Antwerp” a very wide staircase extended down to the bowels of the ship. The stairs were completely boarded over and the stretchers released by one orderly to career speedily down the slope to be caught by two seamen at the foot. Across a large landing and again to career down a second wide chute, then I was comfortably placed on one of the benches which lined the side of the ship. The time was 3pm and we were quickly away. Through a convenient porthole the water

rushed past almost at eye level. Positioned as we were in the bowels of that beautiful ship my normal aptitude for seasickness was non-existent.



HS Stad Antwerpen

Crossing the Channel in broad daylight was a hazardous undertaking for British ships and through my porthole I was comforted by the sight of a destroyer which overtook and passed us with cheeky abandon. A second followed and a third and by the time the fifth destroyer disappeared from view I realised my stupidity. What I supposed was a complete flotilla escort was in fact no more than one or two or at most three ships of the Dover patrol literally making rings around us.

In forty minutes we were in Dover harbour and comfortably ensconced in a Red Cross train bearing the old familiar chocolate and cream colours of the London and North Western Railway. After a hot bowl of soup, a blessed sleep – until awakened by the jolting and jarring of the wheels slowly negotiating the points of what must have been a junction. It was not pitch dark and as we slowly passed through a blacked out station I could just discern the nameplate “South Kensington” picked out in dim blue lights. I speculated as to which London hospital would have the pleasure of my company and happily resumed my slumbers.

I woke suddenly to the sound of a raucous voice shouting “Lichfield”. Lichfield¹ it was and miles from London to which I belonged.

¹ Google Maps entry for Lichfield - <https://goo.gl/maps/FBLZE12qkGL2>

31st August 1917

2am in the morning and in spite of the lateness of the hour a sizeable crowd of onlookers stood silently, peering closely as every stretcher was carried to the string of waiting ambulances. No doubt they were hoping with mixed feelings to recognise some face dear to their hearts.

At the army hospital inside the confines of Whittington Barracks¹ the members of Queen Alexandra's Nursing Service forgot for one brief moment the dignity of their commissioned rank and each one dashed from bed to bed, as did the civilians at the station, searching for a familiar face. It so happened that out of the large intake on that night I was the only Londoner and it was apparent that the majority of the nursing staff were Londoners. All I wanted to do was sleep but that was denied me until I had replied to all their questions which covered the whole field of the London Territorial Battalions which comprised the 56th and 47th Divisions and the individual members thereof from Colonels to humble privates. I could not help and as they drifted away I had my face washed and "London" went to sleep. My status had improved; I was no longer 'number 27', a mere cipher.

When morning came the nursing sisters at Whittington had regained the dignity of their calling and patients had to conform to strict discipline even though they were bedridden. After all it was a pukka military hospital. The weeks at Whittington were grim. I missed the wonderful food of "No 1 Canadian" but that was understandable. The unearthly silence of the ward was almost unendurable. We had no visitors except two ancient crones who appeared each Sunday morning and presented every patient with one small, wrinkled apple and a religious tract. Even the Sergeants' voices and the rattle of arms on the barrack square would have been a source of perverse enjoyment but no sound penetrated the ancient walls of the hospital. We had one moment of light relief each morning when the baker's cart drew up outside the main door and not even matron could still the hearty cheers with which his arrival was greeted.

The elderly matron, a kindly soul no doubt, visited each patient every day with a few words yet oddly enough she was disliked by every man for a particular reason. During her daily round she would plonk down on the patient's bed her revolting pet, a snuffling, beady-eyed King Charles spaniel. This seemed extraordinary behaviour for the matron of a large hospital but we endured and suffered in silence until she departed from the ward. On one occasion only did I see the matron show her claws and I was the cause

¹ Google Maps entry for Whittington Barracks - <https://goo.gl/maps/ijoZfw29jjT2>

of her displeasure. I was still a 'bedcase' and she plumped her wretched animal on the counterpane saying "Good morning London, still in bed?". She passed on to the next patient. Sensitive to any suggestion that I might be "swinging the lead", which I am sure was not implied, I was up and standing by my bed rather improperly dressed when she arrived the following morning. She dealt with me thoroughly. Her verbal onslaught was superb. No sergeant major could have improved on her masterly performance.

31st August 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad

to 2 Ward,
Military Hospital
Lichfield
Staffs.

31/8/17.

Dear Mum & Dad,

I'm glad to say
I'm once more back in old
Blighty, going on fine &
having the best of attention,
 grub &c. We passed through
London late last night but
I was unlucky not to be
dropped there; still I'm
in a fine healthy spot —
a shade healthier than
France. I suppose it is
too far for you to visit?
In any case I shall see

you pretty soon what with
leaves.

I got my wounds
at Ypres - I expect you've
read about conditions there -
I was truly thankful to
get a Blighty & come out
of it.

Afraid I can't write
any more, my hand is
too groggy.

Keeping all our best,

Tender love

Ernie

31st August 1917 - Postcard to sister Daisy



4th September 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad

Ward No 2
Military Hosps
Lichfield
Staffs

Sept 4

Dear Mum + Dad,

I was very
glad to get your letter of
the 11th. I am still going
on fine, practically no
pain + I expect I shall
be up very soon. This
means I shall probably
shift to another place,
maybe a convalescent
home + I shall do
my best to get transferred

nearer home. Really I
don't think it worth your
coming right up here. I'm
very anxious to see you
all, but besides being
a long + expensive
journey, there is a walk
of $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 miles at
this end. We are
absolutely away from
everything + everybody
+ up to the present

have not had a
visitor. Still I don't mind
the quietness itself as
we get splendid attention
+ food. However I'm
~~am~~ looking forward
to my ten days leave
at home very much.
I'm afraid my wounds
won't get me out of the

Army, but I might be
able to wrangle some
"light duty" back at
office for a few months.
I'll do my best.

Should you think
of visiting after all, I
think visitors are all-
owed anywhere in the
afternoons. Let me know

I might be transferred
any day. Will you
give my love to all at
home by Whiplash & ask
them to excuse my not
writing just yet.

Hoping all are
well,

Tenderest love

Gene

13th September 1917 - Letter home to Mum

No. 2. Ward.
Military Hosp.
Lichfield
13/9/17

Dear Mum

many thanks for letter of the 10th. You see I am in the same place still, waiting for the next party to leave. When I wrote I was thinking of my Army razor which is I think, knocking around at home, but perhaps, if it is no trouble, Dad could get me a decent one that can be used. I can use an ordinary one quite well, & should prefer it, (one with a small blade if possible.) Of course, when I got hit I dumped every blessed thing I had, except of course the stuff I had in my pockets. Yes I should like some of my cash sent on. £1 would last

me a long time - we don't get
paid in Hospital. By the way
I collected quite a few small,
decent souvenirs out there in
the way of German buttons
&c. & had the lot. I thought
they would be a good addition
to Dad's case of treasures.

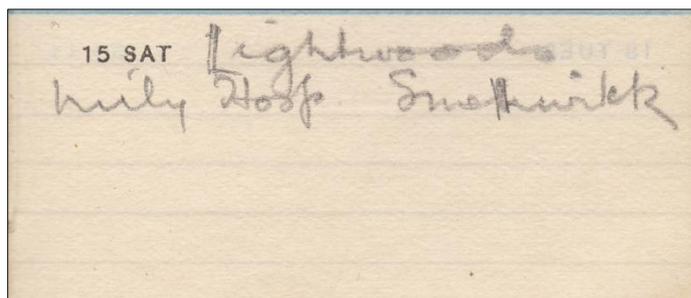
Am feeling quite
fit in myself now. I spent
a fine day yesterday. We
had a tea party some five
miles away outside T. It

was given by some Sunday School.
It was my first experience
of the outside world & civilisation
once again, & I thoroughly
enjoyed myself.

Dearest love to all,
not forgetting the "nippers",

Ernie

15th September 1917



Lightwoods Park Military Hospital, Smethwick¹

¹ Google Maps entry for Lightwoods Park and House - <https://goo.gl/maps/ruTWZ8vTNGFNixfb7>

16th September 1917 - Letter from Bradley

Sunday 16/9/17

Dear Bates

I was jolly glad to get your letter of the 5th inst which arrived whilst we were in the line & to hear that the time you are having is describable as jame. You have evidently turned optimist with a vengeance because your little lot was nothing to grin about.

I don't know how many of the fellows you have news of but perhaps you have heard that Foster was badly wounded when we were coming out. I understand that the vein is almost severed & that he was wounded in several other places as well. He is reported to be delirious. Scamell was wounded in the head when sitting in the trench next to me & has since died. Schneider has been wounded as well as the pl. Taylor & Johnson whilst Killick is missing. If there is anyone else of whom you would like to know just enquire & I will do my best to satisfy your curiosity.

Willis has returned to the Batta & in view of the reports he has received of your conduct after being wounded he is prepared to withdraw all he wrote about your pessimism.

We have gone south to a much quieter part of the line but the number of fatigues prevents us from obtaining much sleep. I don't suppose I averaged more than five hours sleep out of twenty-four, in fact I doubt whether I averaged five. We are just at present "resting" which means that we are engaged on fatigues every other day or night. I have had one night's sleep since the night of the 4-5th. The other nights I have been on sentry (awake all night) or fatigues.

Under the circumstances I haven't much time for letter writing so you will excuse me if I shut up for the present won't you?

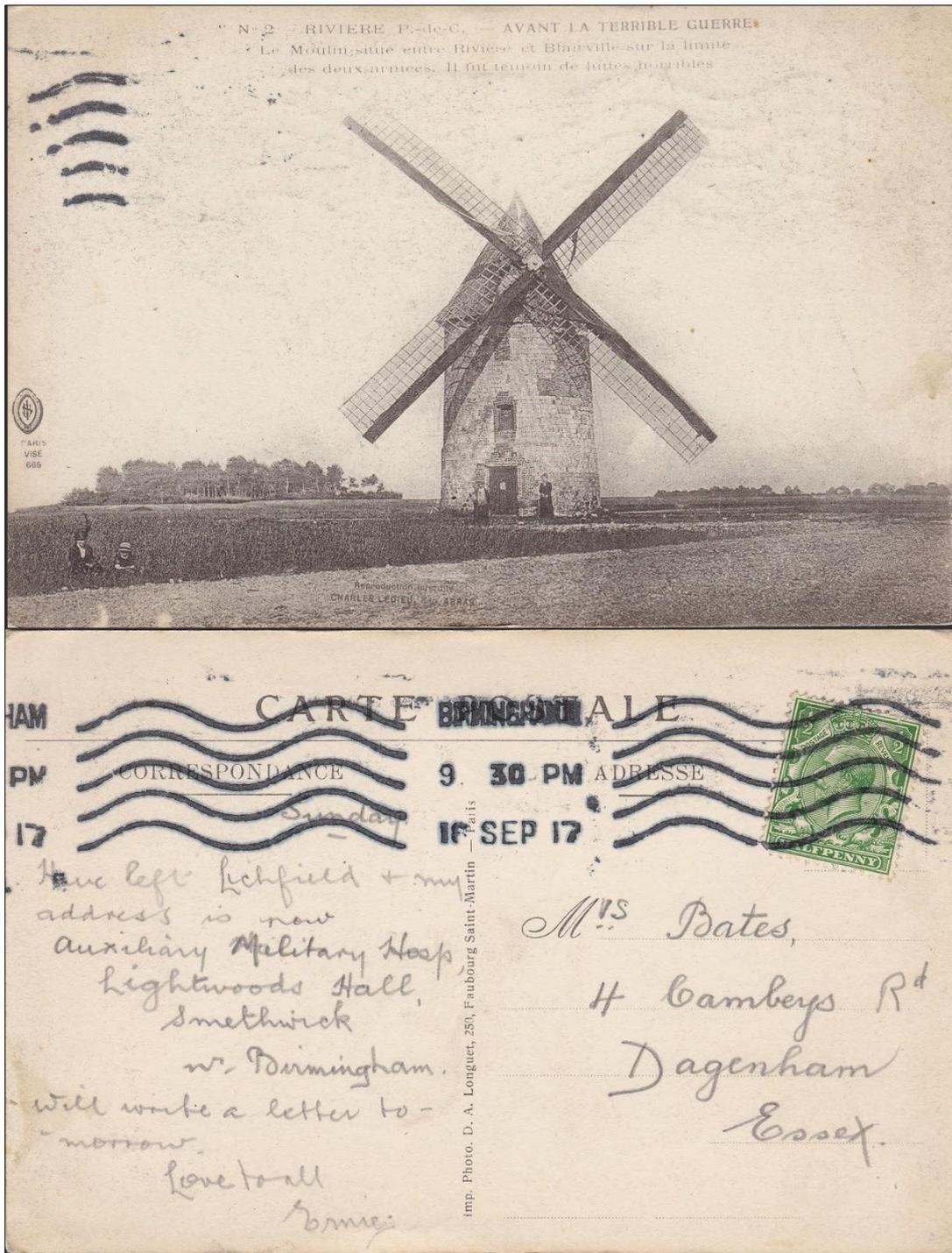
S. Bradley

Dear Bates

Hope you are getting on well, take your time in well. Sorry to hear you caught such a rotten packet.

A. G. Willis

18th September 1917 - Postcard home to Mum



23rd September 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad

Auxiliary Military Hosp.
Lightwoods Hall,
Smethwick.

23/9/17.

Dear Mum + Dad,

Thanks very much for the parcel, + letter dated 18th. The razor will do fine, it is just what I wanted, nice + light.

It was good of the lady to send those apples - Smethwick people are very decent + sympathetic + one doesn't need to spend much money. Have not yet had to spend a penny on fags - I'm making the most of my time here + I wish John could join me.

Pictures come quite fresh to me now after 4 months rest from them + I now frequent the 1/- seats, gratis. We must ~~visit~~ visit a few theatres. etc. when I get my leave.

Have just heard that not only were the QWR's cut up on the 16 Aug but the whole Division caught it

badly + had to retire. Have
you read the doings in
Inverness bopse on the main
Ypres Road? That is the wood
where 2 of us an an
officer got lost for about 3
hours + where I caught my
packet. It is a hellish
spot + now that it has
been taken, I think we can
expect a good advance. I
only wish they would offer
Germany terms - I reckon
she would accept.

Have been all over
Birmingham this week - its a
fine place + reminds me of
London very much. I shall
try + have my phiz took
soon.

Dearest love to all

Ernie

2nd October 1917 - Letter home to Mum

Tuesday. Auxiliary Military Hosp.
Lightwoods Hall,
Smethwick.

Dear Mum,

Just a few lines to thank you for parcel, cash, & the etceteras, which arrived safely. I don't think I shall need to worry you any more in this respect. Poor old London must be in a state over the raids, with everybody clearing off. It is no use losing your head & getting funky over them, but I think yours is a wise decision to clear if they come again, as they are almost sure to now that winter is nearly here. Dagenham must be very dull for you now, & I think you would be far better off in Surrey

in more ways than one.
Redhill is not a bad place
but I believe there are plenty
better. As regards liveliness
it compares very badly with
East Ham, although rents
are pretty cheap. I suppose
that is an important con-
sideration these days.

Glad to hear Daisy is
away. She will be quite
safe at Guildford, & the
rest will do her good.

"Louise" still writes me
cheery letters full of non-
sense. The library in
the War office had some
shrapnel through it during
the last raid, with the
result that there is now

a considerable saving in
overtime! Poor old John
must be fed up after 18 mos-
time does fly - but I'm glad
he's not in Belgium or Is.
It's absolutely hell out there
now, & it's only a matter
of time before something
happens - I was lucky. I've
heard from Bradley. Our
mutual pal, Foster, the
tax clerk has been very
badly hit. I think Percy
must know him. I never
ran across Henderson al-
though I often saw the
Scottish. I expect he has
been in the dumps, since
the whole division were in
it.

Love to all,

Yr affec. son,

Ernie

17th October 1917 - Postcard home to Mum



31st October 1917 - Letter home to Mum and Dad



From Rfn. S. a. Bates No. 554920
1st Queens Westminsters Regt. - Ward

LIGHTWOODS' HALL AUXILIARY HOSPITAL,
SMETHWICK,
BIRMINGHAM,

31 October 1917

Dear Mum & Dad

Many thanks for letter of the 29th — I am still hanging on here & I don't expect to I shall leave this week now. I dropped Percy a card to say I was not going but apparently it didn't reach him in time. If necessary I will send him a wire when I am actually on my way.

I never expected to see the contents of my pack again. We left them all at Dickbusch before going into the line. Did the St Q actually send the parcel, or was it my pal Bradley do you think? I'm very pleased to get the stuff.

Am glad you are going to shift from Dagenham, better still if you can get away before Xmas. Winter in that place must be fearfully dull. Don't you think it possible to get down Torquay way, out of the air-raids. From what Percy says it seems an ideal place, especially

in war time, & you are sure of
plenty of life here. If I do have
the luck to get a C.3. job at HQ
or at the office, I could easily get diggings
in London. If only Ralph could get
transferred down that way as well,
you would all be together & safe from
all Fritz's mischief. I do wish
the blinking war would end - Italy
seems to be another case of Russia
Have no more news so will
close with fondest love to all

S. J.

The Road to Recovery

16th November 1917

Following the weekly visit of the MO, I was declared ready for a discharge from hospital with a medical grading of BIII. I said goodbye to hospitable Lightwoods Hall, Smethwick. It was certainly time I was on the move. Three months enforced inactivity had increased my weight by three stone and a little exercise was essential. A quick return visit to Lichfield Barracks where the hospital grey was exchanged for regulation khaki and I was on my way home to that little village in Essex for ten days leave.



During recovery in England (top row, third from right)



During recovery in England (top row, centre)

26th November 1917

The Third Battalion was now located in East Putney mostly billeted in empty houses. After a brief visit to the MO I was regraded A1 and posted to C Company. Back to the beginning with the rookies! My immediate reaction was to look around for any familiar faces back from the swamps of Ypres. There were none.

With my return to the Third Battalion commenced a period of misery and deep depression. Torn between conflicting emotions I found myself completely alone in spirit with nothing in common with the younger members of C Company and, perhaps to my shame, I wished it that way. On their part they looked upon the overseas man as a being apart, a stranger in their midst, someone to be regarded with awe. I knew because I too had experienced the same inferiority complex not many months earlier when in the presence of those entitled to wear the soft hats and the red QWR on their shoulders. Even my close companions of the days at Redhill, not yet of an age for active drafting, seemed different and in spite of the generous welcome back from E J Smith and many others the carefree and irresponsible associations of the past were elusive. It was I not they who had changed. With the best will in the world I found myself unable to join in the light-hearted quips and banter which took place in the YMCA and cafes of Putney High Street. Ever conscious of the hell on earth that was to be their portion before many weeks had passed I had no desire to be the spectre at the feast and went to the length of inventing excuses to avoid the evening quest for food. During the lonely hours my thoughts went out continuously to those others across the water, ever wondering how each in turn was faring. As my former chief assessed my character I was not the 'belligerent type' and yet, at times, I felt that only the mind and blood of another Ypres could bring back the close human relationships which, in November 1917, I so greatly missed.

It was in this spell that 'EJ' (Smith) sought me out one evening with an invitation to supper at his home a short distance from Putney. We arrived at a small, comfortable villa and were greeted excitedly by two elderly ladies, his mother and her sister. I got the impression that EJ had no other relatives. He was the apple of their eye, their sole remaining interest in life. They entertained me in a gracious and generous manner but in spite of their kindly reception, perhaps even because of it, I regretted my intrusion into the family scene. EJ was about 19, well over six feet in height, thin and sallow complexioned with large brown eyes. He once told me that shortly before joining up he had achieved his first success in commercial art with a poster already to be seen on the hoardings. As we said goodbye to the old

ladies a cold chill run up my spine – premonition perhaps – or cold logic? One day in the not too distant future a German sniper was to fire the bullet that was to find its target between those two large brown eyes.

During December the Third Battalion moved to huts erected on Wimbledon Common. The quarters were comfortable but the night hops in Richmond Park were exciting. As well as those official manoeuvres frequent air raid warnings roused us in the dead of night to scatter to distant parts of the common.

On the parade ground I knew the routine but after three months of complete idleness and overeating I was far from being the smartest soldier on parade. During my absence the Boer War Martini rifle had been replaced by the Canadian Ross rifle. This weapon was originally intended for general issue to the British Army but the war came too quickly and the smaller calibre Ross was not yet produced in sufficient quantity and so was used solely for arms drill. Reputedly the Canadian weapon was more accurate than the old Lee Enfield but for handling on the square it was cumbersome. ‘Trailing arms’ which involved throwing the rifle forward and catching it at the point of balance was my downfall. With the whole company on parade I misjudged the throw and the extra high backsight on the new rifle caught my hand at the spot where Jerry had already operated! I felt like the poor subject of the excellent cartoon by H M Bateman – “The Guardsman who dropped his rifle on parade”. My weapon sailed through the air and landed at the sergeant’s feet. They were reasonably understanding in the guardroom but suggested that a medical report was advisable. The regimental MO barely waited for an explanation of my trouble but said with a grin “I did not expect you could complete with such a manoeuvre”. I returned to quarters to await further orders.



The Guardsman Who Dropped It, Tatler 1st December 1922 © H M Bateman Designs
The company was still on parade but in the hut one lone figure was lounging on his bed. During my brief career coincidence was always

around the corner. Those distant yet personal connections with Forster and Bradley were happy ones but the situation which now confronted me was disturbing. The lounge on the bed sat up, glad to find he had company. "Hello chum, what are you here for?" I explained briefly what had happened and held up my three fingers. In turn he held up his right hand minus the little finger! I shall never forget his exact words, "Blimey chum, what yer fink we'll get for it?". I was too shocked and disgusted to reply and went outside for fresh air, conscious that for the rest of my life strangers would suspiciously eye the missing member on my right hand and naturally, perhaps, think in terms of SIW (*self-inflicted wound*). My expectations were very soon to be confirmed. Unfortunately SIWs were all too common in 1917 and I came across several in the convalescent hospital. Toes appeared to be a favourite target and strangely enough the perpetrators boasted of their cleverness.

"In the British army during World War I, the maximum penalty for a self-inflicted wound ("Wilfully maiming himself with intent to render himself unfit for service" as it was described) under Section 18 of the Army Act 1881 was imprisonment, rather than capital punishment. In the British Army, some 3,894 men were found guilty, and were sent to prison for lengthy periods."

From Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-inflicted_wound

What happened eventually to the lad in the hut on Wimbledon Common I know not but I never saw him in custody, as I might very well have expected, since on the following day I was appointed camp policeman. My orders were to parade around the whole camp in light fatigues armed with a long cane during the hours from 'Reveille' to 'Lights Out' with no need to report to higher authority. I interpreted this as an instruction to "get lost". I soon wearied of the constant perambulation of the camp with no tangible result to the responsibility thrust upon me and gladly accepted the freedom of the evenings to while away a few hours drinking tea in the YMCA.

15th December 1917

I attended a medical board somewhere in the Sloane Square district.

Seated at a large table with his back towards me was an elderly surgeon perusing my medical dossier. Meantime his two very young assistants spotted my maimed hand and I noted a glint of interest in their faces. The questions came thick and fast. "Where was I when 'it' happened?" "What caused it?" "How far away did the shell burst?" "At what angle?" "Did anyone else see it?" They plugged away unceasingly with their questions. The less I said the more convinced they were that their victim himself pulled the trigger.

At last the old man at the desk turned round and spoke to the two young enthusiasts. "Never mind that now you two, let's have a look at the stomach wound." I was not sure who most enjoyed the discomfiture of my two red-faced inquisitors, the man at the desk or myself.

It was near midnight when I arrived back into camp by a devious route and crawled into bed.

Addendum

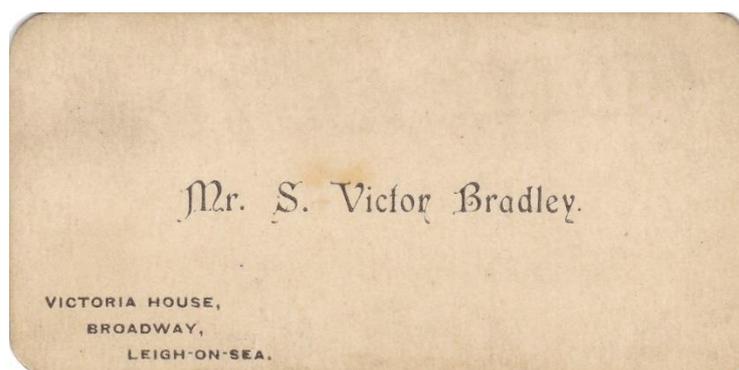
Bradley

Added by Tim Bates (2017)

Stanley Victor Bradley was my dad's closest friend and companion during their time serving with the Queen's Westminster Rifles in 1917.

He was always "Bradley" to my dad.

It was common with those serving together in the army at that time to call each other by their last names. As shown in Bradley's letter sent to my grandfather on 21st August 1917 letting him know that my dad had been wounded, Bradley wasn't especially aware of my dad's first names or how he was known by his family. In the letter Bradley assumed that my dad was known by his second name, possibly since it appears that he, Bradley, was also known by his second name (Victor). He guessed at "Arthur", whereas my dad's second name was actually "Alfred".



From my dad's journal ...

"In later years of peace I have sometimes pondered why in such close relationships the use of Christian names was rejected. The answer I believe lay in some inner consciousness which refused to admit that friendships born and nurtured on the battlefield could be anything but transient and that by some curious quirk of the mind we were facing up to the inevitable."

My dad met Bradley on 1st May 1917, a few weeks after they had landed in France, at the holding camp at Harfeur just outside Le Havre ...

"It was here that I first met Stanley Victor Bradley. On my way back to the billet a short tubby figure joined me. The beaming smile was Bradley's but the curious and shapeless jacket of greenish hue with no pleats to its bulging breast pockets could only be blamed on the quartermaster's stores. Bradley, I learnt in good time, was

not one to be worried by the niceties of dress and I soon became aware that his main preoccupation was the enjoyment of life to the full under all conditions with goodwill to all men.

Time was short in 1917 and we soon became acquainted with each other's relatively brief life histories. At 25 he was five years my senior, a civil servant in the War Trades Department of the Board of Trade. He had been at school with my cousin who had died at Loos, had a passion for tennis and was a fervent Wesleyan. He was also a teetotaller and a non-smoker. I never heard him utter the mildest of swear words except on one never to be forgotten occasion. From that day forward Bradley, Forster and I were inseparables except on those occasions when the duties of the day broke up the trio."

The last recorded contact my father had from Bradley was a letter written on Sunday 4th November 1917.

In the letter Bradley says ...

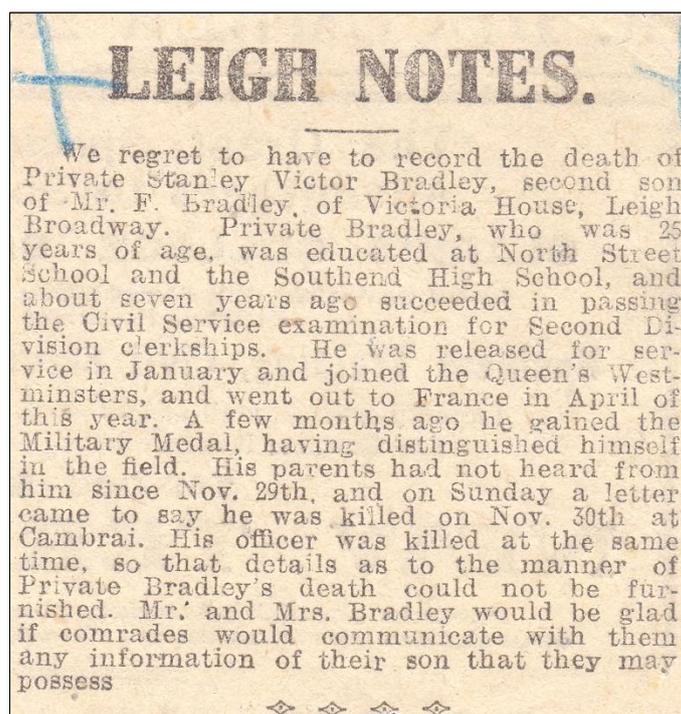
"I have once or twice been in situations sufficient to have induced comrade Charon to have rubbed his hands together in anticipation but I have cheated him each time so far and propose to paddle my own canoe if possible."

In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of Hades who carries souls of the newly deceased across the rivers Styx and Acheron that divided the world of the living from the world of the dead. Bradley ends his letter with - *"au revoir and best of luck"*.

Less than four weeks later Stanley Victor Bradley was killed at the Battle of Cambrai on 30th November 1917.

"November 30th was destined to be a glorious day in the history of the regiment. The losses of the Queen's Westminsters, though very light in comparison with those inflicted on the enemy, were heavy, amounting to 126 all told."

From "The War History of the 1st Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1918"
[ISBN 1-84342-610-2]



Local newspaper article announcing Bradley's death

Rifleman
BRADLEY, STANLEY VICTOR

Service Number 55422

Died 30/11/1917

Aged 25

16th Bn.
 London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles)

M M

Son of Frederick and Mrs. Bradley, of Stanley House, 5, Leighton Avenue, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

INSCRIPTION

"WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN"

In Memory of
 Rifleman
Stanley Victor Bradley
 M M

55422, 16th Bn., London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles) who died on 30 November 1917 Age 25

Son of Frederick and Mrs. Bradley, of Stanley House, 5, Leighton Avenue, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

Remembered with Honour
 Moeuvres Communal Cemetery Extension




Commemorated in perpetuity by
 the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Commonwealth War Graves Record¹

¹ Google Maps entry for Moeuvres Communal Cemetery Extension is - <https://goo.gl/maps/1aADmApRT4T2>

19.8.20. Army Form W. 3372.

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.
GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

NO. 1 District B/C 294. REPORT No. 2 SCHEDULE No. 12c.

Commune: -Moeuvres.

PLACE OF BURIAL MOEUVRES COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION. DAD. CR & E
Certified complete and correct. No. 1 Area.

Map Reference 57c.E.14.c.60.65.

No. _____
DATE Major.

The following are buried here:—

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
<u>PLOT 3 ROW "A" (Contd)</u>						
2/4 L.N.Lancs	26981	BATES	Cpl. G.	13.9.18	E	18. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER			E	19. ✓
R.I.Rifles	-do-	-do-	-do-		E	20. ✓
3 Batt Gren Gds	28041	COLLINS	Pte R.	7.9.18	GRU	21. ✓
2 Batt Gren Gds	19494	SMITH	L/Cpl. F.W.	11.9.18	"	22. ✓
3 Batt Gren Gds	29191	MASKELL	L/Cpl. S.	7.9.18	"	23. ✓
3 Batt Gren Gds	29676	BRADBURY	Pte N.	16. -do-	"	24. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER			E	25. ✓
		-do-	-do-		E	26. ✓
		-do-	-do-		E	27. ✓
		-do-	-do-		E	28. ✓
16/R.S.R. London Regt	554122	BRADLEY	Pte. S.V.	23.11.17	E	29. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER			E	30. ✓
<u>ROW "B"</u>						
16/R.S.R. London Regt	554063	GOODWIN	Pte W.T.	25.11.17	E	1. ✓
16/London	553742	HUMPHREY	" M.J.	30-11-17	E	2. ✓
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER			E	3. ✓

(6 31 5) W3160-P2723 100,000 9/19 HWV(P1021) Forms W3372/3

SLIP GREEN A.C. 18.2.21.

Record No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Authorized	Amount Authorized	No. of List in which advertised	
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	Account and Date	£					s.
593256	54877	Bradley, Stanley Hubert (M.M.)	16/R.S.R. London Regt Pte. 554122	30-11-17 London France	5	8	8	5	8	8	10-1-18	Mr. Hedderley	5	8	8
					3							Lacks 17/1/18 Bradwick	3		

A.T. N. 5070 SENT 11 7 19

WA GRATUITY Effects 10/20/18 Transf. - Cash Regd. Payee - E.L. 122 Serial No. 2728

Record from Army Register of Soldiers' Effects

My dad's journal for Sunday 22nd July 1917 recounts a conversation he had with Bradley and their companion Forster, where my dad pondered on their upcoming fate ...

"On the assumption that one's chances of getting through unscathed were slight I suggested a preference for the little finger of the right hand.

Bradley's reaction was immediate. His face registered anger and bitterness such as I would never have dreamed possible. He spoke at last and his words shocked me to the core. "I want no 'blighty' [a wound sufficiently serious to merit being shipped home]. I won't have those bloody bastards over there mutilate the body God gave into my keeping. If they do get me I want complete oblivion." Forster and I accepted this outburst in silence. There was nothing more to be said. Anyway, I regretted opening my big mouth in the first place. The incident in itself was not one ever likely to be forgotten but the aftermath, some few months later, not only registered the memory of that day for all time but created in me a sense of wonderment which in my lifetime on this earth will never be resolved."

... and as my dad lay badly wounded in the trenches on 14th August 1917 ...

"It was here that Bradley, cheerful as ever, sought me out and kept me company as long as he dared. I was never to see his beaming face again."

Postscript

Added by Tim Bates (2017)

My father, Ernest Alfred Bates ('Ernie'), was discharged from the army on 5th March 1918 and thereafter returned to the Home Civil Service in the War Office, being sent to Belgium on the Disposals Board as a Second Lieutenant Accounts Officer.

182

Army Form B. 2079.

WARNING.—If you lose this Certificate a duplicate cannot be issued.

It is entitled to war and sold price award deduction

Certificate of discharge of No. 554430 (Rank) Rgt
 (Name) Ernest Alfred Bates
 (Regiment) 16th London Regt.
 who was enlisted at East Ham
 on the 11. 12. 1915.

He is discharged in consequence of _____
Para. 892 (XVI) King's Regt
No longer physically fit for War Service.

after serving 1 years 33 days with the Colours, and
1 years 62 days in the Army Reserve.

(Place) London Signature of Commanding Officer } Webster
 (Date) 5. 3. 18 CAPT. FOR

VC INFANTRY RECORD OFFICE

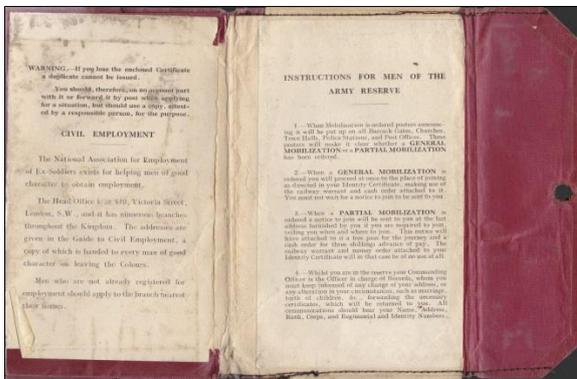
*Description of the above-named man on _____
 when he left the Colours. 5. 3. 18 LONDON

Age <u>20 years 3 months</u>	Marks or Scars, whether on face or other parts of body. <u>Small spots</u> <u>R hind missing</u>
Height <u>5ft 8ins</u>	
Complexion <u>Pale</u>	
Eyes <u>Brown</u>	
Hair <u>Grey</u>	

*Should agree with the description on Character Certificate, Army Form B. 2007

(A8856) Wt. W9155/M2138. 200,000. 9/17. D. D. & L. Sch. 44. Forms/B2079/22.

N.B.—Any person finding this Certificate is requested to forward it, in an unstamped envelope, to the Secretary, War Office, London, S.W. 1.



Certificate of Discharge from the Army (5th March 1918)

PARTICULARS OF SERVICE.

D. D. & L., London, E.C. Army Form B. 2067.
A 3068 Wt. W 8120/2705 250,000 8/15 Sch. 41. Form B. 2067/1.

Date of Enlistment 11.12.15 Serial No. 122

Proceeded on Furlough pending transfer to the Army Reserve, or Discharge on _____

Passed medically fit for the Army Reserve on _____

Due for Transfer to the Army Reserve on _____

Due for final Discharge on 5.3.18

Cause of Transfer or Discharge _____
No longer necessary in War time.
 Para. 333 (VI) King's Reg. 1912

Campaigns, Medals and Decorations

None 11.12.15

" 12.2.17 - 14.4.17

1st Lt 15.4.17 - 30.8.17

None 31.8.17 - 5.3.18

Educational and other Certificates, and dates _____

CHARACTER CERTIFICATE OF No. 554420

Rank Alfa Name Ernest Alfred Barber

16th London Regiment,

Born in the Parish of East Ham

near the Town of London in the

County of Essex on the

date 1894

Trade as stated by him on enlistment Foot Sergeant

* DESCRIPTION ON LEAVING THE COLOURS.

Height 5 ft. 8 in. Identification Marks:—

Complexion Pale Small fingers

Eyes Brown Ahead receding.

Hair Fair

Signature of Soldier

Ernest Barber

* To prevent impersonation.

In the event of any doubt arising as to the bona fides of the bearer, the above description and signature should be carefully compared with present appearance and handwriting.

The Character here given is based on continuous records of the holder's conduct and employment throughout his military career.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that No. 554420. Rank Alfa Name Ernest Alfred Barber

has served with the Colours in the 16th London Regt for 1 ³³/₆₅ years.

Bears a good character, is steady and well conducted.

Has served in France and been wounded.

Signature W. Gibson

Date 5.3.1918 Commanding CAPT. FOR

VC INFANTRY RECORD OFFICE
LONDON

If further particulars as to his character and record of service are required within three years of above date, apply to _____ where he is registered for civil employment, afterwards to the Officer in Charge of Records, _____

* This space is intended to be filled in by any organization which has registered the man's name and is prepared to supply further information.

Character Certificate (5th March 1918)

Army Form W. 3464.

EMPLOYMENT CARD.

SOLDIERS DISCHARGED MEDICALLY UNFIT.

Name and Regtl. Number } *Mr. E. A. Bates 554720*

Name and Address of Local Committee } *Apply at your local Post Office for this information.*

W2225-7843 50,000 6/16 HWV, P33 (2) Forms W3464/1
4397-938 300,000 7/16

Under the Naval and Military War Pensions Act, 1915, a local committee has been established for the area in which a soldier intends to reside. The duty of this committee is to make provision for the care of disabled men after they have left the service, including provision for their health, training, and employment.

This card is issued to each disabled soldier on discharge, to show to which local committee he should apply.

Any change of address should be at once notified to the Local Committee where registered.

Employment Card

1363

**Queen's Westminster
Retired Members' Association.**

Mr. E. A. Bates 554720

a Retired Member of the Queen's Westminster
Volunteers Rifles } having this *29* day of *May* 191*8*
paid the sum of *1/-* is a MEMBER of this
Association for the year ending 31st October, 191*8*

William Sanger Hon. Sec.

N.B.—This Card must be produced whenever required.

Queen's Westminster Rifles Association Membership Card

Reference No. *905H 5110*

Any further correspondence on this subject should be addressed to—
THE CONTROLLER,
and the above Number quoted.

MINISTRY OF PENSIONS,
BURTON COURT,
KING'S ROAD,
LONDON, S. W. 3.

-9 MAR 1920.

SIR,

I am directed by the Minister of Pensions to inform you that your degree of disablement is now too small to entitle you to any further award of pension. You have therefore been awarded a final gratuity of *Twenty Seven* pounds *Ten* shillings and *—* pence, which will be paid to you when the temporary pension you are now drawing expires.

Instructions have been issued to the Superintendent, Pension Issue Office, 38, Baker Street, W. 1, to make payment accordingly.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
William Sanger
Controller,
Soldiers' Awards Branch.

Mr. *E. A. Bates*
Late of *London Regt.*

P. F. 27 B. WT. 6045 2/0 25,000 3/18 DSG(54416) Gp. 158.

Reference No. *905H 5110*

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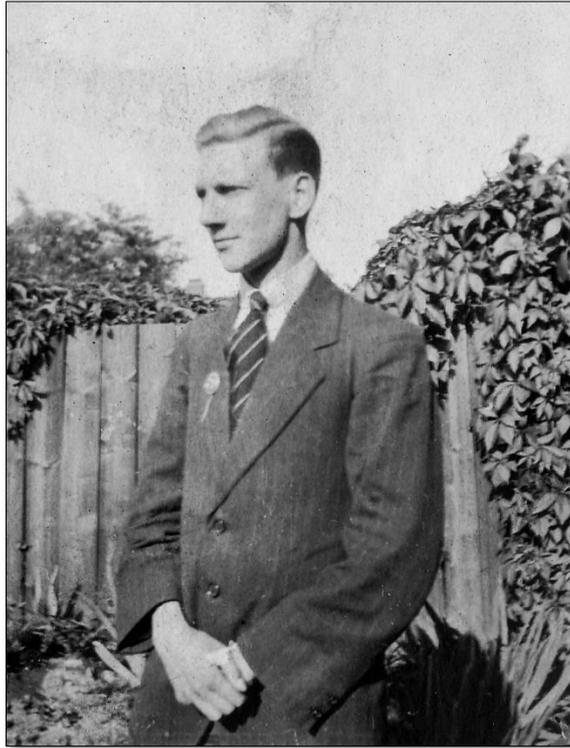
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Late of *London Regt.*

P. F. 27 B. WT. 6045 2/0 25,000 3/18 DSG(54416) Gp. 158.

Renewal (28/01/1919) and revoking (09/03/1920) of disability pension

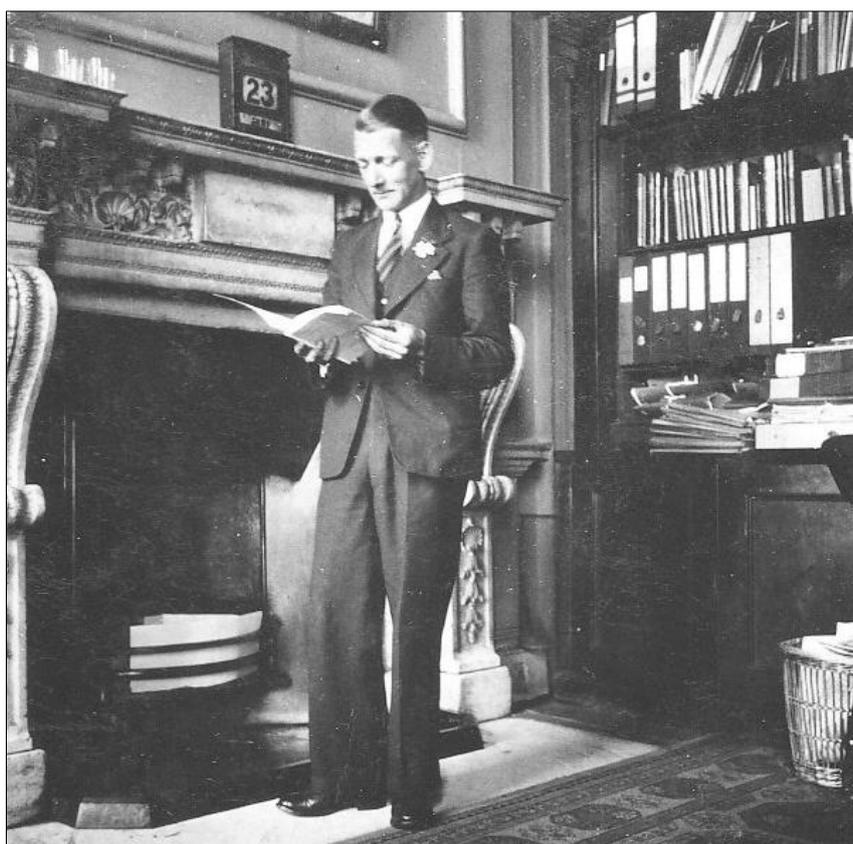


Back in "civvy street" after the war



In the uniform of the Home Guard during WW2

He later transferred to the Treasury¹ where he worked in the Rating of Government Property Department until his retirement.



¹ Wikipedia entry for The Treasury - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HM_Treasury

He was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1950 for his work in the Treasury.

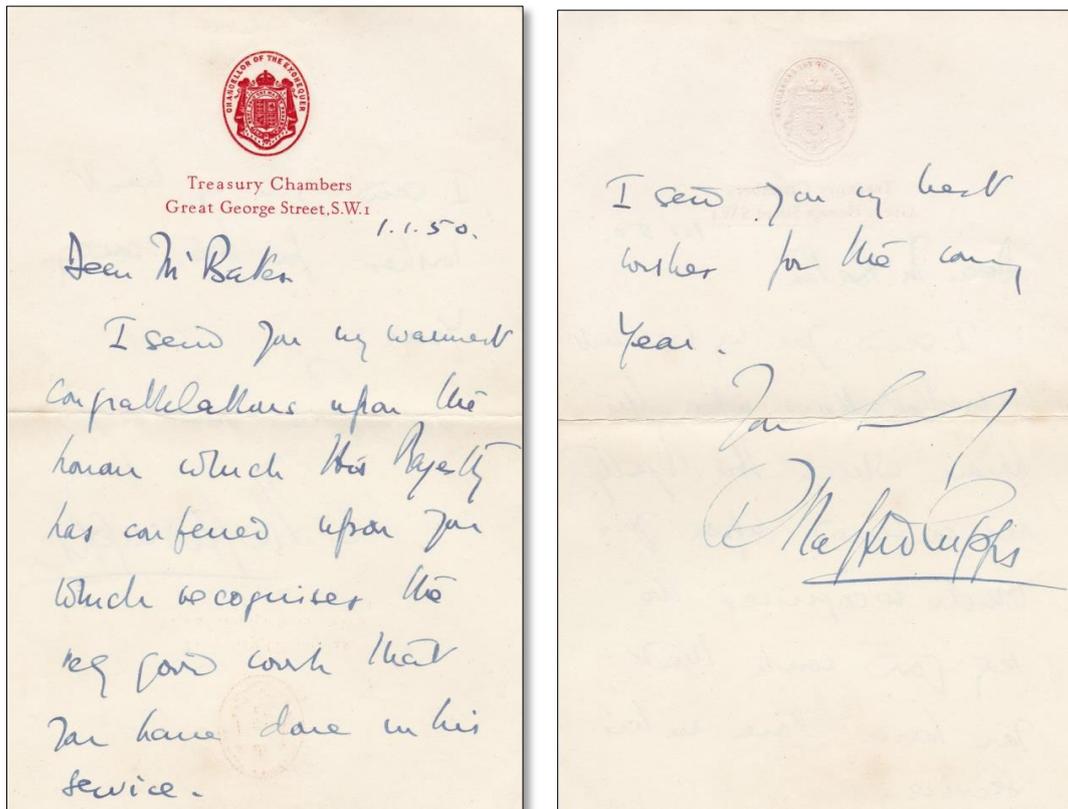
12 SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 2 JANUARY, 1950

<p>Lionel Tertis, Esq., F.R.A.M. For services in Music, particularly in relation to the viola.</p> <p>Lieutenant-Colonel Charles William Thomas, F.D., Chairman, E. J. and J. Pearson, Ltd., Southbridge.</p> <p>Hilbert Charles Messers-Tompson, Esq., Lord Chancellor's Legal Visitor in Lunacy.</p> <p>Herbert Trevor Tacey, Esq., Chief Publicity Officer, Trade Union Congress.</p> <p>Herbert Gordon Turner, Esq., F.I.C.S., Honorary Shipping Adviser to the Ministry of Food.</p> <p>Professor Arthur Mansergh Twissall, D.Sc., F.R.S., Chairman, National Physical Laboratory Enactment Committee.</p> <p>Henry Ernest Weston, Esq., Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Wilfrid Whitley, Esq., For political and public services in Yorkshire.</p> <p>Herbert Oscar Wino, Esq., O.B.E., Director of Accounts and Audit, Ministry of Labour and National Service.</p> <p>Alfred Wilson, Esq., General Secretary, Mercantile Marine Service Association.</p> <p>Captain (S) Dennis Austin Wilson, O.B.E., R.N. (Retired), Employed in a Department of the Foreign Office.</p> <p>John Wilson, Esq., Marine Superintendent, Shaw Savill and Albion Company, Ltd.</p> <p>Edgar Hugh Truman Wiltsiers, Esq., Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Town and Country Planning.</p> <p>Donald Wolcott, Esq., Actor-Manager.</p> <p>Sidney Joseph Wood, Esq., Principal Inspector of Taxes, Board of Inland Revenue.</p>	<p>Edgar Scott Bowen, Esq., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., Chairman, Poole Centre, St. John Ambulance Association.</p> <p>Edward Gregorius Brown, Esq., M.B.E., Senior Control Officer, Control Commission for Germany, British Element.</p> <p>Frank Halford Bryort, Esq., Chief Superintendent of Examinations, Civil Service Commission.</p> <p>Hugh Hill Campbell, Esq., J.P., Chairman, Avonshire County Committee, Air Training Corps.</p> <p>William Gilbert Campbell, Esq., Superintendent, Naval Store Officer, H.M. Dockyard, Devonport.</p> <p>Frederick James Carr, Esq., J.P., Member, Licensing Authority for Public Service Vehicles, Northern Traffic Area.</p> <p>Miss Hilda Chappell, lately Principal, Ministry of Town and Country Planning.</p> <p>Francis John Chappell, Esq., D.S.O., M.B.E., M.I.M.T., General Manager, Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company, Ltd.</p> <p>Frederick James Chittenden, Esq., For services in horticultural education.</p> <p>Alexander Lane Clark, Esq., D.L., Member, County Landowners Committee of Agriculture.</p> <p>Harold George Clarke, Esq., For services to the printing and newspaper industry.</p> <p>Richard Milroy Clarkson, Esq., Assistant Chief Engineer (Aircraft) and Chief of Aerodynamics Department, De Havilland Aircraft Company, Ltd.</p> <p>Ernest Thomas Conybeare, Esq., M.D., F.R.C.P., Medical Officer, Ministry of Health.</p> <p>Charles Frederick Cook, Esq., Director of Sun Printers, Ltd., Watford.</p> <p>Frederick Arthur Copp, Esq., Deputy Regional Controller, Southern Regional Office, Ministry of Labour and National Service.</p> <p>William Courtenay, Esq., M.M., A.R.A.S., Writer on aeronautical subjects.</p> <p>Joseph Christopher Cox, Esq., Secretary, Building Apprenticeship and Training Council.</p> <p>Lieutenant-Colonel Norman George Cox, M.I.M.T., Controller of Transport, Allied Commission for Austria, British Element.</p> <p>Harold Thomas Cranwell, Esq., F.R.I.C., Provincial Advisory Chemist (Sols), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.</p> <p>Isaac William Connerwater, Esq., M.I.M.E., J.P., Area General Manager, North Staffordshire Area, West Midlands Division, National Coal Board.</p> <p>Arthur George Curtis, Esq., Principal, Ministry of Transport.</p> <p>Perival Vaughan Davies, Esq., Assistant Keeper, First Class, Public Record Office.</p> <p>Samuel Dunlop, Esq., Secretary, Belfast Chamber of Trade.</p> <p>William Paisley Easman, Esq., J.P., Councillor, Edinburgh Corporation. For public services in Edinburgh.</p> <p>Edward Ellis, Esq., M.I.Mar.E., Joint Manager, Repair Department, J. I. Throckroft and Company, Ltd., Southampton.</p> <p>George Benjamin Sainsbury Easton, Esq., A.F.R.A.S., Chief Test Pilot, Alcock, Ltd., Chichester.</p>
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For the Ordinary Officers of the Civil Division of the said Most Excellent Order:

<p>James William Acheson, Esq., A.C.I.S., A.C.C.A., Principal Auditor, Excise and Audit Department, Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Henry Richard Amies, Esq., Manager, Sociedad Anonima, Frigorifico Anglo, Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Alexander Forbes Anderson, Esq., Headmaster, County Modern School, Slough.</p> <p>Percy Joseph Bacon, Esq., Chief Examiner, Board of Inland Revenue.</p>	<p>Ernest Alfred Batten, Esq., M.B.E., Inspector of Rates, Rating of Government Property Department.</p> <p>Lieutenant-Colonel John Forbes Batten, M.C., Director, Overseas Service, Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association.</p> <p>Reginald Percy Battye, Esq., Assistant Director, Meteorological Office, Air Ministry.</p> <p>Reginald Fridman Baulkwill, Esq., Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the Public Trustee.</p> <p>Edward Stuart Augustus Baynes, Esq., United Kingdom Trade Commissioner, Dublin.</p> <p>George Beardsworth, Esq., J.P., Chief Organising Officer, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.</p> <p>Ivan Christopher Beardwell, Esq., Member of the Board and lately Chairman, National Egg Distributors Association, Ltd.</p> <p>William Dawson Bratty, Esq., M.I.C.E., lately Assistant Civil Engineer-in-Chief, Admiralty Armaments Branch, Esq., Principal, Ministry of Fuel and Power.</p> <p>George Frederick Brownell, Esq., Chief Engineer Officer, s.s. "Adriatus" (Alfred Holt and Company).</p>
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Record of the award of the Order of the British Empire in 1950



Personal letter of congratulations from Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer¹

¹ Wikipedia entry for Sir Stafford Cripps - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stafford_Cripps

He married Grace Griffiths in June 1926 and they had three children - Norman (born April 1929), Pamela (born July 1931) and David (born April 1933).



Wedding day in June 1926

Grace died in May 1933 when she was just 29 years old.



My father married my mother, Irene Hutton, in October 1936



My dad with his children from his first marriage, David, Pamela and Norman (L-R) and his second wife, Irene



I was born in 1954 when my mother was 44 and my father was 57



On a family holiday in Scotland in 1965

My father passed away in October 1966 aged 69.

