

**The Last Diary of  
Marcus Ebenezer Banfield**

First published by WL Banfield  
October 2015  
[www.banfields.nl](http://www.banfields.nl)

Note by WL Banfield:

This diary has for a long time been kept in a rather uninteresting stiff card file.

It was typewritten by Marc's parents, who evidently copied it from his own written account.

Having visited Marc's grave in Bandaghem on several occasions, and it now being a hundred years or so since these events took place, I thought it might be of interest to publish this diary.

In this booklet, the diary has been kept intact, with Marc's own way of saying things and even preserving the layout chosen by his parents. I have chosen another font, so hopefully it is now more pleasant to the eye...

I have also attempted to provide extra information and have placed this between braces, where applicable acknowledgements are made in footnotes.

A map and a some photos taken by myself in the spring of 2015 are also included.

Marc quotes from the KJV version of the Bible, and hymns are quoted from Gadsby's selection of hymns unless otherwise stated.

The Last

DIARY

of Our Beloved Son

MARCUS EBENEZER BANFIELD

Died, of wounds received in action, on the 26th of April,  
1918, aged 24 years.

## DIARY

(1915)

We left home about 9 a.m. (January 12th), having to get to the Recruiting Office in the Church Road pretty early. Here we were told to wait.

A youth from Steyning, (who regrets very forcibly ever joining), was the first one to arrive, that was to form the party for Bexhill. A little later a disreputable man came in, with a terribly torn coat, whose name we learnt was Swann. We still waited for a third party, but as the minutes went by and he did not turn up we were told to get ready to leave to catch the 11 train. A sergeant turned up, and we were for the first time in our lives escorted through the streets by an officer of the army. For some reason or other I felt a bit ashamed - probably being in the company of the man with the torn coat had something to do with it. We halted at the office of the Southdowns at North Street Quadrant for more recruits, but on finding there were none we marched on to

the station. Arriving there, the sergeant got our tickets and delivered them for safe custody, if I remember aright, to the disreputable Swann. He shook our hands, and said some nice things to us, which I am sorry not to remember. He was a decent chap; if they were all like him the Army would not be bad.



The Southdown Battalions were part of the Royal Sussex Regiment and were raised in 1914 by Colonel Claude Lowther, who was owner of Herstmonceaux Castle, Sussex. They were known as the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Battalions or 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> South Down respectively. Marc was in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion. This Battalion was disbanded in August 1918.



The train started with one 1st Battalion man in one corner of the carriage; he looked very fat, and slept most of the time. Just before getting to London Road Station I saw my aunts waving a cloth of some kind out of the window of their house, in the hope of our seeing it. I saw it, but dare not stir from my seat for obvious reasons.

The journey was slow, the train going into Eastbourne and then out again, on to Bexhill. On arriving at Bexhill, we looked out for some man who was to meet us and conduct us to the Orderly Room. One of my first impressions of this man was the overwhelming desire on his

part for an easy time of it. It evidently required a great deal of energy for him to come and meet us. He led us to the Bexa Hotel, which the military people had taken for their Orderly Room, and we then were told to wait in the hall. I was expecting a Major or someone to come, but instead there turned up a corporal, who, (I believe for the first and last time) smilingly told us he was sorry to keep us waiting. He then took our names, ages etc. Then we were told to go to the Police Station to get our billets.

We were still in the company of Swann and the Steyning youth, and together we marched along to the Police Station. Here we were taken, to the Charge Room, where we were confronted by a jovial sergeant and a constable. The sergeant seemed to take particular notice of the unhappy Swann, and asked where he had seen him before. Swann denied all previous acquaintance, however! After a little confabulation with the constable, he said we should be quite all right at the Manor Cottage. Swann and the Steyning youth were given a billet in the Victoria Road. Just as we were going out, the sergeant called me back and said he did not like the look of Swann; I felt, though I did not say so, that the feeling was mutual, but at the same time I did not think him a bad character. Further, the sergeant told us that directly he saw us

he had it in his mind to put us together; he said he never liked to separate brothers. He was an exceedingly decent chap.

We were then escorted to our billets by the constable. As we went along we saw some of the 3rd Southdowns. The first thing we saw at our billet was a woman at the washing tub, which, however, she left to show us our bedrooms. We soon found that we should be fairly comfortable, and much better than we expected. We were too late for dinner, so had to go out and buy some, after which we strolled on to the front. It was not long before I was thoroughly miserable. I looked out over the sea and wished I was wounded and being sent over to England; this I expect was home-sickness. We then went back to the billet to tea. The landlady gave us her best room, and made us very comfortable. She had a family of 2 boys and 2 girls, her husband being the gardener at the Manor House.

The next morning we went on to the front, where the Battalion paraded, and reported ourselves at the Bexe Hotel, and then were told to join No.4 Company. This we found, and together with a group of recruits like ourselves formed up in something like order, but were speedily sent to a little shelter, where our names were taken by a tall Grenadier

Guardsmen, who proved to be our Company Sergeant-Major. He seemed to be a very decent sort of man, but was very blunt. We then formed up and marched to the Hotel Metropole, where the Battalion had its Quartermaster's Stores. Here we had to wait a good while for our kit, and had the first taste of the quality of the men we had to mix with. The language was the most awful we had ever heard, each one seeming to see who could be the worst.

We got on better with our drills than we anticipated. Every afternoon we went for a route march, arriving back about 4 p.m. On Sundays we paraded on the Sea Front for Church Parade. This was held at St. Stephen's. The service was conducted by the Vicar, the hymns being led by our band. The man preached very empty sermons, though the Church was not "High". After service, which lasted about half an hour, we had a short march till dinnertime. On one occasion we were marched round Cooden Camp<sup>1</sup>, which was the first time we had seen it closely. The huts looked very large, and we wondered whenever we should get used to such a place. Up to this time, in fact till we left billets in March, we were hardly on speaking terms (i.e. with the other men). After

---

<sup>1</sup> Near Pevensey Bay

a route march, our band always played us on to the parade ground with our fine march, "Sussex by the Sea".

In early March we left our comfortable billets for Cooden Camp. I do not think I shall easily forget those first few days. It was the first time we had really been thrown in such close contact with those around us. Though there was and is much in them that we would pray to be kept from, yet I will say that they are the most kind-hearted men I have ever met with. This may be because of their number, but I am speaking generally and from what I have experienced of them.



***Sussex by the Sea***

Now is the time for marching,

Now let your hearts be gay,

Hark to the merry bugles

Sounding along our way.

So let your voices ring, my boys,

And take the time from me,

And I'll sing you a song as we march along,

Of Sussex by the Sea!

*For we're the men from Sussex,  
Sussex by the Sea.*

*We plough and sow and reap and mow,*

*And useful men are we;*

*And when you go to Sussex,  
whoever you may be,*

*You may tell them all that we stand or fall*

*For Sussex by the Sea!*

*Oh Sussex, Sussex by the Sea!*

*Good old Sussex by the Sea!*

*You may tell them all we stand or fall,*

*For Sussex by the Sea.*



We had in the section one or two "characters". "Uncle" Reed, a dirty chap in appearance, who would attach

himself to me; though I used to tease him till he was in the most furious rage, the next minute we would be as friendly as ever. Another man Waller used to make us nearly burst with laughing, especially at meals. One remark of his about an aged bloater<sup>2</sup> I shall not easily forget; looking at the offending article, he sternly said "I think I've told you about this before - don't let me see you again". He then resignedly placed it aside. The huts at Cooden were very large, holding a Company each. Down each side were spaces for sleeping accommodation, in the centre the space for meals. They were very comfortable, and in the camp itself we had every convenience. The camp was situated fairly high, looking over the Pevensey marshes to Eastbourne, with the South Downs behind. The nearest village was Little Common, where we could buy anything not obtainable in the canteens. Bexhill was only 2 miles away, and most went over there.

The usual parades were physical drill before breakfast, the ordinary drills morning and afternoon. I forgot to say that before leaving Bexhill Bert<sup>3</sup> and I were picked out for signallers. I do not



*Bert Banfield*

---

<sup>2</sup> Herring

<sup>3</sup> A brother of Marc

know whether this has been for the best. The men or boys are extremely childish and foolish, their language being vile beyond description. Most of them are chums of the sergeant instructor, living in the same place as he at home. I did not know anything of this when joining the class, or most probably it would have prevented me joining. I sometimes think that One above knew about this even from the beginning, and He also knows the end. I would that I knew He might make all things work for my eternal good. He knows the temptation and my weakness. I read hymn 1072; may it be true of me.



**1072** C. Wesley & A. M. Toplady  
*"Lord, help me." Matt. 15. 25*

1 Jesus, Redeemer, Saviour, Lord,  
The weary sinner's Friend;  
Come to my help, pronounce the word,  
Bid my corruptions end.

2 Thou canst o'ercome this heart of mine,  
Thou canst victorious prove;  
For everlasting strength is thine  
And everlasting love.

3 Bound down with twice ten thousand ties,  
Yet let me hear thy call,  
My soul in confidence shall rise,  
Shall rise and break through all.

4 Speak and the deaf shall hear thy voice,  
The blind his sight receive;  
The dumb in songs of praise rejoice,  
The heart of stone believe.

5 The Ethiop then shall change his skin;  
The dead shall feel thy power;  
The loathsome leper shall be clean,  
And I shall sin abhor.



We soon found out what sort of a man our sergeant

was, wholly unconscientious and about the laziest man I ever knew. How we ever learnt is a marvel. I have never had anything in common with any of the men and now after 6 months don't desire it any more. If it was not that I found the signalling interesting I should have done my best to leave them; as it was, once or twice I made up my mind to leave them, but Father said he would not, so we stayed on.

Life went on its usual way week after week. Every third week or so we had a week end at home, and who can say, except those who live away, what a week end at home is.

After a stay of about 3 months at Cooden we left about the end of June, for Detling, near Maidstone. Here we were trenching for one of the lines of defence for London. We were not sorry on the whole to leave Cooden, as we were quite ready for a change. We trained there, so had our first experience of a troop-train. There were some touching farewells at the station, but it was soon over. We left Bexhill at 10 a.m., reaching Maidstone about 1.30. After detraining, we marched to Detling, about 3 miles off. Detling village is pretty and old-fashioned, the camp lying about  $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile off, at the foot of the North Downs. The country is very pretty, but for some reason I soon wished I was back at Cooden; but this

soon passed off and we began to settle down.

On the Monday we had our first taste of trenching, which we soon found hard enough work. We signallers had to do it for the first week, but afterwards carried on as usual. Things were naturally rougher under canvas than in huts. We slept on the ground, with three blankets and a waterproof sheet. This we very soon got used to. The food was very tough, especially the meat, owing to the difficulty of cooking. While trenching we had to cook our own dinner. This I found a sickening process, especially when out signalling, as sometimes in the middle of receiving a message

In Flanders Fields museum (Ypres):

"By the end of 1914 movement on the Western Front had ground to a halt. The armies faced each other across no-man's land from their opposing systems of trenches. Initially, their first concern was to combat the effects of winter. But there was still occasional fierce fighting to improve local positions, as both sides tried to find a way to break the deadlock.

In 1915, these efforts to force a breakthrough continued in the Westhoek. Frontal attacks by infantry without artillery support, as in 1914, were alternated with attacks using new weapons of war.

Near Ypres, the British attempted to capture German positions by detonating mines under the enemy trenches. The Germans placed their faith in poison gas, a weapon that was forbidden by international conventions. With the exception of two divisions, the French, who continued to support the Belgians on the Yzer front, withdrew most of their troops from the Ypres Salient, where they were replaced by fresh British units, including the first Canadians."

the pot would boil over and nearly put the fire out. Sundays were the best we spent in the Army; either Mrs. Weekes or Mr. Marsh would have us to dinner and tea, so we felt very comfortable there. Mrs. Weekes especially was very kind. In the evenings we went to the Priory Chapel, where we heard various ministers, Mr. Thomas, Boorman, Picknell, Little and Hazelton. Saturdays we often went into Maidstone to have baths and tea, and then for short walks. One Saturday we went over to Staplehurst where we spent a very nice time with Miss Pounds. Altogether we spent a good time at Detling, staying there till the end of September.

The last day and night there we shall not soon forget. The rain came down in misty sheets at intervals in the night. I thought the tent would come down because of the violence of the wind; it however stood the shock, and did not let much water through until the morning, when it dripped in several places. In the morning it was just as bad, so we did what we could as regards rolling our blankets etc. We packed our rations for 24 hours in our haversacks and got ready to march off. As it was raining we had to do this in our overcoats, which made it rather hard work. The band accompanied us, but minus the big drum, which sounded rather strange. We reached Maidstone, but it being wet and rather early, there

were not many people about. We saw Fred Marsh looking out for us. We then entrained for Aldershot, via Redhill and Guildford. We got out at Farnborough, and marched to North Camp, where we were stationed in the Marlborough Lines - Malplaquet Barracks. We were very comfortable here, nevertheless I did not approve of it, the place being too military for my liking. The barracks are brick and certainly comfortable, with washing house attached to each block, which is a great convenience. Baths were quite handy, also a canteen and Y.M.C.A. Hut. One hardly sees a civilian about. Aldershot Town is the most abominable place I know of; plenty of public houses, fried-fish shops and the inevitable Cinemas. There seems to be a sort of curse over the place, and I shall be quite content never to see it again. The country around is flat and uninteresting except to the south. One hardly had the spirit to go far at Aldershot. To my great relief we only stayed there a fortnight.

Just before leaving we had an inspection by our Divisional Commander, Major General Barnardiston. He is an exceedingly nice man, and spoke to several of the men, especially those who had any ribbons.

On leaving Aldershot, (personally without a pang),

we marched to a camp near Witley. One of my feet gave a bit of trouble, but I managed to stick it. We came through Elstead and Milford way, passing over the Hog's-back and Crooksbury Hill. The country looked very beautiful. Witley Camp is situated in a beautiful spot, surrounded by pine trees and heather. The huts are of wood, are fairly water-tight and quite comfortable. For the first time we have a separate mess room, which is rather nice.

While at Aldershot, we signallers had our field telephones, and we are now busy practising on them.

Sundays are very miserable here, no satisfactory churches or chapels near.

About now we had an officer placed over us for the first time. This was disagreeable at first to a great many, for obvious reasons. He had a great many new ideas, and we had to unlearn a good deal. I find he has a great partiality for the old E Company lads, but I think he will find out his mistake soon. We now put in a good deal of time practising on the telephones, and can sometimes read pretty efficiently on them. I had to take a new class of signallers and teach them semaphore and Morse codes on flags. This was quite new

work to me, and for a time I liked it, but it got rather stale at times. About this time I received a stripe. I naturally wanted it, but now I have it am not so sure it is all so nice as it looks. As the signallers are practically without discipline, it is a bit difficult to manage them at times. One day we had to run a new cable from our C.O's house to the Orderly Room; this we did, and had the satisfaction of having it work properly.

About

December 1st we were hurriedly sent home on Christmas leave. We did not exactly approve of the short notice, but



*The Shop, 126 & 127 Western rd., Hove*

had to go. We were told it was the last War Office leave. The weather was bad while at home, but we had a good time. We went down to the shop - said good-bye. I did not like leaving home much. Father came to the station with us and saw us off. On the way down he spoke to us of the Throne of Grace, and said that the best of it was, it was for sinners.

After this things went on pretty quietly, still practising signalling etc. We did not have any early morning

parades, but generally had one in the evening for lamp reading.

Christmas Day came on. We had nearly 4 days holiday, but the weather was unfortunately bad, so we could not get out much. Christmas morning we had a voluntary Church Parade, which was well attended. The food was not bad considering, but the attendant festivities I could very well have done without. We had dinner in No.10 platoon hut, which was decked with holly etc. Capt. Humble- Crofts, Lieuts. Elliott and Elphick and the Adjutant had dinner with us, and I hope they enjoyed it. I was very glad when it was all over. The young fellow (Barker) who slept next to me came in drunk for the first time in his life, and I think he was quite ashamed of himself. The three following days were wet, so we had to keep indoors, and altogether I was very glad to be on parade again.

About this time were very busy on musketry, as we were shortly going on our musketry course. About a fortnight after Christmas we marched off to Aldershot for the purpose. We were put in Tournai Barracks - wretched prison-like places. Every morning we had to get up at 5 a.m. for breakfast, and then march off to Ash Ranges, where we did

our firing. The range where we were ran up to 600 yards, and that was the farthest we had to shoot in this course. We were allowed a practice first to get used to our rifles, and I soon found that the much-exaggerated kick of the rifle was nothing. I got on much better than I expected, getting well over the first-class mark, though not reaching to "marksman". The weather was very fine while firing, though rather cold. There was a lot of waiting about for your turn - in fact, we generally only fired about 10 rounds each per day, this only taking 10 minutes. Aldershot I found as bad as ever. While there Bert and I went over to Camberley to see Arthur<sup>4</sup>, who was in hospital there. We found him up and better, expecting shortly to be out. Camberley is pretty much like Aldershot, only more high class; everyone caters for the military. What must the countries be like where they have conscription? - though it looks as if we are to have a mild sort of it here. I hope it will never really be so after the war. I was very glad to be packing up again to get back to Witley. It is rather dull and depressing here sometimes, but there is the country to get out into sometimes, and on a fine day it is glorious to get



---

<sup>4</sup> A brother of Marc

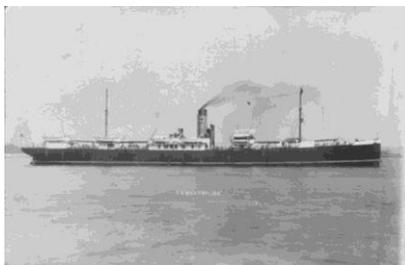
right out and away from everything military. Once I had a very decent stroll with Bert across country to Tilford. We kept right off the main roads, and enjoyed ourselves all right. Another to Haslemere, which was very fine. There is a fine view from the main Portsmouth Road about 2 miles from the top of Hindhead looking east, also another from an old tree stump looking over the same ground, only lower down, Hindhead towering up to the west. I think the view stretches right away to Sussex.

Soon after leaving Aldershot, the Brigade started granting week-end leave, which was very decent. We managed to get one in, but at the present moment are rather afraid they are all over. We keep hearing reports that we shall soon be at the front; in fact, they must be true, as they come from the men that know. We are now on the look-out to see whether last leave of 48 hours will be given.

000000000000

March 7th 1916.

We left Witley Camp on Sunday, about 9.30 a.m., travelling by train to Southampton Docks. This was



*The Australind*

the first time I had been there, and I was very interested in the Docks and shipping. Our boat was the "Australind"<sup>5</sup>, a very slow-goer. The train ran right up to the quay. We got out into a large shed, where was a canteen; here we could obtain hot coffee etc. We arrived about 1 p.m. and as we did not have to embark until 5.50 p.m. we were at liberty to walk about the Docks. There were two or three large Union Castle liners in the Dock, converted into Red Cross ships, having large red crosses painted on the sides and funnels. We also saw an armed merchantman, with several big guns. The tugs plying about the harbour seemed very powerful, though only small in size. We could see Netley Hospital on the other side of the water. The cranes looked very powerful, and it was very interesting to watch the transport carts etc. being swung aboard. About 5.30 p.m. we marched on board and were

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.flotilla-australia.com/australind.htm>

taken down into the hold, which was low-pitched, having fixed table and forms. I did not stay there long - it seemed rather stuffy, so went on deck and had my last looks at England. It was rather misty in the dusk, and I naturally wondered when and under what conditions I shall see it again. The boat did not leave dock till 8.30 p.m. I stood at the bulwarks for nearly an hour and did not feel very sad about leaving, at least not very much, as the novelty and excitement took it off a bit. As the boat moved off I quite made up my mind to be sick. I stayed on deck nearly an hour, and then went below to try to get a sleep. To my surprise I could hardly feel the boat moving, and soon dozed off. I was rather anxious about submarines, especially as Germany had just started her second submarine policy, we picked up, however, a respectable escort of destroyers, which attended us across the Channel. We were each issued out with a life belt, which we had to tie round our bodies. I would feel grateful to the Lord for bringing us safely over, and thus delivering us from one great danger. We sighted the French coast about 7 the next morning. I came on deck about 6 a.m. - felt rather unsteady for a few moments, but soon got over it. There was a fresh wind on, and the sea was swelling a good deal. Soon after ... we dropped anchor just outside the harbour of Havre. Here we saw vessels of several nationalities, Norway,

Denmark etc, being the most prominent. They had their respective flags painted on their sides, so that the Hun subs should have no excuse. Inside the harbour we saw a boat sunk, with only funnels and mast above water. Later we heard that it had been torpedoed just outside the harbour, just missing the transport with the 12th and 11th Battalions by a few hours. We had to wait in the harbour nearly 2 hours before disembarking, so we were very glad when the order came.

About the first thing we saw was a party of German prisoners marching to their work, escorted by French soldiers with fixed bayonets. They looked very rough and indifferent, though I noticed one who seemed rather proud and supercilious and walked with his head in the air. Somehow, I felt rather sorry for them. We stayed for the night at a rest camp just outside the town, under canvas, as the ground was covered with snow this was far from nice. I had a warm night, however, which was better than I expected. At 3.50 a.m. the next morning we were up, marched to Havre Station and were entrained in some cattle trucks. This seemed a very rough way of travelling, but we all accepted it cheerfully. We were fortunately able to get some hot tea and French cakes before starting.

The journey, which took us 19 hours, was very interesting, but we were only able to look out occasionally. We passed through Rouen, and I was just able to see the cathedral. The country is generally very flat and not very interesting round this part. As we got farther east the country was rather prettier.

We at length reached our destination, Steinbach<sup>6</sup>. It was snowing pitilessly when we arrived, and it was an



*Steenbecque*

unpleasant journey up to the camp, a distance of 2 miles. At 4 a.m. we again found ourselves under canvas, which did not mend matters. We all laid down and tried to sleep, in no very genial frame of mind. In the morning we were allotted our tents and soon settled down. We soon found we were in a very interesting part of the country, in places only 12 to 14

---

<sup>6</sup> Probably Steenbecque, about 3 Km southwest of Hazebrouck.

Photograph:

[http://www.ezola.fr/Liensfavoris/Steenbecque/quartier\\_gare.html](http://www.ezola.fr/Liensfavoris/Steenbecque/quartier_gare.html)

miles from the front. We could distinctly hear the guns at times. About the camp we could see the graves of officers and men who had fallen in battles round here. The French people had put up a lot of wooden crosses over them. The houses near all showed marks of the fighting.

We stayed in this camp two or three days, and then moved off to the firing line. The march took us two days, arriving the first night at Estaires, or rather just outside. We were billeted in a barn, which seemed rather rough, but it was a good thing to have a roof over us. The next morning we rose at 4 a.m., had breakfast, and then I, in company with the sergeant and three others went on our bikes to secure billets for the Battalion. It was an awful ride which I shall not easily forget. After three or four hours of it, we arrived at the place, having gone several miles out of the way. For the first time since leaving England we are in something like a comfortable place, though it is within range of the German guns. One shell did drop near "A" Company's billet. We have a very snug little place for our signalling office, and I hope we shall find it comfortable.

March 12th. To-day I saw the first German aeroplane - our anti-aircraft guns firing at it. They fortunately brought it

down. It was a very thrilling sight and I was naturally glad to see the foe defeated. Last night I heard machine guns in action for the first time. I am now on duty at Headquarters until 8 p.m. I now hope to keep the diary daily if at all possible.

In a few hours I shall have been in France a week, and have been through hardships etc such as I have never experienced before, but am thankful to say strength has been given me. I am now about to start on the most serious part of it, in fact am in it as we are so near the firing line.

March 13th. Not a very busy day.

Had an interesting time watching the R.G.A. <sup>7</sup> firing some of their 4.7 guns. Several anti-aircraft guns in action to-day, but no results on either side. Germans shelled Fleurbaix this afternoon, causing

**1115** J. Newton  
*New Year. Ps. 31. 15*

1 Upheld by thy supporting hand,  
We pass, O Lord, from year to year;  
And still we meet, at thy command,  
To seek thy gracious presence here.

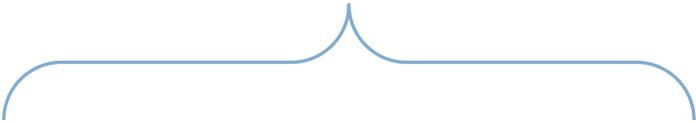
2 Oft feed us, Lord, beneath this vine,  
Through the new year with heavenly bread;  
Oft clothe thy word with power divine,  
To break the rocks and raise the dead.

3 Oft by a Saviour's dying love,  
To many a wounded heart revealed,  
Temptations, fears, and guilt remove,  
And be our Sun, and Strength, and Shield.

some casualties in the 11th Battalion, but particulars not yet to hand. These are most serious times. Oh to know for certain that the Lord is watching over us both. The hymns 1115 and "Abide with me" seem so nice. I think sometimes if it shall ever be true of me I must be the happiest person alive. I think the hymn "Abide with me" very suitable for soldiers. It was Gordon's favourite hymn.

---

<sup>7</sup> Royal Garrison Artillery



Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word,  
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,  
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.  
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,  
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings;  
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea.  
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,  
And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,  
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee.  
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.



I am now on duty, but come off at 11 o'clock. Another round of our 4.7s has just gone off and has shaken our billet to the foundations. To-day all the Battalion signallers except Bert and I and two others who were away went up to the trenches for instruction. I am rather wondering if this means anything. The night seems rather quieter than last, not so much machine gun firing. Saw a German observation balloon to-day.

March 14th. Telephone duty nearly all day; had a very busy time midday. We have such a kind old French woman near our billet; we take her bacon and eggs and rice to cook, and she never thinks of letting us pay. We always go to her for coffee. Her husband also is very friendly. They are Roman Catholics like nearly every one round here; their walls are covered with pictures of the Crucifixion and the Virgin Mary. They have a nice comfortable kitchen, and they never mind us dropping to a meal. I am going up to the trenches to-morrow night; wonder how I shall get on. Till now as a regiment we have only had one casualty, Garner of "B" Company, wounded.

March 15th. Was on telephone duty till 5 p.m., when we were relieved by a party back from the trenches. They came back

with some rather thrilling stories of how they had been shelled on the way back, and how they had only just left the shelter of a house when it was demolished by a shell. I was in charge of the party, and we together started on the journey with rather mixed feelings. On the way we met fellows who told us we were "going through the mill", so we did not have very much to cheer us up. We heard the machine guns, so put on rather more speed, and eventually arrived quite safely. We found the signalling office is a snug little place, sandbagged, and I hope pretty safe. We did not have to do any work, but just laid down and had a chat with the corporal in charge. He had been through Neuve Chapelle and had some good stories. I like what he said about Sir Douglas Haig, but some of the generals... Bert and I slept in a dug-out by ourselves, and had a good night. The signallers here say they had an awful shelling near Headquarters in the afternoon. From our billets we heard them shelling Fleurbaix.

March 16th. Woke up about 6.50; after breakfast, which was rather a rough affair, we went down to the trenches with the corporal. We first entered the communication trench, which leads to the firing line. These were nice and dry owing to the boards laid down the bottoms. We saw the various stations, which seemed very comfortable, if a little cramped. The firing

itself seemed very secure, being sandbagged heavily. The German trenches are not more than 80 yards away in places. I very much wanted to see the German trenches through a periscope, but did not have the opportunity. While we were in the trenches, the Germans were firing a small gun quite close to their firing line. Some of our aeroplanes were observing, and were shelled. We took shelter in a dug-out lest some falling shrapnel should find us out. I have just seen three men brought in wounded, one an officer.

March 17th. We received our first mail since leaving England. What a treat it is to hear. Everyone seems well, which is a great thing. Last night I took over a Company station for our "C" Company, which is holding a part of trench on its own for the first time. I am glad to say, we are going on well. The work is really simple, and provided we don't have too long a spell I think we shall all be pretty satisfied. Our dug-out is nice and roomy, but seems to want rather in furniture. If I was staying here for any length of time I would soon have an alteration. The floor is corrugated iron, which is none too soft to lie on. We had a little exchange of shells this afternoon; a cheeky little 18-pounder of ours that seems to have been annoying Fritz terribly,



underwent a bombardment, but once more escaped. It has been there now for some months. I am making this diary up at 11 p.m. It is generally done at this time; I have more time than when on duty. One of our land mines has just gone off, and quite made our dug-out sway for a moment or two.

Sunday March 19th. I had a lovely long sleep until near 6 this morning. There was a very violent bombardment to the south last night, somewhere near Neuve Chapelle. How differently my dear Father and Mother will be spending this day to what we are experiencing here, but the same God is over us here as there. Lord, do look upon us as the Friend of sinners, and do keep us from our indifference to Thee.

*"Come not in terrors as the King of kings,  
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings,  
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea;  
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me."*

We seem to have rather a mess-up with our rations here. I must have a word with our officer; if it can be found for some it should be for all.

We left the trenches about 5 o'clock, and were not at



all sorry to get away. We had a hot march back, but managed to get some coffee near our old billet. We arrived at our new billet at Saily about 6 p.m. after a safe journey out. It seems to be a great relief away from the trenches. A sniper had been very active near our dug-out for several hours, and I was glad to be rid of his attentions. As we neared our billet I heard some men singing, and saw the sound came from a Soldiers' Club. I got my pack off and went in, and thus attended my first service on French soil. I was glad, I think very glad, to attend a place of worship after all. We had some nice hymns, and the chaplain prayed very earnestly, but am afraid the address was rather wrong at times. One thing was about universal salvation; he said that if he did not believe that he could never be a parson. It seems very sad that there is no one to preach the truth to these men just back from facing death, and even then within sound of the guns; and yet at times he said some better things. We turned in about 9 o'clock, and had a decent night's rest.

March 20th. Could not get the breakfast cooked till past 9 o'clock. What a lot we are! We are leaving to-night for Fleurbaix. It seems rather strange we should be going there, as it is such a mark for the German guns. We feel rather nervy

about it, but, as dear Father writes,

*"Not a single shaft can hit  
Till the God of love sees fit."  
(Hymn 64)*

Later. Have arrived at our billet, which is a dwelling house, situated quite near the front. Trench mortars are making a great noise. As soon as we arrived I was put on duty as usual till 12 p.m.

March 21st. The first day of spring; rather misty here, but everywhere the hedges and trees are bursting into leaf. Had the morning off but could not do much, as no one is allowed out of town without a pass. The town is considerably knocked about. We are nearly on the outskirts, and in a fairly comfortable billet. We work in shifts as usual of 4 hours on and 12 off. Our officer wanted us to do 8 hours on and 8 off, but we jibbed rather. Tried to get a bath, but could not. Went and had supper with Lawrence. Heard from Arthur, and had a parcel from home. Had a decent rest.

March 22nd. Rose at 4 a.m. to go on duty. Heard to-day that I am on Headquarters staff, settled. Am very glad and

relieved, as I did not fancy the Company work. Bert is also on Headquarters, and a pretty sensible lot of men too. To-morrow we are leaving this place; so far we have been kept safe. About 5 o'clock this morning heard a sound of explosion; think it was an aeroplane dropping bombs, as the anti-aircraft guns were in action. Am feeling very relieved we are leaving here. Heard from Mother. Have been at work from 4 a.m. till midnight, though a little rest this afternoon.

March 23rd. Spent in much the same way. Made preparations for leaving. Some of our guns fired in the vicinity, but was thankful the enemy did not retaliate. Left Fleurbaix about 5 p.m. Had rather a tiring march; lost our way and had to wait about while our officer tried to find our whereabouts. It was very cold. Found our billet about 10 p.m. - it was a big barn. We soon tumbled in between the blankets, and as we were nearly dead tired, soon fell off asleep.

March 24th. Woke about 10 a.m. after a fine sleep; cooked my own breakfast, after making my eyes water horribly. We are having a rest to-day, as we are on the move again at 2 in the morning. Am now going to see how I can cook my dinner. (Later: this has turned out very well considering the conditions). About 6 p.m. I was warned to take charge of a

party, and had to take them to the Headquarters of the 9th Cheshires, who are billeted at a place called Robermetz. I found it all right, and was billeted for the night in a barn.

As I was lying down to sleep, I think I felt I wanted a little to thank the Lord for giving us the comforts he has done. Lord, do keep me from my coldness and indifference.

A Cheshire officer was very kind to us, and gave us some supper, which, as we had been rather short of food the last day or so, was very welcome.

March 25th. Heard from Legh<sup>8</sup>. We are always on the look-out for a letter. We find ourselves billeted in a small low-pitched stable which is anything but nice and enjoyable.



March 26th. I woke up this morning feeling anything but happy. It is Sunday again, and we have been brought through one more week. We have been in danger, but have been preserved. Last night I read in that little book that Auntie M.

---

<sup>8</sup> A brother of Marc

gave me, these words "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18) It seemed very nice, especially as I had been feeling rather down.

Near here are several graves of soldiers. The French people seem to take care of them in some cases, which speaks well of them, but some of the native people seem very close and objectionable. I suppose really we cannot wonder, but the man in charge of the farm here is about the limit; he would only give me 9 eggs for about a 10-12 lb. joint of beef. Needless to say he didn't get it!

March 27th. Woke up and found it was rather a better day as regards weather. What a difference the weather makes to our feelings. Was on telephone duty from 1 to 5 o'clock, and as one of our men was sick, went on his turn from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. Tuesday morning. It was a very dismal time, as the night was wild and windy. The signal office here is a very draughty place, with an ill-fitting door and broken windows. I was very glad to leave in the morning.

March 28th. Left off duty at 9 a.m. Went back to the billet and had a good breakfast; afterwards laid down and had a

decent sleep until near 1 o'clock. A little buzzer practice in the afternoon, and at 5 p.m. once more went on duty. Received a lovely photo, of Father and Mother as a birthday present from them. Am very pleased with it.



*The family:*  
*Top: Arthur, Father*  
*Bottom: Bert, Marc and Legh on Mother's knee*

oooooooo

March 30th. My 22nd birthday. The second I have had since joining the Army. I hope very much this will be last. I had a nice lot of letters and parcels, which I think I was very fortunate to get on the very date. I am more than pleased with the photo of Father and Mother. Arthur and Legh sent me some of the always welcome chocolates, and the Lockes sent me a decent little present too.

I hear that we are moving early on the morrow, but I think we are not going farther than Merville. I went there this afternoon, and find it much like the rest of the older French

towns in this part. The square, band stand and Town Hall, reminded me very much of Hazebrouck. There is a very fine church there, far more stately than some of our cathedrals. The town seems quite intact and not to have suffered from the war at all. The Y.M.C.A. have a hut here, and it was nice to go in one again and get some tea etc. The weather is getting quite mild. The last evening or two has been beautiful. The stars here seem very brilliant and large. I saw to-day a map of the British front; we are quite close to La Bassee and Neuve Chapelle.



*Merville church*

March 31st. Was on duty all the previous night, and wrote several letters during the time. We left Merville about 9.30 in the morning for this place, Vieux Berquin. It is very much prettier round here and we are fortunately billeted in a nice barn, quite different from the place we have just left.

April 1st. Beautiful spring-like day. The country seemed very nice and peaceful in the sun. Our life seems to run in one groove very much now. We do practically nothing when not

on duty, so cannot say we have a really hard time. There was a most beautiful sunset this evening. I went out for a little walk by myself.

April 2nd. Sunday has come round once more. I don't know how I shall spend it. I would like to get right away from my surroundings for a few hours. We had a church parade this morning, but I was unable to attend, as I was on duty. I am afraid that being on Headquarters we shall miss these parades. Though we don't hear much I think it is right to attend. I heard the band playing the hymns in the distance. The country all round is dotted with churches, some of which are fine buildings. It makes one sad to think of what is taught in them. I noticed the people dressed in their Sunday best going out for walks this afternoon, just as they do in England. I have felt a great wish and longing for home just lately. How little I realised what blessings I had when home before the war. I often wonder how long it will be before we are home together again. The Lord bring it about, if it be His will, and make it work for our good and his glory. We get some good letters from home. I very much wish I could write and tell my dear parents about that one thing, but I dare not yet. When I write in these books, and look back and read what I have written, I wonder how I dare do it. I hope I shall never write

but what I feel.

April 3rd. 4.50 a.m. I have sinned against Thee - do in mercy remember me. I am continually sinning. It seems to me that those people who know the Lord as their Saviour cannot sin as I sin, nor be nearly so bad: yet the reason they love him is because they know he has forgiven their sins. Oh remember me with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people. (Psalm 106:4) Blot out my transgressions, and let me not live an indifferent life towards Thee. More often, my sins don't trouble me at all.

I like to read of the woman in Luke 7th, who was a sinner. It ended with all she could wish for. I remember reading somewhere Bunyan says, "Let me never get rid of my sin but by the right way".

I so soon forget, and get cold and careless.

*"Convince us of our sin,  
Then lead to Jesus' blood,  
And to our wondering view reveal  
The secret love of God."  
(Hymn 27)*

There is in a soldier's prayer that the chaplain uses at church parades, these words :

"Let the assurance of Thy presence save us from sinning."  
Hymn 593.

The day was spent as usual. Very warm weather. Was fortunate in being able to get a nice warm bath in the afternoon, and in getting a clean change of clothes for the first time in France. Early this morning I was able to watch the sunrise. It rises at Greenwich at 5.54 a.m. It threw a good distinct shadow at 6 a.m this morning.

April 4th. Am able to get hold of some fine fresh eggs, and thus can get some good breakfasts. We live now very well,



ALMIGHTY and Everlasting God, by whose Grace Thy servants are enabled to fight the good fight of faith and ever prove victorious: We humbly beseech Thee so to inspire us, that we may yield our hearts to Thine obedience and, exercise our wills on Thy behalf. Help us to think wisely: to speak rightly: to resolve bravely, to act kindly: to live purely. Bless us in body and in soul, and make us a blessing to our comrades. Whether, at home or abroad may we ever seek the extension of Thy Kingdom. Let the assurance of Thy presence save us from sinning: support us in life, and comfort us in death. O Lord our God accept this prayer for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.



not having had the Army biscuits for some days. I don't dislike them when they are three or four days old and the hardness has gone out from



them a bit. Am very glad to learn from the papers that another Zeppelin is destroyed; they seem to be going one by one. Heard from Legh to-day and am expecting a parcel from him.

In the evening went out for a short stroll with Lightfoot of "A" Company. There was a pretty big bombardment on the front near us - we could see big gun flashes as it got darker; also heard machine gun firing. It seemed rather sad to hear it, as the evening was so peaceful and calm where we were. Heard from Arthur; he also sent some photos.

April 5th. Had to get up soon after 6.50, as I was on duty at 7 o'clock. It was a beautiful morning. Didn't do much all day. ... .. There are some fine chicken here at the farm where our signalling station is, some decent little bantams especially. There is also a goose that makes quite a noise. We can get eggs here at 1½ a-piece, which is not dear. They come in

handy for breakfast.

April 6th. Not much to write about. ... .. My name comes out in Orders as paid lance-corporal.

April 9th. Yesterday afternoon I went for a walk in a big wood or forest that is close by, with Lightfoot. It was very decent; a fine lot of primroses and violets, also lady's-smock and periwinkle were out, and the woods looked a picture. In one place we saw a deer, which was in all probability wild. I could not see it so as to distinguish it, but Lightfoot saw it and traced it along with his eyes. I saw something dashing through the trees. Coming homewards, or rather coming back, we dropped into a cottage, where we consumed six cups of coffee between us. We came back by the village of La Motte. The R.C. Church is a very painful structure. Opposite the Church is a shop where candles are sold for their altars. The French Government have their seal or stamp round the bases of the candles. It seems very sickening, all this fudgery.

I did not have to do my late all-night shift, as Sergt. Woodward volunteered to do it for me. I was very glad, naturally, to get off the job and get another night in bed. By the way, I did sleep in a bed for the first time since being in

France, though it was not long enough to stretch your feet in.  
We heard from home to-day.

April 10th. I noticed how very brilliant the stars and moon  
are this evening. They seem to shine just like diamonds out  
here. The moon seemed  
brighter than I ever remember  
to have seen it before, though  
only half of it is visible. To-day I  
had a look through one of our  
telescopes, and tried to read the  
time on the clock of Merville  
church. I could see the minute  
hand, but couldn't manage the  
smaller hand. The distance was



*Merville church clock*

about 5 miles. We hear unofficially that we are likely to stay  
here for another 14 days. I hope so, for some things. Heard  
from HOME to-day, also from aunties. How I long to get  
home, and for the end of the war. Sometimes I think it won't  
be long before the war draws to an end, but when I look at it  
in a different way I wonder whenever it will end. The nations  
don't seem to be turning to God, as their Helper, much less  
anything closer: but how can I criticise, while I am what I am.  
I am a puzzle and do not know how to write it down. I get so

very, very indifferent to everything that is good and right, but one thing I did feel a little tonight was, that if the Lord does love me, and love me even through all the sins I have committed, it is a very great thing. I don't know whether I am right to even write this down, because I have no real hope that He does, whatever, and in a few hours or even minutes may be thinking of the most worldly things.

The country round here is beginning to look very nice and green, fruit trees blossoming and the hedges all in leaf, the woods being a picture. It has made me think that Watts must have written that hymn somewhere in early spring, after winter –

"There is a land of pure delight

... ..

"There everlasting spring abides,

And never-with'ring flowers."



*The Two Bridges locks at Merville*

April 15<sup>th</sup>. ... ..

... Since writing  
last we have once  
more shifted,  
being now in a  
village called  
Locon, not far  
from Bethune. We  
can easily see the  
town from here,  
and it looks a big  
place. We had a  
very tiring march  
from our previous  
billet, it taking  
somewhere about

4 - 5 hours. We  
came through  
Merville, and  
passed over the La  
Bassee Canal<sup>9</sup>, and  
walked along the

**1022** I. Watts

*Desiring the Heavenly Canaan. Heb. 11. 16*

1 There is a land of pure delight,  
Where saints immortal reign;  
Infinite day excludes the night,  
And pleasures banish pain.

2 There everlasting spring abides,  
And never-withering flowers;  
Death, like a narrow sea, divides  
This heavenly land from ours.

3 O could we make our doubts remove,  
These gloomy doubts that rise,  
And see the Canaan that we love  
With unclouded eyes;

4 Could we but climb where Moses stood,  
And view the landscape o'er,  
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,  
Should fright us from the shore.



*The river Lys at Merville*

---

<sup>9</sup> Though this was probably the canalised river Lys

side of it for over a mile. Near here we saw the first real hill we remember to have come across since being in Flanders. The country is more picturesque and pretty round this part than in any other part we have yet come across. The march was made a little worse by the cold wind, especially when we stopped for rests and took our packs off. Didn't eat very much all day, except on arriving at Locon, where we raided a French girl's basket of cakes. The cakes are awfully small for Id. and the chocolate was an even worse swindle.

We are now very much nearer the firing line; to-day we once more enter the trenches, and take over our portion as



*A baker at Locon*

a battalion. From what we hear we are in a hot part, so I think it is rather an honour for us to be put there. Since being at our last billet a change seems to have come over me as regards fighting; I have even at times felt I want to actually go for the enemy. Fortunately, the feeling doesn't always last. ... .. We hear that the trenches we are to go to are about 8 kilometres distant. Am glad it is not very far, as my feet are

rather sore. The rats and mice are a great plague here. When I got up at 12 o'clock, some mice were having high jinks in someone's haversack.

April 20th. On the next day we went on the final stage of the march up to the trenches. We passed signposts pointing



*La Bassee Canal*

to well-known places, such as La Bassee and Festubert. The weather was rather cold; it came on to rain at times, which made it rather worse. After about two hours' march we struck the famous La Bassee Canal. We marched up the side of it for over a mile, until we reached our destination, Headquarters. The shells had made a terrible mess of the houses round here. I had never, of course, seen anything like it before. Our billet was anything but the thing we had pictured - a ruined house, hardly any roof and no door, altogether a most unsatisfactory place to live in. The signal dug-out itself, however, was quite different, and about the best of its kind I have seen.

In the afternoon I went down through the trenches

to have a look round. I thought they looked as if they had had rougher usage than the ones we had been in at Fleurbaix. I had a look at the German lines through a periscope.

On the Sunday, the day after we came in, we suffered a good few casualties, and it was not very cheerful to hear of fellows that you know being wounded and killed. Sunday, however, was the worst day, the others being comparatively quiet.

The four days we were in the trenches went quickly. I had a rather bad sore throat for the last two days, so was



*The chateau at Gorre*

glad for more than one reason to get into a more comfortable place. On the Tuesday (I think) we left for the rest billet, a big chateau at Gorre - some of the men say it is the one the Crown Prince<sup>10</sup> plundered. It certainly does look as if the paintings etc. had been pulled off, - the ceilings especially. It was not, however, my idea of a chateau, though of course it must have looked very different in peace time. While here we had a pretty easy time, and were fortunate in getting a fairly decent room for sleeping. We were a bit

Gore... the H.Q. of the support battalion; at that time the chateau looked magnificent in its half-ruined state; it was a red brick building, seventeenth century, with superb outhouses enclosing a vast courtyard, I occupied a room which was supposed to have been slept in by the Crown Prince during the German advance of 1914. (The Press and the General Staff by Neville Stephen Lytton).

---

<sup>10</sup> Probably Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, commander-in-chief of the German 6<sup>th</sup> army

crowded, but we never do get things quite our own way. ...

... ..

Easter Day. We once more find ourselves in the trenches, or strictly speaking at our Headquarters. Find it the same scene of desolation and ruin; but to my joy find that our old billet has been condemned - whether as unsafe, unsanitary or unfit for human habitation I do not know. It is a beautiful sunny day, with a bright blue sky and big white clouds, but we find it a job sometimes to appreciate the beauty. There has been constant anti-aircraft firing both at hostile and British aeroplanes, since we have been here this morning. What a pleasure it will be to have the last shot fired and done with!

April 24th. There seems nothing much to write about. We have received several letters and parcels from home lately. ... .. We try to send them as many letters as possible, as they must feel anxious at times. The weather still keeps fine. It would have been more than depressing to have had all that rain and wind whilst in the trenches. The casualties keep pretty low, which is something to be thankful for; though Lieut. Tayler was wounded yesterday. I expect he will be sent home, as he was wounded in three places. He will be missed, for he was an officer really liked.

April 25th. I heard the cuckoo several times to-day.

It seems strange to hear it right up in the firing line. It is so very different from what I pictured.

10.15 p.m. - Have just seen our artillery bombarding to our right. Rather a fine sight, though awe-inspiring. It seemed very incongruous to hear the guns blazing away and to see the flashes, and then to look up and see the beautiful peaceful stars in the sky. All the same, I hope the Germans have had something to remember, and I think they have... ...



### **Gorre Chateau during the First World War**

For much of the war, the chateau stood approximately four kilometres behind a section of the British front-line that ran northward along the Aubers Ridge from Givenchy-les-la-Bassee to Festubert. From the end of the Battle of Festubert in May 1915 until the spring of 1918, this was considered a relatively 'quiet' sector. The village of Gorre was occasionally bombarded by German artillery during this period, but the chateau remained intact and its rooms were used as an officers' mess and headquarters for British units stationed in the area. The grounds of the chateau were also the site of several artillery emplacements, a rifle range and an improvised parade ground and football pitch.

April 26th. I hear that one of our signallers has been



recommended for mending the wires under shell-fire. Also hear that three of our Company signallers are hors du combat. ... .. I think we leave the trenches to-morrow, but only to go into stand-to billets about 200 yards from our present Headquarters; then I hope, after that, we shall be able to get right back for a bit more rest.

Have just been watching two brown field mice eating. They were very pretty little things, with big black eyes, and kept trying to get a piece of rasher rind into their hole. It was too big for them, though.

April 27th. Yesterday we once more left duty in the trenches, having been brought safely through, though we are only in stand-to billets about 200 yards from our trench Headquarters. We hear we are going in a few days time to Locon for an 8-day rest. It will be rather a relief to get out of the fire zone. I saw this evening that the Germans are dropping a few light shells on our communication trenches; hope they won't do much damage.

Hear to-day that the 11th Battalion have sent all their packs back to the base or somewhere. Hope we send ours away soon; they are a bit too much to carry about, this warm

weather. Our billet here is very low-pitched, and the heat gets very oppressive in the evenings. We have to keep the windows covered up to keep the light in, or I expect we should soon become a mark for the German artillery.

April 30th. Sunday has come round once more.

Have a little opportunity to be quiet, and as we have

some grass near here, can lie down and rest. It is a beautiful day, with a little breeze. The sky is very blue, and what with the green leaves and spring flowers it is very nice. It is strange like this, so near the firing line; but just down the road there is desolation such as I have never seen before.



**Psalm 91:4-7**

4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler.

5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day;

6 *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday.

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee.



Friday evening I read the 91st Psalm, and think it is so nice, verses 4 - 7. What wouldn't I give to know that the Lord so regarded me.

An hour or two later we suddenly heard a hooter sounding on our right, and the next minute we were given the order to turn out with our gas<sup>11</sup> helmets, as the enemy were launching a gas attack. We all felt rather nervous, especially as it was night time. I found the gas helmet rather stuffy, and was not at all sorry when, a few minutes later, we were allowed to put them up, as there was not any gas near us at the moment. After about three hours we were allowed to go in and sleep. In the morning I looked again at the same Psalm and thought those words were specially suitable, - "Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday ... .. but it shall not come nigh thee."

Last night we were again held in readiness, as we had information that the Germans had got the gas cylinders ready in their trenches opposite us. Oh that I could know that I am thus



*A gas helmet*

---

<sup>11</sup> Gas was first used by the Germans on 22 April 1915.

watched over. Lord, open my understanding, and let me know.

To-morrow we leave here and go back for 8 days rest. I think everyone will be more than pleased.

May 2nd. Last night we all safely left the trenches. We came away along the canal bank. A little way down I heard a nightingale singing; it seemed very strange to hear it, when the star shells were going up so near. We came by Gorre and Locon, and reached the billet about 2 o'clock in the morning. I soon turned in, and had a decent rest until just on 8 o'clock, when I had to go on duty again. We like it here very much; it seems a great relief to be away from the firing line and the desolation. I don't think we shall mind it much if we keep having a break like this.

The canal here looks very pretty, though un-English.



May 12th. Find I haven't written in here for nearly a week again. I haven't felt much like writing, feeling rather unsettled and careless. Last Tuesday night we left Hinges for the trenches, this time at Festubert. We had a fairly comfortable march up here, till getting to the stand-to billets; after that it was positively painful. It came on to rain, and as it was just getting dark it was not at all pleasant. The star shells kept going up; we were fortunate indeed to get in without a casualty. The soil here is clay and gets very slippery, and for every step we took we slipped back nearly a half. As we were loaded up with signalling apparatus etc., we were glad to get safely to Headquarters. We found this a very comfortable place, by far the best we have yet been to. The dug-outs where we sleep are also comfortable, though the two props that keep the roof up get in the way rather when we lie down, but we manage to wedge ourselves in. It is hopeless to try to turn, and though our hips get rather sore from the hard ground we manage to sleep soundly. I had a specially good sleep last night, nearly 11 hours, and only woke up once. ... .. The other night I was able to watch our artillery bombarding a point in the German lines. Through the glasses the explosions looked very near. The Headquarters here are in the old British line, and our front line right ahead of the old German line. It is interesting to be in the very place where an

advance has taken place. To-morrow we go back to be Battalion in support. I think it is rather a hot place, a few hostile shells dropping in that direction yesterday evening.

There is not nearly so much aeroplane activity here as at Givenchy, but what aircraft there is flies remarkably low. The Germans fire chiefly by rifle at them, but don't do any damage apparently. ... .. Anti-aircraft guns seemed everywhere at Givenchy, but I have not seen many here. The authorities are getting extremely fussy, requiring us to have clean boots in the trenches; it is very sickening, and difficult to understand. We have had a few casualties here - considering where we are, remarkably few. One poor chap died of wounds yesterday, and two more were wounded.

It is wonderful what a lot of birds live out here. A skylark has been singing over our trenches this morning, and the first thing yesterday morning, about 3 o'clock, I heard a cuckoo in some trees close by. The country reminds me very much of near Buxted, just behind our trenches. How I wish I were there. It also reminds me of those walks we had while at Hempstead Farm. Some St. John's-wort in the fields behind reminds me of those days.



May 13th. Have just heard that poor Sergt. Harriott has been killed. He was shot by a bullet from a machine gun in going up to the trenches.

May 17th. This is the last day of 4-days rest, and to-night we once more go into the trenches, we have had a nice rest in a very comfortable billet, quite the best sort of place since being out here, I think. We have wooden huts, which almost remind us of Witley. The huts are in an orchard, and as the blossom is full on the trees, it looks very nice. Sometimes we almost forget there is a war on, so used have we become to the occasional boom of the guns. In the next field are two heavy guns, the report of which, when in action, shakes our hut. They are also in an orchard, one gun being under a fruit tree in full blossom. In the same field I noticed some cows grazing, but tied up so as not to stampede when the guns are in action. We have now lost our Signalling Officer, the sergeant being in charge. I don't know whether it is for the better or not.

Last night I was awakened by some anti-aircraft guns in action quite close to us. I think there must have been a Zeppelin or something near, as the gun-firing was so rapid.

At about six this morning an enemy shell dropped quite close, but failed to explode.

To-night we go into the trenches again. It is unfortunately full moon, but I trust the poor chaps going up to the "islands" will get in safely. I also hope we have a more comfortable time going in, than last time.

May 20th. We all arrived safely in the trenches on Wednesday night. I think our party had some rather narrow shaves coming in. Some bullets whistled quite near enough to be pleasant; I remember especially one that smashed into a bush close on our left. We find ourselves in the same places, and are still having as comfortable a time as possible. We have had fewer casualties so far, though Elliott our Signalling Officer was badly wounded last night and is hardly expected to live. He was shot in the forehead, we feel sorry for him; he had only left us when in the trenches before.

This morning I saw an aeroplane fall to earth, for the first time. It was unfortunately a British one and shot down by a German. The shot, whatever it was, took the tail off the machine, and I suppose then there was no chance. The pilot did all he could, and from the way the machine came down I

should not think he was killed. It came down turning over and over, just like a fluttering leaf.

May 21st. Sunday has once more come round. We are relieved to-day, our Battalion going back to stand-to billets. ... .. Poor Mr. Elliott died last night at 6.30. We all feel very sorry for him now, and everyone has forgiven him. He never would have made a soldier, and the army would never be his home.

It is a beautiful morning, just the sort to be out for a stroll, but of course it is no good to think of such things in the trenches. Last night we saw a daring British flying man; he came down very low and fired at the German trenches with his machine gun. The Germans were also firing at him with machine guns, and there was quite a fusillade for nearly a quarter of an hour. He got off scot free in the end, and must have caused the Germans some wasted ammunition. We have built up a barricade across the gangway outside our signal office, in the hope that it will stop the enfilading bullets that come whistling along each night; I think it does to a certain extent. We find a great difficulty to get washing water here, but suppose we cannot expect anything else while in the trenches.

We hear that the Colonel starts the leave next Friday. How fine! We naturally wonder when our turn will come; I don't think it takes so long as I thought. He goes away with his servant first.

May 22nd. We left the trenches once more quite safely. We had a terribly hot march coming out. Find the stand-to billets not so bad. The country is quite pretty, the foliage on the trees striking me as being very heavy. The billet is rather knocked about, no glass in windows, and no doors; but there is a sound enough roof at present, though that bulges in in one or two places rather ominously. I don't think we are allowed to move about much here, in case we are spotted by the enemy. The 11th Battalion Adjutant seemed to be in an extremely agitated frame of mind, (though he did wear the D.S.O.)<sup>12</sup>, about our moving in too big parties. There are some good drawings on the walls here, done by the various regiments that have been billeted. In the farm yard is the grave of 14 unknown men of the 21st London Regiment, also the grave of an unknown Canadian. Round at the back of the billet is a decent-sized orchard, - a good deal overgrown. I see

---

<sup>12</sup> Distinguished Service Order

there is a hammock in one of the trees, which I hope to sample.

We had several "whizz-bangs" over to-day, which came quite near enough to be pleasant.

May 24th. The time goes very quietly here. There was a good deal of artillery activity yesterday, on our part, and at about 11 o'clock last night it grew very violent on our right. I thought we might have to stand to, but fortunately we were allowed to sleep. More details to hand about leave. The C.O. does go on the 26th. Fancy being in England on Friday!

May 26th. We came safely out of the trenches and stand-to billets yesterday. We had a very tiring march in the dead of night. To add to the misery of the march, it was wet and we had to wear our capes. We arrived at Hinges, in our old billet, about 2.15 a.m. We are going to be billeted in another barn, but I think it is a better one and I hope we shall sleep warmer than last time.

We had some very disturbing rumours, just before we left the stand-to billets, that we were going over the top, but fortunately we were able to leave near midnight quite

safely and peacefully.

May 28th. Sunday has once more come round. Am having a rest on the bank of the canal. Have just read one of Mr. Popham's sermons, which I remember he preached 6 years ago, though I can't say I remember much of the sermon itself.



*Mr Popham*

Yesterday from 9 o'clock to 4 o'clock in the afternoon we were busy trenching. This is, I suppose, what the Army considers a rest. I think the best rest we get is in the trenches. We were paid yesterday, which was welcome, as I had been without cash for nearly a fortnight.

The woods round here are rather nice. There are a lot of nut-trees; I also noticed some young self-grown oaks. There has been a lot of barges passing up and down the canal this morning.

May 29th. Sunday afternoon we suddenly had the order to

move and take over a section of the trenches. It is rather hard that we should have to leave these rest billets, especially as we were looking forward to a little rest from the trenches. I had to go on in advance of the rest of the signallers, we went all along the canal bank. On the way we passed through Bethune; find it rather a decent place, old-fashioned narrow alleys. We did not go near the main streets. Saw several big Army stores on the canal banks. The number of barges there was very large, and they made rather a picturesque appearance, with the old church and sunset for a background. Noticed that the owners keep chicken on board, the fowls running on board by means of a plank. Some of these barges are rather decent affairs, with nice little cabins, well fitted up. The owners also generally keep a dog on them. Noticed that several of the barges were marked "Dunkerque". Also noticed a big hospital at Bethune; expect it was in that building that poor Elliott died. There is one big artificial piece of water, and I could see the R.A.M.C.<sup>13</sup> fellows boating. They seem to have a very easy time of it. We followed the canal up past Gorre. Noticed that we have practically pumped the canal dry near the front, I suppose to prevent the enemy bringing up stores by boat, and also to prevent them

---

<sup>13</sup> Royal Army Medical Corps

pumping and flooding our trenches.

We eventually reached Headquarters, about 10.30, and found them pretty comfortable. Find that we buzz the messages here, different from Festubert, where we speak them. Had a busy morning on the phone. We relieved the Argylls, a fine set of men, I thought.

May 31st. Things seem to be going very much the same here as elsewhere in the trenches. We have to spend most of our time, however, in the dug-out. The R.S.M.<sup>14</sup>, if he sees us outside, makes a great fuss of it. Our dug-out is very secure-looking, and has great wooden beams and small trees for a roof, besides the sandbags on top. It is a very long affair, like a miniature tunnel blocked up at one end. We have not really room to stretch our feet at night. My "Premier" stove is very useful, and I have been able to fry some eggs for supper. I must be getting experienced, as they have turned out well.

Have just heard from our Adjutant that the Commander of our Army Corps has congratulated our Brigade on coming up to relieve the one that was in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Regimental Sergeant Major

trenches. Last night there was a raid on our front lines, the Germans getting in and taking two rifles and some ammunition. One of our sergeants was missing in the morning, and later brought in dead, together with a dead German. A land mine going up, too, last night, caused 15 casualties to "C" Company.

The wires seem bad, very bad for the regular Army. I have never had such a night of it, messages being delayed for some hours through careless mistakes. The tunnelling companies and trench mortar people seem to make a bother with their wires. Am afraid our dug-out is "chatty" as we say; everyone is complaining of live stock on their persons.

June 2nd. How the year is going. In a month's time we shall be commencing the last half of the year. Everyone wondered if 1916 was to be the year in which peace is to be proclaimed, at the beginning of the war, but am afraid it is as big a question now as ever. Yesterday we left our trench headquarters, and moved into support. We are, however, still in trenches, but are in comfortable dug-outs some 12 feet deep in the ground, we spend a lot of our time underground nowadays; up at the trench headquarters we had to spend most of the time, night and day, down in the dug-out. It was

very dark and stuffy, but I suppose we ought to be thankful for the place, as it was very securely made. Last night there was a heavy bombardment on our right towards Loos. Am afraid I am getting very tired of it all out here, but it cannot be wondered at. Our poor "C" Company have had a rough time of it this time. A big mine went up near them making 15 casualties straight away. Our Adjutant, when he heard of it, said to me, "Well, Banfield, there is an advantage in being at Headquarters sometimes, isn't there?" Another of our officers, Lieut. Cornwell of "B" Company, has been killed, shot in the same place as Mr. Elliott. I am afraid that the casualties are mounting up, though a draft came out, we heard, yesterday. I wonder if Arthur is ever likely to come out here; I hope not. I saw a dead German sergeant whilst in the trenches this time, one which we had seen lying out in "No-man's land". Lieut. Fabian was responsible for bringing him in, which was rather a good bit of work, as the Germans must also have seen him and would naturally try to get him. We found out from the Intelligence officer that the German was a Wurtemberger. He was a big fellow, 6 ft. 5 ins. Our Adjutant got a ring off his finger as a souvenir; it sounds very rotten.

June 3rd. Just lately there has been a tremendous amount of

aerial activity on our side. Have seen 6 or even 8 of our air-craft up at a time, observing. The difference between our airmen and the enemy's is very marked. Our men are absolutely daring and seem to care nothing whatever for the anti-aircraft shells, though I have seen those put up literally by the hundred. Our gunners have just to put up a shell somewhere near a German aeroplane and she will generally at once turn back. I don't write this because I am an Englishman, but it is a marked fact and we often remark about it to each other when watching the aeroplanes. There are very few German aeroplanes to be seen about this part; all the while we were at Festubert we only saw one. There was one over us this morning, but right up above the clouds, where I should think he had a job to see anything. I suppose the pick of the German aircraft are at Verdun.

We had a very interesting letter from Arthur, describing a walk he had with Legh and Postlethwaite over the Downs, down to Fulking and then to Henfield, via Woodmancote. I wonder how long it will be before we can once more get out to those places. Woodmancote Church reminds me very much of the beautiful little hamlet of westmeston, at the foot of Ditchling Beacon. I very often think of that place, out here.

June 4th 1916. Last night I took a message from Brigade on the telephone to the effect that the German Navy had got a good trouncing; also that the Canadians had made a move up at Ypres. We are anxiously waiting for details.

Found out an estaminet at Givenchy where I bought some eggs chocolate and oranges. It was nice to find such a place, though I wonder anybody can live there. Everybody seems to think they must be spies, but nothing is done to them.

Have had a rotten night of it on duty, was very busy up to 12 o'clock with messages, but since then the time has dragged very much. Some of our artillery has been active during the night; the report of the guns makes an ear-splitting noise in the signal office. Am now looking forward to a decent sleep, as I feel almost dead tired.

(Later), what a beautiful hymn "Abide with me" is. May I pray the prayer that the hymn is. We



Probably the Battle of Jutland, which was fought on 31 May and 1 June 1916 in the North Sea near Jutland. Britain lost fourteen ships, Germany eleven.



hear that the news is not nearly so good about the North Sea fight, and we also hear something about the enemy getting a hold on part of the western trenches. I feel rather down naturally about the news; the Navy always has been our one strong point. We are anxious to hear the whole news.

June 8th. Have just had some letters and papers, which give accounts of the North Sea battle. The results were I think, pretty even in the end, though on the face of it the Germans look to have the best of it.

We are still in the trenches, but come away to-morrow. I think we go back to a place called Annequin, which is somewhere in the vicinity of the Divisional canteen.

The night before last the 13th Sussex earned the distinction of being the first regiment in the Division to enter the German lines, we had a small bombing raid under Lieut. Mac-Roberts; nearly every man was wounded I believe, but it was supposed to have come off all right. From what I could hear on the 'phone, the Hampshires were indulging in one last night.

We hear to our disgust that all leave is once more

stopped, but trust it won't be for long.

June 10th. We are now back in reserve, in a comfortable barn, and are able to sleep on some rather decent beds made of wood and wire netting. We leave here, however, to-night, going once more to Hinges, am rather tired of the place and hope we move somewhere else soon, if we don't have to go into the trenches at the end of 8 days. Went for a nice walk down to the salvage, to get a bayonet replaced, went through the fields. It was very nice; the crops look very well kept, women do all the cultivating; they keep at it until it is pretty well dark. The weather now is cold for June, and we get a fair lot of rain. There is near here a big slag heap, which looks very like a pyramid. The Germans are shelling near it this morning, with some pretty big stuff.

Heard on the 8th of the death of Lord Kitchener. It seemed difficult to believe it true, but it is so. We have now lost since the war began two of our greatest soldiers.

June 11th. Once more back at Hinges, we hear for 12 days. Had a very tiring march from Annequin last night. The road along the canal is very rough, and well we knew it, in the dark. We feel very much relieved in getting away from the trenches

for a while; we had had practically 52 days in them on end. We hear that after this we once more go up the hateful canal to Givenchy. I don't like the place, but suppose it does not rest with our wishes.

June 14th. Hear we are leaving here again for the trenches to-morrow. This will be the second time our rest has thus been broken. Think we are going to a place called Richebourg, just the other side of Festubert. We don't feel altogether pleased about having to go, naturally, though we are tired of this place. Our sergeant has been up to the trenches to-day to have a look round. We are rather anxious to know what it is like; hope it is not like Cuinchy - we had quite enough of that.

June 15th. Heard yesterday that we are not after all going up to the trenches, which is very nice, we hope we may after all spend our whole time here. Our band played outside, by the bridge, yesterday, which was quite a treat. The Marseillaise was quite a pleasure to the French people, and the people in the estaminet opposite were very generous with their beer afterwards. It was nice to hear "Sussex by the Sea" again, reminding us of the days at Cooden. They also played "Till the boys come home", which will always make me think of

Detling, where we were always hearing it played on the piano at concerts in the Y.M.C.A. tent. The effect of the Marseillaise on the French is almost electrical, and I think it pleased them to hear it played.

We still hear little or nothing about our leave, though the officers keep going.

June 17th. We arrived here (place not named) last evening about 6.30. The headquarters looks as if it had been a sort of farm originally. The signal office is a sandbagged affair against the side of a house, and is not particularly comfortable. Some artillery fellows are in



*Till the Boys come Home*

They were summoned from the hillside,  
They were called in from the glen,  
And the country found them ready  
At the stirring call for men.  
Let no tears add to their hardships  
As the soldiers pass along,  
And although your heart is breaking,  
Make it sing this cheery song:

Keep the Home Fires Burning,  
While your hearts are yearning.  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of home.  
There's a silver lining  
Through the dark clouds shining,  
Turn the dark cloud inside out  
Till the boys come home.

Overseas there came a pleading,  
"Help a nation in distress."  
And we gave our glorious laddies -  
Honour bade us do no less,  
For no gallant son of Freedom  
To a tyrant's yoke should bend,  
And a noble heart must answer  
To the sacred call of "Friend."

Keep the Home Fires Burning,  
While your hearts are yearning.  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of home.  
There's a silver lining  
Through the dark clouds shining,  
Turn the dark cloud inside out



one corner of it. The weather has suddenly changed very much warmer, which is a welcome change. Our sleeping place is not so bad, but I am afraid is overrun with vermin.

June 19th. Yesterday was a very strange sort of Sunday, passing just like an ordinary day. In the evening I went down to the front line, which I found was pretty good and well kept. We had rather a trouble with some armoured cable, but were fortunately able to find the fault. Had a look at the German trenches through a periscope. They don't look particularly formidable, but are evidently not what they look. I expect ours look very much the same from the German side.

June 24th. We are now out of the trenches and in some good billets at Vieille Chapelle. The place has some decent little shops, though only a village. The church is absolutely gutted; the inhabitants say that the British did it, as the Germans when here had machine guns in it. Bert has gone to-day on a signalling



*Vieille Chapelle*

course at Locon.

I should like to have gone with him for some things.

June 25th. Sunday has come round once more. I was able to attend an outdoor service in the evening, we are shortly going "over the top", from what we hear everywhere, and I think everyone felt it rather. The chaplain was new to me, but he seemed rather a nice sort, and one or two things he said I liked. One thing he said, he felt that his prayers were very poor. I noticed the little Irish chaplain that I like. I was late, so did not hear all the service, and was attracted to the place by the Singing of one of the hymns, we sang the hymn "O God, our help in ages past" while I was there.

Yesterday  
afternoon we had a sort  
of rehearsal of charging  
the enemy's trenches,  
am afraid I didn't like it  
much. I hope I shan't  
have to take an active  
part in the actual  
fighting. I hope Bert will  
stay where he is until this  
is all over.

Went up the  
ruined church tower this  
afternoon, but didn't  
think very much of the  
view. It makes me think  
of that beautiful view  
from the top of  
Staplehurst church  
tower.

1139 I. Watts  
*Man Frail, God Eternal. Ps. 90. 1-5*

1 O God, our Help in ages past,  
Our Hope for years to come,  
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal Home.

2 Under the shadow of thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is thine arm alone,  
And our defence is sure.

3 Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame –  
From everlasting thou art God,  
To endless years the same.

4 [Thy word commands our flesh to  
dust,  
“Return, ye sons of men”;  
All nations rose from earth at first,  
And turn to earth again.]

5 A thousand ages in thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the  
night,  
Before the rising sun.

6 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

7 O God, our Help in ages past,  
Our Hope for years to come,  
Be thou our Guard while life shall  
last,  
And our eternal Home.

Had a nice batch of letters yesterday. Hear that dear Father is nearly done up; do hope he can soon get away for a rest. Feel a little down about the news that we are shortly to attack. May I look to the right place for comfort and help. Lord, once more give me strength and wisdom for whatever may be before me, and grant that I may give satisfaction.

Our work will be extremely important, and maybe many lives will depend on it. I wish we had a more capable sergeant, but I trust the men will turn out well. I don't know yet what position I may have to take.

June 26th. A little more news to hand about our coming attack. Hear that we shall all have to go over, but must await further developments. It is a serious time, but I don't feel at times as I should. I don't know how to write it down, and perhaps it is best that I shall not, but may I be able to take the whole matter in prayer to the Lord. I think I did have a little encouragement the other day. I had mislaid my rifle, and could not find it anywhere. It worried me rather, as it is a serious loss. Just before dropping off to sleep I tried to ask that it might be found and restored to me. No sooner had I finished when someone called my name, and asked if so-and-so number was my rifle. He had come all the way

from one of the Companies to give it to me. It appeared that one of the Company men had taken my rifle in mistake for his own.

00000000

(NOTE. There is now a long gap in the diary. - The expected attack was made on the 30th June, 1916. The Brigade of which the 15th Royal Sussex formed part gained the enemy's trenches and held them for a time, but was subsequently forced to return to our own lines. Marc accompanied the attacking party, and regained the British trenches in safety. The Germans, however, commenced shelling very heavily. One shell struck a dug-out in which Bert, a sergeant and an artillery officer were, burying them, and Marc dug them out, though exposed all the time to the shells dropping around. A little later, he was wounded in the right arm and right leg by fragments of a shell.

As a consequence of this wound he was sent back to England, and was in hospital at Portsmouth until mid-September. After a short period of leave he was then for a short period at Newhaven, and finally on the 21st October was sent to the much-loathed Aldershot. From thence on the

11th December, 1916, he was again drafted overseas. The diary recommences at this point.)

We left Aldershot about 2 a.m. Monday morning December 11th, after a rather stormy parting with the 97th Training Reserve.

We travelled, as far as I could make out, via Guildford, Tonbridge, down to Folkestone, arriving there somewhere about 6 o'clock. I managed to get a fair amount of sleep, so didn't get off very badly. On arriving at Folkestone we were billeted in a private house until about 1.50 p.m., when we were marched on to the quay. It was a lovely morning, but towards noon it turned quite dull, and I noticed with apprehension that there was a quite respectable swell on the sea. We found our transport was a paddle-steamer, though not small in size. There were three transports in all, and they all went across together, ours being the second to start, but the last to get across. We had an escort of three destroyers, and the journey took about 2½ hours. I got over without feeling in the least bit bad.

We disembarked at Boulogne, a very slow affair, and then "fell in" and marched up a very steep hill to a rest camp,

I believe called St. Martin's. Here we were fortunately able to get into a hut, though a good many had to be content with tents. We were issued out with two blankets apiece, and were soon in bed and asleep.

This morning it has been snowing a good bit, and is very much colder; it reminds me rather of when we came out here before. There is fortunately a good Expeditionary Force canteen here, and a Y.M.C.A. Hut, so have been able to have some good hot tea.

We paraded about 1.30 p.m., ready to march off. We stood about in the rain for a good half hour, as usual, waiting for the word to move off. Eventually we did move, and soon got warm marching down the hill into Boulogne. From what I saw of it I think it is a pretty decent sort of town, the harbour being naturally very interesting. We marched to the station, and of course had to wait nearly an hour. It would be quite impossible for the army to get things to work in a really organised way, I suppose. Saw a massive French railway engine belonging to the Nord railway; noticed that the lamps on the engines are oil and have glass chimneys just like a reading lamp. Found we were to travel in the same old way - cattle trucks, - and was quite glad to reach Etaples.

Find this a tremendous place. Before arriving at our tents we were issued with our rifles and bayonets, very quick work, but evidently not quick enough for those in authority, for they snapped at us like a lot of dogs. We drew here a gas helmet and two blankets, and were soon in our tents and asleep. The next morning we had the usual kit inspection, also a medical inspection. In the evening I stumbled across Whitcomb, and was awfully glad to see him. Was very interested to hear of all the signallers' doings up to the time he left them.

Experienced the Bull Ring this morning (a name they give to the square here). Can't say I minded it much, especially as we had a decent Scotch sergeant as instructor - I think of the Camerons; but the time will never come when I shall be enthusiastic about drill etc. We went into the poison-gas chamber, a rather novel experience, but of course had our gas helmets on: also the weeping gas, which promptly made us all weep.

Half the  
canteens and Y.M.C.As  
here are taken over by the  
Australians, which makes  
it an awful job for us to  
get into one in comfort.  
Still, the places are a great  
blessing, and the way they  
are patronised would  
make one think the Army  
was half starved. I can't  
say the grub here is the  
best or the most plentiful,  
but I suppose being on  
active service again, must  
not expect the same  
rationing as was  
obtainable in England.

To-day the 16th,  
we have been trying our  
new rifles on a short  
range, and I think mine is  
as true as can be wished

**Psalm 121**

I. Watts

1 To heav'n I lift my waiting eyes,  
There all my hopes are laid:  
The Lord that built the earth and  
skies  
Is my perpetual aid.

2 Their feet shall never slide to fall  
Whom he designs to keep;  
His ear attends the softest call,  
His eyes can never sleep.

3 He will sustain our weakest  
powers  
With his almighty arm,  
And watch our most unguarded  
hours  
Against surprising harm.

4 Isr'el, rejoice, and rest secure,  
Thy keeper is the Lord;  
His wakeful eyes employ his power  
For thine eternal guard.

5 Nor scorching sun, nor sickly  
moon,  
Shall have his leave to smite;  
He shields thy head from burning  
noon,  
From blasting damps at night.

6 He guards thy soul, he keeps thy  
breath,  
Where thickest dangers come:  
Go, and return, secure from death,  
Till God commands thee home.

for. So far, we have not had a very strenuous time here, but am looking forward to going up to the old 13th again. Yesterday I went up to the Orderly Room, and found the sergeant was quite willing to put me down for the 13th. He was a very decent sort, so was the R.S.M., who I found was the King's piper - whatever that was. Hear to-day that we are going up the line, or rather to our battalions, on Monday.

December 17th. Spent the morning from 8.50 a.m. to 1 o'clock at the Bull Ring. Had a rotten time, as may be imagined. Find it very difficult to think that the day is Sunday. Feel very fed up with things, and don't feel up to much in myself.

Read these lines yesterday in a little text-book, - "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore." (Psalm 121:8)

*"He guards thy soul, He keeps thy breath;  
Where thickest dangers come  
Go and return, secure from death  
Till God commands thee home."*

I don't know what is before me, but I must believe

that God has helped me in the past and heard my cries to Him. May He indeed go with me where I go, and keep me, not body only, but keep and preserve my never-dying soul, keep me from my great indifference. May he also give me all the wisdom and strength that I shall need to do my work here.

December 21st. Had my first letter from home, and was naturally awfully glad to hear. Yesterday went down to the specialist about my knee - rather think he has advised an operation, but must wait for the report. Very wet this morning, and things are not exactly pleasant in our tent; rain comes in pretty freely. Still, it is better than being in the trenches with no cover at all.

December 23rd. Have heard nothing about my medical report yet, and we still hear nothing about moving away from here. We are making up our minds to spend Christmas here. Very windy to-day, and several squalls of rain. Some of the tents came down, but fortunately ours stood the shock.

December 24th. Went on Church Parade. Service was held in the cinema here. Don't like the chaplain very much. ... In the evening went down to a service in the old cinema; was far

better than the parade service of the morning. I think it was a Presbyterian minister who preached. There was a big congregation, and I don't remember ever seeing such an attentive body of soldiers at a service before.

December 25th. Christmas Day. My second in the army; may it be the last. We had an apology for a Church Parade in the morning, but I was glad to have it over. We did not come off badly, really, as regards the meals; a very good pudding and mince pies being given.

December 29th. 7 a.m. The draft that I came out from England with have just gone up to the line. Yesterday it was settled that I am to go back to the good old 13th. Am awfully pleased, as may be imagined. Find I am to go before a Travelling Medical Board about my knee. Can't understand it, and am very doubtful about going before such an august tribunal. Expect, if they pronounce for an operation, it will delay my getting back to the 15th.

Hay I feel, however, that these things are not in my hands, but even in His hands who knows the end of all things.

December 30th. Moved yesterday from the old tent up to the "casual" lines. Went this morning before the Board, but managed to get off without the Doctor sending me to hospital. It will suit me very well, and I hope it is the right thing.

December 31st. Understand I am marked "active", which of course means that I am for the line again. It is Sunday again, and the last of the old year. It has been a momentous year, much having happened, but through God's mercy I have been brought through it all.

I suppose that now, 11.20 a.m., my dear Father and Mother are at chapel. How different were those peaceful Sundays to the rush and tear of those out here. Practically no difference is made out here, even though at the Base, where I think at any rate the training could very well be dispensed with for the one day. Of course we have a Church Parade, but from what I can see we are only allowed to attend on one Sunday out of two.

In the afternoon went for a stroll through the woods that surround our camp, with Whitcomb, and I think we both enjoyed it.

It was a relief to me to get away from everything military for an hour or two. The woods and sand hills reminded me very much of Witley district; but on the high ground it very much resembled the fine old South Downs at home. The round haystacks reminded me of those we used to count up at Patcham. Saw the sea for the first time to-day, and suppose I was looking out towards England.

In the evening went to a service in the Church Army hut, and got on fairly well. We opened the service with "Jerusalem the golden", sung to the tune of "Ewing", and closed with that grand hymn, "O God, our help in ages past". The chaplain gave a good address.



**Jerusalem the Golden**  
(by Bernard of Cluny)

Jerusalem the golden,  
With milk and honey blest,  
Beneath your contemplation  
Sink heart and voice oppressed.  
I know not, oh, I know not  
What joys await us there,  
What radiancy of glory,  
What bliss beyond compare.



January 1st 1917. New Year's Day. Went to the Bull Ring in the morning, and listened to lectures on the edifying subject of barbed wire and wiring, also of repairing trenches that

have been smashed by shell fire. Afterwards practised the inevitable bomb-throwing and bayonet fighting.

Had a letter from Arthur and auntie Martie. Very glad to have them. How nice it is to hear from home.

Corporals Pook and Mockford left to-day for the 15th. Very much wanted to go with them, but it has been ruled otherwise.

Arthur seems to have had a pretty decent Christmas on the whole, am glad, as I was afraid the Aldershot surroundings would give him the blue pip. Am still wondering how Bert came off.

January 4th. Was paid 10 francs to-day, after rather an unpleasant exchange of words with the pay sergeant. He didn't like to own up to a mistake of his. Hear rather disgusting news about my going back to the 15th: the pay sergeant will have it I belong to the 7th. Hope, however, all will come right, but it makes me feel very unsettled. The matter is, however, not in my hands, and those men can by no means do what they like. God sees the end of this, and though my thoughts about it are constantly changing, it is still

the same with him. May I feel that He knows best, and be enabled to leave it with Him.

Heard from dear Mother to-day; they are disappointed I am not yet with Bert. Still hear nothing from Bert - think the letters have miscarried somewhere.

January 5th. Had a long talk with Whitcomb last night about the Church of England. He evidently does not take everything for granted that is told him, which is a good thing. Unlike Lawrence, he agreed with me on a good many things, and I with him. I wonder where Lawrence is, and if I get back to the 15th, whether I shall see him again. From the newspapers this morning I see that the enemy artillery is reported very active at Ypres. Shall be interested, if I join the old Division, to see the famous place; but it has always been known as a place for very hot fighting. Have shifted this morning to a new tent, and am to take charge of it. This afternoon went for a route march, and enjoyed it after a style.

January 6th. Was awakened at 4.30 this morning, as I was on a ration fatigue for a draft of men for the West Kents. Got back and finished by 8.50 a.m., so have not been hard worked.

January 9th. was awakened by the sergeant at 5.30 a.m. to go down to the station with some officers' kit. Got the job done all right, but was caught in a most violent rain squall and got my overcoat sopping wet. Later in the morning, received the news that I am at last to go up to the line - am thankful to say to the 15th. Have shown kit and had the usual medical examination, and got even wetter still hanging about in the open.

January 15th. Have at last left Etaples. Woke at 4.15 a.m. Had to give in blankets and get breakfast, so as to be ready for marching off at 6.10. The day was fortunately



finer. Found we were to travel in the old "40 Hommes 8 Chevaux", as usual. Found that the R.T.O.<sup>15</sup> or someone had put us down for the 12th Battalion.

It seems that they make mistakes over the simplest things here. We got two fires going in our truck, so were as comfortable as the crowded state of the truck would allow. After being rushed up at 4.15 a.m. we naturally expected the

---

<sup>15</sup> Railway Transport Officer

train would move off about 8.50 or 9 o'clock, but we eventually left Etaples at 4.15 p.m.! We hear a lot in books on the East, that there, time is no object: it evidently isn't here.

After travelling (via Calais) for about 10 hours, we disembarked at Hazebrouck, and I thus renewed my acquaintance with that town, we marched up to the rest camp, which was a disused convent, where we were left in peace to



*Hazebrouck*

try and sleep, as our train was not going to Poperinghe till 10 o'clock the next morning. I could not secure a paillasse, so had to be content with sleeping on the stone floor, with just my overcoat between. I was naturally soon too cold to sleep, so I got up, and soon had some decent hot tea and biscuits and jam for breakfast. About 9.15 a.m. we left for the station; we found the train all right, but it was not very punctual in leaving. Was interested in the country, as very soon we were in Belgium. There is quite a Dutch sound about all the names here, very unlike the French. I suppose we arrived at Poperinghe somewhere about midday.

Here we were met by a guide who had the haziest of ideas whom he was to guide, but eventually we reached a collection



*Poperinge station*

of huts called "F" Camp. Here we were seen by an adjutant, one of the best of fellows, who very soon had everything put right about our going to our own battalions, we had a little hot tea and some biscuits and cheese, and then started off to find our battalions. Everyone we met had different views as to the direction we were to take, and for some distance we did not find an English soldier to direct us. Eventually we reached a battered sort of village, where we found a 12th Battalion man, and a few yards farther on I came across the Q.M.S.<sup>16</sup> of "B" Company, who soon had us on the right track.

I reported to the Sergeant in the Orderly Room, who was very surprised to see me, and also very pleased, I think. Then I went on to the signallers, and found them all well and as

---

<sup>16</sup> Quartermaster Sergeant

lively as ever. Find a few new signallers, but daresay shall soon be used to them. Bert being away on a course, I haven't yet seen him. Slept like a top the first night, but water drips through the roof of the dug-out in rather an unsatisfactory way, so have decided to move my belongings to a better place for to-night.

January 15th. Am settling down to the old life again now. Find a few new instruments, but they are tolerably easy to get on with.

About 5 o'clock yesterday evening we left the support lines for the line again, proceeded down a paved road, which had very evidently been shelled by Fritz, shell holes being very unhealthily near. We reached the dug-out safely, however. ...

One part of our way took us through a wood, which has been knocked about very considerably, big trees lying all over the place.

January 19th. We left the trenches safely on the night of the 16th. Had to wait a few hours for the sergeant, and then marched off



*Ypres*

for our billet. This we found was in the remains of the city of Ypres. This place, and especially the village before entering Ypres, is absolutely gutted, and it makes me feel quite sick to see the buildings, or what is left of them. Our billet is a cellar, and I think fairly safe. We are able to have a fire, which is a good thing, as we have had snow for some days, and the stone floor of our cellar would make it otherwise unbearable.

January 22nd. We have left the cellar in Ypres and are now in the trenches once more. Headquarters is dug-outs, and I am fairly fortunate in my choice, but it is frightfully cold at nights owing to the dug-out having no door. The Germans put some heavy shells over this morning, which came quite close enough for my liking. Hear that they have knocked our communication trench in. Am afraid my nerves are not quite the same as they used to be, but may I be enabled to leave everything in God's hands and believe that nothing can

happen of itself.

January 24th. Keep spending very cold nights here and have had about enough of it. ... The rats are a plague here; altogether it is a life. ... This morning a large shell dropped quite close to the signal office, the concussion of it blowing out the candle. The next few, however, dropped further off. Artillery has been rather active on both sides since we have been here.

January 25th. Left the trenches once more safely yesterday afternoon. Found that Fritz was shelling Ypres pretty heavily, was glad to reach our billet and get near a warm fire once more.

January 26th. Very little doing. Have been able to have a good fire going all day. About 8 p.m. the gas alarm, went and we had our respirators on for about 25 minutes. Find them more comfortable than the old sort, though these are none too nice.

January 31st. We left Ypres about 10 o'clock on the 27th and went up to some monastic-looking buildings.

oooooOOooooo

March 17th. Wish I had kept the diary up, but will now try and do so once more. Since last writing, I have been in some pretty tight corners, but am thankful to say have been preserved. Had a decent 10 days rest at a camp in huts - enjoyed ourselves there very much - after that proceeding to a village near Bollezele, by rail. We were billeted in a barn. This rest was supposed to be the fabulous Divisional rest of a month's duration, but after about 10 days of it we were trained back to Poperinghe. Next night we were in the line again, Headquarters being in underground saps. Though fairly quiet generally, Fritz gave us a bit of trouble at times.

Spent another decent little rest at St. Laurence. By this time Bert had reported back. How decent to see him again, looking so well, too.

Am at present on a short



*Boeschepe*

signalling course, at Boesheepe,<sup>17</sup> and am having a pretty comfortable time. Am learning about P.Bs and amplifiers. The village boasts some decent little shops, for France; but where will you see anything like the English ones? There is a decent view from the hill here, which in a way reminds me of the good old views from the Downs at home.

March 25th. Have now rejoined the Battalion, and am back from the line in St. Laurence. Very cold weather again. ... ..



*Boeschepe: shops*

There seems to be very great artillery activity up near the line; hope it will quieten down a bit before we go up again. ... Have met Postlethwaite at last; very nice to see him, and he seemed very glad to meet someone.

March 29th. Left St. Laurence about 8 p.m. last night, arriving here at support after a most awful journey. We had our usual experience of advancing in 10-yard rushes: in short, the

---

<sup>17</sup> Boeschepe

distance of about 2 miles must have taken over two hours.

April 2nd. Have now spent my 3rd birthday in the Army. Received a lovely cake from home, and letters from all. We are now in the trenches again, and in the old tunnel. The quarters are far from comfortable, and I was not feeling at all easy about coming in this time, as the enemy has shelled it and knocked it in, in one place. I think I can say I have felt a little comfort from the fact that all is in God's hands. May I realise it more and more, and feel that He is my only Refuge. The other night, read that 91st Psalm, when it seemed a comfort to me.

When I see a bombardment, it makes me very very afraid, but oh to know that God controls it all. Read these words the other day in that little text book : "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth we are dust." (Psalm 103:13).

April 3rd. Still in the trenches, but hear we are shortly to be relieved from this sector. Feel very glad, as the place seems very warm as regards the fighting. Hope we shall be leaving the Ypres sector altogether. Find I have written somewhere

in this book that I should like to see Ypres, but am sure I shall be better pleased to leave it.

April 4th. Saw our artillery strafing on the famous Hill 60 the other day; rather a good sight, but am glad it was not opposite our front - which is perhaps selfish.



*Hill 60*

April 8th. Are now back at St. Laurence - arrived here the day before yesterday. Our future movements seem very doubtful, but think we have now left these sectors for good.

April 14th. Are in a new sector near that awful EKI. Find it very hot and shall be awfully glad to leave. ... Some of the signallers had to leave their dugouts owing to the insufficient shelter. ... What a great thing to know that God has a controlling hand, however, even over the furious fire the enemy sends over. Oh may I realise it and find comfort in it.

April 19th. Have been back to St. Laurence for a couple of

days, and now find ourselves in support on the canal bank. Very decent accommodation in dug-outs, and up to now pretty quiet. We hear rumours of going back for a rest, and once more they have taken a lot of names for leave. Yesterday poor Lieut. Rayner was killed in the front line; it seems very sad, for he was a nice fellow and everyone seemed to respect him.

April 24th. We find ourselves once again in the line, but we hope not for long. ... Lovely spring weather at last - cold at nights, but a welcome change. The aeroplanes on both sides are taking full advantage of it, and we are continually warned to take cover from observation. Fine



Hill 60 is a mass grave. Whoever walks here walks on the remains of hundreds of unknown soldiers who have no known grave.

In December 1914, the French lost the strategically important Hill 60 to the Germans. This mound along the railway from Ypres to Courtrai gave the Germans excellent observation over the entire front region. In February 1915, British units occupied the trenches opposite the hill. They brought with them a new plan of attack: they dug long tunnels under Hill 60 and positioned six mines beneath the German defences. On 17 April 1918 the German front line was blown sky-high. The British 5th Division captured the hill with relative ease, but it proved much harder to hold it. Fierce fighting for its possession continued until 21 April. The British just managed to hang on - for the time being. During the fighting, some of the British troops reported a strange gas-like smell, but no one took any notice of these reports.



view from our headquarters, looking on battered Ypres and right away to the hills beyond Poperinghe. The other day saw two swallows skimming the canal, and to-day hear the skylark singing away, evidently quite oblivious to the ghastly surroundings on the earth.

April 29th. Left the line last night - came out pretty comfortably.

May 3rd. Left camp early in the morning of the 1st, arriving at a village just outside St. Omer about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Left this place again about 7 o'clock next morning for our final destination, a fairly clean village going by the name of Quercamps - quite the best looking place I remember to have seen in France; It is very quiet, however, barely boasting even a shop. Our own dry canteen will therefore come in rather handy.

May 10th. We have now been here just over a week. Have been out nearly every day from about 7 a.m. till tea-time, pretty stiff training. Have been feeling very seedy with rheumatism in my knees, but feel quite different this morning. Had a decent morning signalling in the woods yesterday. Hear there was a wild boar shot in the forest the

day before yesterday. The place is a picture with the violets, cowslips, anemones etc.

May 17th. Left Quercamps last Tuesday, and have to-day finished a three days march. The weather has fortunately been cool, or I should have been rather apprehensive of the result. ... My feet were a bit sore, and I didn't look forward to the third day, as it was the longest march of the lot; however, I survived, though it was raining all the time and we had to wear our waterproofs. Arrived at Wormhout at 10.15 a.m., and after marching about another 8 kilos. found our billet soon after 3 p.m. It is a big loft, holding all headquarters. Can once more hear the sound of the guns quite distinctly.

This morning is much finer; everything is beginning to look beautiful and fresh. The fruit trees are a picture everywhere, being a mass of blossom.

June 7th. Are now in the line. Awful bombardment this morning - somebody must have "gone over". Weather is very hot, the trenches seem stifling. Have got a pretty decent and comfortable dug-out, with very little on top, however.

June 10th. Very quiet this morning, such a difference from the violent cannonading of the previous days. Hear great news of



*Hill 60*

the doings near Messines &c. Hill 60 is evidently ours at last.  
... ..

June 22nd. We are going out to-night, all being well. Shall indeed be glad to get away in safety and peace. Have had a warm time, but have once more been spared. God grant me to realise that I am a subject of His care.

June 24th. Midsummer day, and beautiful weather. Am writing this in a hayfield near our billet. Cannot help being struck with the beauty of the country, the trees of course being in full foliage. A lovely blue sky. What a difference after the sickening desolation of the line, where everything is so uncared for. There seems such a peace here, not a sound of a gun - only a distant aeroplane reminding one of the war. (I forget, however, a rifle range not far away; I can hear the firing now and again). The country reminds me very forcibly

of the Ragstone Ridge in that lovely part of Kent just south of Maidstone, and the fields round Staplehurst; how I should like to be there now. There is a church close by, a big one. How I would go there this evening if it were other than Roman Catholic. We had a church parade this morning, and though it was what the chaplain called a "scratch" service, owing to the fact that we were minus books and band, and he minus surplice and cassock, it was one of the best services we have had out here. I like the padre, and his sermon about the care of God for us was good. Oh, may I be given a thankful heart for the mercies that He does so shower upon me. He does indeed preserve me and keep me; may He give me a grateful heart. Have to-day received a letter from dear Dad, in which he mentions the 91st Psalm. It seems made for any who are on active service. May I be of that number that trust Him, that are His, for they alone are happy. Do make me to truly feel my need of Thee, Lord Jesus.

Have just read the 91st Psalm, and have been very much struck by the 7th verse, chiefly by the clause "and ten thousand at thy right hand." This is exactly the official number of casualties published in the papers, of the Messines Ridge battle. This was just on our right at the time. And it goes on to say, "But it shall not come nigh thee". O God,

number not my soul with those that care not for Thee; be not silent unto me, lest if Thou be silent I become like them that go down into the pit.

July 2nd. The year is now half over, we shall shortly be having the third anniversary of the war. We are having a fairly good time here, having been this day on a signalling stunt with aeroplanes.

Keep hearing rumours of our taking part in an attack. Hymn 352 seems very nice. How often we used to sing it at home:

*"But they that in the Lord confide,  
And shelter in His wounded side,  
Shall see the danger overpast,  
Stand every storm, and live at last."*

O God, Thou knowest that these things are not always absent from my thoughts. Do grant me to be of that happy number that are Thine own. Lord, do remember me with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people.

I can't tell how I envy the lot of God's people.

Dear Legh has now to join the Army, and Father and Mother will be left alone.

July 22nd. It is Sunday, and just about 11 a.m. I expect Father and Mother are at chapel.

This morning, read Hymn 480, which is so nice:

*"Oh might I once mount up and see  
The glories of the eternal skies,  
What little things these worlds would be,  
How despicable to my eyes!*

*"Had I a glance of Thee, my God,  
Kingdoms and men would vanish soon –  
Vanish as though I saw them not,  
As a dim candle dies at noon.*

*"Then they might fight, and rage, and rave;  
I should perceive the noise no more  
Than we can hear a shaking leaf  
While ratt'ling thunders round us roar.*

*"Great All in All, Eternal King,  
Let me but view Thy lovely face,  
And all my powers shall bow and sing  
Thy endless grandeur and Thy grace."*

September 16th. I find several weeks have elapsed since writing anything down here. A lot has happened, chief being the attack made on July 31st. How can I be thankful enough for having been preserved through that ordeal.

We attacked just before dawn, but it was still dark enough, so that we could not see where we were going. The roar of the guns was terrific, and the flashes of our own shells as we followed the barrage up gave us an idea where the enemy lines were. We missed the Boche<sup>18</sup> barrage, and were soon in the remnants of his first line. Soon after this, I got lost, and who can describe the chaos which the dawn produced. Hardly a yard of ground that was not overturned by our barrage. The German lines were battered in, in places, so much that you could not take them for trenches, his concrete dug-outs alone standing the deluge of shells. I eventually found my party wandering about, and in the end

---

<sup>18</sup> German

we all found our destination, where we had a little breathing space. By this time we were experiencing a little of the enemy's fire, his 5.9s being prominent.

We soon had the order to advance, and then began the worst part. We had to get through the enemy barrage before getting to our second headquarters, and this was extremely heavy, so much so that we all, (about 20), had to take what shelter we could find in a gigantic shell-hole. I should say we stayed in that crater for nearly two hours, and the number of times the shells came so close as to take our breath away were too numerous to mention. I think I felt at this time that God was watching over me and preserving me. Soon after, we were ordered to get on, as the fire had slackened, and though dead-tired I managed to reach our Headquarters and get a bit of rest and a portion of tinned ration. Here we were under observation from the enemy, and we were soon made to know it. Just before reaching here, a violent sort of shrapnel burst so close that the concussion absolutely stung my face, but still, not touched, I was able to reach the comparative safety of a concrete dug-out. We had to stand to several times, as we were rather expecting counter-attacks, but our artillery put up a good barrage.

The next morning arrived very wet. I was thankful to get a good sleep, (how much more fortunate than the men in the front line). But being so much under observation, we had orders to shift a little below the ridge, into a big concrete gun-pit. Here we stayed for the remaining two days, wet through, but eventually came out safely. About 15 minutes after I had left the gun-pit, a shell came right into the mouth of the pit and killed over twelve outright, and wounded the remainder. I feel at times that God has been very condescending and gracious. Oh that I might be given a grateful spirit, that I could thank him as I ought. It seems very wonderful that though we had many shells near us during the 48 hours we were in the gun-pit, not one had exploded on or in it. I don't think I shall ever forget the walk out - the anxiety lest we should be spotted, our nerves unsettled by the strain of the last few days, the terrible mud, and the broken uneven road. When about ½-mile back, and near our guns, the enemy started replying to our fire, and we of course came under fire again; but am thankful to say came through again unscathed. How welcome it was to see once more familiar ground, and to remember how far off it seemed when in the line; and then getting back to the now good old canal bank, to get into some dry clothes, have a hot drink of tea and rum, and then a good sleep.

I laid down reserving a place near me for a chap I liked very much, young Albert Ball; but on enquiring, found that he was one of those killed by that last shell. He had stayed behind on his own account, issuing hot tea to the men of his Company, and so had met his death. I have felt it rather, as I took to him, and he to me; but I think I had made an idol of him. O Lord, I am unworthy of Thy goodness. Keep me from the sins that do so easily beset me, and be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent I become like them that go down into the pit.

For the last five weeks I have been on a signalling course at Contay. This place is in the Somme district, and is not very much of a place. There is plenty of work however to keep one occupied, and next week (the last of the course) is all examinations.

October 3rd. Have now been back with the Battalion several days. Had a journey back which covered nearly 7 days. Stayed for one night at the rest camp at Etaples. Visited a few of my old haunts. Find I have passed my examination all right, and have now an Assistant Instructor's Certificate. Am very glad, as I was a bit doubtful, as I was feeling seedy at the time.

November 4th. Have not had an over-eventful month since last writing here. Have only been in the line once for 4 days. We have not, however, been out of Belgium the whole time; it is not exactly a comfortable country to live in, these times. Bert has at last been on leave. Am now out of the line, though the Battalion is in; hear I am to take turns with Sergeant Dudman in going in. There was a big strafe on this morning, but hope all our signallers have come through all right. On coming back from my course was very surprised and grieved to hear that four of our signallers had been killed in action - Tommy Lansdell, Gough, Reg. Collins and Fish are all gone, poor chaps. We are rather depleted now, and we miss them, having been such a time together. This is an awful part of the front, and we all hope we are shifting.

Shortly after writing the foregoing, our dear boy came home on what proved to be his last leave. Returning to France on December 23rd 1917, he was in the great German offensive of March 1918, when he and his brother had a very rough time in the retreat. At this time he wrote and told us how good the words had been to him, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."

He was relieved on March 30th - the day his brother was wounded - and sent near Ypres again. He wrote from there that he was back at the old spot, and he was feeling God had been very good to him; he could say God heard and answered prayer.

We hoped that, having been removed from the scene of the first great German thrust, he would now have a season of comparative quietness, but this was not to be. Scarcely had he arrived in the Ypres region than the second enemy offensive started, and his Battalion was involved in the fighting: and on April 26th, during a German attack, he was mortally wounded and died a few hours later.



His body rests in Bandaghère Military Cemetery, Haringhe, Belgium, in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection.

"HE ASKED LIFE OF THEE, AND THOU GAVEST IT HIM, EVEN LENGTH OF DAYS FOR EVER AND EVER."

Ps. 21:4



*Bandaghem Military Cemetery, Haringhe*



*Row 5B, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left*