MEMORIES OF FRANCE

from 1914 till 1919

by 1310 Sergeant George Thompson of Sunderland

Memoirs of a Transport Driver who served

in the

1st/7th Battalion Durham Light Infantry

in the First World War

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1914 till 1919

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1st 7th Durham Light Infantry

Transport Section
Memories of France
Nov 28th 1928

For Gracie Evelyn Thompson, aged 2 years
Born 30th Nov 1926
8 Crow Street
Sunderland

Joined Territorials Oct 5th 1910
Went 2nd Scarborough Camp, 1919

November 28th 1928

Just for a bit pastime, I will try and write a few things which I can remember while I was away with the 7th Battalion Durham Light Infantry in France, starting from being in Camp at Wales. I am not much of a writer on such a subject, but I will do my best to let you know what we went through. To start with all countries have had war one time or another. But this Great War which started in 1914 till 1918 was the worst in history. And I hope that there will never be another. Over [a] million of lives being lost. So I hope from now, there will be peace for good.

It was in July 1914 our Battalion was having their annual Camp at Conway, in Wales. We were just there a week when we were called back home as England had declared war on Germany. Well there was some game on, you would just have thought

the Germans were not far away. However, we got packed up, and started off for Sunderland again. It was a long ride about 12 hours it took us to come back. We marched up to the Drill Hall, crowds of people were waiting for us, as they thought we were going straight over to France. But we went home that night and everybody had to report next morning.

We were sent to different parts of the town. I was sent to the old Skating Rink in Holmside, others to various schools. Then I was picked out for a Transport Driver. Our Battalion got horses and wagons belonging to a local contractor. Then we started to train for war service. I was stationed in the Drill Hall for a while, while the Government was buying horses for war service. I still can remember the old drivers saying take care of him, he is quiet and a good worker

and will go anywhere. Little did they think what was in store for them, same about myself.

A week or so later we were sent to a place called Ravensworth Castle. The horse I was in charge of was a rank bad one. Nearly every time I took him for a drink I used to get into trouble. He used to kick, bite and bolt away. I was soon fed up with him. After we had done some hard training we went to a farm on the Newcastle Road, Scott's House they called it.

At this place they called a parade of every man belonging to our Battalion, it was for volunteers for France. I think there was 600 put up their hands. The 600 which put their hands up were sent on to Gateshead to schools and the transport was sent to CWS [Cooperative Wholesale Society] Stables in Park Lane, Gateshead. I was one of 600 and one of them to come back home, thank God.

We got a draft of 400 men making our Battalion over 1,000 strong. At Gateshead we went through hard training still having our local transport to train with. We used to get called out all hours of the night for night attacks.

After a long spell at Gateshead, thinking we were never going to get to France, our time came. The local transport which we had was taken from us, and sent back to our 2nd Line. We were fitted out with real service gear. Each man had to have two horses in this case. We went over to Newcastle and got a pair of horses and a limber wagon for each man. I was No. 1 Driver. There was about 60 horses and mules on our strength and about 50 men. All Drivers were taken to 50th Division Royal Field Artillery and went

through a hard week's training to learn to ride and drive. They gave us some stick I can

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tell you, first riding bare back and then with saddles on. We were sore for days after. However we got over that and returned to our own stables again. A few days later we heard the news that we had to sail for France.
By the way round about our stables where we were stationed we found some very nice friends, they were very kind to us. Some of them had sons away in the army. And on many occasion they gave us every comfort they could. They would ask us in to supper. Many a happy night I passed with these people at Park Lane, Gateshead. There was some tears shed the day we left them for France. After the war was over I went to see them. Some had lost husbands and some sons.

Well time was getting on and on 17th April 1915 we started off for France, two days before our Battalion sailed.

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Before we left Gateshead I asked for a few hours' leave to visit my father and mother at Sunderland to say good bye and returned to my duties as promised. So we started off and a lot of people from Sunderland came to see us off. We entrained at Gateshead and some game we had to get some of our mules into the trucks so we got already for moving off. Our CO [Commanding Officer] came to see us away; next time we saw him was in France.

We started off for Southampton and it was a long ride. We had several halts on the journey to feed our horses and mules and ourselves bully beef and biscuits, iron rations. We arrived at the docks at Southampton, very big docks they are. The ship was already waiting for us and name of ship was SS *Dunkirk*, very big ship she was. So we started putting our transport on board ship and some game we had on with

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some of our mules. However we got everything put on board and we were soon ready for sailing. By the way there were other units on board as well as us.

I remember well that night we sailed from Southampton it was [a] grand night, full moon before we left. That night I

was detailed for picket duties, and my orders was to see that nobody came up on deck and that no smoking went on. The Germans had been reported in the Channel with their submarines so we were a bit nervous about it. However we sailed out of Southampton. We were not long at sea when we joined in the convoy of other ships that was waiting for us. We had escorts of four destroyers, they were looking out for our safety. See them sweeping around us, it was

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a grand sight. My duties on deck allowed me to see everything that was going on. There was no lights to be seen anywhere. Sea was rough a bit . So I finished my four hours' watch and I was relieved, and I went and tried to have a sleep. But nobody slept that night. Excitement was too great.

Next morning came, when we found ourselves we were at a place called Harve [Le Havre]. Everybody was allowed on deck now. We layed at the quay for a while. We had to water and feed our horses and then we got our breakfast. Biscuits and tea. Someone shouted to me from the quayside and it was [a] pal I knew who was on the docks at Harve [Le Havre], discharging ships from England. He belonged to Sunderland and he told me what was waiting for us up the line. He was

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right too. So we started discharging our Transport from the ship straight onto the train again. We were fed up with this game, we had a job with one mule, he would not come off the ship so some sailors soon cured him. They hoisted him out of the ship's hold. He was a 'tuff un'.

So again we started on our train journey to a place called Boulogne. At this place our Battalion was waiting here for us. This was 19th April 1915. Then the whole Battalion started to entrain and we moved off to our first billet in France. The journey lasted some hours. Then we got to our destination, a little village, very few people living in it. There was a large farm in it and this was to be our Headquarters. At this place I remember the whole Battalion being called on parade and this was

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to tell us we were now on active service. And to be careful about different things when we were up in the trenches. Well after a few days at this place we moved further up to the line

by road this time. I remember our CO coming to our Transport lines and seeing us having some game on to get some mules shod. He did have a laugh. We had to throw them and fasten their four legs together before we could get a shoe on them.

After a rest at this place again we moved nearer to the line and this was our last rest, next move we were up among the thick of it. On our away up to the line we met Canadians coming down the road and the sights we saw was enough for us. They told us what it was like up the line and they were right too. Now we could hear heavy gun firing and we were getting nearer all the

way. We halted at a place called Poperinghe. Here we halted for the night, next day we made another move to that well known place called Ypres. Some place too, we started off and the smell of the place was awful, all broken material lying about the roads made it awkward for our marching. By the way we were now under shell fire.

Our Battalion went up into the line and the Transport went into a place called White Chateau. From this place I was detailed to proceed up with ammunition for the Battalion. My pal also was detailed, being Numbers 1 and 2 SAA [Small Arms Ammunition] Drivers. We drove up near to our battalion as possible. The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] came with us and made us cover some trees over our horses and wagons, He got into trouble about this, he left us open to the Germans and if we had stayed there till daylight, well I

don't think I would have lived to tell the tale. There were shells bursting all around us, and rifle bullets came whizzing past us. I thought we would never have came out of it, when suddenly there came up a staff officer and asked us who had brought us up here. We told him, he asked where the rest of our Transport was, we told him, he went away and brought our Captain up and they got us out before daylight. We went back to where the rest of the Transport was stationed, the other boys rushed to see us and asked what it was like. We told them. They soon got a turn poor chaps,

some of them went up that road but they never came down again.

It was on Whit Monday 1915 when our Battalion were in thick of it, the Germans sent over some gas of a yellowish colour and we had to put on our respirators to save ourselves

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from being gassed. We went through something at this place. The shell fire was awful. Our Transport got orders to move out of the White Chateau. Shell fire was too bad. Just before we left we saw a batch of German prisoners, Prussian Guards they were. At the White Chateau I helped to bury a Canadian Sergeant who had been killed by shell fire.

We were now feeling a bit weary and tired. We moved to a place called St Jean and the Germans shelled us all the time. Here was to be our Transport lines for a while. At this place there was what was left out of a battalion of King's Own Scottish Borderers There was about 200 of them, they were in an awful state.

St Jean is not far from Hell's Corner. I saw a spy shot here. In the field where we were

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stationed there was a Canadian Field Battery. They were always getting shelled. One day they saw someone in a church, and some of men went over and brought this man over to the Canadian CO [Commanding Officer]. When they searched him they found out he was a spy, they soon put him out of the road. A few of our Drivers went over to have a look at him, he was a very tall chap with French clothes on top of his German uniform. They buried him near to where our lines were.

Next day an order came for a limber wagon to proceed for rations. The driver was warned off for duty; poor fellow he had not long started on his journey when a shell burst right on top of him and blew him and his horses to pieces. This happened near Hell's Corner. We buried him in St Jean. The guide that was

with him came and showed us where it happened. The guide got an awful shock. That same road, I have seen with my own eyes strewn with dead. We got another wagon ready and then proceeded for the rations. I think it was the worst road to be on in France.

Well our duty in St Jean was to take rations and ammunition up to our Battalion in the trenches and I have had some rough rides going up with them. We had to wait till darkness came before we proceeded. All the time we were stationed at St Jean our horses never had their harness off. We slept under the wagons best way we could. We got shelled all day long while we were at St Jean. After a few days we went further back, to a large

field on the road side near to Ypres. Here our horses had their harness taken off for the first time. We gave them a good cleaning down and they looked a bit better. From this place we used to take the rations up and go through Ypres. The sound of the shells bursting was awful and places on fire.

I remember one night when we [were] going up with rations they gave us an order to put our gas masks on, and we had to put them on our horses. We had some game on with them. We had to go to a place called Zillbecke, this was an awful place for shelling. I remember one night when we were going up with rations to this place a battalion was going up to the trenches when the Germans started to shell. Shells bursted among them, it was awful to see them,

heads and arms [and] legs lying all over the place. What an awful sight. One night I was going up with rations to Zillbecke, I was the first wagon to get unloaded and I was just turning round when a shell bursted just beside me and a lump of shell dropped just beside my foot and sunk into the ground. I dug it up and my father still has it for a souvenir.

I have stood in St Jean and watched the Germans shell [the] Cloth Hall for days. I have now in my possession a piece of cloth from one of the windows out of [the] 'Cloth Hall' *[see page 153 below].*

From leaving Zillbecke they shelled us all the way through Ypres. I shall never forget the rough rides I have had going up with rations to that part of the line. The shell holes I have seen, you could have put a pair of horses

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and a wagon in easily. At this part of the line we had several of our Drivers killed and wounded. I remember one day one of our Drivers had been up with rations and word came down to our lines that someone had to go up as he had been wounded, also his horses. Our Sergeant, told me to get harnessed up, I was not long before I was ready. The Sergeant got inside of the wagon and we started off. Just as we were entering Ypres, the Germans opened fire and bombarded for about 2 hours. I rode on and on. Just as we were passing the Cloth Hall there was a battalion coming out of the line and poor fellows they were in a sight and shells bursted among them, it was [an] awful sight. I got to where our Driver was, we got him away to hospital and I took the rations to the

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trenches where our boys were ready for them. 'Yes', I think Ypres was the worst front to be on, out of the whole lot. Out of my four years in France I think Ypres worst of the lot. I think altogether our Battalion had two years at Ypres. And when the winter came on, it was awful, both for men and horses.

I have many a time wondered how those poor horses stood it so long, I have seen them standing up to their knees with mud for days. Same for our men in the trenches. It was awful times I have had going up with rations, raining very hard and pitch dark, only a light from the Very lights showing us the way. When you got to where the rations had to be dumped the ration party would be waiting

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for us; they were not long before they got us unloaded then a few shells would come rolling over. It was not a[n] easy job for a Transport Driver. Every time we went up with rations you always heard bad news, so many had been killed or wounded. Some places where we went with rations used to be quiet and some was just the opposite.

We were glad when we heard that we were going to a new front, Armentieres was the name of the place. We marched

from Ypres to Armentieres through the night. We had halts on the road and next morning we found ourselves at a place called Pont de Nieppe, a few miles from the firing line. A few miles from this place I got my first leave. We stopped at Pont de Nieppe for a few days' rest then we moved out to Armentieres. Our Transport was taken to some very large racing stables

which had been taken over for British troops. It was a fine place.

I remember one night we had one of our best horses killed at this place. The Driver had been out late one night with rations, and in the grounds there was some very large and high railings, to keep people out of the grounds. He had fed his horse and fastened the head rope high up on these railings. He had forgotten to tell the picket that was on duty to halter the rope so when the picket went round to see all's well here was the horse lying dead. He had hung himself. We had a parade for this and every man was warned for the future. We got over that.

A day or so after this had happened our Battalion went up into the trenches again. This time it was not so bad as Ypres. First night up with

rations we had some trouble to get to where the ration dump was. We had to go over open country, and cross over little wooden bridges, one slip and you were in the stream, there was just room for a wagon to get across. At this ration dump, we used to get sniped at pretty often, although it was not a bad front. From these racing stables our Transport moved back to Pont de Nieppe and this was to be our headquarters while we were at Armentieres.

After a few weeks on this front I was detailed for my first leave to England. I had been out in France 14 months now and I was glad, I can tell you. I remember going up to our headquarters to get my papers for leave. The shells were flying in all directions; I thought I was never going to get away. However I had the

luck to get back safe to our Transport lines. There was a few of us came on leave together. So I packed my kit up and

proceeded to a station called Steenwerck. Some station too. It was all blown down with shell fire. There we had to wait for hours. And when the train did come in we had a few more hours to wait. So we were packed into trucks, about 30 men in a truck. And so we started for Boulogne. On the journey down we used to get off the trucks and have a bit walk, they used to travel that quick. However we reached Boulogne and we marched down to a rest camp. Here we got a wash and some rations and then we marched down to the boat. Before we got on board the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] read a few lines out to us about taking things

home, such as shells, and ammunition and other things. So we marched on board and we were glad; about half [an] hour after we sailed out of Boulogne. It took us about 2 hours to cross to Folkestone.

We got off the ship and the train was already waiting for us, there was about 600 altogether, all from different units. Off again we went and we arrived at Victoria Station. Here we were well looked after. We had a good feed and then we went on to King's Cross and then on to Sunderland, and I was glad to be back home again. I got 7 days' leave and it went over just like a day to me. What an awful feeling you had when you had to go back again. I had enjoyed myself during my leave.

So the day came when I had to go back again. I remember one leave I came on, we nearly

run into a mine in the Channel. It was [a] nigh one. When I got back to France again, I remember we were still at Pont de Nieppe and so I was back again to old game. I soon got settled down again, but always wishing [the] rotten war was over.

I remember one night going up with rations to the trenches, one whole street of houses were on fire. What an awful sight it was; we had to go full stretch and gallop. The horses were very frightened. We got through it and got to where the Battalion was. That night we had some of our drivers wounded with shell fire.

Well after a good spell at this front we moved to a place called Kemmel Hill. It was a long march and I remember our horse lines were on the side of the main road, just at the foot of the hill. At this place we got a draft out from England

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of new men. We were there a day or so and up into the line again. It was a good ride from our lines to where our Battalion were. On one part of our journey we had to pass a battery of guns and somehow each night we went up with rations this battery would open out. The horses used to make a bolt for it, and one road we had to go on we could see into the Germans' trenches, we on open country. I have [had] some rough riding at this part of the line. There are a good number of our own Battalion buried at Kemmel.

I remember while we were at Kemmel, there was a shortage of horses for the Artillery and they took from us 20 of our horses and gave us 20 mules in their place, and they gave us some beauties. We had some game on to get them broke in; we got rid of them after a while and we got back horses again. Before I go

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any further on, I remember the day well when we had to go down the line to the railhead for these horses. There were ten of us and our Sergeant went down in a motor lorry, about 30 kilometres or miles. We arrived at the railhead and our Sergeant thought he was doing right by going straight into the trucks and getting 20 of the best horses he could get hold of. However we got the horses into the field, and the Sergeant went and reported to the AVC [Army Veterinary Corps] officer. 'Oh,' he says, 'and who gave you authority to take those horses out of those trucks?' The Sergeant said when he saw the notice on the trucks he thought it was alright. Well that officer didn't half give us some stick. On the train altogether there would be well over 200 horses on and us being the first

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to get to the railhead he made us unload the whole train and make a picket line, and fastened all those horses on it. By this time other units had reported but he told them to wait a while till we got them all out of the trucks. Having done this he came up to us, and said that would be a lesson for us for the future. But to put the lid on it, he gave us [the] worst 20 horses he could get hold of, and made us the last ones to

leave the field. We didn't half put the 'curses' on him; one of the 20 we could not put a saddle on him for a week or so. They gave us some trouble, I can tell you. Our Sergeant, we used to chaff many a time about that day at the railhead. I think those horses came from America. However we got them broke

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in to their work, and after a spell at Kemmel we made a move to a place called Canada Huts, another lucky place for shells.

Somewhere about this time *[16 November 1915]* I think we were made into a Pioneer Battalion. We got extra pay for this, our Transport was enlarged by extra horses and wagons and new men. So we packed up, and marched from Kemmel to our new camp. I remember the night when we marched, it came on raining and we were soaked through, and I shall not forget the night just before we came to where the camp was, there was a narrow road, which we had to go up with our Transport, and once you got off the middle of this road, you sunk about 2 feet into the mud. It was awful. We had to leave

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one wagon till next morning, daylight. We got our horses fed and put away into the stables that was there, far better than where we had come from, because there was a shelter for them, and for us.

Many a time I used to feel sorry for them, they used to stand out in all weathers, and sometimes up to their knees with mud. I can always say, while I had a pair of horses in France, I always did my duty to them. I have seen sometimes some of our Companies would be far away from others and they took with them their own Transport. Sometimes 2 or 3 wagons would be told off to go with them. If I was one of those drivers the first thing I used to do, if possible, to look for a shelter for any horses. Same thing with the other drivers. One out [of] the two horses that I

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took away from Newcastle was still with our Battalion when I left them after the war was over; that was at a place called Ath, where I left our Battalion.

Well I will go back now to where we started our new work, as [a] Pioneer Battalion as I have already said. About getting more transport we got GS [General Service] wagons and limber wagons all full of different tools for different work in the trenches, and on roads. Our job at this part of the front was to take all different things up to where they were working. We had to go down to the dump, get loaded up and then wait till it was dark before we were able to proceed on our journey to where our Companies were working. Some would be on trench work, others on road work. Some wagons were loaded with trench boards and

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some with different kinds of wire. It was not an easy job, I can tell you. I have seen some rough nights on this work.

I was now a Corporal *[promoted 6 March 1916]* and I was sent up in charge of our convoy. When we used to get near to where our Companies were, I used to make our wagons get well apart from each other so if any shelling started they had a bit of a chance to get out of the road if 'possible'.

Months we carried on this work. Sometimes we would be out all night, leading bricks from homes which had been blown down, making roads ready for an advance to get our heavy guns over. There was a certain part on the road where the Germans used to shell pretty often, Café Belge they called it, as it used to be a café in peace time. At this crossing we used to

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gallop past it, we had a few of our drivers wounded at this front, and a lot of our Battalion killed. It was not an easy job for our Battalion at this place. I think 3 Companies used to go up at once, and one stay for a rest. We got some new men at this front, from England, some who had been out before.

I remember one road which one of our Companies were working on, there was a Field Battery just behind some large trees, and just as we would get to where they wanted their rations and material, they would open fire and some game we had on with our horses. I don't know if they used to do it on purpose, but nearly every time we went to that dump, it

occurred. However we got over that, and after a rough time on that front

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orders came down to our own lines to send up the transport, as the Companies were coming down the line.

Then we got to know that we were leaving Canada Huts, and we were going down on the Somme, another right place. So we got all loaded up, and on to the road again. We had a bit of a road journey, and then we arrived at the railhead to entrain, a job I never liked, only when coming on 'leave'. I forget now the name of the station where we left for the Somme. However our Battalion got into trucks and we got all our Transport on the train, and off we went. It was a long ride, and oh how fast those trains travelled on the journey down. I remember stopping at a place where we got a feed of

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bully beef and biscuits, which we were waiting for. We fed our horses and started again on our journey; we arrived not far from Albert.

So we unloaded and away on the road again. I remember while we were passing through Albert there was a large memorial and on the top of this memorial was a bronze woman, and she was hanging right down and it looked very dangerous. Many a time I passed and it was still hanging there. This was done by shell fire, I was told afterwards, and there were hundreds of German prisoners working on different jobs at Albert.

And in Albert we saw a large covered-in wagon, which must have belonged to some show people that must have went away and left it, our Captain said.

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So one night, it was very foggy, we took a few horses down and brought it away to our new camp, and about 20 of us slept in it. Nobody seen us take it away, so we brought it up to our camp and that was at a place called Fricourt, on the Somme. We covered some trees over it for a while. We always used to think we would have got into trouble about it

afterwards, but nobody ever said anything; it made a fine billet for us.

I was taken to hospital from this place, the flu was very bad and there were a lot of troops dying with it. I was away about a fortnight altogether. I returned to my unit again, and started the old job again. Now our Battalion were working in the famous High Wood, and it was some place too.

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Some of the roads were made out of chalk, and what a sight our horses used to get in when it started raining. We had the same work here as we had at the other front, trench boards and stuff for the trenches. When we [were] staying at Fricourt we used to get bombed pretty often. The first thing I saw when I went up the line was [a] village full of German dead; there was also British, in fact the whole place was full of dead and this was at La Bassentien [Le Bazentin], a place we had to pass on our way to where our Battalion was working. The smell was awful, horses and wagons lying about all over.

It was one day when I was in charge of our convoy, we were on our way to High Wood with trench boards, when in front of us was a battalion of

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Welsh Borderers, were going up into the line. It was a bit daylight and the German balloons could be seen plain, when all of a sudden they sent a salvo over of shells and they caught this battalion. I gave the order for my drivers to unhook and gallop back to where it was safe; they continued to shell for more than 1 hour. I helped to dress the wounded and carry them to safety. There were about 50 killed that day. After we had got the wounded away the Battalion proceeded to the line, and I got my wagons ready and got to where our boys were working. We got unloaded and started on our return journey when they started to shell again. This time we watched where the shells were bursting, and then made a gallop for it.

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I was mentioned in a despatch at this part of the line, by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, which I have now in my possession.

I remember at this front we had some awful weather, raining day after day. Roads were in a terrible state, we had an awful job to keep our horses clean.

I remember when we were stationed at Fricourt, there was a skin disease came out among our horses, and the Officer from the AVC [Army Veterinary Corps] came up one morning and ordered about 15 horses to go down the line and one of those 15 was one that I brought out from England, and he had to go as well. So instead of sending him away we sent another in his place, and we built a stable for him away from all the other horses and looked after him ourselves, and in a month we had him

working with the other horses again. The horses that they took away from us we never seen them any more; we got some new ones again. I remember telling that officer from the AVC [Army Veterinary Corps] about it, and he said he was pleased we thought so much about him. He had a look at him and said he was alright and [we] could work him, so that was a good name for us.

While we were at Fricourt we had some heavy work to do, such as leading trench boards and different kinds of metal, all for the trenches to make ready for a big push. One day I was sent down to [a] RE [Royal Engineers] dump in Albert, with a convoy for 6 GS [General Service] wagon loads of trench boards. It was the first time we had been to this dump. It was a huge place and to our surprise, when we got inside

there were hundreds of German prisoners working here, and some of them could speak English very well, and one of them knew where Sunderland was, very well. He used to come here for a holiday, he said, as his parents lived here. And mind they said they were glad they were prisoners as they were getting well looked after, and they were too, better than our prisoners.

Well I remember one morning, while we were on the Somme, we were going up with our Transport to where our Battalion were working. And on our way up, we passed about 2,000 German prisoners marching down the road.

What a sight they were in. There had been a night attack on. And they didn't half go through something. They were glad the war was over for them.

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Another place I did not like to go through was Contalmasion. This was where the Tyneside Scottish got badly cut up; they lost a lot of men to capture this place. I remember the four big guns that was stationed there. They didn't half make us hop when they started to fire.

There were a lot of dead lying about here and the smell was awful. I remember going one day to where our Battalion was working and I saw a trench full of German dead, some of them you would think they were alive as they were in a sitting position and looked as if they were all ready for a jump; they were all gassed, I think. Among them there were only boys, I think, they looked very young to me. High Wood was an awful place for dead to be seen.

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After a while they got them all buried, and not before time, the smell was awful. Our water carts had to take fresh water, up to our Battalion every morning at this front, it was a good way to go, and they had to get away before daylight. Awful place for shell fire.

Well after a few months on this front we went to Arras, I think for a rest. When we got there, there were people still living in their homes, and the Germans were shelling it every day. I remember we went into some French barracks at Arras for a week, till our Battalion went up the line on road work. I was with our CO [Commanding Officer] the first morning; we went to where our Battalion had to work. I remember going through Arras station, and seeing a gun with its horses in, belonging

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to the RGA [Royal Garrison Artillery]. There were eight heavy horses and the four drivers, all blown to pieces. They must have caught a salvo of shells. Not far away from this I saw, in a shell hole, two British soldiers and two Germans, the four of them with their necks all cut; it looked to me as if someone had done it with a knife.

On we went, and we came to where our first line of trenches used to be. Out in front of these trenches it was awful to see

our dead comrades, in fighting kit, as if they were just going to make a charge. Then we came to a big pill box. This was made of concrete; inside the Germans must have had two machine guns, and they had a clean sweep of all [the] roads. Then we came to where our cavalry had been cut up. The whole place, looking

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as far as the eye could see, there were nothing else but dead lying about. This was at a place called Tilloy.

I saw something which caught my eye and I went to have a look at it. It was just beside a cross road, it was just like a tree. You went inside, then you could walk up, and look through a hole and see round for miles. This was a look out for the German Artillery. Their guns had been not far away from this place. Some of their guns were left at this place, broken.

We got to where our Battalion had to start on their new work, it was more road work. The roads were in an awful state. We returned to our Headquarters and next day our Battalion went up. They made little dug outs for themselves and stayed up

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there for several weeks. I remember we came out of those French barracks, and our Transport was spread all over, wherever the Companies were working. I had about 6 men with me in a house in Arras, the people had not long been gone. This was to be our billet for a while. We made ourselves comfortable and then started leading material for the Battalion. One day a knock came on the door, one of my pals opened it, and it was one of my work mates had came to see me. Out of their battalion he said there was only about 400 of them left. They had been in this Battle of Arras. My pal was in a Scottish battalion; they left Arras for a rest to get some new men up before proceeding to a new front. He got home alright

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after the war, but he took ill one night at work and died the next day.

However we started leading material up to where our Battalion was working, under shell fire all the time. We lost a lot of our Battalion at this part of the line, this was near to the

Hindleburg [Hindenburg] line. We moved from here and went further over to the right. Our Battalion went into the trenches and the Transport made Boyelles their headquarters. We had all night work here, leading all sorts of material for the trenches.

I remember one night our Transport Officer Mr. Walker, he belonged to Sunderland, went up with our convoy to a dump called Infantry Hill, some place too .He got off his horse and fastened it behind one of our wagons, and started walking in front of the convoy. Poor chap, he had not been in front more than five minutes, when a shell burst

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right in front of him, and blew him to pieces. We buried him near to Boyelles; he was a fine fellow, everybody felt sorry for him, everybody had a good word for him.

Now this dump where we used to go to, Infantry Hill, we were on open country one part of the journey, and we were among machine gun fire every night. We had a few wounded at this place. Another time we were unloading our wagons at [the] same dump, I was in charge of our wagons this night. I got all the wagons unloaded; when I gave the order for to move on into a valley, the Germans open[ed] fire. I thought it was all up for us. They shelled at the front and the back of us, just as if they knew we were there. The horses were going mad with the shell fire. Every time one used to burst,

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we thought our time had come. We stopped in that valley for one hour, it was no use making a rush for it, as the shells came over quick, and two a minute. However they eased up for a while, I took the opportunity and gave the order to gallop for it. Just as the last wagon was turning the bend to get on to the straight road, a shell bursted in his wagon, and blew it to pieces. Funny part about it was neither the driver nor the horses were touched. I run back to where he was, unhooked his horses out, and we galloped back to safety. We went back a few hours later, when things were quiet, and brought what was left of it back. ‘That was a nigh one for us,’ I said. ‘Yes, Corporal,’ said the driver, ‘a couple of yards further on, and I would have been like that wagon, all pieces.’

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We had some rough rides going up to these dumps while we

were at Arras. I remember one day at this place, a German aeroplane crossed our lines and our aircraft guns opened fire on it. They made on they were hit, and started to come down. I thought they were going right through the earth, but all of a sudden they made a rise, and came right over our Transport. It flew round for a minute, then they put their machine gun on to us. We had to get under cover at once, then our aeroplanes came out, and there was a battle in the air. The German aeroplane managed to get away, but he looked to us to be coming down quick, and I think they just reached their lines when it crashed to the ground.

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I remember one day, when we were retreating, a batch of aeroplanes came down on us, and opened fire on us. Our Captain gave orders for as many men as possible to open fire on them with our rifles, they were that low. I may say we didn't half shift them, everybody that was on that road had a shot at them. There was a few wounded over this job. We got them away into hospital. This was not far away from Arras.

While we were at Boyelles I remember we lost one of our best horses. When the Germans held this part of the line, they made a deep trench, where you could put hundreds of men in it, and inside of this trench they left a big tank. They must have

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used it for a bath while they were there. However about this time there was a skin complaint among our horses, and we got some stuff off our AVC [Army Veterinary Corps] Captain to wash our horses with. We got one end of this tank cut out, and put one end further down in the ground than the other, so our horses could walk straight in. We had about got them all done, when this horse slipped and fell on the side of the tank, and broke a leg. The Sergeant we had at that time knew so much about horses that when we said the horse would have to be shot, he thought we were pulling his leg or having a joke with him. When the AVC Captain came he was not long in telling him what to do. The Sergeant always

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thought he knew everything, but that was a one for him. We put the horse into a shell hole, and filled it in, and that was one of our best horses gone.

At this place we had a lot of night bombing, and we were just sleeping in little places we made ourselves, old pieces of tin and wood, anything as long as it kept the rain out. Our horses of course were out in [the] open all the time.

It used to get on our nerves, same thing day after day, wondering when this rotten war would be over. It used to be great when a battalion passed us, and they belonged to Sunderland, you would hear a cheer go up, 'good old Sunderland' they would shout. Yes, I have sat down and said to myself, 'am I going to see the end of this war,'

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as it was getting on our nerves. Times we have said when we have had a few minutes to spare, 'are we going to see Sunderland again?' Some of us did and some didn't. There we would be, lying sleeping in our little dugouts, when all of a sudden our guns would open out, on a few miles front another attack would be on. 'Some more poor chaps going west,' we would say to ourselves. We would have a peep out of our dugouts, and there you would see for miles the whole sky lit up with gun fire. Then the order would come down, to send up ammunition. Away we go, with the best of luck.

One night while we were stationed at Boyelles, near Arras, some of our Battalion came down to our lines, to guide us up to where our Battalion was in the trenches.

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Our wagons were already loaded with trench boards and ammunition, and we set off as soon as it came in dark. Before we started off, our Officer asked the NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] in charge of the party if he knew the road alright. He said, 'Yes.' We got into a sunken road where we had to go round, one wagon at a time, so many men went with each wagon, and as each wagon got onto this road, we were fastened in, there was no road out of it. It was just like being in a valley. Well if the game 'wasn't on'. There was no room to turn our wagons round. We were stuck all through the night, till late hours of the morning. We had to unhook our horses out, unload all the wagons, pull the wagons so far up the sides of the valley and turn them round best way we could.

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I felt sorry for the NCO in charge, he had lost his bearings altogether. However after a few hours' hard work, we got on to the right road only to go into some very heavy shell fire. We all got safely back that time, and I was glad.

That was one of our many troubles, hitting the right road. It was not like the roads you travel on now; you might go up one road one night, next night there was no road, it would be all blown up with shelling. All kinds of roads we had to go on, through fields, in and out of shell holes, through broken houses over tree trunks layed down. You never knew what was for you when you went up the line.

Five minutes' walk from where we were stationed at Boyelles, there was a village in peace

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time. While we were there, you could not see a single wall standing. The whole village was blown down with shell fire.

Just a little incident which happened while we were on church parade one Sunday. It was very hot, and our Chaplain used to come to the transport lines when it was convenient, and give us a few words. We had a little canteen just a few yards away from where he was having the service. He had been speaking for a half hour, and he said, 'I see all eyes staring at that canteen, so I think I will say no more.' He told our Officer to dismiss us, and he did. It was right too, there was a rush for it. We used to get a barrel now and again, if we were lucky. The Chaplain just stood and

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laughed.

Another time we were stationed at a place called Morcourt. Before I go any further, I don't think I have mentioned about the boys that were on our Transport. I have not been with or seen better than they were. While I was NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] not one ever gave me any trouble to talk about, and always ready when told to do anything.

I will go to where we were, at Morcourt, as I have already said. One morning after morning stables everybody had got their breakfast, and were getting themselves ready for duty. One of our boys belonging to Sunderland sat down on an old

stool to have a shave, he had finished and was getting up to go for a wash, when he dropped dead, poor fellow. He was a good soldier. He was buried at Morcourt. There was always something turning up, every day pals getting killed

or wounded. I knew one chap who was in our Battalion, he once said to me, 'Every pal I chum in with either gets killed or wounded,' and he was telling the truth, I knew that for a fact.

Well I got a leave from this place, and I was glad too, I was fed up with it. The day before I went I remember seeing an Indian Cavalry Regiment going up into action; it was a fine sight.

Well from Boyelles we entrained and went down to St. Quentin front. I hated those train journeys, it took you that long. However we got to our new camp, I think the name of the place was Tertnay [Tournai]. Our Battalion went up into the trenches making new trenches and roads. We had only been up a week or so when the Germans made one of their first great advances. This was something

of a change for everybody. Our Battalion was not long before they were in action. I remember the day, as it were now. We had been playing a football match and we had just finished, when a dispatch rider came in like an express to tell us to retreat at once to a certain town, then down came our Battalion runner, to tell us [to] pack up at once, not a minute to spare. He was right too, the Germans came on very fast.

Well there was some game on. We didn't waste a second, everything was ready for retreating. Yes, it was a retreat, something different to what we were used to. Ten full days we retreated and everybody was getting funny about it, every minute we were expecting to be took prisoners. One day got over and another; bully beef and biscuits, that was

our rations the whole 10 days.

I thought our number was up at one place, there was that much traffic on the road that it became blocked. There was a canal to cross, and it was a very small bridge to cross, and it was ever so long to get all transports across. We saw the German balloons advancing and the Infantry. We thought it was all up for us, but the Infantry made a stand on the canal bank, and held them in check for a few hours. Then to our surprise over comes their aeroplanes, bombing the roads where the transports were on. They would sweep down on us, and play their machine guns on us. We got the order to open out in one place we were going through. The German aeroplanes were flying very low. We shaded our transport under

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some very large trees, and as many men as possible layed in the side of the road and as they flew around us our Captain gave orders to fire. All sides opened fire, they soon retreated. Some of them would be hit, as they were that low. That was going on all the time during the retreat.

We retreated through towns full of people. It was awful to see them taking with them as much as they could carry, and their little children crying over them; that touched me most. They were all taken care of further down the line. The homes some of them would never see again, even these poor people were getting killed as the Germans were advancing. They were shelling all these poor people. I remember going through Merville, we could hardly get through for those poor French people (these people stayed till they could not stay any longer).

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Our first stop, was at a place called Locke [Locre]. Here I remember there was a very large wood or forest. Here I saw those Portuguese Infantry running away through this forest; some of them had no boots on, those were allowed to get away to safety.

Our troops had to make a stand for it. One part of road where we were on, I saw a Sergeant gathering all stragglers together, and an Officer took them all up again and this happened just outside of Merville. About this time our Battalion was spread all over, some here and some there and we had to take some ammunition up to them.

This was here I was nearly done for. It was a long road, just outside Merville and a forest on both sides of this road. On one side the Germans were

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in this forest, we did not know this till we got up. Our Officer, which we had while our Captain was on leave, said he had been up to see if he could see any of our Battalion, and said he could not see them, so he told me to go up in charge of a limber wagon with some rations and ammunition. He gave me the direction, but that was all. So I started off with the Driver of the wagon to find our Battalion. I had a good Driver with me; I was mounted, and on our way up we came across the Guide, who was looking for us. Poor fellow, I felt sorry for him. He asked if we had any rations for them and I said, 'Yes,' so I said 'Jump into the wagon,' and we crossed over open country through narrow places, to get there sooner. I might say the Germans

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were shelling awful and rifle bullets and machine guns were whizzing past us. I remember the Driver saying to me, 'Corporal, I don't think we will get out of this.' We went up a narrow road and here, at the other side of this road, there was our Battalion all along the hedges of the road.

The Guide shouted for someone to come and get the rations. They were not long before they emptied our wagon. So the worst was to come now. The road that we had to go back on was all blown up, so I said, 'Follow me, Harry.' He belonged to South Shields. 'Alright,' he said. We jumped over a little stream, and it brought us near to a farm house. The shells were coming over worse now, and just as we were nearing this farm

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house, I heard someone shouting. I said, 'Did you hear that, Harry?' and he said, 'Yes,' so I said, 'We will have to be careful, there might be some Germans in.' So I said, 'I will see,' because the voice told me it was some Englishman. 'Come here,' he was shouting, 'save me.' So nearer I got, and to my surprise it was our own Machine Gun Sergeant. Poor fellow, he was all shot down his back, he had been caught with a machine gun, I think.

So I shouted of the Driver to come over and he was lying on an old bed, just in the passageway of the house. We lifted

him up, and he started to shout, ‘Don’t leave me, don’t leave me.’ I said, ‘Keep quiet, and we [will] try and get you out of this.’ Now this poor fellow must have been left

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there to die, I think. That will show you how far we were in front of our Battalion at this spot. We got him into our wagon, and started off for our new lines, which were in Locke [Locre]. We managed to get across the open country alright, till we came to four cross roads. I thought we would have never got to this road, shells bursting all round us, and just as we were getting on to the main road, four shells bursted in front of us. The shock turned the horses right round. I felt all sorts hit my horse. After a second I said, ‘Are you all right, Harry?’ ‘I think so,’ he said. I turned his horses round for home, and full stretch and gallop, the horses knew what it meant. The poor

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Sergeant, I thought he was lying dead. We got to where our Transport was resting just outside of Locke [Locre]. I reported alright to our officer, and he asked who was in the wagon and I told him, so he told me to take him to hospital at Hazebrouck, which was a few miles away.

Away we went, and going down the road the Germans started with those coal boxes we used to call them; when the shells bursted, there was clouds of black smoke. We got through that, and when we got to Hazebrouck they were all leaving the town as the Germans were shelling and advancing quick. The place was in an uproar, so I saw a Field Ambulance and I put the Sergeant in and off he went. He would be sent straight over to England. It was awful to see those

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poor civilians leaving their homes behind them.

However after the war was over, I met that Sergeant in Sunderland, and he did give me a shake of the hand. He said to his Dad, ‘This was the Corporal that saved my life.’ I felt sorry for him, he was on crutches then. For that my officer reported me to our CO [Commanding Officer]. I was mentioned in [a] dispatch for this.

When I got back to our lines there was more trouble on, the Germans had broke through again and were not far away,

and there had been several of our Battalion killed with shell fire. They shell[ed] us till we were forced to clear out. Here one of our cooks got hit in the neck. Poor chap, he had a gold chain round his neck, and part of it was

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blown into his flesh. We had to get him away as soon as possible. We retreated 10 full days, and the Germans kept us going. We came to different towns, and we had no time for to stop, most of the people were gone, so everything was quiet as far as that. But see our artillery coming up into action, it was a fine sight; they were going to try and check the advance. However the Germans got stopped and the Allies made a grand 'stand' for it, and everything was quiet again. Fresh troops came up, and we were relieved and went down the line for a rest.

When our Battalion got to their new billets, we heard there had been a large number killed, and a great number of wounded. I forgot to say as to our Transport a great difficulty

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came our way. To move our Transport you must have men to drive our horses and move our wagons. At one place during this retiring we had several of our Drivers killed and wounded. I remember just outside at Merville the order came to retire at once. We were all ready in a tick and drove out of the field where we had been staying, on to the road, and made a gallop for it. Just as we were turning the bend a shell bursted right on one of our Drivers. It blew him to pieces, also his horses. I was detailed to stay back and save as much as possible. There was only ammunition in the wagon. We buried the Driver just outside of Merville.

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The worst part about [it] was the Driver had just received the horses that morning. The Driver what had them before had been promoted Corporal the day before. We had a number of our Drivers wounded the same day.

I remember just outside of a town called Harbonnieres there was a little village, and we had to take ammunition up on pack mules, so many from different units. I was sent up in charge of ours. This was a rotten job, as we had to get as near to our own Battalion as possible. The Germans were

still advancing and we were under heavy rifle fire. At times, on some parts of the line, the Germans were ahead of us. All we could do was to dump it at different places, so

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our Battalion could pick it up as they were retreating. We opened the boxes all ready for them; the guides were placed on them. Away we would go, and do the same thing further back. Our Transport by this time was in a place called Villers Bretonneux, a few kilometres away. The Germans were making a quick advance by now, and they were making for Harbonnieres. When we got there I met one of our Company Sergeant Majors who had just came back off leave. He asked me how far away was our Battalion. I said, 'They won't be long before they are retreating through this place.' He and a private out of one of our Companies went up to try and find their

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Companies. Next time I went up with ammunition the poor Sergeant Major got a one right through the head, and was killed on the spot. They buried him just outside of Harbonnieres. He was a fine fellow, one of the good ones.

One night, while we were retreating, our Transport went up with the rations and to try and find our Battalion. They had to go through a wood; when they entered the wood some French soldiers were hurrying, and told them the Germans were coming. They just managed to jump off their horses and run for it. The Germans got two wagon loads of rations and about 6 jars of rum. One of the party, the Germans open[ed] fire on them and was shot

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through the leg. The drivers got hold of him and run for it, the Germans still firing. There was somebody's mistake there to let them through our own lines.

The funny part about it was when the British made their advance, the CO [Commanding Officer] which we had while we were retreating left us, and went to a regiment, South Wales Borderers, and this battalion captured this wood when the big advance was made. And the CO told me, when he came back to us, he saw the two wagons. They were all

broken, the horses were still beside them but the harness had been taken off them. So a Transport Driver was not a very nice job.

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However we got back to where our Transport was resting. We had just got into the field [and] got a feed of bully beef and biscuits, when the order came to retreat at once. This was a nigh one for us. There was a wide road in front of us; to get on to this road we would have to go right down to the bottom of this field. Had we had done this we would have walked right into a trap. The Germans were not far away from us as it was, so what we did was to gallop right through a corn field, and we came out at the bottom of this road and got on to the main road, and then made a gallop for it, and got to our new billets.

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Ten days altogether we retreated, so we were fed up with it. We had some nigh escapes during this retreat. Our Battalion had [a] large number killed and wounded. When we came to a halt it was at the other side of Amiens. We earned our rest. Fresh troops came up and artillery and stopped the advance. During this great retreat in April 1918 we went through some awful times, the Germans were bombing night and day. Of course they got worse when it came our time to advance; some days you could not find them as they were retreating so fast.

One time during this retreat in a town called Villers Bretonneux we were a bit lucky in getting away. We were feeding our horses

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when the order came to get away at once. We just got away and that's all. Of course the roads were full of other transports and heavy guns; we had to be on the alert. You might just [get] an order to pull into some field with the transport, and you would just get settled down, when the order would come [to] move away again. The most dangerous part about this retreat was when we came to a bridge. It was alright while the bridge was safe but when you get aeroplanes dropping bombs and trying to blow it up, it was awful. I remember one time the Germans blew up a

bridge and we had to wait till our Engineers put a wooden bridge over before we could get across.

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Well I have already said about a rest; we got our losses made up by new men out from England, and some from hospital. The Battalion was made up again, Transport was made up again, and we went to a place called Elverdinge, a famous place for bombing night and day (and another awful place was Iron Cross Corner). If there is one part of my war service I hated to be at, it was Elverdinge.

Our Battalion went up into trenches, repairing them and on to road work. Our Transport had to lead bricks and timber up to where our Battalion was working. We used to get some rough rides, I can tell you. The roads were in an awful state, the whole place was in a terrible state. Our horse lines

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had to be removed about every 3 days as the ground was so muddy, and what a sight our horses used to get in, as some of [them] would lie down. Yes, I used to feel sorry for them.

You would have to go a few miles back to get the material you required for different work our Battalion had to do. It would be probably raining when you started off about midday, and still raining when you got back about daylight next morning, soaked through and hungry. It was awful, I often wondered how we got through it all.

Well leading this material up to the trenches was not an easy job. The Germans would open out and give us some stick. I remember one morning I was up in charge of our convoy, I saw an awful sight.

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It was an artillery driver with his pack horses carrying ammunition up for his guns. He had got off the main road and walked into a sump. There the three of them were standing, just as if it were a statue. Three of them were dead, and this was our danger we had to look out for. The reason this had happened was his battery was about ten minutes' walk from the main road, and it was impossible to get any wagons across, so everything had to be taken on pack horses, or mules, and in the dark he had lost his way.

On another occasion we were going up to where our Battalion was working, and it was just breaking daylight, and turning a bend on the road we were going up I saw in the distance what appeared to me to be Germans.

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Sure it was right, we stopped our wagons, and to our surprise, it was two Germans given themselves up. They were just two young lads, I don't think they would have been more than 16 years of age, and one of them the tears were in his eyes. I thought it funny as there was no guard with them. So we told them to go straight down the road. They were not long before someone got hold of them, a mounted police officer took them away. Now I often wondered to myself how them two Germans had got there. They must have been hiding for several days before they gave themselves up. I bet they were glad, as well; the war was finished for them, as far as they were concerned.

However we went on our way, and

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got to where our Battalion was working, dumped our wagons and made our way back as soon as possible, as if the German balloons saw us, they were not long in sending some shells over. On going to this dump a few days after we saw some terrible sights, poor fellows, it was heart sore to see them. With having so much rain the roads got into an awful state, and as the mud got soft, it started to run anywhere it could, and there at different places we saw dead bodies of our comrades. They were afterwards given a good grave. It was an awful place for mud.

Well days rolled on, same thing day after day, up to the dump and the best of luck we used to say.

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Having got back from the trenches at this part of the line, we would get our horses fed, and seen to ourselves, we would no sooner get started to eat what was for us, boiled meat and spuds, the usual, when all of a sudden you would hear the whistle go, the Germans were over, bombing; lights out if you had any. Oh, it was awful, there you would be lying in your little dugout, saying to yourself I wonder if we will get out of this. The bombs would drop, crash, the earth used to tremble. Some bombs found their mark, some did not, but at Elverdinge they did not miss much. A few yards away, one

night they were over, a battalion had just come out of the line, having been up for

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three weeks, came close to us for a night's rest before going further down the line. Poor chaps, they had just got into the camp when over comes the Germans with their cargo. 'Crash', 'bomb' and our anti-aircraft guns would open out, searchlight would try and get on to them, but they did not go away till they had dropped their cargo. You could hear the yells miles away. There was about a hundred killed that night in that camp. On the road there was a convoy of motor transport, loaded up with shells ready for the next day. The Germans caught these; you should have seen them next morning. Some of them was nothing but a heap of scrap, and the shells were still exploding.

That same night

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I took cover behind a large tree. The aeroplanes were flying low, and I could see where they were dropping. I used [to] work myself round this tree. Next morning I looked at that tree, you should have seen the holes in it, with the splinters off the bombs. While I was behind that tree, our Sergeant was not far away from me. He shouts out, 'Oh, I am hit.' As I run to get hold of him I run right into a pond, nearly drowned myself, it was deep in the middle. 'Oh,' I shouted, and he said, 'what's the matter?' I said, 'It's alright,' I was out now. I got over to where our Sergeant was lying, and we got him away into a Field Ambulance, away to hospital.

Next field to where we

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were, there was some horse lines belonging to [the] Royal Garrison Artillery. They killed about 60 horses and about 20 men. In one dugout they dropped a bomb and killed the lot that was in it, they belonged to the Field Artillery. There was some awful sights seen at this place. We had a few of our horses killed at this place, and a number of men wounded. One night they came over to bomb, and you could see them looking out of their planes, looking for their mark. They flew around and dropped their cargo, and away they went. It was a cruel place for bombs.

A few of our Battalion got a leave from Elverdinge and they

were glad. It was an awful feeling coming on leave

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when those aeroplanes went over bombing. They used to come and drop bombs on the railhead. Then you used to wonder if you were going to get home or not.

I had four leaves altogether. The reason I had four was when our Battalion went out to France and we were out 12 months, I was time expired. So I got one month's leave for this, and joined on again till the war finished. I also got a bounty, £10.

One night I remember coming on leave, it was on a Christmas time. It was snowing very fast. The railway station where we had to report, it was in an awful sight, there was no roof on it, and there we had to wait till the early hours of the

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morning till the train came in. 'Trucks' I should have said. We were 'frozen' 'hungry' when we arrived [at] Boulogne. There we had baths, and hot dinner before we proceeded down to the boat. Then across to our own country once more, and we were glad.

When our time was up, and we had to come back, what an awful feeling. Back to the same old game again, wished this rotten war was over, that was what you heard all the way back to our Battalions. Then when you got back to the base in France you would hear that your Battalion had moved to a new front. This time I hoped it was a quiet front. It was back to Elverdinge again, the place where all troops hated to be in. (We hoped not.)

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Well I think from Elverdinge we went down on to the Marne, I might be wrong in naming the places at some time while I am writing, as it [is] 10 years since I finished with the war. For instance our Battalion served 2 years out of four, I think, at Ypres on and off. You would be at Ypres for about 6 months, then you would move to a new front, then you would come back again, so it takes you to have a good memory. But however we were at all these places, and a lot more places which I have forgotten about.

Well we entrained from Elverdinge and started on a long train journey to the Marne. Again we had our losses made up with new men, our Transport was

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made up. So we found ourselves on the Marne. We had a rest before proceeding to the trenches. When we got up to where our new camp was, you would think that there was no war on, everything was so quiet. Our Battalion went up into the trenches, Transport went up into a French camp on the hillside, not a bad place too. The French had moved out that morning, so we started to make things ship shape. Not far from our camp I remember seeing one of my work mates going up into action with the R.F.A. [Royal Field Artillery], first time I had seen him since going away in 1914. He was wounded at this place shortly after he had seen me.

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Well we started with our work again, rations and ammunition each night. There was bridges to cross this time, so we had to be careful. A Transport driver was not an easy job, I can tell you. When we came near to our dump you had not much of a chance, sitting on a horse back, you were open to machine gun fire and snipers. However we carried on with the good work. I have said a few times going up to this dump it was too good to be true. I was right too. Sometimes it was days before you heard a shell burst, or even see an aeroplane flying about. I said there was something brewing; when they did

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come, they made sure of it.

We were up several weeks before the Germans made their Great Advance on the Marne. On the hill where our camp was, there were two French soldiers in charge of a telephone station. We got on very friendly with them. They took our photograph and used to have a drink with us, when there was any to get. In a place called Conservro, we used to go down into the village to get this strong drink, coloured water I called it, French called it beer.

So one night we were returning to our camp, a few of us that was off duty this night in particular. Our Quarter Master stores was in the same village; there was a few old people

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still living there, too old to leave, I think. So we reached our

camp, and turned into our dugouts, this would be on to midnight, when all of a sudden there was a roar of gun fire. I said to my pal, 'Do you hear that?' He said, 'Yes.' I said it seemed funny as it had been quiet for weeks. I said, 'I will go on top of this hill, and have a look over.' To my surprise it was nothing else but a mass of shells bursting for miles round, as far as the eye could see. It was terrible to look at it, and our brave Pals in it. So I run down to the camp, tells the boys, and they

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went and had a look at it, but they had not been up long when up comes a dispatch rider to give us orders to get all ready for moving, as things seemed to be getting worse. Our Captain gave orders, everybody to get harness up, and to get on to the main road ready to make a gallop for it.

By this time our first and second lines of trenches had been captured. Half of our Battalion were taken prisoners by now. It was getting towards morning now. On and on the Germans were coming. I thought it was all up this time, so we moved out of that camp to an unknown destination. We had no sooner got over

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the top of this hill, the Germans were at the bottom. My orders were to stop and see everybody got away alright; I was the last one to leave our camp. I waited on the main road, guiding our Quarter Master staff to the right road. When they had all gone, I jumped on to my horse and made a dash for it. I was riding hard over the hill, I could see our transport in the distance, when over comes the German aeroplanes, dropping bombs and putting their machine guns on to us, dropping gas shells as well. I had to put my mask on at this retreat. The Germans made quick their advance; some of our Army Service Corps were captured, so quick they came.

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I reached our Transport and reported to our Captain, and he asked if everybody got away. I said, 'Yes.' Some of them would have got on to the wrong road, had I not been there. So on and on we went, day after day, night after night, wondering, what was going to happen to us. One day would get over then another.

I remember one day I thought we were captured. There was

a large field on the side of the main road, and our Captain said to me, 'Corporal, I think [we] will cross that field, and we will hit the main road sooner.' It was alright looking at it, but when we had got so far over one of our wagons sank into the ground, as it

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was that soft. Well what a game we had on. We had to get as many horses out of those other wagons before we could get it out. By this time the Germans were not far away, and we had just got on to the main road when up comes a mounted police officer. [He] said, 'You are lucky, they are not far away and get a move on.' We did put a move [on] full gallop down the road, to catch up to our Transport. Towards the evening we halted, this be about the third day of this retreat. Here we saw all stragglers getting formed up to go and try and make a stand for it, at a certain place. We halted for the night, miles away from a village.

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We drove our Transport into a large field, just off the main road. Here we were glad to get a rest. Being a Pioneer Battalion we had extra wagons, men and horses; it took some looking after. It was getting on towards the evening, so our cook started to make a feed for us, which we were waiting for. We watered and fed our horses, and just fastened them to their own wagons, to be ready for a sharp move if required. We got a night's rest; about 5 o'clock next morning orders came again to retreat at once, as the Germans were making another advance. They kept is going for full 14 days. No fresh troops had come up yet, we had to make the best of it.

One night after a day's retreat we halted for the

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night in a field. We saw everything all right before we retired under the wagons with our top coats over us. We were not long before we were asleep. Next morning when we started to get ready for to move off, I went to where my horse was fastened to a wagon; to my surprise it was gone. I looked all over the place for it. I reported it to our Captain. It was no use looking any more, as we had to move out of this field quick. So I kept my eyes open for it, to see if anyone had seen it on the road. So one day, when we were watering our horses at a place [called] Ault, I saw a driver with it, out of

[the] Engineers. I asked him where he got

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the horse from. He said to me to see his Captain. I went to the Captain and spoke to him about it, and he told me he found it straying in the road not far from the field where I lost him. However, after a bit of trouble he said I could have the horse, which our Captain was pleased [about], when I told him. I might say the horse was in a nice sight when I got him back.

Well I will get to where we were retreating. After a few days of retiring, we were beginning to get the wind up about it. So just before we came to the bridge over the Marne, we saw the famous French cavalry coming up to go into action. What a fine sight it was

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to see them galloping over those fields, you would have thought that no Germans would have stopped them. But after a while they had to retire. When we came to the bridge to cross over the Marne, our Engineers were making a wooden bridge to help to get the traffic over as quick as possible. The roads were beginning to get blocked up, there was so much traffic. However when the 14th day came we found ourselves in a village called Mondement. Here our Battalion mustered together, I think there was only 200 hundred of us left.

At this place our division was broken up, as it had been reduced that much. We stayed at this place

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for about a week. So one day our General came to inspect us, and to say that our Division was to be abanded [disbanded] as it had been reduced that much, with killed, wounded and missing. So he gave us his farewell visit, and we gave him a three hearty cheers. So the old 50 Division was no more; we were put into the 8 Division, where all the polishing went on. Everything had to be polished, on our wagons they made us polish everything that could polish. It was Polish Division, I called it. You did not get much time to spare when you came down the line for a rest, all wagons, harness and horses had to be spick and span, and

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they saw that you did it.

Well, while I was at Mondement I was told I had got the Military Medal for getting rations up to our Battalion through heavy shell fire on many occasions, and saving that Sergeant's life at Merville. I got the medal on 21-5-19.

So we rested at Mondement for a fortnight as the Germans were held in check now, and we were glad. Our poor old General, tears were in his eyes the day we marched past him for the last time.

Just a little incident which happened to me and my pal while we were at Mondement. I was detailed to go and hand our deficiencies in to our Ordnance headquarters about 16 miles away from our camp.

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I took my pal with me as we had to bring some small things back with us such as nose bags for our horses and hay nets which we were waiting for. So we got mounted on our horses and started off early in the morning. So we came to a certain village where we were not allowed through without a pass from our CO [Commanding Officer]. We came back and got a pass, the French were in command at this place. So we passed through the village and we were not allowed to stop, that was our orders from the French Captain. We did not get to know the reason for this.

So we passed out on to our destination, and we got there about midday. They gave us a feed and we

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fed our horses, and we went out for a walk. We met some pals we knew, and went and had a drink with them. We were enjoying ourselves fine when I said to my pal, 'I think we [should] make tracks back to our own camp.' I could see he had one too many. I got our horses ready, and my pal got hold of his horse and put his foot into the stirrup iron, when his horse reared up and threw him to the ground. His horse bolted away. There he layed, stiff on the ground. I thought he was dead, I was in an awful state. It pulled me together sharp. I went after the horse, brought him back, got my pal on to his feet, and we walked down the road for about a mile

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An idea struck me in a moment and it was getting on towards dusk. So I decided to rest in a field for the night.

I came across a nice spot, out of the road of everybody. I layed my pal down on some hay and covered our saddle blankets over him. He was not long before he was asleep. I found some water, gave our horses a drink, found some hay and made them fast to some railings for the night. I got down to it, and was not long before I was asleep. I had a bit of a headache by now.

Well I think it was about 5 o'clock next morning when I woke up. I woke my pal and said to him, 'What do you feel like?' He said, 'Awful,' and said,

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'where are we?' I told him not far away from the place we came to yesterday. I said we are in for it now. One good thing our parcels were all right, with our stores in, which we received from the Ordnance stores. However we got our horses ready, and made for our return journey again. I was wondering how we would come on when we got to the French guard again. So we came to them, so one of them could speak English very well indeed. I showed him the pass, he said that was just for yesterday. I said, 'I know that, but we have lost our road and stayed there all night.' After a bit of argument they let us pass; we had [the] same thing to do going

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out at the other end of the village. We got through alright. Next thing was when we got back to our camp, how were we going to face it. So we said the same thing to our Captain, he said alright and thought we were telling the truth. So he asked for the parcels of nose bags and hay nets, they were all correct, good job they were, I was glad. My pal he was ill for days after, all through Vin Blonk [blanc], that famous wine in France. When we told some of our pals our experience, they said you should have been here last night. They had found out a farm where they sold good beer, and they had had a happy night. So that was

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one of our happy times, which we seldom got. Being only about 200 of us all told, we got extra rations, and a few parcels such as cakes that had been sent out to our fallen comrades.

While we were at Mondement we were just sleeping anywhere we could, some under wagons and some under

large trees. Some days we would [be] soaked through with the heavy rains. There you had to stick it, no big fires to dry your clothes, and no fine beds to lie in. Oh, it was awful, if some of us had to go through the same now, we would not last very long, I am sure of that.

Well we will get back to Mondement. Orders came to us that

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we had to get ready to proceed down to the base, to get made up to our strength again. We entrained and found ourselves at a place called Ault, near to the coast in France. At this place two Battalions were made into one, and the battalion that had to be abanded [disbanded] was the 22nd Durhams. Their transport was sent down to the base and some of their officers and some of ours. There was a big change. Their CO [Commanding Officer] took command, our RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] was sent down to the base, our Transport Sergeant also.

I was made Sergeant. We were a new Battalion, a new Headquarters staff as well. The new CO which we got, Colonel James, he was a fine

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soldier and treated us very well indeed, but the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] was a devil out of hell, I said. He tried his utmost to get me brought before our CO, but it did not come off. The CO used to come and have a look round our horse lines every morning. ‘There is one thing I would like to say, Sergeant Thompson, and that is you have got a fine set of horses.’ He asked me if we had any which we brought out from England. I showed him the two that was left, and one of them was what I brought out when I was a Driver.

By now we had got a new Transport officer, as our Captain had gone home. He was the 22nd DLI Transport

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Officer. He thought he would have stayed down the base, he told me, but he had to come to us. He tried to be funny at the first, but he turned out alright in the end. He was not long with us till our Captain came back again. Our Transport Sergeant, I heard later, he had got a job down the base guarding German prisoners. He was on the old side a bit. However he was my best pal, and was well liked by all that

knew him. That was Sergeant Tweedle [Tweddle]. We have had some happy days together. Happy days, and some awful days, when we were up the line.

Well we got our transport made up to full strength again. We got some of the 22nd DLI

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drivers and I might say that I fell in with some fine fellows. They did not give me any trouble, and made good soldiers. The only man that troubled me was the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]. He was always trying to catch me on something. His reason for this was, he said, I was too much among the men. I gave him my answer one day and told him that I had been soldiering with these fellows since the first outbreak of this war, and there was no reason to bully and shout at them. That's what he wanted me to do. Kind word sometimes went a long way, I said. So one day while we were on our rest I told our Officer about him always hanging about our Transport lines.

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He soon changed his tune then. Not long after this he left us, just before the Great Advance in 1918.

When we got our Transport made up to full strength our CO [Commanding Officer] used to come down to the sea shore with us and have a bathe. We had races on the beach as well. Oh, these were our happy days. I shall never forget them, I used to say to my pal. We used to have [a] bathe then take our horses in as far as we dare to. It was a fine place, Ault.

I remember there was a lot of our men taken to hospital while we were at Ault. That awful disease spread among the troops, the flu. There were large numbers dying with it, I myself was layed up with it for a fortnight.

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However we got over it and got everything ready for a move. So one day orders came that our new General was going to inspect us. We got as many men as possible from the Battalion to get all our wagons cleaned up the same as the other battalions in that division. The day came and we were all ready and our CO told us that our new General was highly pleased with us, so that was a good start.

Then there came an Army Corps show for transport out of the 8 Division. Out of this show the 7th Durhams got three first prizes which our CO was highly pleased with and spoke well of us. We had some of the horses' photos taken which I still have in my possession.

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I often have a look at them, it brings old times back again.

So time rolled on, wondering where our next destination would be. I shall not forget those happy days while we were at Ault. There was a large German prison camp not far from us. I often used to think of our poor comrades in German camps wondering if they were getting treated the same as their prisoners. I know they were getting well treated what was beside us.

The day came when we left Ault and went up to the trenches again. I remember one day, a few months later, I saw coming up the road the new 50th Division had been formed up again. These were all ready for the new great British advance. The last advance

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of the war. We saw some old faces marching up the road, this was at Vimy Ridge. We had some rough times at this new front. We never seemed to get any rest at all at this place.

One morning we were going to water our horses, when suddenly a German aeroplane flew over us very low; it was a misty morning, never expecting to see a plane. They turned round and put their machine gun on to us. I shouted to all drivers to spread out into different directions. By doing this they missed the whole lot of us. That same afternoon the Germans came over with their bombing planes. Next field to us there was a battery of Royal Garrison Artillery camped there. They dropped bombs all over

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their camp and killed a lot of men and a large number of horses. I think there was about 70 horses killed all told. Our camp got it next. We had a number of our horses wounded, none killed. A few drivers got wounded with splinters flying about.

One morning our balloons were high up in the sky trying to see what was going on in the German lines when out of the sky comes a German aeroplane, gets on top of the balloon and sets fire to it. We saw the two men jump out with their parachutes but the Germans in the aeroplane were not satisfied in setting fire to the balloon. They started to play their machine gun on to these men as they were dropping to the ground. They

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dropped into the next field to us and they were not hurt. On one or two occasions I have seen our balloon men jump out of their balloons when the German aeroplanes have been trying to set fire to them. One German aeroplane came down not far from us and the officer in the aeroplane was only a very young chap. They marched him away to Headquarters. At Vimy Ridge we got some stick with bombing.

One night while we were unloading our wagons up on the dump near the trenches, the Germans opened fire with their field guns and there was a large number killed and wounded. Well time was rolling on, wondering when our time was coming to make our Great Advance.

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During this time we had came in contact with a lot of Americans and they were a fine set of fellows. Our boys got on very well with them. The most we saw of them was when we were near to Reims; we saw a whole division of them. They had some heavy casualties when they first went into action. They soon got broke in.

Then in August 1918 came a big change for all, the Greatest Advance of all by Sir Douglas Haig and General Foch. It was a change. They kept the Germans moving this time alright. Our guns were rushed up to the line as quick as possible and as many as possible. Troops of all kinds, British, French, Americans, Australians and as many as possible all to take part

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in this Last Glorious Advance. They got something on their plates this time, something they shall never forget. I think they must have had enough this time.

Our Battalion went up into the trenches. Everybody had to be ready when the time came to advance. When it did come

off they were missing for days as they were retreating that fast. We advanced day after day, but the Germans did not leave everything alright. As they were retreating they left some fine traps for us. One day, as we were making for our next move to a place called Douai, a battery of guns were going into action; they were just about to pass a four road end

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when all of a sudden the whole the team of horses, men and guns were blew up with this booby trap which had been layed there by the Germans. It was an awful sight. Another great trick they left behind them, you would be looking for some wood to make a shelter for the night, the same what I saw; I saw one poor chap go and pick up a new piece of wood about 14 feet long and about 2 feet in breadth. As soon as he touched it he was blown up.

Some of our men lost their lives by going into a German dugout. As soon as they touched this certain thing up they would go, blown to pieces. They left some awful traps behind

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them. Not long after this there came up from the base a special Battalion to locate all these traps. And they found some not very far away from us, even in the water wells they tossed as much rubbish down them as they could. Dead bodies even were seen in these wells during our advance. The Germans left heaps of dead lying all over the place, dead horses and broken wagons scattered all over the place.

We came to a halt not far from Douai. Here the Germans made a bit of a stand. That was just to give them time to get their transports well ahead of them. It was not long before we were in Douai.

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Douai was captured from the Germans October 19 1918. Some places were on fire when we got there. Roads were flooded with water. They tried to blow the bridge up at Douai but it did not come off as we were too quick for them at this part of the line.

They must have gone through something during this retreat, to look at some places with shell fire it was awful. Then we

came to those poor French people who had been prisoners all those four years of war. Boy, how pleased they were when we came up to them. They run and put their arms around our necks, some of them with flags which they must have hidden away all those years. Boy, they

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were glad. Poor souls, I did feel sorry for them. They looked starved to death. They knew that the end was not far off now. They said the Germans were running back, not walking. We knew that as the way they kept us going I thought our stop was going to be in Germany. But we stopped at a village a few miles out of Douai, for a day to get squared up a bit. It was awful to hear the poor old French people telling us the way the Germans had treated them all those years.

Then we got orders to advance on again. Then came 'that' which we were all waiting for. And that was

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the end of the greatest war in history, November 11th. Yes, on that glorious day we were just entering a large town called Tournai when we heard that great news. Oh, it was right enough, our Captain said. Just then a French captain posted it up on a board. See all the French people jumping with joy and not forgetting ourselves. I don't think that anybody slept that night, both in France or England. Boy, we did shake hands with each other that day. We did say we were going to get to see old England again. I shall not forget that day, November 11th.

Well Tournai had to be our headquarters for the time being, so I remember we went into some barracks,

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fine place it was too. They were very large, and the whole of our Battalion was stationed here, Transport as well. Now we had to start and get polished up again. We now could sleep without our clothes and boots which we had not done for over a week. Oh, it was great to think that those aeroplanes were finished with, no more bombs to contend with. We could sleep without any worries. While I was at Tournai I enjoyed myself, I think everybody did.

Well our duty at Tournai was just to go for rations and keeping our horses fit. Not long had we been in Tournai when there was notices posted up everywhere, looters will be shot. The British knew different

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to that. They were only too glad to help those French people, [let] alone take anything off them. Then we came to where our prisoners had been set free. Poor fellows, I felt sorry for them, some of them were in rags. But they were soon taken care of, they were clothed and fed and sent to a proper camp till they were sent home. Some of them had some awful tales to tell the way they had been treated, starved to death nearly. One thing I will say and that is the Germans were well looked after by the British while prisoners of war.

After we had got ourselves pulled together, such as hot baths, clean clothes and some good food, we got orders

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that our General was coming to inspect us, so we got everything as correct as possible. Our Transport was paraded in front of our own CO before our General inspected it, and he said we looked fine, so we were alright now.

I remember well the day when our General came to see us. He said, 'I am proud of you all.' This was when he was inspecting us at Tournai Barracks. Yes, they had a good right to be proud of us. I think it was marvellous to see so many old faces come right through that Great War without a scratch, I said to myself many a time after what we had went through, nearly four years altogether.

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Before we left Tournai each man received a slip of paper and on it was written from our General:

From Lieut. General Sir Hunter Weston
To Major General W. Heneker, C.B., D.S.O., Officers, W.O.s, N.C.O.s and Men of the 8th Division.

I congratulate you heartily on being selected to take part in the triumphal advance to the Rhine.

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Much though I regret that thereby the Division will be severed from my command, I consider myself fortunate to have had you under my command for so long, both during the difficult and dreary days in the Passchendaele Salient when you stuck it out so well on the Vimy Ridge and in this last glorious advance by which you have succeeded in finishing the war, on the very spot where some of you received your baptism of fire in our first great battle. The discipline, self sacrifice and devotion to duty which have been the main factors of your success in war

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will, I am sure, be displayed by you throughout the trying period of demoblilization and will be carried by you into your civil life, in peace. In the hands of men such as you who have been through the stern realities of war, and have thereby acquired a broad outlook on life, the future of England and of the Empire is safe. In bidding you all farewell I desire to place on record my appreciation of the splendid work that you have done and of the initiative and endurance that you have displayed. I congratulate you on your splendid

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achievements in this war and I wish you each and all, both those who continue in the army and those who return to civil life, the very best of health, happiness and prosperity.

From Hunter Weston

I wonder how many men kept those slips of paper. I think it was very kind of him to send such a nice letter to each man.

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Well after our inspection everybody was satisfied with us. The day was our own, we were told; we did enjoy ourselves, with what money we had.

While we were at Tournai we saw a large number of our prisoners coming from the German prison camps. I felt sorry for them. Well the next thing we were wondering was when were we going to get home. Ah, it was a long time before any of us got home. After a few weeks at Tournai orders came for us to move to a place called Ath, a few miles from Brussels. Here our Battalion went into billets a mile or so away from the transport.

Our Transport went into a new building, which was not quite finished by the French. This was for the French Mounted Police. It was a fine place.

My billet I will say was the best one I ever had all the time I was away. It was with a French old lady and her husband. Oh, they were good to us. There were four of us stayed with her. We had one room taken off her, there was a fine bed in it, everything you required. Well it was great, she thought the world of us. I often wondered when I used to sit talking to this old couple which way they were

treated with the Germans. She afterwards told us. She said to me one day [when] I was having a chat with her, 'I used to feel sorry when I saw those British prisoners marched past my window. I often wondered when the British would hold this place', and here we were billeted in her very home. She was glad to have us staying with her. She told us it was awful to see the state the Germans were in when they were retreating. They left dead horses lying right in the middle of the road, broken wagons all over the place. The place was in an awful state.

The room where we slept in there was a cellar underneath it and this old woman kept her

money hidden there all the time during the war. She got it out when the Germans cleared out. And she gave the four of us three coins each as a souvenir of the war. One coin I have still got. She also gave each of us the day when we left her a present. I got a jug she said was over hundred years old. And I think it is well over that, it was passed from one family to another she said. One of my pals got a gold brooch, the others got a vase each. She was a fine old lady. I often wished I could have went over to France, and seen her.

Well we will get back to our work. Again, our duty was when we were at Ath, just to go and

bring rations from the railhead and take them to our Q.M. stores. So we had an easy job. I remember one night while we were at Ath we thought the Germans had broke through again. Not far from our billet there was the railway station, such as it was. One night there was some truck loads of shells put into a siding for the night. About midnight, somehow or another, one of these trucks exploded and you should have heard the noise. We all thought that another war had began. There was a few wounded over this, we heard next morning, and some of them were coming home for good.

I forgot to say about the fine billet our Transport drivers had.

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It was a large building belonged to some wealthy people, who left it when the Germans first made their advance. It had been knocked about a bit with shell fire, such as bombs. There was plenty of that, the old woman told us. Just behind the house where we were staying there was a bomb hole; the old woman thought her time had come. I should think she would.

Well we were all wondering when we were going to get home and be finished with the Army for good. But we were there a few months before we got home. It was wonderful how they worked it out for as many men to come home at once. We thought we would be coming home as a Battalion but

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we did not, we came home in groups. So many at a time, till the last group was left. So time was rolling on, just wondering when our turn was going to come. Each day papers would come down to our Captain to tell [a] certain number of men to report to the Orderly Room as they were going home. So many horses were taken from us so our transport was getting less. I heard afterwards that our battalion moved near to Germany after I had left them at Ath. There would only be about 300 I think by then. So one night I was out in the village of Ath, when one of our own headquarters runners came up to me and said, ‘Sergeant, you have to report at the

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Orderly Room at once.’

There were three of us altogether from our transport came away together. I had already lost some of the old boys that had gone home. So our Captain said, 'I don't know what I am going to do.' I heard afterwards what they did when I saw some of the boys who stayed till the last. One man had to look after four horses till they got men for them out of the Battalion. I handed everything over to the new Sergeant. He was with us all the time so the right one got the stripes but he afterwards told he had a job with the new men. They gave him trouble, some of them did not know anything about horses. I can imagine what sort of a time he would

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have with them.

So the three of us got into one of our wagons which was going that way and we had a nigh escape. There was a railway crossing which we had to cross over. There was no gates on or anybody there to warn us of the trains coming. The gates that were on were blown off. So just as we were turning the bend to get to the crossing, there was an old house which stopped you from seeing down the line. It was a misty night to start with, and just as [we] got to the crossing up comes an express. It passed us like a flash of lightning. I nearly pulled the driver off the seat as I was behind him in

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the wagon. Well we could not speak to each other for a while. 'Well,' I said, 'that was a bit lucky. Fancy going for our papers and nearly getting killed into the bargain.' 'Drive on,' I said, 'see what comes next for us.' But everything was alright and we got to our Orderly Room.
Here our CO wished us the best of luck when we got home. So we got our papers, had a good shake of hands, and left for our billet. And when we got there the old French woman was waiting for us. She had a fine supper for us, eggs and chips

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and coffee she gave us. Tears were in her eyes all the time were packing our kits. We enjoyed ourselves before turning in for the night, as we left Ath next morning. All the boys came up to my billet and I wished them all good luck and hoped it would not be long before they were home, and finished with it for good. I think the last one I shaked hands with was the old woman. She did cry, you would have

thought we were her sons going away. So the three set off for the station which was not far away. As we reached the bottom of the road I turned round and stood for a minute or so,

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and looked up to our billet. There the boys were waving their hands to us and the poor old woman had her apron up to her eyes with one hand and waving with the other. I waved to them and on we went out of the last billet in France, Ath.

When we got to the station there was a large number of our Division coming home. And to our surprise when the train did come in, it was an English train, all third class coaches. So we had a comfortable ride for the last time in France. They must have just sent these trains over for our troops

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to come home in, as we had never seen any before. There were eight of us got into a carriage. So we started off for our last ride in France, as far as soldiering was concerned. When we got down to the base, that was at Boulogne, a place I have been in when there has been many a bombing raid. There we got some rations, a wash and a quick march down to the docks. When we got there the ship was just coming in and her name was the SS *Perth*. She had just come from the east, one of the sailors told us, and this was the first time she had taken troops out of Boulogne. They told us she was bound to

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London. From the ship coming in and going out, it took only two hours, so they cast off the ropes and we steamed out of the harbour, just to go right into a fog. At times you could not see a thing. There was plenty of ships' buzzers blowing we could hear. So on and on we sailed till we came out of the fog and the sailors [said] we were now going up the Thames and we would land at Tilbury Dock. To our surprise when we got to Tilbury they kept us on board of ship all night till 8am next morning, when we got onto the quayside each man before proceeding on to the train that was waiting for us.

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Each man received rations for the next stage of our journey. I think there would be about a thousand of us altogether from the ship. So again we started for Ripon. On our way

from Tilbury people from both sides of the station gave us a good send off. They were cheering and waving flags to us.

So after a long ride, it took a few hours, we reached Ripon. We marched up to the camp and there we spent the night. Next morning came and we went through different parts of our kit in different places till you had no kit left at all. There were heaps of kit and rifles just as the men had put them down. After we had done

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that next thing was to get all clean clothes, and a bath. After having done that we felt something like it now. Each man had to be graded for different papers you had to bring home with you, so you could draw all the money that was due to you, which did not take long to do. So next morning came and all of us was put into different groups and marched down to the station and then we left Ripon for Sunderland and for good this time. No more 'comesy back' we were all saying. I might say while we were at Ripon we were very well treated. The food what we got was excellent. Each man got prompt attention. They saw to that.

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So we were now free men after serving over four [years] in the worst war in history. Yes four years, it seemed like eight to us, and I wish every man and woman that was connected with war service the very best of luck. Some of us have been lucky since we came home from the war, and some have not. We thought things would have been different to ex-service men, as regards to employment. Now there are thousands upon thousands of ex-service out of employment. Such things will happen, I suppose, after great wars.

Now after 10 years since the Great War finished nearly each Division are erecting a war memorial in memory of our Glorious Dead. Our Division, 50th Division, are going to unveil their memorial

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in 1929 which I do hope to be able to attend. Near Ypres I expect will be the place where it will [be] erected.

Well after I was finished with [the] Army work was the next thing to think about and, as I have said, I was one of the lucky ones to get a job after the war was over. But some poor fellows have never worked since they came home.

I joined up in our Battalion for one year to make my 13 years complete for a long service medal, which I have got. We went to Scarborough for our fortnight's training but it was a holiday. I think we did enjoy ourselves. Some of our pals that had legs and arms blown off with shell fire were invited to come with us. That was in 1920. I received my Military Medal – 25-5-19 - for being mentioned in dispatches.

On this occasion I was also awarded the Oak Leaf Emblem which I received 17 June 1920. It was on 6th of January 1919 that I left our Battalion at Ath in France.

PS There are a lot of incidents which I have forgotten to write, which comes back to me when I sit and think.
I will try and think of them.
So that was my four years experience from leaving England till coming back 1919.

Nov 29th 1928
G. Thompson, 8 Crow St Sunderland

This piece of cloth was taken out of [the] Cloth Hall in Ypres, 1915.
I tore it from a curtain as a souvenir.
G. Thompson. 1310

	7 DLI	
Over	BEF	1915
	France	1916
		1917
		1918
		1919

I left Ath in France 6th January 1919
Finished with the War.

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It is getting on for Christmas 1928, but I remember one Christmas when our Transport was stationed at Vlamertinghe, not far away from Ypres. We had got some Christmas pudding sent out from England by some very kind people. There was a small one for each man. We were given each man one when our farrier had just gone into his hut when a shell bursted and blew him to pieces, poor chap. He was an awful sight. We buried [him] near Ypres.

We were at a place called St Jean near Ypres. The Germans had been shelling our camp for days and we [had] orders for to move further back as it was too bad. As we were leaving the camp one of our ammunition

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carriers had four of his fingers blown off, which I helped to dress his hand. You would have thought it had been done with a knife, it was that straight. Just a few minutes after that had happened the same thing nearly happened to me. I was getting my wagon ready to move off when a shell bursted not far away from me. I ducked into a hole, I put out my hands to save me when falling and just about one inch of shell had buried itself in the ground. In this field I might say there was heaps of dead horses. We had a large number of our horses killed at this place. Continuity shelling all day long and through the night; it was awful.

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Another time we were coming back from the trenches having taken up rations and ammunition for our Battalion. The Germans opened out with heavy shell fire [at] which our Sergeant gave orders to gallop. Going down open roads you have not much chance on horses, rifle fire, heavy shelling and the lights going up from the trenches made you feel very uncomfortable. However we got off the roads and came into a large wood. Here there were field batteries firing as hard as they could. There was telephone wires lying all over the ground and we got into a fix here. The wires had got fastened to our horses' shoes [and] round our wagon wheels. We were in a right mix up, we had stop and cut as

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much as possible to get our horses' feet clear of all the wire. Luckily no one got killed over it. Shells were bursting on both sides of us. It was impossible for our horses to walk, otherwise we would have went further on before we stopped. The wire was so entangled it was impossible for them to walk. After a lot of trouble which nearly cost us our lives we got clear and made our return journey, which was now nearly daylight. All our work was done in the dark at this part of the front.

One day as we were retreating through a place called Merville I was just going to the back of our column to see everything correct when a shell bursted just in front of one of our

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wagons and blew horses and driver to pieces, it was awful. Poor chap, he had only got those horses that morning as the Driver was away. Just luck you see.
By Sergeant G.Thompson

April 25th 1928
A cutting out of our Echo, April 25 1928

How many of the first line 7th Durhams will ever forget those stirring days in April 1915, 13 years ago, when our Battalion tramped through Ypres, that awful city of the dead. The streets lighted by the flames roaring in the tower of St Martin's Cathedral, our feet crunching broken glass and slates and all about us the fearsome devastation wrought by heavy artillery, bent and twisted lamp posts, shattered houses, dead horses and wrecked wagons.

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A sickening, deathly smell filled the air, an unforgettable odour as of smoke and explosives, corpses, disinfectants, dressing stations, ruin and desolation. On we marched past [the] Cloth Hall out through the Menin Gate till we reached the wood surrounding the Potijze Wood where we spent a most miserable night in a downpour of rain, and deafened by the crashing of field guns all around us.

The next evening, Sunday April 25th 1915, we proceeded up the road to Zonnebeke and turned off to the right into the

fields between Verlorenhoek and Frezenburg where the adjutant Captain Bergne ordered us to dig ourselves in along by the hedges.

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Next morning found us sitting in a long shallow ditch in evil-smelling clay. Some two or three miles behind the ruins of Ypres, standing up above a fringe of trees, all around us were fields with farming dotted here and there, while the ground in front sloped away to a ridge on the sky line three or four fields away. Ahead a battery of 18 pounders was concealed in some of the farms in front and it was a stirring sight to see the ammunition coming up, the men lying forward over the horses' necks, whips cracking as the splendid animals dashed over the rough ground, the wagons leaping and crashing behind them.

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About noon a red tabbed staff officer, Captain Carpenter, came galloping over the fields and jumping off his horse saluted Colonel Vaux and handed him some orders. After a brief consultation Captain Carpenter remounted and galloped away – something up again thought we. Sure enough a little later Major Spain with several officers came and sat in our end of the ditch and discussed the programme which the platoon officers communicated to the sergeants. It appeared that for some reason unknown to us we were to carry out a decoy attack in the direction of the Gravenstafel Ridge on the left of Zonnebeke, for the purpose of drawing artillery fire

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upon our noble selves, a thrilling occupation indeed.

The German Fire

About mid-afternoon the Battalion began to form up and the hedge-backs marched off in artillery formation to the open fields on the left front. After advancing about 500 yards the order came along the line to double out into extended order and lie down. It was now a clear, sunny afternoon and I could see that the Battalion was now stretched out into three long lines of skirmishers, myself being on the extreme left of the third line.

The Germans now began to take an intelligent interest in the proceedings and sent over several aeroplanes

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which circled over us for some time and disappeared, leaving behind them a long line of black smoke signals for the information of their gunners. Then the fun began. The German artillery commenced to spray us with shrapnel and the air was soon full of the screaming, bursting shells, moaning nose caps and spattering bullets but, strange to say, nobody at the end of our line was hurt, although the shrapnel was bouncing about our ears and low-drifting clouds of pungent yellow smoke floated over us. After lying here for what seemed like ages the welcome order came for us

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to advance again, and the enemy guns now began to pot at us with loud-whistling, small-calibre concussion shells which burst in our line with deadly effect. One shell fell right between the feet of an elderly man, just ten yards in front of my brother and I. And when the shower of clods had ceased falling on our heads and the smoke had cleared away, the poor fellow was lying dead – disembowelled, the stretcher-bearers told me afterwards.

Give them Hell

Soon we came to some reserve trenches sparsely populated with Canadians who cheered us and threw

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us cigarettes, telling us that the Germans were just over the ridge and advising us to give them hell. Rifle bullets now began to whistle past our ears as we approached the road between St Julien and Zonnebeke and we took cover behind the ruined houses on the roadside. It was now dusk and in the fading [light] I saw a man slowly and painfully crawling down the road on his hands and knees. He told me that he had been buried in a dugout by a coal-box. Near us was a windmill, at the foot of which lay a dead man, whom I recognized as one of our buglers. How weird it was watching the smoke-blackened Canadian

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crawling down the road past the still form by the windmill. The 'decoy' attack now seemed to be over and the shelling had slackened with the coming of darkness, although rifle bullets constantly whistled across the road. Not far away

along the road I saw Lieutenant Hickey lying on a stretcher with his head wrapped in bandages and Lieutenant Jacks sitting in the ditch smoking a cigarette, with his foot in bandages, and from him I learned that the adjutant had been hit by shrapnel. My own platoon had been lucky in losing only three men wounded.

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Thus ended our baptism of fire amidst the ruins of Zonnebeke – a day which those who had survived the campaign will never forget, however thrilling their subsequent experiences may have been.

Thus ends another 7th Durhams experience.

This was in our Echo
April 25th 1928.

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Another cutting out of our daily Echo by J.W. Campbell.
May 26th 1928

Whit-Monday, 1915
The Battle of Hooge Recalled with the 7th Durhams
On Whit-Sunday, May 23rd 1915, we of the 7th Durhams found ourselves in the front line of trenches near Bellewaarde Lake, between Hooge and Wieltje, waiting to be relieved by the East Surreys and Royal Welsh Fusiliers. We had just been in three days having taken over on the previous Friday night from the Lancers, 5th Dragoon Guards and the 20th Hussars. Our Cavalry friends informed us that there had

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been nothing doing for a week or so, everything being nice and quiet, in fact 'cushy'.

Whit-Sunday arrived in the splendour of a brilliant sun, making the place look like a fairy glen, and giving us the impression that the war had suddenly drifted away to environments more in keeping with its grim work. It seemed an ideal place for a picnic, the grass after the night dew had that refreshing smell of the country, unmolested by the litter or the effects of a war, such as one had expected. A few shells coming over us seemed to sense the glory of this idyll,

giving the impression that they had been loath to leave the guns,

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and were quite willing to rest in their baskets on such as this, especially being ‘holiday time’. However one of our own shells bursting short stirred us up into a little more activity, disturbing the solemn ceremony of handing over orderly sergeant duties, and for the moment the serenity of our existence.

A Reminder

After attending to the needs of the injured members of the fraternity the day resumed its normal course. We were being lulled into a state of security by our regular friends saying that the Germans, whom we could see across the Lake moving about, some busy at fires making a meal, could not possibly get

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across the stretch of water and therefore attack was out of the question. It never entered our heads that they may come through on our flanks, and subsequently this is just what happened. We had been digging a deep and narrow communication trench during the night, connecting the old breastwork to another line, and had just returned to our dugouts when the alarm went for everyone to ‘stand to’, as we were informed the Germans had got through into the wood on our left. We all tumbled out in a great flurry, and somehow or other word came along that it was a false alarm, so back we went. In another short space of time we were again called out,

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and this time it was established fact that the Boshe had broken through on both of our flanks and was working round the sides of the Lake. Rifle and machine gun fire opened out also shell fire and we were ordered to man this deep communication trench which in the mean [time] had gradually filled up with water and was knee deep in liquid mud. Owing to the depth it was very difficult to see over the top, much less get a rifle over to fire. Shells were now bursting on our trench with deadly effect and to our horror we saw a great cloud of greenish-yellow gas drifting across no-man’s

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land and over the trenches on our left. We were firing with great difficulty, owing to there being no fire step, and lack of orders only added to the confusion of the moment caused by the sudden and heavy attack. The spare bandoliers which we had carried with us since landing in France now became of real use and were passed over to the men who occupied a small advance trench and also a ruined farm house from which they were able to do some sniping with much success.

Terrific Din

The din was now something terrific and all we could do was to fire whenever

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a German – they were Prussian Guards and big chaps – showed up over our line of vision. The Prussians were very cool and during the storm were seen digging their way up to us with those very long handled spades, the tops of which we could see working up and down. A few of our chaps were now hors de combat having been shot through the head and wounded by shell fire, while other poor fellows were slowly choking through the dreadful effects of the chlorine gas, as the respirators in use then were of a most primitive order. Eventually we got the order to retire from this position and work back a bit.

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We were now being pounded from all sides and momentarily everything became confusion. The enemy began to pour upon us from both flanks and we were in great danger of being surrounded. Gradually, and with difficulty, we managed to get out of this communication trench and work down towards a support line. Our people got scattered and mixed up with other units who had come up in support, such as the Lancers and Dragoon Guards. The din was now tremendous, our field guns appeared to have moved up and were firing as hard as they could go – the gunners having stripped to the waist.

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Owing to the close proximity and the large numbers of Germans advancing the gunners were firing with sights at zero.

Supports arrive

Other supports were now coming up and moving over in front of us for counter-attacking and as the day wore on we gradually stemmed this massed attack, and the line was consolidated once more and as night time approached the fire on both sides was felt to be slackening, although the tension being somewhat eased, the position was far from normal. C and D Companies who had been relieved and were now at Brielen Huts were immediately recalled and had a fearful time coming

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through a murderous shell-fire and a belt of chlorine gas, suffering many casualties thereby.

Captain Bradford our new adjutant met the troops at the cross-roads by Potize Chateau, and an inspiring sight it was to see him standing as coolly as a policeman on point duty giving instructions to the officers although bullets were singing past uncomfortably near. The two returning companies under Captains Mail and Errington entered some trenches immediately in front of the Chateau, where they found the 8th and 9th Durhams under Colonel Henderson, together with the Irish Fusiliers and the

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Border Regiment. After a short stay in these trenches under somewhat nerve-racking conditions the Battalion was relieved and arriving down at Brielen Huts we learnt to our sorrow how many of our brave comrades had fallen on that strenuous Whit-Monday, and that amongst the officers who had laid down their lives were Major Hines, Major Wawn, and Lieutenants Bob Adamson, Sayers, R[h]odes, Stockdale and Jack Meek, whose gallant conduct on that historic day will ever be remembered by those who took part in this action.

Thus ends another Durhams Adventure. I remember that day well and was at Brielen Huts when they came, what was left of them. I remember our old

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Colonel saying what they had gone through. I was taking ammunition up to them through heavy shell fire, houses fallen on to the road way which made it awful to drive on, dead bodies was lying all over the place. I have had some rough rides going up with our Transports. I remember just a night before Whit Monday we were going up with

ammunition to our Battalion when a shell bursted just ahead of us. A Transport Driver was blown to bits, his officer was also wounded.

This ended another 7 Durham story.
Copied out Sunderland Daily Echo. Writing

Never forget Whit Monday
G. Thompson. 8. Crow St.

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After nearly ten years 50 Division War Memorial had to be unveiled on April 26th 1929 but owing to the bad weather it has been postponed till August 1929.
The weather has been the worst for 34 years. Not much snow but the frost has been terrible.

Death of the Great War's Greatest Soldiers
Marshal Joffre died 3.1.31
Sir Douglas Haig
English General Died
also Marshal Foch, born Oct 2nd 1851,
French General, 20.3.29
The two great men in the World's War which lasted 4 years.

General Foch placed in special command to carry through Armistice terms Nov 5th 1918.
G. Thompson

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20th March 1929
Death of a Great War General, Marshal Foch,
one of the world's greatest generals. It was through him the Great War came to an end after 4 years.
Millions of lives lost.

Our King George on March 22nd 1929 sent the following message:
Her Greatest Soldier
Our King George has sent the following message
to the President of the French Republic:

With heartfelt sorrow I offer to you Mlle.[sic] President, and to the French nation my deep sympathy in the death of Marshall Foch. France mourns her greatest soldier [and] my

country the loss of one of whose name honoured the roll of British Field Marshals.
For all time he will be remembered as the distinguished chief who led the Allied armies to victory, while his memory will be cherished by all ranks of the Empire's Forces who served in the World War.
George R.I.

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March 23rd 1929
Foch's last message to Britain, written as he lay dying.

The great soldier called to one of his attendants and made a gallant effort to frame the message. But he was not satisfied with some phrasing, his strength failed at the last minute so the message was never completed.
The completed part which was give me (Sunday Chronicle) today by Madame Foch
runs as follows:

It is with regret that I find I cannot join in the tribute to the British dead which French pilgrims are making.
But I shall be with you in spirit when the British dead are honoured on behalf of the French nation and army.

G. Thompson, 8 Crow St, Sunderland.

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I recall with pride the achievement of the British troops who fought under my command, and it would have given me the greatest pleasure to have identified myself in person with this tribute.

It is not for me, this pleasure now, but that does not prevent me saluting your glorious dead in spirit. No one in France is likely to forget what our nation owes to the British comrades in arms who laid down their lives so freely for the common cause and it is right that pilgrimages such as these should take place from time to time to help and keep alive the flame of remembrance and foster the spirit that animated the armies of two nations when they fought side by side against the common foe.

On Thursday March 28th 1,000 ex-soldiers from France

visit the Cenotaph, London.
Copied out of Sunday Chronicle, March 24th 1929
G. Thompson

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23.3.29
The Prince of Wales represented the King yesterday at the memorial service in Westminster Cathedral [sic] for Marshal Foch. The Leader of the Allied Armies in the Great War.

Another French General's Death
Death of General Sarrail, 23.3.29
He was 73; took command of the 6th Army at the outbreak of war. He was credited with the salvation of Verdun.

In January 1916 he was given supreme command of British and French Troops in Macedonia.

13.3.29
Our King goes out in the gardens of Craigwell. He still continues to improve in health after a serious illness which we all hope he will so be well again.

26.3.29
Owing to King George's health the Prince of Wales will attend the funeral of Marshal Foch in Paris today as representative of our King.

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March 26 1929
Wonderful scenes in Paris
A Soldier of Peace.
Foch passes from Cathedral to Tomb. Marshall Foch was buried today. 20 foreign powers were at the funeral. The Prince of Wales in the uniform of a Colonel of the Coldstream Guards was a much observed figure. Later he walked in the procession to the Invalides, place of burial, with Prince Charles of Belgium.
British Field Marshals and British troops were at the funeral.

The Flame
The Flame which has just gone out was one of the most ardent and pure that ever shed its brilliance on earth. He had all the magnanimity, natural-goodness, vivacity, penetration

and greatness and the sublimity of genius. He had no other ambition than to serve.
M.Poincare's speech on Foch yesterday in Paris.

Copied out Daily News.
G. Thompson, 8 Crow St, Sunderland.

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Glorious weather last week in March 1929.

March 29.3.29
General Sarrail was buried near to where Marshal Foch was buried.

French Homage to our Dead
General Gouraud the Military Governor of Paris, who is to lead the pilgrimage of French ex-servicemen to the grave of the Unknown Warrior and the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, tomorrow, arrived in Victoria yesterday.
He was delighted to visit London on such an occasion. He had two legs broken, an arm lost and wounded in the Great War at Gallipoli. Said what fine soldiers the British were. We were real comrades in arms.
Earl Jellicoe will receive the French ex-servicemen on behalf of the British Legion. They will march to Westminster Abbey for a short ceremony at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior then, led by a French Band, march to the Cenotaph.

April 1st 1929
Sunderland played St. Mirren. Lost 1-0.

2nd April 1929
The King was out again at Bognor. He is still improving.

The worst week in my life for illness was 1st week April 1929
Fainting feelings when sitting quiet. Stomach Trouble.
All right after night shift. G. Thompson 10 till 6.

Good Friday
2 till 10 (very busy)
G. Thompson March 30th 1929

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April 1st 1929
Foch Knew

Shortly before his death Marshal Foch sent for one of his grandchildren. Patting the boy on the head Foch said, 'My child, for you my wish is that you may never know 'war'.'

Territorials' 21st Anniversary
The King's Message
The King in a message on the 21st anniversary of the formation of the Territorial Army, congratulates all ranks and says the Empire will never forget the inestimable services rendered by Territorial troops throughout the Great War, more especially during those early and critical days before the new armies were ready to take the field. The gallantry and self-sacrifice of the men who fought and fell will be an inspiration for all time.
1st April 1929

The French and British Tommys stood shoulder to shoulder in the common cause of remembrance at the Cenotaph yesterday when the Guardians of La Flamme, the French Ex-Servicemen's Association, made their pilgrimage.
Nine hundred French ex-servicemen over the grave of the Unknown Warrior, 31 March 1929
Lady Haig was a guide for them in the Tower of London.

1st April 1929
Cold weather again, raining at 8pm.
G. Thompson

7.4.1929
One theatre visit in 101 years. Mrs S. Shilleto of Sunderland who was 101 on Saturday has only been to theatre once and to a dance once.

April 13th 1929
Scotland beat England 1-0. 120,000 people present.

April 19th 1929
We had our 2nd annual dinner at the Palatine Hotel.
Mrs Vaux and her two sons were present. Happy time we had.

The Exhibition North East Coast was opened in May 16th 1929 on [the] Town Moor, Newcastle, by [the] Prince of

Wales. One day, Whit Monday, there [were] over 100,000 there.

New Labour Government formed June 1929.
Raining June 8th.

The Big French Monoplane crossed the Atlantic with a 24 year old stowaway aboard.
Landed in Spain short of petrol, June 15th 1929. Then they flew to Paris.

Fred Rigby died June 14th 1929. Royal Infirmary.

Visited Exhibition July 2nd 1929 very good day (wet).
Holiday week.

July 1st 1929
When I saw Doctor Gibb. Fainting feelings.

Register reader Evening World.
Sunday Chronicle July 1st 1929; Evening World July 1st 1929; Sunday Chronicle July 5th

Finished Daily News John Bull July 1st 1929. Started with Feb J. Bull 1932

American aeroplane name Pathfinder flew Atlantic 31½ hours, July 1929

Two planes non-stop flight from France to New York.
One French and the other Polish Russia left Sat 13th 1929
One French returned and the other landed one killed the other injured.

Our King undergoes another operation, July 15th 1929

July 13th 1929
Weather fine. St Swithin's Day. Hottest day in Durham 80.3 [degrees]. G.Thompson

7th Battalion The Durham Light Infantry.
50th Divisional Memorial unveiling ceremony August 31st 1929. Fare £3-4-6.

Weather very hot, July 16th 1929

July 15th 1929
30 cwt. motor lorry climbed Tunstall Hill

July 18th 1929
King of Spain visited exhibition and Seaham Harbour

Sir Alan Cobham arrived at North Hylton. Sir Walter Raine was there to meet him.
July 20th 1929. Hot weather.

Started laying water main ~~into Brewery~~ Vaux's, July 1929

July 29th 1929
First tram to pass over new centre of the Bridge.

German Zeppelin crossed Atlantic, stowaway aboard.
93 hours, July 1929

Territorials arrived back from Ripon, August 11th 1929

German Zeppelin crossed Atlantic in record time, July 1929; stowaway aboard.

For a world tour flew around the whole world.

Territorials' War Memorial unveiled Sept 1st 1929
Left Sunderland Aug 31st for France. Few old members went with the party. The ceremony was carried out by Lord Plumer who commanded 50 Division.
Wieltje near Ypres.

Aug 26th 1929
Vaux's Brewery visited the North Coast Exhibition,
Very good day we had. 14 bus loads, very hot.

August 31st
Sunderland first match of the season with Derby County and lost 3-0.

Aug 28th 1929
Thunder and lightning the worst I have seen on night shift. Warm weather.

G. Thompson. Sept 2nd 1929 Hot day.

The new Wearmouth Bridge was opened by
H.R.H. Duke of York on Oct 31st 1929.
I was there [and] Gracie Evelyn Thompson. Large crowds there. Guard of Honour from the 7th Durhams. 10 till 6.

Feb 15th 1930
Sunderland played Notts Forest. Draw 2-2. 10 till 6.

Feb 16th 1930
Snowing. Cold night. 10 till 6.

July 3rd 1930
Prince of Wales lays foundation stone for new hospital, Newcastle Road. Gracie Evelyn Thompson was there. I saw him in Mary Street. Streets were crowded.
Very hot day. E.S. Thompson at Barnard Castle same day.
G. Thompson. Ada Thompson. 1 till 5.

July 22nd 1930
S. Lenach puts up for M.P. for Sunderland.
Australians had to visit Ashbrooke to play Durham at cricket, but 4 days' rain straight off stopped play. Still raining [after] 5 days, over a million tons of water has fallen.

Earthquake Italian over 2,142 dead. 4,551 injured. July 27th 1930.
Australians v England at Manchester Cricket. Hot day.

Aug 9th Sore throat. Went to Dr Gibb Aug 11th 1930. 2 till 10.

Sept 6th 1930
G. Henderson married. 2 till 10. Raining. 15/9 present.

Sept 6th Sunderland played Portsmouth. Draw 1-1 at Portsmouth.

Sept 28th 1930
Aunt Maria Phillips died.

Oct 4th 1930
Saturday night. Terrible winds all night. 10 till 6.
The Great Airship wrecked, British in France, R101 on flight to India and Egypt. 47 lives lost, several prominent men on board; one belongs to Sunderland.

Thursday 24 July 1930
Echo Reporters come round Vaux Brewery and they gave a very good report in the Echo.
G. Thompson 2 till 10.
Wet day. F. Potts 10 till 6.
J. Parkin 6 till 2.

Wet day 2nd Aug 1930

August 4th Wet Day. 16 years ago today August 4th 1930 since the War started. 6 till 2 working.
Amy Johnson arrives in England, this is the only woman that has flown to Australia alone. Daily Mail gives £10,000.

Aug 12th 1930
Very heavy thunder and lightning, worst for years. Heavy rain.

July 6th 1930
2nd Durhams in India in action. 1 killed, 13 wounded.

Aug 14th 1930
Fine day but heavy winds. 1930 G.T.

Aug 29th
Worst thunder and lightning I have [seen] for several years. There was heavy down pour of rain. Warm weather. 6 till 2 working.

2nd September
Two French airmen flew from Paris to New York, just over 37 hours, record time. Won about 200,000 thousand [sic] pounds. 2 till 10. G.T.

September 4th
Dueart's Brewery Fire. Crowds watching from the Bridge

Oct 4th 1930
Clocks went back 1 hour. 10 till 6.

Oct 4th 1930
Sunderland won at Leeds 3-0.

Saturday Oct 25th 1930
Berlin, Germany. All Germany mourned today while the 262 victims of the Alsdorf Mine Disaster were borne to their last resting place.

Oct 25th
Ninety miners entombed. Another German Mine Disaster.

1930 Oct 31st
50 Dick Graham killed at South Shields, 34 years at Vaux's Brewery.

November 1st 1930
Wet day Sunderland lost 7-2 Sheffield Wednesday.

Sunday night Nov 2nd
Wet night, windy.

Monday Nov 3rd 1930
Raining. 1 till 5.

Nov 11th 1930
Armistice Day. Layed a wreath on War Memorial. In memory of 7 Durhams Comrades
10 till 6. G. Thompson

Nov 22nd
Sunderland won, beat Newcastle 5-0. Raining heavy. Poor gate, 26,000.

Nov 27th
Sent for Dr Gibb for Gracie, sore throat.
2 till 10. 15 brews.

November very bad month for fogs, terrible lot of deaths.

Dec 25th 1930
Christmas Day. Sunderland played Leicester, lost 5-2. 10 till 6.

Boxing Day
Terrible day, rain and sleet. 10 till 6.

New Year's Day
Fine Day. G. Thompson, 6 till 2. Parkin, 10 till 6. Potts, 2 till 10.

3.1.31
Sunderland played draw, Portsmouth 0-0.

Saturday 3rd January 1931
Great soldier dies. Marshal Joffre, the great leader of the French Army.
In the darkest days of the war the man who engineered the Victory of the Marne which saved Paris and the Allies [in] 1914, died in Paris yesterday after an amazing battle against illness. 'I am going,' murmured the brave soldier on his death bed, 'this is the fight that all must lose.'

I was in the Retreat of the Marne 1918. 14 days we were drove back. Day and night.

Sat January 10th
2 till 10. Fine day. Sunderland beat Southampton 2-0.

Tuesday 13th January 1931
Snowing, very cold. 10 till 6.

Friday January 16th
Very windy night. 10 till 6.

Sat 17th
Sunderland beat Arsenal 3-1 away. 10 till 6.

Sunday night January 18th
Snowing.

January 20th 1931
Vaux Welfare Dance. 260 present, Edward Hall. 6 till 2.

January 28th 1931 Wednesday
Sunderland beat Bolton 3-1. Best cup tie I have seen. 2 till 10.

January 29th midnight
Snowing.

January
Tomas Booker retires from Vaux's after 48 years service.

Sat 31st January
Terrible day. Snow and rain, sleet. 5 till 10.
Blackpool beat Sunderland 3-1. Vaux's match off at Grindon.

January 1931
Worst month at Vaux's. Trade bad. Short time.

February 3rd
J. Parkin off sick, 6 till 2. Started Feb 6th, 2 till 10.

Wednesday February 4th
70 miles an hour plunge in to sea. 9 men lost their lives at Plymouth Sound in a flying boat. 10 till 6 night shift.

Wednesday February 4th
Earthquake disaster New Zealand, 250 dead. 5,000 fleeing women and children for their lives. 10 till 6.

Wednesday February 4th
Sunderland beat Blackburn Rovers 8-2. 10 till 6.
1 goal Fulwell end, 9 goals scored at the Roker end (snowing). Very slack at Vaux's. 10 till 6.

February 6th
1am snowing. 10 till 6. Friday 2 coppers
Brews. 6 Coppers this week. Trade bad. G.T.

February 11th Wednesday night
Heavy winds. 6 till 2. G.T.

February 14th
5th round Cup Tie. Sunderland beat Sheffield United 2-1 after hard game. It was a grand day for football. Record for the ground, £4,069 gate money. 63,000 people present. 6 till 2. Snowing Saturday night after fine day.

17th Feb 1931
Edis Lonard started at Ryhope Pit, 16 years age, 1931

SS *Hallmoor* ashore at Seaham Harbour. Seen it Feb 18th 1931. 2 till 10.

Ballot – Vaux's Welfare Club. G. Thompson 209 votes out of a possible 233. 1931

Feb 23 1931
Mrs Shilleto dies, oldest woman in Sunderland. 103 years old.

Tuesday Feb 24th
River Wear. 3 men drowned under Wearmouth Bridge. Run down by a steamer. Age 26, 25, 22, all three men married.

Feb 28th 1931
Sunderland played Exeter City, 6th Round English Cup.
In sunshine, 5 hours later there was a snowstorm.
Over 51,000 at football match, score 1-1. Replay Sunderland 4 Exeter 2. 10 till 6.

Sunday March 1st
Snowing.

March 7th 1931
Heavy fall of snow. Sunderland beat Wednesday 5-1.
6 till 2. Snowing.

March 8th and 9th
Snowing. Monday 1 till 5.

March 10th 1931
Mr Rouse was hanged for the motor murder. 2 till 10.

March 14th
Prince of Wales opened British Exhibition in America. 2 till 10.

March 14th
Sunderland knocked out of the Cup by Birmingham 2-0. Semi final at Leeds. 2 till 10.

Sunderland Bye Election, Mr Luke Thompson wins, majority 422.

April 18th
4th Annual Dinner held at Drill Hall, Garrison Field. 6 till 2.

April 1931 has been a bad month for rain. West Bromwich Albion wins English Cup, April 25th

George Lenord started at Ryhope Pit, April 1931

April 27th 1931
Census of England taken

3.6.31
May and June. Last week in May holidays, lot of rain. 2 till 10. Solly Joel dies May.

June 7th 1931
Raining 1:30am. Every town in the north shaken by great earthquake.

June 12th 1931
Vaux's Welfare Club beat Echo Sports Club 79-73 at bowls, 79-73, at Barley Mow ground. Won both games. T. Snaith 27, G. Thompson 26, S. Welsh 16, D. Campbell 10. 79-73. 10 till 6.

June 14th Sunday night
Heavy thunder storm and rain.

25-26 June
Very hot days.

26th June 1931
Boy killed, Silksworth Road Bank, knocked down with motor.

June 24 1931
Blue Vision wins Northumberland Plate 11-4. Fine day.

24, 25, 26, 27, 28th June 1931
Very hot days. 28th June very hot.

July 3rd week.
Raining. Atlantic flown twice in a week.

Sat July 18 1931
Storm kills 1,600 pigeons. Weighed down into the Channel by rain.

13th Aug 1931
Washed cooler. Painted it on Sat. Aug 15th. Monday Aug 17th painted under cooler. All done red green.

Aug 17th 1931
Rained all day. (Terrible month for rain)

Monday 24th 1931
Final Vaux Bowls. T. Nebist [Nesbit], A. Barret. Barret wins.

Wed Aug 19th 1931
The German Zeppelin flies over Roker.

Wed Aug 19th 1931
Tun Room and Square Room windows painted green, half day, G. Henderson, N. Packer.

Wed Aug 19th 1931
Started to paint Tun Room ceiling, F. Potts under 13-14 tuns. Terrible 1 week. 10 till 6.

Wed Aug 19th 1931
Terrible day for rain. 2 till 10.

Wed Aug 20th
Fire [at] Garage in Brougham St. Fine day.

Friday 21st Aug 1931
Gracie Evelyn Thompson goes to school 1931

Aug 24th 1931.
Ulcers in the throat. G. Thompson 1931

Sept.
Sore throat, Gracie off school, Sept 3rd. Raining Sept 4th 1931

Monday Aug 31st 1931
Tuns painted round. One day, 4 men.

Saturday 3rd Sept. 1931
Square Room stairs painted brown. F. Potts 2 till 10.
1931

Monday 7th 1931
All Squares painted round. All finished. 1 day, 4 men.

Cabin painted out Sept 8th 1931. Lab painted out Sept. 9th.
Potts Cabin 10 till 6. Packer Lab 7 till 5.

Sept 14th 1931
Hop Back Room all painted out.

Sept 21st 1931
Gracie goes to school after fortnight sickness. Trouble ear and throat.

Oct 15th 1931
R. Pipe died. Buried Oct 20th 1931

Oct 24th 1931
Springboks Rugby Team South Africans visit Roker Park, 41-0.

Oct 24th 1931
Snowing. Cold night. Vaux's Welfare 4, St Mary's 3.

Oct 27th 1931
General Election. Nation's Victory for Nation's Government. 491 Majority.

Oct 29th 1931
Presentation of prizes, Vaux's Welfare, Rose and Crown.

Nov 3rd 1931
Midnight heavy winds, lot of damage done.

Christmas Day
4 hrs each, G. Henderson, T. Smith, Parkin, G. Thompson 10 till 6.

New Year Eve
G.T. 10 till 6. F. Potts 10-2. J. Parkin 6 till 10, 4 hours.

Very fine weather during holidays

Jan 6th 1932
Gracie Evelyn Thompson party, Low Room Church Hall.

January 23rd 1932
Sunderland played Stoke in 4th round English Cup, 1-1.

January 22nd 1932
Marion Phillips dies, Labour Candidate for Sunderland.

Sunderland played Stoke at Stoke. Score 1-1 after extra time.

January 29th 1932
T. Booker dies, 1 year retired, 48 years'service.

Feb 2nd 1932
Thomas Booker buried.

Feb 1st 1932
English Cup. Sunderland lost to Stoke 2-1 at Manchester, 3rd replay.

Feb 9th 1932

Heavy wind, snow, rain, sleet. 1 Copper Wed. 10-6.

Feb 10th 1932
Edgar Wallace dies Famous writer. 10-6.

Feb 11th 1932
Raining morning 7am after a cold night. 10-6.

Feb 12th
5 Brewings. Trade very bad, total time 37 hours. 10-6.

Monday Feb 8th 1932
B. Forster went into hospital. Raining.

Feb 12th
Damp weather. 10 till 6

Saturday
Vaux's played Bethal United, 3rd round, Blind Institute, but lost, score 3-0.

Feb 27th 1932
Avenue Theatre closes.

March 22nd 23rd 1932
Raining.

March 28th 1932, Easter Monday
Regal Picture House in Holmside open. The Mayor opened it. Gracie Evelyn Thompson was there, age 5½ years old, with father and mother. Fine day.

March 31st 1932
Yeast Room painted. 4 brewings. G.T. 7 till 5. F.P. 11 till 8. G.H. 7 till 5. J.P. 7 till 5. J. Parkin finished top end, 1 day, night shift.

April Sat 16th 1932
Clocks put forward.

Sat April 30th
Bowling season starts.

May 11th 1932
Andrew Jobling died. Buried Whit Monday.

21st May 1932
Miss Earhart first woman to fly Atlantic alone, 16 hours.

Sat May 21st 1932
Raining all day. Heavy rain. Also Sunday 22nd.

May 22nd 1932
Double time finished at Vaux's. F. Potts. G. Thompson. J. Parkin. T. Nebist [Nesbit].

Terrible fortnight, last 2 weeks in May for rain. Floods all over country, 1932.

July 1st 1932
Binns fire, out all night. 2 till 10.

Mr Stephenson, brewer, came from Scotland. July last 2 weeks, 2 weeks Aug 1932.

July 1932
Mr Stephenson came from Lorimer Clarks' Brewery, Scotland.

July 1932
Mr Acthinson [Atkinson] went away for month holiday.

Aug 3rd 1932
Fine day. Gracie at Sea Lane. Warm day.

Aug 18th 1932
Hottest night in London. T. Smith cut his eye, Aug 16th.

Aug 19th 1932
British airman flew from Ireland to New York, Mr Mollison.

Aug 1932
Good month at Vaux's Brewery. Very hot month.

Aug 22th 1932

E.S. Thompson starts holiday. Brewery Monday 3 Coppers, N.E.B. Heavy week.

Aug 20th 1932
Sat night. Terrible thunder storms. 10 till 6.

Aug 27 1932
Football season opened, Sunderland v Manchester 3-2. Very hot weather.

Sept 16th 1932
H.M.S *Valiant* arrives at Roker.

Oct 7th1932
Edie Lonard joins the Army, age 18th.

Nov 14th 1932
Tomas Naisbet dies, age 29 years

Collected £2.8.0. 15 shillings wreath. Remainder to his sister.

Nov 1932
Mr Kidd comes from Lorimer Clarks', Scotland.

Dec 1932
Yeast Room painted.

13 January 1933
Old cooler taken out from Vaux Brewery. 10 till 6.

January 14th 1933
Sunderland beat Hull City 2-0 in Cup tie.

Feb 17th 1933
New cooler used for first time. New motor pump used Feb 17th. Snowing all night.

4 coppers 9,10,11,12 Tuns. J. Parkin 6-2. G. Thompson 2-10. F. Potts 10 till 6.

Feb 18th 1933
Sunderland played Blackpool. Terrible day for snow.

Feb 22nd 1933
Snowing. 10 till 6. Sunderland beat Leeds 3-2. Heavy fall of snow.

Feb 23rd 1933
Heavy fall of snow.

Feb 24th 1933
Midnight. Terrible night. Wind, rain, snow. 10 till 6.

Feb 25th
Heavy winds. Sunderland 1 v Sheffield Wednesday 2.
Terrible day.

Feb 26th 1933 Sunday
Terrible day. One of the worst weeks for years. Rain, wind and snow. Very few football matches, all off through the weather.

March 8th 1933
Sunderland V Derby County 0-1, Cup tie at Roker Park. After extra time lost 1-0 after hard game. Record for the ground, 75,120. Gate money £4,565. Fine day.
There was 20,000 who could not get in. Gates shut at 2pm.
What a crowd. Ramage scored for Derby after extra time.

March 18th
Scotland beat England 3-0 Rugby.

July 5th
Very hot weather, June & July 1933.

July 19th 1933
Terrible thunder storm. Terrible downpour. St Mary's School children's school treat. They were soaked to the skin.

July 26th 1933
Hottest day this year. 78 [degrees Farenheit]. 84 in London.

July 26th 1933

W.S. Sanderson offered £4,000 pounds for a picture what cost 10 shillings, 1933.

July 26th 1933
I think this year has been the hottest summer we have had for a number of years, G.T.

July 26th 1933
F. Potts 6 till 2. G. Thompson 2 till 10. J. Parkin 10 till 6.

Sept 19th 1933
5 Coppers. Each copper used.
J. Parkin 2 till 10. F. Potts 10 till 6. G. Thompson 7 till 5.
E.J.T. holiday.
2 PA. 2 IPA. 1 PAS. 4,9,10,11,12 Tuns. Warm day.

Sept 24th 1933
Last week September, HMS *Malaya* arrives for 4 days at Roker.

1933 Dec
Square Room finished painted. Bottom floor January 1934.

End Dec 1933
Mr Hood left Vaux's. Heavy fogs.

1934 Feb 7th
No brewing. Wind terrible. Heavy rain 1:45. One of the worst I have heard of. 10 till 6.

Feb 7th 1934
Tun Room ceiling cleaned.

Feb 6th 1934
Meeting Charities Committee.

Feb 26th 1934
Fall of snow.

Elton won Lincoln 100-1. Gregalach won 100-1. Grand National 1929.

February 2nd 1929

The old Wearmouth Bridge was closed. Sunderland played Portsmouth at Roker Park and won 5-0. The Mayor and members of the Town Council went across for the last time in two tramcars at 9-45. All traffic was now done on the new bridge. The old bridge was 133 years old. 275049. T310. G. Thompson, 8 Crow St, Sunderland

Thousands of deaths in February caused through Influenza. Coldest month for 34 years. Worst month February for deaths.

Sunday Feb 17 1929
One of the worst weeks we have ever had for frost was in February 1929. Everything was frozen, water was very scarce, nearly all pipes were frozen, number of people killed with house boilers bursting. G. Thompson.

16th, 17th Feb 1930
Snowing again. G. Thompson.