

Corporal in
6th Battalion
2nd Brigade

This copy of diary is
property of ^{"Martindale"} Thomas - 52 Kellett St -
King's Cross

Friday, 21 July 1916: Going into action at 2.30 am Saturday. I feel cool & collected, very fit & will do my bit well. All the boys are excited and wondering what it will be like. Thousands upon thousands are on the road already to follow on so the German will have to quit at last & mighty quick.

^{Saturday} Saturday, 22 July. Night was the most terrible bombardment in history. The Anzac's made their big debut and after heavy fighting we took a village ^{at half grown} by 4 pm today.

Sunday, 23 July. No expect a counter attack & no doubt Fritz will try & do his job in his best style. The awful sights of today have made me sick & patriotic songs should be cut out. People who have not experienced modern warfare should be chary in giving their views. I glanced through those support trenches today & which were German yesterday, & their great horse-like dug-outs - so deep & so penning - safe - were full of dead officers & all. I'll wager my life there is no German living today who does not curse their damned militarism. I spoke to several prisoners & they made me understand by their smiles & sighs that they were in heaven again. God wise for ever monarchs.

Sunday: 8 pm. Our new yellow artillery has begun & God, you ought to hear them. I'll wager two thousand guns are speaking at once all along this front. All day long the word Berko have been coming through our trench fearfully wounded. They are on our left and one who had been buried in a dug-out by a shell, told me that their experience on hopping across in charging. They were cut to ribbons, their officers shot, their bombs finished - they had to get reinforcements & still hang on. They beat hoots of Germans & drove them out of the trench & then more trouble followed them for the Germans counter-attacked in great ferocity. My hat off to the British.

Tuesday

THOROUGHLY
WASHED

11 a

1.30 p

1916

2

Tuesday, 25 July - made a move forward this morning into a seething hell & my god. What sights! Our traps have been cut up - if a man gets through it will be a marvel. Last night's inferno is printed on our minds in red. We are pushing on & Fritz is getting blown to pieces, but his counter-attacks are awful. For Christ's sake write a book on the life of an infantryman & by so doing you will quickly prevent these shocking tragedies. If we can get these blighters back another mile or so, then the cavalry can jump into the bloody inferno & chase them right back eight miles or so. I shoudn't bother to take impressions for I want to forget it as soon as possible. I am loaded like a pack-horse, carrying twelve bombs, 250 rounds ammunition, haversack coat, two gas helmets & rifle. I am corporal of the bombers & I will do some damage to these bloody huns. I have seen things here that will make the bloody military aristocrats' name stink for ever. I pity the soldiers as they have been ruled into this.

11 am. a big shell burst upon 8th Platoon - killed one, & wounded another. There is a fearful counter-attack & we are relieving, & hundreds of shells from big 12 inch howitzers are being fired at us. God! it is cruel. What humans will stand is astounding. (myself & myself)

1:30 pm. Have been sent for shovels so we can dig in. We have to cross open country, simply alive with shells. I turned my head sharply right & saw a decapitated man - one of ours. It is bloody gruesome - ah well, it will soon end - this awful game. Plenty of lives - just gun-fodder. Our casualties are very heavy. I picked up a German club - it will come in handy we think. Bombs & rifles are all right but they get broken.

We repulsed the enemy & are now consolidating & doing our damndest to hold. That we have strenuously won.

To-night will be another long vigil, gazing into death. This is truly the Valley of the Shadows - God help us.

Wednesday 26 July.

I had a very trying experience last night - also many others, some sixty men. We had to carry water and rations through a very heavy bombardment, to our front line. ~~Which~~ we only dug this afternoon at a shocking price.

Our Officer got lost, however, in a village or what was once a village & my God, Fritz's shells fall very heavy just there. We were for three dreadful hours under heavy shell-fire in the Valley of Death. I was crossing an old trench in the dark & how dark it was between the flares. I saw a white face staring at me, such a handsome face, he was dead. I shuddered & cursed & hurried on. Oh God almighty, what sights, what slaughter, what an end to a man, no burial, no comfort to see out there, wounded probably & a lingering death.

The German infantry are giving in gradually, they are fearfully cowed.

Today we had to dig a new trench in daylight - a new front line trench & my God, it was a chaos. We - "B" company - lost more than half our men. The Huns saw us & soon the shells came. They did not stop their awful slaughter until we were relieved. Thus we advanced the line & straightened it. The British have now to come up on our right. Pozieres will never be forgotten by thousands. What a village - a veritable village of death. Verdun was not much worse. Hundreds of handsome young Officers lie there unburied. We were taken out today (Thursday) & my God how they shelled us. The 24th Brigade took our place & in relieving us they made such a noise that the Boche heard us changing over & they shelled us like flayed. 'Tis a wonder any of us got out. We had no

communication trench, so had to cross in the open, so a battalion of men was at stake & the silly fighters moved us out in single file, it was awful, dozens were killed, blown to bits. Never shall I forget the 26th July, 1916, on the 24th & 25th we were hustled in, had to hop over & make our name. We were shelled incessantly for three days. Two chaps near me in the trench had a shell right in their bay, lucky for them it was a dud.

Monday, 27 July. - Today, after marching ten miles from the firing line, we bivouacked & slept. How we slept! We had not slept for three nights & had had no food.

Tuesday 28 July. Marched today six miles & slept in a glorious forest.

Wednesday 29 July. Moved off & marched nine miles & most of us knocked up. It was awfully hot & our poor feet suffered. We camped here in a glorious orchard of about ten acres. We washed & rested, were issued with socks & shirts & so are quite comfortable now.

Thursday 30 July. Getting prepared to move again - our reinforcements have arrived. The 1st Division requires 6,000 - gives you an idea how things have been with us.

Friday 31 July. Bonneville.
Arrived here after a gruelling march & have had enough of marching for a while. Funny old village - the usual dirty hells, thousands of troops have been camped here, there is lovely scenery about here & a cool, clear running stream in which I took the first opportunity to bathe in & it freshened me up a lot.

1916

5

Tuesday, 1st August. Supposed to be resting but the authorities mean to keep us in condition, so we have started parades already.

Wednesday, 2nd August. More drill + fearfully hot.

Thursday, 3rd August. This morning we went for a route march. We felt the heat very much + the feet blister in this humidity. In the afternoon squad drill + bayonet fighting for two hours - so plenty of practice for NCOs + Officers.

Friday, 4th August. Same as yesterday.

Saturday, 5th August. Lectures on attack.

Sunday, 6th August - Another chapter in this great drama. We heard a terrific bombardment last night, away in the distance. So orders came through to stand to arms we are all ready, eye steady for some big stunt. Our morale is excellent + the boys know the sacrifice + also the reward. We did not, however, move out.

Monday, 7th August. - Started for Albert on our pilgrimage at 10 am. It is fearfully warm, it turned out a cruel day - we only marched four hours + camped again in the orchard + soon recovered our strength.

Tuesday, 8th August - marched in hour shifts, then rested ten minutes. It was the hottest day I ever remember. My feet troubled me very much. We arrived at the forest at 4.30 pm.

Wednesday, 9th August - Had forest trench tactics this morning + evidently the 1st Division are in for some forest fighting. In the afternoon we had aeroplane fighting observing +

1916

(6)

signalling - an aeroplane had to find us in trenches covered with grass three feet high. It was accomplished. Our aeroplane men are excellent.

Thursday 10 August - Today we met the King. He passed through Cantigny & Warloy, so we lined the road & gave lusty cheers as His Majesty slipped through quietly in his motor. Afterwards several of our stretcher-bearers were given D.C.M.'s for bravery at Pozieres by General Birdwood. He is a few well-chosen words - complimented us on our success at Pozieres. A couple dozens of cases which should have earned the V.C., but Officers did not see them.

Friday 11 August - Have been transferred to the 7th Platoon, No 1 Section. I know most of the boys, so the change will not matter much. All morning squaring up kits & arranging for new issues. We are waiting for the word to advance. The 2nd Division is to go in ahead of us but they are not here yet & we may have to take their place.

Saturday 12 August. Route march this morning - very warm. In the afternoon we had squad drill & bayonet fighting & lectures by Major & Colonel.

Sunday 13 August - Papers & letters in hundreds - one chap from Gallipoli received 39 & he nearly fainted. Last night we had a Brigade concert in the forest & it proved a great success. We have some great talent. I sang two songs "The Soldier's Song" & "Thought far from dear Australia". This morning Brigade Church Parade - a solemn affair. I went fast asleep.

Monday 14 August. Up at 4.30 am making a move to our objective. The day has started with rain & this forest is indeed gloom. The cursed pack - how we all hate it. It will be a

1916

7

a joyful day when we've finished with it. It is 3 pm & the march up was very wet & we've got soaked. We are in the reserve trenches & relieve the 4th Brigade tomorrow probably. We are supposed to take a farm in front of the position which we were lost in. Several ridges have been taken since our debut. I trust it is an easy go & not too hot.

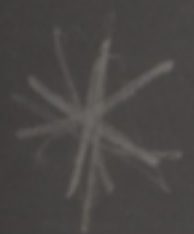
Monday - 15 April - At 3 am after breakfast on a moonlight morning we march away up here to supports, about six miles from Albert & about two from Poitiers. There is no doubt we are pushing the Hun back. Passed 14 prisoners on the way up, real square headed pale looking chaps but big strong brutes. Every night we are pushing 'em back with the usual heavy casualties. God how they shelled this position. It is frightful, frightful. God is cursing the German but every inch of the ground has to be fought for, every fearful inch. Going up we passed a lot of wounded. So early in the morning it has a bloody rotten effect on us all. Nearly out of matches smoking is a real luxury. I have a nice tin of those ^{cyonettes} Cables & some good tobacco. The old pipe is invaluable. Tonight we hop over - God preserve us from disaster. Our nerves are bad & the heads are keeping us hard at it.

Wednesday 16 April - All last night & yesterday we were shelled fearfully. A lot of my old platoon boys were buried by a shell & casualties were plentiful. Most of our officers were put out of action. Fairly quiet so far today except air duels which are fairly frequent.

We go into the front line at 2.30 in the morning. So far our chaps have been hanging on, covering themselves in shell holes. I presume they have a trench made by now. We may not attack much further. The cavalry must come to our assistance soon. The Australians have advanced further than the British & the trench; holding & consolidating is something treacherous

1916

8



because the artillery enfilade us & plays hell.

Thursday 17 August. Am writing in the firing line. Dead men everywhere & Oh my God, the stench! it gets into every thing, bread, bacon & one's boots are full of it. "D" Company were shelled nearly to ribbons but hung on. Last night the Germans attacked en masse, but our artillery were enlightened by the aeroplanes & we simply demoralised thousands of them. They are out for keeps & no mistake. For dash & audacity the Australian is the limit. Here we are right on a ridge, trying to get "dig-in", hanging on to shell holes all day & at night dig like blazes. The trenches are blown to pieces again, so our Companies are getting thinned out & reinforcements will be required right away. We are the furthest out in the line & the British will soon line up with us on both flanks. Our chaps - a big proportion being reinforcements - are fearfully nervous, poor devils & coming up this morning our patience was tried. Nothing upsets a man like another crowd of nervous men. God, can you wonder at it, these overloading high explosives are vile. We had four of our most promising young men buried the night before last, a huge shell came right into the trench. We dug & tore with our nails to get them, two were quite dead, the other two, hospital cases. I'll wager if this war does not end soon & very soon, the infantry will chuck it in, shooting or not. The artillery will have to finish it if it is possible. A big shell came into this trench & did not explode. We call them "duds". However it fell, onto a chap's arm & broke it, a "blightie", lucky beggar!!

A few minutes ago I witnessed an awful tragedy. A German aeroplane was set alight, probably by a bullet striking the petrol tank. We watched excitedly the fearful result. The two occupants jumped from the aeroplane which was quickly enveloped in flames. & were dashed to their fearful death at our very feet almost. God will I ever forget the thud of

of those bodies as they came head long down six thousand feet. Their bodies were brought into his trench & searched then they were buried.

Friday 18 August.

My experiences of the past 36 hours are beyond my imagination, the suffering, solitude & death of the human being, the whole tragic horror of it - men are praying hard, for the end of life for most of us is probably near. I am so far phenomenally lucky. In this hour I saved a man from death. He is a good navvy, so I got him to dig with me & consequently he was separated from his "collier" it was marvellous luck for him for a shell burst in the trench, killing twelve of them. This man must have gone.

Last night at twelve o'clock we marched out to the front line, four hundred strong. The trenches were simply great shell holes with an occasional bit of trench left. The Germans had shelled it away. However it was decided to go out five hundred yards & make a new trench. That meant out in the open & shells were falling thick & heavy. We lined out the Engineer gave us the position. It was a moonlight night with misty clouds, a weird spectacle. Casualties soon commenced & one poor fellow got a piece of shrapnel in his head & sank down in a sitting posture, dead. The German was sending up his flares & he makes a great show of his front. However we played like blacks & we got our trench made but Fritz saw us & he shelled us unmercifully. Soon killed & wounded were many, we had no stretcher bearers & the poor fearfully wounded had to be carried on the backs of others, & plenty died on the way. We lost fifty or so.

We kept on consolidating our trench, wondering fearfully to ourselves all the time how the Germans would behave in the daylight. Nearly asleep with exhaustion & very "nervy", the daylight broke & Fritz woke up with a liver that was very furious at our audacity in having

got so near to his lines, so he tries to get the range all day long. Bang, thud, crash & his shells have a long, sighing, weird explosion which makes men think things & all these poor dead soldiers lying about makes the world very weird to live in, it is all very terrible.

We were relieved yesterday morning & sent back here to supports, return the following night & hop over & take a German trench. The 7th & 8th hopped over the night before last & were successful. The 8th lost very heavily. However last night our contract was cancelled & we were promised relief at daybreak. We are still here & 'tis Sunday morning. Probably we will be reinforced here & put into the inferno again. We have not had a shave or a wash or clothes, boots or putties off for six days. The food is not so bad but ^{being} under constant fire all these days has affected our appetite & ^{so} eating is impossible at times.

While evacuating the front line & changing over the night before last, the Hun charged the air with shrapnel & other great shells. None of us felt any humor in this last stunt. No, it was too damned serious & most of us were praying & trusting to luck.

Saturday 19 Aug. Landed back in supports after an exciting run across the open at 4.30 a.m. Every sort of shell is hurled across this battlefield where they think soldiers are moving against him. God ~~has~~ how we welcomed our saviors who released us. The men were so excited & merry after their long trying vigil awaiting events, that they kissed each other. We left that new advanced ground & trench quite consolidated & they were lucky. No doubt they may have to do as much for us some day. It was a splendid move such a success - the General is delighted at our work. We took the hardest position at Poitiers as easy as eating bread & butter, so we expect a spell.

1916

11

It has been cancelled so far.

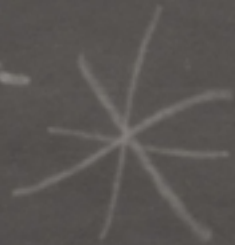
We had a good breakfast of bacon, bread & tea & simply slept before we had finished our tucker, so fearfully exhausted were we. Such is Battle. It is raining, these days after day bombardments, no doubt, being the cause.

Sunday 20 August -

This morning broke bitterly cold & cloudy, drizzling rain making it worse, too wet to sleep. Am talking to a friend about food, nice breakfasts etc. Supposed to be relieved this morning at 3 o'clock. No sign. The boys are downhearted & several of us are quietly crying over their young dead comrades, many of them close friends from school days. Oh God it gives me a lump in my throat to see them, this dull horrid Sunday. Fritz won't let us alone, crash, bang, crash, bang, all around the parapet. To make us more miserable the breakfast has been sent up to the front line as we were to have gone back last night but it was cancelled & chief was promised, so therefore, our much looked for drink of tea was lost. It is very cold, so cold, no blankets, no coat, just a waterproof sheet, so it is real hardship & as far as I can see, unnecessary. There is always a silver lining to every cloud, the company clerk brought us letters from home. Home! God think of it. The letters cheered us a big lot, they were a great comfort & we are now our old selves. Word has come - the good oil - that the fifth battalion is coming to our relief as fast as they can, so hurrah for the fifth boys.

Sunday 21 August -

Tramped back from the slaughter ground to scenes of peace & grandeur. What a relief. The men soon forget everything & soon broke into song. We bivouacked at 4 pm, had tea & an issue of rum & then retired for the night.



1916

12

Tuesday, 22 August - We made an early start, secured our kits & then made off to Barlong, which we reached at 2.30 pm, all dead-beat, knocked right up. On arrival I was informed I had to proceed the following day to Eipe to a machine gun school, so am very glad to be cleaning myself up & feel like a school boy.

Wednesday, 23 August - Up at 6 am, have to leave at 7.30 am. Have to march 8 miles or so, worse luck. The battalions are all making up to Belgium. We have finished our tasks here at Albert & we go to Ypres to battle there. We - a small gun party for the gun school - are still on the road, Lieut Swinpton is in charge of us. He was wounded a couple of weeks ago - we are good friends & it is lucky we all came out of the last stunt safe. I feel the march terribly, for it is so humid today. We have to camp for four days rest at the Augae Expeditionary Force Rest Camp & leave for the school at Paris Plage on Sunday 26 August. As the school begins on 27th. It is going to be a nice change.

Thursday, 24 August - This is glorious. No work, no drill. Am P.M. for our 39 men, an easy job, a pleasure. Such lovely country, all fields of crops. Brigades are in & out each day.

Friday 25 August. Another idyllic day & fine weather. Am writing to the home folks.

Saturday, 26 August - More rest & good food. Am feeling myself again & the boys are quite partying.

Sunday, 27 August. Today has opened cloudy & showery & we move off from here at 3 pm. We march five miles. We moved off in a heavy storm & entrained. We spent the night in the train which was rather trying. A big bump threw our gear down from the rack & gave us a bit of a shock - we thought the Zeppelins were at work. A couple of Tommy sergeants

joined our crowd & they told us they had finished war. They were off to England to take a good job as instructors. They were very happy naturally.

Monday 28 August - arrived at Staples after a weary journey. It is grand to see smartly dressed women & nice shops after the infernal village hags who were worked to death on those farms. We arrived at the Camp here at 2.30pm & it appeared a jumble.

Tuesday, 29 August - Up at 5.30 am. School starts at 7am & we work until 8am. Start again at 9am & work until 1pm, then lunch, resume work at 2.15pm & work until 4.15pm & that finishes the day. I started the day by drawing rations for a line of 108 men, nine tents, 12 to a tent. There are all manner of troops here, Scotch, Irish, English, Canadian, New Zealand & of course Australian. I managed splendidly & every body was well satisfied. A Tommy S.M.S.M. - a real hard head - told me to stand no slack from the boys but the Tommy is a gentleman & a man & too damned good for the way they get out of it. A strange thing, a N.Z. Sergeant Instructor on the Lewis Machine gun is my instructor, such a young chap. I got on famously today, I am very interested & will make good.

Wednesday, 30 August - Was a long day again on the gun. It is very interesting however, & time does not drag, so far. Unfortunately heavy rain has set in & it is blowing great guns. After 4pm I go to Paris Plage for the evening.

Thursday, 31 August - Saw the famous Plage in winter garments, all the ladies wore oil skin coats with belts & long winter hats & were very smart. The beach was very like what I remember. Several wrecks about - mostly fishing craft. The tide goes out a long way. The rope made is

1916

14

is quite magnificent, The houses very artistic looking. The shops are good, nice bright windows, good fruit shops & sweet shops & excellent restaurants.

Friday 1 Sept. Going on well at school & can detail any part of the Lewis gun now. Our instructor has been very patient. Of course he never sees a fight. Discipline is terrific here & the British army would do for me. The food is good but watched by cooks. There is a splendid canteen on the ground.

Saturday 2 Sept. Today we fire on the range, grouping, application, traversing, stoppage. The instructor makes a breakdown & we have to find the cause quickly. We have also to strip the gun against time. ductility it is fine. It is all sand hills around here & golf links. Good forests & beautiful drives. But old 81 Kilda can knock it, apart from the deer who visit this place.

Sunday 3 Sept - Yesterday was all right - firing went well & we were all like veterans. Last night I paid a visit to Paris Plage in good bright weather & undoubtedly it is a pretty place, very swanky. I had an excellent dinner along with several of the boys & really our poor stomachs could hardly stand such a shock. I had a dandy swim near an old wickered barque, a nice deep hole & felt quite refreshed. The night before we all marched to Etaples & got new clothes, shirts, pants, socks & money. God, how the money goes at these seaside resorts. We were quite clean; we also had hot baths.

Monday 4 Sept. This morning at 2 o'clock turned out & moved to Etaple to entertain for Belgium. It is raining very hard & so cold. It is now about 3 pm & we have ten more miles to go to Baillone

1916

15

Which is perhaps our destination. We have indeed towered France. We pulled up at Colais at 11.30 this morning - didn't see much of it.

Arrived at Binchere at 5.30. raining very hard, marched seven miles up here to the reserve trenches at Ypres 'what a march'. my pockets skinned my feet & I was very fatigued, the pack has got me bluffed.

Monday 5 Sept. The Serjt-major woke me at 4 am & asked me to go up to the firing line with a fatigue party. I point blank refused - telling him my condition. In the afternoon at 4 o'clock I had to take the clerk right back to Binchere on foot to find the battalion transport. It rained all the way. We didn't find 'em until 9 pm. The business was important so the clerk wanted to get back, he was frightened we might get into trouble for not returning that night. So we set off back on another seven mile march, 22 in all & when I got near the line I got lost but kept on trying until I knocked up the clerk also. I decided it was useless to try further for passing nervy sentries these dark nights is extremely dangerous, so we camped in an old shelled shop in Ypres & suffered hellishly from the cold all night. In the early morning we reached our trench in about half an hour, so few knew as we went straight to bed. I slept all that day quite exhausted.

Tuesday 6 Sept. Slept off the weariness of the previous day's exertion. Packed my letters.

Wednesday 7 Sept. Up at 4 am, took 60 men to the firing line to repair trenches which have been bombarded & are right down in places. The Germans are only 30 to 40 yards from us, it is a bad position. We are on the right of Hill 60 - Ypres Cathedral Tower can be seen standing there, defying the shells still & the Germans have been battering at it for two years. The

1916

16

Canadian fought hard here to hold the position, they lost, however, & it took a tricky front.

wound back here at 4pm. Have only a piece of bread & small bit of cheese. We went at breakfast & had we got tea. A little ~~last~~^{cook} found a tin of pork & beans & I hunted up three potatoes, while blow me if he didn't find a tin of Bartlett pears. After all I made a splendid tea, the dry hash was done.

Friday 8 Sept - Precious little tucker. I went away from trench & found a canteen, so now we have bread, butter, jam, sausage, fruit, fish, so won't go hungry again, I can assure you. Tonight have to take a party of men on a pushing job from 7pm until 3am. The first thing we saw when we arrived at our destination was five dead men. Biz landed a shell among a Canadian fatigue party, killing five, wounding fifteen. We finished up our job safely.

Saturday 9 Sept - Today I worked on the Canal. We lost two men here some days ago & I saw the shell hole. One of them was a Sergeant in the Dismounted Battalion in the last stunt. It is a glorious bit of meadow country and the King of the Belgians castle or what is left of it is situated on it. We are having beautiful weather & you would hardly think a war was raging, yet we are losing men every day with stray shells & bombs & rifle grenades. It is a rotten front.

Sunday 10 Sept. Today started at 2pm on a sapping job which lasted until 10pm. It has turned cold & looks like rain. Got home safely to the reserve trenches. A machine gun plays up a lot of damage up near the supports & regularly kills men. I got a pleasant surprise on getting back for a neat little parcel awaited me from dear fil - tucker was very scarce & it comes as a blessing. God bless the thoughtful one, for kindnesses I shall never forget.

1916

17

Monday 11 Sept. - Had an easy day preparing to moving up to front line. We moved off at 9pm & landed here in supports at about 10.30. Very quiet except for the terrific machine guns which are sudden death if they catch you. I had no sooner ported out a dug-out & was lumbering off when I was roused up & told to find ten men to go for rations. It is such work that breaks ^{the} men's hearts. We had a particularly heavy issue, tinned fruit & very heavy cases, all to be carried by hand. I finished up by 3.30. Stand to meant no sleep until 4.30. No tea for breakfast & a shocking head, probably too much strain carrying boxes two miles.

Tuesday 12 Sept. - Filling sandbags at 6.30 this morning, nothing but fatigue & aching. The wet & cold weather is creeping upon us. I trust we are sent from here soon.

Wednesday, 13 Sept. - This morning slept after 4 am & was well beat. No all work & no play these days. I will make up for it if I am lucky. This afternoon Fritz started bombardment of our trench with minnewepfers. He played hell & caught a machine gunner, wounding him badly, powder etc. He passed me & said "I'm badly hit". There seems very little humour lately, our men are about done & a change will do them good.

Thursday, 14 Sept. - The stand to from 4 to 6 is cruel. The wet is fearful. A rum issue just saves us from freezing. Work seems the only passion. The day has been very quiet.

Friday 15 Sept. - Spent a very hard night last night building fortifications. This part of the ^{front} line is awful. The Canadians have done no work here at all & it looks an almost impossible task yet. Pussing away as we are doing is improving it considerably.

I had a great team last night & the Captain praised us for the work. It is for our own sakes that we work so hard at it.

Saturday, 16 Sept. - Spent the day making parapets, the line here is in an awful state, just a shambles. We have to whisper, as Fritz is about thirty yards away & he can hurl his Mills bomb right in here & they shell here most of the night & day & the risk to life is terrible.

Sunday, 17 Sept. - At about midnight last night we opened a hurricane bombardment on Fritz on a big frontage & it continued terribly for some two hours, Fritz of course joining in the row. There were the usual casualties from bombs, aerial torpedoes, shells etc. Worse luck for us as it is to go on every evening for some time. Probably to keep the German up here at Ypres instead of going to the Somme. Quiet today & fine. I will be glad when we are relieved from here.

Monday, 18 Sept. - Raining heavens hard. Stand to from 4.30 am until 5.30 - breakfast 6.30, get to work at 7, making parapets & parados. For breakfast bread, jam & tea. I manage to keep a bit over from day to day so had a strip of fat bacon - old horse for hard road. I have a fairly decent dug out - frail but keeps rain out. I get well out when they have a bombardment. Saw the Captain & explained to him that the boys had no change of clothes, they were wet through & work was retarded. Several wounds be in the hands of the Doctor. So he let us knock off & we are comfortably esconced in our dug out & trust it rains a bit longer. It is off the north sea which is only 20 kilometres from here. Poor old Belgium - a glorious country laid waste by unscrupulous monsters, who will be judged by God almighty.

1916

19

Another big stunt is being whispered for us on the Somme & those who are left may get a bit up; anyhow "furfys" are rampant these days but they keep us all interested & it is nothing short of marvellous how information leaks out.

We have a very officer over our platoon - a simple sort of Coon. When in the reserves one day I asked him ^{whether} it had come out in orders if the boys could use the boat to paddle about in a big lagoon nearby in the once glorious grounds of the King of Belgium. He said he would ask Captain Monster. The next time I saw the captain, he grinned. There was no bottom in the boat & the place was shelled like hell!!

When down on the Somme in the last stunt and after we had hopped over & dug ourselves in ready to hop a stage further & shells were falling killing right & left, the 7th Platoon, B Company were informed they were to be left to hang on at all hazards, A & C Company to retire. There was about 30 men. The captain said to our simple officer: "Well, George, you've got to stick; Fritz will shell hell out of this place tomorrow, but see these fellows make strong points & he then shook hands with George & departed to his big dugout about half a mile away. George did not seem to like it & sat with his head on his hands, deeply depressed. I tried to rally him by assuring him that it was a natural wide secret trench, right in among the shell holes & that they wouldn't find us. I would have been ~~unsuccessful~~ successful had not Fritz sent a coal box right near us & half buried us in muck & phosphorus. After I had extricated him & he had shaken himself like a big dog & groaned very loudly, I put in still another claim to send for a thousand or two of sand bags & a lead-up to a demi-john of rum. I told him that the men were low in spirits that to face the music next day & had besides to work like blazes on empty stomachs, excepting

perhaps a biscuit a bit of bully. He groaned "Get that you like." I did & damn well too for it was the most terrific ordeal of our lives. When daylight broke, I was peeping about, & the first uncanny spectacle I saw was some 50 boxes all lying side by side covered with a screen probably put there ready for burial by their pioneers. It made me bite my lips but what startled me more was the appearance of the blue-coated Germans themselves with an officer, creeping from shell hole to shell hole trying of course to find us & give the artillery the range. We dare not fire so after consultation with the O/C, decided to grab & slip quietly away whoever poked his nose too near. Word was passed along, the advice given to the men & Neos & they did not find us themselves but next day a Parbe sighted us & they killed about 30 of the 5th Battalion who relieved us that morning at 2.30 o'clock, so we spent a night, a day & a night in an inferno, & we had big losses, about 15 of us returned. We are of course being reinforced slowly.

Tuesday 19 Sept. - Heavy rain & up in the front line very muddy. We have been working hard here to make it liveable.

Wednesday 20 Sept. - Still raining but the gum boots keep our feet dry. Very quiet today.

Thursday 21 Sept. - Nice day today - bombarding like hell, an' fed right up, this place stinks of death, Canadian & Boche - am too sick to write.

Friday, 22 Sept. - Beautiful weather - sleep out & uneasy time. another bombardment, do the bloody artillery ever think of the infantry?

1916

21

Saturday 23 Sept - Another Goums day - we get relieved tomorrow so a little change.

Sunday 24 Sept - The relief will not arrive until to-morrow night. Have been dodging huge shells all the afternoon. It beats me how we stand it. Have to act as guide to-morrow.

Monday 25 Sept - We marched out tonight, I picked Capt. Marker to be the destination. The march was exceedingly trying.

Tuesday 26 Sept - Our rest camp. Pretty rotten place, poor water two miles from Popperinge.

Wednesday 27 Sept - An orderly company for the week, so up at 6 am rounding up the sick, fixing mess orderlies for the day & generally making myself useful. 'Tis a change from route marches & drill.

Thursday 28 Sept - Today much the same as yesterday. Black Thursday, is called because there is no issue of jam or butter, only bread, cheese & matches but good canteen usually saves the situation.

Friday 29 Sept - This morning up & away on a big fatigue job. Raining hard & on these roads, slippery as a skating rink. The day passed away without incident.

Saturday 30 Sept - Sports today & a big inspection - the poor bloody infantry - they never leave us alone.

Sunday 1 Oct. Getting into winter, dark at 5.30 pm & wet & cold. More inspections & wasting our time. We are supposed to be resting but a putrid rest. The only solace I have here

1916

22

is a decent hotel & I can get a real solid good dinner. General Birdwood inspected us, & a big church parade. The spoke very nicely to us &c.

Monday 2 Oct. - Went for a route march, started to rain & we all got drenched. Spent the afternoon cleaning up.

Tuesday 3 Oct - Raining hard - no parade. Lectures & other trips.

(Interval of 3 days - nothing recorded)

Saturday 7 Oct - Sports today so expect an easy day. We are served by a decent team - popperidge - & one can obtain a decent dinner. Dan going in this evening.

Sunday 8 Oct. Had a glorious dinner last night, soup, entree, dish of beautiful underdone roast beef, sweet omelette, black coffee. It is the best feed I've had since Egypt. Move to the trenches at 8 o'clock tonight.

no entries from 9th to 13th October.

Saturday 14 Oct - Packing up & preparing for a move to Pozieres for another stint, so another big move is ahead of us.

Sunday 15 Oct. We have just finished up our second days march, we did ten miles & it was nice & easy. We pass through lovely country. We are outside Steenkerke which is quite a large town, very clean & artistic. It looked well to see the column winding its way along the country roads. The weather is a lot colder & marching is made easier.

Monday 16 Oct. Our third days march & we are off at 7.30 am. We have two fine bands to help us along, so we are lucky. The country we

1916

23

we passing through is glorious, the sun has not penetrated this far into Belgium. The beautiful snow-white farms stand out so charmingly from the vivid green. We marched 17 miles & had a man fall out of 'B' Company. The Colonel highly complimented us on our condition. My feet chafed a bit but I applied the old Zambuck thick & heavy. The weather is glorious & we have had no rain for a fortnight & the roads are very good.

Monday 17 Oct. - Have finished up a real arduous march of about 15 miles. My feet skinned & I had a bad day in consequence & I finished up in great distress. It appears we are marching right through to the Somme, no doubt to take Baupomme. It will take us 16 days or so. We left Ypres on 14th Oct for this pilgrimage. It is the first time my feet have gone back on me. I have new boots now. I don't fancy new boots marching. The marching gets us fit.

Tuesday 18 Oct. - We are to have a couple of days rest at Ypercheques, not far from St Omer & about 25 miles from Palais. Our votes have to go in for conscription. After what I suffered yesterday, I feel inclined to vote - NO. ~~I received a box from Mutual Hotel from descent [Lella] she is a real sticker. The socks enclosed are just what I wanted. The country here is glorious for agriculture.~~

Wednesday 19 Oct. - Paid yesterday so am off to St Omer, about 9 kilos from here. It is a fine big town & it will be a change.

Thursday 20 Oct. - Yesterday was a red letter-day. We put down to Oysteria. What a glorious treat. We had other dishes. Saw the picture & drove home.

Friday 21 Oct. - an easy day & had a real good rest, no parade so a sleep went high.

1916

24

Sunday, 22 Oct - Church parade + heavy sermon, for we are going in to take Banpanne + spiritual work is necessary.

Monday, 23 Oct - Rose at 5 am. The coldest morning of my life. We are going to suffer. We are going to motor to Albert (160 cars).

Tuesday 24 Oct - Yesterday was terrifically long + trying, bumping to pieces in the cars, cars broke down but we got here.

Wednesday 25 Oct - Arrived here Dicourt wood last night, thoroughly knocked up, + my god, the mud + rain, we have to sleep in humps which are ankle deep in mud. It is a shambles. I cannot sleep for aches + pains, it is still raining + sh. so cold.

Thursday, 26 Oct - Passed a wretched night again, cold as a frog + covered in mud, only one blanket + waterproof. Thank god, they are sending us to Albert to billet in the ruins there. We probably go in later on. The weather has interfered with the popanne. a terrific bombardment took place all night + all morning, shells were falling all about us, although we are about six miles from the front.

Friday 27 Oct - Still raining + cold. We are still at Albert in houses, so have fires + can cook a few extras for ourselves. Had our tin helmets + gaseros issued this afternoon. The town is full of soldiers of all nations. They tell us there is three feet of mud up in the front line. That will be lovely. Just got Fred's letter + expect one from Lella today. There is a tremendous mail to sort. I have a bad toe so can't parade.

Saturday 28 Oct - We had lectures on the capture of enemy machine guns + how to go about it. Most of the day we spent in front of the fire + cooked some special dishes.

1916

25

We are ordered that reveille is at 5 am.

Sunday 29 Oct. Up at 5 am & preparing to go up to Theipveil, rumors of a gigantic stunt to take Baupanne before the winter sets in properly but I fancy the weather is against it.

Monday 30 Oct. - Yesterday was ^{absolutely} the worst day of my varied career. We were marched from Albert, leaving there at 8 am & reached the front trenches at 5.30 am next day with only two hours' sleep for lunch. It rained all the time & most of the journey was done in the dark. We battled through mud & over dark open country, covered with dead men, & we were slipping & falling every yard. Nothing can describe it - it was Hell! We got lost at the finish & the men fell down & slept in their tracks. Such a strenuous time I've never had before.

Tuesday 31 Oct. - Still raining. We are cold & hungry, tis too far to get hot tea, only biscuit & butter, no water, only shell hole stuff. My feet are all skinned & swollen. Most of the men have trench feet & are in great pain, sort of frost bite. I don't see how the Australians will stand a winter here. These trenches are up to the waist in slush & mud, & there is four miles of them. We went up two miles to the front line & it was awful, mud, mud, mud.

Wednesday, 1 Nov. No dry outs - a rotten trench, just a hop out trench. How I suffered with the cold & it rained so that every bone in my body aches & I cannot last it out. No hot tea, no water, haven't light a fire. There is a terrific bombardment going on & if Fritz turns his guns on us, tis the finish of us. Last night we captured 13 Germans including an officer who was shot in the neck at the Liskinn's Post. They came through on the way to their own lines, so they must have got lost. We took their rations which were excellent & composed of rye bread, two loaves each, tinned meat, very nice fresh butter in glass jars & tins

1916

26

& spa water. The officer gave up his gold watch & a lovely tea set of cut glass which we left in a shell hole for we couldn't carry it. He or rather H.Q. gave them fresh rations - poor devils - all young men.

Thursday 2 Nov - Captured more prisoners last night, 38 in all & they kept us in tucker. We are to be relieved tonight. Shate the thoughts of that week. God it is so cold & miserable. I will never last it out.

Friday, 3 Nov - God, I cannot express the horrors of last night. We were relieved & coming back we were shelled awfully & five were knocked. The wounded had a fearful time. God help us in a scrap here for we are miles from a dressing station. The officer let us, so at 2.30 am I asked him to let us bivouac which he did. Some just fell down & slept, rain & all & shells falling about us but we were too exhausted to bother. We didn't mind if we were killed, it was terrible. Got back here & after some decent tucker felt all right.

Saturday, 4 Nov - We are having a good four days rest waiting to be called back. It is still wet & cold & we are sticking to our humpies & keeping nice & warm. We have a coke fire in a tin & it keeps us dry. We have been issued with sheepskin coats & gloves, so are fairly warm. Several millions complimented us on our work yesterday in the front line re our captures, etc. He reckoned we had a fearfully exposed time. We are bombarding Baupanne terribly & it will have to be taken soon. We can take any place but the loss of life will be terrific.

Bernatray Camp near Delville Wood -

Sunday 5 Nov - Another day of rest. We are waiting for the Brigade to come out.

Monday 6 Nov - Very cold - we are like moles & don't move at much. We are covered with mud & our feet are bad.

1916

27

Monday, 7 Nov - Bad news, we go back to the line & hop over. God be with us; our captain does not look happy. I smell trouble. Oh well, I must be careful.

no entries on 8 + 9 Nov.

Tuesday, 10 Nov - landed in a reserve trench called Bulltrench. Shot a frail trench. Fritz has it picked a treat & we will have casualties tomorrow.

Wednesday, 11 Nov - Cold cheerless day, no sun, our poor feet! Quite a lot have trench feet, a bad complaint. We are to be relieved tonight. No wounded, we only three feet from me.

Thursday, 12 Nov - Last night, Christ what a doing we got - the captain got badly wounded. We were caught charging over.

Friday, 13 Nov - We are being marched away from the front, so we needn't bear the brunt.

Saturday, 14 Nov - Arrived from Champagne front at the camp. We can have a wash & clean up.

Sunday, 15 Nov - Pay Day, the first for 20 days as the boys are all right.

Monday, 16 Nov - at a rest camp, over-crowded, crowded with soldiers. Terribly cold, can't sleep for it, snowing & I feel ill.

Tuesday, 17 Nov - Spent yesterday afternoon at a small town named Cotay, no catering for soldiers. It is rare to strike a town where you can feed.

Wednesday, 18 Nov - Up early. God how cold it was. We slept in canvas huts - luckily we could have fires. Snow thick upon the ground. We are ^(the whole battalion) making for Verincourt by motor. We spend ten

days there for a supposed rest, consisting of inspections, squad drill, route marches &c. We then return to the Somme, probably Bapaume will be our objective. We passed thousands of fresh troops going in, the penard's guards & many others. I am sorry for them all.

Sunday, 19 Nov. Here we are Valenciennes, another French town much the same as the others. We landed here at dusk & had to start cleaning billets. I am damned seedy. I cannot sleep at night for rheumatism.

Monday, 20 Nov. In charge of prisoners today. Waiting about the District Court at Valenciennes. One of our fellows got a wash out for six months. I am trying to make up new clothes.

Tuesday, 21 Nov. Same today as yesterday. Very tiring this police business. I am responsible for a man & must not go far away.

Wednesday, 22 Nov. Still hanging about the Court. Our man reprieved from his six months & is up on another charge. Strange the plaintiffs have been both shot in a clash.

Thursday, 23 Nov. I have been informed today that I am to go to a School for Off. com & NCOs. It will be splendid for ~~my~~ doing a month there will earn a man a com.

Friday, 24 Nov.

1916

29

Friday 24 Nov^r - Still putting in time here. The cold is fearful + one must keep warm.

Saturday, 25 Nov^r - Dull + looks like snow. I visit a pancake shop + get near the fire then off parade. a lot of men going to hospital.

Sunday, 26 Nov^r - Raining very heavily so parade cancelled; inter-writing letter home.

Monday, 27 Nov^r - Was instructed to pack up + get ready for the school but it was cancelled until 29th. Weather very cold.

Tuesday, 28 Nov^r - Have been granted a day's leave to Amiens which was a fine town.

Wednesday, 29 Nov^r - Yesterday had a most enjoyable day at Amiens. The Cathedral there is magnificent. There were beautifully dressed women. I dined at the Central Hotel; had quite a lunch + some champagne. I was quite at home with the French. The day cost me 70 francs or £2.10. Today I go to the school at Perquigny, so must hurry.

Thursday, 30 Nov^r - Here I am again, camped at a most glorious chateau, a lovely property, rising above the town. We are being put through the simplest drill just like recruits, it is the best for me. The cold is cruel. I will be here a month so will know my work or death.

Friday 1 Dec^r - Another day of simple drill, as the better for me as it freshens me up. No incident of note. I wonder how our boys are getting on, they must be well on the road to Ieper.

Saturday 2 Dec^r - Same today, intensely cold, however we are kept active so circulation is good.

Sunday, 3 Dec^r - Have been granted leave for Amiens, that is not significant, Perquigny Headquarters. We had a ceremonial parade, sizing off etc + then

1916

30

caught train all of us for Amiens.

- Requins, France -

Monday 4 Dec - Yesterday was a day of amusement, one round of pleasure, good food, drink & theatre. We fed our school, one war & for a change were top once more. The fair girls like the hard-mugged Australians. Arrived back at 1 am by train, thoroughly happy & ready for work.

Tuesday 5 Dec - We rise at 7 am, breakfast at 8, fall in 8.45, leave parade ground H.Q. at 9 to go to drill up to 12.15, course includes squad, rifle, physical drill. Afternoon detailing & bombing & machine gun practice.

1916

30

Wednesday 6 Dec. Morning, squad drill. Lad, has cold it is, just about to snow. In the afternoon compulsory sports have been cancelled, so adjourned to the little township of Picquing, had steak & chips & a few drinks.

Thursday 7 Dec. - Good hard days work, plenty of study - it is however better than the line.

Friday, 8 Dec. - Sorted my Australian mail. Corporal fighting by expert instructors & they drill some.

Saturday, 9 Dec. - another interesting day, before it. Leave granted for Amiens tomorrow, so will be a let-up.

Sunday, 10 Dec. - Ceremonial parade & base passes issued.

Monday, 11 Dec. - Had a great day yesterday, plenty of nice food & went to pictures. Rather easy in school, route march etc.

Tuesday, 12 Dec. - Heavy snow today. am orderly sergeant for the day. I draw rations for day & make out a tattoo return for 9 pm. The snow looks lovely, trees all beautifully covered with snow.

Wednesday, 13 Dec. - Battalion drill & compulsory sports.

Thursday, 14 Dec. - very cold, snowing hard. Feet rocky in the legs with rheumatism.

Friday, 15 Dec - Plenty of drill & it takes us all our time to keep warm.
Had a good lecture on bayonet fighting.

Saturday, 16 Dec - Musketry - firing on range, rapid part of the examination.
I did well.

Sunday, 17 Dec - Paid last night so am off for the afternoon to Amiens
to have dinner.

Monday, 18 Dec - Didn't get home till 3 am, when train left Amiens
two hours late. Had a good dinner of roast beef & went to the
pictures. Feel dappy today, the cold is intense.

Tuesday, 19 Dec - Snowing very heavily & the parades are awful, standing &
shivering while being inspected.

Wednesday, 20 Dec - Baths & park work. The sun has at last made
his appearance & very welcome I can assure you.

Thursday, 21 Dec - Had standard tests today for distances & musketry.
I did very well. The work is easing a bit.

Friday, 22 Dec - Company Drill exam & bombing - very interesting.

Saturday, 23 Dec - Officers sent off to Paris last night with 500
francs each, but no money for us & there is 2 francs.

Sunday, 24 Dec - Loan to Amiens & no money. I will see the Major
was never beaten yet. The Officer refused me a loan.

Monday, 25 Dec - Secured 40 from the Major, so am off to Amiens.

1916

32

Snowing hard & is intensely cold. Hear that 'B' Company had a lot of men killed, I was lucky to be out of it.

Tuesday 26 Dec - Back to work again. Fearfully wet & break up tomorrow.

Wednesday 27 Dec - Last day & concert tonight; also inspection by general Goodwood.

Thursday 28 Dec - The 'buses' are waiting for us & we are off to the wired mud. The Battalion is finished for another month. Thank God, the Division comes out on 3 January 1917. Last night's concert was a great success.

Friday 29 Dec - Yesterday went off without incident. Reached a reinforcement camp & stayed for a night under canvas. It rained all night, some mud too. I reached here ^(mainly) dinner time. Our crowd is road-making. It transpires that 'B' Company & each of the other 6th Battalion Companies had a bad time. Several fine fellows, & friends of mine, are left up there to bleach.

Saturday 30 Dec - Orderly corporal today. A lot of bad feet. The 7th Battalion Doctor examined us.

Sunday 31 Dec. Raining very heavily, are having an easy time, although damn monotonous. Last day of 1916 - an infernal year.

Monday, 1 January. Have made a bad start, took a bad turn in the night & was cruelly sick, eat also some sardines which probably upset me. Everything is rotten & it has been the damned time, Ave ever spent. Glad to say my letters arrived, cheered me immensely.

Tuesday, 2 January. Still feeling seedy, took a dizzy turn, fell head first into the mud. Had to be assisted to hunt. Have dreadful headache. I did a couple of nights shovelling metal to keep me warm & that may have caused it.

Wednesday, 3 January. Doctor gave me a pill. I feel a bit better but fancy my eyes have gone back on me.

Thursday, 4 January. The Germans are attacking & a terrible bombardment is raging. The Red Cross are busy. The 46th Battalion had a bad time & a lot of wounded are being brought in.

Friday, 5 January. Still bombarding. Getting busy & hundred of new guns are going up to the front.

Saturday, 6 January. Plenty of reinforcements for us. We won't be reorganised until we get back from here which may be in another week. I expect my leave shortly.

Sunday, 7 January. Cannot differentiate one day from another. We are called out to unload trains at any old time. This morning at 3.30 o'clock called out & worked until 6 am, by God the men swear to haul, we often go without breakfast & it's very rough on these terrible cold mornings.

Monday, 8 Jan - Had a bath & change of clothes. I feel a change is necessary so must get away to Blightie, or hospital. There's work to do. I have been going very hard now for eighteen

for nearly three of which I've been under shell fire.

Tuesday, 9 Jan - Yesterday I was very ill & if leave does not come soon I will have to go to hospital somewhere in France & so do in my English leave. If I go to the Doctor again he will be sure to send me away.

Wednesday, 10 Jan - Feel better again, wish they would send us away for a spell. The constant crash of cannon, the lack of sleep & the intense cold is having a bad effect on me. We have a fire in the hut & it smokes cruel, makes my head ache. Am getting old & this game is aging us all.

Thursday, 11 Jan - Had a bath & clean change & feel a bit better. Am still working on the railway.

Friday, 12 Jan - We move from here on Sunday & go back to Warley for a rest & will like blazes.

Saturday, 13 Jan - Dull & cloudy & intensely cold, getting very monotonous. Will be glad when we move.

Sunday, 14 Jan - Ready for road, a twelve mile march to Warley & then some good tucker. Very cold.

Monday, 15 Jan - Fearful dirty billets & damn draughty & cold. The cokers are a mile from here, so the tucker is rotten when it reaches here.

