



DURHAM
AT **WAR**



DIARY OF WILLIAM ROBERTS

18/944 Private William Roberts

'B' Company, 18th Battalion Durham Light Infantry

Volume 2

22 May - 26 October 1916

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22 May 1916

The line quietened down so we left the trenches and arrived back to camp about 2pm. On passing down out of the communication trench I saw a yellow hammer's nest with young ones built in the side of the trench.

23 May 1916

Inspection of billet by Brigadier at 9am. Afternoon the village shelled. I was sitting upstairs when I heard an explosion in the village, as I ran to the window to look out I heard another I thought I had better get out as I saw both men and horses running up the road. Just as I got into the orchard I heard another shell coming which burst in the yard of our billet. I just got one glance of flying slates and bricks as I ran for the open country. Six shells came as it seemed to quieten down I returned to the village. The shell which dropped in the yard of our billet blew a shed down and ruined D Company's cooker. No one was killed but one shell burst near a horse line killing 4. At 8pm we paraded to work down in the trenches. The work consisted of digging a new trench behind the front line. As we started on the turf it needs no recording that we worked to get cover for ourselves. Fortunately for us the night was quiet and we arrived back to camp about 3am.

24 May 1916

Had very little sleep as we had to pack up and parade by 8am. Our work today consisted

of digging a 6 foot cable trench near Colincamps. It came on to rain hard and we soon got drenched. Finishing our work we had to march to a new camp about 1½ miles back from Bus les Artois which we found was of the usual small huts built in a large wood. I was too tired to look round and soon got my bed down and was asleep. A lot of rain fell and I was drenched through. I had a sleep and woke again before lights out.



25 May 1916

Work again, paraded at 8am and marched up to Courcelles. As my shirt was still wet and I had no more I went without one. Reaching Courcelles we found the work was filling sand bags for a dugout. We were too tired to do much, but still had a long day as we did not get back till 6pm.

26 May 1916

Paraded at 8am and reported to Bus les Artois commandant. The work consisted of cleaning the gutters.

27 May 1916

On the same job as Thursday at the dugout near Courcelles. Walked to Authie at night.

28 May 1916

Church parade at 9 30 in the wood. Had a walk to St Leger, a village about a mile away.

29 May 1916

With a working party digging a hole for water tank just outside Bus les Artois wood.

30 May 1916

Paraded sick with pain in the head and stomach. Doctor told me to go to bed. Spent all day in bed.

31 May 1916

Still ill, can

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hardly eat anything. Spent all day in bed.

1 June 1916

A little better, walked about the wood a bit.



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2 June 1916

On bayonet fighting a short while this morning. 6.30pm paraded with a working party for the trenches. Went up to Colincamps in a motor wagon. Reaching the trenches we found the work consisted of laying a cable and the work I had to do was on the top pushing the heavy cable drum along. It was a hard job as at times it would drop in a shell hole and at other times it had to be lifted over trenches.

3 June 1916

Arrived back to camp from the trenches utterly tired out about 4.30am. 8pm went to Holy Communion service in the YMCA tent which was held tonight as our Brigade was taking over the trenches tomorrow.

4 June 1916

West Yorks go into the trenches. We march to Courcelles and take over billets. The billet I got was in a dirty outhouse. I believe we are here to provide working parties. Went to a service in the YMCA here at night.

5 June 1916

Paraded out at 7am and went down to the trenches on working party. There we started to dig for a dugout. Relieved at 5pm and marched back.

6 June 1916

A wet day, paraded at 3pm for the trenches. Worked at the dugout till 1am. Kept fine while we worked.

7 June 1916

Got into billet about 2am and went to bed till dinner time.

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Paraded again at 11pm for our next shift, firing line very quiet.



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8 June 1916

Worked the usual 8 hours shift and got back to our billet about 10am. Went to bed till about 4pm.

9 June 1916

Left the billet at 7am. Working party for the trenches, got back about 6pm.

10 June 1916

Wet day. Paraded at 3pm for work at dugout. Worked from 5 till 1am.

11 June 1916

Left the trenches at 1am and tramped through mud and water back to our billet which we reached about 2.30 wet through. Stayed in bed till 11am. Went into the YMCA service at 6pm and stayed for Holy Communion. At 11pm went for our shift at the dugout in the trenches.

12 June 1916

Arrived back from the trenches about 10am and went to bed. Night packed up as we had orders to move off on an 11 miles march back. At 1am orders cancelled.

13 June 1916

Wet day. Inspection of us by platoon officer and of billets by Colonel, then inspection in fighting order.

14 June 1916

No parade.

15 June 1916

Started work on the dugout again. Paraded at 1 got back at 6pm. Clocks put on 1 hour.



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16 June 1916

Morning wrote a few letters. Paraded at 3pm for a shift at the dugout in the trenches. Got back to my billet about 2am.

17 June 1916

Slept till dinner time, night work again. Paraded at 8pm and loaded trench mortar bombs into wagons at Colincamps. Arrived back to billet about 2am. The bombs are about the size of a football

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fitted with a metal rod, which gave them the appearance of huge hammers.

18 June 1916

Got out of bed about 12am. Went to YMCA service at 6. For the last week huge transports have come up at nights, taking hours to pass through this village and this afternoon a 6 inch naval gun was firing. I expect the Germans have got wind and so that accounted for the number of taubes over here today. 8pm paraded for the trenches. Several taubes were above us at a great height, being fired at by our guns, and our planes were trying to rise to the height of them, but as far as I could see they got clear away. On arriving at the trenches we had to carry big boxes of rations in. It was a heavy job and I got back tired out about 3am. There were a lot of transport carts up at the trench.

19 June 1916

Volunteered for a job at the incinerator at 8am so as to escape night work.

20 June 1916

Paraded at 8am for working party in the trenches. The work consisted of carrying timber up to the new dugouts. Our front line has been shelled with high explosives. We got back about 3pm.



21 June 1916

Digging trenches in the orchard near our billets for refuge in case of the village being shelled. Left off at 3pm as we were wanted for a night party. Left at 8 for the trenches, our work consisted of filling in a cable trench. We

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got back to our billet about 1.

22 June 1916

No parade. Stayed in bed till 11am.

23 June 1916

No parade as we were going up to the trenches at night. 9am paraded for the trenches. As we got to the RE dump at the entrance of the trenches, the Germans sent about 8 shrapnel shells over, but I am pleased to say no one was hurt. Our work consisted of what I think was carrying boxes of smoke bombs from motor wagons to the cellar of a ruined farm down the trenches. The trenches were in a bad state as it had been raining heavily during the afternoon. The job turned out to be a slow one, as it was difficult getting the boxes through the narrow tunnel into the cellar. After I had got my box dumped I got out on the top amid the ruins of the farm only to fall head first into a hole. It was raining heavily and black dark but somehow I managed to find my way across the mud and water back to the road at the entrance of the trenches. A lot more men were trying to find their way out and I seemed to succeed better than a good few, judging from the splashes and remarks as they fell in shell holes, which were plentiful about that part. Just before the breaking of day I got back to Courcelles almost covered with mud and wet through.

24 June 1916

Stayed in bed till dinner time then spent most of the afternoon in trying to remove

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the mud from my clothes and rifle. After tea digging at our refuge in the orchard near our billets. About 12pm heard German shells bursting outside the village or over



Colincamps so we got up and got dressed. Told we were not in danger so returned to billet, and lay down with boots on. Shortly after we got in we heard 3 or 4 shells come into the village so we turned out into the trenches for a short while. A shell burst in a cellar about 40 yards from our billet and killed 2 of the chaps of our platoon who were taking refuge there.

25 June 1916

Working at our trenches in the orchard. About 12 we heard shells coming which seemed to burst just outside the village or in Colincamps. We went into the trenches and I should say they would send over about 20. Worked at the trenches again after dinner. Our big guns have been bombarding heavily yesterday and today. We went out to sleep in the fields at night, in case the village was shelled. The noise and flashes of our guns was terrible, but the Germans did not seem to be replying much. I dropped off to sleep and slept well most of the night.

26 June 1916

Returned to the village, our guns still bombarding heavily. A thick cloud of smoke hung about the firing line and as I was watching some shrapnel shells came over the village so I flitted out into the fields. The village was shelled heavily with high explosives

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and our guns kept up a heavy bombardment back. We brought our things out into a wheat field as the village was unfit for habitation. The Germans sent a few shells over into Bertrancourt and Bus les Artois this afternoon. As the weather was showery and we had to spend another night in the open air we made a shelter on the road side, with sticks covered with our ground sheets, but it was not much of a success against the heavy showers but we kept fairly dry and slept well. Our guns kept up a heavy bombardment most of the night.

27 June 1916

A few shells went over us in the direction of Bertrancourt and Bus les Artois early this morning. Seeing Bill Morrison in Courcelles up from Bus les Artois I gave him this



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book till we settled down again as it takes me all my time to keep my few things dry. Our ground sheet shelter of last night not much of a success, we built a small one of a few sticks supporting a piece of corrugated iron in a field just clear of the village. 2pm I went out to a communication trench to pump out water and did not get back till 6pm. Slept fairly well in our little shelter.

28 June 1916

Packed our blankets and great coats and sent them away, prepared to go into the trenches ready for the advance in the morning. Our guns still bombarding heavily, a few shells came over

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into Bertrancourt this morning. Afternoon orders came out that the advance was off, and our coats and blankets had to be brought back. We had to go on living in our shelter. The weather was very showery but I spent a fairly good night.

29 June 1916

11am inspection in fighting order. A few shells burst about 200 yards behind our shelter, but I think they were meant for the roads. During the afternoon looking round I saw 21 balloons up. Our guns have not been bombarding so heavily today but did a lot of work during the night. Slept again in our little hut in the field.

30 June 1916

Paraded in a field this morning and our Army Commander addressed us. Afternoon again packed up, as we expect the advance to take place in the morning. Our guns have sent a good few shells over. Paraded in fighting order for the trenches at 9.30pm. Fighting order consisted of rifle, bayonet, 170 rounds of ammunition, 2 bombs, 1 pick, a shovel, 3 sand bags and haversack with biscuits, holdall, socks, towel etc. On account of the large number of troops entering the trenches progress was very slow and we did not reach our position till 4am. While standing in Courcelles several shells dropped in or near the village and the roads were shelled all the way to the trenches. A building in Colincamps was blazing fiercely while the village was shelled.



1 July 1916

Reached the waiting trench about 4am. We

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opened a violent bombardment on the German lines. 7am a village blown up by our mine and 7.30 advance started. We were the 4th battalion to go over, which we did about an hour later. The short but terrible rush through the fierce curtain fire with men falling on all sides I shall never forget. High explosive shells fell all round us. The sights I saw are too terrible to write about and men almost blown to pieces were lying side by side. Unable to proceed further, the order to retire was given and I thanked God that I came through the terrible ordeal unhurt. I went to work in our front line at night but had to come away as it was almost blown to pieces. There again I saw dead and wounded lying side by side. Some were moaning and others had so far lost their reason that they were laughing and singing.

2 July 1916

Resting in one of our trenches but went to carry wounded out at 11. The communication trench out was packed with stretchers. Tear shells were sent over which burst about the entrance of our trenches and my eyes were running with water. Returned to our resting trench about day break.

3 July 1916

On sentry duty in the battered front line, dead men, rifles, spades and equipment were lying about and there I had to stay till 2am next morning.

4 July 1916

Left the front line at 2am and got

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a few hours' sleep in a trench a little further back. Afternoon a heavy thunderstorm burst. The trenches were soon full of water, in places above the knees. We were relieved at 10pm by the Worcesters of another division and struggled out of the



trench through the deep mud and water, most of us wet through, but too thankful on getting out to bother about a small matter like that. We marched back through Bus to the village of Louvencourt which we reached about dawn, covered with mud and wet through.

5 July 1916

We learn that what we thought had been a failure was really a great attack and we had been used to decoy a large number of German troops and guns. We had suffered so that the right and left might advance. Our division has had a terrible cutting up. Spent the day cleaning, but most of our clothes were ruined and we had to have new ones. I had to wash my rifle as it was thick with mud. The 19th Northumberland Fusiliers who we trained with at Cramlington passed through at night. Our blankets taken away but we spent a fairly good night in our billet.

6 July 1916

Left Louvencourt in marching order on an 8 mile march to the village or I should say small town of Beauval. It was a fine, clean place with a large church in a commanding position. We were billeted

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in an outhouse of a farm and again slept without a blanket.

7 July 1916

Started off on the march again at 7am to the village of Bernaville some 7 miles away. I was stiff and ill from a severe cold so fell out at the first halt and came the rest of the way in a motor ambulance. Reached the village about 11 and we were again billeted in a farm out house. It is a quiet country village and it has been raining heavily this afternoon. Slept well although without a blanket.

8 July 1916

Inspection of kit etc. Left Bernaville at 9pm in marching order on a 9 mile march to the station at Conteville, where we entrained after waiting there for about 3 hours.



9 July 1916

We were crowded in horse boxes for the journey which lasted about 5 hours, arriving at Berguette about 1pm. We left the train there. The place seemed of a fair size with several large shops and well stocked with pretty girls. We marched on for about 3 miles to a country village named Busnes where we were billeted in a farm shed. The country here is well cultivated, large patches of land show splendid crops of French beans.

10 July 1916

Paraded and the divisional General delivered a speech of congratulation. I had a bath in a ditch near the billet. After dinner had a swim in the canal which runs through this village, and night on guard

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at our Company Headquarters. The guard was only a 12 hour one.

11 July 1916

Came off guard at 6am. Did not go on any parade but had a walk up the canal at night.

12 July 1916

9 to 11 parade. Physical drill, company drill, had a hot bath at the army baths in the village.

13 July 1916

Missed parade by cleaning potatoes for dinner. Had a walk to St Venant at night.

14 July 1916

Orders came to HQ to prepare for taking over trenches at night but am pleased to say order was cancelled. Walked to Berguette at night.



15 July 1916

Had a hot bath at army baths. Left Busnes in marching order at 3pm and marched to La Fosse, a distance of 12 miles, which we reached at 8pm utterly tired out. Billeted in a large farm building and soon was fast asleep.

16 July 1916

Church parade in morning. 6pm I went to Holy Communion held in the open room of a café. The service and scene reminded me of what I think the early church would be like.

17 July 1916

A short parade in the morning, rest of day off.

18 July 1916

Short parade, night played a few games at quoits.

19 July 1916

Short parade, played a few games at quoits, horse shoes for quoits.

20 July 1916

Platoon orderly.

21 July 1916

7am marched to a field just beyond Lestrem where brigade paraded for practice for the inspection in the afternoon. 1pm marched to the same field as the morning, and there the brigade was inspected

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by the G.O.C of the 1st Army. After tea I walked into the village of Lestrem.

22 July 1916

Short parade in morning. Went on guard at Company HQ doing from 8pm to 10 and 2am to 4. The rattle of machine gun and rifle fire seemed very close and the star



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shells in the firing line seemed but a few fields away. There was a heavy bombardment in the night. The night was warm and still.

23 July 1916

Coming off guard I stayed in bed till dinner time. Afternoon stewed some rhubarb and apples which I had for tea with half a tin of milk. Went to a short service at 6pm in a field near the ruined church. The church which was shelled by the British and French guns on Oct 11th and 12th and by German guns on the 13th and 14th had the roof blown in, but the walls remained standing, with the spire. Holes in the spire showed where the machine guns had once been mounted and other holes showed the splendid marksmanship of the artillery.

24 July 1916

Expecting to move but orders were cancelled. No parade.

25 July 1916

Practice in wiring. Afternoon off.

26 July 1916

Another rest day. No parade of importance except a fumigating parade.

27 July 1916

Left in fighting order for the trenches at 9am. Passed a ruined empty village and after about an hour's march came to 4 road ends. The houses there had been shelled, but I noticed a large crucifix standing untouched. Halting here we went off down the long

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straight road to the right in single file and parties of 10. The entrance to the trenches was on this road and as we filed down the communication trench we found they were very shallow as the ground was very wet. Nearing the firing line we came to a ruined village which we learnt was the much talked of village of Neuve Chapelle. One of the houses had been a gentleman's house and in the garden still bloomed flowers, also



the place was thickly covered with fruit trees. A little way past these ruins we came to the firing line but a different line to what we had been used to for here it was breast works built of sand bags. At the back the ground was ploughed up by large shell holes. Passing down the line to where we had to take over we relieved the York & Lancs. The time passed quietly till about 5pm when the Germans started with a trench mortar which threw a shell quite strange to us. It was a terrible size, and the explosion was almost deafening. Until 8.30 they kept up the terrible bombardment. We could see them coming and were kept running from one part of the trench to another. The strain on the nerves was terrible as HE shells were coming over too. Two of my platoon were almost buried and two were taken out with shell shock. A trench connecting us to a part of the front line a little further

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back was blown completely to pieces. At dusk they quietened down and we went on sentry, but it was not quiet for long, as a fierce bombardment was opened on our trenches. After shelling the front line for an hour or two the fire was lifted behind and we kept a sharp look out for an expected attack. Our Sergeant shouted, 'Here they come, rifle fire'. Standing on the fire step, we blazed away until our rifles were almost too hot to use, I could not see very much but saw one or two when a flare went up.

28 July 1916

We had successfully kept the Germans out of our trenches and lying in front of JJ post, a little way from the one I was on, was a group of dead Germans caught coming through our wire. A patrol out at night reported counting 28 and more were lying nearer the German lines. Some had got into C Company trenches but were soon driven out. A good few West Yorks were taken prisoners. After dawn we went to a better part of the line for rest but returned at night. We went out to carry the dead Germans in. They all wore helmets with spiked tops, we got one each for a souvenir but had them taken from us. Several little things such as watches were smuggled away. Rest of day quiet.

29 July 1916

Rested in front line, very quiet. I felt ill, nearly fainted. Excused duty at night,



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so slept in a shelter. More dead Germans carried in.

30 July 1916

Quiet day. Went on duty again at night, more dead Germans were carried in, night passed quietly.

31 July 1916

Quiet until our guns fired about 3pm when the Germans retaliated with their dreadful trench mortar, which they had not used since the first day we were in. After sending a few over, and a few HE, they quietened down. Night quiet.

1 August 1916

Quiet until our guns fired, when they sent over a few HE and trench mortar shells, but we had removed further up the line till they quietened down.

2 August 1916

Most of us are about done up which I think accounts for D Company going to relieve us this afternoon. Misty morning. I went over the top, wiring till the fog lifted. Afternoon relieved by D Company, we went back to the support trenches. Night I was detailed to bury some parts of a man or men who had been blown to pieces. The pieces were in sand bags on a stretcher. We had great difficulty in carrying the stretcher to the burying ground and once there we were in danger from machine gun bullets, which were flying over and around us. We had to fill the grave in almost lying on our stomachs.

3 August 1916

Had a good sleep in the reserve line, and was on sentry there at night.

4 August 1916

Relieved by the Y & L about 12. We were thankful to leave



the trenches. We had had splendid weather. We marched back to our billets at La Fosse which we had been in before leaving for the trenches. I had not been well for the last week so reaching the billet I was soon laid down and asleep.

5 August 1916

Had a good night's sleep. Went on sick, still feel ill.

6 August 1916

Went on sick, missed Church parade, but went to the service of Holy Communion and to the short service at 6pm.

7 August 1916

Went on sick, still feel ill.

8 August 1916

Sick. Fried 2 eggs and made a pot of Fry's for supper, feeling better.

9 August 1916

Feel a lot better, very hot. Left La Fosse in fighting order on a march of about 5 miles to Estaires, about 1½ miles from Bethune. Slept in a cart in a farm yard. Bought 4 fried eggs and a cup of coffee for supper. Eggs seem to be doing me a lot of good.

10 August 1916

Left for trenches about 7pm. Entered the communication trench in the ruined village of F. The land was very wet and so the trenches were only dug a foot or two deep, then sand bagged up the sides. Passing the reserve and support lines, we came out in the open and proceeded about 300 yards over the top to the front line. The line here was only a breast work of sand bags. I went on guard at the end of the communication path, after relieving the Cheshires.



There was a lot of machine gun and rifle fire.

11 August 1916

Quiet day. A few shells came over but not near us. Hot day, night on guard as the last night.

12 August 1916

Last night was very quiet. Hot, quiet day. Some shelling on the crater on our right. A few shells over into our supports.

13 August 1916

Warm day. A few shells fired into our supports, night quiet. On the same guard as night before.

14 August 1916

Very quiet day. About 11pm relieved by C Company and went back into support in 3rd line, some 500 yards behind first line. Sentry at end of communication trench.

15 August 1916

In support, I found a cat and 4 pretty kittens in a bag. Afternoon our guns bombarding. Germans reply, but not near us. Night, short bursts of artillery fire into front line, by us and Germans. I was on working party, fixing screens of canvas and willow branches across a road which looks on communication trench. Finishing that, slept in a dugout.

16 August 1916

Slept most of the day in dugout. 12pm went down to the front line with ammunition and filled sand bags there.



17 August 1916

Slept most of the morning. 4pm our guns bombarded. We went up an old trench for safety but the Germans did not reply very much. Night went down to front line with water, finished about 10pm and slept till stand to.

18 August 1916

Slept

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most of the afternoon. Night A, C, D Company relieved by the W Yorks. On sentry group in support.

19 August 1916

Showery. A few shells came over well on our left. Night working at sand bagging when I was surprised at being told to put my things on and go out with the Quarter Master for the ration supply. Walked to the village of La Couture and got a billet in the QM wooden hut, but did not sleep well on account of the cold.

20 August 1916

Packing rations up for the trenches. Went to a service in a hut in the village at 6pm.

21 August 1916

Packing rations. Had a bath at the army baths here.

22 August 1916

Packing rations. C Company relieves B tonight. After tea went up to the huts, which B Company take over from C. I saw one of our aeroplanes brought down by a German shell. B Company arrived safely about 1am.

23 August 1916

Late breakfast. No parade.



24 August 1916

No parade. Slept in the afternoon. Had a bath.

25 August 1916

7am left for the trenches on a working party. Got back about 3pm.

26 August 1916

No parade. Left for the trenches, same as before. Relieved West Yorks in front line about 10pm. Did sentry duty there, there was heavy bombing and shelling at the crater on our left.

27 August 1916

At dawn I saw a German standing between my post and our wire, who throwing down his rifle and shouting Kamrade

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came slowly toward me. We allowed him in and sent him up to HQ. Our guns bombarded heavily at night for a short while. A fire broke out in the German lines. Germans sending large shells over which I think were for Bethune, or billets behind our line.

28 August 1916

Lying in shelter most of the day. Our guns firing a lot, Germans not replying. Evening a large covey of partridges, 20 or more, settled behind our front line. Our guns heavily bombarding ridge for a short while. Relieved by C Company and went back into support. Sleeping in dugout but wakened by our guns firing. Germans sent a few back, one or two near us. Quietened down, turned in again.

29 August 1916

Bombardment of ridge. Heavy thunder storm came on .Night on rations. Brought rations from transport down light railway, on trucks, to support. Then carried them to front line.



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30 August 1916

Rainy day, but quiet. Night on sentry. Our guns shelling ridge for a short while Germans sending big shells over I think to Bethune, but soon tired of it, when our big guns started sending 2 back for every one of theirs.

31 August 1916

Fine quiet day. Night on working party. Big shells going over which started our big guns. Rat bit a hole through my haversack, and ate my bread leaving me the hard biscuits.

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1 September 1916

Quiet day. Relieved about 9pm by W Yorks and marched back to La Couture to huts here.

2 September 1916

Had a bath at Army baths. Stayed in camp.

3 September 1916

Church parade in harvest field. 11 went to Holy Communion in hut in village. 8pm left La Couture in full marching order on the short march through Neuve Chapelle to our old billets at La Fosse. Night had a short walk through the village.

4 September 1916

On a short fatigue in the morning. 6pm on working party to Neuve Chapelle trenches. Building a parapet of a new trench about 300 yards behind the front line. We got back about 2am, tired out.

5 September 1916

In bed most of day. 6pm again went to Neuve Chapelle on same job as before. I think it will be a march of 5 miles to our work as it takes us over 2 hours to get there. A march of 5 miles there, then 3 hours' work, then the 5 miles back is no joke. We reached the billet about 2am, about dropping with fatigue.



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6 September 1916

In bed till dinner time. Walked to Neuve Chapelle at night.

7 September 1916

3am Left on working party to trenches at Richebourg. Very long walk, left trenches again at 9am arrived at billet about 11. Went to bed till tea time.

8 September 1916

6am left on working party for the trenches. After walking about 3 hours we entered the trenches on the right of Neuve Chapelle. On the way up I noticed a number of large country houses in various

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stages of ruin. Coming back, we passed through the village of Richebourg. It was in ruins, every house seemed to have been shelled and the large church was brought almost to the ground. A large crucifix stood untouched in the church, just the cross amongst the ruins.

9 September 1916

On working party, same time and place as yesterday. Am very tired after the long walk, which I think will be easy 5 miles there and back. Went up to a concert in YMCA at Vieille Chapelle, but found the place packed out with a crowd outside. I got a peep through a window, where about a dozen men were trying to look through at the same time.

10 September 1916

On the same working party as yesterday. I expected a rest today and was very disappointed on been named for working, also I am tired and stiff with the long walk each day. Went to a church service in an orchard in the village.



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11 September 1916

9am left for the trenches at Neuve Chapelle. Took over from the York & Lancs. On sentry in the front line. Quiet night.

12 September 1916

Our guns firing. Germans do not reply until football bombs are fired from our left. Reply with a few shells, night very quiet. We wonder if anybody is holding the German line, and the talk goes round that there is only an old man there as watchman.

13 September 1916

Quiet day and night. In no man's land at night, on covering party for wirers.

14 September 1916

Quiet.

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Relieved by C Company and went back into support trenches. Night brought rations into the line on the tramway.

15 September 1916

Quiet here, good night's sleep.

16 September 1916

We expected to be in for 8 days, but this afternoon were relieved by the Gloucesters. March back to Neuve Chapelle, which we reached about 7pm. Slept in the upper room of a chateau.

17 September 1916

9am left in motor wagons which took us to Gorze, from there we marched into a ruined village about 800 yards behind the front line. The village has been a large, busy place. There were large houses and works. A railway runs parallel with the canal, and in the ruined station stands a train of trucks. A large barge stands rotting



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in the dry dock. We billet in the bottom room of a large farm house. It is a cold miserable place and very draughty.

18 September 1916

Wet day, raining in the billet. The place swarms with rats. A few minutes after blowing the candle out, there is a squeak and a tin is knocked over. 'They have kicked off', said someone, and we cover our heads with our coats, and try to get to sleep before the match gets in full swing.

19 September 1916

A bomb thrown in the canal gets us a good fry of fish. We manage to catch over 20. Covered by the firing of a heavy gun we remove the old trucks from the station.

20 September 1916

Working in a communication trench on the canal bank.

21 September 1916

9am left the village and

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took over the front line. On sentry. Trench mortar firing by both sides. Heavy bombardment on our right at night. A few shells over here the first part of night, the rest quiet.

22 September 1916

About dinner time trench mortars are busy, and again in the afternoon. Mine blew our bag in and buried my great coat. We went in the crater for safety. Quiet night. I was on covering party for the wiring men.

23 September 1916

Morning heavy trench mortar bombardment. Our footballs, sticks and rifle grenade etc. Went into the crater while it lasted. Afternoon retired back as we bombarded with our huge trench mortar, throwing big shells. They looked like huge fishes flying



through the air and burst like a mine. Germans retaliated on our empty front line. Quiet night.

24 September 1916

Just getting breakfast when Wiz bangs came over. Went into crater. Afternoon quieter. Night on covering party for wiring

25 September 1916

Relieved about 3pm and marched up to the village of Gorze .Our billet is in an out building of a gentleman's large house. The fine old house, now empty, with the large out building, enclose a large yard in which are growing 4 large trees.

26 September 1916

Poor Infantry man. 8am back to the trenches again on a working party. Arrived back about 3pm. Given a blanket each, looking

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forward to a good night's sleep.

27 September 1916

Went to Holy Communion here at 8. Had a hot bath. Having a pass to Bethune, I left after dinner and walked along the canal into the town, a distance of about 3 miles. The centre of the town bore marks of the recent shelling. Went into the cathedral, and to the theatre at night.

28 September 1916

Short parade this morning .On Headquarters guard at 6pm.

29 September 1916

1pm Battalion left to take over trenches again at Givenchy. B Company being in reserve we stayed in village of Givenchy. Billeted in a cellar. Night went up with HQ rations.



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30 September 1916

Morning carried wine up to HQ and rations up to A Company at night.

1 October 1916

4pm went to improve trench between front line and crater. A lot of trench mortar shells and rifle grenades came over on our right.

2 October 1916

Whole day's rest, spent time reading.

3 October 1916

Twice up to the trenches, carrying trench boards. Rumours of going to the Somme.

4 October 1916

9am went into reserve trenches. Other 3 Companies relieved by the Cornwalls. Large number of rats in the trenches and I had to change my dugout on account of them. On sentry duty during the wet night.

5 October 1916

Relieved about 12am by Devons. Marched along the canal bank to Bethune. Billeted in one of the rooms of a large school. Had a stroll round and went to the picture hall.

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6 October 1916

Left in marching order at 7am and marched through Chocques to the village of Busnes which we left about 3 months ago. Billeted in a straw barn. Could not sleep on account of fleas so got up about 12pm and Jim Hall and I joined other 4 chaps who had gone out into a cart shed. Slept under a wagon.

7 October 1916

Orderly. Went to an entertainment at night.



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8 October 1916

Left Busnes in full marching order at 2pm and marched to Lillers, where we entrained into cattle trucks and moved off at 6pm. Arriving at Doullens about 11pm we marched to the village of Orville where we were put into a small camp of tents. The tents had just been put up and the grass floor was soaking with water, but we were too tired to bother about a small matter like that.

9 October 1916

As we did not get into the tents till about 3am we had breakfast about 9 this morning. Spent morning hunting for bread.

10 October 1916

9 to 10 parade, and practice in artillery formation for an hour during the afternoon. Went to a short service in the village at 6pm.

11 October 1916

Moved out of our tents to allow other troops going up to the line to rest for the night. Fixed up small shelters with waterproof sheets in a wood close at hand. Afternoon short field parade.

12 October 1916

12am left camp to practise an attack. We advanced over fields under cover of a barrage, which was represented by

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men carrying red flags. Two aeroplanes worked with us and signalled by means of short blasts on a horn. We arrived back about 6pm.

13 October 1916

Morning no parade. Had a clean up. Afternoon short parade of bayonet fighting.



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14 October 1916

9 to 12 practice in advancing to the attack behind a barrage, represented by men carrying flags. Short practice in bayonet fighting during the afternoon. Shaved my tash off.

15 October 1916

On fatigue picking papers up in the village during the morning. Went to a church service at 6pm and stayed to Holy Communion.

16 October 1916

Practising an attack from 9 to 12.

17 October 1916

Left Orville in full pack and marched to the small village of St Leger. Billeted in a hut built of plaster and thatched with straw. We had a good feed of biscuits which we found in the hut and the billet was a treat compared with the shelter in Orville wood.

18 October 1916

Morning at the first aid class. 6pm left St Leger in motor buses, which took us to Sailly. Leaving the bus there we marched to the trenches, which took us about an hour. Near the entrance to the trenches we passed through the ruined village of Hebuterne. From the entrance to the communication trench we had to carry sand to the front line. Two men carried at one box, other two relieving them every 5 minutes. It was a very heavy job and we were tired out

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when we at last reached the buses at Sailly which landed us safely at our billets about 2am.

19 October 1916

Stayed in bed till 12, pouring with rain all the morning. 6pm on the same job as last night. The trenches were wet and our boots were soon wet through. We had buses again to and from Sailly.



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20 October 1916

Stayed in bed till dinner time. 6pm left in buses again on the same job as last night. A lot of big gun fire. Just as we got into Hebutterne we received orders to go back, think it was on account of bombardment.

21 October 1916

Frosty morning. Left St Leger in full marching order and marched to the village of Saily, where we had to go into low shelters built of waterproof sheets. There are big guns all round and the firing is deafening. 2pm left for the trenches on a working party. The ground between Saily and Hebutterne was full of guns which were bombarding heavily. I noticed a battery of 6 guns standing in the open. I noticed a crucifix standing near the ruined church of Hebutterne which had not been touched by shell fire. Once more I see, as I have seen many a time, the cross amongst the ruins. Our work was carrying footballs [trench mortar bombs] from the village into the trenches. We did not get back until after dark to our shelters.

22 October 1916

9am went again to the trenches on the same work as yesterday, and as my boots were

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still wet I went without socks. Our guns were keeping up a terrific bombardment. We got back about 1pm and had to move down into the village into an empty house there. Our guns were bombarding heavily some village behind the German lines and he replied by sending a few over here. The village is surrounded with guns and the noise of them firing was deafening. Moved into a dugout in the hill side where we slept the night, only bothered by a rat or two.

23 October 1916

8am went again into the trenches to carry footballs, made 2 journeys from Hebutterne to the trench mortar. Got back to Saily about 2pm. Germans shelling village with heavies, we moved out of the village back again into the shelters in the field.



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Germans shelling over here again during the night, and our guns were bombarding heavily. Cold in our shelter.

24 October 1916

Went again to the trenches to carry footballs. We had just returned from the trenches to Hebuterne when the Germans started shelling it, so we cleared out as fast as possible. They were also shelling round Sailly as we were returning. Wet day, the trenches were in an awful state and we were all about wet through. Raining in our shelter spent a cold night, as we could not get our things dry.

25 October 1916

No working party. Wet day, spent a cold miserable time in shelter, where rain was coming in. 5pm on Company guard.

26 October 1916

Left for the trenches about 12am.



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