

Diary of Driver G H Ewart, 4th Field Artillery Brigade¹, Volume 2

Written across page 2 - Inspected by Lord Kitchener at Lynde.

13th March 1916	We left Tel El Kebir Egypt for Alexandria to embark for France. After Alexandria the same day at 5.00 pm we had a very smooth passage in the Mediterranean. We arrived at Marseilles on 20th. It was a great sight as we were going into the harbour. Great cliffs (very faint). It took three nights to get to Le Havre. It was terrible travelling in the horse box.
24th March	We got to Le Havre on the 24th. It was snowing when we arrived here. It was very cold. It rained and snowed for two days. It played up with the boys and horses. We were issued with winter clothing, rainproof coats and sheep skin vests, and stayed there a few days and then we had another train journey to (blank) a very pretty place.
31 March	The gunners went straight into action on 31st March. The drivers had a few days there and had a road journey to Armentieres on 8th April. It was at a place near Steenwerck. I got orders the next day to move off. They made me into a Dispatch rider. I was attached to an English Brigade at Bac St Maur. Started to the Bty with a dispatch the same afternoon was shelled for the first time one shell dropped about 90 yds away not a very good reception for the first time.
11th April	Shelled again going up to the Bty, the shells coming very close.
12-13th	Very quiet
14th	A few more shells. Too damned close to be pleasant. I was exploring some of the old ruins round about where one fell on top of the house. I go out of it quick enough. Old Fritz plays havoc with his shells about here. The Bty is situated at Chapelle Armentieres
15 th	16 17th 18th Went up to the Bty as usual was on my way home when Old Fritz started to shell. Well one fell a few yds away. The concussion sent me flying. My good old horse caught the full force of it. He was killed and I had a very narrow shave. I do not know how it missed me. It shook my nerves up for about a week.
19th	(Just the date)
4th May	I started again riding up to the Bty as usual. Well I had five Batteries to do. We had a gas attack in the night. It did not last long. We have to carry our gas helmets with us wherever we go sleep with them under our head. Was called up at 2 am to go up to the Bty with orders.
5th May	Shelled again. Going to the Bty. Getting used to them now a little but they are not to pleasant at any time.
6th May	Bac St Maur was bombarded by Fritz very little damage done you can hear the shells coming a long way off but you do not know where they are going to land
7-8 th	Very quiet
9th May	Old Fritz started to bombard our Bty but no damage done
10 th	Bac St Maur was in for another bombardment but Fritz was sending a few 5.9 shells over. Some were dropped in the main street killing a few civilians and wounding a couple of our boys. I am not feeling too well.
13 th	Getting plenty of rain now. Been raining here the last four days. Went to La Gorgue for the mail. Passed through Sailly and Estaires two big towns. Received letters from home, two from Hilda and one from aunt.
15 th	16-17th very quiet.
18 th	Plenty of aeroplanes flying round today. A few Germans were up also. Our planes went after them but the Germans soon got away.
19 th	Another air duel. Two more Germans were brought down. One came down a few hundred yards

¹ Claude Harold Ewart enlisted on 14 August 1915 and returned to Australia on 24 December 1918.

Two volumes of his diary are held in the Museum of Victoria's Arms and Armour Collection. The second ends in October 1917, towards the end of the disastrous Paaschendale offensive. Whether Ewart continued his diary beyond that time is not known.

The transcription that follows was made by Ailsa and William Stent, of Lockwood South.

The diary has few paragraphs and little punctuation, these have been added and minor spelling mistakes, especially of place names, have been corrected.

At some time in May or June of 1916, Ewart seems to have lost a month and in about October of the same year he wrote 'I am not going to trouble about the dates now, only on special occasions'. An effort has been made to correct and insert some dates, the corrections being shown in brackets.

away from us. There was a rush over to it but the German was a dead as a doornail.

20th May Got some more letters from Miss E Tea, also one from Harold, the first I had from him.

21st May Went up to the Bty as usual. The emergency road I travel across was shelled. I had a lively ride for about a mile. Old Fritz must know when I come along that road. He is always shelling it.

22nd Received another letter from Richmond. Miss C Bain, also a few papers which all the boys like to read.

23rd It is rumoured that we are going to Belgium to Ypres. It will be a bit of a change.

23rd We was inspected by old Billy Hughes and Andy Fisher at a place called Croix de Bac. There were plenty of our planes flying around that day keeping the German planes off.

24th General Birdwood came round today. I had a talk to him. He will pull you up and have a talk wherever he sees you.

25th Old Fritz started to bombard our billets but the nearest one was 100 yds away.

26th Plenty of planes up today. When you see them up like that you can bet there is something doing. Well about 5 o'clock we opened up a bombardment and then old Fritz started too. They went at it hammer and tongs for a couple of hours.

27th I had another lively ride to the Bty. It was a touch and go with this night but I got out of it safe and sound. Had orders to go back to the waggon line to be ready to move off on the 12th June to a place called Caestre

(June) We stayed [at Caestre] there for about a week for a spell. It was a nice place. I got a few little souvenirs to take with me. Well I forgot to mention that the 4th Div relieved us up at Armentieres.

Well we moved off from Caestre about 11 o'clock at night. We travelled all night. We got to a place called blank near St Omer. We entrained there for the Somme. Well we passed Calais and Boulogne.

We got to Amiens about 5 o'clock. It is a very big place, the largest we have been in since we got to France. Well we got a grand reception when we passed thro the town, the best reception we had in France.

We had another night travelling when we came to a place called La Chasseau. There is a church there built in 1740. A very old place. Well we stayed there a few days then we had a swim in the Somme.

On to a place called Puchevillers. Had another rest there and then another day's travelling which brought us to Albert, another big place but it is terribly knocked about by Fritz

There is a lovely church there, well not much of it left now. It has a great big steeple with a statue of the virgin Mary holding Christ in her arms. It is a great piece of work. There is a funny story attached to that place. The French people say when that statue falls the war will end. It has got a great lean on it. When I heard that I felt inclined to get up to it to push it down. The steeple is the only place left standing.

Went for a swim in the Ancre brook today, the first bath I have had for weeks. We are getting some great weather here now. I only hope it lasts.

Well at last we have to go into action. We took the guns up to Mametz Wood. We had to go up to a place called Dead Man's Gully, a good name for it. Well old Fritz started to send over some iron rations. They were falling all over the place but thank God we got out of it safe and sound but there was a terrible smell in this place. We were running over the dead. They were that many you could not miss them for the shell holes. It is hell on earth at this front.

We had a bit of bad luck, the second day in action Gunner Greenam was killed. He was standing near the water cart horses. It killed him, also the horses. Well today I was sitting on the side of a shell hole having a feed of bully and biscuits that is all we get down here. I could smell something so I kicked a tin over that was down in the bottom of it and there was a big German laying there. He must have been there for weeks. He smelt a bit.

We went into some of the German dugouts round about Fricourt. Some of them are 40 ft deep. There was a lot a dead Germans in them. The Germans never had time to bury them. I came across one big German. He had medal pinned on his breast. Well I was too slow in getting the medal but I got the ribbon off it. Also I went through his pockets. I got his watch. It is a good one. Not a bad souvenir. Well when I touched him he nearly fell to pieces. I got one of his buttons off his tunic and there are plenty of German coats laying about also mess tins and water bottles.

I was hit on the head with a piece of shrapnel today. It nearly knocked me off my horse. I had my steel helmet on at the time. Took ammunition up to the Bty. We arrived out in the open on the other side of a road. It was quiet till we were leaving, then old Fritz opened up shells were

coming all over us. I do not know how they missed us, they were falling all around us. We was giving a Tommy a ride home when they started to shell. He got for his life into a dugout. I could not help laughing the way he ran.

Went down exploring some more German dugouts today. We found two more dead Huns, also part of a leg. It must have been blown off. We could not find the other parts of him. No more souvenirs on this lot. They must have been stripped before we came across them. We came across some women's clothes down one dugout. You bet the Germans had a good time of it while it lasted till they got hunted out. Some of the dugouts must have been between 40 and 50 ft deep.

You should hear the bombardment going on. You can hardly hear yourself speak miles behind the firing line. There must be thousands of guns here from the 18 pounders to the great big 15 inch guns. It is a pretty sight of a night watching the bombardment. It lights up the sky for 20 or 30 miles round.

The guns are going day and night. We are getting very little to eat. We are only on half rations. We get one slice of bread a day and the rest biscuits and bully beef. You can tell what it is like. It is terrible going about hungry. We have got some money but we cannot buy anything with it and things are very dear over here. You pay one Franc and nine pence for a small tin of jam. That runs out at about 1/7. One Franc is 10d. We get paid in French money.

You see plenty of our aeroplanes up down on the Somme, but hardly any German ones. I counted 36 one day. They were going over the German lines on a raid. They looked like great big birds going over. And then we had 33 observation balloons up. We call them sausages. When one of Fritz's goes up our planes go over and drop bombs on them. They catch alight and down they come. He has lost a lot of balloons like that. We have never lost one. I saw five come down one evening. It would do some of the boys that are left at home to see some of the towns about here. They are that battered about that you would not know that they were towns once. We see plenty of Hun prisoners come this way. They have to pass our camp to the place where they are kept. They keep some of them to work on the road. They have taken away all our blankets now so we have only got our big coats to sleep on. It is pretty hard.

I have not had my clothes off for a few weeks now. I have a few boarders staying with me. I get rid of a few in my spare time which I do not have much of because we are kept at it day and night. It gets a bit cold through the night although we are having some nice fine days. I am wearing a German helmet now. I got it off one of the prisoners down here. He did not like parting with it. As soon as the prisoners see any Australian boys about the first thing they do is take off their hats and put them in their pockets. In the trenches they will not face the boys up goes their hands as soon as they see them coming over and sing out *Mercy Kamerad*.

I have been without any shirts for about three weeks now so you can see we are having a rough time of it. I have got a pair of Upants. They have not been washed now for over a month. Well I don't think it will last for ever but what I can't understand I get no letters now. I have not had any for months. I suppose they go astray somewhere.

Went for a swim in the Ancre Brook today. You can keep yourself a little clean.

3rd July
(August)

Just got into bed about 9.30 when I got an order to saddle my horse to take a dispatch down to the headquarters. Got back about 1 am. It is a job to find your way on these French roads. They run at all angles. When I got back I had to go up with ammunition to the Bty. Well we had a pretty lively time of it. It was hell let loose. No wonder a lot suffer from shock. No wonder the Germans are giving themselves up. Well, we did not get much sleep that night. We were glad we got back safe and sound. Well we had another trip up the same night. Old Fritz sent over a salvo a coal boxes dropped about 100 yards away. They make holes in the ground 20 ft deep. Well we had to get for our lives. We saw two Tommies killed that night by a shell. It just missed us. We have got a couple of 15 inch guns a couple of hundred yards away from our waggon lines. They fairly lift you off your bed when they go off. We were told today that an army corp were going over the bags tonight. Our boys are fighting well here Pozieres the place they captured other units Scotch and English had three or four tries to take it but they could not hang onto it. Well our boys took it and hung onto it and captured a lot more trenches besides. We have suffered very heavily on this front.

4 July
(August)

The Germans started to bombard Albert today. Some hit the cathedral but no damage done. The Germans are trying to get the range of a couple of batteries of Naval guns about here but he can't find them. The boys captured a couple of lines of trenches so I think we will have to get up a little higher with our guns. Well we found some more dugouts today. There were some more dead Huns in them. If you touched them they would fall to pieces. One of them had his head

- blown right off. I got a pair of boots off one of them. I am wearing them now. They are good ones. One of the other boys got one of their overcoats. It is funny to see the boys wearing the German things. Nearly all the German prisoners that come in wear glasses. They must be short sighted.
- 5 July More ammunition up to the battery. A lot more Hun prisoners came in today. The bombardment eased off a little today but started again in the afternoon. It just seemed like as if they leave off to give the guns a bit of a breather. Well I am feeling a but hungry. Had more biscuits and bully. What would I give to sit down to a good dinner at home. The British Tommy gets looked after better than we do. I suppose it is the money we get makes the difference. I saw General Birdwood today. He had just been inspecting the infantry. Eight more waggon loads of shells went up today. You can easily tell what sort of a time the Germans are getting by shells that are going up. Old Fritz had four balloons today but we heard later on in the day that they were destroyed. He has lost a lot of balloons lately, also aeroplanes. His planes are too frightened to go up now while our planes go over onto his lines and drop bombs and use machine guns on the trenches.
- 6 July Old Fritz started a bit of a stunt today. Shells falling all around us. We went up with shells. It was hell. I do not know how they missed us. Had 6 horses killed and 4 drivers. He gets a few now and again. We took a lovely cross up to Gunner Greenam's grave today. One of the boys made it. There are a lot of graves near our battery. You can see the drivers do not have a good time of it. They can't get into dugouts. They have to stick to their horses. It is wonderful how the horses stand the noise of the guns. You will be going past a battery of guns when they will open up. You can feel the wind of the shell as it goes past your head. You think your head's coming off. A big howitzer 9.2 gun was knocked out of action today. It was blown about 50 yds away.
- 7 July (August) It is rumoured that we are coming out for a spell. The boys are in need of one. Plenty more bombardment today. I was hit with a piece of shrapnel in the back but it done no damage. It was a spent bit. I managed to buy a packet of John Bull oats today. When I get time I will have a feed. I paid 2 Francs for it. As I am writing in my diary today a German plane came over but our aircraft guns soon sent him back. A few more shells landed in Albert. There were some more prisoners came in today. They looked a weedy lot. Some of the Prussian guard. That is one of the Kaiser's crack regiments. They will not face the Australians. We will not be getting paid till we come out for a spell, then we will have a good feed of eggs. We can get plenty of them right back from the line. They are very dear 2 ½ each. We generally have 8 eggs each meal. No mail for me today. One came in. A lot of the boys got letters. I suppose I will get some shortly.
- 8 July (August) Orders came out that we were being relieved today so we harnessed up our horses and started for the Bty. We got up there and then the order was cancelled so we had to come back again and shells flying all around us. It was risky going up there on a wild goose chase. We had another trip up through the night with shells. That is the time to try your nerves going in shell holes bit enough to bury your team of horses. You will not find a square foot of good ground about here. We nearly run into some liquid fire tonight that Fritz was putting over. It would have been the end of us had it caught us. A few fell in front of us so we had to wait till they burnt out.
- 9 July (August) More shells to the Bty. Had another narrow shave today. A piece of shrapnel hit my horse on the back. It gave him a nasty wound. You ought to have seen him when he was hit. He stopped and looked round at me as much as to say who done that. Well I would like to have the one here for a few minutes who did do it. A few of the boys came down today suffering from shell shock. It is terrible. There were four horses hit today near the Bty. The poor brutes do not know the danger they go into every day. But when the shells come flying round you can see that they can understand a little what is wanted of them. Well you cannot see the driver in front of you for dust and dirt and missiles that is flying around. Well we got free of that safe and sound.
- 10th (August) Was on stables piquet tonight. Orders came down for more ammunition so we had to wake all the boys up. My word they take waking the poor devils that knocked up. It was my turn up to the Bty. Well I felt completely knocked out so we got ready to go. There was a big bombardment going on. Our Big Lizzie was firing all night. They have got it trained on a town

called Bapaume 10 miles away where the Germans have got all their troops concentrated. Well we got up to the Bty all right but was coming home when a shell killed our two horses. The driver was not touched. We had to cut them loose and come home with only four horses. It was a long hill while it lasted. Two of our guns were put out of action tonight. The gunners had to retire to their dugouts for safety. (sentence unreadable). George Staley one of my mates has just gone to the hospital suffering from shell shock. Sgt McPhee suffering from the same thing slightly.

11th July
(August)
1916

Another trip at 2.30 am with ammunition. It was quieter than usual. We got back safe. Had another swim today in the Ancre. We are only 100 yds from it, right on the bank of it. We are having some warm weather lately. The rain has kept off nicely. It is just like the Australian spring now. I go about all day with only a pair of short pants on, no socks or shirt. I am getting very dark now, also thin. The boys call me Nigger. The boys hopped the bags last night, captured another line of trenches. Also took some more prisoners and a few machine guns and trench mortars. I was talking to an English officer today. He said he went over with the boys a couple of times. He said they will do him. He said he would lead them anywhere, the best fighters he ever saw he said. He would go through hell with them. Another trip to the battery with shells. Old Fritz was putting a few over but none coming near. It started to rain a little today. I hope it does not keep on.

12th July
(August)
1916

We had a sleep till 7 o'clock this morning. It is still raining. The bombardment is a little bit quieter than usual today on account of the rain. We had breakfast at 8.30 which consisted of biscuits and bully beef. It has not got much kick in it for anybody who has been roughing like us. We are expecting to be relieved shortly. There has been a lot of batteries come up lately to go in. There are guns every few yards. You walk along the road. They even fire from the road. Our battery is right on the side of a road. We were coming from the battery today when we came across a body half buried in a shell hole. I think it was a German. We could only see his legs sticking out of the hole. We did not stop to investigate because old Fritz was shelling us going down the valley. We will look into it another time. We had another trip up to the battery later in the day. It was the quietest trip we ever had - for not a shell coming over.

13 July
(August)

Rain stopped. Went up to battery with dispatch. The bombardment has opened out again. Had to go up to the first line trenches to the O G(?) Had a run for about 50 yds across no mans' land to an old windmill. The O Post machine guns playing on me all the time. Well I had a lively time of it while it lasted. I took the wrong track. I nearly run into the German trenches. I scooted back as hard as I could. Well I thought I was a goner. Glad to get out of it safe. The Germans made a raid last night on our trenches. The boys met them half way and then they go to it with the bayonets. Well, not a German got back to tell the tale. I got a German helmet from that lot. Had another swim in the Ancre today. It was grand. The ground is very muddy after the rain. We have got a big 10 acre crop of hay next to our lines that the Germans put in so we are cutting it for our horses. They are enjoying it. It is a change from the feed they get which is not too plentiful. Our Big Lizzy is putting a few shells over to old Fritz. Our planes are doing good work. They will go over the German lines and observe and then they will come back again and drop a message to the batteries and then they open up and they go over again to see what damage is done. I think old Fritz is taking all his big guns back. We will get him on the run again. We have captured such a lot of his guns and ammunition. Well we are using his own guns on him. Some of them are very old dating back as far as 1870. We brought one of them down the other day from the battery that our boys captured.

14 July
(August)

Rain has kept off. Well I think we are preparing for a bit push in a few days. The First Division has been called back again so our chance for a rest is gone till the push is over. No letters yet. I wonder when I am going to get some.

Big Lizzy opened up a bit. The horses nearly jump out of their skins when she goes off she makes that much row.

Went up to the battery with some iron rations for old Fritz. I was hit by a piece of shrapnel on the head. I had my steel helmet on. I have got the piece in my pocket book. I am keeping it for a souvenir. The steel helmet is the best thing that they gave us. They save many lives and you can use them for cooking and washing in so they come in useful for different purposes. We all get into a row with the British authorities for using them for cooking in

Well we had another bit of bad luck today. Old Fritz shelled our battery all day. He got one on the cookhouse that killed the cook, a Tasmanian boy named Charlie Cockerill, and wounded others. There was a lot of German ammunition stacked outside. One shell fell right in amongst that and it made a fearful explosion. It made a hole in the ground 30 ft deep. We had just left the battery. It was right along side our waggon and horses so we had another narrow shave.

My God it is awful. You do not know when you go up there when you are going to get hit but when they are falling over like that you never think of anything. Your blood is up and you rush into the thick of it regardless of them and the language of some of the boys. Well we had a parson with us one day. We were giving him a ride and we were getting shelled. The boys started swearing. He only laughed but my word he got a rough ride while it lasted in shell holes and over tree stumps. You ought to see the waggons and water carts and cook carts that is smashed up here laying on the side of the road. When a horse gets killed they bury him in the nearest shell hole. Well it is just the same with the men. There are that many they can't get them away and the place smells. It is terrible.

Everywhere you go it is the same. And you see little white crosses, the graves of soldiers, everywhere. There are a couple of German cemeteries about here.

There were 27 sausage balloons up today. They do good work for the artillery. Fritz has not had any up now for over a week. Our planes get right over them and set them alight so you can see we are masters of the air. He started to shell Albert today when one shell dropped 100 yds behind our waggon line. There were a lot of horses coming down at the time but not one of them were touched so as soon as all the dust and smoke cleared away a couple of us went over into the shell hole and started to dig for the nose cap which we go after about a half hour's digging. It was a 5.9 inch shell. That is the only shell I do not like.

It was read out in orders today that all the guns the Australians capture belong to them. So I think there will be a lot go out there after the war as trophies.

The French soldiers has taken a liking to the Australians. They think they are great fighters. The boys captured another 300 yds of trenches last night and some more prisoners and machine guns. Eleven prisoners passed our line today. They looked mere boys. The boys were saying that Fritz must have gone away when he opened up he sent over a lot. One shell dropped just in the place I was standing a few seconds before.

The Indians are coming in next our boys. They are great fighters so they ought to stir them up a bit now.

I was talking to one of the boy of the 49th Batt. He said they were going in to relieve the 52nd so my brother Vic is with them. I might get a chance to look him up when he comes out. I have not heard anything of him since we left Egypt.

I have got a nasty cold on me, had it for weeks.

Old Lizzie started again this afternoon.

I went down into Albert to buy a paper when I met some Tasmanian boys, one of them named Jack Goss from Carrick. He told me the last time that he saw Vic was on Gallipoli.

Old Fritz shelling Albert again tonight. He put some into the cathedral or what remains of it.

There is a big attack coming off tonight so we went off the battery with some iron rations for Fritz. The Scots are going over with our boys. They fight well together. I see by the paper that the Italians are making a big move on their front and the Russians are shaking them up a bit. We had another lively ride today. We had to gallop out of action. Five more of the boys came away today wounded. I can tell you we are pretty short handed now.

I heard today that one of my mates that I went to school with had been killed. Charlie Hargreaves. He was with the 21st battery. His head was blown right off. He was from Tasmania. It rained today again. It came down all right but I do not think it will last.

Well the rain has eased off now.

The Attack came off last night. We went up to the battery with a few souvenirs for Fritz and my word he got some of them and the boys captured a lot more prisoners and machine guns.

The bombardment was something terrible. Some of the Germans came running into our lines

15 July
(August)

16 July
(August)

17 July
(August)

crying like babies. Well we could not help pitying them. They are half starved. They said they had nothing to eat for four days. They could not get the supplies up to them for our artillery. They were putting shells over a treat.

We found some more dugouts today. We went down one. Well the smell was something awful. We put our gas helmets on. We found 8 dead Germans and would you believe it there was a dead woman with them. By God it made my blood boil what I saw. I suppose they took her from one of the towns they captured. Well I could not help kicking one of them. She did have a sorrowful look on her face. We carried out and gave her a decent burial. We found nothing on the Germans. We left them where they were. So it will tell you what sort of people we are fighting. And the towns they have wrecked. My word the day of reckoning will come for Kaiser Bill. He will have to pay for it all.

Fritz sent some gas over today. Well he nearly caught us with it. It is a horrible thing the gas, but ours is three times as strong as his. Also the French have got a shell filled with Turfrimite (?). It kills them where they stand. They go as hard as a rock.

We got caught on some tear shells he put over. They affect the eyes just as if you have been crying. Well that is not so bad as the gas or the liquid fire. I think the last named is the worst of the lot.

He sent more shells over near our Btty, killed two more drivers and a few horses. Death Valley - it is a good name for it. Dead lying all around in shell holes.

A German plane ventured up this morning. He did not stay up long before one of our planes was after him. He soon got down into his own lines again.

Well the order came in today that we're coming out for a rest. I got orders to saddle my horse to act as guide to the other Bgde that is taking over from us. Well they came to our lines about 2 o'clock. Well we moved off with me pride of place in front leading the Battery. Well we had a safe ride up. A few Jack Johnsons coming over but they were a long way off over on a ridge. Well I came back with the captain and we moved off from our waggon line.

About 5 o'clock we camped the other side of Albert for the night. It came on to rain about 9 o'clock. It did not rain much. I had a good sleep under a big G.S. waggon cover.

18th July

(August)

Had a good night's sleep. Rain eased off a little.

Moved off about 4 o'clock to our place where we are going to rest. And didn't it rain on the way. Well we got wet through before we had time to undo our capes off the saddle. Well we got to the place called Vadencourt. Well it is rumoured that we are going to stay here.

Well I was glad to turn into bed. We call it bed. Because we have got no blankets we had to sleep in our wet clothes.

Well I never felt it. I had one of my bilious attacks. I felt very bad.

19th July

(August)

Well we are staying at Vadencourt. It is a nice little place. Well we got paid today. A month's pay. So we will shake the eggs and chips up soon. We will be able to get some feed into us. Also there is a canteen right in our paddock. The British Tommies run it. Also there is a big canteen in Warloy, a big town we passed thro 2 km away. Well we had some good things today. I had a feed of tinned lobster and some sauce. Also tinned fruit and cakes, chocolate. We went into a town called Contay, a nice place.

All the Australians are out here for a rest. They deserve it the way they have fought on the Somme. They captured Pozieres and hung on to it. Others tried it, captured it but could never hold it. Well the Australian done it and captured a lot more ground besides.

Well I was saying we went into Contay. We had a couple of bottles of champagne also some wine and beer. The beer is very harmless. You see the little French kiddies go into the estaminet. They are what we call hotels and have there glasses of beer. The French people do not drink tea, only coffee. It is good coffee too.

King George passed our camp today. Well we did not know it was him. He spoke and nodded to some of the boys. He visited the boys in the trenches, also the German dugouts and the towns we captured.

Well we had a grand time in Contay tonight. Got into bed about 10 o'clock. I don't think it will take much rocking to put me to sleep tonight I feel that knocked up.

20th (August)

Reveille at 6 am. Watered and fed the horses. Breakfast at 8 o'clock. We got some bacon for breakfast today, also a little bread. We bought some off the French people too so we will not do too bad here.

We went out exercising the horses. We went for a good ride and enjoyed it. Such a lovely day too. We passed thro a couple of towns. I could not get the names of them.

Well we had to start again today to get our harness polished up which got very rusty in action.

- Went for a good hot bath too. I enjoyed that more than anything. Went in to Warloy for a few hours at night. Bought some things at the canteen and then went home and had a good feed and then to bed.
- 21st (August) Reveille at 6 am. Fed and watered the horses. Breakfast and then we had a kit inspection. They took a list of all the things that we were short of. We lost a lot of things at action at Fricourt and Mametz Wood. I do not know when we will get our shortages made up. We need them bad enough, especially clothing. My tunic is in rags.
- 22nd (August) Went down to Ordnance to get a gun which got knocked about a bit in action. We went to a place called Varennes. Rumoured that we are going back again into action on the 25th.
- 23rd (August) Reveille at 4 am. Got orders to move off at 9 o'clock.
- We passed through a few villages and we had a few hours rest this side of Albert and then took the guns into action. Well we never got into the place we came out of. We went in to a place called Sausage Valley.
- Well we had a safe ride in. Old Fritz was sending a few coalboxes over to the left of us half a mile away. We're on the outskirts of Contalmaison. The place has been knocked about. You would not think it was a town once. We are not far away from Pozieres.
- Well we found a lot of German coats and tunics also a lot more dead bodies. A little bit more of the old smell about dead bodies lying about all over the place. You run over a lot of them. You cannot get out of the way of them.
- There is a hill we go down we can see all over the German lines. The 20th battery had bad luck. When they went in a shell came over and fell right in between the drivers and horses. It killed two drivers and wounded five others. It is the first casualty they had on this front.
- 24th July (August) Went up to the batty with some more iron rations. We had a good trip this time, the best one ever we had down here. We always having rows with the Tommies. They try and knock us back all they can but they find their mistake each time.
- Gen Birdwood said the Australians should never have come to this front. The losses are enormous. It will open the eyes of the people when it comes out. If there is any hard fighting to be done its the Australian and Scots called upon to do it. We get on very well with the Scots. They think a lot of the Australians.
- 25th July (August) Another trip up to the battery. I had to take a dispatch up.
- Well I had a rough time of it. A shell came over. It knocked me flying off my horse. It knocked my poor old horse about a bit. He got wounded in two places but he carried me out of it safe. The horse is your best friend when you are carrying dispatches. You have to pick your own track out. No roads about here, they have been blown up, all shell holes now.
- A mail came in today when I was away. I got a surprise. When I got home there were two letters for me. One from home and the other was from Miss E Tear. I nearly cried with joy when I got them. It is nearly five months since I got one so you can tell how pleased I was. It started to rain tonight and we got flooded out thro the night. Well we had a rough time of it. We had to get up and fix our dugout as best we could. We have only got a few shell boxes. Well we had to keep our wet clothes on. We have got no change of clothes. Well we will be glad to get out of this front. It's a living hell. The sights we see people would not believe you when you tell them what you see.
- Well its a grand sight watching the bombardments of a night. It lights the sky up for miles around. You can see old Fritz send up a few SOS rockets when it gets a bit too hot. I do not know how they stand the bombardment. His is bad enough but we put over twelve shells to his one. So you can tell what sort of time he is having.
- 26th July (August) A few more loads of shells went up today. The track is in an awful state. It is right over the axles in mud. But we got through.
- It is still raining. Fritz started to shell our waggon line today but no damage done.
- One of our planes were brought down today. It came down near our waggon line.
- Plenty of flies over here. I think it is on account of so many dead bodies laying round. If you leave your mug of tea for a while it is full of them when you come back. You have to keep it covered up. When we are in bed of a night they all get on a bit of bush we hang up in the dugout. We burn them off with a piece of paper. The only thing that happens they are crawling all over you through the night. Well that is better than eating them.
- I had a call up about 12 o'clock tonight with a dispatch for the Btty.
- Well I had a lively ride. It was raining shells and shrapnel. I caught a piece on top of the head. I had my helmet on. Well I lost my way. I found myself up near the trenches. I was looking at a bayonet. I was halted by one of the boys. He put me on the right track. I had not got far

when my horse fell in a shell hole on top of me. It was half full of water, not a very pleasant thing in the middle of the night.

Well I found the btty all right. I was glad to get there. They gave me a hot drink. It warmed me up a little. I got back to the lines all right. It was night of adventure. Well I would not like to go through it again for all the tea in China.

27th (August) Well I laid in bed till 12 o'clock today after my trip last night. My clothes were all wet. The cook dried them for me while I was in bed.

Well we are on our old thing - bully and biscuits. It's a hard job to get anything at the canteens about here. They are run by the Tommies and the boys buy them so quickly and it takes a few days to get a stock in again.

Well we were flooded out of our dugouts again today. Still raining.

Two German aeroplanes were brought down today. It's a pretty sight watching them come down. They come down very gracefully, just like a bird.

Two of our balloons caught fire today. They were struck by lightening.

More ammunition went up to the batty. Just think of it, the guns have not been silent on the front for seven weeks.

There are a lot of batteries ready to come in to take our place. The Canadians are going to relieve us. We're going up to Ypres. It will be a change, another train journey. We will take over from them up there. The 1st Division have gone up. They left a few days ago.

The rain has eased off but I think it will come on again shortly. It is blowing a gale now. Mud is up to your knees now. It is hard on the poor horses too. It gets cold of a night now. We will soon have winter on us. I do not know how we will get on through it. They say the snow is a foot deep in winter time.

More bully and biscuits today. The guns eased off a little this morning but they opened out again in the afternoon. Old Fritz will catch it hot in the rain.

There are a few divisions going to make another advance so I suppose I will have a bit of work to do.

Gen Birdwood came round today. He gave some medals to some of the boys. Two of our btty boys was mentioned in dispatches.

Well a few more shells went up tonight. I suppose things will be a bit more lively there.

Well, got orders to saddle up at 10 o'clock to take dispatches. I had two, one to our own btty and one to an Indian. Well I got to our own all right but I could not find the other one. Well I was wandering about for two hours. I was in Pozieres, Contalmaison then I went through Trones Wood. I came across it about a mile away from our own. I had a rough time of it, shells falling all around. It is marvellous that I got out of it. I must be like a cat with nine lives.

28th July (August) The sun is shining beautiful today. I had a few hours extra in bed on account of last night. It is a pleasure to see the sun.

I think we are coming out of action on Sunday. I think we will hand over our guns to the Canadians because we would not be able to get them out. We will take theirs.

We had a bit of bread and butter today. It was a treat to get a bit of bread. I had my breakfast in bed. Fancy getting breakfast in bed on Active Service.

Hats off to our boys, they captured 2,000 Huns last night, the biggest haul ever been made in one night. On this front it is a record. We saw 500 of them pass our lines today. They were Bavarians, the pick of the Huns, the Kaiser's picked troops, so they got a bit of a stick and some more.

Good news we heard today that the Bulgarians have had enough of it and the Russians were marching on still advancing. Good news indeed.

We were standing outside our "Wassa" when old Fritz sent some shells over into a Dressing Station on the brow of a hill about a mile away. We saw them quite plainly, horses and men scattering in all directions.

We had 37 sausage balloons up today. We can see 5 of old Fritz's up. One of our planes are manoeuvring around that way. I would not be surprised to see them come down before very long.

We had a gift of chocolate today from Queensland. It was very nice.

More dispatches to the batteries. I had another rough ride of it. Plenty of shells coming over. One shell fell right under my horse but it was my day out. It never went off, it was a dud. It is a living hell down there. I do not know how long it is going to last.

29th July (August) I managed to get a couple of tins of pineapple today.

More shells went up to the battery so you can easily tell what sort a time old Fritz is getting by

the ammunition that we fire.

We found some more German dugouts today in Contalmaison. We went down to explore them. We found plenty of dead Germans. My word you ought to see how they have got them fitted out like underground palaces and the smell down there, well we take no notice of it now we are that used to it. We counted 10 in all. I think they must have been wounded and gone down there to die. We got a few souvenirs off them. I've got a German water bottle. It is made of aluminium. I am getting a disc made out of it.

It is still raining.

Some more dispatches to the battery. A terrible bombardment going on.

I got hit on the head with a piece of shrapnel as I was leaving the battery. Well I got home safe and sound. You do not know the minute you will be blown to pieces.

I was up at the battery a few days ago when a shell came over. It blew a Tommy to pieces. He was riding on a G S Waggon. None of the others were touched. It is marvellous the way you get out of it. Another day on our water cart was up at the battery and one of the gunners was holding the horses' heads. It killed the horses and the gunner was not touched.

A few hundred more Germans came past our lines today. They were a sorry looking crowd. They said that had not anything to eat for four days. Their supplies could not get up to them on account of our bombardment. And the boys gained some more ground last night.

30th (August) Reveille at 6 am. We had breakfast which consisted of bully and biscuits.

The bombardment has just eased off a little. Old Fritz started to shell our waggon line a few shells dropped near but the battery next to ours suffered most. The men had just finished feeding the horses when a shell came over and dropped right in between the horses. It killed two and wounded a few others. None of the men were touched. Had another ride up to the battery. I had to go along a road which was being heavily shelled. I was going well when my horse fell down a shell hole. I went right over his head. A bit of luck he was not hurt, so I got on him again and galloped in with my dispatches. I got out of that safe.

The guns have started again. More iron rations went up to old Fritz. He must like them the way we are sending them over to him.

We are pushing right on to Thiepval and Combles. The first named will be hard to take because it is a fortress but we will get it before long. We have only one more ridge to go over and then we will have them on the run. But we have to get them back a long way before we get them out of France and Belgium.

I would like to get home and have Christmas dinner at home, It would be different to the dinner we had last Christmas, bully and biscuits. That was in Egypt. We moved camp on Christmas Eve travelling all night. Raining all the time we went to a place called Maadi. I think Maadi the best camp we were in Egypt then we shifted further down the line to Tel el Kabir.

31 July (August) Well I have just got up out of bed when I got word to saddle up to take dispatches to the battery. Well I had a pretty lively ride. I had to take a road which was being shelled heavily. One shell burst about five years behind me so I had to gallop for it. They say a dispatch rider's life is only five minutes. I had to jump trenches and shell holes. The shrapnel was bursting a treat but my blood was up. I did not notice half the shells that came over. You just ride on and don't give a hang for anything.

Well I got out of that living hell safe and sound.

Well we found a few more dugouts up in Contalmaison. We went down some of them and we found a few dead Germans. They must have been down there for a few weeks because they smelt some. Well we have found no souvenirs on them. Someone must have been there before us. I have still got the German helmet. I wear it every day when I go up to the battery.

1 August (September) More ammunition went up to the battery. The drivers had a lively ride. They were shelled all the time they were there. We have to pass over a hill and I think old Fritz must be able to see us when we go over the top.

One of our planes came down today. I was just going to the battery when I heard it coming down. When it got about 20 yds off the ground it fell with a crash. The pilot and observer was not hurt.

Fritz started to shell our waggon line today. He put half a dozen over then our guns silenced his battery and there were no damage done only ploughed the ground up a bit.

It is still raining. I am wet to the skin, well I have been for the last week. I have had my wet clothes on for a week now because I have got no changes. I suppose we will get some when we come out of this place.

I am looking forward to the time when we get back up to the North of France. We will be able

2nd August
(September)

to get plenty to eat, plenty of eggs and chips. Well I think we are coming out of this forsaken place tomorrow.

I have got two more trips to do and then I will be finished. I suppose I will have one some time through the night. They are getting ready to give Fritz a big bombardment tonight. I hope I miss it. I generally get my dispatches right in the middle of it. It is still raining so I think both sides will have a hard time of it.

Well I am just off up with a dispatch. It is so very quiet at the time so I think I will have a good ride. It is about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Got back safe and sound. It did not take me long to do that trip. Not a blessed shell came over. It was the quietest ride ever I had.

The aeroplanes are very busy today. I counted 22 going over the line so when they go over like that you can always depend on it something is doing.

I had a tin of salmon for tea. I managed to get it down at Albert at one of the canteens. We're about two miles from Albert. I gave my horse a good feed because we will want it. It will be out nearly all night. We will be glad when it is over.

I am going to turn in for a few hours sleep because we will have a big day of it tomorrow. Bon Soir. That is good night in French.

Well I was woke up again at 11 o'clock. My horse was already saddled. I started away. I had 5 dispatches to deliver. I had been up to three of the batteries before. I had to find the other two as best as I could. I always carry a map with me. The bombardment started about 8 o'clock and is still raging. I got up to our battery all right. I was getting across country, over to Dead Man's Gully when I was hit with a piece of shell. It hit my leather bag that I carry my dispatches in. It nearly knocked me off my horse. He must have known that there was something the matter. I was all right in a few minutes. Well I found all the places all right after a lot of trouble.

I got back to the waggon line at 5 o'clock am I turned in for a few hours sleep.

The right section came out of action today so we pushed off straight away. We are going to the other side of Albert. We will camp there for the night and wait for the left section. They come out next day. We are camped right along side a crop of potatoes. We had a good feed of them. We turned in bed early camped under the waggons. It came on to rain and we got flooded out. The left section came out today so we will move off when they come down. We moved off about 1 o'clock. We passed through Warloy and came to Vadencourt where we camped the night. We will push on next day. We passed Varennes, Toutencourt, Raincheval, Beauquesne, Terramesil, Bagneaux, Gezaincourt, which brought us to a place called Hem where we will camp for the night. It is a very pretty little place with some very old places in it. One church especially built in 1736.

The first thing we did after we looked after our horses, we had a good feed of chips and eggs which were very plentiful. Then a few of us went for a bit of a walk. Some very pretty scenery about.

You see all over France wherever you go old windmills. Very old fashioned things which you see in books.

Well we turned in early so as to get a good night's sleep which we needed. We had plenty of nice clean straw to lie on. Better than sleeping out in the wet.

Well we are up nice and early. I do not know how long ago I had a sleep as good as last night. Well we moved about 2 pm for Doullens a big town not very far off where we entrained for Ypres. We got a good stock of bread and cake chocolate, also 4 bottles of champagne. So we have had a good feast in the train.

We left Doullens about 6 pm. Some very pretty scenery passed through.

We were in a box with 8 horses so you see we do not get very comfortable travelling in first class carriages here for soldiers. We passed through St Pol, a very big place, plenty of people on the station and got a great reception as we passed through the big places.

We next came to Hazebrouck so I had a good idea where we were going to. I have been in that town before.

Well we arrived at our destination Poperinge about 1 o'clock. We disentrained and then we had a six mile journey on the road to our billets. We took the wrong road and we had to turn back. We got to our billets at 5 am and the place we are at now is Boeschepe Mill. We fixed up our horses and then had a good sleep. I woke up at 12 o'clock. We are up in Belgium now about 7 miles from Ypres. I do not know when we are going into action.

This is better than that hellish place the Somme. Well all the boys were glad to get back from there. We came away from there with 18 short, two killed and 16 wounded. That is a lot for a

battery.

Well I was glad to get to bed tonight because I have not had my clothes off for a week. I feel completely knocked up. We let our horses loose in the paddock now. The poor brutes are glad of a bit of grass because they have not had any for weeks.

Well the second night I went into Boeschepe. It is a very nice place. Some of the houses have got pianos so we had a good time. It is very quiet up this part of the front. You would not know that there is a war on where we are. Well I suppose we will be into it again shortly.

Had a bad attack of gastritis and went to see the doctor. He put me off all food. Said I was not to eat anything and get all the rest I could. He wanted me to go to the hospital I did not like the thought of that so he said he would do the best he could here.

I got a few letters and papers today.

Still very bad. Had a bad night of it. Well I had 10 days of it but I am better now.

We got orders today to move off to our new waggon line 5 or 6 miles away. It started to rain about 2 am and kept on all day. We moved away at 9.30 am. Well we were wet through before we started and when we got to our waggon lines we had to put up tents. You know what sort of a game that is in the rain.

We had a very bad night of it, wet through and no change to put on.

18th August
(September) It is still raining. I do not know how we will get on this winter if we stay here. They called for volunteers for the Royal Flying Corps. I put my name down.

19th
(September) Still raining. Went into Poperinge tonight. It is a very big place. Old Fritz sends a few shells into it sometimes. We will be going into action at the end of the week.

Well there is not much to put down in the diary when we are out of action.

24th
(September) Went into action. We did not take the guns in. We took over from the 16th Bty.

I took a dispatch up today. Went right through Ypres. Our battery is just outside the town. The cookhouse is right in Ypres. The place has been knocked about. Some lovely buildings, big cathedrals also the beautiful building the cloth hall all in pieces. I have never seen anything like it before. It is murderous how the place has been knocked about. Not a house that has not had a shell in it. I took another dispatch up today. I have a different time of it here than what I had down in the Somme. It is very quiet here. Hardly any firing going on at all. Well we shifted to a different waggon line today. We are in huts. Ours has got a stove in it. We will have a fire when the snow comes.

I am not going to trouble about the dates now, only on special occasions.

Well we are nearing Christmas. I must try to get some cards to send to Australia. I will be able to get some in Poperinge.

Gen Birdwood came down today. He had a look around the horses. He ordered stables to be put up.

I see by the papers that they have got conscription in Australia. It is time they done something to make the slackers do their bit. I think we have done our share. The hardships and rough time we have had of it I will be glad to get back home.

I see by the paper also that they have got the tanks going down at the Somme. We heard when we were down there that they had something that would startle the Germans so I think they must be them. It must have frightened them when they saw them coming over trenches and shell holes.

Well we have put in a few days in huts about here. We have got word that we are moving again shortly. It is raining now. The place is in a terrible state.

Well we moved off about 9 o'clock to a place called Oudezeele near Cassel which is built on a great big hill. A few of us went into see the place. By what we could see of it it is a very pretty place. All the lights are put out at night on account of the Zeppelins. We stayed there a few days. We had a game of football. We played the 21st Bty. We beat them and then we moved on to a place called (blank). We stayed two days there. It was raining all the time.

Then entrained at a place called (blank) for the Somme.

(November) We arrived at Amiens in the afternoon. Made another move towards Albert.

It is terrible down here. Raining all the time. We slept in tents and then we made on towards our new waggon lines. The mud is something terrible. The gunners went into action. They had to walk up to their gun. We have to take the ammunition up on horseback. You can't get up with the waggons.

You see horses and mules laying dead all over the place. They get bogged in shell holes and they can't get out. They have to be shot.

We are walking about in mud over your knees all day. Some of the boys has to be dragged out.

Old Fritz sent a couple of shells over on our line this morning. A Bty was just moving through. It wounded about half a dozen men. Well I was wishing I was one of them so as to get out of this infernal hole.

My clothes are wet through and inches of mud hanging on to them. I have been wet now for a week. I suppose I will get used to it in time.

We are sleeping under a few bits of tin. It keeps the rain off a little. Plenty of flees here too. They keep you busy catching them. Well they are good company. I would not be without them for anything. Not had a wash now for five days. Well today I had a shave and wash the first for a week. Well you would not have know me covered in mud and water. I am getting sore feet too. Well I received a parcel from Miss E Tear. Some nice things in it. Well we went out with a waggon to the R E dump. While we were out all night it was raining heavens hard. Had another bit of a wash today out of a shell hole. The water was green. It smelt some too. But I enjoyed the wash.

8 November Well when I got home from the Bty today there was a parcel for me from home. I nearly cried with joy. Well it came in handy because we were three days without rations so we enjoyed the good things in it. The place is in a terrible state here. It is rough on the poor horses also the men. We can put up with a bit but the poor brutes you would not believe me if I was to tell you what we have to go through.

I am glad that they put conscription out because I would not vote to get anyone over here what I would like to get out of myself. All the soldiers voted to let them stay at home if they can't come voluntary.

We are putting eight weeks in this hole. I will be glad when we are out of it. I suppose we will have another Xmas here. I was living in hope of it being over by Xmas but no sign of it here. There are plenty of Fritz prisoners working about here on the roads. They are looked after better than us. We were a few days without cigarettes and no matches. Matches are worth money at the present time. We have got a few Francs with us but cannot buy anything with it.

The weather has been terrible here lately, rain wind and sleet. The ground froze for a few days. Then the rain came on. It made it in an awful state. The poor horses are catching it. They get down in the mud and have to be shot. There has been a few Fritz planes over the last few days. We brought five or six of them down.

I have been very bad with gastritis. I do not know how long we are going to stop here but it will be the end of the boys when they come out of this place. It is bitterly cold. Fritz shells our waggon lines nearly every day now but does very little damage.

(December) Received a letter from Miss M Gorrie. Was very pleased to get it. I wrote home to a few friends. I sent a few Xmas cards also. I don't suppose they will get them by Xmas. Went up to the Bty with water. One of our boys had his head blown right off.

They boys are in a terrible state coming from the trenches. Some of the poor devils are without boots. We always give them a ride down through the mud on our pack horses. They are glad to it.

We shifted our gun positions on Dec? 23rd to the left of Flers.

We came across some dead Germans in shell holes. The rain had washed all the dirt off them. They did smell some. It is a good job it is winter. You would not be able to stand the stink in summer. Dead bodies laying all over the place. Also dead horses. It is terrible. One poor fellow got knocked over with a shell. Just put him in a shell hole and throw in a bit of dirt over him. It has started to rain again. The mud is something awful. You go over your waists in it. Sometimes you cannot see the shell holds and all of a sudden you go down. Well you are lucky if there are anybody about. They will give you a pull out. If there is nobody you have to stay there till somebody comes along and the poor horses. They have to shoot them.

A couple of tanks came by today. I had to laugh when I saw them. No wonder the Germans went mad when they came over. They are very funny looking objects. They crawl over shell holes and trenches. They can go anywhere. They are no good in this kind of weather so they are going to give them a spell. They done great work the time they were in action. I suppose you have heard all about them in Australia and the doings of them.

We expect to make a big move here shortly on to Bapaume. They are getting a big cage made for the prisoners. We brought a few Fritz planes down lately. They have been flying over our lines of a night. He dropped a few bombs. One Fritz plane flew across our horse lines today. He dropped three bombs but I don't think anyone was killed and then he started to shell us. He was putting big coal boxes over. You could see tents and dugouts going up in the air. Well we are having a very rough time of it both man and horses. I pity the poor devils. The mud they have to

put up with.

Well I heard some good news today. My name is down for leave to England. What a Godsend it will be to have a few days out of this hell. It is more than human endurance can stand.

They are taking it out of us now we voted no conscription. There will not be many Australians left after they come out of here. We are here for the winter. We have had rain, hail and snow, plenty of it. It has been bitterly cold. I came across a dead Fritz a few days ago in a shell hole. He had a pair of Jackboots on but they were perished. It is nothing to come across dead bodies. Some of our own men not had time to be buried. A few killed on the spot and a bit of dirt thrown over them.

We packed all our ammunition up on horses. We can't get up with the waggons. Too much mud and shell holes. I was up to the battery today. My horse fell in a shell hole with me. I was underneath him. Well I was in a state when they dragged me out.

Went up to the battery today with more shells. Old Fritz has been giving us a pretty lively time this last two or three days. The weather has been clear. He can see us on a part of the road. He puts some over. One fell a few yards away. A piece hit my horse. He had to be shot.

It is still raining. We are getting some terrible weather now, snowing one day and then rain.

I heard some good news today. Was told to get ready to go on leave. Well I was so excited I did not know what to do. Well we went down to Albert. Next day we were in plenty of time to catch the train because it did not leave till 2 am next morning. It was very cold waiting for it. At last we were on board for dear old Blighty. My word it was a Godsend to get out of the mud for a few weeks.

It took us 28 hours to get to Le Havre a distance of about 100 miles. My word it was cold. Was glad to get to our destination.

We were marched to a rest camp to wait our turn for the leave boat to take us to Blighty. Well we had to wait three days at Le Havre for a boat.

At last the day came when we were to sail for Blighty. We were marched down to the boat at 2 pm. We sailed at 4 pm. It was terrible rough crossing the Channel. Some of the poor Tommies suffered from sea sickness. It took us 8 hours to cross the Channel. We arrived at Southampton. We arrived at 12 midnight. We were kept on board till 8 in the morning. We landed and there were two special trains to take us up to London. There was a rush to get on the first train. We managed to catch the first one. We got to London at 1 o'clock. It was very misty. Well we went straight round to Headquarter to get settled up and get some clean clothes and most of all a good hot bath. And then we went around to get our beds. We stayed at the Union Jack Club in Waterloo Road. It was a very good and clean place.

Well we had a good look round London the same night. We could not see London much because all the lights are out on account of zeppelins. We slept well that night in a good clean bed with sheets, the first for many a long month.

My mate and I went to Bournemouth for a few days. I knew some friends down there from Australia. Bournemouth is a very pretty place. It is a seaside resort. We spent two days there and went back to London. Went to a few theatres there.

Well the people could not do enough for us. They treated us fine. I will never forget it. We spent a good time in London.

I will never forget the day when it was time to go back. We was on Waterloo station and decided to miss the train till next day. Well we did and came back on the Sunday 21st January 1917. It was just like leaving Australia. We knew what we had to go back - Hell let loose on earth. We saw some terrible scenes on the station that day, wives and sweethearts crying. It was terrible. Well it broke me up.

We left London 4 pm for Southampton. The boat was waiting for us. It did not take long to cross the Channel this time because it was very calm. We got to Le Havre again and was marched to a rest camp ready to be sent back to our units.

The first thing that greeted us when we landed in France was the snow. It had been snowing all the time we were away. The ground had frozen hard. It was better than the mud. French people say it was the coldest time they have had for 30 years.

We stayed a day in the rest camp and left Le Havre at 6 am for our unit. It was very cold.

Another long time in the train. It took us 26 hours to get back to Albert.

We heard in London that our Bty had come out for a rest. Well we were travelling all about looking for them. We were 3 days finding them. We had to sleep anywhere we could get in. All of us were stony. We got some food off other soldiers.

We found our battery at last at a place called Naours. We got there about 4 o'clock still

(January
1917)

21 January

- snowing. It is 7 degrees below zero so you can tell what sort of a time we are having.
- (26 January) I think we are going to be transferred back to our old brigade, the 4th. We moved off from Naours to a place called Rainneville to be reorganised. The right section were put in the 10th Bty, the left section the 11th Bty. I am in the 10th Bty now.
We spent 4 days at Rainneville and moved off to a place called Baudincourt.
We are going into action again in a few days. They did not keep us out long after being in 12 weeks. They are taking it out on Australians in France. The people in Australia do not know how they are treating us. People in England call us the white slaves of the Western Front. They are right too.
The weather is still very cold. I think we are going into action in the morning. I am not sure which sector. I think up near Pozieres way.
Well I think I will turn in to bed now. We are sleeping in a barn with nice clean straw so it is not so bad but I would rather have my own little bed at home to turn into. Will be glad when it is all over. Would not like to spend another winter in France. It is killing half our boys. Three of them were on piquet one night when they found them next morning they were frozen. One of them died. When we get up of a morning our boots are that hard frozen that we have a hard job to put them on. Still snowing. We had the last move to Bardincourt from Rainneville in a snow storm. It was bitterly cold.
We are moving off into action of 4th February. We never had much of a rest. I do not know how long we will be in this time. I hope it's not long this time. Reveille will be at 5 am in the morning to get things ready for the move.
- (4 January) Well we got to our waggon lines at Contalmaison. It was our gun position the first time we came down to the Somme. We had canvass stables for the horses. There is still plenty of snow on the ground. It has frozen hard. It is a hard job to get anything at the canteens. As soon as they get a stock in it does not last long.
Well the snow is just beginning to thaw. I suppose it will be just as much mud about as before. We were called out at 3 am to move the guns up The infantry made a charge and old Fritz had to go. We advanced about 3 miles. Could find nothing of him for a couple of days so we have got him on the run at last. There is plenty of mud about now at the guns. Another charge by the boys. Old Fritz moved back some more so we were called out again to move the guns. We had a terrible time of it. The guns getting bogged in shell holes. We were out all one night and day without anything to eat. We were having a rough time of it. We had to go through Le Sars to a place called Bty Copse just outside Le Barque. Plenty of dead Germans laying about. I have got a German cap as a souvenir. Still we have got them on the move.
We are not far from the town of Bapaume. It will be all right if the Australians take it. They have done well this time in the great push. There will be great rejoicings in Australia when we capture Bapaume. Another advance. We were taking ammunition up to the guns when word came to move again so the boys was out like a shot.
- 17 March The Australians captured Bapaume this morning the 17th March so we took the guns through just to the left of it a little. It will live long in my memory the fall of that town. It happened on my birthday so it will be a thing to remember it by. Old Fritz set the town alight before he was drove out of it and you could see other villages ahead of it on fire. He started firing on us with a machine gun on the night of the 17th so you can see we were close on his heels. But he cleared out again next morning. Got him on the run again.
We had to stand by our horses all night in case another move came till 3 am we moved the guns up another half mile to the left of Bapaume. We have got our waggon lines in our old gun position at Le Barque. We went and explored the ruins of the village. Not a place left standing. Had orders to proceed to Grevillers for ammunition.
Pushed Fritz back some more today. Our battery has got orders to stand to in case of emergency. We shifted our waggon line up to Bapaume. Nice country for the horses. Plenty of grass about. We are getting very poorly fed now. We have not had any fresh meat for eight days now. We have 4 biscuits and a tin of bully beef a day - not much to live on. Well we had nothing for two whole days. The rations could not get up to us. We are expecting a move out for a rest soon. It is just about time.
- (27 March) We have been on the Somme since October. Spent the winter here on the Somme so it is time they gave us a look in. They are taking it out of us all right. We are camped at a place called Avesnes les Bapaume. Just outside the town of Bapaume.
Well it has just started to snow again. It is very cold. We have had six stand by with the guns. We have moved them up 6 times this month.

I have had a lot of mail lately. Also parcels of socks which came in very useful at the time. I was right out of them at the time.

(11 April)

We are on the eve of a big battle. We got orders to stand by our guns so we had to harness up and go up the line a mile behind the guns.
We got shelled out through the night. We had to pick another place out.
Well the bombardment started about 4 am. Talk about noise. We are just behind a Bty of 9.2s and they opened up. Well no more sleep that morning.
Well the boys done real well. They advanced on a lot of ground and were still holding it.
Another bombardment tonight. Old Fritz made three counter-attacks. Our boys were ready to make an attack on Fritz when he got in first. But he got cut up very badly. They were ready for him. They were not many that got away. Took very few prisoners. Knocked them over as fast as they came. Counted 2,500 dead after the battle.
We are the only one to break through to the Hindenburg line so far.
Another battle coming off tonight. The Tommies are going over supported by the Australians to try and capture Bullecourt.
It is rumoured that we are going out for a rest in a few days. It is time too. They are getting all they can out of the Australians in this war. Tommies can go out for 3 months but we only go out for a few days.

6th May

Our guns are in a valley that is called Death Valley just beyond Noreuil.
We were just having a nice sleep this morning when Old Fritz started to shell us. We had to get out of it Tuts sweet. He sent some aeroplanes over last night. He dropped some bombs on Bapaume killing a few. They were flying very low. They turned the machine guns on us but never hit anybody.
The guns have never stopped firing for over a fortnight now. It is hell on earth. Of a night time all kinds of rockets going up, most Fritz's.
We are camped outside a village called Vaulx-Vraucourt. We have been shelled out twice now. I met a Richmond boy today F. K.(?) He is coming up tonight to see me.
Dead bodies packed up 4 feet high in no man's land, mostly Germans. He is getting a rough time of it lately. He is doing a lot of counter-attacking. He is coming second all the time. The boys mow them down like grass.
We were shelled out of our forward line today. We were just sitting down on the ground to have dinner when Fritz opened up with some 5.9s. We run to get our horses away. I was leading mine round the gun limber when one came over. It just missed my head and never exploded. Lucky for me. Other shells killed 2 and wounded some more. It lasted about 10 minutes. We went back and finished our dinner.
We expect to be relieved in a few days time.
Our battery has moved up to the front line. We are made into an anti-tank battery waiting on the tanks. If they happen to come over they will get a warm reception.
Went down to the waggon lines at Bapaume tonight.
Was relieved by other team. Had a very narrow escape today. Fritz started to shell. He started about 12.30. I was getting my horses away. I heard a shell coming near me. I just ducked in time. It went about a foot over my head and landed a couple of yards away. It was dud. If it had exploded it would have blown me to Hell.
Went up to the forward line again today. It is one continuous shelling.

(17 May)

We have captured Bullecourt. Old Fritz had put in between 15 and 20 counter-attacks. He has been knocked back each time. We still hold Bullecourt. Old Fritz he wants it. It is one of his chief points along the whole Hindenburg line. Our boys have done wonders.
Our battery got shelled out tonight so we had to go up in the dark and shift the guns. We moved them 400 yards to the rear and got back about 4.30 am after being out all night. It is all night work now we do because Fritz can observe us in the day time. He shelled our position heavily tonight. Killed three boys and wounded five. My mate and I went down to the CCS to see them tonight. They will be going away today. I suppose. they will go to Blighty.
I think we are going out on the 28th. We are going up. It is time they gave us a bit of a spell.
We had this morning to ourselves so I took my horses out for a pick of grass. There is plenty of it about now. They enjoy it all right.

(28 May)

We came out of action tonight. I had to take a dispatch up to the Battery about 9.30 tonight. It was raining a little. I was taking a short cut over the field when I was caught in some barb wire

entanglements. It took me a long while to get out of it. Got home about midnight. Packed up 5 am. Getting ready to move off.

We are going to Pozieres. The first day we will be in huts the first night. They are called Wolessely (or holiday?) huts. We got there about three o'clock, stayed the night then moved off to a village called Aveley, not an inhabitant to be found in the place.

Went into Albert to the pictures. They were rotten. Then next night we went into a place called Bouzincourt. We went to the pictures. They were very good. It was a mixed show. Pierotto pictures.

We are supposed to be resting but we are working harder now than when in action. Will be glad when we go back again.

We are getting ready for a review by Gen Birdwood. It is to take place on Tuesday.

(8 July) Well everything passed off well on the day. The General was pleased with it. We are now preparing to move up north into Belgium. It will take us 14 days. We moved off at 2 am. Well I will not put in any of the places we passed through. The biggest was St Pol and Aire.

(August) We are now up in Belgium between Ypres and Zillebeke. This place is Hell awful. The dead bodies laying along the road, also the horses and waggons that are knocked.

We are preparing for a big move in a few days. Our team is to go up and stand by the guns till they fire, 2 hours and 10 minutes, and then hook in and move them up 2 miles.

The day at last. We are up along side the guns. The bombardment is something awful.

Well they talk about Henley nights. It is not in it. As soon as we opened up Fritz sent up all his different kinds of lights, all colours. Must be awful over in his lines.

Well the firing has eased off a bit now. This is worst part of the job. We are all ready to move forward. Word came in to get a start.

Well everything went off well till we were returning with the horses and then Fritz opened out on us. He put a terrible barrage on us but we got out of it quite safely.

We have had a lot of casualties in the Battery up here, over 30. Not many of the old boys left now. They are going one by one. Will be glad when it is all over. No sign of it yet and this is August 1917.

I can see another winter ahead of us. I am dreading another winter. I heard from Cyril the other day so I got a day off to look him up. I found him. He had been sent away to hospital with nervous debility. Well I am glad he is out of it because one is enough over here. I will keep in touch with him by letters. The latest I heard of him was that he was going back to Australia.

(20 September) We shifted our gun positions to a place beyond Ypres called Birr X roads near a place called Hell Fire Corner which I think is a good name for it because it is hell to go near it. Fritz gives us no peace at all every time we are up the line.

We are supporting our own boys now. They are going to have a stunt in the morning. They are going to take Westhoek Ridge. The mud is something awful.

Well the stunt was successful. Our boys gained everything. I went up the line with a dispatch. My horse was wounded. I had to foot it for a long way. We made another move with the guns this morning . . . (illegible) . . . Fritz's original front line.

We have lost a few of our men this last few days. It is awful. You do not know when your time will come. We'll be lucky to get out of this place. Another move forward with the guns to Sans Sucie.

Well we had an awful time moving them up. This time the mud is something awful. It was nothing to see men and horses floundering in the shell holed. We had to shoot a few of the horses. We could not get them out.

We are getting plenty of rain. We have to cart all the ammunition up with packs leading two horses. We have only got a corduroy road to go up. It is something terrible the way it is blocked. We have been in three months now. I wonder if ever they are going to take us out for a spell. I think we deserve one . . . (illegible) . . .

they are going to have another go at Conscription in Australia. I know what all the boys will vote. NO. I would not ask anyone to come over here and go through what I have in the this last twelve months.

(9 October) Another move with the guns up about another mile. Old Fritz is getting it pretty warm now. We are nearing Paaschendale now. We can see it from where we are. The mud is something awful now. There are plenty of Pill Boxes about, also plenty of dead bodies. Also horses. They are just laying where they fell.

I have given up hope now of ever getting home. I suppose this will last years now. We are getting quite used to it. There is some talk of us coming out for a spell. It is just about time.

A few of the boys killed today and a few wounded. Well I would like a nice Blighty myself now. It would be very welcome.

I have just heard that I will soon be going over on leave to England. Well that will be welcome. A change to get out of the mud. I would like to get my photo taken to show you what it is like over here.

I don't think I will be able to stick it out much longer. My nerves are in a terrible state. The rain and mud is something awful.

I lost my poor horse last night. He was wounded again. He was sent away to hospital. That is the third time he has been wounded.