

## BOB'S DIARY.

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Part 2.26 July  
1918.

I believe it is just about a year since I started my last diary. It is finished - and in my bag. The Censor forbids my sending it along to its rightful owner. At present I am sitting in my dug-out. Dug-outs you know are not very roomy places - mine for instance measures about 6ft long by 5ft wide - and perhaps 5ft high; A musty smell pervades the place generally, tainted by that of rats. A sooty looking fungus growth decorates the sand-bag walls, while weird forms of mushrooms and toadstools poke their heads out of damp corners and dark recesses - The door consists of a sand-bag - while iron girders hold up layers of sand-bags on the roof to prevent those iron rations supplied by the Germans from disturbing my privacy. The other side of the parapet is "No Mans Land," - bounded by our trenches on one side and by the Germans on the other - a desolate patch clothed with tall grass and wild oats - while a few battered willow trees mark what were once the boundaries of civilized fields. Some miles from the firing line it is hard to realize that War is in existence. Crops are growing in the fields - children laugh and run about the streets. There are very few men folk about though. France is just one great garden. We came through from Marseilles by train - and I have never seen a more beautiful place. The crops were being harvested - and showing amongst the standing wheat were wild flowers and poppies mostly - and cornflowers. All the roads are lined on either side by beautiful avenues of trees. We followed the Valley of the Rhone as far as Lyons - and the yellow muddy waters of that river rush and tumble in their hurry towards the sea. Here and there scattered about the landscape - perched on the crest of some sharp peak on pinnacles of rock would be old Chateaux - their thick walls and narrow windows seeming to say "War - war - we have known War also" - as we hurried along. The train would stop at meal times for about an hour to enable us to appease nature by devouring bully-beef and tea. It took us nearly three days to pass through France to our destination at a place called Thiennes where we were billeted. In the letters I receive from home they seem to imagine me sitting in the garden of some nice French farm - playing with little children. But billets are not quite like that. The French peasant is not like that. I mean he does not possess a lovely garden. Crops grow all round his dwelling - wheat - oats - peas - beans - broad beans - but I have seen no pretty gardens round their houses. The house itself is a large, square building with an open space in the centre. The people dwell in one portion - the rest consists of barns - stables - pig stys etc. All manure and straw are raked out into the centre - and here collected till there is sufficient quantity to distribute on the fields - The method does not seem very clean, but there is no smell, and apparently no ill-effects. The troops are billeted in the barns and lofts while the officers are given a room in the inhabited portion. Every farm house sells beer and wine to the soldiers billeted there - so that the quiet calm characteristics of the country do not exist for soldiers. Would you like to know about a battle and what it is like? Just a little stunt we had the other day in which the Division took part. I will try and describe it. In the first place we had taken up rather a quiet position in the firing line



When news came that we were to take part in a certain operation of storming a portion of the enemys trenches. The Battalion (55th) was anxious for this as we all wanted to do our share - but our special job was practically that of pioneers of our Brigade. Two Battalions - the 55th and 56th were to make the charge while we were to follow and dig the communication trench between the captured German trench and our own. For about six hours our Artillery stormed the enemy trenches - Boom - Boom - Boom, it thundered, all the afternoon - the windows of the houses where we were situated rattled in their frames - while great clouds of smoke rose from the bursting shells - A and B corps were to dig the communication trenches while C and D corps were split up into fatigue parties to carry supplies etc. across. Captain Gibbins led us - and we could not have had a better leader. We marched along the road in single file - keeping to the right under cover of the hedge as much as possible - and about five minutes interval between platoons, till we got to the communication saps leading to the main trench: in these we were slightly congested owing to supplies going forward - and wounded coming back - The first wounded man I saw was one lying on the road with a bullet wound through the stomach. The sight seemed to bring to me the first indication that we were actually going into battle - a slight feeling of sickness crept over me - and I felt annoyed with myself, but it soon passed. In the sap a shell landed among our front party - but we could not stop, one poor chap was blown to pulp, bits of legs and arms were scattered about. I trod on his head by mistake as I hurried by - and it gave under my foot like a sponge - others were lying about moaning and groaning - but all feeling had left me now - I passed dead men without feeling pity or remorse. We lined up in our support-trench, and here bombs were handed out to each man - after which Capt. Gibbins gave the order to scale the parapet - and away we went. Each man carried fifteen sand-bags - and most had a pick or shovel, so on arriving at "No Mans Land" it did not take us long to settle down to work. But an order came through from the front that they wanted reinforcements so off we went again. Our road was strewn with dead men lying as they had fallen - mostly face downwards, and heads towards the enemy - their yellow-white complexions - blue finger nails and clear staring eyes gazing into vacancy telling that Death had for some time taken his toll. We reached the German trench about the point B. and found that the 54th were occupying a small trench in front, B.C.D This was dug about 3ft deep and was very muddy - We took up our position between the points B & C and started to dig in. A parapet was erected out of sand-bags - Fatigue parties were told off to carry sand-bags - ammunition and bombs from our own trench, others were sent to the machine gunners to dig emplacements for their guns, and by morning we felt a little safer than when first we got into that muddy little trench. It is very hard to describe exactly what takes place in a fight. Little incidents fix themselves in one's mind - but the whole seems more or less a blur. During the night reinforcements were called for from the right - Mr. Wyllie was sent - but as he got up to go 'thud' comes something against his side - and over he rolled - grasping his side, "they've got me Chappie - they've got me" - he said as I held his head. They carried him to the main German trench - and from there to our own trenches. He is in Hospital and doing well now. Captain Gibbins was the marvel - he kept walking up and down the lines, never showing any sign of fear, encouraging people and helping them. Towards dawn our flanks were being attacked by enemy bombers -



so Capt. Gibbins led an attack against them over "No Mans Land" and drove them back - but again they came and still again. Bombs and bombers were called for - and still more bombs - but our officers were becoming less. Mendellson was blown up on the right. Joek Matthews was shot Foliard was wounded Denoon had been shot through the shoulder. Of the ~~xxx~~ officers of B. Company Capt. Gibbins and myself were the only ones left. And then coming through the dusk on our left we saw Germans. Our machine guns opened fire - But word came from the right that they were out men - During the night some of our own men had been found stripped of their clothing - and apparently spies were sending these messages. However - although we accounted for a good many the enemy got in on our left. Then came the sound of bombing. We were being driven in on either front between the points B and M. As they came our artillery put a couple of shells over and the 31st Battalion thinking our own artillery was shelling them in a body left the trench and retired to our own lines. I got to the tail end just in time to get them back again - but the majority left. Capt Gibbins came along then and we both went round the trench and found it all clear - The men were then extended on the left again - but still the bombers came. "Get as many bombs as you can - and come with me" said Gib - so I got all the bombs I could - called to some men to follow and Gib led the way on the outside of the parapet. We shifted those bombers - but poor old Gib got a wound in the head and had to retire. Robinson hurried back to our own trench to get reinforcements but they would not come. I took charge of the bombing party and as the Basches had dropped bombs for the present and taken to rifle fire we had to take shelter in the trench. We waited there for perhaps a quarter of an hour ready to bomb Fritz should he come again. But the order came to retire - so I went back to the point B. and sat on the parapet. I borrowed a rifle from one of the troops passing and sniped at Fritz till he got up to me with his bombs. It was then time to go - so I had to. My return is a bit blurred. I remember picking my way through barbed wire with rifles cracking round me - At one place the grass in front was shaking and quivering. I looked at it for a second and realized that a machine-gun was playing through there - so I jumped and hurried on. I got in all right - and as the trench was becoming too crowded I sent what 55th men I could back into the support. As soon as the enemy saw our men making use of the sap they opened fire with high explosives. "Crack - "Crack came whistling over our heads - but we leaned against the parapet and were comparatively safe. Capt. Gibbins was shot through the head while coming in. I have never known a braver man than he. If ever a man died bravely - doing his duty old Gib did. Well so ends the first fight. I am the only officer left in B Company. About 25% of the Battalion are either killed or wounded - but our losses were light in comparison to some, the 60th Battalion have only 61 men and 1 officer left.

Sunday morning 30/7/16

It is a beautiful Australian day - Aeroplanes are drowning overhead far up in the sky like huge dragon flies - the hum of their engines has a peaceful sound - occasionally a rifle cracks out its message - and viciously scatters some elods of earth from off the parapet. Far down on the right towards the Somme the sound of big guns rumbles over the ground booming out their message of Death. The English are advancing there - But here our men are sunning themselves while the horse flies play "touched you last" on the sandbag wall above our heads. Aeroplanes are common things here. Yesterday mine of them flew over the German lines on a raiding expedition - Fritz seemed to treat them like a plague of locusts judging by the reception they received at his hands.



I was on duty at the time and counted 330 shells that he poured in - but I did not get them all by any means - Our aeroplanes however treat old Fritz and his anti-aircraft - to use the little girl's phrase - "with dispisery." They swerve gracefully to one side or the other, swoop down or rise higher, but always continue on - The other day one of our airmen swooped low over the German line and followed it right along - old Fritz woke up like a distracted hornets next - rifles cracked - machine guns spat and snarled - anti-aircraft guns polluted the air with shrapnel smoke but they did not get our fellow. Fritz is a spiteful sort of chap - if you challenged him to a boxing contest he would bite scratch - kick - and be as nasty as possible. That is - if he boxed the same way as he fights. For instance - he puts phosphorous in his shells to make the wounds a bit worse - or fires what we call "tear" shells filled with a chemical that nearly blinds one. Talk about onions making one cry!! - Then he fires phosphorous shells that explode at night like a small volcano - scattering burning phosphorous everywhere. Of course liquid fire is his little invention also but we have got hold of that now. The other day Fritz put up a lot of observation balloons which looked very pretty till our airmen squirted liquid fire over them all. They looked prettier then for a little while - but did not last long. The machine gun however is Fritz's pet little weapon, he has them scattered about every fifty yards along his trench and when he gets a bit nervy at night plays "The Watch on the Rhine" along our parapet. Talking about old Fritz - there is one incident in that last bit of a scrap we had that will remain in my memory - Gib and I were sitting on the parapet of the front trench that we had captured while the men were busy filling sand-bags with mud and earth building the parapet, when in our rear staggering through the gloom we saw a man - he came about 10 yds towards us, and then fell & started to crawl. I thought it was one of our own men so went out to him. Poor beggar I have seen worse looking mess-ups but he was bad enough - his left eye was gone - as for the rest of him I could not tell what else was wrong except that he was a mass of blood and looked as if he had been through a sausage machine. He pleaded something in German - I don't know what, it was hardly a plead - it was a moan, or a prayer - so I gave him my hand to hold and said as nicely as I could "All right old chap." He kept pushing towards the trench all the time & as it was rather awkward getting along on one hand & two knees while I held his other hand I let it go. Whereupon the poor mangled brute got up on his knee - put his hands together & started to pray! Oh cruel - cruel" Gib said when he saw the poor beggar - Gib was with him all the time also, but as I looked at him the thought struck me "How can men be so cruel" - I got on one side of him and Gib the other and together we helped him along. He was determined to get into our trench as a black scarab beetle is to get out of your fingers when you catch him round the lamp at night - only he felt a bit worse - he was covered all over with wet cold blood. I think the Germans must have imagined we were going to eat them when we get in their trench - Another chicken was sitting hunched up in the trench - a shell had got him and his case was just about ma-fish- I patted him gently on the head and he gave me such a wondering look as I passed.

Sunday night. Fritz has been returning a little present of iron rations that our Artillery presented him with before sunset. Twenty seven shells came over into our sector, but no damage was done - Well I suppose it



would not do to let Sunday pass without paying a few compliments. I am on duty all night to-night - which means I walk up and down to see that the men do their duty. Did you ever hear of that mosquito that could drill a hole with his proboscis through everything but a politician's cheek? Well they must have imported him from here - Behind the trench are a number of stagnant pools. They hum a bit - also breed mosquitoes. The reason they smell slightly is that dead men are buried all over the place - fatigue parties filling sand-bags come across the remains. Not far from my dug-out on the path is a peculiar small mound - that springs up and down as one walks on it. This mound excited my curiosity till someone explained to me that a dead man rested underneath - Poor chap! his rest is a bit disturbed. Well - it is nearly time to "Stand to" - which means I must don a revolver and go on duty.

Monday morning.

I'm afraid there is not much to write about - but perhaps little incidents that are stale to us might be of interest - Certain walks in life seem to foster certain beliefs. For instance most sailors are more or less superstitious, just as most soldiers are fatalists. Of course if one sits down amongst one's books in a comfortable arm-chair, one will scoff at the idea of Fatalism - I have myself, but when fellows are getting wounded - or dying continually, a belief in these words of Shakespeare "There is a Destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hue them how we will" seems to creep in - Well if I start to argue it out on paper I'm afraid my own logic will squash my belief - This morning I was squizzing over the parapet at some of Fritz's work when "Thud" came a bullet into the sandbag in front. If it had been 2in higher - well - Labalastier would have sent my diary home as I have told him to do - Labalastier is my batman, and a very good one too: in that stunt the other day he was always just near me, throwing bombs - or pulling out the pins, and handing them to me to throw.

Saturday: Poor Labalastier got wounded yesterday We have - amongst the constabulary - the Trench Mortar people. These are divided into two classes, the heavy trench Howitzers, and the Stokes gunners. Both these have tactics which are not very agreeable to the men in the trenches. They come here from somewhere in the rear, fire a couple of shots, and then clear out, leaving the men manning the trenches to stand the retaliation. If they would only stay and have it out with Fritz to see who was the best man, nobody would mind. They came here yesterday on this little game, fired two shots, and then went away laughing - Fritz answered - first with bombs, then with shells; things were interesting for a few minutes, the consequence being that my batman got wounded in the back and arm. He walked down to the dressing station - although you could almost put your fist in the hole in his back, and sent word to me that he had been plugged. I went down to the dressing station as soon as I heard about it - he was lying on his face on a stretcher looking very white, but as soon as he saw me started to laugh and joke. Of all the officers who came over in B Company - four that is - who came over to France - and their four batmen - I am the only officer left - and only one Battalion is left.

Fleurbaix. 7/8/16

We are in billets again in a French village, about 10 miles behind the firing line. Well - I hope War will never come into Our Country. This place once was a pretty little French village. In most of these villages the inhabitants boast of a church the size of which seems to be out of proportion to the number of inhabitants. The Armidale cathedral is small in comparison to some of them.



But the Church here is no more - just a heap of ruins, and all the houses in the vicinity are just heaps of ruins also. The windows and doors of some are sandbagged, except for small loop-holes which are cut in the shutters - showing that street fighting took place. Some of the inhabitants still remain, and tell stories of what the Germans did during their time of occupation. The atrocities that we have heard of are all true. Yesterday the C.O Colonel McConaghy lent me Ginger to go for a ride on. Ginger is his horse, a big chestnut, and a beauty too. It was awfully good of the C O he has always been jolly good to me. He started in this campaign as a platoon commander, was charge of the 3rd Battalion in Gallipoli at the Lone Pine stunt, and is C.O now of the 55th. He has often lent me Ginger to ride before. Yesterday I and two others went to Armentieres, which is only about four miles from here. Towns in France you know are not quite the same as in AUSTRALIA, every two or three miles here there is a town or a village of some sort. But Armentieres is a little bigger than the average. The streets in these villages are cobble-stoned, everlasting but very hard - We rode along the bank of the Lys river going - Harvesting is in full swing now, and it is very interesting to watch them at it. The crops are all so uniform anything below thirty bushels to the acre would be poor - Some reapers and binders are used, but a lot of it is done by hand - a one-handed scythe being used. Instead of tip-drays they have small carts on three wheels - their waggons seem rather lumbering, but appear to run easily. The horses are all rolling fat - and know as much - or more about the work than the men.

Twilight over here is one of the most peculiar features - when we first arrived the light was quite strong enough at 10 p.m. to read and write. It does not do to build castles in the air, but after the War is over, and everything is quite - I would like to take you all over the places where I have been. This little diary is all I can do to let you follow me now - and it leaves a great deal out.....

We are back in the firing line again but everything is very peaceful. Warfare here is most peculiar - if Fritz gets worried he retaliates, but if he is left alone nothing seems to happen. This morning we sent some rifle grenades over just as a morning greeting, our Artillery also gave them some 18-pounders, one, alas - was given to us! Over here a fellow studies all sorts of laws other than those we generally think about when in civil life. The law of chance seems the most interesting here. Of course if I had been interested in the little game of "two-up" or 'crows in anchor' before joining the Army the Law of Chance may have interested me then - But "Chance" has led me elsewhere. After she sent me through a school of experience wherein I wandered along many enchanting walks - but they all seemed to end in a Slough of Despair. Well to continue - before I wander along too many roads of Remembrance and become a penitent - That shot that our 18-pounder fired passed through a latrine, through the parade - and through a dug-out and burst in the rear wall - Now, as it happens - that dug-out contained six men a few minutes before, but as soon as the rifle grenades began to fall they got out - Had they remained - Well, it would have been ma-fish the lot! That 18 pounder made a mess of things. When I begin to get sentimental or to moralize, I generally feel like taking a drink of Eno's Fruit Salts. When one reads his high, flowery advertisements you cant help imagining old Eno as a learned-grey-bearded old philosopher. The advertisement of "The morning and evening of a Mother's life" - a tender mother with her child - and then an old grey-haired



woman with her manly son bending over her - All done on his Fruit Salts!! and under it the words "What higher aim can Man attain than conquest over human pain." What a noble character and great soul must Eno have had! Then you examine the bottle - plenty of pretty labels and paper - and the salts - tartaric acid and soda - perhaps 2d. a bottle manufacturing price sold to the Public at 3/6! Oh, Eno - what a nice purse you must have too! - Well "such is human life so gliding on - It glimmers like a meteor and is gone - Eno again. I think that old chicken must have gone through half a dozen books of popular quotations, and taken all those that were not copy-write for his Ads.

Well - the day is closing. In half an hours time I will have to inspect the rifles, and gas helmets of No. 7 and 8 platoons.

"Stand to" will be at 9 p.m and at 10 p.m I go out on patrol into 'No Mans Land' The night before last I went out, and while there picked a little flower which I have pressed in this book. Fritz is sending over some ninnie-werfers and sausage bombs on the right, disturbing the evening calm. Occasionally a shell wearily crawls through the sky to end with a crash in our line of supports - otherwise the calm which exists between latent opposing forces is ushering in the night. But my spirit is not altogether calm. I asked my sergeant would he come out with me tonight - he is a married man with some little children at home, but he is a good man - and so has to come - Of course when I asked him he jumped at it, and said he would be only too pleased etc. - My sergeant did not come after all, as he had a bad cold and of course coughing does not do out there. Patrol work here is nothing out of the ordinary - You crawl out into 'No Mans Land' while Fritz fires star shells over your head, making you do experiments as to how you can flatten your body onto the earth - I have a bit of news for you tonight. The honours for that bit of a stunt we had some time ago have just come out, and I have got the Military Cross! I sent a cable to-day as I thought you would all be pleased. I dont think I deserve a Military Cross - People who get these honours should not want to go home or feel home-sick - But I feel I would like to step in and have a yarn at home tonight - just for a little while would do - However War is War, and it is sent to some that they may learn to appreciate Home when they get there. If we are surrounded by too much comfort and ease - and good things are a matter of course, we dont understand hardships when it comes, and are apt to give way -

There has been a good deal of rain today, the consequence being that the trenches are a bog-hole - I woke up last night feeling my boot filling with water, quite a nice feeling! Do you know, I believe my imagination is getting dulled - "Square the dink" as the Gypies would say - Here I am in the midst of War where guns boom and scream, Rifles track out their errands of Fate - and machine guns rattle their codes of Hate - (These last lines happen to rhyme - so I stopped and made up some 'poetry' but I have lost the whisperings of my sweet Muse and forgot what I was writing about!) I am at school again - This time however I do not worry out intricate phrases of Horace - or law terms of Cicero - although still I follow the precepts of Horace, and "Conde et compone quae masi deponici passim." That sentence sounds learned doesnt it! There is nothing like a show of knowledge as long as the show is made by those who are not capable of judging. If I were a Doctor I expect I would be a quack - and as the writer of a Diary do I pretend? Not intentionally anyhow - The electric light has just been switched on - Fancy living in a big old French Convent about four stories high! With a spring mattress to sleep on!



and no 'stand to' in the morning! Why War is becoming a luxury! -

Outerstein - 15/10/16

I am sitting in a billet while our little French cook is preparing dinner - Today is Sunday and we have done our first stage towards the Somme where we are going to our share of the fighting. For the last month I have been at School at Wisgnes - I have told you all about it in my letters - but not the name of the place. Wisgnes is a little village about four miles from St. Omer. When I come back we will have a look at the place on the map. A huge old convent is situated at Wisgnes perched on a hill surrounded by what ever here is called a wood. Of course these woods here are all planted - the trees are generally in rows except in the private hunting reserves where everything is allowed to follow its own sweet will, and consequently are very thick. It was quite nice to see rabbits flashing their little white tails in and out through the blackberries. The private hunting reserve at the School was out of bounds - but C. Young and I didn't see the notice till we had seen all that was interesting. The Convent was built about 30 years ago, but owing to some religious rows was never consecrated. The place is mostly built of chalk - which seemed to me to be a very soft stone to build such a big place as that. Three of us shared a room which was on the third floor - Cheng - A Captain McPherson, who was in the Seaforth Highlanders and myself. I don't suppose that when this convent was being built that those who contemplated living there ever thought that all these large rooms and cloisters would echo with the clash of martial music while Military Officers toasted 'The King' in glasses of old port. In all the doors of the bedrooms were little holes with a slide over each - I suppose for the Mother Superior to peep in and see if the nun inside was doing penance or not! My month there was really a holiday - nothing to think of or worry about. Of course at these schools we are all drilled in the ranks, just as the privates. Before breakfast we would do physical drill - bayonet fighting - or something of that sort - then after breakfast we would consolidate some mine-crater or form plans for the fortification of the convent. A huge crater had been exploded near the School, about 40 yards across, and 20ft deep. Four tons of explosives were used I believe. Every evening at 6 o'clock we would have a lecture given by some general or other. Dinner was at 7.30 and after that the time was our own - An officers club was put up just near, which contained a piano, and many little tables where we had afternoon tea. A cinema machine was installed in the Y.M.C.A hut, and when a concert was not being held, a cinema show would be given. After leaving the School - I said goodbye to old Cheng - wasn't it strange meeting him there! These old Armidale boys were there Cheng Young, F. Fertins, Anderson - who now is in the Black Watch and myself - Then I returned to the Battalion at Fleurbaix. and that night marched into the support line, but everything was very quiet till the last night when the 54th sent a raiding party over to Fritz - but that only lasted about half-an-hour. After that little event we were called out - and taken by Motor bus to Outerstein, a small French village - I don't know officially where we are to go - I think it is the Somme -

Well Chronus is swallowing up his sons rather rapidly at present, the fact is we are still on the move, and Time generally passes quickly, When scenes are changing. We left our last billet about 10 o'clock yesterday morning and after a short march of two and a half miles sat down by the way-side-as many wanderers have done before to await our train. Travelling is all right for the officers - the men don't have such a good time though - but whenever everybody is in good spirits



comforts don't count much. They travelled in horse-trucks with straw on the bottom to lie on - 35 to a truck! - Sounds rather crowded doesn't it! but the French go 40 to a truck! - B. Company had to get to the station first, and help load up the transport, but this did not take long and when everything was ready our train steamed up from the station about half past 2. It takes a big train to convey a battalion of troops, but these French engines are up to the task; they are so big and powerful. After about nine hours journey we arrived at our present billeting quarters - about five miles from Abbeville. When I come back we can follow all my wanderings together. After about three hours work, the transport was at last unloaded after a great deal of grunting - and slipping about in the mud, and we turned into bed about 5 this morning. This is the best billet I've been in so far - My bed is one of those old fashioned wooden ones, and requires a step-ladder almost to get into - then you sink down and get lost amongst the mattress. The Company is billeted at a bread-factory, and over the road is a large cotton mill. I have already asked the Manager for permission to go through, and am looking forward to doing so after parade which takes place in a quarter of an hour -

Half-past twelve next day -

I have not been through the cotton mill yet Fortune - this time in the shape of our C.O - bade me be on parade till 5 o'clock.

We went for a route march through a small wood which at present looks very pretty - I only wish it was not War-time - and we were here together. Last night before going to bed my host and Madame asked me to share in a bottle of cider - the farther south we get the nicer and more hospitable the people seem to become - The two with whom I am billeted have no children and so bestow their care upon any worthy - and perhaps unworthy creature that comes along - whether it be a small spoilt dog or a lonely soldier on his way to the Somme. I can't talk French very well, but we managed to get along fairly - I told her about Australia and the Peninsula - and Egypt and showed her some home photographs. This morning has been Polling Day recording the votes on the Referendum - During most of the morning it has been raining - but just for a minute the sun shone through my window. I'm afraid it will be pretty muddy in the trenches, all sorts of stories reach us as to the conditions there - However we will soon see for ourselves.

) - And now we have seen. There does not seem to be much between those last two sentences does there? but there is..... --  
I am sitting in a small dug-out which Captain Stutsbury and I share - The dug-out is not high enough to stand up in - not long enough to lie down in, it resembles somewhat I should think those special forms of torture introduced into the West Indies by the Spaniards. However - this is the Somme so too much cannot be expected. And Sunday also which may account for the bright sun shining - But you would like to know how we got there? If the guns would only keep quiet I might be able to concentrate my thoughts a little - but there is just one continuous rumble - the shells that pass directly over our heads we can hear hiss and scream on their way, but for the rest it is just one continuous B.o.o.o.o.o.o.o.o.o. etc. The M at the end of the B.O.O.M never comes; We marched from our last billeting place Pont-Remy for about 8 miles - training at about 5.30 in the morning Then in came by motor-transport for about 30 miles, and the remaining 10 on Shanks ponies, again arriving at our destination after dark. The night was spent anywhere we could rest our heads, and as there was a very heavy frost - well some of us



had to try to keep warm by adopting nature's method of shivering - Now if I tell you about mud and cold you must not imagine me to be sick or miserable, because I am one of that sort of people who enjoy misery! - that is of course when it comes while I am trying to do my job - and I am in no way responsible for it - Well to continue - The next day we marched through Montanbau once a French village, but now no more. There is hardly anything to indicate that a town ever existed. The road that passes by is made of the bricks that once composed the houses and village church. From here the road passes on towards Bapaume - I cannot describe the scenery here.

Near Pont-Remy the country is very pretty, undulating hills with woods perched on top and villages nestling in the valleys. It is all much more picturesque than higher north. Here the country was just as beautiful before the War - but now is just a great desolate waste. The little villages are all blown clean away, the woods, there were plenty here - are gone! and broken stumps are all that remain. It is not possible to walk ten yards in a straight line without falling into a shell-hole. The whole country is one great upheaval. During the day when going to the front trenches - we have to march through saps filled with liquid mud - in some places two feet deep. The trenches themselves remind me somewhat of those at the Peninsula, the only places for sleeping in are small shell shelters, into the side of which is hardly enough room to sit in properly, let alone lie down.

B Company had to occupy a line of trenches in the reserve known as Cobham trenches - These it seemed were a little better than those in front, but there was very little difference between them. However it did not take long for the men to make themselves as comfortable as possible. Australians are very resourceful - much more so than the Tommies, who are regular stoics, but cannot shift for themselves as well as we can. I shall never forget the roar of the guns as Stutsbury and I huddled up in our little dug-out, trying to keep warm. Just one great B-O-O-M like the roar of the sea, broken only by the hiss and scream of shells, which passed over our heads. I only heard one machine gun at work - the mud and slush has put everything but big guns out of action. Flers - which was taken by the New Zealanders some time ago was situated on our right rear - the road to it is lined by dead horses. The Tommies whom we relieved had been in the trenches for about 11 days. The Brigades down here are sent into the trenches, and given a certain work to do.. If they are successful they are relieved - if not they stay till they are successful. These poor chaps had to advance a tank went over first and cleared the enemy trench, but as no infantry seemed to be coming, the tank Commander opened the back door, called "Come on Infantry" Two officers answered the call - and walked over to the trench, but the men were too exhausted by lack of food and water, and sleep to follow - After spending a couple of days in the trenches we were relieved and are now bivouacked near Montaubau - awaiting finer weather to take a couple of German trenches in front. One of the officers here is called Morgan, a jolly nice old chap full of life & roar - he keeps us all alive. I made up a rhyme about him - here it is. -

"For roar and noise - why Morgan  
Will beat the bally lot!

Worse than a barrel organ  
Is the voice that he has got.  
He sings his Nielan' Scotch songs  
That is he makes a row  
And thinks that it is music



But it seems to me somehow  
 that this brawny hard faced Scotchman  
 To sing should not contrive  
 Still - he is Morgan - just old Morgan  
 And he keeps us all alive!

The C.O just picked up the piece of paper on which I wrote the above. He is a very good critic and said it was 'Piffle' which it is not - but it doesn't matter. I hope he does not know who wrote it - The stars are shining outside - so we ought to be able to get to work soon now - I have the honour of leading B. Company on the parapet when we make our charge. Captain Stutsbury - who is at present O.C of B. Company has to act as intelligence officer. I had to go down yesterday to the Front Trenches to see where we go over from - and got the bearings generally of the country. You could not imagine what a shambles the whole place looks! We have a couple of bombing posts that run out to within thirty yards of Fritz's front line - without taking much notice of us - and we do the same - The mud is so thick in front that most rifles are out of action. Dead men lie about just as they fell, some seem weeks old - others only a few days, but as the weather is cold they seem to last a considerable time. The trenches are indistinguishable owing to the number of shell holes - towards the front I don't think there is a square yard of soil that has not been hit by a shell. The front line is about five miles from our present quarters, which are situated near Montaubau. Last night it was my pleasant duty to meet the Brigadier and Brigade Major at a place about three miles from here known as Thistle-dump situated between High Road and Delville Road. When I come back we can have a look at it on the map. The Brigadier did not turn up till about 10 o'clock, and as the night was wild and stormy and absolutely pitch black, and the road knee-deep in mud I did not altogether like the job. Not that I minded the weather conditions, but the task of picking ones way back past shell-holes and quag-mires with a Brigadier-General who is already soaked through, and holds you responsible for conducting him to Head Quarters by the shortest route is not an enticing job. But I got him home quite safe and sound, and he thanked me quite nicely afterwards so I went to be happy, and snuggled into my sleeping bag. To-day Ceres still continues to weep for her daughter Persephone, and the whole earth is bathed in her tears. Black storm clouds blot out the sun's rays, while intermittent showers beat upon the canvas roof that the wind blows about in a discontented manner.

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Once more the scene changes - my fighting in France seems to be sprinkled with a great deal of ease. At present I am comfortably installed in a warm bed in the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital at Etaples - a beautiful - palatial place with kind nurses to wait on me. But you would like to know how I got here - The Australian Band is playing a two-step - one that I am sure we have danced at Booloomimbah. Well - The attack that was going to be made by us had been postponed so often that it seemed it would not come off at all owing to the wet conditions. but at last a fine day came which seemed to indicate finer weather for the event. C. and D. Companies were going to lead the first wave, while A. and B were forming the second. We left Montaubau about 1.30 p.m. for the Front Line but we had not gone more than a quarter of a mile before it came on to rain - Lord how it did rain! - The ground which was



only just a little dry on the surface soon became worse than ever, & as the 56th Battalion were in front of us - our progress was very slow. After we left Thistledump we got into the region of the big guns. 9.2. guns were those furthest back, then came the 6 in. guns, 4in and up near the firing line the 18 pounders - These guns are concealed in pits, during the day they can be easily seen - but at night when coming out of the trenches one is apt to get in front of one of these by mistake till a flash and a roar which almost knocks you down proclaims your whereabouts - We got over the ridge near High-wood all right - but as there were a good many of us we had to proceed through a sap known as Tuck Lone The rain had so soaked the ground that the sides of this sap in places had fallen in making puddles of liquid mud in places 18in. deep, through which we had to wade. By the time we got to advanced Brigade H.Q. and the Battalion dump - most of the men were getting a bit tired - and as the 55th were blocked in front - and darkness was falling prospects were not very inviting. As in the Front Line the only thing to do is to stand or sit till some other Battalion relieves you which is generally about three days - The Battalion dump is situated at a cross road - that is to say they were roads once but now -- well - it is possible to know where the road was in places - Shovels were being handed out to the men so that a jumping off place could be made in the front line. I was standing near Captain Stutsbury waiting for the 56th fellows to pass on, and make room when a shell burst overhead, pieces hurled themselves in the mud around, while I got a bang on the back of the thigh a bit worse than a kick from a horse. I hopped round for a bit but I knew there was not much wrong. However when I said it was only a bruise Stuts told me not to be a fool, so I limped off to the Q. M's dug-out. A Doctor came along afterwards and gave me a ticket to proceed to the rear to have the thing looked after but I did not go. Instead I slept with the Q.M Next morning before I got up I sent down word to Stutch that I would be down shortly. But when I got up my leg had a lump on it about the size of a foot-ball, and it didn't look too pretty, so I decided I would go back to Montabau, and wait there a couple of days till it got better. I walked back but it was rather a weary walk. I found Major Carver in charge, and with him most of the officers of C and D Companies. The C.O had given orders they should remain as the conditions in front were so bad. I felt pretty miserable as I was not fit for duty, and yet I did not feel bad enough to go to Hospital. The next day most of the other officers received orders to proceed down, so I got my things on to go down also; I had to do this on the quiet - as they told me I should not go down. But when I started it was no good, so I went to the Field Ambulance instead. I'm always frightened of Doctors - they always exaggerate things. Anyway they they sent me on to the Casualty Clearance Station - and from there I was sent to the Duchess of Westminster's - and from there across to England to the No.3 General Hospital where I am now in bed because I have no clothes to put on. Sometimes I like the Hospital - and at other times I just hate it. If I had a decent wound it would not be so bad.

7/12/16.

At last I am out of the Doctors hands although I must say that those august personages were very lenient as regards their treatment. Upon leaving the Hospital I was given a slip of paper, and told to proceed to Horseferry Rd. the Headquarters of the A.I.F Forces abroad - here I was ushered into the presence of a Major to whom I gave my slip, and



he in return - with a casual question as to how I was - gave me another slip of paper with an order to hand it in at Room 13.A which I did and in return got leave for fourteen days. The fellow in charge asked me if I had received my Military Cross yet from the King - and upon learning that I had not - asked my address - and said I would receive a telegram in the course of a few days from the Lord Chamberlain to proceed to Buckingham Palace. When he asked me my address I did not quite know what to say, as London is a big place especially when one does not know anybody there, or the name of an Hotel to stay at. However I had had lunch the day before at Regent's Palace, and it seemed central enough - so I said "Regent's Palace" - I then returned to the Hospital for my clothes. There I met another officer - who like myself - was cast adrift upon the City of London to recuperate. We got our clothes - and had just hailed a taxi when we noticed two ladies in distress. These were V. A's - strangers of course - though I can count one of them now as one of my best friends. However we had the only taxi to be obtained - so of course we offered to take them with us. They were both very nice - and seemed to think that they had imposed upon us, and each wanted to pay her share. Of course we would not hear of that - On setting out one of the ladies gave her card to each of us and asked us to come and see her. I liked her - she seemed such a lady - although it was too dark in the taxi to see her face - or read her card. I decided I would call the next day - Upon arrival at the Hotel I booked my room, had dinner, and then be-thought me of my new acquaintance. Her card consisted of an envelope upon which she had written by the light of a match as we had driven along "Lady Turing' 87. Victoria St.

I called the next day - and I believe the following day and when I got to know her better we went to "High Jinks" and the 'Bing Boys' and lunched at 'Les Gobelins' and 'An Petit Riche.' Lady Turing is good to all Australians - not the officers, I believe I am the only Australian officer she knows - but to the privates in the Hospitals - taking them papers and books and mothering them generally. Her husband died some time ago, her brother and cousin have both been killed in the War and now she has been left without anybody. I am very fond of her. I wrote and told her all about my folk at home - and showed her this Diary - You would all love her if you knew her. Have you ever heard of an English village called Codford? but of course you have not - It is only a little place with one shop, a Picture Show and a couple of Tea-rooms - Some of the Australians are camped here - and that is the reason of my presence - but I am before my story - I had a fortnights furlough after leaving Hospital which I spent in London. The second week I intended going up to Scotland, but as I heard it was very cold, and one continual down-pour of rain, and also as I now had a friend in London - and was a lonely soldier no longer I decided to remain where I was - After my leave had expired I had to go before a medical Board - Peculiar things - medical Boards - perhaps or because I am - I really dont know why I want so much to get back to the Front - when I think of the slush and cold over there I shiver, and yet I am a jolly side happier over there than here - Well - I appeared before that august tribunal, and was asked many questions regarding my health and abilities. They asked me how far I could walk to which I answered about 20 miles - Old Charlie Ryan looked suspicious of that - but the other one smiled. They asked me if I had seen much fighting then - and where was I born? I thought "You think I am either mad or a German spy." They then asked if I realized what I was going back to - I dont generally try to think about what I have got to go back



to when I do I find my good resolutions breaking, so I switen my thoughts onto something else. What I really want to carry about with me is a clear conscience - that I have found is better than a cosy billet and a warm fire, but of course that wont go down with a Doctor - or anybody else generally. I passed the Board all right, and was ordered to report to Perham Downs. I was there for three days, doing nothing but sitting down and shivering - awaiting orders to proceed. England is pretty cold in the winter. From there I was ordered to report to the 13th training Battalion at Codford - and here I am awaiting orders to take things over to France.

France 14/12/16.

It seems to me that I skip out a good deal in this Diary. I have not told you anything about London - the places I visited, or my visit to Buckingham Palace, where the King shook hands with me, and pinned the Cross on my tunic. He seems a nice little fellow, I hope he wont mind my being so condescending, but he has one of those inscrutable sort of faces that are difficult to read. Perhaps he has pinned so many Crosses on - that by this time he does not think of anything at all - Well - I am back in France again - but I dont like it quite so well since seeing England, England seems such a beautifully clean little place - there seems to be no dirt or rubbish about anywhere. But here - the railway station at Boulogne positively stunk - French people seem to pay so little attention to sanitary arrangements.

7/1/17.

The New Year has come - and we have set sail on the troubled waters of 1917 - but rifts seem to be appearing in the heavens, so perhaps the dove of Peace will find her way to Earth once again - I joined the Battalion at Buire on my return - Buire is a small village about 6 miles from Albert of which you have heard. The most peculiar feature of Albert is the church. This has been shelled by the Germans, and is still under shell fire. No one lives there except one civilian and two or three girls who keep a restaurant for officers. I stayed at Albert for a night before proceeding to Buire. The church still stands, but is very much damaged. On top of the Church Tower stood a statue of the Virgin holding her child at arms length above her head - but a shell has destroyed the statue, and now it hangs head downwards, (~~the Virgin holding her child at arms length above her head but a shell has destroyed the statue~~) the Virgin still holding the child in her arms as if to save it from falling. We spent Christmas - and the New Year at Buire - and on both occasions dined sumptuously, especially when ushering out the Old Year, and welcoming the New. From there we marched first to Frank-villiers, a distance of about 6 miles and then the following day to Flascelles, a distance of 12 miles, and here we are billeted at present. I must tell you that I am now a Captain - the notice came out in orders soon after I got wounded - but I did not know of the fact till I returned. It was rather a pleasant surprise - Our present billett is rather comfortable, except that we have no fire. The owner of the place is a wheel wright by trade. The Family which consists of the Grandfather - Father - two daughters - a son - two cats and a dog live in one room, and as there are only two beds for their use they must be warm at night. A dove also adds to the peace of this little establishment - and coos sweetly beside a large old grandfathers clock which - in its turn - strikes the hour twice at about a minute interval - I suppose to remind those who hear it strike, and peacefully deze off again that the hour has passed. Outside the snow is falling and looks very pretty. France - when seen



from a distance is a very pretty place. Little woods are dotted about on the hills, in winter they have a beautiful brown tint; little villages nestle amongst the trees, while a church - by far the largest building in the whole place - seems to spread a protecting hand over all. But these little villages when seen at close quarters are not very inviting, especially in Winter when mud seems to predominate. But perhaps the War - and the extra heavy traffic is responsible. At present Nature seems disgusted with the everlasting mud, and slush - so has sent a snow-storm to cover up all defects. Lately the weather has been what might be termed inclement - first a slight snow storm - then rain - then hail. The rotation would be charged with an increase of slushiness.

We returned to Buire today, and from there to the trenches again. They should be interesting in this weather. I saw an article in some paper the other day to the effect that War has a bad effect upon the imagination of literary people. Of course I do not claim to be literary, but I sometimes wonder why I cannot write more. Of course conditions are bad - The literary muse will not hold my hand when it is too cold to write, and the glamour of War seems to vanish when men have to sit passively in a trench - half full of mud till they are taken out with trench feet - No - its only after War - when the hardships have passed, and only the pleasant memories remain that the fiery fervour - and spirit of War will return.?

Tonight we are camped at Fircourt one of those places that was once a town - Now a part of a Mill remains, and the entrance to what was once a church, beyond these two places not a vestige - The Church appears to have been of the ordinary type, resembling a huge Egyptian "Pylo" (I dont know if that is the way to spell it) in front, in the centre of which is the bell tower and behind this large frontal structure is the Church. The masonry of this church was rather massive, and in the porch a canteen now serves to the physical needs of men where once their spiritual welfare was the chief aim. Trifling little troubles sometimes are very annoying. Today we marched from Buire and on arrival here my sock was saturated with blood. Feet sometimes swell in this cold weather with the result that boots sometimes chafe. The mud is not nearly so bad at present - today the roads were quite hard - everything was frozen, and seemed to continue to freeze all day. But we are very comfortable. A warm brazier burns in the centre of our hut - I am comfortably settled in my sleeping bag - but thought I would say good-night before tucking under-

Again I am settling down for the night in my sleeping bag - Snow outside has taken possession, the whole country side is white, except where the roads plough their muddy ways through its cleanliness. Flashes outside followed by a crash - and a rumble act as our lullaby. We are at present comfortably settled in any army hut - all the officers of the 55th. Some are in bed, others are standing round while Cot and Peat are reading verse for verse "A sentimental Bloke" - All men are more or less sentimental, and the sentiment hidden in this poem behind the slang seems to appeal to most of us.

I have just had my rum issue, rather a stiff glass too, which made me screw my face up till I could get my breath again - well goodnight - On the Peninsula we had a touch of cold weather, but France can go one better. For more than a week now snow has been lying on the ground, and by this time it has lost its soft-white purity. In the distance



of course it is a great white sheet, but on close examination resembles more or less the cauliflower formation that limestone assumes in caves sometimes. I forget what the formation is called. The last two nights have been somewhere about 20' below freezing point with the result that everything is hard. Yesterday morning my batman brought me in a cup of tea which he deposited about a yard away from the stove. I drank a little and went on shaving. Some time after I remembered my tea, and went to drink it. The remainder of it was a solid mass of ice. The hot water one washes with when spilt on the floor freezes hard a very short time afterwards. Yesterday Cot and I went to a lecture on Gas given at Miricourt. Have I ever told you about Cot? The way I have written it there looks like C.A.T but his name is Cotterill - He is an Englishman who has travelled all over the world, ran away from home when he was a boy, and is now a Captain. He went on leave to England the other day & delighted his people very much I believe. He is at present sitting next me reading "The Worlds News" - I am very fond of him. The cold has a wonderful effect on everything, a few days ago the roads were just one mass of mud and gangs of men had to be employed to sweep and scrape the mud off. Then came the cold - and everything turned into a solid mass - so much so that yesterday - driving along in a motor-bus a dust was actually raised! Fancy a dust of frozen mud! -

To-day the sun is shining with not a cloud in the sky, but the suns rays are not strong enough to melt the snow - Some thousands of feet up a German aeroplane is soaring over our heads at which our anti-aircraft guns are pounding away. We got two of their 'planes yesterday. The fighting force of an army is called 'mobile' which it certainly is. We are never in one place more than a couple of days; Especially is this so in the Somme district. I dont care for too much shifting, but it seems to be our usual course of events here, and we get so used to it that moving is hardly noticed. At present all the officers are billeted in one hut, while a brazier burns in the centre. Some are up - others are having their breakfast in bed as the crowd in the room is rather great. Ding-bats - or batmen take possession of everything - making toast round the fire for their special officer seems to be their favorite pastime.

Outside the guns are rumbling - The other night I believe the 29th went over the bags and took a German trench, and a number of prisoners. We are making our way up towards the Front Line. A batman near me is busily engaged in thawing a water bottle for the officer to have a drink, or perhaps wash his teeth. Water is a scarce commodity just at present, as everything is frozen - and the water we have to wash with is generally taken from some shell-hole. It has to be broken first with a pick - as the ice is about eight inches thick. Some of these shell holes have all sorts of refuse in them, with the result that we have to hold our nose before we can wash sometimes. At Montaubau Camp just outside our hut a shell had evidently landed on someones grave, leaving the little wooden cross standing upon which was written "To one unknown" -

I rode into Albert the other day with Cot to get something at the Canteen there. The Church Tower with the Virgin suspended from above still remains the same - I am interested in that Tower as the French have it that the War will end when the image falls. My Company are parading to the A.M.C hut at 11 o'clock to have a bath - and have their feet attended to. Trench feet have to be carefully guarded against, &



all sorts of things are done to prevent them becoming affected. Some time ago when oil was used - this had to be rubbed on every day, but it is dirty stuff and the men did not like using it. That method now is changed. Instead of whale oil - before going into the trenches the men are paraded and made to wash their feet in hot water - after which they are given a certain powder which is rubbed in, and sprinkled over the socks. I was interrupted in my writing by the necessity of eating some dinner - If only we could go without eating - and did not feel the cold, trench life would be no trouble at all - but then when we get out again, we would not enjoy a good dinner - nor a comfortable arm-chair over a good fire, and I believe of all things I look forward to a warm fire and two big comfortable chairs on either side! - In all this business - whenever I feel a bit cold or miserable, my reward will be that cosy fire - (~~But-neither-fire-nor-chairs-will-come-unless I-bring-home-a-clear~~) and you and I, and neither will come unless I come home to you with a clear conscience feeling that I have tried to do my best.

At present we are in the trenches again, but conditions are not very hard. The ground still is covered with snow, and everything in the shape of liquid is frozen. The end of a Menu-generally finishes with an ice, but here we have ices right through. The bully beef is frozen Today we went back for some things to the Canteen, such as tinned plum-pudding, curried fowl, sardines, chocolates etc. So now we are quite comfortable. Well I must go out while my batman tidies things up a bit.

Yesterday while sitting in this dug-out I drew the entrance - the resemblance to the original is not very good but it might give you some idea of what things are like.



We are moving into the Front line tonight. I had to go over to H.Q. for some information a few minutes ago. Their position is just near us - only about 200 yards away, but Fritz is jumping at everything he sees - the consequence was that on my way back one shell landed about 20 yds on my right - the next was a good deal closer, I don't exactly know how close! - Smoke flew all over the place - my face began to tingle as the blood trickled down from my nose and cheek - Some small splinters caught me in the face, but it was nothing at all. At present our Artillery is giving Fritz some in return. A tiny splinter of shell is sticking in my cheek so I think I shall go and get it out. This morning Fritz has had a morning out - I mentioned that the 29th had made an advance on our right - which has caused the line to swing round considerably and evidently Fritz imagined we intend to straighten our part out. All the morning he has been amusing himself pumping heavy stuff into our line. - just about 500 yards on my right. A trench especially just over the crest of a hill is rather a hard target - the shells landed a bit short, but they made row enough. At first he put single shots over, while an aeroplane overhead directed the shooting. Then when he got on the mark three guns opened fire. They carried on for a bit, putting over three at a time at first bursting in a straight line thus X - then to vary the monotony he sent them over in a triangle thus X - X. We were just getting used to his 590 when they ceased. The X X telephone line from my H.Q. to B.O.R. was cut, so one of the signallers went out to mend it. Whether Fritz was watching for movement in the Line or not I'm not sure, as our signallers GALLANT efforts to mend the line may be the result of his second strafe. At all events he opened again - this time two at once - But the shooting was finished by this time and my batman is lighting a brazier in my dug-out preparatory to getting something to eat. I am in a new dug-out again, not the one with the cavernous entrance illustrated on the other Page. All that illustration needs is a chamois on the outside - then you might imagine I was in the Alps somewhere - It is great having a Company to look after. I am the O.C. of A Company. Last night we took over from the 53rd - and one of my servants said it was the best organized, and quickest relief A. Company had done. Perhaps a little of it was butter, but the Adjutant and C.O. both said they were very pleased with my show. I wonder what you would think of me if you saw me now. I have not had a shave for about three days - over a week yesterday my right cheek got sprinkled with shell dust, and still has blood on it. My hands are engrimed with dirt, Now - if I walked into the sitting-room and you had a nice white dress on! - When I touched it would you say "Oh! Bob you dirty boy! go out and have a wash" or would you scurry off yourself to get some hot water and a towel & soap? Of course I could not walk in like that as I would have had plenty of time to get decent in - but when I arrived at the Hospital in November last I was nearly as bad - I had all sorts of little flowers in this diary, but one by one they seem to get lost. A little holly leaf from what remained of the garden in the Abbey Chartreuse has gone, also a little scarlet pimpernel, and a piece of forget me-not. But some French heather from St. Omer & some moss from Pont-Remy still remain.

We are moving from here again tonight, back to Montauban. Conditions this time have not been nearly so bad as the last time I was in the Front line. Instead of mud and slush everything is frozen. Most of the trenches were half full of water, but now we walk safely over the top of a solid block of ice - in places over a foot thick.



Last night rather a funny thing happened. C. Company had a patrol out - the German main line is about 500 yds in front of our line. We are at present in front of La Transloy - "No Man's Land" consists of a number of old dis-used trenches - belonging to Fritz once, but now only occupied by night patrols, sometimes our men, sometimes the enemy. A sunken road runs from the left of A Company's lines to La Transloy & along this Fritz sends his patrols. This road now is of course only a mass of shell-holes. Our patrol had taken up a position in a shell-hole a couple of hundred yds out, in No Man's Land near the sunken road, and as they watched, saw a patrol of eight Germans coming up the road, all dressed in white shirts. Our men kept quiet but when the enemy patrol got up to them it evidently became a bit nervous and sneaked into a small sap near by. Our sergeant asked them to surrender, but the only answer he got was a bomb, which luckily failed to take effect. He then landed a bomb in amongst the Fritzes who went flying in all directions - Three were killed, one taken prisoner, the remainder just disappeared. The funny part then began. The sergeant was as pleased as a dog with two tails; He danced round his man, hurling at him all the Australian adjectives he could lay his tongue to, while a little chap in the rear followed up the German with his bayonet never more than a couple of inches from his back! The German was a big chap about 6ft 2in. and the whole thing looked very funny - Do you ever feel when dealing with certain people that if you don't look out you'll become a laughing stock in some way? Capt. Goldstein is the O.C of B Company - my old Company - He is not a bad sort of chap, good looking not over burdened with courage, suits a drawing room much better than the Somme battle-field. I forget what I was going to say - about Goldie - I suppose he got on my nerves a bit, he is not a bad chap a good deal better than some I know -

I have been meditating for the last 2 minutes as to what is best to do. whether to stay in bed - or get up, when someone opens the door and I see a clear blue sky and the sun shining I think I'll get up, then the cold wind envelops me, and I immediately get under the clothes again. A number of us are camped in a hut - All are in bed, some are sitting up in bed shaving - two next me are laughing over "Fragments from France." while batmen seem to flood the place out. My good batman Labalastier has not returned from England so ever since his departure I have had to make shift with what I could get. My next adventure as regards this special class of being took the form of an Irishman called McCarthy - the name sound Scotch, but this special individual was Irish - I could see it on his face - He was always in the way when he wasn't wanted & never within coo-ee when he was! - However he has gone now and I have another. We move about so much that it is hardly possible to enter up all events. At present we are camped in a hut near Burnefoy Wood, preparatory to going into the Front line in a couple of days. We only remain in the Front line a few days - then come back for a spell, and work our way back again by stages. The snow & ice have all gone, rain is pattering down on the roof, the country outside is just a big quagmire. The ground was frozen for about 3 ft down; this has thawed on top but still remains hard underneath. Every day the mud gets deeper as the ice thaws. -- Since I made my last entry we have been in the trenches - and out again. The 56th Battalion who relieved us were rather late. We heard shells humming their way over our heads towards the supports, then landed with a dull thud, and one after the other appeared to be 'duds' - I thought they sounded very like gas shells, so did not expect the relieving Btn. for some time. At last they arrived safe and sound, but owing to the gas-shells they had become divided among themselves, and only half the



Relieving party arrived. About 12 o'clock that night we arrived back in supports - rather tired - but our beds were all made by those we had left behind, so we were soon tucked in and snoring peacefully. Things are a little complicated in the Battalion at present. A Major who has been in England for the last 3 months & who while there swung the lead a little, has just returned to the Battalion. During his absence one of our men who practically has made the Battn. what it is, was made a temporary Major. The consequence is that now we have two Majors, in H.Q. which of course cannot be allowed and also - now I come to the part which concerns me - I am junior Capt. in the Battn. - there are three Captains senior to me - yet I have got a Company, while one of them is 2nd in Command of one Company, another was sent away the other day to a school - the third - sick - So you see, if one Major has to take a Company it will in all probability be mine. But it is no use looking too far ahead. Life is something like a big play isn't it? At present the Show of the day is a drama - only if it were acted on the stage there would be a good deal of curtain raising - & lowering --

We are back in supports again - the weather is muggy & warm, compared to that of some days ago - What was then ice is now water. A brazier burns in my dug-out, and keeps the place dry. Outside the sides of the trench are breaking away like miniature avalanches and keeps tumbling in, forming liquid mud on the bottom about a foot deep. An 18-pounder Battery is barking away outside - spiteful little things 18-pounders - they are so continuous and persistent. Two new officers have just arrived to my Company. I'm afraid I am rather conservative - new officers - especially Reinforcement officers - do get on my nerves and somehow they generally seem to be sent to me to break in. I like men who have risen from the ranks - as they generally seem to have character and strength - but these Reinforcement chaps mostly seem fellows who would not come away without a Commission - sort of "Pretty boys" - "mother's darlings" - who are not always dependable. Of course there are exceptions I hope those friends of Rosie's were not reinforcement officers - Steel hats would make rather good seats if they were not so hard! Four of us are sitting in a dug-out. I have just finished shaving. Someone else is shaving now and between the intervals singing hymns - and talking to one of the others about Goulburn, The fourth is reclining upon the floor dreaming I believe of his leave to England which has been hanging fire for the last 6 weeks. Last night about 12.30 I was rudely awakened by the signaller - who informed me that I was needed at the telephone - so I scrambled over to the 'phone to learn that I was needed at B.H.Q. at once. B.H.Q. stands for "Battalion Head Quarters." Then I learned that Fritz was evidently retiring, as on our left four villages had been taken without opposition - and our orders were to be ready to advance at a moments notice. So I had to haul out all the N.C.O's and officers, so that things should be ready.

Getting out of bed in the Front line is not so very hard. We are something like dogs you know, just whine - then get up and shake ourselves as we are already dressed. But nothing came from the alarm and we were able to snooze off again till dawn. Everything is very quiet today. Fritz seems to have very few guns in action - sometimes our howitzer batteries open - but there is no reply.

Another entry generally means another position - We are in the Front line



scata. Fritz has again woken up - Shells whine their way overhead - some land with a crash on les Bocufs sending up a cloud of smoke & earth into the air which falls to earth again within a radius of 100 yds. and sends up a spray of water from the numerous shell-holes which are all full of water. Others burst overhead, a great rending "crash" they make, followed by a great cloud of black smoke from the centre of which suddenly shoots forward a ring of smoke which twists viciously towards the ground. Fritz aims at destroying the morale of troops - most of his shells are high explosives and make a tremendous noise as his bombs do - but their killing power does not seem as great as ours. Now that the snow has all melted, the Somme Battlefield reminds me somewhat of Egypt. If you can imagine a large undulating expanse swept clean of all signs of habitation just as if some great giant had taken his rake and cleaned up trees - houses - everything in his way -- only leaving behind gnarled tree trunks, stripped of all their limbs - and now broken and dead.

Heaps of bricks which were once houses, and all life gone! - the whole surface pitted and turned over where the huge prongs of his rake struck the ground as he continually let it fall - Then you have a faint idea of what the surroundings of my little dug-out are like. Dead men still lie about just as they fell, their packs still on their backs. In one case a German and a Scotchman lie side by side - the bayonet of the Scotchman in his opponents throat - while that of the German is through the Scotchmans stomach.

A skylark this morning perched on a cled of earth beside a huge shell-hole and sang as if spring was in the air - He seemed to strike a strange note in this land of Desolation. Wilkie - otherwise Mr. Wilkins is sitting at the bottom of the dug-out, having his dinner which consists of some bully-beef and onions, a piece of toast and a cup of tea. The time is 2.30 P.M. but as he was on night duty nearly all night we let him slumber on till a shell burst inside the dug-out which set everything rumbling and incidentally woke him up. Fritz is rather inconsiderate with his shells, sometimes he sends them round the mouth of the dug-out, sending up cleds of earth and muck, which in turn lands all over the place - sometimes in the fire of the brazier, upsetting the water and spoiling our dinner! -

9th March 1917.

Once more the scene changes. This time I am in a German dug-out. Naturally you have not experienced the pleasure of living in one of them. Three shafts lead down into the ground - these are connected up below by a gallery which contains bunks very similar to the steerage compartments in a big passenger boat.

We are quite comfortable and dry - and out of range of all shell-fire. Of course the surroundings are not those that one conjures up in one's mind among which he wishes to spend the peaceful years of the latter end of his life - In that existence we wont live in a German dug-out will we? Have you forgotten the little study which we were going to have? Well - it will all come some day - My pen ran dry, so I had to borrow another.

A bombardment is going on outside - sounding like distant thunder from down here. We are in supports at present, but move forward tomorrow to the Front line. I was up yesterday to have a look round - the front trench is only a broad ditch - battered and blown about in places to make it practically impassible.