



DURHAM
AT **WAR**



DIARY OF WILLIAM ROBERTS

18/944 Private William Roberts

'B' Company, 18th Battalion Durham Light Infantry

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2 December 1915

Expecting to leave here by special train for Durham. We made out passes from 6pm tonight till mid night Sunday. Having drawn new rifles yesterday, we tested them this morning, firing 5 rounds grouping at 200 yds and 5 rounds application at 200 yds. In the grouping I scored all 8 in group and in application 1 inner 2 naggi[?] 2 outer.

About 12 noon we were told all leave had been stopped and that instead of going to France we were going to Egypt. I had to give our gas helmets in. In the afternoon the battalion was inspected by Lord Durham and in his speech he said that instead of the working parties in the County of Durham making us garments to keep out the cold they now would have to give us something to protect us from the sun.

3 December 1915

A wet morning. Afternoon I was marking in the buttes, at night I drew a waterproof sheet. I wonder if we leave tomorrow or not.

4 December 1915

Still raining, mud everywhere. Inspected in the dining hall by the Brigadier. While we were having tea Colonel Burdon came in and bid us farewell in his speech.

Sunday 5 December 1915

Fine morning turned in wet later. 11am had a short service in YMCA.

6 December 1915

Entrained at Denton at 5.30am for Liverpool. We passed by Oxford. From the carriage window I could see the large steeples of the city and then on to Birmingham which looked just the opposite, this time being a mass of dirty buildings. We arrived at Liverpool about 3pm and went on board the Empress of Britain and were packed tightly into what I thought was only the dining room. Asking where we had to sleep I was told a hammock had to be slung to the low roof for sleeping purposes. Can



anyone imagine a stuffy dark room with men struggling to fix hammocks. I can hardly describe it, but I rigged mine

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up somehow and was soon asleep.

7 December 1915

Arising early I found those who could not find room to hang a hammock, had been sleeping on deck or under the table. We are packed like sardines, can hardly move about down here. About 10am we moved off. We had a parade to put life belts where we can easily get at them. It is lovely standing on deck, as we are going out and watching the passing boats. I saw a cruiser and destroyer, perhaps they are our escort or part of it. After dinner I turned sea sick and ill.

Tuesday 7 to Friday 10 December 1915

Have been too ill to write. Hardly had strength to walk about and have eaten nothing but a mouthful of bread and a few dry biscuits. I have been 2 days without a wash. How terrible it is down below, without the fresh air and I have been too ill to push through the crowded passages to get it. I will never forget these

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three days how sick and helpless I have been.

11 December 1915

The sea is quite calm to-day and the sun is shining like on a spring day in England. I am feeling a lot better to-day. We have been ordered to sleep on deck as we are now entering dangerous waters. Tonight from the starboard side can be seen the African coast and lights which seem to come from some town and from the port side can be seen the lights of Gibraltar and dimly we can see the large rock. The strong search light from the rock swept us over once or twice as we steamed through the straits. Laying down on deck I was soon asleep.



12 December 1915

What a crowd there is always on deck. I can hardly find room to sit down. We have had a short service on deck this morning. I slept on deck again at night.

13 December 1915

The day spent as usual with the life belt parade at 10am. Rest of day spent lying about.

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14 December 1915

During last night we ran into a French vessel which was returning from Salonica (after landing troops she was sunk). But all the crew but two are safe on board here. This afternoon we came in sight of Malta and slowing down opposite the harbour waiting for the pilot I had a fine view of Valetta which seemed to be of the same clean, light stone of the rock on which it was built. The view I looked upon seemed to be more like a group of miniature castles than anything else. The pilot coming on board we moved slowly into the harbour. Looking overboard I noticed the water was of a bright green colour. Turning a corner I beheld one of the sights of my life. There were boats of every description. I saw several French battleships and large hospital ships. As we moved slowly along we were followed by naked lads in small

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boats on the lookout for coppers. Passing a French man of war, we were greeted by their band playing Tipperary. Singing altogether we returned their greeting with their national anthem. All along the harbour sides the buildings were all of the same clean, light stone. Coming to rest, I went down to tea. After the meal again going on deck I found the lights all lit. How much pleasanter it was than stumbling about in the dark, as we had been doing the night before. The harbour was a lovely sight, lit up with the numerous lights of ships, and we had two bands playing on deck which made it seem more like a fairy land than a splendid British harbour.



15 December 1915

Started coaling. The Maltese men carrying the coal are like a flock of monkeys, shouting and gesticulating wildly. They come in little boats and pick scraps of fat meat out of the water, that we throw overboard, when not engaged in carrying passengers on board.

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16 December 1915

We do not get near sufficient food, and when on orderly duty we are packed in the narrow passage for about an hour before we can get near the cook house. The canteen and the barbers shop have got a new stock in here at Malta. The men are waiting in long lines to be served and have to pay about twice the value for chocolate, but what can be done to satisfy our hunger. There are still several French battle ships in the harbour.

17 December 1915

Left the harbour about 7am. The weather is sunny and the sea calm. I slept on deck.

18 December 1915

A calm day. This afternoon inoculated again, making the second time since coming on board. We passed an empty boat, drifting about. Our boat slowed down as if she was going to pick it up, but did not. I heard someone say it may have been a ruse of some hostile craft to get us to slow down, and thus

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making us an easy mark for a torpedo. I did not pay much attention to the remark but laying down on deck I was soon startled at hearing the report of our own gun at the stern. As I was hurrying to the side she fired again, soon it was known a submarine was chasing us, and in the trail of our ship I could see the water churned up as though some vessel was forcing its way in our wake. That, it was said, was the submarine. Some said it fired a torpedo which passed our stern. We all paraded on



our deck with life belts on. Everybody seemed very calm and very interested. Going over to the port side I saw the white cliffs of some land. I slept on deck.

19 December 1915

Sunny day. A short service on deck. Just after the sun had appeared to sink into the sea like a great ball of fire. We came to a stop off Alexandria until the pilot came on board.

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It was a bright moonlight night and we passed into the harbour between two long breakwaters and anchored inside amongst a lot of large vessels which looked like traders.

20 December 1915

Going on deck the sky was like a scarlet blanket over Alexandria, out of which soon came the sun like the summer sun of England. Large flocks of silver coloured seagulls were screaming round the boat for waste food, and dark skinned Egyptians, harbour police with red helmets on which resembled a flower pot, were rowing lazily round the boat. Some of them had been bribed by the sellers of fruit, who were waiting in little boats, a favourable opportunity of sending it up to us by means of a basket and rope, and those police who were bribed kept watch at the end of our boat for them. About 4.30 we took to the sea.

21 December 1915

This morning we steamed into

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Port Said, along the right entrance to the harbour, where large houses and hotels with strange looking trees in the gardens. The harbour was well stocked with large boats and a few French battle ships. A band on the deck of one greeted us with Tipperary twice a day. I have had the pleasure of seeing a water plane descending upon the water near our boat and skimming along the harbour.



22 December 1915

Disembarked this morning. Pitched our tents on a large stretch of sand near the sea. How different it is among this loose sand from our old camp at Fovant. I had a swim in an inlet of the sea this afternoon. Tonight I had my first walk in Port Said. I was surprised to find such large shops and large open air cafes, with small orchestra playing popular tunes. There were drinking dens all over the place. I had a drink of lovely coffee

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in a French café. Some Indian troops have marched out of the harbour, as though they have just disembarked.

23 December 1915

A fresh wind blowing this morning. It is blowing the sand into our eyes and we have faces like blacks. It is sand everywhere, sand in our huts and sand in our food. This afternoon I had a swim in the sea, at night I went into town. I went into a music hall, the singing was all in French. Had coffee and cakes in a café and two glasses of wine. The tram cars here are very amusing, they run on little metals about 18 inches apart and are drawn by tiny mules. Other ways of travelling I have seen and one which is very funny (but not for the animal) is to see a big native sitting on a donkey which is about the size of a goat, and looks more like a rabbit than anything else. There has been

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several train loads of Indian troops passing through here to-day.

24 December 1915

I went down to the sea with the bathing parade but did not fancy a dip to-day. It is Christmas Eve and from nearly every tent can be heard the singing of carols in a quite peaceful way. I went to bed early, but got up for a drink of wine from a bottle which Jimmy (Sandy) had brought in.



25 December 1915

Christmas day. A bright sun shining from a cloudless sky. This morning I had a bath by means of scraping a hole in the sand and laying my waterproof sheet in it, then filling up with water. I got a good wash. 11.30am I went to Holy Communion. Had a swim in the sea this afternoon. Went into the town at night, the place was very lively as most of the soldiers had some wine. The natives who are always pestering you to buy something were easily frightened tonight,

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and picking up their small trays of sweets took to their heels on seeing a crowd of soldiers in a happy mood. There were a lot of French sailors in the town who looked very smart and clean in their blue uniforms with starched collars and cap with a red knob in the centre. There were one or two British tars, who although being rougher dressed than their French comrades, had the stern, bulldog, calm, steady look about them that was lacking in a lot of the French men, who seemed easily excited. Tonight the town was in the hands of the British soldiers who could do about what they liked. I saw some big Australians push through some Egyptian police as though they were but bean stalks.

26 December 1915

Short service on the sands between the tents. The Indians who were here have disappeared somewhere. After dinner I walked down to the inlet from the sea and I was very interested in a native who was fishing there. He had a net which when

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opened out was in the form of a circle, about 5 foot in diameter with the edges loaded with lead. This net he had looped up in one hand and a length of rope which was fastened to it in the other. Wading into the water to where the fish were rising he cast his net which opened out over them and then sank. Then he dragged it ashore containing about 5 fish, and a few small crabs. I had a walk into the town at night and found it the same as a week day, the selling and drinking going on as usual.



27 December 1915

After the usual short parade I did some washing, which soon dried after been hung on the sunny side of our tent. Afternoon I had a swim in the sea, went into the town at night.

28 December 1915

Early in the morning by the light of a fading moon, we took down our tents and packed up ready to move. Going on to the station we got into open waggon, and started off down the single line which for a long way was only on a strip of land with a large stretch of water

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on either side. Passing 2 or 3 small stations on the way, I noticed they were all well-guarded with troops. The line was parallel with a canal and I was surprised when I got to know it was the Suez. I expected to see it much wider than it was. After about an hour's run we came to a station named Kantarah where we got out. Here there were a lot of dark skinned, active little men, not unlike Japanese, they were Gurkhas from India. Crossing the canal by means of a pontoon bridge we pitched our tents on the sands. There are one or two buildings here, but a lot of trenches and dug-outs made with sand bags. After tea which consisted of 2 hard biscuits, my platoon drew 100 rounds each man and went to a line of well-built trenches and sand bag dug-outs. There I relieved a Gurkha sentry at a gate in the trench line. Beyond the trench stretched a flat waste of sand. Although being hot during the day, it is very cold in the night, and I found it difficult to keep warm.

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29 December 1915

Left the trench at daybreak, had breakfast of 3 hard biscuits and dinner of a little bully beef. The ways of transport here are by means of camels, who never seem to feel the weight of the blankets and tents. At night I went into a picket trench in the desert, did about 2 hours' sentry, slept in the trench fully dressed with great coat and two bandoliers of ammunition on. We were facing east with the canal behind us and



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the desert in front of us. I have heard we are on the old caravan route between Egypt and Jerusalem, probably the way Joseph and his brethren came to buy corn in Egypt. I forgot to mention I had a swim in the canal this afternoon.

30 December 1915

At daybreak as a score of Indian Lancers went out into the desert. We returned to camp at night, it is very cold, but through the day it is too hot to walk far. I did not go on night picket as I was drawing rations until dark. The ration party crossed the canal on a raft to the station

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on the other side. What a terrible scramble it was getting the horses on to the raft, as they were frightened of the camels. We loaded a camel with 4 great legs of beef and it was on its feet as though it had nothing on its back. With a little dodging in a tent without a light I missed going on picket.

31 December 1915

Had a swim in the canal. Most of the houses were partly knocked down when the Turks got this far about a year ago. We are well prepared for another attack with trenches and barbed wire all round. At night I went with a picket group about a mile along the canal side, to a position on the bank. Before us stretched a large lake and from our position we could stop any one coming round it. I dug a hole in the sand to sleep in, until my turn came for sentry duty.

1 January 1916

I can hardly describe the lovely day break. The lake in front of our trench reflected the colour from the clouds, and the sky and water seemed to meet together in one beautiful picture of silver, blue,

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and red. About half an hour later the sun rose behind it all. It seemed to rise quickly out of the sand, like a great ball of fire, into a bright red and golden sky. There had been a heavy mist during the night and my blankets and rifle were wet, but I forgot



my discomforts and stood admiring the lovely scene. The Indian Lancers came out of the desert as we returned to camp. I had a swim in the canal this morning. Spent the rest of the day about camp and went to bed early. New Year's day had been a hot sunny day.

2 January 1916

Had a walk along the canal bank. I like to see the boats coming through and watch the natives unloading stones by carrying them in baskets on their shoulders. Anyone not knowing of the canal and standing in the desert would wonder however a large ship had got into the desert. I have stood and watched French cruisers on the sand, and as I could not see the water they just appeared to be floating on the sand.

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I walked past the camp of the Indian Lancers and they were busily engaged grooming their beautiful horses, the coats of which were shining like silk. Spent the rest of the day about the camp.

3 January 1916

A windy day, the sand blowing about got into our eyes and almost choked us, so that the only comfortable place was in the tent. About 5pm I with 3 others went on guard over six prisoners, and also with them I think would be about 99 million fleas. They were in a long shed, 3 at one end and 3 at the other. Two were old men, three fairly young, and one a fine handsome boy about 16. We watched them through the night and I was nearly bitten to pieces by fleas.

4 January 1916

Hearing breakfast time our prisoners roused themselves, from under the straw where they had been laid and I got a better look at them. They were all Arabs except one, the old one seemed more like a Maltese. He had not the spirit of the rest and several times I heard him crying.



The two old men seemed in a jolly mood, one we taught to sing a few lines of a song, and to say good-morning mister. We gave one old chap some of our bread, as it touched our hearts seeing him try to eat the hard biscuits with his bad teeth, and as we only get half a loaf of bread daily we had to buy some for tea. One of the younger men seemed of a better and clever type. I noticed he had better clothes and I saw him bring out a mirror and comb his moustache. I greatly admired the boy with his handsome face and lovely teeth and he returned our glances with a smile.

5 January 1916

Went over to repair a picket trench. The wind which had been blowing rose to a small gale. We had to give up as the sand drove over the desert like a snowstorm. Covering our faces with handkerchief and bent nearly double we returned to camp. Afternoon the sand storm still continues, looking up the desert the driving

sand looks like mist. We have to be continually going out of the tent, to drive our pegs in tighter.

6 January 1916

From 8.30am to 11.30am we had a march up the desert. 5 pm I went out with a picket group. The weather was very cold and a heavy shower of rain fell early in the evening. Jimmy Sandy and I slept together in the bottom of the trench. We had our waterproof sheets on the bottom then put a great coat on them. Then, laying down, we pulled our blankets and the other coat over us, and with a sand bag for a pillow we were fairly comfortable, until the fleas started biting. I spent my last few coppers today.

7 January 1916

Left the trench at day break. Had my hair sheared off this morning for the second time since being in the army.



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8 January 1916

Raining this morning, with a fine afternoon. This is an awful place for fleas. I think all of us are making a good home for a family. Bob Evans was searching his shirt today, with the tent mallet in his hand

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and a determined expression on his face. Harold Brown said he had a good lead, as he had just killed 28 from his clothes this morning. I am a keen follower and lover of bird life and here I find the place of the cheeky little sparrow is filled by the common wagtail, which are here in large numbers, and like the sparrows they are growing bold and come quite near the tents. There are a few sparrows here, which are slightly prettier than those of England.

9 January 1916

Hot sunny day back again. We had a short service, parade this afternoon. Our mail arrived which caused great excitement. I received 3 letters. Jimmy Sandy danced a war dance round the rifles, as he had received a letter with a kiss in it. The letter I received from home was the fourth they had written. We think our first mail went down with the Persia, so I expect the other 3 went down with her.

10 January 1916

On repairing the trenches this morning. I did not do much as the sun was

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so hot. Went on picket at night. Slept in the trench fully dressed.

11 January 1916

Left picket trench at day break, and after the parade I had a swim in a salt water lake near the camp. Sports were held here this afternoon. I think the best events were provided by the Mysore Lancers. The tall, slim, wiry men from India, dressed in khaki breeches with long green coats, and mounted on beautiful horses with coats like silk, were admired by everyone. After, a tent pegging competition in which they were very skilful, but what I admired most was the speed of the horses. They gave



an exhibition of horsemanship by galloping at a terrific speed and picking a lance up of the ground and sticking a peg a short way further on. I think the best of all was what they call the musical ride. As the band started playing, they trotted into the ring, a lovely sight, with their lances held erect. Keeping perfect time to the band they went through

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movements similar to the set dances seen in our ball-rooms and at about the conclusion of the dance, they lined up in 2 lines, about 40 yds apart, and as the bugle sounded the charge, they dashed at each other at a terrific pace. From the spectators' point of view, it seemed as though they could not help but crash into one another, but just before joining they turned outwards and pulled up, facing at right angles the way they had charged.

12 January 1916

Repairing trenches.

13 January 1916

A route march into the desert, back for dinner.

14 January 1916

A parade from 8 till 12am. Went to bed early as I felt ill.

15 January 1916

Saw a flock of flamingos fly over – still feel ill so went to see doctor and he sent me into the hospital, a little straw shed near the camp. I think it is a chill I have got.

16 January 1916

Feel a good bit better, received another letter from home. A warm, sunny day.

17 January 1916

Still improving, out a good bit today. This



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last few days have been getting poor food. For breakfast dry bread and bully beef, stew for dinner and dry bread and 6 dates for tea.

18 January 1916

Came out of hospital this morning. Rations for day - usual pound of bread with bully beef and dates and stew. The first parcel post reached here.

19 January 1916

About better but went on sick list. Washed any dirty clothes this morning. Rations - 6 biscuits, 12 ozs of tinned beef, rice for dinner.

20 January 1916

Better again. On unloading and carrying rails for the light railway into the desert at the canal side. Fine day. Received a letter from home.

21 January 1916

Loading waggons at the canal side with bags of chips. Then went on picket at 5pm. It was a bright moonlight night.

22 January 1916

Came off picket. This afternoon I was carrying wood from the canal up the bank side. The weather was very warm and the scene was very busy. A group gang of Arabs were unloading stones from barges, carrying

the large stones in baskets on their shoulders. Another gang were carrying barbed wire up the bank. We were carrying wood and heavy transport waggons were being loaded with hay. A small steamer came to the landing with large barge of hay and food stuff. About 30 Arabs came to unload, being hurried along by their overseer, who lashed them with the whips. The pontoon bridge was across the blue water of the canal all the afternoon and a constant stream of traffic kept crossing, consisting



of heavy transport waggons, light carts of the Indian transport, drawn by tiny mules, and large camels carrying heavy loads. A French cruiser was at anchor lower down the canal and a few swimmers splashed about. It all made a lovely picture, one not easy to explain but greatly to be admired.

23 January 1916

Took our tents down at 5am and moved off into the desert, tents and blankets following on the backs of camels.

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We marched for about 4 hours, a terrible march in full kit over loose sand with a hot sun shining, our destination about 7 miles from the Suez. We are surrounded by the desert. Tired out we were in bed about 6pm. Rations 1lb bread, a small piece bully beef and a few dates.

24 January 1916

Our water comes up on the backs of camels, we were bringing the telephone wire which connects us with some other camp. At 6pm went on picket duty in a valley in the desert. The early part of the night was fine but dark clouds rolled up and it started to rain and a very cold wind arose. Most of us found it impossible to sleep on account of the great cold and driving rain. We were relieved by a party of Mysore Lancers about 5am and, returning to camp, found our tent had blown down during the night.

25 January 1916

A cold wind and rain this morning.

26 January 1916

A parade from 9 to 11. Then in the afternoon a short route march. I received a [parcel],



we got a taste of good old English cake which made us lick our lips and our eyes sparkled, and I think most of us were thinking of home, where we are not limited to a pound of bread a day, and often sour at that. Anyway I have a Christmas pudding on the way somewhere, which is long being looked forward to and talked about. Dismissed off guard at 5pm.

30 January 1916

A hot day, we had no parade. A large post arrived, but I received no letters and was very disappointed. We draw about a small pail full of water which has to serve our tent of 11 men for 2 days, for washing purposes. The water has a nasty smell for the second morning and sometimes I never wash at all that day. Today extra water came up for bathing purposes. Our company was divided up into groups of 6 men and each group drew a small pail of water and emptying it into a ground sheet we proceeded to wash all round like little pigs round a trough.

31 January 1916

Went out with a small party to meet the camels with our water, and escort them back to camp. It was a hot, sunny day and it had brought the sand lizards out of their holes and they were basking in the sun, but dashed back to their holes at a great speed on sighting us. We found two pretty black and white beetles which we caught. We met the camels and Bob Evans, by giving a few cigarettes to one of the native drivers, got permission to have a ride. On the camel being brought to its knees he climbed on its back but being a novice at camel riding he came flying over the animal's head as it rose on its hind legs. On reaching the camp the Arabs made a rush and picked up pieces of our meat, which was burning among other rubbish, which they greedily ate. Received a letter from home and Frances.

1 February 1916

Trench digging, 5pm went on picket. At midnight I went out with two others to patrol the picket trenches round the camp. One can easily get lost amongst



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the cliffs and ridges of the desert, in the darkness, it was almost impossible to travel round the camp. After tramping about 1½ hours and never being challenged by a picket, we were given up for lost, when we suddenly found we had come back to the point from which we started. Trusting that the picket sentry would not get excited at seeing three men approaching his post and fire before challenging us, we started off again. This time we did better for we tumbled across a group, and being directed by them we managed to go round in 2½ hours, which in the day time would only take about 20 minutes.

2 February 1916

Left picket about 7am and went to the trenches. There we were helping the Royal Engineers (RE) to fasten the trench sides up with hurdles.

3 February 1916

Building the trenches, we are getting better rations now having bacon for breakfast and jam for tea.

4 February 1916

Building trenches. I received 2 parcels from home, containing Christmas cake and pudding.

Set building trenches, same hours as before. At 6pm on an outlying sentry group. It was pouring with rain till well past mid-night. Our coats and blankets about wet through.

6 February 1916

7am returned back to camp. The sun is shining on our blankets so will soon be dry. Went trench building. Same as a week day. The chaplain came and held a short service on the sand, about 3.30pm and those who wished to go left the trenches at



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3. It is a lovely starlight night and a new moon is lying on its back, with Jupiter and Venus shining brightly near it. What enjoyment could be got out of such a night as this in old England, but here we are, 12 of us sitting in a stuffy tent, singing hymns before going to bed. Which will be soon, as lights out is at 8.30pm and all talking has to cease at once. I received 2 letters from home and one from Francie.

7 February 1916

Building trenches till 4pm.

8 February 1916

Building trenches till 4pm.

9 February 1916

Building trenches at 5pm. Went on picket, had a good night's sleep in a low dug out as I was not on

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duty during the night.

10 February 1916

Came off picket about 7am, then building trenches from 9 to 4. They are getting somewhat in order now, the sides being held up by bundles of basket work at the bottom, then 5 rows of sand bags.

11 February 1916

Building trenches as usual.

12 February 1916

My birthday. A thought for the year.

I came to Jesus and I drank

Of that life giving stream

My thirst was quenched my soul revived



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And now I live in him
Be thou at my right hand
Then can I never fail
Uphold thou me and I shall stand
Fight and I must prevail

13 February 1916

Short service on the sand, then Holy Communion. After dinner I had a bath by means of the ground sheet method. 6pm went on outlying sentry group, did 4 hours' guard. It was a bright moonlight night and fairly warm.

14 February 1916

Trenching till 4pm. Received 2 letters, one from home and one from Mrs Jenkins.

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15 February 1916

Trenching.

16 February 1916

Went out to meet the camels which bring our food and guide them to camp. Got back about 1.30pm, rest of day off duty.

17 February 1916

Platoon orderly. Went on picket, slept all night in dug out.

18 February 1916

Came back to camp at dawn, then went trenching till 4pm. To-day I got 3 parcels, one from home, one from mother and one from Aunt Alice. What a treat cake is to us after a bread and jam tea.



19 February 1916

Trenching till 12pm.

20 February 1916

A short service after dinner.

21 February 1916

Trenching till 3pm. Went on sentry group at 6, did the usual 4 hours' guard.

22 February 1916

Came off sentry at 7am. Then we paraded at 8.30 to move to another position, leaving our tents behind us. Saying good-bye to point 108 we started out on an 8 mile march back to Kantara. Soon after leaving camp we passed the York and Lancs (Y&L) coming up to take our place. We came at a good pace, considering the hot sun, and reaching Kantara about 1pm we found it a much busier place than when we left it. There were a great

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number of horses tethered about the place and also there were aeroplane sheds there. We stayed there until 5pm, then we marched down to the Suez. After much crushing and packing we were got on board a barge and a small tug took us northwards for about 3½ miles and landed us at a place called Spit Post where C Company were camped. A and B Company had been alone at Point 108. Being put in a tent I was soon asleep, tired out.

23 February 1916

The camp is on the east bank of the canal, near us is a large lake and a camp of Arab workers, surrounded by barbed wire. The sand here is of a bluish colour and looks very dirty. I enjoyed a swim in the canal this morning. This afternoon we marched about 3½ miles into the desert, to dig a trench for the laying of a water pipe. We passed several gangs of Arabs, closely guarded, making a road. The dirty Arabs are often seen searching their clothes for lice.



24 February 1916

Went up to lay the water pipe. Left camp

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at 8am and returned at 4. The march would be nearly 4 miles out, and as it was a hot day we suffered from the march. But I had a swim on returning and it refreshed me greatly.

25 February 1916

Went up to dig trench for water pipe. 3 miles' march here is a good day's work without digging. I had an enjoyable swim in the canal on returning.

26 February 1916

9-11 Company parade. I had a swim in the canal this afternoon. After tea had a try at fishing in the canal but without success. The water was calm and blue and hundreds of fish were splashing about. As the darkness fell a large boat came down with a powerful searchlight and to see the fish jumping in the rays looked as though someone was tossing silver plates into the water. At the canal side it was quiet and peaceful, but from the camp above, inhabited by the Arabs, came the sound of their peculiar song which sounded nothing more to one than La da da repeated over and

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over again. We received orders tonight to move off to Hill 58 at 8am next day.

27 February 1916

More rumours about moving to France shortly. Washed my shirt this morning. Short service after dinner. Received a parcel from home.

28 February 1916

A parade from 8 to 11 and from 2 till 3 I had swim in the canal.



29 February 1916

Moved to Kantara this morning. Having some rubbish to dispose of I went over to the incinerator which is near the barbed wire fence which runs round the Arabs' camp. There were a crowd of our chaps there and they were amusing themselves by throwing scraps of bread and clothing over to the Arabs who fought and scrambled like a pack of wolves. One large Arab received a crust of bread full in the face. But he did not go away. One of our chaps came up with a pair of old trousers, at the sight of which the Arabs danced wildly. As the pants were thrown over the big Arab and another big chap grabbed a leg each and fought like two dogs. The big Arab, by

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punching the other in the face a few times at last got the trousers and proceeded to put them on and danced about like a little child, watched with envy by the others. We left Spit about 10.30am and marched to Kantara, about 4 miles. Arriving there I was named for guard over the iron rations by the canal side. There were several large vessels passed during the night. When not on duty, I slept with a guard of Scottish Borderers in a dugout.

1 March 1916

Early this morning a gang of Arabs came to unload a barge of wood near the boxes I was guarding. One of them, anxious to learn a few words of English, came up to me, and we carried on a conversation, by him pointing to his boots and then I said 'boots' and he repeated it after me, and so on, pointing to different objects. He learned very quickly and was very interested. About 9am we were relieved, and going up to camp with my pack I had a swim in a salt water lake near[by].

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2 March 1916

Good-bye Kantara. We left from the station in open trucks about 9am to Port Said and there went into tents on our old camping ground. 2pm bathing parade, marched through the town to the sea and there enjoyed a splendid bathe. Expect to leave here in a few days' time for France.



3 March 1916

Parade from 8 to 11 then bathing parade in the sea at 2pm. I went into the town at night, had a good feed of fried eggs.

4 March 1916

Gave helmet in, now wearing service caps. After dinner I started out to look round the Arab town, which to us is out of bounds, and so I had to keep a close look out for Military Police (MP) who keep a close watch on the place. I expected to see a dirty place, but the narrow streets and little houses were much worse than I expected to see. My Granny once built a hen house of old pieces of wood, and it I think was much superior to some of the hovels the Arabs were living in along with goats, hens

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and donkeys. I had a quick look round and once had to run, on seeing an MP. Seeing an Arab fair in progress in an enclosure I ventured in and there the Arabs were buying sugar and lace and livestock, rabbits, fowls etc. As my mate and I were the only soldiers there, and at times the Arabs seemed to close in round us, we thought it was the wisest course to clear out. We knew quite well what would happen if we stayed there till dark. So going up into the European part of the town we had tea of fried eggs, then paid a visit to a music hall.

5 March 1916

Packed up and embarked on the Ivernia lying in the harbour. On the Empress of Britain I had only a hammock to sleep in, in a stuffy crowded room, but this time have one of the little beds, arranged in lines on line about half way up the room. The bed proved very comfortable and warm, after sleeping on the ground in our tent. We received much better food than on the Empress of Britain.

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6 March 1916

When I woke up I found we were under way. The sea is calm and the boat very steady. I saw several flying fish which looked like large dragonflies with their wings



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coloured a slight red. We paraded with life belts at 10am and spent the rest of the day lying about or reading.

7 March 1916

At sea. It is a very warm day, and a shady place on deck is much sought after. The sea is a lovely blue and calm, and the small waves breaking into spray look to me like a field of lambs at play. I am enjoying this voyage and also my bed after lying on the hard ground. I sleep well and sound at night.

8 March 1916

The sea calm, but weather slightly colder. We are being well fed, porridge and coffee for breakfast, beef, vegetables and soup for dinner, stewed fruit for tea.

9 March 1916

Early this morning stopped outside Malta, but did not enter the harbour. The wind rose and the sea became rough at times. The

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waves broke right over the bow and several chaps were wet. The rocking of the ship soon made one sea-sick and the wind was very cold. I spent most of the day in bed.

10 March 1916

The sea a lot calmer, feel a lot better. This afternoon we passed close to the island of Sardinia. We could see distinctly small white cottages on the red rocks.

11 March 1916

This morning reached Marseilles. Sailed past some large rocks on which I saw several guns. These rocks I discovered were at the entrance to the harbour. Passing them we entered the beautiful harbour at each side of which were large houses and trees. As I was orderly I had to go down to see to the dinner, much to my annoyance and so did not see all of the lovely scene. Going on deck after dinner I found we were at rest near the dock side. Looking down on to the quay I got my first glance of French soldiers in their blue coats and red trousers.



There were a lot of large boats at anchor near. It is a pouring wet day, the first wet day I have seen for a long time. We disembarked about 10pm to night and entrained in cattle trucks, about 30 men to a truck. Pickles, our Sergt Major, had been having a little sup too much to drink, and when we had got more or less comfortably set down on the truck bottom, he started to tell us a yarn which the Quarter Master had told us. At the conclusion of his story, which was nothing much, only the drink had made him talky, he said, 'It's true, the Quarter Master would tell you the same if he was here'. Which remark brought forth a loud laugh as the Quarter Master was in the same truck, and unknown to Pickles was listening to the story. After singing and shouting a while we settled down to try and get some sleep. About 2pm I was wakened up by the bumping and shaking of the truck as we started on our journey.

12 March 1916

Last Sunday we were in Egypt,

today we are in France, being jolted along northward in a cattle truck. All today we have been in the lovely valley of the Rhine [Rhône] and I think I can say the scenery I have seen to-day is the prettiest I have ever seen. The line runs parallel with the Rhine [Rhône], and on each bank vines are growing, like we in England grow raspberries. The fertile valley was bound on each side by large hills and rocks of various colours from red to brown and black and shrubs were growing in them like heather. Here and there between the pretty villages, houses were built on the hillside, some seemed to be built in the hills themselves. Bridges spanned the river at the villages and at several stood old castles. Several times I noticed huge mountains capped with snow behind the brown hills in the foreground which, with the river slightly flooded, formed the most beautiful scenery I had ever seen. Some of the stations I noticed on the way were as follows, Arles,



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Turascon, Avignon, Orange, Valance, Lyon, then darkness fell. The train stopped a few minutes at Lyon and in the street below a crowd soon collected shouting (Souvenir) and scrambling for buttons and badges which we threw to them. At all the places we passed the people came out and waved to us. The pretty girls threw us kisses, but of young men there did not seem any.

13 March 1916

Slept fairly well in spite of the jolting of our truck. We have left the beautiful Rhone valley and now the scenery is like that of England, cultivated land but hedges are scarce. I noticed mistletoe growing on trees in large bunches, which just looked like crows' nests. On several of the stations we passed were French soldiers in their smart blue uniforms, and by the side of streams I saw a board on which the women wash clothes. I noticed a lot of these boards, and saw women kneeling down washing clothes. At some of the stations we received hot rum.

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Darkness fell for the second day that we have been in the train, and we removing our boots settled down in the truck to sleep. The journey had been very enjoyable and interesting although it might have been more comfortable.

14 March 1916

Slept fairly well during the night although the truck jolted terribly. Were called out about 4am as we had reached our destination. After a journey lasting 54 hours, we marched to a little village about 7 miles from the station. We were there put into billets. The billet I was put into with about 14 more men, was in a farmyard. It is a dirty little place, built of laths and lime, with many holes in the walls and I should think it has been used as a hen house. I slept fairly well although felt the cold a good bit.

15 March 1916

The village is called Citerne. 10am battalion route march till 1. The hard road soon tires us out after the soft sand of Egypt.



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16 March 1916

Physical drill in the morning in the main

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street, much to the amusement of the villagers, then company drill till 12.

17 March 1916

9 to 12 parade. We are not allowed to go far away and must be in by 8pm.

18 March 1916

Route march from 9 to 1.

19 March 1916

Short church parade. Had a pass till 8pm so went to the village of Hallencourt.

20 March 1916

Parade from 9 to 12 then a short route march in the afternoon.

21 March 1916

Similar to yesterday.

22 March 1916

Short route march.

23 March 1916

Practice in wearing gas helmets.

24 March 1916

On waking up we found the ground covered with snow, the first snow we have seen this winter. I think how just a few weeks ago I was grumbling about the heat in Egypt and looking eagerly for the bathing parade. Snowing most of the day so we had no parade. Spent the night till lights out in the farm house singing and drinking coffee.



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25 March 1916

Good-bye Citerne. Marched off at 9am with full pack. The following are a list of the articles I carried. Pack, haversack, water bottle, entrenching tool, bayonet, rifle, 120 rounds of

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ammunition, great coat, 2 gas helmets, goggles for weeping gas, one shirt, 2 pairs of pants, several pairs of socks, razor, shaving soap, 2 towels, writing pad, diary, several handkerchiefs, 1 tin bully beef, 1 tin jam and several small things. The march was over dirty roads through cultivated fields. The weight we carried made our shoulders sore. A few men had to give up. About 1pm we arrived at a large village named Longpres after a march of 9 miles. There we were put in billets, I with 9 other men got a champion billet in a house. We got 2 rooms, 5 in each room. A Belgian family were living in the house and they made us very welcome. There were 2 girls, one grown up who could speak English fairly well, and a very pretty girl about 12 years of age. We sat in the kitchen by the stove till bed time. Slept well on the hard floor.

26 March 1916

Left Longpres about 8am in pouring rain. We got wet through but it faired up in the afternoon, and our clothes soon got dry. It was a terrible march and the West Yorks were

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marching in front of us and they seemed to be suffering a lot. I believe about 400 men fell out of their battalion. I am very pleased to say a very few Durhams fell out although most of us were about done towards the end of the march. We reached the village of Vignacourt at 2pm and there the Yorks were billeted for the night and we marched about 4 miles further on to the village of Flesselles where we were billeted for the night. We had marched 15 miles and I was about dropping, my legs were in good condition but my shoulders hurt terrible from the weight of the pack. The billet I was in was a straw loft in the farm yard. Feeling cold I went to a café for a drink of



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liquor and leaving there went into the farm house of our billet, and sat there beside the stove drinking cider. Another lad who was there who could speak French, sat talking to the old lady and she told him her son was in the fighting line, and the army had taken

Page 49

her only horse. She also said there had only been 5 Germans in that village. I should have been in the billet by 8pm but I sat in the kitchen till past 9 so that when I made my way to the loft I found all lights out, and most of the chaps asleep. Opening the door someone who was awake lit a candle for me, and I started to climb up the ladder to the loft. Near the top I found the ladder had been broken but I managed to struggle up only to find the place swarming with rats. They were running all over. I must confess I was afraid to sleep up there and so I slept on some chaff downstairs.

27 March 1916

Left Flesselles about 8 and marched slow and painfully to the village of Beauquesne, which we reached about 12.30 after an 8 mile march, but we had to wait outside till 2 till the village was clear of troops. I got a good billet in a shed in a farmyard and slept well but was cold a little. We can hear the booming of the guns

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quite plainly and here there are a lot of barbed wire entanglements.

28 March 1916

Stayed in bed till 8. Continued the march about 3pm as we had to do part of the march under cover of darkness. About 6 we had tea and waited till dark, before ascending the hill in front of us, as the hill was within range of the German artillery. We reached the village of Beaumart about 10. We could see the star shells, bursting along the firing line about 3 miles away. The billet I got was in a shed in a farmyard. I slept on a very dirty paliasse.



29 March 1916

Stayed in the billet this morning. A German aeroplane dropped 2 bombs on the village this morning, one man of B Company was killed. The bombs killed 3 men and wounded 6. This afternoon it was snowing heavily but it faired up as we left for the trenches about 6pm. After about a 3 mile march we entered a communication trench and went along it right into the front line trench. D and B

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Companies were in the front line with A and C in reserve. I and 6 men relieved a sentry group of Irish Rifles in the front line trench. A few rifle shots and machine guns were fired during the night otherwise it was quiet.

30 March 1916

About the first glance of the war I got was to see shells bursting up above me round an aeroplane. There is nearly always an aeroplane up above, sometimes 4 or 3 together. At night bombs or trench mortars were fired, several of which dropped near our trench with terrible explosions, throwing up the clay in the air. A quick bombardment of the enemy trench by our artillery soon put a stop to the firing and the night settled down quiet, except for the crack of the sniper's rifle.

31 March 1916

Our engineers fired 2 mines near to German trenches and the party who were on guard at the end were gassed by the fumes. As they could not be got back through the mine as it was full of gas, some plucky engineer

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climbed over the parapet, and brought them in over the ground between the enemy and our trenches under cover of the darkness. They soon recovered but a Colonel had been killed by a rifle grenade. Now came the Germans' turn and they made a terrible bombardment of our trenches by artillery and trench mortars. None dropped into our trench where we were lying close to the side. Most of us new to this work were trembling, though we tried to speak in calm voices.



1 April 1916

The usual shelling of aeroplanes which I see every morning. Our artillery bombarded the enemy's trenches and our engineers fired a mine. I went down into the sap which is like a coal mine but cut through chalk. Several passages had been cut to within 10 yds of the German trenches where mines had been fired. The Germans bombarded our trenches again between the hours of 8pm and 12. Several shells dropped near our trench with terrible explosions but none dropped inside.

2 April 1916

Day dawns

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into another lovely day. I have now spent 4 nights in this narrow front line trench, trenches with rats nearly the size of rabbits and each day, mingled with the hum of aeroplanes, skylarks sing sweetly overhead. How peaceful and undisturbed they seem although living amongst the noise of guns and war. Night heavy rifle and machine fire turned on our trench.

3 April 1916

About 3am bombarded with bombs or tins, then quiet till 12am when more tins came over, bursting with loud explosions. Afternoon our guns shelled. About 6pm German guns started and several tins came together, which dropped at the back of our trench and burst with a terrible explosion, throwing soil up into the air and the door of the bomb shelter, beside which I crouched, blew open with the shock. About 9pm we were relieved by Y & L, after being in the front line for 5 days and nights. During that time we had never been washed or shaved and had very little

Page 54

rest as we had to take a turn every night at guard looking over the trench. After a long walk up communication trenches, with bullets whistling over our heads, we at last came to a small gate opening out on to a road beside some buildings about knocked down by shell fire. We still in great danger from shell fire, so hurried off



down the road in small parties. About 1am we arrived at the village we left last Wednesday for the trenches, and went into our old billets and were soon fast asleep, utterly tired out. I was so tired I could hardly walk, and came down the street to the billet like a drunken man.

4 April 1916

I feel a new man. I have had a good wash in a pond. 6pm moved off to a new camp about 3 miles away. Reaching the camp we found it composed of low huts, built in a wood out of sight of aeroplanes. The huts are mostly of canvas. There will be about 48 men in each hut.

5 April 1916

9 to 11 physical drill and bayonet fighting in the wood.

6 April 1916

Similar to yesterday.

7 April 1916

Left camp

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at 7am to repair the 2nd line trenches near the firing line. The village of Colincamps I saw had been shelled, one or two houses had been brought almost to the ground and the church spire had a shell hole in it. Got back about 3pm then went to a lecture on gas helmets. Wearing our helmets we passed through a room full of gas.

8 April 1916

Left camp to repair the 2nd line trench at 7am. Several aeroplanes were flying near, and they were being continually shelled. Left the trench at 1pm and arrived at camp about 3.



9 April 1916

Went to Holy Communion service in a hut at 7 then we had Church Parade in the wood about 9am. At 11 we went up to the 2nd line trench to repair. We arrived back to camp at 6. At one time about 9 aeroplanes could be seen in the air at the same time, and whenever they neared the German lines they were heavily shelled.

10 April 1916

Left camp for 2nd line trench at 7 got back about 3pm.

11 April 1916

Left for trenches at 10am as it was pouring with rain. Reaching the

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trenches we stayed in dug outs till time to return.

12 April 1916

I did not go with the trenching party, as I was warned for guard at night. A wet day, about 3pm the trenching party returned wet through. Went on guard at 6pm doing 2 hours on and 4 off.

13 April 1916

On guard over water cart, dismissed off guard at 6pm.

14 April 1916

Left for trenches at 7am returned at 3.

15 April 1916

Left for trenches at 10am returned at 6pm. I saw a few shells bursting in the next field to where we were working.

16 April 1916

Left at 7am for trenches. Soon after arriving there I saw 5 aeroplanes come from over the German lines together, and another one flying a short distance from them.



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About 12 a German plane came over at a great height, and from somewhere behind me I heard the report of a gun and saw several shells burst near the aeroplane which quickly turned and made off to the German lines. I was surprised at the rapidity of the fire from our gun, and at the splendid

Page 57

shooting for when the plane was almost out of sight I saw shells still bursting near it. I have never seen the Germans shoot so quickly and so well. We reached camp from the trench about 3. I went to a service held in the village about 6 by the Nonconformist Chaplain which I enjoyed.

17 April 1916

No parade today except an hour this afternoon spent in physical drill and bayonet fighting.

18 April 1916

Left camp with a party of 15 at 7am and marched to the village of Colincamps to unload stones. As no stones came we had an easy morning sitting by a fire we had lit in a farmyard till 12 when we were relieved by another party. I went to a short church service held in the school at the village. There were very few there but I enjoyed it very much.

19 April 1916

Left camp at 10 to unload stones, returned to camp about 5. We have had a lot of rain lately and the roads are in a terrible state of mud.

20 April 1916

No parade as our battalion take over part of the firing

Page 58

line tonight. Had a walk in the wood this afternoon, and there I saw several jays also for the first time this year I heard in the distance the calling of the cuckoo. 6pm our battalion left to take a position in the firing line. Owing to the spell of wet weather the



roads were in a terrible condition between Colincamps and the entrance to the trenches. About the only sound I could hear was the suck, suck of the mud, and the splash of water and now and again a louder splash as someone fell. B Company this time was in reserve as my platoon went into a dug out at the entrance to the trenches, where we were very much crowded and soon our things became very much mixed up. About 12pm the transport arrived and we turned out to carry rations up to C Company, who were in the front line. We soon found the job was no easy one, as the long communication trench was in a terrible condition, and the water was well over our boot

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tops and some holes we fell in took us almost up to the waist in water. The woods at the trench bottom in places were floating about and on stepping upon them, we sometimes found ourselves waist deep in water. It takes us on average about 5 hours to make the journey to the front line and back to the dug out.

21 April 1916

Returned to dug out from ration carrying about 3pm. Enjoyed a few hours' sleep, then set off to carry empty dixies up to our transport at Colincamps. Arriving at that village we were told the transport was at the next village, so we had to carry them on to Courcelles. On arriving back we rested till the rations came at 10pm. We had the same difficulty as the previous night and I think if anything the water was deeper. Jack Dester fell in one hole up to the waist and stuck there till I pulled him out. Now and again a scuffle, and a dixey banged, then a splash, then I knew someone had discovered a hole.

22 April 1916

Arrived

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at dug out about 2am ready for the rum ration and slept. Turned out at 11am and carried empty dixies to Colincamps. Carried the rations again at night, there were a lot of loud explosions, either bombs or shells in the German lines.



23 April 1916

Returned to dug out from ration carrying in the early hours and when I again turned out at 11am to take supplies up to Colincamps, I found the dull wet weather we had been having had given place to sunshine. After tea in the dugout we sang hymns for an hour or two and Billy Warwick gave us an interesting sermon while we rested our voices a little. After dark, as the transport came up, we again started off carrying the rations to the front line where our chaps were standing in places up to the knees in mud and water. This time I was unfortunate, and went into a hole up to the waist and had to remove my trousers on returning to the dug out.

24 April 1916

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Morning again went up to the village with the empty dixies. We have had a lot of aeroplanes up to day and our artillery has been firing all day with hardly a reply from the Germans. Our battalion relieved to day by the W Yorks coming in and going out by sections. I with a few other men was left behind to load our transport when it came up after dark so it was about 10pm when I got up to the village at Colincamps where we were in reserve billets in a farm out-house.

25 April 1916

Today drawing water from a well for use in the bath house. Then I had a bath, the first one since leaving Egypt.

26 April 1916

My platoon on inlying picket. Went down into the firing line to dig an old communication trench deeper just behind the front trench. Got back about 2am.

27 April 1916

No parade today. We are having lovely warm weather.



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28 April 1916

Left Colincamps this morning for Bertrancourt, a village about a mile away. Went into a camp of small huts built in an orchard.

29 April 1916

At

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8am mending the road through the village or judging by the result spoiling it. Taking the washing bag C Ashby had found, and of which he was very proud, I went down to a well in the village to draw washing water but on winding the rope up I found the bag had stayed behind, so made my way back to break the news gently to him, after which we returned to the well with a wire hook to fish for it but without success.

Eager for a wash we found a large biscuit tin, which we let down the well, but this time it came up but leaking badly, of no use to us whatever. We returned to camp and went to bed without the comfort of a wash.

30 April 1916

Today we are keeping as Easter Sunday. Rising at 6am I got a canvas pail and this time successfully drew water from the village well. Washing and shaving then went to Holy Communion service in a hut near the village at 7, then the church parade at 10 in a large orchard. Went to a service held

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in a hut in the village at 6pm.

1 May 1916

Another lovely sunny morning. Left camp at 12 and marched up to the trench. We had to cross over a stretch of open country to the entrance to the trenches. The Germans were shelling this ground and while we were crossing shells were dropping but I am pleased to say they would be 100 yds away from us. Entering the communication trench we started to repair it. Most of the time the German guns were busy shelling the ground behind us, also our aeroplanes were flying overhead.



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Once the aeroplane was directly above me and two shells burst near it and a piece of shell dropped in the trench about 4 feet away from me. We arrived safely back to camp at 6.

2 May 1916

Left camp to dig communication trench behind the line but in front of our big guns. Arrived back about 1pm.

3 May 1916

Went down to Bus about 10am for a hot bath. 7pm went up to the trenches and starting on the turf dug a communication trench.

4 May 1916

Morning took my trousers in with great success

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then slept most of the afternoon. 7pm went up to continue digging the trench.

5 May 1916

No parade as we had to go out at 11pm, raining. Went up to the trench but did not do much work. Arrived back to camp about 4am.

6 May 1916

5pm left our camp at Bertrancourt and marched to Bus about 1 mile further back, where we again went into similar huts in an orchard.

7 May 1916

Church parade at 10am. I with a party of 50 men were put on for a working party, but as we never met the RE guide we turned back just before reaching Courcelles.

8 May 1916

As we were supposed to have been out on night work we had today off. Played football this morning also during the afternoon.



9 May 1916

Paraded at 8am and left with a digging party for the trenches which we reached about 11am. When we had got about 200 yds down the communication trench a wiz bang came over and burst a little way behind me wounding one man in both knees and one man in the mouth and 3 or 4 more slightly grazed.

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We worked in a communication trench till 3pm. A lot of shells came over bursting a good way behind us.

10 May 1916

Paraded at 8am and marched off near Colincamps to dig a trench for a cable.

11 May 1916

Instruction in hand grenades, threw my first live bomb.

12 May 1916

Paraded at 8am and marched to the trenches to repair a communication trench. Got back about 4pm.

13 May 1916

Went up to defend a truck as we were crossing the open waste land behind the trenches. A lot of shells were bursting about 200 yds from us on our right. All were high explosive shells and I should think were meant for a battery near[by]. I think all the damage they did was only to blow the ground up a bit.

14 May 1916

Battalion takes over a portion of the line. I left for the trenches with the Machine Gun (MG) section to help them carry ammunition about 8am. Having got the guns down to the support trench I returned to the sugary [Sucrerie, or Sugar Factory] at the entrance of the trenches to wait for the company coming up. My platoon arrived about 5pm and we went into the front



line trench. I did duty in a sentry group. The line was quiet.

15 May 1916

Left the first trench soon after dawn and had a few hours' sleep in a dug out then returned to the trench till relieved at 7pm. At dusk I went on duty in the support trench about 100 yds behind the firing line. The line was quiet until 12pm when suddenly the German artillery opened fire and bombarded our trenches for about an hour until our guns got the upper hand. It was the fiercest bombardment I had ever seen, hundreds of shells must have come over as it was one continual roar, the whole place being lit up by the terrible explosions. As it was in full swing our guns started to reply then the noise was fearful. Then gradually the German guns ceased and our guns shelled the German trenches. The whole bombardment lasted about 3 hours. We came off well as no one was killed but the Y & L suffered rather heavily.

16 May 1916

Soon after dawn I got a little sleep in a dug out then worked at ladling water out of a trench

from 9 till 12. There had been a few wet days but now it was warm and sunny. Afternoon slept in a dug out, we were shelled a good bit, chiefly I think with wiz bangs. Night I was again sentry in the firing line and had a quiet time.

17 May 1916

Left the first trench for a rest at 12pm till 6. A good few shells and tins came over. The dugout I slept in today was swarming with rats and mice, which made a terrible noise. They ran over our clothes and faces, and one very much amused me by sitting on the butter tin and polishing its whiskers. Night I was on sentry in Rat Street, an old trench which joined up two first firing trenches. The trench was rightly named, for there were rats all over and such big ones. They were running about and



squealing all night. Once I sat down for a time, but was startled by one sitting on my arm biting my fingers. The night was fairly quiet.

18 May 1916

Soon after dawn went for a sleep, then worked at cleaning up.

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Night again sentry in Rat Street. A few tins came over with loud explosions.

19 May 1916

Had a few hours' sleep after dawn, then did a little cleaning up. Afternoon our trenches were shelled with high explosive shells. 2.30pm our company relieved by West Yorks and we left the trenches by the sugary entrance. The short march up to the village of Colincamps was almost too much for us, as we were very tired. What a treat it was to see the green fields again, and smell not the foul smell of the trench and rats but the sweet smell of the may in the hedges. We got a billet in an upstairs room of what was once I think the home of a well-to-do farmer, as the out buildings were good, and a coat of arms was on the front of the house, but now the house and the out houses were deserted except for the British soldiers, who here enjoyed the rest they had so well earned. Taking off my pack I drew some water out of the well for the wash I needed so badly as I had not

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had one for about a week. After washing I removed my week's growth of beard. Having cleaned myself I walked into the large garden now overgrown with weeds and from there I could hear the report of our large guns and the tearing of the shells toward the German line. We were getting our own back for the shells they sent us during the afternoon.

20 May 1916

I have had a splendid night's sleep and roused myself about 9am to see a lovely sunny day. No parade today, as we were detailed for night work. 11pm marched down to the trenches and passed through to the first line to make an old French



communication trench into a fire step. Heavy rifle and machine gun fire swept over the trench till well past dawn, which made it too dangerous to look over very often. We would be about 80 yds from the Germans and they kept shouting over to us. One kept shouting for quite a long time, but as he spoke in German I could not make him out.

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21 May 1916

At dawn a German opposite me spoke very good English and the conversation between him and one of our chaps was something like the following. From the German trench, 'How about Kut.' Reply, 'What about Verdun.' Our chap, 'Waiter bring me a glass of lager.' German reply unfit for paper, and several other remarks such as how do you like your eggs boiled and would you like your hair cut. Things quietened down after dawn. We got back to camp about 9am. Slept most of the day which was a very hot one.

22 May 1916

Paraded at 3pm and detailed for working party. Went down to the trenches into the front line to repair it. About 11pm the Germans started to heavily bombard our trench. We joined the lads on the fire step. The bombardment only lasted about half an hour but it was very hot. There was one continuous roar of bursting shrapnel. Our working party escaped unhurt but I heard the Yorks had caught it rather heavily. While it lasted it was as bad as the previous Monday night.

