

**1914 to 1919**

**A Medical Officer's diary and narrative of the  
First World War**

**by Travis Hampson MC**

**edited by Travis Philip Davies, 1999-2001**

**Editor's Note**

**This wordprocessed text is a copy of a hand written book which was compiled by my grandfather Travis Hampson at Chirk in North Wales in 1951. This book includes transcribed entries from a notebook diary that TH kept from 4 August 1914 to 4 September 1915. I have used italics here to show the explanatory notes added by TH in 1951, together with his record of the period September 1915 to February 1919, which I suspect was compiled from memory and miscellaneous notes. The 1951 book includes a number of photos, diagrams and original documents which I hope to publish on the web eventually. TPD, Feb 2001.**

## **FOREWORD**

*The writing of this account of my experiences has come about through the finding of my old pocket diary, which I had carried about with me and in which I had jotted down some of our doings while serving with the BEF from August 6<sup>th</sup> 1914 to February 19<sup>th</sup> 1919. In the earlier part it is almost from day-to-day and word-for-word what I wrote then.*

*The 'Notes' are of happenings which I remember which were not written down at the time and contain some explanations of the events described in the original diary. These have been put in at the time of writing this. (Editor's note: the 'Notes' added to the diary text by TH are shown in italics).*

*It was strictly against orders to keep a diary but a lot of people did it. Mine was so badly written with so many abbreviations and symbols that no one could have made head or tail of it if it had fallen into enemy hands.*

*As the diary was really kept for the benefit of my people at home, a lot of the sticky and dirtier doings of the War have been left out.*

*No doubt inaccuracies will appear in names, places and comments; it must be remembered we were all very much in the dark as to what was happening elsewhere. Frequently the newspapers sent from home told us a lot we didn't know about events.*

*There was at the beginning of the War, and in my experience, during and since, an almost complete ignorance of what sort of unit a FA (Field Ambulance) was in those days, not only amongst civilians, but in very much of the Army, outside the more senior officers.*

*The nearest approach to a 1914 FA was what was known as a Field Hospital during the Boer War, and I often heard the FAs called field hospitals when they are quite different in organisation. Some thought the Unit contained all sorts of luxuries including nurses. A report in the 'Daily Mail' which my people sent me to see in November 1914 is attached. Of course there are no nurses with the Unit, which is very much a 'Field' one,*

*and although we were shelled on many occasions, we were never totally destroyed.*

*An FA is an RAMC Unit which does not exist in peacetime. Although I had put in three months at the RAMC depot at Aldershot in 1913 to obtain a commission in the Special Reserve, I did not see one there, and I don't think one had ever been put on a full war footing until general mobilisation in 1914. I was told they had one partly equipped for manoeuvres and for training. The TA at least had their personnel ready to staff them but did not have the complete vehicles and horses until these were drawn from store to complete a unit.*

*In the regular FAs the officers and men come from all over the place on mobilisation and have never served together as a unit before.*

*Normally the FA is a divisional unit, three to a division, that is, one to each brigade. This includes nine MOs, one quartermaster and about forty Army Service Corps (ASC) drivers. All the officers are mounted. There are altogether about seventy eight horses, heavy draught, light draught, and riders - also one bicycle.*

*A FA is divided into three sections, A, B and C, and each section divided into a tent and a bearer sub-division. 'A' Section is slightly larger than the others as it contains the administrative side, clerks, and specialist NCOs in nursing, cooking, dispensing, et cetera, together with the Sergeant Major, who is also mounted.*

*Each Section is complete in itself, and can act independently of the others when detached from the Unit. The Unit is horse drawn; there are no motor vehicles. This applied to the whole of the original BEF (British Expeditionary Force), except for a few staff cars and motor cyclists, and the motor lorry supply columns.*

*The vehicles are:*

*10 rubber tyred ambulance wagons*

*3 forage carts*

*3 water carts, and*

*1 G.S. wagon with the supply train.*

*The Unit takes up about 450 yards on the line of march, and normally marches in rear of the Brigade ammunition column, except when any dirty work is expected on line of march, and then our Brigadier liked to have an MO with bearers, forage and water cart marching in rear of the advance guard - right in the front of the column.*

*It would take too much space, and perhaps be of little interest to detail the equipment carried, but it is very complete, as it has to be adapted for service in any part of the world where the expeditionary force might be sent. Each Section carries an operating and six bell tents, complete surgical outfit, dressing, drugs, cooks apparatus, Primus stoves et cetera. In addition, for each Section there are 36 bearers for clearing the wounded from the firing line, as well as the tent sub-division. Medical comforts are also carried, not a vast amount, as these things are liable to disappear mysteriously! Some are:- Brandy (one bottle), Champagne (one dozen half bottles), condensed milk and meat extracts.*

*With the ASC there are a saddler and a cold shoeing smith.*

*The officers' valises, limited to 35 pounds in weight, are carried in front on our saddles, the iron ration, socks, washing kit and anything that could be crammed in, the great coat being rolled and strapped behind the cantle of the saddle. On yourself, a regular Christmas Tree, as it came to be known. Sam Browne belt, haversack, water bottle, field glasses, map case, whistle, pocket instrument case, revolver and ammo pouch. On the horse: a saddle, with the things already mentioned, also a head rope, a heel rope (on some), a nose bag, a body brush and rubber, a canvas bucket, two spare horse shoes in case, a sword, a picketing peg, and a saddle blanket. The total weight carried by the horse is about seventeen and a half stone on average, depending of course quite a bit on the weight of the rider. I believe a cavalry horse has to carry even more. From all this it will be seen that an FA is quite a considerable Unit.*

### ***Functions of a Field Ambulance***

*Primarily the collection of the wounded from the troops in action, and their evacuation to the rear at the earliest possible moment.*

*In theory the FA bearers collect wounded from the Regimental Aid Post (RAP), to which place they have been brought by the Regimental stretcher bearers.*

*This RAP is where the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) establishes himself, and where he is usually to be found. He dresses as far as possible any needing more than the first field dressing which is carried by all of us, and has usually been applied by the man himself, or a regimental stretcher bearer, and quite often by his pals, if conditions permit of this. These regimental stretcher bearers are not RAMC, but the bandsmen of the regiments, who have been given some instruction in first aid and stretcher bearing, the band instruments all being left at home.*

*In a scattered action, naturally the wounded will be all over the place, many will never get to the RAP, and have to be searched for and collected together for dressing or evacuation. The next step in the evacuation is the carriage of the wounded from the RAP or round about to the FA Advanced Dressing Station (ADS). The position of this is of course extremely variable, depending on the situation, but if possible it is a place on a road where our horse buses can be got to, and where the wounded can be attended to, that is, those who need further attention before their next move.*

*These ADS's have to be as close as possible to avoid long carries by bearers, and are often within rifle range of the enemy.*

*In the early days of the war, the horse buses brought the wounded back to the HQ of the FA, a very variable distance, where some place (a building if possible) had been got ready by the tent sub-divisions, where the wounded could receive more attention than they had had yet. What happened next depended entirely on the situation as to how soon they could be evacuated.*

*At the FA HQ, urgent operations could be done, or the cases more thoroughly dressed, given AT serum, drinks and food, and made as comfortable as possible, often on palliasses stuffed with straw; but there was no unnecessary undressing. Although evacuation down the line at the earliest possible moment was the aim, it was at times necessary to keep some cases even a day or two when we were not on the move. We had no*

*motor ambulances for some time, and no motor ambulance convoys to collect from the HQ of the FA. Our horse buses were usually too fully occupied in the more forward area to take cases down the line. We had to rely at first on returning empty supply wagons to take the wounded that first stage from us.*

*Men reporting sick from ordinary ailments were also sorted out at the FA, if they got that far, to see that no one got down the line who was fit to stay with his unit.*

*The next halt for the wounded after leaving the FA was at a Clearing Hospital, afterwards called a Casualty Clearing Station. These were at a railway whenever possible, so that a hospital train could get up to them. They were tented hospitals, with no transport of their own, and were well back from the line. Serious cases could be kept any time in them; they were also the most forward unit to have nursing sisters. From here the wounded passed to Stationary or General Hospitals of the L of C (Lines of Communication) and Bases; later by hospital ship across the Channel home.*

*The original BEF consisted of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions, the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, some Army troops, together with all the L of C Units, Hospitals, Base Depots etc. ASC formations. At GHQ, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Cameron Highlanders, the North Irish Horse Yeomanry, and No 20 FA. These all went to France in August 1914. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Divisions came out a bit later; the 4<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of the Retreat.*

*The events described in the diary may not now appear so exciting to the people at home who have lived through another more terrifying war from a civilian point of view. But to me the 1914 war in its early days was all very exciting and intensely interesting. A horse damaged by shell fire or a civilian killed by enemy action were novelties, as for that matter a dead soldier or wounded also.*

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

*BEF British Expeditionary Force*

*RAMC Royal Army Medical Corps*

*MO Medical Officer*

*FA Field Ambulance*

*ADS Advanced Dressing Station*

*RAP Regimental Aid Post*

*RMO Regimental Medical Officer*

*DG Director General, Medical Services*

*DMS Director of Medical Services (Army)*

*DDMS Deputy Director of Medical Services (Corps)*

*ADMS Assistant Director of Medical Services (Division)*

*(DDMS and ADMS had deputies)*

*MAC Motor Ambulance Convoy*

*Buses Horse ambulance wagons*

*CCS Casualty Clearing Station*

*TA Territorial Army*

*L of C Lines of Communication*

*ASC Army Service Corps*

*RTO Railway Transport Officer*

*Bgde Brigade*

*HQ Headquarters*

*PBI Poor B----- Infantry*

*RWF Royal Wech Fusiliers*

*A&SH Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders*

*V SR Scottish Rifles*

*APM Assistant Provost Marshal (police)*

*HE High explosive shells*

*RFC Royal Flying Corps*

## **THE DIARY**

*At the outbreak of War, I was in residence at the General Hospital, Birmingham, as a house physician, and was lucky in not having settled into a practice or permanent job when it started. Being a Special Reserve officer, I had to go at once, I believe much to the envy of some of the other residents.*

### **August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Mobilisation notices were posted up in all the public places in Birmingham. My instructions as to where I should report were 18 months old and I have received no others since, but it was understood that a wire would be sent with a travelling warrant in confirmation.

During the evening C Johnson and Rollason, both Special Reserve officers rolled up at the hospital, the former to report at Croydon on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the latter to be in York within 24 hours. They were both in the same state as myself as regards kit, with many articles to be got. At midnight I went with Johnson to the Garrick Club to see if any news of things in general had come through. No one had anything but rumours. There I met Cox's partner. Cox has resigned his commission just in time; he said it was impossible for him to go having just settled in practice.

### **August 5<sup>th</sup> 1914**

I got Greensill, a fifth year student to come in as locum in my job, having seen Dr Short, my chief, a consulting physician on the staff of the GH. He was a bit stuffy, didn't see the need immediately to chuck up his job, but I did, and got busy completing my outfit, as I was expecting a telegram any



minute. I spent the rest of the day rushing about in my jigger (Morgan three wheeler), which I kept at the hospital. I managed to get a fair number of things in Birmingham, and then went to Walsall, where father had arrived by car from Vyrnwy. I dare not go home on account of the expected wire to join at once.

The Territorials are all mobilising. Many of them, including Wilfred, are in camp now for their annual training. The Birmingham medicos are completing a general hospital at Bournebrook, for which some of the sisters here are under orders to staff.

I wrote off this morning to OC No 20 FA asking for instructions.

This was a very trying day, what with lack of kit and lack of orders. All but about three of the residents here are sending in their names for one of the services. Hird, a Naval Special Reserve Officer, has had to join up at Chatham without any outfit.

Dr Sawyer, one of the honoraries, turned up to do a round dressed in his TA uniform.

I collected all my books and belongings and left them in charge of HH Sampson, now RSO here, and sitting on the fence until he gets his appointment to the staff of the General Hospital; he promised to see them all stored in the box room.

### **August 6<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Out early into the town to try to complete my outfit. On returning midday, I found a telegram waiting for me to join in Aldershot immediately. HHS turned up with a sword for me, which he had found in the town. I was quite worried by the idea of reporting for duty without one.

Left Snow Hill at 2.30 for Aldershot; no trouble getting a ticket on the strength of my telegram. I travelled up with a Major Norrington. A regular ASC bloke, he was not at all thrilled at the prospect of a war, having been in South Africa. He said he thought it was going to be a long job, and that we should be lucky if we came through it alright. He rather depressed me for a bit, as I had been rather looking forward to it.

Detained at North Camp, and shared a taxi first to ASC mess, and then on to the RAMC Depot, where I signed the arrivals book in the orderly room. I saw Major Davidson and Captain Wright, who were at the Depot when I was there in 1913. Went on to Redan Hill, where No 20 FA is mustering, arriving just as it was getting dark. I found our lines, which were just a collection of bell tents, and looked for the CO, Major Steel, and reported to him. I found I was the first Special Reserve officer to join. Others already there were Major Biggam and Captain Pascoe, both Regulars. Osbourne, the CO's servant found me a couple of blankets, and I slept in an empty tent on the ground. A very uncomfortable night.

*Most of my books and items of clothing, including a new morning suit, left at the General Hospital, were missing when I called after the war to collect them, and I never saw them again.*

*The shortage of equipment which every Special Reserve officer should have in case of mobilisation came about because several of us at the Hospital took the course in Aldershot before the war at different times, and lent each other such items as we possessed, such as swords, greatcoats, Sam Browns etc., to avoid having to buy the whole outfit, which was an expensive one. I managed to get a Sam Browne in Walsall; the sword which I had been so fussed about was rather amusing, because we left them all behind in Aldershot. Even the infantry officers didn't worry about swords after the first month or two.*

*I had to leave Birmingham without a greatcoat; mine had been lent to Evan Davies, who was doing his training when war started. He left Aldershot before I got there, for Shorncliff?, taking it with him. He wrote saying he was sorry not to see me, but he had left an order with an Aldershot tailor to make one for me at his expense. This never materialized, and I had to get another. Evan Davies finished his letter by saying 'It is frightfully lucky to have the chance of a war before we have settled down into old men.' Two weeks later he was taken prisoner, together with my greatcoat.*

## **August 7<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Found things not very forward, only about 50 men and some tents so far. Redan Hill is filled with medical units mobilising under canvas. No

equipment of any kind has been drawn yet, and of course there is no information as to when we may move off.

I hear we are to be attached to Army Troops and GHQ, presumably to be sent off to any place wanting FA service.

From now to August 17th will be just a short account of how the time was spent before entraining.

### **August 8<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 1914**

It was very interesting gradually drawing the stores and equipment, and then the horses, and seeing the FA fill out into a complete unit. The first few days there was very little doing. I spent some time getting my personal kit together. Things were extremely difficult to come by. I couldn't get a flea bag, so used two blankets. A valise turned up just in time.

Lt JB Williamson SR and Lt Jones joined on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and Lt Brown SR on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Brown left us very soon, going sick with a septic finger. He got rather chipped on arriving with a second hand tin uniform trunk, with a picture of the Duke of Manchester painted on the top, to whom it had once belonged. These boxes in any case were not taken overseas.

Major Hull, a Regular and a FRCS, who had been posted to us as the specialist surgeon, very wisely waited until almost the last possible day, and had to be urgently sent for, so missing a lot of hard work and bad feeding.

Three civil surgeons, Lts Greaves, Dillon and Aldis were attached to complete the officer strength. The term civil surgeon was soon dropped; it was a relic of South Africa, and these people were just temporary commissions. At the beginning of the war they signed on for one year.

I was given charge of the bearer sub-division of A Section, but with Brown going sick, I had to take on C Section. Lt Aldis, who knew nothing except French, was put into A Section, A Section bearers being not so likely to be detached from the unit. I think the CO thought he might as well have an interpreter with the HQ of the FA. It was generally believed that France was our destination.

About 50 Welsh terriers (RAMC Territorial bearers) joined under Sgt Barnfield, arriving from the camp at Aberystwyth where Wilfred was with the RWFs. This camp was broken up on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and the men turned up without any equipment, and mostly without greatcoats.

There were not enough trained RAMC personnel to make up the necessary numbers of bearers in all the FA's, so each had a certain number of infantry reservists who had volunteered for the job on mobilisation. They got a grant of money and some training in First Aid and stretcher bearing, and so were ready when wanted. Naturally they were not the pick of the infantry regiments, as they would not have been let go. Ours seem a pretty tough lot.

Our CO acted as Camp Commandant, and Capt Pascoe as Sanitary Officer. I went round with him a bit as his assistant.

The usual camp routine was Reveille 5.30am, then a route march before breakfast at 7.30 am. After that, some drill, demonstrations, and lectures to the men on First Aid, sanitation and general subjects. Then perhaps another route march to get the feet hardened; afterwards foot inspection, corn cutting and boot fitting. These were very important items. Dinner at 1pm, and afterwards odd jobs, and more or less off-duty.

After a few days the horses arrived with their ASC personnel. I chose my rider, a well made nice looking nag of about 15.2, strong, and in good condition. After this I had a ride every afternoon with the CO to Long Valley, or somewhere to call on people he knew round about. My nag very fresh, on the jog all the time, very difficult to make him walk. I hope it will wear off later; he is very fast, but can't jump. Except for the CO, the other officers seem rather to dislike the sight of their horses, and several of them I think have never been on a horse before.

The riders on the whole seem to be rather on the small side, in any case, the average MO doesn't want, and certainly won't get, a cavalry officer's charger. But we have some very fine requisitioned hunters getting to some of the FAs.

The draught horses, also the riders, are all civilians, and quite new to Army life. The heavies are a magnificent lot; they are the pick of the

brewer's drays and such like horse drawn civilian transport. The light draught also appear to be first rate. I believe the Government has a scheme to subsidise owners in exchange for the liability to requisition the horses when wanted.

On drawing the ambulances and other vehicles there was a lot of work to be done checking every item and all the stores and to get to know exactly where any particular thing should be and was carried. Quite a job was pairing the draught horses and fitting the harness, all of which was delivered in its parts with nothing put together, and when assembled, each bit had to be fitted to the individual horse.

We rigged up a tarpaulin between two buses to mess in, it was better than eating it off the ground as we had been doing before. We drew Army rations from the first day with no extras, and they were very badly cooked, made in a dixie, generally smoked and you just dipped your enamelled pint mug into it when you wanted any. We had no extras, which most of the units round about seemed to go in for. We did not even have butter and bread from the town at first, just the ration biscuits. Perhaps the CO wants to harden us up for what is to come, but my impression is that the regular officers in this unit are too damned mean to spend anything, and until Major Hull joined, we didn't even have beer sent over from the canteen. No RAMC officers except those stationed permanently in Aldershot were allowed to use the RAMC Depot mess. I got an occasional decent meal in the town, but it was mostly what became known as 'mucking in'.

Identity discs worn round the neck, first field dressing to be sewn inside the point of the jacket in front, and our iron rations were next issued. The iron ration consists of a three quarter pound tin of bully beef, four biscuits equalling a pound of bread, two cubes of Oxo and a grocery ration of tea and sugar, the whole in an American cloth case. These iron rations were to be carried by everyone, and were not to be used except in an emergency on orders from a very senior officer. It was supposed to be food for 24 hours. Both the bully and the biscuits are very good.

Padre Gibb (Capt) joined two days before we left. He brought his own horse, and man who rode a bicycle with a tradesman's carrier in front of it. The Padre had been throughout the South African War as a trooper in a cavalry regiment. He was given charge of the Mess; some pounds of butter

and bread appeared at once. My teeth were getting a bit sore from the hard biscuits.

When the FA was complete, the whole unit had some treks across the country, distances up to 15 miles. Everything went off very well, except my horse got a small saddle sore, and I couldn't ride him for a few days. His action keeps the same unfortunately, and I think this was responsible for it. There is very little opportunity for trying to get him out of it.

The weather during this time kept gloriously fine; the only trouble was the dust. I happened to say to one of our senior NCO's one day how lucky we were that the show was happening at this time of the year, but he rather morosely replied that it wasn't long to the Winter. He had been in South Africa, and had no illusions about the pleasurable anticipations of everything being anything but myths. His attitude rather brought me up with a jolt. Come to think of it, rather like the ASC officer I travelled to Aldershot with.

All the officers and most of the men had anti-typhoid inoculations at the Cambridge hospital. This was not compulsory; it knocked some of them out rather badly. I was a bit feverish and seedy for about 24 hours and had a very sore arm.

Redan Hill is not far from the station and sidings. We could see and hear troops entraining throughout the night, every night. Nobody knows where they are going, but there is a general idea that we shall fetch up somewhere in the region of Charleroi.

The RAMC Depot is crowded with about 3000 RA and St John's men. I saw an enormous parade of them in the square, some in civilian clothes, most in the uniform of their order. Presumably they are to act as reinforcement for us and to staff other medical units such as hospitals.

Lts Miller and Darcy, with whom I trained in 1913, are also on Redan Hill. The time passed very quickly, and altogether was quite enjoyable and full of variety, but there was no time and one was not encouraged to move very far from the camp.

We flew our flags, a Red Cross and a Union Jack, on the flagpole which is part of our equipment by day, and the lamps at night, but we were the only unit I saw on Redan Hill to do this.

Various handbooks of the organisation and equipment of foreign armies were dished out to us, and pictures of the uniforms of Germans, French and Belgians.

Our men seemed a fairly decent lot, but kicked up rather a row late at night and in the early morning. One lot had 'The early birds' chalked on their tent and woke up about 3am. The ones next door wouldn't settle down until about midnight, in spite of the orderly officer and picket's warnings, so we had to have some of them up for it. After that things were a bit better. Everyone was I think so excited and so keen not to be left behind that their spirits were a bit too high.

When complete we had to put 14 men into most of the bell tents for a few nights. This is more than a bit overcrowded, and accounted for much of the scuffling and bad language at nights. There was also the usual doleful singing by the Welsh contingent, with also a good deal of 'One man and his dog going to mow a meadow' going on to hundreds of men and dogs.

The entraining already mentioned began soon after I got to Aldershot. Later the medical units started: one would wake up in the morning and find another empty tented area in the camp. We were told we should be amongst the last to leave as we were attached to GHQ.

On August 17th we were told we should leave on the night of August 19th, so on the 18th the final packing of wagons and mobilisation of kit had to be complete. My valise must have weighed quite a bit over the 35 pounds, although the same as everyone else's. I had managed to get all the necessary things; many of them I could have got much better if I had known how long we were going to be in the camp, such as breeches ordered in a hurry as a second pair came fitting so tightly at the knee I had to get them altered in the town in a few hours, and they made an awful mess of the job.

The officers who started with No 20 FA were -

Major Steel (CO) Regular

Major Biggam - ditto -

Major Hull - ditto -

Capt Pascoe - ditto -

Lt Williamson Special Reserve

Lt Hampson - ditto -

Lt Dillon Temporary commission, one years contract

Lt Greaves - ditto -

Lt Aldis - ditto -

Lt & QM Regular ex-ranker

*Command of a FA was by establishment a Lt. Col's job, with a major in charge of each section, but it was not until late in the war that this was observed, in fact not until I had left the unit in 1917 were these ranks given, so that I had been holding a job which carried the rank (and pay) of a Major for most of the time, but I remained a Captain. This was of course very unfair, but typical of the Authorities. Another source of annoyance was the terms of service of the temporary officers. These people only signed on for one year. This didn't really matter, as they were conscripted later when this came in when they didn't volunteer to stay on, but their pay was 24 shillings a day, and mine only 14. Many of them were youngsters only just qualified, and none of them had given three valuable months as we had to in the Special Reserve, training in the Depot for a commission.*

*The SR's were given, on active service, some allowances amounting to a few shillings a day which the Regulars got, but it did not anything like bring it up to 24 shillings, and you lost these if sent home sick or wounded, so the basic difference of 10 shillings a day was a real grouse. However, we were not the only ones. Specially enlisted Motor Transport drivers were paid 6 shillings a day while the regular ASC MT man got his army pay of 1s2d a day for doing the same job, frequently in the same unit. This*



*sort of thing didn't worry us at first; all we thought about was getting out and not getting left behind. But later on, when the first excitement had worn away, and things began to get tedious, it wasn't so good year after year.*

*The only thing we went out short of was officer's saddles. I suppose there was a shortage, and we were issued with the troopers saddle, which being rather short in the seat, and we rather long in the leg wasn't too comfortable. The holsters strapped on in front soon began to wear out the knees of my breeches. As time went on those who wanted it managed a decent saddle by various means.*

*The secrecy of everything was remarkable; I don't think our letters from Aldershot got home until after we had left. All the information which has been published about the BEF having been taped for the left flank of the French army for some years before the war started was quite unknown, at any rate to the juniors. Also, news of what was happening when we got out, except on our immediate front, was mostly what we read in the papers from home, and there was very little official news in those. Always plenty of rumours, of course: these became known as 'water cart', the water cart being a place where so many collected to fill their bottles and swapped yarns about what had been heard. The most extraordinary, wild sort of stories circulated.*

*Just before we left I had a letter from Wilfred with the 53 Div T. His push were all very agitated that they wouldn't get out before the show was over. He needn't have worried, but it was generally thought that we should be home by Christmas. No grounds could be given for this supposition.*

*The smooth mobilisation and departure of the original BEF has been so much written about that it would only be trying the patience of anyone who reads this to say anything very much about it. But the fact remains that as far as the ordinary bloke could see of what happened the whole thing was amazing, and I don't think the force went overseas short of anything in spite of some curious things that were rumoured, e.g. the scare at home at about the end of the retreat that we had no chloroform. Well meaning people bought it and tried to send it over, when as a matter of fact even a RMO carried sufficient in his panniers for many more cases than he was likely to deal with. Our real difficulty at first was to get the wounded back*

*to a place where they could be properly attended to. The greatest want I think was motor ambulances, of which we had none in the BEF at first. Later we got 8 in place of 7 of our horse buses, keeping 3 horse buses as they could get to places where no motors could, especially such places as the Somme area in the Winter. Then it took a team of six horses instead of two for the job.*

## **August 18<sup>th</sup> /19<sup>th</sup>1914**

For the train journey the FA was split up into two parts. The first party marched to the station at midnight. The second, which I was with, went at 1.30am.

With end-to-end loading, that is, a vehicle is pushed onto the end of a truck from a platform, and then shoved along the whole length of the train of trucks to the end one and so-on, everything was loaded in 30 minutes, and we were complimented by the RTO. There was a little trouble with some of the horses. Many of them are huge beasts, and could hardly hold their heads up in the cattle trucks. Entraining instructions stated - 'if there is any trouble in getting a horse in, two drivers should lock arms above his hocks and hustle him in'. Our ASC drivers are all very small, though tough, and it struck us as rather amusing to see two small men trying to hustle an enormous draught horse that had other ideas on the subject. But by getting a willing one in first, there was not too much difficulty.

The train left Aldershot at 2.30am. We didn't know where we were going, but thought it would be Southampton, though there was some talk of Bristol. I slept a bit, on and off, in the train, and came to life about 10 miles from Southampton, a district new to me but recognised by others in the carriage. This proved to be our port of embarkation. The train ran alongside a quay, and was unloaded onto a wharf..

No 19 FA had come into the same quay, and had arrived just before our first half. It turned out they were going on the same ship, the 'Karnak', a tramp of about 3000 tons or so which was lying alongside.

We had to wait while No. 19 embarked. I was fairly hungry and thirsty by this time, but managed to get some coffee and a bun on the quay, and then bought a paper and sat out on the end of the wharf watching the shipping

until it came to our turn to load. When that came, I chucked my Christmas tree in the corner of a cabin, of which there were only six, alongside a small saloon under the bridge. The 'Robilla', an Indian trooper, was lying on the opposite side being converted into a hospital ship. Further down were several liners with sailors at work on them, mounting guns for them to become armed merchantmen or cruisers. There were also several steam yachts with big red crosses painted on their sides. I bought some postcards from a boy scout, of whom there were quite a lot about, running errands and as messenger boys. He said he would post them for me, but I expected them to be stopped at the Post Office.

Loading the ship was a slow job. She was light and high above the quay, the tide being in. There were two electric cranes going. The vehicles were slung up by their hubs, and the horses with a sling under their bellies. The riders were slung up in a box. The heavies looked rather funny high up in the air. They looked a bit scared, which no doubt they were, and you had to stand clear when they landed, because as soon as their feet touched down nearly all of them tried to jump off the floor. The crane drivers were very good at landing them down quietly. No doubt they had been at it for 10 days or so already. The accommodation below decks was very good; they had a stall each, but the atmosphere soon became very thick. The hatches were left wide open: what it would have been like battened down I can't imagine. Everything was located without accident, and we sailed about 6pm. I think it might have been a bit later; with a good deal of 'Tipperary' and 'Are we downhearted?' from the men. The captain is sailing under sealed orders not to be opened until we have dropped the pilot. The trip down Southampton water was very interesting; dozens of transports and a fair number of naval vessels were lying at anchor. It was said that there was a line of small naval vessels guarding the route right across to the coast of France, within sight of each other. At any rate, we were always within a fairly short distance of one as far as I could see. When it got dark, no lights were shown on the ship.

After dropping the pilot off the Isle of Wight, we heard we were going to Rouen, so we should have all night and most of next day on board. I was orderly MO, and had to be up until midnight, but I didn't have anything to do, medical or otherwise, and there was no trouble amongst the horses. Luckily it was a dead flat calm. Some lights said to be those of Havre were in sight when I went off duty. I then slept intermittently on deck in my

greatcoat. After a longer doze, when I awoke it was daylight; we had passed Havre, and were just entering the mouth of the Seine. The river was like a very wide canal, muddy, and with the tide against. It was a most interesting trip up the river, rather slow going, but a glorious fine morning. We were only one of a continuous line of transports, there were also many returning empty down river. The civilians had turned out at all the towns and villages, waving flags, letting off toy cannon and yelling 'Vive la France', 'Vive l'Angleterre', 'Vive l'Armee', 'Vive l'Entente Cordiale' and 'Vive la Patrie'. The ship's company retaliated with the same, or other shouts, and the usual songs were sung by the men. All this went on continuously, and they must have felt hoarse by the time we got to Rouen. Some of the scenery was very fine, in places cliffs coming down to the river bank. There seemed to be a town or village every two or three miles.

We had to wait several hours outside Rouen for some reason, while a lot of transports went by with much chaffing and asking whether we were downhearted. Eventually we got alongside the quay; it was said to be too late to unload that night.

The large quays were a mass of stores and equipment, with a few French soldiers about in their brilliant uniforms.

Five of us went into the town and had dinner at the Hotel de la Poste, a fine up to date place, with by far the best dinner I had had since mobilising. It appears to be fine city. The streets are all pavé, and the noise, dust and heat are tremendous. All the kids worry you for souvenirs; most of them have a British cap badge or shoulder plate stuck on their caps in spite of strict orders to the troops not to give them away. I called at a saddlers to have some repairs done to leggings. Back to the ship early. The men were not allowed off, so they were lining the quay side of the ship entertaining a large crowd of civilians with a concert. We are to begin unloading at daybreak. I wrote some postcards home and strolled about. We have no news of where we are to be sent; the CO has seen the authorities, but won't tell us anything. There are some of our naval officers about, but no warships to be seen up here. Late tonight I managed to get a berth, but of course didn't do much undressing.

**Rouen (continued) August 21<sup>st</sup> 1914**

We began unloading at 5am, a delay and much trouble. The cranes on our quay didn't seem strong enough to lift our loaded GS wagons. There were nothing like the ones at Southampton, and it was a much slower business than loading. The wagons were manhandled about 100 yards away from the ship. During these proceedings I had a couple of short walks into the town. Everyone seems very pleased to see us, except the stevedores, who were on the point of striking after nearly a fortnights work, continuously on the job.

No 19 FA got orders and moved off first, having sorted out the two lots of horses and transport.

We have to go up to the rest camp, 2 to 3 miles out of the town. Lt Aldis was sent off to find the way while the unloading was going on. After a very scrappy lunch of bully and biscuits and poisonous tea in the saloon, we moved off at about 4.30pm. Nothing of importance had been smashed on the journey. The route was through the town and up 2 to 3 miles of a fairly steep gradient, which had to be done without a halt, and tried the horses rather. On the way up we were presented with flowers and apples at almost every house. Had a water cart overturned by the driver, who was trying to pick apples off a tree overhanging the road, and ran it up the bank. No damage was done to it.

The rest camp is in some big fields on the top of the hills above the town. There seemed to be about 1000 bell tents. Here we found No 19 FA, who had been up some hours ahead of us, and also various other units.

Here there seemed to be a lack of orders for us. Anyhow, we expected to have a night's rest. The horses were unharnessed, and we seized the tents allotted to us, and had our valises brought over from the baggage wagon. I managed to get a shave and a good wash. It had been a hot dusty day without any sitting down.

By this time it was dark. There was what appeared to be hopeless confusion in the camp, and it was almost impossible to find anyone or our tents once you had moved away from them in the pitch darkness. This it was necessary to do, as our transport, men and horses were in a different part of the field.

The cooks got to work as soon as we got to the field, but for some reason we had to wait about two hours for our meal. By this time we were pretty empty. There had been an issue of fresh meat. The steak we had was the toughest bit of meat I have ever tried to eat, and to wash it down, a dixie of black tea. When we were just thinking of turning in for the night, orders came to march down the hill again and entrain for some place unknown.

## **August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914**

The Unit had to be collected and got on the move at once. It was still a pitch dark night, and a bit misty, but we managed to leave on time and without leaving anybody behind. To begin with I footslogged with the men, until we came to a bad hairpin on the hill, which was quite tricky enough by daylight, and saw the transport safely round. It was a job to prevent the drivers cutting the corner. I don't think any heavy transport had been sent up to the camp except the FAs.

It was about a four mile march to the station. We arrived outside the gates about midnight, but were not allowed in. Everything was late on account of the fog. The men were very tired, as indeed everyone was, including the horses. The men just sat down anywhere on the road. We sat on the kerbstone and nibbled biscuits. Lt Dillon had some brandy, which went down very well. After one and a half hours we marched into the station, and again waited about, the men trying to wander off and find somewhere to lie down. They had to be just kept together on the open platform. B and C sections of No 19 FA marched into the station and on to the opposite platform. Their train came in almost immediately, and as they had a raised platform to load from, which we hadn't, were off in good time. Neither they nor we knew where they were going.

Then our train came in. C Section officers Hull, Dillon and self bagged our carriage and then began the loading, a most awful job. Every vehicle had to be man handled up wooden ramps from the level of the rails up onto the trucks. With everyone working hard it took two and a half hours, although it was daylight nearly all the time. The GS wagons with their quarter lock were the chief trouble.

I had a splash under a pump on the platform, and then we took our corners in the carriage at 6am. We were soon on the move, and slept a bit until

8.30am, when we made some tea with a spirit stove and had some bully and biscuits. The officers' messing arrangements were rotten. There was no reason why we should not have laid in some civilian stores, such as tinned stuff or sardines, before leaving Aldershot, but no-one would back me up in the matter. We slept a bit, on and off, and watched the country until about 2pm, when we had some more grub and felt very dirty. We had no map, and I couldn't discover from the names of the stations where we were going. If we had passed through any town, it must have been while I was asleep. From the time taken on the journey, it must have been a very round about country trip.

About this time while we were crawling along at about 20 miles per hour, a horse tumbled out of one of the vans (Hommes 40, Cheveaux en long 8) onto the permanent way. It didn't seem to hurt him; he got up and began to graze immediately at the side of the track. I was looking out the window at the time and saw it happen. Of course we didn't stop for him. The whole journey was done very slowly: never more than 25 miles per hour. There was plenty of time for the civilians gathered at the level crossings to shout for souvenirs and biscuits. From the number of badges we could see on them, a good many of our troops had travelled on this line. We didn't stop in a station, and nowhere else for more than a few minutes until we reached our destination, which turned out to be Le Cateau, a town about 20 to 30 miles from the Belgian frontier.

We did not see anything at all remarkable on the journey, perhaps because a lot of it was passed dosing uneasily. The country was very like parts of our own, except for the lines of tall trees on the roads, and enormous fields of roots, probably beet. Everyone turned out to wave flags, shout the usual things, throw us green apples, and want souvenirs. Most of our men had got rid of their badges by the time we got to Le Cateau.

Unloading at the station again had to be done on ramps, and our loaded GS wagons and horses took a bit of stopping on the incline. It was not such a lengthy business as loading, and in about an hour we were formed up and ready to move off.

A French interpreter met us and told us we were not expected, and no billets were ready for us. The town was about a mile from the station. Soon after we got out of the yard Hull nearly went into a blind ditch about

six feet deep. He managed to slide off, but the horse went into it. It sustained no damage. About half a mile from the station we were overtaken by about 40 motor lorries and smothered with dust. On arriving in the town we were halted in the main street while a billeting party searched around. Eventually, after about two hours waiting, the men were put into an empty school building, and the horses had to be picketed on lines between wagons standing in the street.

From the mayor the officers got billets delogement for private houses .

Dillon was the only one to take advantage of this; the rest of us scuttled into a house from which the owners had departed. It was close to our transport, at the corner of two streets, and had quite a big walled garden with a conservatory at the back. There was a housekeeper and a man in charge, so our servants had a range and could cook for us when required.

After seeing to the men and transport, three of us walked into the town to the best cafe we could find for dinner. It was quite a small place, and very crowded. A lot of GHQ officers were dining there. We got a good meal, and the white wine wasn't bad either, but it took about one and a half hours.

There was a complete absence of news, at least we couldn't get hold of any, but much rushing about in motor cars by the staff and motor bike dispatch riders. These were mostly recruited into the RE's at the outbreak of war from the sporting type of youth who owned a motor bike, and was enlisted with his bike for this kind of duty, being given a stripe, a uniform and a revolver. Trains of motor lorries loaded with grub and ammunition kept going through the town.

The only troops in the town are the First Battalion Cameron Highlanders acting as GHQ guard, and the North Irish Horse, a Yeomanry regiment, with other oddments, RE's, ASC and ourselves. The other army troops were supposed to have been sent further forward.

I turned in early under a tree on the grass in the garden for the first night's rest since leaving Aldershot. It had been four days and nights with nothing but snatches of sleep and no decent meal until tonight, except at Hotel de la Poste in Rouen.



Our maps have been dished out to us today. We each have about twenty to hump about with our kit. Now at any rate we could see the lie of the land.

### **Le Cateau continued, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914, Sunday**

After about ten hours sleep, I felt much better this morning. Had some breakfast in an estaminet opposite our billet, and afterwards just messed about with the men and horses. The CO went to see the DMS (Director of Medical Services), who told him we had to stay where we were in the meantime. I walked into town and tried to pick up some news. No luck; don't know what is happening. GHQ is in the same place, so I suppose we shall not move until they do.

We had no idea how far away the front was but thought we heard some gunfire to the north a good way off. The Padre held a short service in the school and read General French's letter to the troops, mostly about the fact that we were serving in a friendly allied country and not to make free with the ox as the ass, etc, or appropriate anything not belonging to us, and generally to behave ourselves.

After lunch I had my watch mended and saw a sick horse, one of ours with pneumonia. Many of the horses have abrasions from the boat and train journey, but all except the one mentioned are quite fit otherwise.

A few sick rolled up from amongst the troops in the town. Hull was sent off somewhere to see a sick officer, who died from intestinal obstruction before anything could be done. He later trephined another who had been shot through the head and sent down the line in a motor lorry. He brought back no news except that there had been heavy fighting to the north, but no details as to where, casualties, or which way it had gone. Staff officers driving about seem pleased enough. I slept in the afternoon and had dinner again at the same cafe.

### **Le Cateau Continued, August 24<sup>th</sup> 1914**

At 10am the DG Surgeon General O'Donnell drove up to our billet in a great stew with a telegram that said that there were 300 of our wounded who had been sent into Landrecies, a town near the frontier about 12 to 14 miles away. He wanted to send someone out there to see what would have

to be done, so Hull, Dillon, Aldis and myself packed into his car, an open Vauxhall. This car was driven by its owner, who had offered himself and his car and had come out to drive staff officers about. (He later wrote a book of his experiences and in it mentioned this incident.)

The DG did not come. We took some surgical haversacks and a monkey box, which is a case containing a fair variety of dressings and instruments which can be carried by a shoulder strap. How it came to be called this I don't know, unless it looked like a portable organ grinders organ which the monkey sat on top of. How these arrangements were going to cope with 300 wounded is a bit of a mystery. However, we started off for the place with orders to send all particulars back by the car. On the way we saw a lot of French territorials building barricades on the road, leaving just enough room for a vehicle to get through. We were challenged several times.

On arriving at Landrecies we could hear gunfire quite distinctly. In the town there were two hospitals, one the ordinary civilian one, and the other improvised in a school. Altogether there were about 60 of our sick and wounded. The sick had been left there on the way up, and the wounded had been sent down by motor lorry from round about Mons. They were mostly RFA casualties.

From a slightly wounded officer I had a description of the happenings. He said several batteries had been wiped out. It seems our people had no idea the Germans were so close and took up their positions during the night. The Germans lay quiet, and then early in the morning, knowing where our batteries were and having got the range they opened on them with a terrific burst of shrapnel and later HE. Our guns, being uncovered, were simply at their mercy, and took an awful knock. This officer says he thinks his guns were lost for certain, as they could not get them out of action, their horses nearly all being killed. He seemed to think the same thing was happening in other parts of our line. He was perfectly astounded by the way an aeroplane was spotting and range finding for the German gunners. He knew nothing about the infantry except that things were not good.

We found that all the wounded had been dressed by the civilian French doctors and nurses and there was very little for us to do medically. We sent details back to HQ and waited instructions. We had some lunch in a small hotel in the town; it is not so large a place as Le Cateau.

About 3.30pm a message came by despatch rider with orders to get all the wounded to a train which was expected at the station. This improvised hospital train would leave at 5.30pm at the latest. We were not sorry to get the order, as we were wondering what was going to happen. There had been a rumour by a lorry driver that a retirement was in progress.

We had no bearers, and so had to get our coats off and carry the stretcher cases down several flights of stairs. We then put them on some wagons we had commandeered for the job and took them to the station about half a mile away. This was a longish job and a devilish hot one. The doctors and nurses were awfully cut up about our taking them away, and said we should kill several of them, at which I don't wonder. Amongst them there was a very bad pneumonia and another two days convalescent from an acute appendectomy, several with very bad wounds, and one officer who was completely delirious. However, we got them all out of the place and onto the train just in time, before it started without warning. I think the engine driver wasn't for wasting any time in getting a bit further south.

We travelled down with them as far as Le Cateau, where with great difficulty we had got them to stop the train. Otherwise it would have meant a twelve mile tramp back, and quite likely being potted at by the French sentries. Aldis was left on the train to take the wounded on and hand them over at some place I never heard the name of.

Before we left Landrecies we tried to reassure the civilians that les Allemands would not come there, but it was doubtful if they believed it. I didn't feel at all sure about it myself after such information as we had been able to come by, and wasn't sorry to be out of the place.

*By this time the Retreat from Mons was under weigh, although we didn't know it. Landrecies was the place where the Guards had to fight their way out of an ambush, I'm not certain, but I think the night of the day we had evacuated the place. I don't remember what time we rejoined our unit, and my diary doesn't say, but I know it was late.*

### **Le Cateau continued, August 25<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Early this morning we had orders to move at once south to St Quentin, in fact a forced march of about 25 miles. The starting point for the column

was at the station. Major Howard ASC was in charge of the column, which should have consisted of the North Irish Horse, two companies ASC and ourselves. The Camerons passed us later travelling by railway train.

After waiting about an hour for the OC column, our CO thought we might as well be getting on by ourselves, as he had been told where to go. So we did.

To the North there was a continuous rumble of guns, but we could not tell how far away. On the way we saw a lot of bullocks harnessed to wagons and working in the fields. They are shod, and wear a wooden arrangement on their heads on which the pole rests and by which they pull. I rendered first aid to a motor cyclist despatch rider. I was riding about 100 yards behind the column when he came by at a good pace. A dog ran in front of him and he came an awful cropper. He didn't break anything except some fittings on the cycle. We hammered it straight and he went on all right. It was a Triumph motor bike. Then I caught up with the column again, and marched and rode alternately.

After about two hours we met two brigades (or it might have been three) of RFA field guns going north. The dust was awful.

*These were the guns which came up just in time for the battle of Le Cateau. I forget details, but I believe their arrival allowed one of our divisions to get away without being completely cut up or surrounded.*

The dust got worse as the day got hotter, especially when motor lorries went by, which they did at various times. Ammunition columns went by also, but these were going south. Some appeared to be fully loaded.

Ten minutes in the hour was the halt allowed, and men could fall out on the side of the road. By the time we got half way the men were beginning to feel it. There was a lot of pavé, and our buses were getting loaded up with the sore footed ones.

If we hadn't had such a good breaking in at Aldershot, I don't think many of them would have stood up so well. These pavé roads are dreadful for marching on, especially the old ones which have got really uneven and have probably been laid since before the Napoleonic Wars. The tall trees

lining the road gave a fair amount of shade. As we got further from Le Cateau the sound of the guns got fainter.

## **St Quentin**

When we got about 5 kilometres from the town a billeting party was sent on ahead to fix things up for us. They met us on arrival and there was not much waiting about. It was a fair sized town with a fine park and avenues of trees. Under these the wagons were drawn up, and the horses picketed to lines stretched between them. Those near enough soon began to gnaw the bark off them. The men were put in a large empty school, and ourselves in a ladies' college. Needless to say there were no young ladies about. Nearly all the bigger houses were shut up, in fact the town was almost empty. Ours was not a bad building. There were dormitories with beds and mattresses. Nothing else, of course, and the beds were very short. No one was in occupation except the caretakers.

On the way here we saw on the railway some train loads of English and French wounded, and also some French Cavalry with their tin hats. I didn't think much of them - they didn't look good horsemen, and their mounts were poor light beasts.

During the halts the villagers were very good in giving drinks of beer, wine and cider to everyone, and also apples and cigarettes. They also ran out with these while we were on the move, and it was a job at times to keep the men in the ranks and also to keep them from drinking any sort of water they could come by.

We saw our first German plane today. He came down quite low and had a good look at about the time the guns were going by us.

The recognised distance for heavy draught animals to cover in a day is 14 miles, so our hairies had done pretty well today.

After having some grub and a cold splash in a sink (there was no bathroom in the place) we strolled into the town, but could pick up no news. The padre did not march with us, and turned up later with some rumours.

There seems to be no doubt that a retreat is going on which is said to be strategic, although we are not very happy about it anyhow.

### **August 26<sup>th</sup> 1914, St Quentin to Noyon**

Had an excellent night - raining hard this morning. After breakfast went round the men's billet with a headmistress sort of person. Afterwards censored letters and wrote home. I had also posted letters at Le Cateau, and hope they get home.

*None of these ever did get home.*

The CO went to HQ but told us nothing when he returned, so I just messed about and spent a lot of time with the horses. Some of them had been galled, so I arranged different harness by swapping about and using what breast collars we had to best advantage.

Lunch at 1pm. Halfway through it a staff officer drove up to our billets with orders for us to clear off immediately to Noyon with all possible speed. HQ had been gone about four hours, and they had forgotten all about us. There were no obvious signs of any need for haste: no close firing, no transport or wounded or stragglers falling back through the town. Not that we wasted any time in pushing off as they might have by passed the town. It took the best part of an hour before we were on the road. Not very good, but we were not very used to it yet and are still very regimental, almost doing things by numbers.

A very trying march of about 25 miles. It rained most of the time and soon got dark. Here we began to get amongst other units trekking back and the road was very congested with transport of all kinds. My nag had a sore back, and I had to footslog most of it.

When we got to what the CO thought was about 3 kilometres from Noyon, I was sent in on a borrowed horse with the Sergeant Major (also mounted in a FA) to arrange about billets. We went on and on what seemed about 10 kilometres, and thought we must have lost our way. It was pitch dark and raining. Just then we came upon a reserve park of rations or ammunition. I don't know which, but it was miles of horse drawn GS wagons and an awful job getting by them in a narrow road with most of

their drivers asleep. I found they were going to the same place. I think there must have been a good many splintered tail boards that night; the horses were just following the wagon in front, and if there was a check the pole of the following wagon was into the tailboard of the next before the horses could pull up.

We got by them eventually and soon afterwards were challenged by a French sentry who told me we had arrived at Noyon, which I had almost given up hope of seeing that night. Another 200 yards brought us to the French cavalry barracks, which are just outside the town. There I met someone in a car who had been waiting three hours for us to turn up. He had orders for us to billet in the cavalry barracks, and immediately departed. I went into the place, leaving the Sergeant Major on the road. We had taken such a long time getting there since leaving the FA that I thought they may be up any time. After leaving my Christmas tree in the Guardroom, I had a look round.

The French soldiers were very interested in my clothes and kit, and looked at and handled everything I was carrying with remarks I couldn't understand, but apparently friendly. I think I was the first member of the BEF they had seen close enough to talk to. I found the stables and a place for the vehicles and then went into the road to wait for them. The head of the reserve park was halted just outside the gates waiting for instructions: it was still raining hard. I exchanged views with a blasphemous ASC major in charge of it and also their medical officer, who wasn't too pleased with life.

After about an hour, at 2am, the FA turned up. They had just about had enough of it. The men were very footsore and the buses were loaded up with them. Marching on wet greasy pavé is worse than when it is dry. We got everything under cover at last, and at about 3.30am I turned in on a stretcher in a bus without taking anything off. I had had nothing to eat all day except the interrupted lunch at St Quentin and a small piece of cheese and biscuit. My store of chocolate, never very big, was long since finished. We could have done differently if the CO had liked to have a decent halt, and this could have been done quite easily, as we were on our own, and not marching with a column.

GHQ were in town. They all travel by cars and motor lorries with their bodyguard of Cameron Highlanders travelling by train. We had seen nothing of the North Irish Horse or ASC boys today. I think they left St Quentin a long time before us. I found we left the FA at least 6 kilometres before we need have done to come on billeting. There are rumours that Le Cateau has fallen, so we are really retreating if that is true.

### **August 27<sup>th</sup> 1914, Noyon**

Disturbed early. Had a good breakfast and then a look around the cavalry barracks. Very fine stabling but very badly kept. There was a fine cinder track in the centre with jumps.

There are perhaps 500 French here, not more, and they are infantry; you have to watch your belongings, as they will take anything and say it's a souvenir. The whole place is disgustingly dirty, and the flies simply awful. I have never seen anything like them - it's necessary to blow them off your food before you put it in your mouth. The reason, of course, is that the French have made no attempt to remove the heaps of horse manure for weeks, and this is the perfect breeding ground for them.

The town is only a short distance below us. We had several strolls down after news, but there is nothing reliable. It is rumoured that one of our divisions has been badly cut up and lost all its guns. Hope it isn't true.

*When I came back to this area while with the XIII Corps in 1918 the barracks had been smashed by shell fire and burnt out.*

This morning we opened an Aid Post on the station to attend to any wounded going through who needed it. This was in charge of Greaves and Aldis. They had a certain amount of work, but not very much. There was very little moving; I suppose any trains could only go a short distance north by this time. There were no proper ambulance trains, just ordinary trucks improvised to take stretchers and some of the usual vans with straw on the floor. Hull and I went down to have a look at them. It was thought that by then the last train from the north had gone through..

*There were stories later on that some of these trains just wandered on to the south for days before the men got any proper attention.*



Hall and I went on onto town to GHQ. No news. Bought a French newspaper but it said nothing of importance that we could make out. Anyhow, our French was not very strong. GHQ seemed to be very active, but no one would spill anything to us. There were a good many civilians going through the town with cars loaded to more than capacity. Some of the folks on bicycles also, so they evidently think the Germans are coming this way. We expect to move again today, but have no idea where. Some German aeroplanes over again today. There are quite a few motor lorries dashing about, some carrying wounded.

A most anxious day, I think we are getting it in the neck. I spent another night in the bus. We have seen nothing of the fighting line yet except the wounded, and really not very many of these. It was flies, dirt, heat, dust and bad food with no decent washing.

*During a fighting retreat the evacuation of the wounded becomes in many cases an impossibility. During the opening stages of the action the slightly wounded can get themselves to the rear, having been dressed by the RMO at his Aid Post, or by regimental stretcher bearers, or even after applying the first field dressing themselves. These bearers also at first may have time to carry back some stretcher cases, together with the FA bearers, and many were in fact loaded into horse ambulances and got away. But then, the retirement having begun, the FA bearers and buses couldn't advance through the retiring infantry without being captured. In any case, things were generally too hot for any horse transport to exist under such conditions. They would do no good, and only be in the way.*

*Many FA MO's were captured. Under the Geneva Convention it was agreed that sufficient medical personnel should be left with the wounded to attend to them, and that these people would then be returned to their own lines at the first favourable opportunity. It was the job of the CO of the FA to detail those to stay behind when the rest retired.*

*The Geneva Convention like many other things was not observed by the Germans, and most of our people who were captured spent a year or more as ordinary prisoners of war. Evan Davies was left behind and captured. He told me when I met him after the war that when he asked the German officer in charge if he could go now and return to his own lines under the*

*Convention, the German just laughed at him, and he was packed off to Germany as a POW, where he spent more than a year.*

## **August 28<sup>th</sup> 1914, Noyon to Compiègne**

Still retreating, today we have to go to Compiègne.

The news this morning is that the French have let us down by not standing and not coming into action on the right flank as promised.

*This is historically true - see any war history.*

The II Corps 1st and 2nd Divisions is said to be badly decimated and is following us to reconstruct. A tremendous fight was put up at Le Cateau against odds of about 8 to 1 in men and 10 to 1 in guns. It is also said that the Germans have had tremendous losses by advancing in close formation against our rapid rifle fire. Rearguard actions have been going on for four days. A few stragglers have come into Noyon and the fighting is said to be 10 to 12 miles to the north of us.

The march to Compiègne was much the same as the other two treks. I saw the transport off and then had to wait in the town for a man leading a sick horse. The horse kept lying down and was only got up again with great difficulty. I think it was colic. I had nothing to give it, and there was no vet to be had of course, and I was a bit uncertain what to do. I wouldn't have him ill-treated, and didn't like to shoot him. After getting him along about a mile I found a stable attached to some works, and put him in there. There was only an old Frenchman in charge, who wasn't a bit pleased, especially as I made the ASC driver make him up a good bed with the straw belonging to the place. This was the best I could do, so we just left him.

Our column must have been two to three miles ahead by this time. I didn't know which road had been allotted to us for the march and couldn't go fast on account of the unmounted ASC driver marching on his flat feet. Luckily the road was lined with transport and various units and was quite straight once we were out of the town, so we got on all right and caught them up just as they were crossing a very frail suspension bridge over a small river. This had to be done very slowly, one vehicle at a time.

The first over did not wait, so the whole FA got spread out over about a mile of road, and it took about an hour before we were in proper formation again. It appears everyone is in a hurry, although the Germans must be a long way behind us. We had heard guns again this morning, a bit nearer than before.

I was the last up. There so often seemed to be something to do about the transport in some way or other. I believe in most FA's one of the MO's in addition to his other duties acts transport officer. Although not detailed by the CO to do this, the duty seems to have fallen to my lot, not that I mind, I rather like it. I don't think any of the others care a cuss about the horses. At any rate they take no interest, and I have yet to see one of them easing his horse by dismounting and marching for a spell. Several times already I have given a ride to someone out of the ranks, who was done in, on my mount.

At one place where we halted to water the horses I spoke to an old couple sitting outside their cottage who had seen the Prussians marching through in 1870. They looked like seeing them again from what I could see and hear of the business.

I had to give up riding my nag later in the day and footslog. It was devilish hot too. A small saddle gall had broken down again in spite of any adjustment the saddler could make or different foldings of the saddle blanket. I think it was really due to his bad habit mentioned earlier of being constantly on the jog. He would not walk march even at the end of our long treks, so it was no use trying to tire him out of it.

## **Compiègne**

On arrival here we found we were to be stationed a little to the north of the town in a kind of sports ground about the size of a soccer field or a bit bigger. There was a small grandstand on one side, and on the other about 15 large hangars covered with tarpaulin, each of which could take 200 men easily. We were told they had been used for the French mobilisation.

When we got in there were already about 300 BEF stragglers who had rolled up on their own with no officers as yet.

We took possession of the grandstand which had a range and wash place. There was a nice veranda to mess under. We had some grub at about 3pm.

We heard that there had been an orderly retreat and the Germans were reported checked, a French force with plenty of guns having at last come up. The Germans are said to be about 10 to 12 miles away, so perhaps there was a good reason for our hurry.

Instructions were received for our CO to take over as Camp commandant. There was a constant stream of stragglers coming in, in parties of one or two up to 30 or 40 at a time, mostly under NCOs, only about half a dozen officers. Each party was quite sure they were the only survivors of their Battalion, and while they were telling us that, perhaps another party of the same Battalion rolled up. They were in rather a state. Most of them, or quite half, had no arms or equipment of any sort. All were footsore, and some had slight wounds. How they found their way was a bit of a mystery, but I suppose they had only to trek outh with the refugees who swarmed on the roads and they would fetch up somewhere. For all I knew the authorities may have had pickets out along the route sending them on to this collecting point.

*From this sentence the actual description in my diary reads:- Most of them were not the heroes of the business but mostly of the same 'qui peut' type although they had had a very rough time and perhaps had been told to look after themselves, but from what we heard a lot of arms and equipment had been cast away unnecessarily and I think that there is no doubt that in places the retreat was not so orderly but more resembled a rout.*

*When we knew more about it in later times this bit of the diary is I think now much too hard on them and it must be remembered that we ourselves had not seen any fighting or even been under shell fire, so it isn't very fair from that point of view.*

*The marvel will always be how many of them stood up to the intense fatigue, and fighting continuously for days on end against hopelessly overwhelming odds. I suppose we had been too cocksure that the BEF could not be defeated by anyone.*

Lt Col Kennedy and 2 officers of No7 FA came in during the morning. They were all that was left of their push as far as they knew. They had only one QS wagon left of their transport, and the only item it contained was a case of whiskey. I also saw Lts Adams and Sparks: one of the old GH residents and I heard that Evan Davies had been either killed or wounded or captured.

Captain G C Browne with 'A' Section 19 FA turned up next. He had seen nothing of B and C Sections, that is, the rest of his unit which had entrained before us at Rouen. His A Section was complete and was at the station with Preston and not coming to our camp. A letter from General French came round saying the troops had done all that was expected of them. There are rumours that the Russians are doing well.

*This I believe was historically correct, as it was the Russian pressure which relieved the strain to some extent and helped to turn the tide at the Marne.*

Some of us had a quick run into the town and had a very good dinner at a cafe although most of the place was empty of civilians. Talked to an RFC officer who was ferrying planes out from home, also an MT officer who had charged the Germans with fire lorries when surrounded, and got away with it.

The town is a nice place, and there is a very fine old palace in which GHQ are quartered.

Turned in on the grass, a fine hot day. The camp guard was mounted by the Camerons.

### **August 29<sup>th</sup> 1914, at Compie'gne**

Stragglers kept coming in all night, and by morning we had about 3000 in the camp and we were ordered to medically inspect them and dress any needing it. We rigged up an operating tent, collected the various units together as far as possible and had a foot inspection. It was rather a comic sight to see long rows of men sitting on the ground taking off their boots and socks. Then we walked down the lines and sorted out those who needed dressing, and it was the majority. Some of them were in a bad

state. Lots of the socks had to be cut off. The Army socks shrink and get as hard as a board. There were very few men who didn't have some sort of a sore. They had been cutting their boots to pieces to ease their feet, and dust and grit had got in and made things worse.

*The Highlanders (kilted regiments), although as far as I can remember there were very few of these amongst the stragglers, were at a great disadvantage in wearing brogues; the grit and stones got in so easily in spite of the spats. A bit later in the war brogues were given up for the ordinary army boot with a turn or two of puttee around the top.*

After this the men filed through the operating tents, and after washing, their feet were dressed. We soon used up all our powder, and I was sent off into town to buy up all I could. I managed to get several pounds of dusting powder and everyone had some sort of attention. These men didn't seem at all down hearted as to be worrying about things. A lot of them were soon playing football after they had had their dinner: the provision of this was also a job for us.

We had the sanitation of the camp also to see to, the French as usual had left the place in an awful state 'anywhere would do', so we all had a busy time and justified our existence for once.

A quick dash into the town for dinner in the same cafe. There were many fewer oddments about. One very lost, very young subaltern staggered into the cafe wearing a pair of carpet slippers: he couldn't get into his boots. He hadn't the slightest idea where his unit was and was looking for someone to report to.

On the way back I called at the palace to get some money from the field cashier, who had an office there. I had to go through several very magnificent large room to find him. We are allowed to draw up to £5 at a time, that is, about 125 Francs.

Turned in on the grass in the same place as last night very tired indeed. Most of the others had mucked in at the grandstand for their meal. They didn't like to spend anything on a decent meal, but as a great treat they had some butter. Our officers messing arrangements are rotten: the servants are

incompetent and dirty, and I shall get a meal out whenever opportunity offers.

### **August 30<sup>th</sup> 1914, Compie'gne**

I slept very soundly. When I awoke I found that the camp had been cleared of stragglers, beginning at 12.30am. Everyone else had had a rotten night, but I had slept through all the noise. There was nothing for us to do anyhow, this was regimental business. All the men had been marched off to the station and sent off somewhere. We had orders to leave at 6am for the south, destination unknown, so the reported check could not have amounted to much.

We marched through the town. There were no other units with us and the town was quite empty. We then entered the celebrated forest of Compeigne, on the way passing a race course and a golf course. They seem to be quite a sporting lot around here.

The woods are very extensive, and the roads mostly in straight lines with fine trees right up to the edge. We have left the pave behind some time ago. There is now a nice turf ride for the horses at the side of the road. The continuous forest mile after mile gets a bit monotonous, but is nice and shady, which is a great advantage in this blazing hot weather.

After marching about seven miles we were overtaken by a dispatch rider with orders for us to return to Compeigne. We were all very bucked with this news, and marched back again to our field and grandstand, and took up our old quarters. Everything was very quiet. I had some food in the town. A few more stragglers turned up.

We were just settling down for the night thinking that things would go better now and that we were all set for a move in the right direction when orders came for us to move at 5am south to Dammartin, and we were very fed up about it. If we hadn't already done between 16 and 29 miles today, I think we should have been sent off at once. However, I had done some washing today, and had a bath in a canvas one.

Guns very clearly heard today - said to be 8 to 10 miles away.

## **August 31<sup>st</sup> 1914, Compie'gne to Dammartin**

Left at 5.15am for a forced march of, it is said, about 30 miles. My horse has not properly recovered from his sore back, but he had to carry me for some of the way. I managed this by committing the dreadful crime of cutting my saddle blanket and folding it to clear the tender spot. I rode short spells, for the first 20 miles.

Our route was through Gilocourt, Crepy-en-Valois and Nauteuil, Dammartin, not, I think the most direct route, but no doubt there were columns on the other roads. We are again marching by ourselves, which is a great advantage, as there are no irritating checks to the transport, and no sick of other units to worry about.

It was very pleasant at first in the early morning, going through the forest. We did good time for the first 10 miles, while it was shady. Soon it became very hot, quite the hottest day yet, and more dust than ever if possible. The sweat simply ran off everyone in streams. We were all wearing the same weight clothes we should be wearing in winter, outside, anyhow. Our men are lucky in not having rifles and ammunition to carry. The stretchers are carried on the transport when on the march. When any motor vehicles went past it made you feel murderous.

The CO wanted to break the back of the journey before halting for dinner, bully and biscuits, and we went on with only ten minute halts until 3pm, that is, ten hours without a real break in the hottest part of the day. I think the CO had orders to put as many miles behind us as quickly as possible because the Germans might be nearer than was thought when we were sent back to Compiègne, or they might have Uhlan patrols out, which could cut us off. One armed man could have taken the whole lot prisoner, as such arms as we had were only to be used for the protection of our wounded from ill treatment, according to the Geneva Convention.

We halted at the side of a thick wood, got the horses unharnessed down to the bridle and took them into the wood for shade. So far they seemed very fit. I spent my time supervising this, and then had dinner. The others had just given their horses to their batmen and started in at once on the bully and biscuits. After dinner I slept for an hour and then it was time to start again.



From now on I had to footslog, but I was quite fit and had no excuse to ride on a wagon. In any case, it would be a very bad example to the men, and our buses were already as full as they could hold. We were not strict enough in making those march who could. A lot of them were skrimshankers. We reached Dammartin at last. The last hill up to the town was too much for the horses, and we had many halts. Two pairs gave out altogether, that is, one in each pair, and we had to change them. Then we found we had to get up a steep rise onto the top of a small round hill like an old fortification here there was just room for the horses and transport. Here any men who had a push left in them had to help the horses by shoving behind and on drag ropes.

Both men and horses were absolutely done in. In my opinion there didn't seem to be any reason why we shouldn't have had at least a six hour halt and come on in the cool of the evening. But I wasn't CO, and perhaps he was afraid the Germans were too near and that we should get mixed up with other retreating columns if we waited too long. GHQ was in town, so the enemy couldn't have been very close.

The 1st Battalion Camerons are just above us. They had come by train, but not from Compeigne, as GHQ had left before we got back to the place. They always seem to travel by train. They had several German prisoners in their charge.

Water was scarce, and very little could be spared for washing. Just below us there was a small private house. We borrowed their kitchen and had some grub on their veranda, after which we were not long in getting into our valises on the grass.

### **September 1<sup>st</sup> 1914, Dammartin continued**

Breakfast at the same house. The people were very ready to oblige us and provided vin ordinaire. Afterwards I went up to the Cameron bivouacs to have a look at the German prisoners. They looked pretty miserable. One of them was wounded, so I attended to him. I couldn't find out what they belonged to, but they were wearing very well made cavalry boots.

No orders this morning about what we are going to do. A 'Petit Parisien' bought in the town gives an account of the Mons, Landrecies and Le Cateau fighting.

This town is a dirty little hole, and GHQ have a beastly billet compared to their usual way of doing things.

We are now within about 25 miles of Paris and within the first line of fortifications. Watched a regiment of French cavalry going out patrolling. I am beginning to wonder whether we are going to spend the winter besieged in Paris, like it was in 1870.

Today I chose another servant, one Strudwick, a grocer's assistant in civil life and said to be a relative of the cricketer. He is going to do for Hull and myself, my ASC batman will just look after the horse. There is no establishment of RAMC servants, but it doesn't matter if they do their ordinary duty as well, and it means a bit of extra money for them.

From our mound we had a fine view of the country, and could see transport motors and troops four to five miles away by the dust they kicked up. We could hear guns quite loudly, and when it got dark could see the shell bursts and flashes of the guns to the north and left of us.

We thought we shouldn't be here long if we were going to stay with GHQ. We couldn't understand why we had to trail along with them and fetch up in the same place all the time, as there were really none of the Army troops that we were supposed to look after except the Camerons and some oddments. The others we supposed had been sent into action somewhere - the 19th Brigade had been sent to Mons. At any rate there was nothing for us to expect trivialities while with GHQ. Possibly the authorities want to keep one complete FA for use later when they know the extent of the losses in the ones that have been in the fighting.

Sure enough we got orders to clear out again as soon as possible for Lagny. The horses could have done with a bit more rest. It was late in the day when we set out on a fine moonlit night and quite pleasant marching. We passed one of our aeroplane parks and were surprised at the number of planes we had got there. Must have been 30 to 40, but it was difficult to say by moonlight.

The motor lorries were as usual the biggest nuisance on the road. On one long uphill, about 50 lorries overtook us and then discovered they had taken the wrong road, so they all had to turn amongst us, causing much delay and bad language.

After this I rode along the buses one by one and turned out everybody in them, making them all walk up the hill or be left behind. Whether they could or couldn't, they all did however, and I wouldn't have let most of them get in again at the top of the hill if I had been backed up by one of the seniors. But they all don't seem to care a d--- if all the horses drop dead. They are the rottenest collection of horsemen you could imagine for people who are supposed to know something about it.

The CO is a good rider but has I expect too many other worries to find out whether men are fit to march or not, and the others wouldn't trouble themselves. The CO chaffed me the next day about the bad language which he must have heard when he saw me turning the blighters out. I was pretty wild at the time to think that a man had only to say he wasn't able to march and climb into a bus and go to sleep. There had been far too much of this thing since Le Cateau.

*Again, I may be too hard on them. Being a regular unit we had a number of fairly senior NCO's who had been sent to us on mobilisation from fairly sedentary jobs, most of them, and they were too fat and soft.*

We got into Lagny about 2am after crossing the river Marne, and parked in a square in the town. This was the first time the CO didn't generally supervise the settling in to a place. He was quite done in and climbed into the first bus with Aldis and went to sleep, it was said by the scandalmongers with a bottle of medical comforts (brandy), but this was I think without foundation.

After messing about for a bit helping to get things straight - there were no billets and everyone had to doss down just anywhere - Hull and I opened a bottle of whiskey, a great treat. It had been given to me by Lord Jocelyn of the Northern Irish Horse a few days before; they ran a decent mess. We had a spot or so and tried to eat some biscuits, but as far as I could remember I think I went to sleep with a piece in my mouth.

Today's trek was only about 18 to 20 miles. Tonight we saw the Paris searchlights trying to pick up enemy planes.

### **September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914, Lagny**

There was no grub for breakfast except bully, so I found a small shop nearby and got the woman to make me an omelette and coffee. This went down extremely well, as I was extremely empty. Then I bought some huge peaches from a stall very cheaply: I suppose they had been unable to get them away to the Paris shops. Afterwards I watched the RE's mining the bridge we had come over.

There are more refugees here than we have seen so far; I suppose we have caught them up. There is a constant stream of vehicles of all sorts, a lot pulled by oxen, chiefly huge farm wagons pulled by two or three big farm horses. The family are on top on mattresses and straw, hen coops are slung about, mostly underneath. Loose animals are driven - cattle, sheep and goats. They seemed remarkably cheerful considering what it must have meant to them leaving their houses and farms, and what they were going through generally. Luckily the weather was just right for the game as far as humans were concerned, but not so good for the animals, being hot and dry.

Refugee owners of motor cars had by this time, for the most part, got well ahead. These parties of refugees were trekking under some sort of a system. Some person such as the village priest, or someone chosen by themselves, was in charge of a certain number, and decided where they should halt, and for how long and so on. They were not allowed to stay in a town on the route, but were all pushed on by the authorities.

*I was told afterwards that none of the refugees were allowed into Paris, but were all side tracked*

At 11am we got orders about another move. GHQ had at last discovered that our men were the only ones of the remaining Army troops who were footslogging: all the rest had been travelling by troop trains. So this morning they had provided space in the last train to leave this place for our men. These were sent out under Biggam, Williamson and Aldis to Melun. The rest of us with the transport were given two days to do the distance in,

not much to worry about after what we had done, as the whole distance was only about 25 miles. We had plenty of time to take it easy, and very glad we were, as it was very hot and dusty.

At one place where we crossed a lovely clear small river, like one of the chalk streams at home, the horses were unharnessed and ridden into the water. It was deep enough to make the drivers kneel on their backs. There was no difficulty in getting the horses in, but a good deal in getting them out, as they were enjoying it so thoroughly. I should have liked a swim myself, and don't really know why some of us didn't go in. I had not had a real all over wetting since leaving Aldershot. After trekking about 15 miles we found a nice village to stay the night in at Coubert. A nice clean field for the transport, our billets in a first rate medium sized country chateau just across the road, with a bathroom, for which there was a rush. I managed to get in third. No hot water of course, but I don't think I ever enjoyed a bath so much.

We each had a bedroom to ourselves. It was a very well furnished place, with a good billiard room, and must have belonged to someone with plenty of money. Some maids and the housekeeper were still there, and the governess returned late at night, having just seen the family off to England. They cooked our dinner and gave us some wine, which however was quite undrinkable, being like vinegar. No one could manage it, although some peaches we had were very fine.

After dinner we had a game of billiards with the CO, and then strolled into the village. There were a few British MT people about, but no other troops.

It was much to fine a night to sleep in a stuffy French bedroom, so I had my valise out on the lawn. Soon after leaving Lagny we heard some big explosions, said to be blowing up bridges, and probably including the one we had just come over on the Marne.

On the way we saw a lot of new trenches, and in some places French soldiers and civilians digging them. These trenches chiefly encircled small villages and farms.

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914, Coubert to Melun**

Having only ten miles to do we thought we might have a slack day, and move in the evening. However, after breakfast the CO got a bit uneasy, and thought we ought to push off; he decided to at 9.30am. We were very sorry to leave such quarters, the best we had struck yet. They were robbers, though, and tried to charge us 8 Francs for the peaches, as well as other things including the wine we couldn't drink. I had a pillow as discount. At least the one I had borrowed from my bedroom to sleep out with in the garden somehow got rolled up in my valise. I expect it was only the servants on the make; I don't suppose the owners would have done it.

Another hot dusty trek, but only a short one of 10 miles brought us to Melun. We are now to the south-east of Paris on the Seine. There was not much to note on the way, and not such a continuous stream of refugees. They must have branched off somewhere.

On entering the town we saw the Northern Irish Horse on one side of the street and GHQ on the other side next to a French Red Cross hospital. We went on down the hill and parked the transport under the trees on the embankment of the river. Our billet was in a convent, and close by were some rooms which had been given us for the men. The nuns were still living in the place. After settling in and having some grub, Dillon and I walked along the river bank to some open air swimming baths on the river and had a good swim. The water was quite clean and warm. A good number of Tommies were bathing from the bank and from boats all the way along. There is still no official news of what is happening elsewhere.

### **September 4<sup>th</sup> 1914, Melun**

After the morning doings, I went into the town to have a look around. The shops are shutting up, and the place is full of the military. I saw several French motors with an anti-aircraft gun mounted on them. For the first time I saw something of the French army more than the oddments seen previously. About 50 of their motor ambulances went by as we were sitting in the only cafe we could find open. We couldn't buy a paper or pick up any news.

We had another swim, and after getting back to the convent we heard that our FA (No20) was going to be split up. B and C Sections were going to

join up with A Section of No19, the whole to be known as No19 FA. B and C Sections of No19 are still in the blue, and no one seems to know where they are. The new No19 FA, then a complete unit, is to be attached to the 19th Infantry Brigade, an independent brigade made up of Army troops and attached to the III Corps, which will then consist of the IV Division, just out, and the 19th Infantry Brigade.

The A Section of No19 FA with which we are to join up is said to be already with this Brigade which was in action at Mons. We are very pleased with this news as we are very tired of trekking on our own and hearing everything going on behind us. 'A' Section of No 20 FA is remaining with GHQ. After lunch I had another walk into the town to the station where I saw Captain Bill Adams RAMC Spec. Res. with the remnants of No 7 FA who were running an Aid Post at the station and having a lot of wounded through their hands. I had another swim, and went to the same cafe with Dillon. Next I was sent to the Northern Irish Horse quarters to inspect some stragglers. Afterwards I helped pay the men in Francs drawn from the Field Cashier. There was an issue of fresh meat today which was so tough that it was impossible to eat it - the cook's fault, mainly. Our messing arrangements are still rotten, and I think our food is worse than the men's. The padre bought a hammock and slung it between two trees in the garden. I slept on the grass; it rained a bit.

### **September 5<sup>th</sup> 1914, Melun**

I had another swim this morning, so I am now reasonably clean. We left Melun with B and C Sections at 3.30pm: jolly glad to get away. The CO rode out with us a few miles until we were met by Major Davidson from GHQ who had orders where we were to proceed to. The CO shook hands and said he would try to get us all together again if he could. I don't think it will ever come off.

*The Unit never was joined up again. A Section of No20 remained at GHQ the whole war, although the officers didn't. Our CO, Major Steel, left A Section almost immediately to become ADMS of a Cavalry Division and was killed soon after by a shell.*

We are very pleased to get going at last in the right direction; we believe things are looking a bit better now. A French officer interpreter riding by

shouted out 'Is not the news good?', and seemed very pleased about things. He couldn't tell us exactly what the good news was - something about some guns being captured and a real check to the Germans. We saw several enemy planes today, and one came down almost to tree top level top have a look at us.

Later on we met one we met one of our Cavalry Brigades going across country at intervals of about half a mile from west to east at right angles to our line of march. We didn't hear what they were up to. The V Dragoon Guards were amongst them. I saw a sergeant of this Regiment who was in the riding school in Aldershot when I was there in 1913.

We are to spend the night at Brie Comte Robert. At dusk we marched through the whole of the IV Division who were bivouacked all along the roadside. There was no one to give us any orders where to go, so we had to find a site, which was rather a job in the dark with the place full of troops. Eventually we parked on a dirty field close to a French motor ambulance convoy. We had a good look at them and wished we had some like them. Our old horse buses look very cumbersome, but a horse can do lots of things a motor can't.

### **September 6<sup>th</sup> 1914, Brie Comte Robert**

Rather an bad night in an uncomfortable bivouac. Dillon had got some brandy, which was the only thing left in the village. We are to join up with our Brigade today, marching to a crossroads to wait for them to turn up. After about half an hour they came in sight, and a very weary footsore lot they looked. But the Battalions looked very well up to strength. No doubt they had recently had some drafts as they had already been in action, and apart from that must have lost a certain number from other causes during the retreat. They looked very unwashed and unshaven, and their uniforms were covered with dust. However, they managed to raise a few jests with our men who were waiting to fall in behind the column, such as 'don't they look nice and clean', as they should have done after a rest at Melun.

The 19th Brigade consists of:-

1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment



2nd Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers

1st Battalion Scottish Rifles, The Cameronians

2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

ASC 16 Wagons of Ammunition Column

ASC Supply Train

No19 Field Ambulance

*This was the Brigade I was to spend the next two and a half years with.*

The A Section of No19 (original FA) was marching in rear of the column with Captain CG Browne, Lieutenant Preston and Padre Webb-Peploe. We fell in behind and followed on. We soon found it was very different marching behind a long column on our own. At the tail of a Brigade the checks are tiring and annoying. They are short halts mostly, but a slight check at the head of the column gets longer as it is passed back, until the horses are halted, and next minute almost trotting to keep up.

We went through Chevry, Pont Carré, Fevriers, Jossigny and Villeneuve le Comte. There was some heavy firing going on not far away. We were told it was the I Corps engaged near Rozay. We are to expect the enemy any time now and be ready for anything that may turn up. At dusk we had quite a decent clean field to bivouac in with plenty of corn just cut to lie on. As soon as we were settled down Hull lanced a gumboil for me; the beastly thing had been worrying me for about a week. We got some apples from a deserted smallholding and found our men chasing the hens and trying to get one for their supper. I think they did get one. The district seems to be fairly well denuded of civilians.

There were a good number of sick rolling up from the Brigade to attend to, and the job of evacuating those that need it is a difficult one. They have to be got to a refilling point, that is the place where the motor lorries come to with supplies which are then transferred to the horse drawn GS wagons of the Brigade train and distributed to the various units. When on the move the refilling point varies of course from day to day so that the returning empty train wagons have to take them back. The horse buses of the FA

could not do it as they would never catch up again if sent a long way back. Any other returning transport is also used for this.

There are very heavy dews at night now. This morning my valise was really too wet to roll up. It was some time with all these things to see to before we could settle down for the night. We expect our Brigade may have to go into action anytime. Rode my horse again today. There is no doubt now the Germans have been checked.

*The Battle of the Marne was beginning, and the BEF was pushing forward toward the gap between two French armies. We knew nothing of this at the time, such as the improvised army from Paris being sent out in taxi cabs and buses to fall on the flank of Von Klanck's army.*

### **September 7<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Up at 5am. Heavy firing in the direction of Crecy at daybreak, lasting until about 8am just about as we were moving off. Our route today was Pic le Gibet, Bailly, Romanvilliers. We expect to get into it today. The march was very slow and dusty, and we went over some very bad country roads.

At about 5pm I was sent on with the quartermaster to see about where we were to bivouac on arrival at our stopping place. It was quite a long job getting to the head of the column in the narrow lane, and the dust kicked up by our horses caused a good deal of cursing in the ranks as we pushed by. On getting to the head of the column there was a long halt while the General appeared to be waiting for orders, or perhaps information from patrols. On talking to one of the Brigade staff officers I found it was quite uncertain where we should stop the night. I gave my horse a good feed of lucerne in a field adjoining while waiting about. The infantry just lay down in the road or anywhere, very tired and dusty.

In about an hour we moved on. I stayed in front and met some of the officers of the Brigade for the first time. I quite enjoyed riding in front and seeing what was going on. Soon we began to see signs that a large force had bivouacked alongside the road. Some might have been our own troops, but nobody seems to think there are any of ours ahead of us. Anyhow they were chiefly German, easily distinguished by their fireplaces. They are very careful to dig a hole in sheltered places in such a way that the fire

cannot be seen from the front towards the enemy, and the glow from it for a very short distance only. Their camping grounds are also very untidy and look as though they had left in a hurry. There were dozens of dead horses lying about, also lances and odd German equipment.

At dusk the head of the column arrived at La Haute Maison where we are to bivouac. I was shown our part of the field by Jack (surname), staff Captain of the Brigade. It was a stubble field on a slope, and the Argyll and Sutherlands were just above us. By the time the FA turned up it was quite dark.

While waiting for the FA to turn up I heard close rifle fire for the first time, lasting about half an hour. It seemed to be about half a mile to our left front. This was probably the IV Division again, to which we seem to be acting as a reserve, or it might be from our own advance guard. We were not called upon to do anything about it. The Brigadier, General Gordon, dossed down under a rick of corn close to us in our field. I cannot find out what is happening exactly, except that the Germans are retreating, but that is good enough to go on with.

I slept on a stretcher, no valises out now. There is no water for washing, and the horses have to go back into the village to water. This is a long job, as there are only two wells and a lot of Brigade transport wanting the water.

### **September 8<sup>th</sup> 1914, La Haute Maison**

Up at 3am; firing again to the north and left of us. We expected to move at once, but waited some hours before doing so. Saw aeroplanes of both sides today. Orders to follow on behind the Brigade. The slowest march yet, halts of an hour at a time, very annoying. The firing is continuous, and we heard it was our guns shelling the Germans as they were crossing the Marne.

We seem to have left the IV Division and are going on towards the river on our own. At last we came out of some woods on a hill overlooking the Marne. The river itself was hidden by a low hill, but we could see our shells bursting on the far side, and in the far distance some Germans

making off as hard as they could. The road we were on seemed to lead straight down hill then up a short rise and down to the river.

We were shelled going down this road by the German guns on the opposite side of the river. The Middlesex were the ones to catch it and had 20 casualties. We had a halt on the hill while two Battalions disappeared to take up positions or do something I don't know what. The FA then went down the hill to Signy Signets, a collection of a few houses at the bottom of the hill. I was sent out to find Brigade HQ to get some orders if possible, as our CO, now Major Biggam, was fussed as to what to do. I found the HQ in a field opposite and stood for about an hour by the general, having been told to stay until there was some instruction and they knew what they were going to do with us, that is, the whole Brigade, as to whether we are going to advance any more at present or not. Apparently there is not much chance of an infantry engagement this side of the river to our front unless there are a lot of Germans still this side, though we might tickle them up a bit with rifle fire from this side if they have got across.

We could hear rifle fire and machine gun fire just in front but hidden by the rise in the ground from our two attached Battalions. Several of our batteries were in action round about, and some German shells were falling about a quarter of a mile away; nothing near us.

At 6.40pm I had orders to take back that the FA was to stay where we were for the night. The Brigade was not to move from present places yet. So we parked in a field at Signey Signets, and settled down for the night, not having had any further calls for stretcher parties. We seem to be getting a bit nearer to where things happen.

There are various rumours that the Germans are trapped and can't get across the river and other rumours that they are entrenched and don't want to get across. There was nothing official, but we had seen them making off on the other side.

### **September 9<sup>th</sup> 1914, Signy Signets**

Up at 5am. No orders. Soon some shrapnel began to fly over our bivouac, which is in a dip, and burst beyond, some within 50 yards and some away up the hill behind us as though they were trying to search the road again on

which we had marched down. Quite a few in the field where the general was last night.

*The word 'shrapnel' has come to be used very loosely nowadays. Any kind of shell is called shrapnel, when this is really quite distinct from the ordinary high explosive kind of shell, being a shell loaded with lead bullets. There is an explosive charge which fractures the shell case, and the bullets continue in the line of the trajectory, scattering over a fairly wide area. The shell is timed to burst at any particular altitude wanted. This shrapnel is no use against men in good cover such as dugouts, or in strong buildings, but only when the troops are exposed. I think the scream of the bullets coming down is more terrifying than a HE at the same distance away. The wounds caused by shrapnel are often multiple and very extensive. Later in the war very little shrapnel was used.*

It is a queer sensation being under fire for the first time, although there was nothing dangerously near except perhaps large fragments of shells, but all the time there might be.

Major Rattray, the original CO of 19 FA, has not yet rejoined. He had been left in hospital at Rouen, having been kicked by a horse. Major Biggam was acting CO, much to his annoyance. He said he never wanted to serve in a FA, particularly as CO. He didn't like things much and was really a bit rattled, I think. He thought our transport was too close up, and sent me off to find Brigade HQ. We had not even been told where our Battalions had been moved to so that we could send bearers if wanted. I went into last night's field hut; there was no one there and the place was getting a bit hot. One burst very near and nearly frightened the life out of my horse. I tried round a bit but couldn't find them anywhere, so went back for further instructions. I then found orders had come for us to move onto a wood on the hill behind us, so we tacked off by a side lane. Our original road was being swept by gunfire now and then, and was quite exposed to view from the other side.

After getting under cover, Williamson and I went back to the corner of the wood and watched the shelling. Our batteries were making things a bit hot on the other side of the river. Two farms in particular were catching it, and in the far distance we could see something (with field glasses of course) moving off to the north like a column of troops. In about an hour the

General sent up for two bearer sub-divisions. Williamson and I took ours. We were told to stand by behind the infantry in case of need, so we put the men in a ditch, and contrary to our expectations had a very slack afternoon, not being called on. 'A' Section, further to our left collected six wounded from the gunners. Hull amputated an arm by the side of the road.

The afternoon was quiet as far as enemy shelling was concerned. Our guns kept banging away, but after midday there was no reply from theirs. A little rifle fire could be heard, but not near us. A bit later the Middlesex came back and mustered in front of us and then lay down. I saw Dillon who had been detached from us to become RMO to the Middlesex, vice Maconachie wounded. It doesn't look as though our Brigade has much to do. The RWFs have gone off somewhere to the right, and it may have been them we heard in action. The Argyll and Sutherland are in a wood behind us, so there can't be any Germans between us and the river just here. One of our aeroplanes came down quite low in a strong wind and dropped a message for Brigade HQ. It didn't look a very easy job.

At dusk we had orders to rejoin the FA which was going to move on to cross the river at La Ferté with the Brigade where a pontoon bridge has been thrown across with great difficulty under fire. We expect to cross during the night. The Germans seem to be fairly on the run and only fighting a rearguard action on the Marne. However, it doesn't need a large force to make passage of a river very difficult.

Leaving Signy Signels at 9pm we marched to Jouarre, a place just above La Ferté, showing no lights, where after a wait of three hours we were turned into a field. After some bully and biscuits I lay down on the grass by the wagons close to where all our men were lying. Everyone is fairly tired, and could sleep in any position. Soon I was awakened by someone stumbling over me and kicking me in the ribs. I found all our men getting up and running in one direction across the field. After about a hundred yards they all stopped and came back wondering what they were doing. It was a sort of stampede; no one had any reason for it and they just lay down and went to sleep again. There had been a loose horse galloping about the field a bit before which had caused some excitement. Someone must have thought it was coming again and sent everyone off, but it was a strange sort of mass movement. I didn't want to be trampled on again, so got into a bus. Didn't get any rest, though, as we were told to be ready to

move at 12.30am. We got ready, but didn't move until 4am, down into the town of La Ferté with many halts. A lot of houses were badly knocked about by shell fire. We passed some smashed German transport wagons.

### **September 10<sup>th</sup> 1914**

At 5am during a long halt we knocked up some people at a house and got them to make us some coffee; they also gave us some peaches. They were very excited at seeing the last of the Germans, who had not long left. Some of them had been billeted in the house and had not behaved too well.

While waiting, I was asked to see an old woman in what I think was a small hospital or home of some sort. She was too ill to do anything for. We moved on down and got in sight of the river at last. Some dead men in the ditches at the side of the road. Seaforth Highlanders. Again we had to wait while several brigades of our guns went over the bridge and also a regiment of French cavalry.

The pontoon bridge didn't look too strong. It was made with RE bridging pontoons (needless the road bridge had been blown up) but there were not enough to span the river, and some oddments of civilian boats had to be used as well. After all that had gone over it already we had another wait while it was strengthened, and even then it sagged a good deal as our heavy GS wagons went over one by one. The ordinary bridges had all been blown up, and there was nowhere else to cross anywhere near. Here we saw the results of the shelling of the town by both sides. Many of the houses were complete ruins, and all showed rifle bullet and shrapnel holes.

There was some firing on the ridge above us while we were at the river, and two bearer sub-divisions were sent for. With B and C Sections I went on ahead of the FA up a long hill to a village where we were to get orders.

The village was a complete wreck. All the belongings in the houses had been turned out and upside down and scattered about the road. Drawers of linen and clothes lying about having been looted for anything worth taking away. Nothing happened, however. The Germans were too busy retreating to stop and fight here.

It was said that an opportunity of bagging a lot of them was missed this morning. A German column and one of ours were marching on parallel roads for a time, four or five miles apart, and our people thought they were one of our columns until it was too late to scupper them.

We had orders to move on, and all day we marched in the tracks of the beaten German army. Trenches everywhere, unused ammunition, cartloads of shells, clothing and all sorts of equipment and a most remarkable number of empty wine bottles, literally thousands of them. Many dead horses, also cattle, some of which had been roughly roasted whole in a ditch. There were many broken down civilian vehicles. The inhabitants of La Ferte told us the Germans had bagged all the vehicles they could find to carry their wounded, of whom they were said to have a great number.

In retreating they had not stuck to the road. Their column was too wide and probably disorderly. Everything was trampled down for twenty to thirty yards on each side of the road. In addition to everything else there were a large number of civilian bicycles discarded as soon as the tyres or something gave out.

Our route at first ran along the hills on the north bank of the river roughly parallel to the one we had travelled along on the other side last night.

I was sent off to a chateau about a quarter of a mile from the road to see some German wounded who had been left behind. There were about fifty of them in the house lying in the beds with their boots and all their clothes on, and some on the floors. There was only one nursing orderly with them. Some of them were in a serious condition, and said they had been there without any attention at all for 36 hours. This was contrary to the Geneva Convention already mentioned which accounted for so many of our MOs being captured at the beginning of the retreat. Amongst the wounded was one of our own men. We took him, but couldn't take the others or do very much for them being on the move, and we had to leave them to be dealt with by the French authorities and clearing up formations which would no doubt be following up immediately.

Some cavalry, mostly French, was searching the countryside: we saw them potting at someone. There were also several parties of prisoners of war. They were digging them out of the farms and hiding places all along the



route. One party of about 25 looked particularly happy and pleased to be safe though prisoners.

It turns out that one of our Battalions, the RWF, had been in action last night near the bridge at La Ferté, so that is where they disappeared to. Sproule their MO had several casualties, but as they had been detached from the Brigade we did not collect from them. At dusk we arrived at Certigny where we stayed the night. The Brigade were in a field close by; they had not been engaged today.

On the march we saw the remains of a barn where 150 of the enemy had been killed by one of our lyddite shells. I think the number was exaggerated, but they were busy burying them as we went by.

The going today was very heavy; it had been raining most of the day and the roads were very cut up.

### **September 11<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Off again early. We appear to be acting as a reserve, at any rate we are not near the guns which can be heard in the distance. The roads get worse. In one place we had to sent the transport in a round about way and took the men across country. Still much the same signs of a retreat to be seen in the way of shell dumps etcetera.

It rained hard most of the day. We had to wait at some crossroads while what seemed like the whole of the IV Division went by. It took hours.

Arrived at Maury, where we stayed the night in a barn. It was pitch dark when we got there. The barn was a very big one, with room for us, all the men, and the riders tied up at one end of it. There was plenty of straw for everyone. The cooks foraged round and found a lot of vegetables growing in a garden near, and we had an excellent bully stew which we were quite ready for.

Major Rattray joined up tonight and took command. He was in hospital at Havre when the port was evacuated towards the end of the retreat.

### **September 12<sup>th</sup> 1914**

On the move again early, much rain and mud. Terrific firing all along a wooded ridge on our left. The march was very slow; many troops and much transport on the road. Still the same entrenchments, dead horses and broken German lances on the road. Our horses got very done up, mine went dead lame. He had been recently shod. I thought he had been pricked, so had the shoe off again.

We picked up a wounded German in one village. They must have evacuated their wounded wonderfully well. We saw numbers of graves, some just trenches being filled in. It was said a great number had been buried all along the route by the time we got up, either by their own people or the civilians. There were not many of these to be seen. We are to stay the night at Busancy, a small village up a steep hill, which nearly finished the horses.

We arrived there with no billets available except one small school. The horses had to stand in the pouring rain all night harnessed up. It was a beastly night - pitch dark when we got in. There was just room in a small bedroom for our valises to be unrolled, but we were glad to be under a roof of any sort. The men had to sleep on top of each other almost to get into the schoolroom.

We hear the Germans are again between us and a river, the Aisne, and we are hoping to get up before they can cross.

### **September 13<sup>th</sup> 1914, Busancy**

Wet again this morning. Everything wet through, but we are cheerful enough at the idea of the Germans being chased instead of them chasing us.

I got Sergeant Barnfield, a hair dresser in civil life, to cut my hair in the school yard where we had stayed. He is one of the Terriers from South Wales and a very good chap. Several officers of the Brigade, seeing what was happening lined up for the same attention. Barnfield did pretty well with the tips given. There were a lot of sick from the Brigade this morning, some needing evacuation.

A church parade taken by Webb-Peploe was cut short by orders to move at once. There was heavy fighting going close ahead.

After a few miles we arrived at Septmonts, a dirty straggling village, a small place of about two streets, but very prettily situated under a line of hills. The country round here is very fine: hilly, well wooded and with fine views. We went through the village, passing on the way two FAs halted on the road, and up a steep winding hill at the back, where we halted under the lee of a big farm, looking back down onto the village. Pavilion Farm was occupied by Divisional HQ, IV Division.

We hear the Germans are again between us and a river, this time the Aisne, and we hope to get up before they get across. We were told we had come up too soon, and should have waited below.

This Pavilion Farm is situated on the South side of a large plateau, and on walking over this a quarter of a mile or so we got a very fine view over the valley of the Aisne and saw the bombardment going on. Some WWs from them were bursting close to a rick on which we had climbed to get a good view.

*WW, 'Whistling Willie' is a name we gave to the German 5.9 shell, sometimes known as 'Jack Johnsons', or 'Coal Boxes' from the black smoke on bursting.*

As far as one could see to the right and left, which was a good many miles, there were batteries in action.

No official news, but various rumours pointing to the fact that the Germans had got across the river without being cut off, and also that they had not been able to prevent our people getting a footing on the far bank over a partly broken down bridge; every other bridge had been destroyed.

It was apparently quite certain that some of our army had got across in the rain and darkness last night, but everyone is very disappointed at not bagging a lot of the enemy between the two rivers.

As soon as it got dark the firing stopped. They won't give away their gun emplacements by firing at night, as the flash gives a very fair idea of the position of the batteries.

Returned to the FA on the road below the farm. Our Brigade is lying about on the lee side of the plateau. We heard we are going to move on sometime during the night, we supposed, across the river. Had a fire made in the ditch and a bully stew which went down very well. Afterwards had another walk onto the plateau. As far as one could see there were blazing farms, villages and stacks, and one big glare right away to the left which we thought might be Compiègne.

I lay down on a stretcher, with no idea when we should start.

We turned out at 1.30am and got on the move in rear of the ammunition column over the plateau and down some vile twisting lanes. The ammo column took a wrong turn in the pitch darkness, and all the wagons had to turn round in a narrow lane, a lengthy business. We went through the village of Billy, and a bit further on turned to the right on a very decent road for about half a mile. Here we were told to turn into a field on our right and take up a position alongside a hedge. The ammo column was also put into the field, behind the hedge lining the road to the right of the gate.

We thought we must be fairly near the river and wondered why we had not gone on and across. It was still very dark, quite foggy, and strangely quiet.

We had orders to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible. The hedge did not by any means give complete cover from the river side so we set about cutting branches from the wood on our right adjoining field, thickening the hedge. We also put some Xmas decorations on the buses, which with their white painted tilts are very conspicuous. By this time it was beginning to get light. The CO, who had gone off to Brigade HQ, turned up and said we were to wait where we were for orders. He also cursed at our decorations, which we had to remove as it is against the Geneva Convention to hide an ambulance wagon by artificial means. For all that we were told to be most careful not to show ourselves, we had no idea what was going to happen next, except that we were not going to cross the river yet.

We waited anxiously for daylight and for the thick mist to clear so that we could see what sort of place we were in; when it was fully daylight the visibility wasn't more than one to two hundred yards. The mist soon cleared and we saw that our hedge faced the hills on the opposite side of the river.

The river not visible from here was a good distance away across some flat low lying ground. To our right front was a big wood (Venizel Wood), with woods to our right and behind us. We were absolutely exposed, except for the thin hedge, to the German batteries which were all over the opposite hills.

In the sketch, the part marked fields was absolutely flat low lying ground by the river - more or less marshy waste ground, at least it looked like that from where we were.

The most interesting thing that happened first was the RFA battery, deployed in a field two to three hundred yards away in the open in a field in front of us, opening fire as soon as the mist had cleared. Almost immediately, German shrapnel began to burst over them four at a time. They didn't have much of an innings: they had to take cover in the wood on their right. They kept going out and firing a few rounds, but it was too hot for them and they began to get casualties, of which more later.

As the morning went on other batteries began up and down and all about. One of our field howitzer batteries started to the right and behind us, and some five inch heavies from the hill behind.

After watching for about two hours Greaves and I lay down in a bus and went to sleep for a bit as we had had none last night. It wasn't long before we were awakened by a WW plumping into our field and a bit of shell coming through the top of our bus. They had begun to search for our batteries. We were not in a very pleasant position with them all round us, but we had to stay where we were. The road in front was quite exposed up and down and there was absolutely no cover anywhere.

They were only dropping a few odd ones in just now, so we began to have some grub got ready. While that was going on I strolled about and had a look at the shell holes. They had stopped putting any close to us and were

trying their luck bit further along. However it soon started again in our field and a message came along from the General that we could move if we liked. That was all very well, but there was nowhere to move to. Anyhow the horses were taken into the wood behind us and the men marched off through the wood up the hill behind.

*Our Brigade was not in action, being scattered about near us in the woods, so there was really nothing to do in the way of wounded except a few oddments, but it was extraordinary how little damage was done to anyone by this promiscuous shelling.*

On getting to the top of the hill with the men we found a cave into which they were put. There were a lot of caves in these hills in some of which civilians and their cattle were taking cover.

Browne with two men had stayed below with the transport, and started digging a hole to shelter in.

After parking the men with some other officers, the CO and I went back to the transport field. On our way down he sent me to see if the horses were alright. They were sheltered from view and a little from fire by a rise in the ground. They were alright except one rider, being scared by the row had broken away and was not seen again. I went on down after the CO, on my way coming across Majors Hull and Biggam in the wood, crouching behind a pile of brushwood. They asked me if I thought they were alright there. I was frightened enough myself, but was rather surprised at the windy state they were both in.

By this time the shelling was incessant, and they were also shelling the wood with shrapnel. Arriving at our field, I found the CO, Browne, and two men packed tightly into a small dugout. There was no room for another to squeeze in. Things were too hot to do any more digging, so after waiting flat on my face for the next salvos I began after a time to make my way back to the cave through the wood, a five or ten minute scramble. The shells they were using were a fairly heavy calibre HE, and made holes in our ploughed field eighteen feet across and five to six feet deep. There appeared to be four guns at work on our particular bit of field. Four shells with about four seconds between them, and then a pause of about thirty seconds before another salvo. Our buses and wagons were getting a bit

splashed, but there had been no direct hits and no casualties up to now. After lying on my face behind a tree, behind a bit of a bank at the edge of the field I took the opportunity during the next lull to make off up the wood leaving the dugout party to sit tight in their hole. They were quite safe there except for a direct hit or shrapnel. My scramble up the hill was a d--- unpleasant walk I took shelter behind a tree - for what it was worth - when I heard them coming, as it was some protection against shell splinters, but worse than useless if one lands on it. The branches of the trees were being clipped off and it was perfect hell for a time with shrapnel as well as HE.

On arriving at the top of the hill it was far too fascinating to go into the cave where the others were. There was nothing coming our way anyhow up there. There was a wonderful view over the valley of the Aisne for great distances to right and left as well. The artillery fire from both sides was tremendous. To our left about a quarter of a mile away were some French batteries firing as fast as they could load, six at a time. All the bursts could be seen on the opposite side of the river. The view from my site must have stretched over fifteen to twenty miles of front. The firing was the same all the way along and was terrific.

In one place I could see a body of troops under the ridge on the opposite side, and as we were not firing at them, they must have been our own people who had got up during the night and were in such a position that the German batteries could not be brought to bear on them.

As it got dark the German gunners stopped firing completely but ours continued for a time. The men were marched back to the field, as we had orders to move. The field was a sight; they must have put about 200 WWs into an area of less the two acres, mostly towards the middle. If they had followed the hedge, most of our transport and the ammo column would have been wiped out. As it was, the only real damage was a smashed wheel and chips off various parts of the transport. One of the ammo column wagons was completely wrecked; it didn't blow up, being only SAA.

Altogether a wonderfully exciting day, and we are lucky to have had no casualties. We think it was the column they were after in our field. Apart

from spotting the vehicles, they must have known there were troops there because there were men wandering about in spite of orders to keep close.

At one stage we rigged up our flag staff and flags in the middle of the field, but that only seemed to make things worse. As one of our buses drove out onto the road to pick up some wounded gunners from the battery opposite, one landed on the road in front of it, and one behind, but not near enough to do any damage. With their glasses they must have been able to distinguish the white tilt and red cross, but we can't grumble about being shelled if we are put amongst ammunition columns and batteries. Of course the FA should have stayed higher up and just sent bearers and a bus or two until it was seen what was wanted, but our Brigade commander, General Gordon, likes to say where the FA will go himself. Being an odd Brigade we do not seem to come under a Divisional ADMS which is the usual thing. Also it was probably that they expected to move forward at once.

We had to be careful of the holes when driving out of the field. We were told to be as quiet as possible and show no lights. We moved along the road to the right about half a mile and parked by the side of Venizel wood. Our Brigade was lying in the wood in front of us where it had been all day; none had crossed the river.

It seems we have come up against a very strongly held position on the other side of the river which had been prepared during the time the Germans were retreating from the furthest point they had got towards Paris.

We were told that two pontoon bridges had been wrecked today; they had been trying to build them under fire. We also heard that one had been made lower down and that some of our troops had crossed there last night, but that it had been destroyed during the day.

### **September 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, Aisne**

At daybreak we found we were lying alongside the Middlesex; the other Battalions of the Brigade were deeper in the wood towards Venizel. It had been quiet all night but soon started again. A few went over and round about, a good many in our field along the road, nothing dangerously near



us until lunch time, when as we were all squatting down feeding several came unpleasantly close. Orders came to draw under the trees and keep out of sight of aeroplanes. Dillon unpacked his valise this morning and found a piece of shell had gone through it. The valise had been with the others in the baggage wagon. The fragment had cut through a lot of things and finished in a towel.

After getting everything under cover as much as possible I had a sleep under a tree. We had a few casualties during the morning. I can't imagine why they keep the main part of the FA in such a position instead of just a sub-division, as the Brigade isn't in action.

It seems that the strength of the position was not known and that we are properly up against it. There seems to be no prospect of our Brigade getting over the river. We hear that our advanced troops over the river are entrenching very close to the German trenches. Artillery fire very much the same as yesterday. We are a bit more amongst our guns than ever.

One solitary 18-pounder is on the road a few yards away from us, banging away occasionally. It is the only one left out of a whole Brigade of guns that got scuppered in the retreat. There were two left, but one fell into the river here while trying to cross the pontoon bridge, so they brought the remaining one back here. It looks very lonely by itself, but there are plenty of senior RFA NCOs with it. However we seem to have plenty of others round about us.

Things are said to be going well, and we are waiting for two French Corps and two of our Divisions to outflank the Germans while we hold on here.

There are said to be 18 German batteries on the hills in our immediate front.

Our troops are entrenching just below the ridge on the opposite hills. The Germans hold the tops, and they are very close together in some places but the Germans can't bring many of their guns to bear on account of this position of affairs. Our Brigade and the FA are exposed to them all right, and the infantry are digging in amongst the trees near Venizel.

The FA had orders to move back at dusk to L'Aube, about three quarters of a mile away, and as we had to travel over an exposed piece of road the transport was sent off with 200 yard intervals between the vehicles.

It began to rain and was pitch dark when we arrived at the small village in a hollow between the hills and turned into a grass field by the side of the road. We found a dirty deserted cottage where we had our valises taken, the men in other cottages and wagons. Got my clothes off tonight: the first time to be properly undressed since leaving Melun on September 5th. Have sent home for a suit of pyjamas. None of us started the war with them, which was a bit unnecessary, since they don't weigh anything. Hoping to get another horse soon; mine still too lame to ride. Several German planes over today while we were in the wood.

### **September 16<sup>th</sup> 1914, Aisne district**

Up at about 6.30am and had a complete wash. Very nice after several days sleeping in clothes, that is when we did get any sleep. We found to our surprise that we were still amongst our own batteries, so our move hasn't made much difference. We have to stay somewhere near the Brigade in case it gets orders to cross the river. There is one battery on the hill above our cottage and one to the right amongst some trees. Sure enough some WWs began to drop round about after breakfast. Nothing nearer than about 100 yards, but had a narrow shave from a big chunk of shell which whizzed between Greaves and myself as we were walking across the turnip field. I heard it coming and ducked, so busting my braces which I had to repair with a boot lace.

The battery above got it rather badly; they had to withdraw and leave two guns until after dark. They were very exposed and the Germans seem to have got the range. Sent a stretcher up the hill to bring in one of the wounded gunners. We moved our horses and men to a place down the road sheltered from observation and started the men digging some shelters for themselves in the bank at the side of the road.

The village of Arcy l'Aube is on the hill behind us overlooking our camping place. There is a large chateau at which the Germans seem to be aiming a few. Some dropped short near us and some in the village beyond.

Expected a mail today, but it didn't come. There is said to be good news of last night that we had taken some guns and prisoners.

Today we had quite an air show, several of them up at once, appeared to be chasing each other. One of them had been throwing out smoke trailers, probably giving away our gun positions. It was chased away by two of ours. All were fired at by one side or the other; quite a fine sight to see a lot of shell bursts high up in the sky. I don't think anyone was hit.

We now hear for certain that the Germans have a very strongly prepared position opposite over a front of about 40 miles with plenty of big guns.

There is very little to do at present, so walked up the hill with Hull and through the village which is badly knocked about, and then to the edge of the hill where we watched a gunner Major in his observation post telephoning to his heavy battery which was in some trees behind our billet. They had finished for the day as it was dusk. He was only waiting to see if the Germans would give away their positions by firing in the dusk, when a flash would show up. We waited about an hour, but they didn't fire again. It appears they have a heavy battery of eight inch guns near Fort Conde, which is an old French fortification which our people can't exactly locate. One battery which was trying to get them is one of our five inch heavies.

These are the biggest we have got here. They are part of the Divisional artillery; I think there is one battery of four to each Brigade of 18 pounders. They fire a 60 pound shell, and it takes a team of eight heavy draught horses to pull them. Their range is 10,000 yards. We hoped they would soon get the Fort Conde outfit as it was pretty unpleasant being fired at by this heavy stuff with no cover of any sort against it.

At 9pm I was sent down to Divisional HQ which were in Venizel (can't understand why this place isn't shelled more being close up: may be a reason as with the trenches), to get pay for the men, although there had been nowhere to spend it, no cafes or estaminets round about. I borrowed Biggam's mount and rode down with the padre. It was pitch dark but an easy road to find. We overtook the Middlesex, who were just going over the pontoon bridge to entrench on the other side of the river. The road to the river past Venizel is impassable in daylight, anything having to cross it doing so at a gallop. There had been several exciting incidents, and the

sides of the road had a good number of dead horses even before we got to Divisional HQ, and the stink was pretty bad. Major Isaacs the field cashier gave me a whiskey and soda, the first I had had since leaving England. Lord Jocelyn's bottle already mentioned was drunk neat or with plain water. We got the money in 20 Franc notes, he had nothing else, so paying out will be a bit awkward. Returned safely, chief danger was from our own sentries who didn't wait long before loosing off.

Today was glorious and sunny so our things dried out a bit, but the field was getting cut up and like walking in a bog. During the day the ammunition wagons of one of these batteries came and tried to park themselves in our field close by our buses. This was a bit too much. The CO kicked them out and told them they were sheltering under the Red Cross flag which we had rigged up as usual in the field. This rather annoyed them, but it was bad enough to have batteries all round without having their beastly wagons in the same field as our transport, to be easily spotted by any odd plane that came over.

### **September 17<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Beastly wet again this morning. Paid my section, two men coming up together for a 20 Franc note to be divided between them when the opportunity offered.

WW left two cards on us after breakfast, others further off. Heard we were to move to become a reserve Brigade to another Corps at 7pm tonight, also that the French are still trying to get round the flanks as this position is too strong to be taken by frontal attack. This is causing a bad delay, as the Germans had now had time to bring up their reinforcements and supplies. It is a great pity after having them on the run between the two rivers; they were properly routed then. We were told a story by a civilian in one village we came through where we were searching for wounded, that three of their Generals while they were feeding in his cottage were so wild with each other that they wouldn't speak, and so tired that one of them fell asleep with a sardine in his mouth.

It was also said that the Crown Prince and his family were on this side of the river and only just got back in time. They had come close up for the triumphal entry into Paris which didn't come off. Another rumour today is

that the Canadians are on the way up here, and also that some Russians had passed through Paris on their way to the front.

*This would be about the time the people at home were convinced that Russians had been seen passing through England. It was said that they were known to be Russians 'by the snow on their boots'!! The fact is that no Russians came to France until very late in the war.*

During the afternoon, Haycroft, another General Hospital Resident, turned up in a car with two Frenchmen from a Clearing Station near Septmonts with which he was serving. They were having a look round and were willing to take any sick or wounded they could get into the car back to the hospital.

Haycroft had seen Elkington, also General Hospital, serving with a FA somewhere. He gave me the first Virginian cigarette I had had for over three weeks.

There was a tobacco ration today: an issue of a two ounce tin of Capstan to everyone.

The Turcos are not far away on our left flank and we hear some wonderful stories of their crawling out to the German trenches at night and bringing back such trophies as heads and ears.

Later I went up hill to attend to a wounded gunner officer. They are billeted in a farm up there, and a WW fell on the road outside and got him.

Close to the farm is one of the big caves for old workings of some sort. In the one by the farm all the villagers shelter; at present they are spending most of their time there. Part of it is used for cattle when they are driven in at night, so the atmosphere is a bit yellow.

The gunners think we are mad not to take cover of some sort instead of living in a rickety old cottage, but we have to go where sent, and there is nowhere near that would give any protection from the heavy shells except the cave on the top of the hill, and this is too far away anyhow.

*Later in the war we should no doubt have been living in a dugout by this time.*

Three cards from WW this afternoon; appeared to be directed at the village alone. No orders to move, rained all day. Valise early on the tiled floor of the cottage.

### **September 18<sup>th</sup> 1914, same place**

Still no orders. The usual after breakfast - cards from WW. Walked up to the village, the place is now a wreck. I measured a hole in our field: eighteen feet across and five to six feet deep.

We are getting better food now, and there is a chance of foraging round: eggs, a chicken and vegetables just appropriated. There are no owners about to pay in any case.

No one is getting any exercise, so put the men onto digging some more shelter trenches to get into if necessary. The rifle fire was a bit heavier tonight.

### **September 19<sup>th</sup> 1914, same place**

Our Brigade is now dug in on both sides of the river but is not in action.

Had a walk round the heavies and a howitzer battery with Greaves. The heavies say they put WW out of action yesterday. He gave away his position by firing at dusk and our people promptly put four lyddite shells at him all fired together. Sheets of yellow flame went up and the gunners thought they had got the ammunition if not the guns as well. They think the guns may be working on a disappearing platform. We then walked on to the howitzer battery and had a talk to the officer in charge. Just then an order came through to make Chivres à - ? . This is a village on the opposite side across the river; it turned out that German snipers had been making themselves a nuisance from it. The Howitzers at once set to work and put half lyddite and half shrapnel shells into it, about 80 of them. Set the place on fire, and it must have been a --- --- by the time they finished. Very interesting watching them work the guns, but very deafening.

They showed us the base of one of WWs shells; it was nine inches across and very heavy. They had dug it up near one of their guns. The shell had burst beyond them, and this piece had come at them backwards. These

WWs were thought to be siege howitzers. The shells made a deafening whistling noise, much more than the smaller ones.

Same amount of rifle fire chiefly at night. We heard the pom-pom which is said to have brought down three German aeroplanes. It fires a burst of five at a time, very small (one pound) shells.

A mail bag arrived today, and as we were getting all excited it turned out to be for another unit.

German prisoners state that all of them are fed up and get insufficient food.

Our Brigade is having a bad time in waterlogged trenches. Some ten inch French guns and some of our naval guns are said to be on the way up here. They ought to knock WW sideways.

There was a night attack on the French last night, which was repulsed. One is expected on us tonight, and they are busy putting up barbed wire entanglements.

The cottage we are living in was used by the Germans, and we haven't got the place really clean yet. There are some very decent apples on the trees round about without any owners.

### **September 20<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Orders came this morning for us to move back tonight as soon as it is dark with the Brigade to Septmonts. Rain today and colder. Not much firing today. Position said to be good, nothing from WW today.

Messed about all day and at dusk moved out of our Quagmire up the road through Arcy to starting point at crossroads. Browne had been over the hill to Septmonts to see about billets and left two NCOs picketing a mustard factory. We waited about an hour for the infantry and then set off without them; as it happened they had already gone. On getting to the plateau a searchlight from the German lines caught us in the beam, and there was considerable 'wind up'. However, nothing happened, although it appeared to be as light as day in the beam. Perhaps they didn't want to give away their gun positions.

When we got to Septmonts we found the place had been jumped by some RWFs , and two of their officers were asleep. They were kicked out by the CO, and were very annoyed, but they were in the wrong in forcing our pickets, who of course were unarmed and couldn't do anything.

It was quite a decent billet, with one big sitting room and a smaller bedroom with three beds; I got one of them and had my valise unrolled on top of it. There were four others in the room; it was very fuggy, but dry and warm.

*This backward move by our Brigade, which had been in reserve most of the time on the Aisne, was probably the first step towards withdrawing the BEF from this front and transferring it to Flanders. It was said that General French had stated that he would rather have one weak flank than two, meaning he would have the sea on his left flank after the move. Perhaps it was just a watercart story, but he had just been most damnably let down by the French at the beginning of the retreat.*

### **September 21<sup>th</sup> 1914, Septmonts**

Rain again, not much doing, no news, firing all day in the direction of Vanizel. We found that our Brigade had been moved back into reserve because it wouldn't be used there at present and it was no use its lying about close up doing nothing. Another Division had also come up, the VI, so there were plenty of troops to man the trenches, really all the better for us though it comes of being an odd Brigade.

### **September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> 1914, quiet days at Septmonts**

We had only the ordinary sick of the Brigade to attend to, and spent our time in route marches, walks, messing about and riding about the countryside. This is quite a pleasant spot really and the weather is better. At least once a day I walked up to the plateau by Pavilion Farm (see September 13<sup>th</sup>) from which we can see over the valley of the Aisne and watch the shelling. Our men were digging trenches all along the ridge of the plateau, partly I think to find them something to do. A very occasional shell comes over: the firing is usually heavier over to the left.

It was quite a peaceful existence here except for the continual noise.



Several times a day planes of both sides came over and were fired at by both sides, our anti-aircraft defence being a pom-pom mounted on a lorry.

I got a mail today with ten 50 tins of Gold Flake cigarettes from Father, the first in a long time. The parcel was broken open showing what was inside, so the APO people must have been very honest. It has been impossible to get any Virginian cigarettes since we landed in France, and latterly not even French ones. In any case they are foul. A week or so ago tobacco and cigarettes were put on the ration as a free issue to the troops.

Two ounces of tobacco or 40 cigarettes such as Woodbine per week, so these don't last long. We also got some from Paris. One of the Cameronian Majors (Vandelens?) had permission to take a car and go to Paris and execute various small commissions for the Brigade. He turned up with a good supply of cigarettes.

Every day now we get a summary of information, a type-written sheet giving such news as it is permissible to print, and also extracts from diaries and letters found on prisoners. For the most part they seem to be quite fed up with the show. They are said to have had enormous losses and very little food.

Our mails are now coming regularly by the motor supply column. The vehicle delivering the Brigade mail is a civilian closed van painted a deep purple with an advertisement for 'The Dollar Princess' painted in big letters on the sides. There is still a lot of confusion about Nos 19 and 20 FAs. It appears Johnson is still at large with a remnant of the original No19, calling himself the 19<sup>th</sup>, and our A Section of No 20 is still at GHQ, so we are getting each others mails.

The Clearing Hospital with which Haycroft is serving is only a few miles from us back along the road. I had a walk there to call on them. They are in quite a nice chateau with their tents round about. There are two or three nursing sisters with them.

*The Clearing Hospitals, later known as Casualty Clearing Stations are not Divisional units and are not mobile in the sense a FA is and are not as a rule within extreme range of artillery fire. They can be moved in a*

*reasonably short period of time but at this period of the war they had no transport of their own and had to be moved by railway or motor lorries.*

*They were pitched as a rule near a railway line so they could be evacuated by a hospital train.*

*Clearing Hospital was the first place where a wounded man could be put to bed and where major surgical treatment could be given under decent conditions. In a FA, although we had no beds or much comfort of any sort, if stationary and opened out could deal with anything almost, for some days if necessary. In the early days we had to, but later on in trench warfare these things were not done except in emergencies.*

Three spies were captured at Bucy in a cellar; they had a telephone line running to the German lines. We hear also that the man taken in the chateau at Arcy turned out to be a spy; he had been signalling with lights.

### **September 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, Septmonts**

Got permission from the General to ride over to Soissons with the Padre to do some shopping. It is about 3 miles over the plateau by Pavilion Farm. The town is on the river Aisne and has had a bad time, having been first in the hands of one and then the other, and shelled by both sides. No troops are occupying it now; there are only a few civilians about who mostly live in cellars. On the way we were put on to a concealed path by a French cavalry officer. He said it wasn't safe to follow the one we were on as the Germans shelled it when they saw anything moving on it.

On the way we passed through the Turcos' billets and bivouacs - French Colonial Troops. They were a dirty looking lot of cut-throats, and it is not difficult on seeing them to believe the tales of heads as souvenirs.

The town is badly knocked about, but we found a small hotel open where, after tying up the horses in the wrecked stabling, we had quite a decent meal. We managed to get a few things, but all the shops were shut and the town was on fire in two places. We then had a look at the Cathedral, a very fine one. It had had about 50 shells into it. While we were inside looking a round a shell exploded on the roof somewhere and the nose cap came down on to the floor a few yards away. Thinking I would have it as a

souvenir, I burnt my fingers picking it up, forgetting that it must be nearly red hot. However, I took it away with me.

Soissons wasn't a place to linger in so we didn't waste much time. The occasional shell kept dropping in the town. On the way back we met a party of Turcos who stopped us, excitedly jabbering, and we had to shake hands with about a hundred of them. We met several other officers from our Brigade who had ridden over to try to do some shopping. Many of them are still very short of kit, a lot being lost in the retreat. Many of them have only had what they stand up in for several weeks.

### **September 26<sup>th</sup> 1914, Septmonts**

Nothing doing: usual walks and riding. There is a lot of game about in this district: wish we had a gun. If we had, I doubt whether we should wait for October 1st. Slept in the garden during the afternoon.

### **September 27<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Being Sunday we expected to move, as we usually do. Sure enough we had orders to get ready to go to the support of a Division to the eastward which was being pressed. After hooking in and being all ready we didn't go after all, and had a church parade instead.

Orders came round tonight that we were to 'stand to arms' at 5am every morning for an hour or until dismissed by the General himself or one of his staff. I think the General thinks we are getting slack and staying in bed too long. Later we heard he had been going round the Units asking how long it would take them to get on the move, and some silly CO had said one hour instead of ten minutes or so as he should. Anyhow it will be a d--  
- nuisance.

Today Flook, Lt ASC, i/c Brigade ammo column unpacked one of his wagons and found a piece of shell had gone right into the middle of one of his boxes of SAA without exploding any of them. Lots of cartridges had been bent and broken. This probably happened at the time he had one of his wagons smashed in our field near Venizel. Lt Flook, being on his own, messes with us, likes reciting Gungadin. Joined today by Lt Cohen, a temporary commission RAMC.

## **September 28<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914**

Same as before except for the 'standing to arms' at 5am. Everything has to be ready to march off on the word. One bearer sub-division with water cart and forage cart has to march with the advance guard of the Brigade as we did in the advance to the Aisne. Everybody curses it, not least the PBI (Poor Bloody Infantry), as it is so cold and dark waiting about on the road. We give the men some double mark time to warm them up.

On the river things seem to be about as usual. There is more or less continuous firing. In some places the trenches are so close to each other it is said that the two sides can talk to each other.

A prisoner was taken in a wood close by. He had been left as a spy I expect. He said he had had nothing to eat except turnip for five days.

There was an order to look out for a motor ambulance with a driver and a woman dressed as a man in the driving seat; it was suspected that these people were spies. The order came too late, as I had seen the ambulance as described driving very fast through the village by our billet, but no one of course thought anything of it. We did not hear whether they got it.

## **October 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 1914**

When the General came round to dismiss us this morning he told us we were going to move tonight. He does not say to what place eventually. We marched out from Septmonts behind the Brigade at 7.30pm via Chacrise, Hortense and St Gervaise to St Remy where we arrived at 2am. The Brigade hidden in a wood. Slept on the ground: a bit cold.

This move is supposed to be a secret march, destination unknown, so we are to be hidden by day, but they left us out in an open field. Our buses are very conspicuous, and if a FA is seen, it must be suspected that it is with something. The Brigade is well hidden, also their transport. A mail again today. During the afternoon I had a sleep on some straw on a farm wagon.

We use the farm house for meals. I saw a lot of French troops marching along a road in the distance going in the opposite direction to us.

Orders to move at 7.30 pm. It was my turn to ride at the head of the column as representative of the FA.

A very fine moonlit night, and much more enjoyable in front than in the rear of the column. The aggravating checks don't occur as they do at the rear.

Route through Nadon, Corzy?, Fleury Timbre, Villa Cotterets to Vez. We are to entrain somewhere. Today we went through part of the Forest of Compiègne. Towards the end of the journey I trotted on with the other representatives to arrange places to stop during the daylight. After about an hour searching we were given a stubble field on the side of a hill. I got very cold waiting for the Brigade to turn up, which it did, very weary and footsore. Turned in on a stretcher about 4 am. A march of about seventeen miles.

### **October 7<sup>th</sup> 1914, Vez**

Spent a very pleasant day slacking about in the sun on the side of the hill, everyone else hidden as usual in the woods.

On the road again at 6.30pm for Bethisy St Pierre, a march of about twelve miles. Arrived there between 11 and 12 and messed in a dirty cottage on half cooked stew. Slept the rest of the night in the garden. It is getting very cold at nights now, there is usually a hard frost. The country we have been marching through looks very fine by moonlight.

### **October 8<sup>th</sup> 1914**

A glorious morning. It seems we have now finished the night marches as we are to leave here at 2pm to entrain at ? . We think we are going south of Antwerp as we hear the VII Division has already gone there and we are to join up with them.

*We did not go to Antwerp, in fact we never saw the VII Division until November 14<sup>th</sup> 1914 when the whole Division took over the line of trenches from our Brigade in front of Bac St Maur . The VII Division was then so weak in numbers that it took the whole lot of it to man the line held by our Brigade.*

It is reported that the whole of the BEF is moving round to the left flank. We are very pleased at the idea as we were getting a bit sick of hanging about the rear areas of the Aisne district.

We left Bethisy at 2pm and had a very dusty march to Verberie where we are to wait for orders. We are now on our own again. It is said that some of these Battalions have already entrained. We waited five hours on the road outside Verberie. Started a concert for the men round a fire, meanwhile some of them sneaked off in the pitch dark and got blind drunk. Four of them couldn't stand and had to be carried in a bus. They will be 'for it' later; a good dose of FP No 1 I expect

*FP No1, ie Field Punishment No1, means being tied up by the wrists to the wheel of a wagon, or other convenient place such as trees for a certain length of time every day for the duration of the award in full view of everybody. A very ignominious and irksome proceeding meaning also loss of pay. At the present day this sounds a rather barbarous proceeding, but the old army had some pretty tough characters who were not amenable to psychology, which however had not become popular then. FP No2 is a milder punishment with no tying up.*

*Getting drink from the civilians was one of our problems from the point of view of discipline. The white wine taken in quantities, especially if laced with cognac very soon put a man out of action. During the retreat one of our infantry reservist bearers got hold of some drink and became mutinous and wouldn't march, although he could. He told Major Hull to use his moustache to clean his boots with instead of leaving his food in it etc (Hull had a straggling moustache). Finally we had to have him tied up behind a forage cart so that he had to march or be dragged along: he wisely chose to march. Quite likely if a senior staff officer had come along he would have shot him out of hand. There was no time to play about with such things.*

After that each Section was formed up on the road and had to stand there. Luckily we soon got orders to push on to Pont St Mascence where we bivouacked in a very dirty field at 11.30pm. The Brigade transport was in the same place, they had got in some hours before us. As usual Brigade HQ had forgotten about the FA and left us in the road for hours.

Here we crossed a wonderful pontoon bridge, made with the large French canal barges; it hardly vibrated when our transport moved over it. We nearly forgot one of our drunks, he fell out and got left. Four men were sent back for him. They had to carry him a limb each for the best part of a mile to the bivouac, where they chucked him in a ditch. They didn't love him much.

I thought they had broken his neck; he was quite comatose but there was no damage.

It was getting late so we had some cocoa and biscuits - there had been no meal since 1pm. A travelling drapers cart came round from which I bought some gloves. Expecting to entrain in the morning.

### **October 9<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Up at 6am, very cold washing, valise covered with ice. We are not entraining here, orders to march 10 miles to Estrées St Denis to entrain there. we marched along a magnificent straight road to arrive at Estrées at midday. The Argyll an Sutherlands are just ahead of us so we have picked up the Brigade again. We were not expecting to move until evening so had our valises got out, and I had a cold bath in the canvas tub and a change. We were in a clover field close to the station and a road. Some females were very interested in the canvas bath and kept walking backwards and forwards across the field.

*It is extremely difficult to shave out in the open in a cold wind. The padre said it was his last cold bath of the year; we all needed it anyhow.*

Contradictory orders kept coming in about every hour. It appears there are not enough trucks to take the whole of the transport. Forgotten us again, I expect.

Towards evening made a huge fire and had a good blow out. The RTO (Railway Transport Officer) joined us - he had just come from Lille. They still can't take us all in the last train, and some of us may have to be left for goodness knows how long. At last we were told that we should entrain at 7am so we settled down in the field for the night. We think we may go to Lille, where we hear the Germans are in force. We have been told to get

out maps of the Boulogne and St Omer areas. We are all very much afraid we may be sent to guard the L of C (Lines of Communication). Got some eggs today.

We were told by the RTO of the evacuation of Rouen. It appears that they all cleared out in a hurry at about the time of the end of our retreat, in such a hurry that they left thousands of mail bags on the quay and burnt them expecting to be shelled as they sailed down the river.

*They were not shelled, and were soon back in Rouen again.*

### **October 10<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Half of the Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers were on our train, two of their officers with their MO in our carriage.

We left at 10.30am, a tremendously long train and very slow travelling. Route: Montdidier, Amiens, Etaples, Boulogne, St Omer, Arques. Along the route at first all the bridges had been blown up and progress was very slow over the repairs. There were a lot of French Territorials about, but not the so much enthusiasm as on our first journey up North. Feeding on the train was rather a job, all the grub was in the next carriage, and they wouldn't hand along a fair share, so we stuck to the wine which was in our compartment. The train didn't stop anywhere more than five minutes and never in a big station until about midnight when there was a long halt near Boulogne. Couldn't help thinking how near we were to England again and that perhaps things weren't quite such fun. About this time I got a bit of sleep. It was beastly uncomfortable, a full carriage with no room to stretch out.

### **October 11<sup>th</sup> 1914, Arques**

Arrived here at 5am and began to detrain. A small village but a very large station with many sidings. Probably strategic in the same way that all the roads near the frontiers are paved so that they would stand up to the heavy military traffic.



The servants got some tea with biscuits and jam going while the detraining was going on. A RFA battery was just moving out of the station yard and another came in behind us.

The Germans were said to be at Hazebrouck 15 kilometres away. We left the station at 9.30am for Renescure where we were told to turn into a field, finally that we were going to spend the night in the place. During the afternoon some of our Brigade moved off. We were told they were going into action, but they didn't ask us for any of our bearer sub divisions to go with them. Probably there was a FA of the Division to which we were attached already there. Divisional FAs do not necessarily work the Brigade of the same number in the Division.

Today we heard the bad news about Antwerp.

Very little food today and feel very tired. Didn't sleep in the field but found a dirty little estaminet on the road by the field and had my valise carried there as it was beginning to rain. Army saying:- 'The worst billet is better than the best bivouac.'

Several Brigades of guns went by during the afternoon.

*Many small parties of the enemy, chiefly Uhlans had penetrated miles ahead of the main body of the Germans and as the BEF advanced in this area they were driven in. It was said that some had appeared on the heights above Boulogne.*

## **October 12<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Moved at 9.30am. The road was full of men and guns for about fourteen miles. Arrived on the outskirts of Hazebrouck. I was sent on into the town to get billets, as we were told we should stop the night there. The 17 FA was close to us and I rode into the town with their representative to the town hall, waited an hour for the mayor, an abbé, a big fine looking man who spoke very good English. We interviewed him in his book lined study. It is one of the jobs of a French mayor to stay in his town and not clear out when everyone else is doing so as the enemy is about to occupy the town. The Germans had been in Hazebrouck for a short time. The penalties are heavy for not doing so.

There were crowds of us there wanting billets and much language. They want to put the whole of the VI Division into the town. At last I was given my turn and was given the name of a street to find billets in. Found it at last, a street of very small houses, so it looked like taking the rest of the day fixing up the numbers for each house and chalking the unit and number on the doors. I went first the whole length of the street and was lucky in finding a school which would take all the men in one go. So back to the town hall for the key. It wasn't there, but the abbé agreed to its being used and sent a man with me to find the mistress. We ran her to earth after an hours search in various streets and got the place open. A small hotel sort of place I snaffled for the officers, but didn't go in as I had taken so much time and kept the FA waiting so long.

I went back to the place I had left them and found they had gone without leaving anyone to direct me to where they were. 'Dirty Dogs'. Luckily some civilians had seen the direction they had taken, and after a mile or two I found them parked in a field. They had had orders from Brigade to follow on and contradictory orders from the ADMS VI Division. In the end we went back to the billets I had already found.

On the way met Crawford Jones, an old General Hospital resident who had gone into the RAMC as a regular a year or two ago and had come out with the VI Division. He was very fed up with life and had a cold in the head. He said he had had enough of it and was making urgent moves for a job at the Base, rather a strange attitude for a regular officer, I thought.

Some firing was rather close at one time. Some enemy cavalry, about a dozen, had been in this place for a short time, so the 200 or so French infantry supposed to be guarding it had at once fled. However, our people got possession of the place before the enemy came up in any strength. They were said to be only a scouting party anyhow.

We have no news of what is happening except that the enemy is falling back.

Our Brigade appears to have acted as a rearguard again today. When settled in I had a walk in the town with Hull. There is a huge square in front of the Town Hall in which our transport is parked together with that

of 17 and 18 FA. Troops kept arriving in the town in motor buses, formed up in the square and marched off.

We found our pension very comfortable. I slept on a mattress on the floor. A negro housekeeper was the only person left in the place.

### **October 13<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Left Hazebrouck at 8am to march behind the VI Division. No 17 FA was in front of us. A slow march with many halts to Borre, where we had to stand by. I think our Brigade went on with No 17 FA to deal with them as there were none of them about here. Felt pretty sick at being left there waiting for orders.

The VII Division and a cavalry Division said to be on our left. VI Division and 19 Brigade in front and IV Division to right. Plenty of gun and rifle fire fairly close but we don't seem to be wanted. We don't know the strength of the enemy. Our cyclists killed some of them here this morning. Their graves in the churchyard are just being filled in by some civilians.

There was also an unexploded shell stuck in the wall of the church. It is said in the village that they are also burying the priest who was shot by the Germans for refusing to give up the keys of the church tower. Some German prisoners who came through nearly had a rough time from the villagers on this account. The village is badly knocked about and burnt.

No orders by midday so we had some grub in a tiny sort of Mairie by the roadside. Dug some shrapnel bullets out of the door in idleness. In a small room at the back we found a wonderful collection of arms of all sorts, rifles and guns of all periods, no crossbows. These arms are collected by the Mayor in any village likely to be occupied by the enemy so that no armed civilians will be tempted to have a pot at the invader and get shot.

It was a beastly day, rained all the time. Still no orders to move when it got dark, so made preparations to stay the night. Got into an estaminet and slept on a bed; no undressing of course. Buses out on the road, poles let down, found a stable for my horse. Everyone very wet. First free issue of cigarettes today - the first issue on the Aisne was tobacco only.

**October 14<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Had really a very comfortable night.

A message for two bearer subdivisions and some buses to go forward. Williamson and I took ours and had to go without any breakfast. We had to call at Pradelles for orders. This was about a mile on from here. We found the DADMS of the VI Division and a dressing station which had been opened by 17 FA. They had a lot of wounded in from yesterday's and last night's fighting. I had orders to work my way along a lane in the direction of Merris with my bearers and collect anything on the way. I was told to go forward to investigate the country first as the DADMS could not tell me definitely what was happening a bit beyond this place, and I was to be careful where I went. I took the party to Strazeele, another mile or so, left the men and buses with Williamson and rode on by myself.

It was raining hard, and visibility was only about 100 to 200 yards. Some batteries in action round about, absolutely nothing on the road. It felt rather lonely, and I was almost expecting to be fired at by the Germans any time, but by all the rules I should have come up with some of our infantry first. I went on about 2km to Merris, where I found four badly wounded men in a convent. After having a look at them I hurried back and brought up some bearers and a bus in which we sent them back to Pradelles. The convent was badly knocked about, roof and windows all smashed. Could have picked up buckets full of shrapnel bullets lying round it.

The two sisters I saw, who had attended to the wounded were very kind. They gave me some coffee and a bunch of grapes. They are wonderful women, and do not appear to be at all rattled. They had already attended to a lot of other wounded. Rifle fire sounded very close on my right. Couldn't get to hear of any more wounded round about. The 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade HQ were back in the village, so I went there. As far as they knew there were none others lying about not yet collected, and I was wondering whether to push on further with my party when Rutherford turned up (the DADMS). I was told to wait with my part in Merris until No 19 FA (ours) came up. While waiting about two miles of guns and REs came through the village moving forward, then our FA and lastly Divisional HQ.

Halted in a village for instructions and waited hours, so began to look round for some place to stay the night. Greaves was sent off to find Divisional HQ and get instructions.

A message came in that there were some wounded in a farm about a mile away. I went with four bearers and a bus. Collected four of ours and two Germans, one an officer. Took them to the convent for the night. The German officer had an Iron Cross, and the padre was I think determined to get it by some means or other; he is an awful souvenir hunter. I don't think that I have mentioned that Padre Gibb left us to join a cavalry regiment as a combatant, and we now have a Padre Webb-Peploe, a regular chaplain attached to us.

Greaves, who had been looking for Divisional HQ, turned up about midnight. They thought they were in for a night attack on them and got very excited, giving everyone a rifle, including Greaves, but nothing came of it.

The Germans are still retreating, but we have only rumours to go on.

### **October 15<sup>th</sup> 1914**

We have orders to go to Bailleul, so our people have knocked them back properly.

I waited to see the wounded off in a motor lorry and then caught up with the column. Biggam went on to find a billet and got a fine house near the station, with a bathroom, our transport in the station yard and the men in a shed.

We had orders to clean up the station, which had been badly knocked about and prepare it for a clearing station. We are in a funk we may be left behind to run it until the proper one comes up. During the evening a hospital train came into the station with two nurses on board in spite of the newspaper reports. Here we must be a long way back, the place isn't even being shelled.

The MO i/c of the train had some grub with us and told us some of his adventures, such as steaming direct into the German lines, only stopping just in time to back away.

Had a bath.

### **October 16<sup>th</sup> 1914, Bailleul**

Messed about in the morning, went into town and bought some towels and a blanket, my one only Jaeger one is not going to be enough. There were no flea bags to be bought before we left Aldershot. The Germans have not long left the town, and the shops have been cleared out of anything worth taking in the way of loot.

Corps HQ have come into the town, so the Germans must be well away. We have heard nothing of our Brigade, so we seem to be getting left in the rear again.

At 4pm we got orders to move at once leaving the place to be taken over by someone else.

Marching on our own again we crossed the frontier into Belgium. Raining and a dark dirty night when we arrived at Neuve Eglise. Here we found orders waiting for us to rejoin our Brigade about fifteen miles across country. Some Hussars were billeted for the night in the square. Their CO said the country was not safe for us to trek across alone, as there were enemy patrols of cavalry about. We had no escort, and one man could have captured the lot of us.

*Our ASC drivers, belonging as they do to an armed corps had their rifles, but according to the book could only be used in defence of the wounded as in savage warfare, a distinction without (much) difference. The same applies to the revolvers we carry, or did at first, but there were some nasty stories about what they did to RAMC personnel captured carrying arms. Mine was in one of the wagons, a useless weight. A certain proportion of regular army RAMC personnel are trained in musketry, but none of them carried arms in this war.*

Our CO decided on the advice of the Hussars to start at dawn instead of pushing on at once. A section of ours had been sent on ahead of us and had picked up some wounded on the way here.

The padre captured a Uhlan while foraging for eggs for the mess. A dead beat German crawled out of a ditch and gave himself up, so the Padre took the German's lance and marched him back carrying the basket of eggs. Our cavalry were hunting these stragglers all over the countryside as we came along. It is said that there have been about 1200 casualties in this area during the last two days. Three of us found a dirty estaminet and lay on the floor for the night. There was a stove going.

### **October 17<sup>th</sup> 1914**

We scored over the people sleeping next door. The occupants of our estaminet made us an omelette and some coffee before we started, a very good one too.

It was a very cold damp start at dawn. We had a good halt at midday at some cross roads where there was an estaminet. Here we got a mail. We have got a most excellent postman. He sets off on the bicycle for wherever the supply column is expected to fetch up, usually a good distance back. He has an excellent eye for the country and generally comes back to us, himself and the bicycle all slung over with mail bags. Name of Evans, from Newport, a postman in civil life.

*Note on how supplies are got to their units. When on the move the Brigade train, horse drawn GS wagons belonging to the individual units of the Brigade collect rations and supplies from a point determined by the staff to which the motor lorries of the supply column come. Having brought these supplies from railhead, i.e. as near as a railway train can get up, they are transferred to the horse wagons which then return to their units. This is a daily trip, our wagon returning immediately it has dumped the stuff to rejoin the others. The amount we get is determined by the ration strength sent in daily by the quartermaster of the unit. It was said that the strawberry jam never got as far as the infantryman, everyone was after it.*

*The only reserve carried by the Unit is the iron ration on each man, not to be used except in emergency on orders from a very senior officer. So that*

*if you get rations say in the afternoon there will be no more until roughly the same time next day depending on the exigencies of the service; the soldier might be expected to exist for the greater part of a day on what is technically called 'the unexpended portion of the previous days ration', in my experience a completely mythical entity.*

## **Vlamertuyhe**

We arrived here at 2pm without any adventures on the way. Here we are amongst the 19th Brigade again. The CO got into hot water for not coming on last night. Billeted again in a dirty estaminet. Things seem to be quiet round about just now.

In the afternoon I rode into Ypres, about two miles away with Cohen. A very fine old town with some fine buildings, plenty of shops still open, but many hut and the people departed. There had been slight damage by shell fire

The Germans have taken everything they wanted, being especially keen on field glasses, flashlamps and champagne. Cohen tried to buy a Martingale, but couldn't find one. I bought a small enamel beetle brooch at a jewellers who had had a lot of his stock looted. After a cup of coffee and a bun we rode back.

There are a lot of French troops in the town. On the way home I saw an armoured car. Our advanced troops have gone through the town to the eastward of it but there does not seem to be a battle going on at present.

Heard today that Ostend had fallen.

## **October 18<sup>th</sup> 1914**

It was said there was a big fight today around Armentières. About 45 buses from the London streets arrived; they propose moving troops about in them. The Argyll and Sutherlands were taken out into the country for a run round trial. The buses look very out of place with their route boards, theatre notices and other advertisements on them. Not much doing. Messed about, mended clothes etc. No mail today. Railhead has been changed three times in three days.



This is a beastly dirty billet with an open cess-pit under the window of the room we sleep in, and we don't mind how soon we leave. Today I watched a Belgian cutting up the tobacco he had grown on his farm. This is a tobacco growing area; you can buy a pocketful for next to nothing, but it is coarse beastly stuff.

We are now amongst the Flemish people. Some of them speak no French and their language I believe most nearly approaches our own than any other foreign one. I can't make anything of it, but the Argyll and Sutherlands are said to get on fine with it. The country is flat and mostly uninteresting.

*We had no idea of course that the battle was about to take place in front of 'Wipers', or how near it was to starting. All we knew was that our people were following up the retreating Germans on the other side of the town.*

### **October 19<sup>th</sup> 1914, Vlamertuyhe to Levantie**

Orders to move at 1.45pm to Levantie, fell in rear of the Brigade and went back on our tracks through Neuve Eglise to Steenwerk??, where there was some heavy firing going on to the left. One of our Battalions travelled in the motor buses. Neuve Eglise, where there was also heavy firing in the distance, was crowded with troops and motor lorries.

We left Belgium at about the same time, and in the same beastly weather as when we entered it. Hull tried to knock out one of the border posts: didn't see it in the pitch darkness, and it hit his horse in the chest and nearly unseated him. At the frontier we had a halt of one and a half hours and had some grub.

It was a filthy night, raining all the time, just like the night we got into Noyon on the retreat. The going was very bad; we took a wrong turning and ditched two buses, but no one was hurt. Towards the end of the journey we passed the smoking ruins of several houses which had just been burned out.

Ate some biscuit and chocolate while riding along. Then over a very slippery pontoon bridge. Warning of this was passed back down the column; when it got to us it was 'pass the pontoon bridge along'! Never by

any chance can a message be passed accurately by word of mouth without getting hopelessly tangled up. All the way on this march of about 27 miles there was incessant heavy firing on our left - constant gun flashes.

Arrived at Leventie about 4.30am. Everyone had just about enough of the greasy pavé stone sets which made the going very difficult. Found the Germans had only evacuated the place about two hours before we got in. Our Brigade is in the town. No doubt must have a breather before going on into action. Rifle fire sounds close. At about 5.30am had a lie down in an estaminet.

### **October 20<sup>th</sup> 1914, Leventie**

Awakened early by heavy firing to the East. A lot of sick from the Brigade rolled up this morning. Those needing to be evacuated were sent off to Merville.

At 12 noon the Brigade was moved off in a lorry to support a French Division. B Section bearers under Williamson and Greaves were sent with them.

This town has been ransacked too. A fine big house close by has had everything in it wilfully smashed up; broken mirrors, furniture and china covered the floors. The bedding had all been torn and soiled by defecation everywhere, and, of course, all the wine cleared out of the cellar. They are a dirty lot of swine. We had to find somewhere to put the sick, so had some of the place cleaned up, and put them in it, wishing we had a few German POWs to make it cleaner.

*We only knew much later that what was happening was the first battle of Ypres beginning. It was found that on the right flank there was a gap with no troops, British or French to fill it, so our Brigade had to make last night's forced march behind the battle line to come up on the right flank of the BEF.*

*Although the really desperate struggle took place in front of Ypres, it is a mistake to think the rest of the line was in any way quiet. On the line our Brigade was to take up there were some very heavy attacks, at first with no artillery support. It was a very thinly held line too, without a reserve man*

*to send in nearer than England. There is the story of the captured German officer being taken back saying 'where are your reserves?', and on being told we hadn't any being perfectly astounded, and saying if only they had known how weak the line was here.*

*The 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade dug in under fire on a line which although I never saw it, later in the war I was told never altered throughout the war until the Portuguese ran away in Flanders in 1918.*

## **October 21<sup>st</sup> 1914**

Orders to move in an easterly direction to Croix Blanche. The people at home seem to be rather in the dumps; the papers speak of Russian reverses.

On arrival at Croix Blanche took over a small farm and put the transport in a field nearby. The CO to Brigade HQ for instructions. He sent word that A Section was to relieve B, (the one we sent into action yesterday). The firing has been too hot to do anything much in daylight. It has been going on all day but appears to be much closer this evening, about half a mile away, or even less. There is terrific machine gun, rifle fire and shelling over a wide front. Some shells near this farm but no damage. There are some French cavalry close to, standing by in a field with part of a French FA. The French cavalry look rather comic with their plumed helmets and their breastplates. I had a chat with the French MO who was very friendly.

Went out with the buses later to collect what the A Section bearers had brought back. Could get the buses well up into the forward area in the dark. Things had quietened down, although there were plenty of 'overs', ie rifle bullets flying about but no shelling. There were a lot of wounded to collect tonight.

The Brigade has had to move back a bit and dig in, but our FA HQ have not moved and are now well within range of 'overs'. Dillon acting MO to the Middlesex has been brought in shot through the arm; it looked bad enough to keep him out of things for a long time. Greaves had a graze on the knee, and one of our bearers was badly wounded. Altogether a pretty warm day, and we were working all night. Turned the kitchen of the farmhouse into a theatre, very cramped bad accommodation. Most of the

cases after dressing were put on straw in a barn, and when I thought we had finished for a time we found most of them had not had their anti-tetanic serum, so had to crawl about amongst the straw and squirt them all by the bad light of a pocket torch, not a very aseptic proceeding.

What happened today isn't very clear to us. I think it was intended that the Brigade should go beyond Les Mesuil and Fromelles. The RWF got ahead with a French battery into Fromelles, but by not being supported had to fall back. This is where our B Section was and they had a pretty warm time.

The Argyll and Sutherlands lost most of their first line transport - for the second time it is said. The Cameronians had to dig themselves in under fire guarded by two half companies which had a lot of casualties. The Middlesex had some hand to hand fighting.

We heard that after taking Armentières the VI Division had to evacuate it (this turned out later not to be true). As it was getting light I had a nap on some straw in the farmyard - it was probably a midden. Cohen was sent to the Middlesex in place of Dillon.

### **October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914, Croix Blanche**

Out early, firing again heavy. We were cleared this morning of our wounded by a motor ambulance convoy for the first time. They told us the VI Division had done well on our left taking Armentières and getting beyond it, also of a Russian victory somewhere. In spite of this we seem to be rather up against it. Collected about 30 casualties during the morning.

We opened an ADS on the Rue des Lombards in a small cottage (deserted of course). Our Sections are to take it in turns to run it. That means bearers with an officer collect from the Regimental Aid Posts and carry back to our ADS, where if things allow it the horse buses come up and take them back to FA HQ. More wounded during the day and continuous firing. Turned in about 10pm on the straw in the yard again. The motor ambulance convoy came up again during the night.

We have no artillery support behind our Brigade but today two French batteries of 75s came up and unlimbered in the field by our FA HQ. I

suppose Brigade had sent urgent requests for artillery support against the frequent German attacks. The French gunners pooped off a lot of stuff very rapidly for a time and then pushed off somewhere else, leaving us the benefit of the German counter battery strafe which started immediately they had left the field. However we sustained no damage, only being frightened of where the next one was coming to.

### **October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914**

C Section for the ADS today with forage cart and water cart. Two of us sitting there during most of the day. The country is very flat: a few trees and hedges and very large fields of roots, very few buildings.

We managed to get a few wounded in but it is quite impossible to get up to the trenches by daylight. The approaches are in full view of the enemy and are swept periodically by rifle and machine gun fire whether there is anyone there or not.

Not so much today in the way of wounded but the Germans are setting fire to all the cottages and farm buildings round about and shelling all the crossroads, so it is a pretty warm place.

The Brigade has now taken up a definite line and is entrenched all along.

Brigade HQ are getting it today in the La Boutellerie Road and have had to move three times. ? The work of spies.

### **October 24<sup>th</sup> 1914**

The Indians are up in the line, one Battalion on our right flank. The RWF seem to be getting most of the attention today. Some of our own RFA have come up and we have seen no more of the French batteries. Had a chat with the officer in charge of the battery in the next field. He is very short of ammunition and is not allowed to fire more than five rounds per gun per day unless in a very extreme emergency. The German gunfire is heavier today and although they are falling all about we have had good luck so far.

The Germans staged an attack on our lines, a perfectly hellish fire broke out; it seemed as though every rifle in our line was firing as fast as it could load. The RFA battery in the next field loosed off as fast as they could

load, quite ignoring the ration allowance, so there must have been something fairly serious in the wind, and we could hear the guns going all the way up and down the front. There were plenty of rifle bullets flying about, mostly spent. Our only casualty at the FA HQ was the mess cook - one went through the seat of his pants and grazed the skin.

We harnessed up, as we thought it quite likely the FA HQ would be ordered to take the transport back a bit; it was very close up to have all our equipment and horses and wagons. After about one and a half hours things quietened down and no orders came. Our Section out at the ADS did not have much to do; there were not so many casualties as might have been expected from the amount of firing.

### **October 25<sup>th</sup> 1914, Croix Blanche, continued**

A good deal of shelling this morning; nothing very near, as they seem to be searching crossroads and buildings. Brigade HQ again having a warm time.

During the afternoon I walked across to relieve Browne at the ADS; he was wanted at the FA to do an operation. Several rifle bullets in at the back door of the cottage. A bit later on a shell hit the corner of the cottage but luckily didn't explode, and only killed a hen outside. There are plenty of HEs bursting on the trenches and farms. Browne came back to the ADS and I walked back across the fields to the FA to bring out C Section in relief.

Found several shells had fallen very near the farm building. We think the main part of the FA is much too close up.

The owner of the cottage we are using as an ADS has been locked up as a spy. He has a bomb proof shelter hollowed out of a rick at the bottom of his garden. Where they had caught him I don't know, as he had not appeared while we were in the cottage.

Heavy rifle fire again tonight. Buses kept coming in loaded and we were busy most of the night.

### **October 26<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Orders for the main part of the FA to move back about half a mile to another farm. There was very poor accommodation here, so we rigged up one of our operating tents and four bell tents. Still running the same routine at the ADS.

There is a fairly decent clean room for grub and to sleep in for those not on duty out in the collecting area. During the afternoon I had a sleep on a threshing machine in the barn.

The Indian FAs not being up yet, we are going to collect from them tonight.

Had all ten of our buses going and the busiest time yet with a fair number of Indians. One officer of the Indian Army (white) had his servant with him. This man sat by like hawk looking as though he would like to stick a knife in me while I was dressing his boss. The CO and Browne can speak to them in Hindustani; like all regular RAMC officers they have to put in a good deal of time in India, and have to pass an examination in this language for promotion.

The CO of the RWF spent the night with us, not wounded, but a bit of a nervous wreck. I think he will be sent down the line.

### **October 27<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Orders for the FA to move back further tonight to Bac St Maur, as the accommodation is not good enough here.

*The HQ of the FA with the tent subdivisions always try to find a decent building where there is cover for the wounded awaiting evacuation.*

At 8.30am an excited cyclist orderly dashed into the yard. He said the Germans had broken through and were coming along towards us. There had certainly been a rather brisker bombardment this morning, although we didn't believe him, as some of them would have been here almost as soon as he was, and there were no signs of any of our men falling back. However, we hooked in, and loaded up as many of the wounded as we could, others to march, and prepared to push off. After waiting an hour nothing happened, so we unloaded and unharnessed again. The whole

thing turned out to be a false rumour. I went off as usual with bearers and two buses at about 10am to the ADS. The others when cleared by the motor ambulance convoy pushed off to Bac.

After being at the ADS for a short time I was recalled to Bac St Maur, and brought everyone back with me; we are going to work the evacuation of the forward area in a different way, because it is still impossible to get to the Regimental Aid Posts in daylight. No one can show themselves out of a trench and there are no communication trenches leading up, so there is no point in so many of us sitting tight all day in a tumbled down cottage or some place under fire where we can't do any good: we are therefore to come up at night and not stop there all day.

Shelling about as usual. Brigade HQ have moved again; their Sergeant Clerk was shot by a rifle bullet coming through the window of their cottage.

Farms are still burning in all directions.

I trekked off with my detachment to Bac St Maur and found the FA across the River Lys in a large linen finishing factory. Plenty of room for patients and our personnel, a small office to use for a mess, valises amongst bales and rolls of linen on the floor of a warehouse, rather a cold damp place with a stone floor. There is a good big yard for the transport and cover for all the horses: rather a good spot, no one here, and no work going on.

Two similar large factories on the other side of the river have been burnt out. This place would be over two miles from the front line.

About an hour before dusk I started out again with the bearers and some buses. A typical tour for the night is as follows:- the idea now is to clear the Regimental Aid Posts as soon as it is dark, taking the buses as far as possible depending on the state of affairs, and if much is going on do a long carry by bearers and not take the buses too close.

I took my horse for the first part of the way. It looked as though things were going to be lively; quite a lot of shrapnel was coming over, but it quietened down as we advanced and as it was getting dark.



I left the buses at Croix Blanche, our original spot when we first got here, put my horse into a shed and took on the bearers. I sent one party to the nearest Regimental Aid Posts, those of the RWF and Royal Fusiliers (a Battalion temporarily attached to 19th Brigade) and took on the others and myself to the Cameronians and Middlesex RAPs. Found things were fairly quiet, so sent back for two buses to follow up to about half way down the La Boutillerie road. Saw Davidson, MO Cameronians and further along the line Cohen, who was now CO Middlesex. Davidson has a nice deep dugout, but it is very exposed to get up to and there is a machine gun trained on the corner of the road by it which fires a few bursts now and then. Cohen has already had enough of it - very miserable and wet. It is only a week or two ago he was grouching about not being in the thick of things. Promised to lend him a spare pair of my boots.

After finding what these two had in the way of wounded, I left Sergeant Barnfield in charge to start the carrying and loading the buses. The La Boutillerie road is absolutely flat and straight, running at right angles to the trenches. The bullets smack and whistle straight up it. As we were marching up, one came between me and the bearer alongside. We were almost touching, so it was a pretty near one, and very frightening. This was the nearest one that night as far as I know, but there were plenty of others.

There are a lot of sniping shots flying about, and some seem to come from behind us.

Cohen's Aid Post is in the Middlesex reserve trenches which are behind the wall of a chateau which is about eight feet high. There are a few shell holes in it, but it is excellent cover from the rifle fire and shrapnel.

The bullets make a curious crack as they come over the wall. The wounded have to be got to the Cameronian corner and then up the La Boutillerie Road, and then up this straight. It is absolutely impossible to move on this corner during daylight.

After leaving Sergeant Barnfield I walked back up the La Boutillerie Road and turned left along the Rue des Lombards and left again to the RWF Aid Post.

They were going on all right and had managed to get a bus right up to it.

This road is not so exposed, and when things are quiet a bus can get right up to the cottage used as an RAP. From here I took some men further along to the Royal Fusilier Aid Post, not at all a nice place, as there is a very exposed piece of road to get to it. (The Indians are on the right of the Royal Fusiliers.)

Captain Hare, MO Royal Fusiliers, is in a small farm building by the side of the road. Sat down with him for a time and had a smoke; he also gave me some coffee. On the way back heavy rifle and machine gun fire broke out over the RWF and Royals trenches. I was on the exposed bit of road, but luckily by a bit of low wall when it started, and had to wait there quite a time, at least it seemed wiser to. They were quite thick, so I stayed until things quietened down. It might have been 15 minutes, but time seems very long under these circumstances. It isn't pleasant at any time wandering about behind the trenches!

I walked back to Croix Blanche, and all the wounded we knew of having been cleared, I got my horse out of the shed and went back to the factory at St Maur. The bearers stay in a house near Croix Blanche, and before dawn sent to all the RAPs to see if there is anything to be cleared before daylight. Then they return with the buses to Bac St Maur for the daytime.

There is now a rum issue in the trenches, but our unit hasn't been given any yet. Our men are not going through enough continuous exposure as the men in the trenches are.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup> 1914, Bac St Maur continued**

Became definitely lousy. I had suspected it for a day or two, but on stripping for a complete wash all over, which I hadn't for some days, I found three, which had been responsible for the crummy feeling. Very disgusting and unpleasant. Some of the others are the same, and nearly all the men. They are worse, and had been for some time. It comes from sleeping in your clothes on the ground in all sorts of places.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup> 1914**

The routine described was the usual one for clearing the wounded, and for this fortnight we were in the same place. After three days we went round two together. It was much pleasanter doing the night round with another of our MOs, instead of prowling along the pitch dark lanes from one RAP to another by yourself, particularly as there was always some sniping going on, and one didn't want to lie out on the road until someone found you. Our sentries didn't waste much time before loosing off, and there have been several casualties in that way here.

One night, a moonlit night, I thought the Cameronian quartermaster was going to have a pot at me. He was going up to the reserve trenches as I was coming back. As he got near I saw him draw his revolver; he owned up he was getting ready. These roads are no joke. Civilians, Germans dressed as civilians, spies, and at first Germans in uniform were gradually rounded up and shot or imprisoned. Towards the end of our time here there was no sniping from behind the lines. One day I was in about a half company of infantry in extended order walking up the country like a line of guns in a civilian shoot.

The first capture behind our lines was of three Germans with a machine gun hidden in a hollowed out rick. Our people got to know of it, set fire to the rick, and out they crawled, half starved, and one of them badly wounded.

The farmer at Croix Blanche was taken. He was found waving a lamp about at 2am. Brigade HQ had to move frequently. The Germans couldn't have followed them as they did without some information. A sniping shot, not from the trenches, which were too far away, even came into our yard at Bac St Maur.

One of our Sergeants was responsible for catching a spy. Noticing the pigeons, he reported it and this man was caught with carrier pigeons, German money, letters and maps, and was shot the next day.

Their spy system must be wonderfully well organised, but the people round here in general are not a very fine lot, those that are left. They are money grubbers and a most miserable crew.

Gradually the small village of La Boutillerie and all the buildings behind our lines were fired by incendiary shells. The chateau and wall in the Middlesex lines was knocked all to bits. Nine of their first line transport horses were killed behind it somewhere. The RWF Aid Post had two cottages burnt over it. Our own Aid Post at Croix Blanche was also burnt out and some kit lost in it. It is said they have got some guns almost in their fire trenches and move them about at night.

Towards the end of our time in this area things quietened down a bit, probably on account of the Russian pressure.

*It was really the failure of the Germans to break through in any part of our line and the slowing up of the first battle of Ypres of which our line was a part where they failed so badly.*

At first the night attacks were frequent and fierce. We got quite a lot of German wounded, badly wounded too, as they were the few who had reached our trenches. Some had bayonet wounds, and one man had been lying out between the trenches for three days. None of the dead are buried; they can't or won't trust each other to go out to do it. When the wind blows this way the stink is pretty bad. I got a German bayonet here and a few other oddments as souvenirs.

One night our people got 40 prisoners - a rum looking lot. Some were very young, and some elderly, and all looked pretty sick. From what we hear they very rarely push an attack right home: they come up and start shouting 'come out you English -----' and then turn round and bolt away when things start. They have long handled shears for cutting the barbed wire entanglements, but it is no joke trying to get through in the face of rapid rifle and machine gun fire, and sometimes gunfire.

A trick done by both sides is to crawl out at night and tie tin cans on to the wire and carry a string back to their trenches. They then jink the string and everyone loses off a lot of ammunition and is kept on the jump thinking an attack is developing. All the empty bully tins are thrown out towards the enemy so that the men stumbling on them will kick up a row and give the alarm.

The rifle position became acute during this period, so many had become unserviceable from overuse, rust, breeches clogged with mud or the action put out of gear. Our CO told the Brigadier that our ASC personnel had about 45 perfectly good unused rifles, so they were promptly taken over against a receipt to safeguard the CO. Our drivers were only too glad to get rid of them as something less to look after. They left them their bandoliers, which were much lighter with only tobacco or other oddments in them.

*About two years later some observant senior officer asked why we hadn't any rifles. The CO had left long ago, the receipt didn't exist, and no one in the Brigade, if anyone was left, would remember anything about it. I happened to be acting CO at this time and had some difficulty in persuading the bloke that I hadn't sold them or otherwise unlawfully disposed of them!!*

Our linen factory makes a good hospital after being cleaned up following the German occupation. We got the boiler and machinery patched up so that finally the building was steam heated. The Germans had smashed everything they could. On the roof of the boiler house was a large tank full of water about four feet deep and twelve yards long which I used as a swimming bath in the morning when I was in the billet. The water was very cold, but it was well worth having such a dip. Preston was the only other to join me in this. The roof of the building makes a very good observation post, the country being so flat you can't see very much except towards Neuve Eglise, where you can see a range of hills. Big gun fire is continuous, particularly from that direction, and rather gets on your nerves at times.

While we were here we collected from the Indians for a week until their FAs, which had gone astray, came up. From what we hear they seem to be doing all right, but they were very jumpy at first and blazed away all night long, so didn't get much rest or allow anyone else to. They will only take biscuits, condensed milk and sweets from us; their caste won't allow them to eat anything not prepared by their own people. Luckily we don't have to keep any wounded here, or we should have to get a native cook.

We are now being cleared by a Red Cross motor ambulance convoy, the WO ambulances having been sent elsewhere. The drivers are very decent sorts, and bring us news, what there is of it, papers, and other comforts.

During the day I often had a ride when back at FA HQ. It is quite good going along the towpath of the River Lys. I visited various places - Armentières, Erquinghem, Saily (badly knocked about) and Steenwerck. We also had some good fun tent pegging in a field close by; I used an Indian lance which had got left with us. We also had a German and a French one. Later on we rigged up a jump. My mare hasn't much idea, but scrambles over somehow.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Made a flea bag by sewing two blankets together.

The Leinsters from the 17th Brigade VI Division on our left are attached to us temporarily; the rest of their Brigade appear to be having a rest.

Rumours that the war will be over in two months, but no reasons given: probably only watercart. Message today from the General thanking the troops and attached units for the good work done

### **October 30<sup>th</sup> 1914**

As usual.

### **October 31<sup>st</sup> 1914**

An extra big mail: lots of parcels. A lot of German prisoners last night.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup> 1914**

Being Sunday, we were to have moved to Saily one and a half miles south but it didn't come off. Message from General French from GHQ to all units today:-

'The German emperor will arrive in the field today to conduct operations against the British Army. I call upon all ranks once more to repeat their magnificent efforts and show him what British soldiers really are.'

### **November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914**

Expecting to move any time. There is an air of suspense more than usual the last few days. We hear the whole 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps passed through Bailleul yesterday, destination unknown. Bailleul is also full of French guns; it looks as though we are going to have a big show in this area soon. The summary of information also states that the Germans are withdrawing from the coast and coming in this direction. Rumours of more heavy fighting round Ypres and Neuve Eglise. Position said to be good.

This evening on my tour of collecting in the forward area, having started things going, I took Lt Harbison out to relieve Sproule as MO to RWFs. Sproule joining us for a time. Harbison not knowing the lie of the land I had to land him up at Battalion HQ which were in a ditch a little distance behind their fire trenches. Having introduced him, I was just going on to the other RAPs when the adjutant said 'have a spot of rum, doctor, before you start'. A tin mug was produced, which I held under the jar for the adjutant to pour me out a drop as I thought. It was very dark, and I couldn't see how much there was in the mug. However, I lapped it up and started away. After about 200 yards or so I felt extremely warm and comfortable and a bit unsteady on my legs, so I thought I had better sit down for a spell, which I did in a very wet place. After a time I felt all right again, and proceeded on my way, but still feeling rather brave. I had been told some days before that the rum was first rate - it had been in store since the South African War. I felt none the worse for it, and wished we got an issue as well as the infantry.

Joined today by Chandler, a temporary Lieutenant from a base hospital.

### **November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914**

Same place. A lot of shrapnel over the RWFs, and they seem to be trying to blow in their trenches with HE.

A letter from General French asking us to hold out a day or two longer until strong reinforcements come up. The general position is said to be good - rumours that we have cut off a large number of Von Kluck's army between us and the sea.

### **November 4<sup>th</sup> 1914**

A night attack lasting longer and being heavier than usual. I wondered whether to undress in case of having to go suddenly to reinforce our people in the forward area on account of the fierceness of the firing. Have lost the legs of my pyjamas. Cohen said to have walked down a trench of sleeping Germans in mistake for our own.

### **November 10<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Our men have now been in the trenches for twenty days without any relief. There is no one to relieve them. In fact we seem to have no resources of any sort anywhere near us, and the strength of the battalions is rapidly falling.

The Middlesex have had a lot of their trenches blown in by WWs and had much digging to do. The chateau wall is getting more decrepit every day. It is said that Lord Roberts is round about visiting the Indian troops.

### **November 14<sup>th</sup> 1914**

This morning some Guards Battalions, SW Borderers, S Staffs and others marched past here. The VII Division is said to about half strength or less on account of the desperate fighting they have been in further North; we think we may be relieved by them. Our Brigade (19th) has stuck the time wonderfully, and the men seem remarkably cheerful through it all. The weather is now beastly wet and cold, and the water in the tank is extremely cold for the morning dip. The firing in the direction of Ypres is continuous.

### **November 15<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Some officers of the 23rd FA came to see out quarters and find out how we worked the forward area, so there is something on. It is uncertain about our move, but we believe we are to take over some line in front of Armentières in a day or two. Our Brigade was relieved last night and is billeted round about here (Bac St Maur).

From the Summary of Information today:-

'Kaiser Bill went up the hill to see the bloody slaughter,



Bill came down without his crown, and so the B----- orter'

The Summary of Information is a typewritten sheet containing items of news such as it is permissible to publish - statements of prisoners, and the vast numbers of the enemy scuppered by the Russians at all sorts of unpronounceable places.

There is a report that Lord Roberts died last night in France.

Weather getting worse, perfectly awful. Very wet, cold wind, seas of mud. Missed my swim on the roof today.

Saw the cutting out of the Daily Mail, which was sent from home, today, saying the 19th FA had been destroyed.

### **November 17<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Orders today to move out at 3.30pm for Armentières. The Brigade is going to take over the line at present held by the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade round Houplines to the North East of Armentières.

The infantry marched through Erquinghem, a party from our FA going with them. We went by way of Croix du Bac and Pont de Nieppe into the town. Roads awful, arrived in the dark.

We are not sorry to see the last of our warehouse; it was getting very chilly and uncomfortable. I have to own up that we took, or looted would be a better word, several big rolls of very nice fine linen to use for various surgical purposes. No doubt the whole lot would soon disappear: No one saw any sign of an owner.

Our Brigade has now been in the same waterlogged trenches for 25 days without any relief (October 21<sup>st</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>). We hear the whole of the VII Division is going into our old Brigade line.

### **Armentières, November 17<sup>th</sup> 1914, continued**

It was very dark when we got into this deserted town, or so it appeared. Arriving outside the Ecole Professionnelle, where our men are to go, we found No 17 FA personnel already there, also some French Gendarmerie,

but we managed to get everyone in. Hoping we should not have any work to do tonight.

Found Browne who had gone on to see about the billets having a long argument with the CO of the 17<sup>th</sup> FA as to who should have the large house opposite for officers billets. During this we bagged the stables at the back of the house and got most of the riders in, and eventually got possession of the house. It was an extraordinarily fine place, with a large hall, billiard room with fine oak panelling and good pictures, various other rooms with easy chairs and Turkey carpets, a winter garden, fine bedrooms and bathroom, a butler and some servants, a pianola piano and large gramophone. Hoping to keep this place some time.

At about 9pm we had a civilised dinner, about the first since the Compiègne cafe on the retreat, fine glass, cloth etc, and wine from the cellar of the house. The German general staff stayed in this house - the King of Albania was with them. Nothing looted or damaged.

Slept in sheets for the first time since leaving home. The rifle fire sounds close, but it is a very still night.

### **November 18<sup>th</sup> 1914, Armentières continued**

After breakfast went with Sproule to Houplines, where our B Section, which is already there, is going to take the first tour of duty. Route partly through the town and then over a pontoon bridge over a canal, a rather round about way to avoid a piece of road on the direct route said to be unsafe in the daylight.

The town is fairly large, uninteresting, brewing and manufacturing place with plenty of small dirty streets. Has not been knocked about much yet. No shops are open, and there is hardly anyone about in the streets.

Our ADS at Houplines is in a knocked about small brewery: slates, windows and shutters mostly smashed. This part is altogether much more knocked about than Armentières, which adjoins it very nearly. Here we are, I think 800 to 1000 yards from our trenches. The village, Frehlinghien is in German hands and is not a mile away. The brewery is alongside the

River Lys, the other side being Belgium. There is a lock here, broken, but the footbridge is whole, so we can walk into Belgium any time!

The ADS is in the cellar; all the surrounding buildings have been chipped, most by shrapnel bullets. The town hall, a big building to our right front overlooking the country towards the trenches, has no glass left in it.

This is a dismal hole. There is one man left in the brewery - he is still brewing beer, so we should be all right for that. This man gave us a vivid pantomime of how our men pushed the Germans out of this place. The RAPs are quite close by, and I suppose the German trenches are about 1000 yards away, perhaps a bit more in places. After a look round it was getting dark, so Sproule and I set off back and lost ourselves in the dark streets. Finally got in to dinner in our sumptuous residence.

The 5th Scottish (Territorials) Rifles joined the Brigade today as a fifth battalion.

Things seem to be run in much the same way as in the place we have just left, but this is not so countrified.

It is official about Lord Roberts and the 'Emden'.

### **November 19<sup>th</sup> 1914**

This morning we fixed up the main dressing station of the FA in a Jesuit college, a fine building with plenty of room for all the transport in the courtyard. It may mean that we have to leave our present billet as it is a bit far away. As orderly MO I had to sleep in what we call the hospital for the night on duty. It is very cold, hard frost, roads icy. Shall have to think of sharpening the horses. Snowing a bit.

Find we have to move out of our billet after a lot of scrapping about it. Now looking for another house, but there is nothing so good as this.

### **November 20<sup>th</sup> 1914**

A sharp breeze last night and another later on away to the right.

A frosty morning with some snow still on the ground. Got ready to move but didn't at once, so went into the town to try to get a toothbrush and oddments. It was very dull - no one about although there are still said to be 20,000 inhabitants still in the town and suburbs. It doesn't look like it. A stationers shop I went into was wide open but quite deserted; couldn't find anyone in the house. It was a big shop, full of things which anyone could walk off with. I only wanted a writing pad, so I took it and left some money on the counter.

### **November 21<sup>st</sup> 1914**

Moved to new billet today, a large well built house on the street, the Rue Nationale. Plenty of room for all of us. The cook with a relative had been left in charge - it belongs to a widow lady who has fled. No easy chairs, but quite a good bathroom and a cellar. The cook had been told that if any English officers were billeted there to offer them some wine.

*We had some wine every day. The owners did not think there would be such a long stay on the part of the English. I don't think we made much of a hole in the cellar. We were not greedy, and generally drank the local beer, but over the next few years there were probably dozens of officers billeted in the house who drank it up by degrees. However, a bill for wine drunk followed the unit about, and finally caught up with us. I think it was late in 1916. By this time I was the only officer left in the FA who had been in the house. I didn't feel inclined to pay for nine others, and I don't know what happened afterwards. Nothing, I expect, unless the French authorities managed to add it to the bill for all the other things this country had to pay for, such as trees which had been barked by tying horses up to them. It was said we had to pay the French railways for every item that went over them including hospital trains. We heard a good deal about 'un bon requisition' in the early days.*

It is reported that the Kaiser has been shot.

Leave is being granted in order of seniority. This is quite a surprise to me. In spite of rumours, I had not really thought of it happening. The padre and Biggam leave on November 26th for ten days.

People are returning to Armentières; some shops are opening, but it is a rotten dull place.

Heard today that Lt Col Steel, my original CO in No 20 had been killed by a shell at an ADMS of a Cavalry Division.

### **November 26<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Had a ride round in the morning and bought some carrots for the horses. There are more people about, but about eight shells were put into the town and everyone disappeared.

My turn to take over duty at the ADS Houplines today, so later on walked up there with Chandler, who is sharing the job with me, and took over.

I visited the Middlesex and Argyll and Sutherlands. Chandler did RWFs and civilians - there is quite a general practice amongst the few civilians round about. Had some dinner at 6.30: champagne, sardines and Maconachie stew. In the sitting room of the brewery house, a small dirty place, there were seven or eight bottles of champagne. There must have been a lot more, only our predecessors had not had time to finish it - unless they hadn't spotted it. If they had, I think they would have packed up what they hadn't drunk. Two Seaforths came in to visit us, and they had some. Strictly speaking I suppose we shouldn't have touched it, but if we hadn't, somebody else would. The place was too battered and too near the line for the owners to turn up, in spite of one man continuing to brew his beer.

*We go on to that later.*

Round the side of the building by the river I came across some of our bearers busy with a bean stick and string loop in the end of it, by a ventilator leading down into a cellar. The cellar was flooded up to the top, and these lads were fishing for bottles of wine. I don't know whether or not they got any. They made off of course when I appeared, and I didn't press the matter so long as they don't get drunk. I looked round inside the house and found the steps to the cellar, but the water was too high to see much except the tops of a layer of bottles. I fished one out and it turned out to be a very decent Burgundy. There may be some competition to run this ADS when it gets known.

It looks as though another attack in this region is expected, they are said to have moved a lot of guns in this direction. The usual amount of sniping shots tonight - the bullets keep smacking against the houses. that is the overs. Cohen MO Middlesex said he was sniped at from 100 yards tonight. Plugstreet is on our left over the river about a mile away. The small town of Frehlinghien opposite us in the German lines is getting badly knocked about, but there is still one tall factory chimney standing which would make a very good observation post for the Germans. Our Battalions are doing one week in and one out of the trenches - it is about time they had a break.

We can get a wonderful view over the trenches from the upper windows of the town hall, which stands higher up and on the edge of the village. There is an uninterrupted view over open country, and we watched our gunners pasting the German trenches. No movement to be seen there, of course, but we could see our own men moving about.

Our clearing of the wounded still has to be done mostly at night, so there is a good deal of slack time to slope about in

### **November 27<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Our predecessors here, one of the FAs of the VI Division, had been in the habit of sleeping in the cellar with their men, that is when they had nothing to do in the way of clearing and dressing during the night, so Chandler and I thought this was the thing to do. This was the brewery cellar, not the wine cellar already mentioned. There was no water in it, a large place. All our men at one end, and we took the other, but not to sleep. The men talked, snored, and made other less polite noises all night, and there was a rotten cold damp fug. We decided to sleep on the ground floor in future. In any case one did not expect much in the way of sleep while out here, and only had blanket on the bare floor while there was nothing doing.

Up at about 9am. During the morning the ADMS came here to meet regimental MOs to discuss sanitation in the trenches. They talk about being here two months before there is anything much doing again. During the afternoon I saw some civilian patients; rather afraid the practice will grow too big. A bit of shelling and the usual sniping.

Some of the men are getting hold of rather too much beer, and although it isn't much stronger than water I suspect the water to make it comes out of the Lys and this is a foul stream. Turned in for a bit on the floor under the windows of the sitting room in front of the house. There is really no furniture in the place, but upstairs I found a mattress.

## **November 28<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Not a good night, had a hot bath with water from the brewery. Paraded the men at 10am and told them a thing or two about drink. The Pot calling the Kettle black - however discipline must be maintained!! Messed about and watched Frehlinghien being shelled. Took some photos. My camera, a VPK, (vest pocket Kodak?) arrived a little time ago. This, the same as keeping a diary, is not really allowed, though there are quite a few about. One has to be careful not to advertise it, which is a pity, as one can't take the really interesting bits one would like to.

*Later in the war everyone had to sign 'on his honour' that he hadn't a camera in his possession.*

My hot bath from the brewery water had given me an idea. Why not use one of the big empty vats in the brewery, have it filled, and let the men go in a dozen or so at a time? This was done.

*This I believe was the first organised bathing establishment for troops in the forward area. The Brigade got wind of it and asked to send parties from Battalions in rest. Later on much larger ones were opened further back, where linen factories had no end of vats not in use. They also became de-lousing stations where the men after the bath got a clean change and left the others for treatment.*

Took a few photos. Our batteries rather busy from somewhere behind us. Maconachie ( a tinned Irish stew ready cooked and only needing to be heated up) and champagne for lunch. Afterwards Chandler went to see some civilians. I stayed in and wrote a few letters. A few shells dropped near, and a lot of civilians rushed in to shelter in the cellars. It was soon over. One went into the house next door to where Chandler was dispensing and killed the whole family while they were sitting round in the room

having their meal. At about the same time they put about fifty shells into the station at Armentières.

News of a great Russian victory brought by Browne, Greaves and Sproule who had walked up to see us and stayed to tea. Dinner was fresh beef, sardines on toast and mulled beer, done by heating the end of a poker red hot and sticking it into a glass of beer. Can't say it was much improvement.

Later walked down to Middlesex aid post; Cohen not there. A beastly wet windy night. Blanket at 9pm after clearing the sick and wounded.

### **November 29<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Another rotten night. Trouble with the civilians coming to shelter and kicking up a row in the yard all night, also had a long job fixing up one of our men who was in a nasty mess when brought in at 5am. Later went into the town to dress some cases.

A spy hunt is on: it is said that someone has been signalling to the Germans from a window in the Hotel de Ville, ie, our battered town hall, which is in full view of the German trenches. No-one caught yet.

*A bit later on when we were in Erquinghem this spy was caught - a woman. She had been tracked down to a small farm in the back area where one of the veterinary officers had his billet. The story goes that the APM's people knocked on the door in the small hours of the morning, the officer put his head out of the window to know what it was all about, and when told said 'well you can't have her now - come back in the morning'.*

A good deal of shelling today round about. Went to the Hotel de Ville again, but couldn't see very much; it was rather a misty day. Trouble today with some Argyll and Sutherlands pinching beer from this place, so had it put out of bounds to the troops except for the bathing parties.

The Russian victory appears to be official.

### **November 30<sup>th</sup> 1914, Houplines cont'd**

A better night but a gale of wind blowing down slates and bits of glass from the damaged houses. I went to see the CO of the Argyll and



Sutherlands to ask him to picket the gate into the brewery yard as his lads are beginning to wait about there with buckets trying to get beer on the cheap.

Nothing much to note today. A shell occasionally in our direction, and the usual rifle fire. Watched one of our planes spotting for our gunners. It came down very low and was heavily fired on from the German trenches, but without any result that I could see.

### **December 1<sup>st</sup> 1914, same place**

An Argyll and Sutherland officer dropped in and had some beer with us. He told us the Germans had left their fire trenches in some places and retired to their reserve line which is higher and drier. Our people have had to take over the original German line, and have the benefit of the mud and water.

I had a walk along the railway on the other side of the river, but didn't go very far as I didn't know exactly where our trenches ran. When nearly back at our footbridge I met a party of villainous looking civilians. I stopped them and was told they had come from Plugstreet. They had sacks of boots, blood stained clothes and uniforms, tins of bully etc, and had of course been looting. They were a bit nervous on seeing me. I made one lot of them turn out their sacks on the ground and took a lot of pistol ammunition off one of them. Not that I wanted it, but they oughtn't to have had it anyhow. In any case, I wouldn't trust them a yard: they are a dirty scrounging lot.

### **December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914, same place**

Had a walk into Plugstreet village this afternoon. It is badly knocked about but there was nothing going just now. Our trenches are said to be in the wood in front of the village.

*The Plugstreet bit had a very bad name for being the cause of a great number of casualties later on.*

### **December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914**

B Section takes over from us today and we went back to the FA HQ in Armentières. Before going I had another look from the Hotel de Ville windows. It was a very clear day, and I could see our men moving about, but no sign of movement from the German trenches. Some of the civilians are trying to repair damage to their houses in Houplines; a bit optimistic I thought, as further damage was being done every day.

### **December 4<sup>th</sup> 1914, in Armentières**

At FA HQ again. Took all the men not out at Houplines for a route march to Erquinghem, a village to the right flank; there is very little for them to do when things are quiet, and our Section is enough to run the ADS.

Browne and Chandler walked out to Houplines to call on the ADS and got into the middle of a hate; they put about 50 shells into the place. The Argyll and Sutherlands were shelled out of their billets opposite and had some casualties. Cellars there again full of civilians.

Major Biggam has at last got his transfer, and is to be posted for duty at Boulogne. A Major Parsons joined us, also a French interpreter, one Marhange, a Lance Corporal in the French army. He is going to mess with us, although an NCO. Not a very nice type, but he did come back from the USA to serve when really over age. Something to do with film making in America. At first he was with the Sherwood Forresters in the VI Division, but 'wid de Sherwood was very frightened' one day when some shells were coming over, and told us something that happened to him which I can't put down in the diary.

Found I was lousy again, no doubt from the Houplines ADS.

### **December 10<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Leave stopped for some reason we don't know. Greaves sent out to Cameronians temporarily as Regimental MO (Davidson wounded). From the Summary of Information, known as 'Comic Cuts' -

'The German XXIV Corps which took a knock from the 19th Brigade (ours) at La Boutillerie at the end of October is now in the Carpathians and

has taken another bad knock there from the Russians. The 133 Regiment is opposite us in Frelinghien.

We already knew the latter part, as it had been shouted across no mans land.

*I think it was in this sector that the enemy, then Saxons, shouted across that they were being relieved by some Prussians and to give them Hell when they got there. As far as I remember the Corps mentioned was the one which asked us to knock Hell out of the Prussians.*

### **December 12<sup>th</sup> 1914**

The DDMS Corps came today to be taken to our ADS at Houplines. He didn't know the way and wanted to be shown round. It was my job to escort him there; he didn't want to stay very long.

Story of the up and the down and a polisher. (?)

### **December 13<sup>th</sup> 1914, Armentières**

After dinner had a walk in the town and just got back when they started shelling it. I had just had a bath when one came a bit closer, as I was getting into bed, and parts of the house across the street began falling in the road, so I thought it would be as well to be on the ground floor. Putting on a greatcoat, I went down and sat with the others, but things getting warmer I went up and dressed. As I got down a man came over from the college, which is just across a road at the bottom of our garden, to say a shell had gone clean through two walls of the men's billet and exploded outside. Covered them with bits and dust, but no casualties. If it had burst after hitting the first wall, there might have been a large number of killed and wounded.

Went over to the building which in addition to billets we use as a hospital until we can evacuate the wounded - (I think I have already mentioned this before) - and got the patients under some better cover, and put the men behind a thick wall, as it seemed we were in for a lively night. A big flax mill close by was by this time blazing furiously and lighting everything up. The Germans were steadily plugging them in: bricks, glass and tiles were

flying about everywhere. Thought someone would get it soon - they seemed to be concentrating on this small area of the town.

After about two hours it eased off. The horses and transport all escaped damage. We collected our kit and brought it downstairs in case of fire, then went to look at the blazing factory, a grand site by now. It was being used as a billet by two Companies of Infantry. They had left in a great hurry, and their ammunition left behind kept popping off. All the men had got out safely. Then we watched the flash of the German gun which could be plainly seen and timed the arrival of the shell. It took 35 seconds, so must have been a good distance away. The bang of the guns could be heard before the shells got here; it was at much longer intervals now, but our two nearest were to come. One in the road in front and one through the greenhouse just outside the sitting room. This was very near, and covered us with glass and dust. From the one in the road a large chunk of shell came through the shutters of the bedroom the interpreter was using and finished up on his bed. Altogether rather a warm night. The total bag was said to be one dog, apart from structural damage, for about 500 shells. All the civilians went to ground in the deepest cellars. It was marvellous how all our outfit escaped. The college had several holes in it, most of the windows were in and the men's quarters were broken.

### **December 14<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Our bit of the town looked a mess this morning, with glass and masonry all over the streets, but the damage didn't look much for the number of shells fired - many of them were blind. All the horses of the Brigade train and ammunition column were just along our street. Their CO thought they were after them, so cleared out with the whole lot to Nieppe, at 11pm. Things being a bit quieter, he came back, and the whole thing started up again but he had no casualties.

### **December 16<sup>th</sup> 1914**

A gunner officer came to look at an unexploded shell which was on our premises. He said it was French, captured at the fortress of Mauberge and fired at us from near Lille.

### **December 17<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Relieved Williamson at the Houplines ADS. We are now to do it in 24 hour spells. Very little doing; some German searchlights in use.

### **December 18<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Took a bathing parade of 200 of our men. The VI Division have just taken over a linen factory near Erquinghem and turned it into a divisional bathhouse. It took about two hours to wash them all.

Things seem to be very busy in the direction of our old line around La Boutillerie; tremendous gunfire and searchlight. Was told it was the VII Division making an attack.

### **December 19<sup>th</sup> 1914**

We heard the VII Division attack had not done much good: they took some trenches, but had to evacuate them as the attack had failed in other parts. The casualties were very heavy.

Went to a meet today at Croix de Bac, four couples of beagles belonging to the 19th Hussars. Chandler, Preston and self. It was too heavy going for following on foot, so everyone rode, a field of about 40 - 50, including some brass hats. It was quite good fun, but too many horses, and the field too much on top of the hounds, also too many deep ditches and dykes. My mare took some of them very well - didn't come down, but several of the others did. Back to Armentières by dark. A great day, wished the Germans could have seen us hunting within range of their guns, it might have annoyed them as we were so 'contemptible' anyhow.

Firing going on along the line as usual.

*This hunting was soon put a stop to. The French didn't like it - thought we were not taking the war seriously enough, so our high ups had to frown on it.*

### **December 20<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Had a walk with Chandler to Plugstreet., a fine morning for photos. Passed the DLI on the road. Guns busy all round this morning. As we left they began to drop a few into Armentières and were also searching for a battery

on our right as we got out into the country. One shrapnel shell burst very near a horse some distance away from us in a field. We were too busy seeing

if he was hurt to get our cameras out. More came over but were too far away to get a good picture. We wanted to get a good shell picture so waited about but had no luck.

*After this length of time it now seems as though we were mad to mess about for this purpose, but again it must be remembered that things were comparatively new and exciting.*

We wondered whether to go on, but it was as safe in one place as another, unless in a cellar, so we walked on into the village of Plugstreet. Thereabouts we heard our anti-aircraft guns firing at a German plane, so we went on half a mile or so and found their emplacements by a farm. There were two motor lorries with a 12 pounder mounted on each. They were I think the 12 pounder RHA gun adapted for the job. We asked if we could take a snap and did so, afterwards waiting to see if a plane came over. Nothing doing, so we used up the spool, then of course over came a Taube, looking like a louse in the sky, and they opened up on it. We had no film left. They got a string of bursts which looked very near, but the plane just went straight on. They fired about 15 rounds each, whilst I was hurriedly trying to change the film, just too late to get one of them in action.

On our walk we met one of the MOs of the 10<sup>th</sup>FA who are working this bit of the line. They had just dealt with over 100 casualties while trying to straighten out a bit of the line near Plugstreet. The ridge to the north is in our hands and there are a lot of our guns on it.

While we were away on our walk a bomb had dropped on the gasworks in the town and killed or wounded several civilians. Things have kicked up a lot round here in the last few days.

Orders for Captain Browne to proceed to No 7 Clearing Station for duty. He doesn't want to go to a cushy job, and is trying to work it otherwise. Being a regular with some good friends, he will probably work it all right.

Some excitement tonight - the General's leave has been stopped; he has been heard to say that the only thing that can stop his leave is an advance. Leave has been stopped twice before, so we think something is going to happen soon.

### **December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914**

Chandler for duty with Argyll and Sutherlands as Regimental MO. The enterprise which stopped the General's leave was I think to have been an attack by our Brigade on a localised bit of line. Luckily it didn't come off.

### **December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914**

Out to ADS at Houplines at 5pm. Our Brigade is expected to move out for a week and then relieve the 16th Brigade further to the west.

### **December 25<sup>th</sup> 1914, Christmas Day**

A very quiet morning; distributed gifts to the men, the brass box with smokers in it from the Royal Family, also a pipe from 'Mary and the Ladies of the Empire'. Saying of the day:- 'we know the ladies of the Empire, but which is Mary?'

After this I went to a concert in the men's billets for an hour or so, and then going up to Houplines ADS heard about the fraternisation going on, but didn't hear of it until too late to get into it. It was started by a kilted figure jumping up onto the parapet, and as nothing happened, about 300 Argyll and Sutherlands and RWF got out of their trenches and mixed in no man's land with parties of Germans. The Germans rolled out barrels of lager and handed round cigars. I had one of these; it lasted me about two hours. They were Saxons, and said they were sorry to be fighting us. Chandler, MO at the A and S tried to get some snaps, but he was a bit late on the scene. It was getting dusk, and he only got a few of our trenches taken from places quite impossible in ordinary times. There was no sniping that night - our Brigade was relieved without a shot being fired in that part of the line.

There was a story of two men of the N Staffs on our right who went into the German trenches and did not come back; probably stayed a bit too

long. It was said they were kicking a football about in another part of the line. When everyone had got back into their trenches, someone fired a rifle into the air and the war started again.

### **December 27<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Our Brigade is now out of the line for a time and we are working the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade which relieved them, with the same routine.

### **December 28<sup>th</sup> 1914**

On duty at Houplines again. Visited the Regimental Aid Posts of the East and West Yorks. Everything fairly quiet, but nearly lost my cap from a piece of flying slate. Later on went to the house by the lock to see a boy of ten whose parents had been amongst the eight killed by the chemists shop already mentioned. Saw him in the cellar of the house where there were ten people all ages and sexes sleeping in a row.

We heard that the Indians are now out of the line and are somewhere near La Bassee: they had lost some trenches which had to be retaken by our people. I Corps is said to be going down there somewhere.

### **December 30<sup>th</sup> 1914**

Had a walk with Chandler to watch our Heavies knocking hell out of Frelinghien.

A meet of the Beagles today, but I couldn't get away for it.

A lot of shells into the town today; a train came over the bridge at Erquinghem, so that was probably the reason for it.

### **January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1915**

Said to be 100,000 of K's army now in France. Have not seen any of them up here yet.

The Germans are now using bombs and hand grenades. Much rain, floods getting worse, trenches falling in. They are building breastworks in some parts of the line. The cellar at Houplines is full again. A message to



Battalion HQ from a trench: 'am digging up a graveyard - what am I to do?'

### **January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1915**

Some time before this date a concert party was organised by an ASC Captain of the IV Division train in a large school room in Armentières. Called themselves the IV Division Follies after the Pulissier (?) show in London. There were two French girls in the show called Glycerine and Vaseline. One of them sang 'I'm Gilbert zee filbert zee king of zee nut'. It was an amusing show compered by the producer. Some of his stories could not be told here. One that can was:- 'An Englishman and a Yank in a railway compartment. The Englishman took down his suitcase, and on opening it some mothballs rolled out onto the floor. Yank: 'Say stranger, what are those?' Englishman: 'Mothballs.' Yank: 'Gee, some moth.'

The story went round that the rather pious Div commander ordered the show to be censored.

### **February 5<sup>th</sup> 1915**

An armoured train has come up on the line between Armentières and Erquinghem. Carries 4.7 naval guns.

The Germans are using a trench mortar, the shell loaded with door handles, bolts, nuts, nails, etc. Makes a nasty mess.

Joined today by Major Ahern, late MO to some gunners.

### **February 12<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Had a walk with Ahern, visited some of his gunner friends in an observation post in the roof of a derelict house overlooking the German trenches. Had a look down a telescope through a gap in the tiles. Could see the German trenches very plainly; they looked only about 20 yards away instead of over 500 as they were - or more. The only movement to be seen was an arm moving up and down pumping water out of the trench. It was visible only at the top of his stroke.

Strong rumours that Armentières is going to be bombarded again. There is talk of moving the FAs out of the town. Canadian troops now said to be in the line somewhere. Things quieter now than ever. Sniping as usual. Got some head wounds and an officer wounded by trench mortar in tonight

### **February 13<sup>th</sup> 1915**

To Croix du Bac in the pouring rain to the field cashier for money to pay the men, not a pleasant ride. I took a rider we had just got from remounts to try him out. He was said to be a bit of a wrong 'un. Certainly he jibbed and shied at everything, but is a nice nag, and will settle down I think with us.

On getting back to the FA, found I had been detailed to take over the V<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles as RMO, the CO said temporarily, as the present one, Capt Nichols, a Regular, has worked his passage to the Base. Sorry he is going in one way; he is a very good pianist, and used to come in sometimes and play the piano in our billet.

Not much time to get my kit mobilised. Had it taken down in a forage cart to L'Arnice (?) where the V<sup>th</sup> SR Batt HQ are - a collection of houses to the south-east of the town, almost a continuation of Armentières - and took over. Nichols pushed off in a hurry without showing me round

The CO, Lt Col Douglas, a very decent bloke. The Adjutant, Capt Fox, was the regular peacetime adjutant to this Territorial Batt. The Batt HQ mess is in quite a decent little house. The HQ are not now up in the line with the men as only half the Batt is in the trenches at a time in between two old Batts of the 19th Brigade, this, I suppose, because they are new to the job.

I got a very good pair of gum boots from the Batt QM. Had been trying for some time to get a pair, but got them at once here. After that I went to the Regimental aid post to spy out the lie of the land. The Regimental aid post is in a small deserted cottage on a lane running parallel to the trenches, more or less. It is very exposed and said to be untenable in the daylight. While I was there several ripped across the lane (it was daylight).

### **February 13<sup>th</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup> 1915**

During this time I was Regimental MO to the 5<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles, and with them I had a very pleasant time, ie, under such conditions. My usual routine was to spend the night at the Aid Post and in trenches which was the only time possible to get our wounded away. There were really very few. No active operations were staged, and it was the usual wastage by casualties during the so-called quiet times, though it was never quiet. In the morning I went back to the Battn HQ in L' Armee and took sick parade of the two companies in billets there. During the day the MOs of the neighbouring Batts would attend to anything serious at their RAPs and keep it until it could be evacuated at night.

Sanitation was a bore, at L'Armee where the half Batt was in billets in the small houses round about. An old Frenchman would ladle out his cess-pit on the vegetables growing round the patch of garden where the cooks had their rows of dixies cooking. He would not understand my aversion to his proceedings, and licked his fingers to show me his vintage was not harmful.

It must be appreciated that the civilians in this area tried to carry on with their cultivation and civil life in general: frequently a farmer would plough within rifle shot range of the enemy during quiet spells and could ignore the occasional sniping shots. Just to the left of my aid post the farmer is ploughing just behind the reserve breastworks, but is get into shelter before night. It was thought at one time that some of these people were in the pay of the Germans and by some sort of a code could signal by their plough arrival of a battery, Batt reliefs, or any other things useful to the enemy.

We were in the Fleurbaix , Bois Grenier sector where the 19th Brigade had come from the trenches in front of Houplines. Brigade HQ were in Streaky Bacon farm, so called from the layers of light and dark bricks of which it was built.

During this time my FA (19<sup>th</sup>) was still working the Houplines ADS, the 18th Brigade was still in the line. My wounded from the V<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles had to be got to Erquinhem by a VI Dision FA stationed there.

I didn't think much of my Regimental Aid Post and don't believe my precessor Captain Nichols had spent any time there at all from what I

heard. The cottage was in a very exposed site, and I had it moved to another cottage further along the lane in a more sheltered position. It was lucky I did so, as early the next morning a shell went through the old one just where I dosed down, and I should have been 'for it' if I had been in my usual place at the time, which would have been probable as things were quiet and I had very few calls.

At this time there were a lot of men just a bit seedy - slight temperature, colds or very mild type of flu. These lads paraded sick in the early morning before light, and if sent back to the FA straight away might have been sent down the line or at any rate would have been lost to the Batt for a time. This sort of thing was a curse to the Regt'l MOs when every man was wanted in the line previously and also now, and there was no option but to take a risk and keep men on duty in the trenches who would have been all the better for a spell out of them. A field away from my aid post there was a low barn, well hidden, in good repair with lots of clean straw in it; every night I had 15 to 20 men of the sort mentioned in it. It meant that the men had a night's rest in the dryness with a couple of aspirins and missed the carrying parties, and other night jobs such as wiring out in no mans land.

As a rule, this one night, or perhaps two, made all the difference, and they returned to duty without being shown as evacuated down the line and lost to the Batt. This was of course quite unofficial, known to the CO and Company commanders but quite unknown to the Div. There were risks of course. If a shell had landed on the barn it would have been awkward to explain how these men came to be there when they ought to be on duty somewhere. Another thing was that these youngsters, as these mostly were, although they had plenty of guts were not the tough old regular infantrymen I had had to deal with mostly up to now, and there were very few indeed trying to swing it.

I also managed to save the two companies out in billets the four mile march to the Divisional baths and all the waiting about in the cold. Amongst the houses there was a boiler house. I don't know what it was for, but there were a lot of tubs about and it was derelict. I got the QM to draw a coal allowance which he did with considerable wangling, and then with Batt interpreter we ran the owner to earth and got permission to use it as a

bath house. The boiler worked well , there were tons of hot water. This arrangement turned out to be very popular with the men.

The interpreter - Chermie - a Parisian jeweller in civilian life - was a cheerful soul, always singing 'Kitty', a much better specimen than ours with the FA.

### **February 15<sup>th</sup> 1915**

A wire from HQ saying a general attack on us was expected on 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>, information had been given by two Alsatian deserters. No attack developed.

### **February 19<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Heard that Greaves who was going to take over from me had gone sick while on leave, so I shall have to stay on. A quiet eight days followed with the usual routine. I had the CO in bed for a few days. He didn't want to go to the FA, afraid he might be sent down perhaps.

### **February 28<sup>th</sup> 1914**

The old aid post and rations dump heavily shelled again. The Germans are thought to have a travelling circus of WWs on a railway line, which they move about. After shelling one area they move on to another. There is also a German searchlight on the rising ground about two miles back. It lights up our ground and roads like daylight. If one is caught in the beam, one is supposed to stand still - not so easily seen, rather uncanny being suddenly bathed in the bright light.

Tale of the kids in the bath and the periscope. (?)

Heard that Rattray CO 19FA is now a Lt Col.

### **March 8<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Hearing I was to be relieved to rejoin the FA I wondered whether to apply to stay on with the 5th Scottish Rifles instead, which could easily have been done if Rattray didn't mind, but apparently he wanted me back. I had such a good time with the Batt; they had all been so friendly that I was

sorry to leave them. Lt Col Douglas, their CO, badly wanted me to stay. However there was more interest with the FA: one got about and saw more of what was going on, also at the rate the more senior officers were making for other jobs I should get a section any time. Three or four Regulars had joined lately for short periods but had soon pushed off. The latest, Major Ahern, he is a fairly senior major and will soon be found a FA of his own or something, so I thought it would be better to go back to the FA and wait.

While with the 5th SR I tasted my first haggis, a sort of glorified black pudding, but not black, very good indeed with a spot of neat whiskey in the approved style. Also I never had so many sweets and cakes before; they were sent to these people from home almost by the ton.

One of their officers had an acute appendicitis unknown to anyone until he was forced by his brother (also in the Batt) to come to me instead of going to the trenches that night for his week's spell of duty. He should have gone down with it long ago. However, I packed him off immediately; he had an enormous mass of inflammation in the lower abdomen - must have been a stout hearted devil.

*Lt Col Douglas their CO was shot through the head by a sniper while going round his trenches and killed instantly. I forget the exact date, but it was just before the Battle of Loos, I think. I went to his funeral which was in a cemetery near Bethune. A slow march to the grave with the bagpipes of the Argyll and Sutherlands playing the lament 'the flowers of the forest' - rather impressive. The bugles of his Batt also, for the usual calls, being well away from the line.*

Lt Clarke, temporary commission, arrived to take over from me.

### **March 8<sup>th</sup> 1915 Back with the FA in Armentières.**

At 11pm there was a wire to clear the hospital. I don't think I have mentioned that several large rooms have been taken over in the convent school buildings by our FA. Here we also rigged up an operating theatre and there were at times quite large numbers detained here temporarily waiting evacuation. A bit before this date we had the first trench feet; they nearly all came from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division which had come from hot stations in

the East and Mediterranean and rushed out here without any preparation. We were very puzzled by this condition which nobody seemed to have described before. It is set up by the legs and feet being continuously wet and cold over long periods.

Our patients were to go to Bac St Maur for their first stage; we were up at 7am getting them away, all fit to move except three. All the civilians were ordered to stay in the cellars or indoors at Cappell d'Armentières, a suburb, and no one was to discuss movements of troops - expecting something exciting is going to happen. Town very quiet but heavy firing to north.

Out to Houplines ADS for duty at 6pm. Things here much as usual while I was away with 5th SR. A bit of a flurry over the river to our left ... Plugstreet .

### **March 11<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Heard that one of the Midland Divs has arrived in the back areas.

### **March 12<sup>th</sup> 1915**

What has happened at Neuve Chapelle? We had heard a commotion going on in that direction. Said to have been 11,000 casualties - 300 officers amongst them.

At 4.30pm a wire from Div to say that N. Staffs had had a lot of casualties. They are a Batt of the Brigade we are now working from Houplines and had made a frontal attack on the German trenches in front of them. More bearers were wanted.

It was nearer the Houplines ADS, but I was sent off with a bearer sub-div with Sgt Barnfield and arrived at the N Staffs Regimental Aid Post which was in a farm building behind their lines. Their MO knew nothing about it and was just sitting there doing nothing. Our bearers went out and worked magnificently clearing the fire trenches; the regimental bearers had been swamped by the number of casualties. I had been a bit uncertain what to do as normally the Rgtl MO is in touch and knows what is happening, but he knew nothing so I left my bearers at his post and was pushing off myself when some of the walking wounded began to trickle down the road

and we got some information. The bearers then started and I opened a collecting station on this road to which the horse buses could get to. There was still a lot of dirty iron flying about and considerable rifle fire from the Germans. Our trenches had been blown in and there was a B- awful mess. The attack must have been a costly failure.

We had cleared 50-60 by 10pm. It was a long carry, and bus loads of walking wounded had been sent off to the FA in the town long before this.

At about 11pm when I got back to the collecting post I found the CO and Browne sitting there. The CO had come up as they could not understand what was happening. There had been several messengers to the FA from Bgde asking when the bearers were going to arrive, while all that time we had been collecting and buses of N Staffs wounded from us were arriving at FA HQ in the town. I was able to tell the CO we were nearly through with it and someone didn't know what they were talking about. He went off to Bgde HQ.

I went out to the Regtl Aid Post again. Had a row with their MO - he and two others were just sitting tight there and doing nothing all the time. Then off along the road leading to the trenches again where I met some of my bearers who told me they were carrying the last one out, so we went back together to the collecting post and cleared off about 5am for the HQ in the town. I had had to call on Browne at the Houplines ADS for some of his stretchers and bearers to help. It was a very unpleasant night - rifle and machine gun bullets very near at times, considerable 'wind up' everywhere.

Did not hear actual details of the show but when the N Staffs attack failed, the German counter measures were very effective.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Rumours of all sorts, chiefly that two other FAs are coming into the town and we are going to move.

Had a ride in the afternoon with Ahern along the river tow path. His horse shied and slithered down a steep 10ft drop into the river. Ahern just managed to scramble off in time. His horse was pulled out with ropes by



some men of the divisional ammunition column who were parked close by. No harm done except a shoe pulled off.

### **March 14 1915**

A shell into the billets of the W Yorks today, about 40 casualties. At night Davidson MO the Cameronians was brought in shot through hip and hand.

Had a busy night.

### **March 15<sup>th</sup> 1915**

It is definite now that we are going to move to the right out to Erquinghem to take over from No 18 FA. We shall be working our old 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade again. Snow today.

### **March 18<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Packed kit for the move, afterwards took out a party from No 18 FA to the ADS at Houplines to show them round and hand over. Was riding back on the driving seat of a bus when about a mile from our billet the Germans put over a solitary shrapnel shell which raked the street just in front of us and caught two small boys who were playing about in it. One of them was very badly damaged. Put them both in our bus and took them to the civilian hospital in the town which is run by the nuns. My men carried them up stairs to a ward. By this time one of them was dying and nothing could be done for him. I helped with the other for a bit and then pushed off to rejoin the FA. It made me late; I got no lunch as the unit was just pushing off for Erquinghem.

On arrival at Erquinghem I had to take the bearers out to Grizpot, a small collection of cottages where the ADS we are taking over is situated while the main part of the FA remains in Erquinghem, a village on the banks of the Lys quite near Armentières. Visited the Regtl Aid Posts of the RWF and 5<sup>th</sup>SR myself and sent the corporal to the Argyll and Sutherlands, these being the Batts in the line now, to see what has to be cleared.

Before leaving Houplines I had a bit of luck in missing a very unpleasant duty. They were searching round for an MO to attend an execution by a firing squad to place a mark over the man's heart. He was being shot for

desertion, and very thankful I was to have been away from the ADS at the time and they had to get someone else.

*I believe after this time, about March 1915, executions by a firing squad (very few in any case) were not carried out in the forward area. In fact there is reason to think that very few of the sentences at all were carried out later on. The prisoner was sent down the line to a detention prison and for the benefit of the troops it appeared in the Summaries of Information which were sent round a notice to the effect that:- 'By a Field General Court Martial that so-and-so was found guilty of so-and-so and sentenced to death, the sentence was duly carried out on (date)'. Whether my supposition was really correct I don't know.*

Erquinghem is not a very salubrious place but is better I think for the HQ of the FA than being in a town, at any rate the fields are alongside. I remembered in 'The Three Musketeers' by Dumas the beheading of Milady on a ferry boat on a river, on a dark dirty night such as the one we arrived at the place. It was easy to understand the Musketeers loathing of the district.

### **March 21<sup>st</sup> 1915**

Very slack at the ADS, walked about and sat in the sun by the roadside - in a sheltered spot the sun is getting quite warm. Then had to go and retrieve one of our buses from the Regtl Aid Post of the 5th SR. The driver had made a mistake and driven up to a place no vehicles go in the daylight. However we got out without being spotted or they didn't think it worth while doing anything about us.

Gurney Dixon, a GP from Brockenhurst joined us today, also Ford and Grellier, all temporaries. In the afternoon they turned up at the ADS having been sent by the CO to be shown round and learn a bit about the lie of the land. Later I was relieved here and walked back to the FA at Erquinghem with an officer of the N Staffs who had been spending the day with the A&S in their trenches. He told me the whole N Midland Div is somewhere quite near behind us.

Our mess is in a house by the side of the church and I have a small bedroom in it to myself; no owners here. The only snag is the chiming

clock in the church tower which makes an unmusical tinkle every quarter of an hour.

### **March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915**

Messed about in the morning and practised over some jumps which had been put up by an RE unit. The MO of the S Staffs in to tea. The 4.7s on the armoured train just along the road to our left are very busy this afternoon.

### **March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1915**

Rode into Armentières. There was a rumour that the 7<sup>th</sup>RWFs were about - that would mean the 53<sup>rd</sup> Div with which Wilfred was serving. No news of them but the town is full of Territorials and others, it looks as though something was going to happen here soon. Rode back via L'Armee to call on Batt HQ of the V SR, they are just moving to a spot nearer the trenches.

Thought I would continue on to Grizpot for tea but one of our 5" and a German gun were having a duel over the place. Some of the German shells were a bit near the place I wanted to go, so rode straight back to Erquinghem and had it there. My mare behaved very well under the noise. I have just got her in place of the everlastingly sore backed Tommy who is going to one of the transport sergeants.

### **March 26<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Nothing doing, had a ride round Nieppe, a lot of stuff on the roads. There seems to be a great concentration of everything round about compared to what we started with.

A visit from General Gordon (our Brigadier). Almost the limit of boredom reached. Saying by an infantry officer about trench warfare:- 'An infinity of boredom punctuated by moments of abject terror'.

### **March 27<sup>th</sup> 1915**

My tour of duty at the ADS. Very little doing. Very clear fine cold weather. The General came round and wanted our buses put out of sight.

Some of the Middlesex and RWFs are using a barn alongside when the Batts are in reserve and he doesn't want gunfire drawn to the place by vehicles. Had a walk around the Rgtl Aid Posts with Chandler and Soltan. Bois Grenier shelled again.

### **March 30<sup>th</sup> 1915**

It is said that the infantry did too well at Neuve Cappelle, getting too far forward and losing the support of their guns. Story of the Germans shouting across no mans land 'the N Staffs are relieving you tonight aren't they' - and the orders had only been out a few hours. How is it done?

A similar thing happened a short time ago when the Cameronians had just relieved another Batt in the trenches- a German shouted over 'How is Maryhill?', Maryhill being the depot of the Cameronians in Glasgow. Had a visit from the Bishop of London - he held a service at L'Armee. While it was going on one of our planes came down in a field close by with engine trouble. Soon after a German plane came over looking for it. Shortly after this the Germans put about 30 shells round about, much to the detriment of the service.

### **April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915**

Major Ahern left us to go home to train and bring out a Kitchener FA. He left me his horse, the one that shied into the river, and his officer's saddle which we have not been able to get as yet in exchange for our troopers saddles. There is to be a horse show with jumping etc in the sports ground at Armentières. Browne wants me to ride his Polly who is a first rate hunter type and must have come out of a good stable at home. I believe a lot of hunters were just commandeered on mobilisation at a flat rate of about £40 regardless of the real value. No 19 FA was lucky enough to get two first raters. Browne himself is not much of a rider, at any rate he doesn't want to ride himself in the competition. I took her round the RE jumps; she is very good.

Winfield came in to tea. He told me Seymour Barlings' FA, N Midland Div, was in town. I rode in to see him, also Broderick and some others from the Birmingham district. They are being shown round by 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> FA.

### **April 3<sup>rd</sup>1915**

Jumped Polly and entered for the show.

### **April 6<sup>th</sup>1915 The Armentières Show**

It was a wonder the place wasn't shelled; it was packed with troops and many brass hats. Polly did a good clear round without the slightest difficulty although it was treacherous heavy going. Quite half of them came down at the water jump or made a mess of things. In fact I didn't see a better round than Polly's. Capt Flook the OC of our Ammo column who had messed with us since the beginning of the war was very incensed at our not being called into the ring - he wanted me to protest as he said it was the best round. I didn't of course, but I think I made a mistake in wearing my brassard, as other branches of the services are inclined to believe no doctor could ride a horse. Ike, the other good hunter of ours, ridden by Preston, didn't do a good round; he pressed him too much at the jumps.

There are two 9.2 howitzers camouflaged at the edge of this park. I haven't seen anything so heavy before. I don't think they have been fired yet here.

### **April 10<sup>th</sup>1915**

At the ADS again. Went to see Chandler, who is now MO to the Argyll and Sutherlands, at Batt HQ in a cellar. Had some hot whisky with them.

### **April 11<sup>th</sup>1915**

Had a walk with Chandler and two A and S officers into Bois Grenier. Came back along the road where my original V SR aid post was which I had evacuated. While looking at the shell hole in the wall where I should have slept two sniping shots were fired at us, so we didn't linger any longer.

*It might appear from the number of casual walks and rides mentioned up to now in the diary that we foolishly messed about in places better avoided and where we had no need to go. It was of course unnecessary, but when there was nothing doing one couldn't just sit about all day getting more and more bored and out of condition. Also it was comparatively early in*

*the war as yet, many things were still novelties and one wanted to see everything that was going on and pick up all sorts of unlikely information. No one at that time had any idea of course of the stalemate that had set in.*

*At about this date - April - this was a quiet part of the line taking it all round. Later in the war when everything had become stale there was not so much rubber necking out of curiosity and one was generally only too glad to be under cover of some sort, or right away from it in rest areas. There was without doubt a tendency to get more 'windy' as time went on.*

### **April 19<sup>th</sup>1915**

Preston left us for the Base; we were joined by Mullen.

*Preston came out again with a FA and was killed soon after by a shell.*

We now have the navy lying in the Lys by our billet in Erquinghem. Two good sized civilian motor boats each with a machine gun mounted on the deck in the bows. We were invited on board and went, saluting the quarter deck in the approved fashion. Each had a crew of 5 or 6, and we met two cheery RNVR NOs who gave us a drink. We suppose these boats are to advance along the Lys keeping pace with the advancing infantry on the banks.

### **April 24<sup>th</sup>1915**

Duty at ADS again. Went to call on the Middlesex in their trenches today.

There is now a good communication trench, nearly finished, leading from the road by ration farm right up to the fire trenches. Had a good look at the German trenches through a periscope - about 300 yards away - also had a couple of shots, I can't say at a German as there were none in sight, but at any rate in their direction. When thinking of getting back to my ADS a hate broke out and they began shelling the end of the communications trench by the farm through which I should have to go, so watched instead from Soltan's (MO) shelter while they made several direct hits on the ration farm buildings. Then they shortened range and got some on the reserve trenches, although it is more correct to talk of breastworks than trenches just here on this low lying ground as it is impossible to dig down

very deeply on account of the water which floods a trench at once. A bit later they knocked about a place known as Burnt Farm, and very heavy rifle and machine gun fire broke out also so I thought it was time to push off to look after the arrangements which would have to be made if this show was going to develop into anything at the ADS. When nearly there I met the CO and Browne who had come out from Erquinghem to see what all the fuss was about. Later in the day I was told it had been a demonstration of some sort on our part, but there were 10 casualties in the Cameronians. I had chosen a bad day to visit Soltan.

Some of our heavy guns have been taken away from here, rumours of heavy fighting at Ypres, also the French to the left of it have retreated four miles. There seems to be a general air of unrest everywhere - the Fleurbaix business, a show our Bgde was to do and we were told to get ready for is off. The Germans are said to know all about it.

### **April 25<sup>th</sup>1915**

Heard it was a bad knock the French territorials took up north. The Canadians had to conform to the movement and swing back but they retook some of the ground and some of the guns which had been abandoned.

First news (for us) about the gas used against the Canadians, and I was sent with a party by motor ambulance to see some of the casualties at Charing Station. They are using chlorine. The mortality of those who get a good dose in the forward area is very high, and even those who get back as far as Charing Hospital, say 8 to 10 miles have a mortality rate of 10%, and probably many more go under when sent right away down the line after leaving Charing Hospital, eventually from the effects of the gas. This gas causes an intense irritation of the air passages with actual destruction of the lung tissue. The sight of these men was most distressing, far worse than most gunshot wounds, so little could be done to counteract the actual damage to the lungs. The worst cases were out in the open propped up on stretchers. Oxygen, brandy, warmth and constant attention was about all that could be done for them. From a Cpl of the Batt who was not too bad we got a graphic description of the happenings, about what looked like a yellowish fog billowing out towards our trenches.

There was now of course considerable 'wind up' everywhere. No one knew when the next lot might be loosed off and there was absolutely no protection against it at present. A good deal of argument took place amongst the staff as to whether anti-gas measures were the job of the medical services. It was decided not to be our job, our job of course to treat the casualties, but gas is a weapon.

The defence against chlorine gas is to breathe through some material that has been damped with a solution of Sod Bicarb or hyposulphite of soda.

Hundreds of French women behind the lines were put to work making gauze pads packed with tow with tapes to tie on over mouth and nose. Everyone had to carry one and also a small bottle of solution to damp the pad with on a gas alarm.

*It was difficult to make the above pad fit efficiently, and it did not protect the eyes. As soon as they could be got ready everyone was issued with a flannel helmet with a talc window to tuck in under the tunic. This was kept damp by constant spraying with a solution of hypo with a little glycerine in it and carried in a waterproof pouch. The spraying apparatus was called a 'Vermoral' sprayer or something like it, the sort of apparatus used to spray things in a garden. The helmets were laid out in rows on the ground and sprayed periodically - Tommy after finishing the job 'What shall I do with this 'ere venereal sprayer now Sir'. The gas mask was improved as time went on, the old helmet was no protection against the newer gases that were introduced later on, until we had the elaborate apparatus carried in a haversack. The penalties for not carrying the thing were heavy. The tale of the General going out in a hurry having mislaid his pouch and borrowing his servants so as not to be seen without one, coming across a man who was not carrying one, he talked to him in the approved way and finished by saying what do you think this pouch is for, opening it and putting his hand in he pulled out a pair of his servant's dirty socks. (This was of course the first type, I don't mean the socks, the mask).*

### **April 28<sup>th</sup>1915 News of the Dardanelles landing**

There are some hard tennis courts in Armentières. As there was absolutely nothing doing I went in with three others and had a game of sorts with borrowed rackets and balls from the clubhouse. Having no shoes it wasn't



much fun and I expect again the French thought we were not taking the war seriously enough as they did over the hunting.

### **April 30<sup>th</sup>1915**

One of the 4.7-inch guns on the armoured train still near us blew about two feet off its muzzle today. One piece about 30lbs with a terrific screaming noise flew about half a mile and buried itself in front of the Divisional baths which Gurney Dixon is running at present. He had it dug up and said he was going to take it home to make a door stop of. (*Which he did - I saw it in his home in Brockenhurst after the war*).

To duty at the ADS tonight. Weather now very hot, slept out in the open.

### **May 1<sup>st</sup>1915**

Another demonstration in front of us this morning, didn't hear what it was all about.

### **May 2<sup>nd</sup>1915**

Went into the town to judge the transport turnout of the 16<sup>th</sup>FA. Our Capt Browne had been lent to them as CO temporarily to straighten the unit up a bit generally and he had asked me to go and see the difference after being there a week or two. Heard some stories of the fighting up north from an officer who had just returned from up there. He is very pessimistic - says there are only 400 Canadians left and a Northumbrian Bgde was completely wiped out. There are persistent rumours that things might be better up there. Very heavy firing this afternoon in that direction, said to be Hill 60 and that they are again using gas.

We are said to have given the Germans 24 hours in which to stop using gas otherwise we shall retaliate in the same way and use gas shells. Very depressing times and very stuffy weather, damp and stinking.

It is said out line has gone back another 1 1/2 miles to conform with the French. Terrific firing to North. Will they get Ypres after all?

### **May 6<sup>th</sup>1915**

To ADS at 5.30am. Tremendous lot of gunfire going on for about an hour, both theirs and ours - in a thick fog - very uncanny - mostly in the direction of the town and L'Armee, some very near the ADS.

### **May 7<sup>th</sup>1915**

Hill 60 reported lost again by the use of gas.

Orders to all civilians to stay indoors tomorrow in the town and in Erquinghem. There is much excitement in the air today: to be a push on somewhere? The VI supply column of motor lorries started joy riding as soon as it got dark. They drove by on the road in front of us at Erquinghem with headlights on into the town, out into the country with them off and then by us again with them on. They did this several times. We don't know, but we suspect it is to give the impression of a lot of stuff arriving in the town because lights on our road can be seen by the Germans at night. Tonight there are some signallers on the top of the church tower. It is just across the road from our billet, so may turn out unpleasant for us.

Very little shelling today.

### **May 8<sup>th</sup>1915**

Had a ride before breakfast. Orders to reinforce our ADS and hold two other bearer subdivisions in readiness, Browne and I to go with them.

### **May 9<sup>th</sup>1915**

At the ADS Grizpot. A lot of gunnery beginning at 7am: a few small shells over us, but it was quiet on our bit of trenchline and we were not called on to do anything.

Rumours of an advance by the IV Division and heavy losses by the 28 Division to the north, also of an advance by the IV Division to the right of us which has taken three lines of trenches but had to retire out of two of them.

It is said that these two shows were to hold the Germans down while the French did a pig push (at Arras?) where they are said to have taken 30,000 prisoners and 2000 guns.

The Germans are shelling our trenches heavily tonight opposite Fleurbaix. They are sending up a tremendous number of flares and seem to be very jumpy.

## May 19<sup>th</sup>1915

It has been getting gradually quieter here. We held a sports meeting and horse show for the ASC of the four FAs in a field at Erquinghem.

Turnouts, single horses, heavy and light draught etc, and a tent pegging competition which I managed to win on a mare we call 'The Camel'. She goes very straight, and is fast, not swerving when the lance comes down by the side of her head. The lances being Germans picked up on the Marne, and one French and one Indian which we should not really be in possession of. Our push (19 FA) got 6 firsts out of 13 events.

We have had a visit from the Bishop of Pretoria, a big fat man wearing an enormous ring. He had a meal with us.

Some of K's army are thought to be in this neighbourhood; haven't seen them yet.

Whenever possible during the quiet times I take the transport for a route march in the back areas. There is no work for the draught horses during these stationary quiet periods and they are getting too fat. The full ration of oats and hay is being drawn, work or not. Several times Ahern and I took the whole lot of horses only out into the meadows and let them have a good graze.

*The horses kept remarkably fit on the whole. The ASC drivers stick to the same pair all the time, and become very attached to them, although you mightn't think it from the terms of endearment used towards them. One pair in a forage cart, light draught animals, won a first prize in the Divisional horse shows while I was with the Unit. they were a magnificent pair, and their driver, Lyons, was devoted to them. We nearly lost one of them from intestinal obstruction.*

*As time went on, thing being so stationery, a lot of horse standings were made from slag from pit banks and colliery mounds so the horses should not be standing knee deep in mud all the time. The oats and wisps of hay*

*were shaken out from nosebags and nets onto this ground. The horses were continually nosing about for these, and in picking them up got a certain amount of this slag at the same time. This caused an intestinal obstruction which killed a number.*

*One of the pair mentioned above got this trouble. Lyons was terribly upset and in tears about her. I didn't send for the veterinary officer, as there was a tendency to shoot the horse if its condition was bad, or if it would stand the journey send it to a mobile veterinary section, when we never saw it again, as most of ours were very much better at this stage than remounts later in the war. We didn't want to lose any, so in this case with plenty of paraffin oil drenching, an enema given with the pump of a water cart, and other measures we managed to get this one fit again. She was still looking as fit as ever when I left the FA in 1917.*

*Another time one of the heavies developed a collection of fibromata of the skin so that she could not be worked in either a collar or a breast harness, so again without saying anything to the vets, Sgt Bean, the senior ASC NCO and a party of our men threw her on a heap of straw. Then with a local anaesthetic I dissected the things out, with the result that we kept a first rate animal which we should never have seen again.*

*Later on some time in June before we left Erquinghem we had some grilling hot sun, day after day. The horses were standing out in it without an atom of shade, so I sent to the Works in Walsall for some straw sun bonnets for them all. We tried them on as soon as we got them, which was almost by return, but it was no good putting them on while they were standing on the horse lines because they immediately began to eat each other's. Next time they all wore them on a route march, that was alright, but I don't know what a senior staff officer would have said to this unmilitary spectacle. Funnily enough, although they must have been seen by hundreds of the BEF there was never any official comment. At any rate it created a certain amount of amusement for the troops during a quiet boring period to see these enormous heavy draught horses in a French lane wearing coloured bonnets with tassels!*

Several Batts of K's army marched through Erquinghem with some guns. They were a very fine looking lot: much better average physique than the reinforcements.

*There is no doubt that a large proportion of K's 1<sup>st</sup> Army should have been officers or kept for that purpose instead of being put straight into the hopeless mess at Loos where most of them were scuppered. The same applies to Batts like the Westminster Rifles and some of the first Public School Batts, but of course as there was no conscription the, they had to be used up as other ranks, there being no others.*

## **May continued**

Another MO to us for training. The VI Div to which we are attached seems to be a training ground. It is known as the 'Armentières Town Guard', or the 'The Neutrals'.

The town has a few shells every day, but is quiet compared to what it was.

Some in our Brigade has the bright idea of taking an 18 pounder field gun up into the fire trenches at night, pushing the parapet down in front of the muzzle, and pooping off a few rounds to smash up the German wire and smash up his parapet. This was done. I happened to be at Brigade HQ in Streaky Bacon Farm when the message came in: 'the 18-pounder is now back on the road waiting for its horses.' The gun had to be man handled from the road up to the fire trench and back. As it was quite light by then I took a walk down to get a snap of it.

While waiting at Brigade HQ a shell came bang into the middle of the midden which filled the courtyard of the farm. Luckily it was a dud, or we should have been in a nice mess.

It is the usual thing here to have the midden as close up to the living quarters of the farm as possible, and if it drains into the well they get the drinking water from, so much the better.

Two other MOs to us for training.

The VI Decision is moving, no one knows where. Our 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade is as usual 'nobody's child': there will be a new ADMS and new everybody to chat with, but really it may be better for us as it is rumoured that they are going to Ypres, and the 27<sup>th</sup> Division coming into town.

I haven't mentioned yet that it was from the 27<sup>th</sup>(29<sup>th</sup>) and 28<sup>th</sup> Divisions we had most of the trench foot during the winter. They were troops that had been stationed in the East and were hurried out here without I believe sufficient warm clothing for the weather they got into. Trench foot develops as a result of being wet through about the legs and feet for too long in cold weather without getting puttees and boots off. In a way it is rather like the first stage of frostbite. Cold, pale, mottled and very swollen legs and feet, very painful at one stage, afterwards becoming quite numbed. We didn't keep them of course, not being a hospital, but at one time our improvised wards in the Convent were full of them. It was decided that it was a form of neuritis.

### **May 28<sup>th</sup>1915**

More and more bored. Gurney Dixon's bath attendants have all gone; they belonged to the VI Division.

### **May 29<sup>th</sup>1915**

Lt Gibbons who had been a short time with us has gone to the Base. Lt Hill joined, weighs about 15 stone and has never been on a horse, like most of them.

This period is being somewhat enlivened by turns of duty at the bombing school, a place where the infantry go in batches to learn how to throw bombs, canisters, stick grenades and other such experimental things. An MO has to be present, and the only shelter for him is behind a tree. Surprisingly few accidents: some have happened from the man hitting the back of the trench behind him on his backward swing with a stick grenade.

### **May 31<sup>th</sup>1915**

Nos 81 and 82 FAs now in Armentières. Some rumours of more bad news from the Ypres area.

### **June 1<sup>st</sup>1915**

The Navy has moved off. The motor boats 'Slush' and 'Dido' have left their moorings in our field for some place unknown.

Sgts Bean ASC and Carter RAMC have been awarded the DCM. Sgt Barnfield had one given earlier.

### **June 2<sup>nd</sup>1915**

Restrictions about exercising horses and transport after 7am. The incoming Division seems to be very nervous. They are trying to put a stopper on our next sports meeting. Their transport officers came to see my push and were duly impressed.

There is no transport officer officially in a regular FA, but one of the MOs who has seen a horse before is generally made responsible for supervising things. In the Territorial FAs they have an official one, and I am told that in K's New Army they have a non-medical transport officer. It has given me a lot of amusement and interest although it means a good deal of extra work in addition to the ordinary routine.

Called on the 83<sup>rd</sup>FA and saw Alabaster.

### **June 3<sup>rd</sup>1915**

Started a riding school for the officers, most of them never having been on a horse before. Shake them up a bit, quite good fun. I got Sgt Bean to take the school and lead the string myself. I am not popular about it anyhow, and if I started instructing as in a riding school they would be more peeved than ever. Sgt Bean is first rate himself, and being a regular he has been through it all so nothing can be said.

Rather depressed last week by Russian news. The weather is very hot now.

### **June 14<sup>th</sup>1915**

General Gordon, commanding our 19<sup>th</sup>Brigade, has left us for a higher command. Col Brown our new ADMS 28 Division to which we are attached called to see us and visited the transport. It is extraordinary how the senior officers of all branches of the service are interested in this.

Two more MOs from 12<sup>th</sup>Division for instruction.

The Germans are said to be massing guns in front of us. One of our 9.2" hows arrived this evening in the garden.

Grizpot and Bois Grenier being shelled more heavily than usual. We have had more casualties than for some time, partly due to the Rue du Bois trenches.

Rode into Bailleul today and had lunch with S Barking's FA, S Midland Division. He has with him Bowlby, Nuthall, Goodwin and Wilkinson, all Birmingham medicos.

### **June 15<sup>th</sup>1915**

Had orders to move our horses and wagons under trees, so went along to our right and found some gunners just moving out of a field by the river. Sent back for our lot, and as they were ready to move we jumped in as the gunners moved out. A fine spot. Shade for all the horses and wagons, although shade was not what the staff were thinking of, but being inconspicuous. The gunners left behind three bell tents and some useful stores which we snaffled.

### **June 16<sup>th</sup>1915**

Browne has now got his majority and has been sent to command No82 FA temporarily. When back from the line now I sleep in a bell tent in the field by the church, much pleasanter than my stuffy little room. Weather still very fine, and there are still plenty of strawberries about.

More gunning than usual ?another La Bassee.

### **June 19<sup>th</sup>1915**

At Grizpot. Had about 150 shells over the ADS. They were searching for a battery behind us which had moved away before they started. No damage to us, but an awful row. The A and S had two wounded in a cottage next to our ADS.

Sent in application for another spot of leave.

### **June 20<sup>th</sup>1915**



Browne has been awarded the DSO.

### **June 21<sup>st</sup> to July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915**

On leave.

### **July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915**

Arrived back at Erquinghem and found that Sgts Allport, Male and Pollock had been killed by a shell in this field by the church. This was a bit of extraordinary bad luck as they had what were in the ordinary way three of the safest jobs in the FA: Clerk, Dispenser, and Nursing duties. Three of our best NCOs. It happened that they had all three gone into the field together to sit in the sun near the river and have a slack for a bit when a shell came over and got the lot of them. A day or two before Gurney Dixon was sitting in the bell tent which I have just mentioned as the one I slept in before going on leave, when they put one into the field, and a piece of it went through the tent just above his head. He was busy at the time writing a thesis for his MD (Cantab), an occupation he has been engaged on for weeks whenever opportunity arose.

The Sergeants had been buried in the churchyard close by and it was decided to put a headstone on the grave. The mason in Armentières undertook the job but it had not been put up when we left the place.

*We heard later that the stone had been erected although none of us saw it except Browne who went there to have a look some months after leaving us. He told me about it when I met him some time in 1918. When in France in 1923 on our motor trip we went through Erquinghem so stopped and had a look. A lot of the graves had been churned up by shell fire, but our stone had only a few chips and was listing a bit. The church itself was a ruin, also our billet. In fact the whole village had been wrecked and there was no one in it to speak of.*

### **July 10<sup>th</sup> 1915**

A new interpreter has been posted to us Marishal de Lozis Chopin, a great improvement on Marhange, who is going back to the USA. Williamson has applied for a transfer to a job in the back areas.

Went with the ADMS CO and Browne looking for farms further back as they are talking of moving all the FA HQs a bit further away from shell fire. The Germans are said to be bringing a lot more guns up opposite us. Also all transport is to be moved out of Armentières as much as possible.

### **July 11<sup>th</sup>1915**

Went out early with Sgt Bean to have a quick look round on our own, found everyone out doing the same thing. Found a good place, but too late; it had just been bagged by some gunners. The ADMS talks of moving us back to Bac St Maur where we were for a time last year, but it is about the same distance from the forward area, perhaps half a mile or so further back.

### **July 13<sup>th</sup>1915**

All leave cancelled.

We are to move several miles along the road to the right to a place called the White House. No 82 FA has already moved out of Armentières. Brigade HQs are moving into our billet here in Erquinghem. Things are getting more lively. Every day the town is shelled more heavily.

### **July 15<sup>th</sup>1915**

No orders to move yet. Browne went off in a hurry to become DADMS of a Corps and has left us for good.

Orders later to move to the White House at Fort Rompu which I had been to with a picket in case it was jumped by somebody. Our ADS had already been handed over. We left our old billets at Erquinghem and after a short march arrived at the new place. A biggish house with lots of buildings, with a large clear field in front for the horse lines and plenty of room in lofts and barns for the men. The CO being still on leave, Williamson as next senior is acting as CO. We are now attached to the 27<sup>th</sup> Division temporarily.

At 11pm the ADMS of this division knocked us up. We were all tucked up for the night, being out of the line. Williamson, in his pyjamas, interviewed him on the doorstep. The bloke was apparently in a great stew

and wanted to know what we were doing. He said we were to expect 150 casualties any minute. Where from we couldn't imagine. Our people were out of the line also and there was no special hate going on anywhere in front of us. However, it meant getting everyone up and making preparations, hooking in the horse buses, getting a big cellar covered with straw, stuffing palliases, operating table and lamp, surgical panniers, in fact the whole show ready with everything that might be needed. We believed it was a try on with the CO away, so thought we might as well show him how things should be done.

Nothing happened, so we all turned in again at 2.30am, leaving everything ready, and had a quiet night.

### **July 16<sup>th</sup>1915**

It was a ramp last night as we suspected. The ADMS came round with his DADMS and had the goodness to say he thought we had done very well. We thought it was 'un peu epais' - all right to try on with anyone who hadn't been out long, or one of his own beastly FAs, but we had been doing this sort of thing for a year and it seemed a pity to spoil the men's night's rest by a bit of foolery like that. The only thing he could find to complain about was the manure left by our predecessors in the yard.

We hear that the Northumbrian Division is going into the Armentières line. There seems to be a general thickening up of the whole area, with much movement.

Rode back this morning to our old horse lines with a wagon to collect our jumps as there is no knowing how long we might be in this place, but they had all been lifted by somebody. While I was there I met the CO of 82 FA. He was in a great state of jitters and appeared to be quite at sea about things.

Duty at the bombing school this afternoon.

Temp Lts Ford, Mullen and Chandler are not renewing their contracts, so will be for home in a few days. None have done a year in the line.

Had a visit from the GOC 27<sup>th</sup> Division and a later one from Skinner DDMS of this Corps. Both very affable.

Several captive balloons, ours and the enemy's, to be seen.

### **July 18<sup>th</sup> 1915**

To move again. Went with Dixon to see about our new quarters through Steenwerck to a farm about two miles away. Got settled in after a busy day. It is very nice out in the country here a bit away from things. Slept out in the open.

### **July 20<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Williamson sick, so took orderly room as acting CO. A visit from Col Skinner today to say we are to belong to the 8<sup>th</sup> Division and are going to take over a bit of line now held by the 51<sup>st</sup> Division.

### **July 21<sup>st</sup> 1915**

Rode over to Fort Rompu to see if one of the horses I had had to leave there was better and fit to move. Met one of the MOs of the FA which took over from us two days ago. The ADMS had played the same trick on them as soon as they got in, threatening them with 200 casualties at any time. Afterwards he played hell with them for the show they had put up, and wasn't at all satisfied.

In the afternoon went with Williamson to see the ground we are to move to, a beastly place with no buildings for the men. Went as far as Estaires. Called at Saily on the way back to call on the ADMS, but he couldn't tell us where we are going.

### **July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915**

Estaires is to be the place, in a fine building. The 1<sup>st</sup> Highland FA 51<sup>st</sup> Division is already installed in it. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> FAs are also in town.

The 51<sup>st</sup> Division is moving south in a few days. In the mean time we have to crowd in with them, but they are a very nice lot. Flies awful in our farm.

## **July 23<sup>rd</sup>1915**

CO turned up from leave and we moved at 3pm to Estaires to the Pensionat des Demoiselles, which was neither of the places we had inspected beforehand. It is a good building with plenty of room for the men, but the horses are in a beastly dirty field which I hope to get changed.

We have no place to use as a mess, so we are feeding at the Hotel de l'Hotel de Ville, very good grub, and sleep in a dormitory sort of place at the top of the building.

The Lahore Division is in town, jumping everything. Quite a lot of shops open. The place has hardly been shelled at all. Our ADS is in Levantie which we see for the second time; it is very badly knocked about. Two of our Batts are in the line, two in reserve and one in Div reserve. A fair amount of firing in the forward area.

## **July 24<sup>th</sup>1915**

Not knowing how long we may stay here we had a busy day cleaning up this place and opening out. Still feeding in the same place: good but monotonous. There is no news. Saw four 8-inch hows in the square drawn by caterpillar tractors, said to be going in the Armentières direction. Rumours that K's army is going a good bit south of us.

*All the moves and the number of different divisions and units we had seen recently were of course in preparation for the battle of Loos. Although we did not know this, there was a general idea that things were going to blow up somewhere.*

## **July 25<sup>th</sup>1915, Estaires continued**

More straightening up and to look at a new place for our transport, but didn't like it so did nothing. Rumours today of another move soon.

I got a bath this morning at the Convent in the town by calling at the place and asking if I could have one. The nun went off and I was then interviewed by a mother superior sort of person, finally being taken to a room which had a tin bath in it, not a very big one. They got some hot water and messed about until I began to wonder whether they intended to

bath me themselves. However, they left me to it, and very enjoyable it was, not having had one I could lie down in since our Armentières billet, except on my last leave. Afterwards they did not want to take anything, but I got them to accept a note for any purpose they liked. My French even now was not too good, though I easily understood what they said about being so glad to have us here. The Germans were in the place earlier in the war for about eight hours.

### **July 28<sup>th</sup>1915**

Today we got a room in a house for a mess. The hotel, although a very small town sort of a place, as getting rather an expensive item. Also some billets in different houses. My landlady had a complete typewritten copy of operation orders for the battle of Neuve Chappelle. How she got them I couldn't understand. No doubt it was after the show. I handed on the information, though I never heard anything more about it.

### **July 29<sup>th</sup>1915**

My promotion to the rank of Captain came out in the Gazette dated for April so I shall have a nice bit of back pay credited to me at Holt's Bank. We had a small dinner at the inn to celebrate, CO, Williamson, Chopin and self.

### **July 31<sup>st</sup>1915**

Heard that Stafford was with the 21<sup>st</sup>FA about four miles away on our left. rode over to call on him and quite by chance met him on the road coming back from their ADS. B Gaunt was in the same push. Stafford is fed up and is not renewing his contract.

### **August 1<sup>st</sup> 1915**

Very hot. Took the ASC to bathe in the river, but don't go in myself now. I started to, at Erquinghem as soon as the river got warm enough, just to start them going, but couldn't fancy the water again. It is filthy dirty, occasionally a dead horse or something floating down. However, they seemed to enjoy it.

### **August 14<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Chandler, Mullen and Ford left for home having finished their year's contract. Mullen and Ford have only been a short time in the forward area. Three other temporaries, Clarke, Murray and Barber joined.

Things very quiet. We are getting very few wounded in our brigade line here. There was an awful row going on in the distance, said to be a push at Hooze by the VI Division. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Divisions are behind us.

While in this place (Estaires) several of us used to go to a wine merchants for some elevenses, the usual type of house on the street with an archway in the middle for driving any vehicle into the back regions courtyard. We were not by any means the only officers using the place. The French are not allowed to sell whisky to the English. In the cupboard in the room we used on the right of the gate were several bottles labelled 'eye lotion' and such like. They were the bottles belonging to owners who popped in to have a spot now and then.

Our usual in the morning when back in town was a bottle of champagne between two or three and some biscuits at about 11 am. It only cost about three or four francs a bottle, and wasn't too bad. In fact rather pleasant at a table in the garden at the back. In this garden were two enormous old mulberry trees with the fruit just right for eating. Shaking a branch would bring down any quantity. We tucked into these one morning. A few hours later I came out with a terrific urticaria (nettle rash) and nearly went mad with the irritation of it. Williamson prescribed and I remembered the Convent bath, so with some soda I went there and had a hot soda bath. By evening it had subsided.

Rode in the Divisional horse show held at Saily sur Lys, which is close by. I rode Ike, Browne having taken Polly away with him. He did a clear round and we got a first prize. The show ground is a bit further back than the one at Armentières, but is still within range of big gun fire. Several German Sausages (observation balloons) overlooked the place. However, there was no dirty work.

Padre Webb-Paploe has left us, and we have another padre, Hughes.

**August 15<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Secret orders. We are moving south to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps, 1<sup>st</sup> Army. They are taking the Guards Brigade out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and putting us (19<sup>th</sup> Brigade) in place of them. So we are to become a divisional unit at last. Not that we want to; we should much prefer to go on as an independent brigade as we have been up to now.

### **August 16<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Our men came out of the line today and are in billets.

### **August 17<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Closing down and packing up again.

### **August 18<sup>th</sup> 1915**

With Williamson in the Ford to Bethune to find out where we are to go. I don't think I have mentioned that we got seven motor ambulances (Sunbeam Chassirs), one Ford and a motor cycle some time ago in exchange for seven of our horse buses.

On arrival at Bethune the ADMSD was out, so we went on to Vendin where we are to take over from No 4 FA. Had tea with them and a look around afterwards: a dirty muddy field. The V<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles are in the same village. Our brigade is not going into the trenches immediately, and when it does it will take over the line astride the Le Basen canal, Givenchy and Cuinchy. Back to Estaires later.

### **August 19<sup>th</sup> 1915**

When the MAC (Motor Ambulance Convoy) had cleared us, we marched out of Estaires at 11am. Had a bit of a tiff with my landlady who accused me of losing her front door key, which might have been so. In any case, to save a row I paid her enough to buy a dozen keys.

A fine day. The horse buses are going to march behind the Brigade which is going to march past Kitchener. The rest of the FA is marching by a different route and I think the men are feeling a bit hurt about it in not doing the same.



We were in no hurry and had a two-hour halt for dinner. Just missed seeing K by a few minutes. Arrived Vendin about 5.30pm. No billets for men, so put up all our tents for them. Some bivouacked under ground sheets. Dixon and I had a room with one bed in it. He had my camp bed, an item not allowed officially, but as we had plenty of transport I had got one and had it stuffed in somewhere when we moved. This is a dirty place, but has the advantage of being a long way back.

### **August 20<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Getting straight. We are not to open up, but we may have to take casualties from the town of Bethune if it gets shelled. We are on the outskirts on the side away from the line.

### **August 21<sup>st</sup> 1915**

Williamson has left us for his Base job at Rouen. Murray, Clarke and Grellier also left us today. Williamson's departure has left me second in command, and I am the only officer left who started from Aldershot with it and been with it all the time. I don't know how many others have been with us for short periods in addition to the originals. The CO started with the unit but had to be left at Rouen after an accident, and did not rejoin until after the Marne.

The GOC the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division is Gen Horne and the ADMS Col Holt.

Orders for all the men to bivouac; our tents are to be kept for sick and wounded. Had a look today at the new line we are to take over. Any buildings there are about, and all the trees, are very battered.

### **August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915, Sunday**

Took church parade. Dixon off duty with a knee. Had a ride round by myself by an aviation park and then on to Hinges, HQ of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army. counted eight sausages up at once: they are shelling one of them. Also six planes up together. The weather is fine but much colder than at this time last year. We heard that all cross-channel sailings had been stopped.

### **Sept 4<sup>th</sup> 1915, Vendin**

Same place, same routine. Our brigade now moving up into the trenches, so went with the CO to explore new ADS and Regimental Aid Posts where we shall have to work in this bit, Harley street and Cambrin.

*- end of diary kept in my pocket book -*

### **SEPTEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup> 1915 TO FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup> 1919**

*The notes which follow are chiefly from memory, and after a lapse of 36 years this does not run to exact dates. Many events and doings, even some trivial ones, are still very vivid memories, but many names, places and times escape me. Also a somewhat stilted and personal diary of events such as this is not the place to write detailed accounts of historical events which have been better described by many writers and official histories.*

*I did not read many war books, and of those I read I liked Sigfried Sasoon's two books best: 'Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man' and 'Memoirs of an Infantry Officer'. And for the atmosphere of the first few weeks of war from a civilian's point of view 'A Hilltop on the Marne' by Mildred Aldrich.*

*I was lucky to get out in August 1914. The first year was the really interesting time, especially before trench warfare really began with its monotonous sameness except for the 'Pushes'. It was in and out all the time, but some pleasant times of a week or two in the back areas, riding about the country, going into a town such as Amiens for a meal, visiting other units and such like things. When I left the FA in February 1917 it was really a duller war than ever for me. Things were so stale and people one served with seemed to be so different. I had seen about 60 to 70 different Medical Officers in the Unit, and the last straw was hearing they had given command of the FA to another regular while I was away convalescing in January 1917. The ADMS said he never expected to see me back, or it wouldn't have been done.*

### **Bethune**

*After a short time at Vendin we moved into the town of Bethune. HQ of the FA in a school on the outskirts of the town to the north where the men not out at the ADS were billeted, also the transport in the yard. Officers in a*

*house close by with another house for a mess. All very comfortable compared to most places.*

*All this was in preparation for the battle of Loos. For a time we worked this line in the usual way. When the attack started the Batts of our Brigade to go over first could not get going owing to our own gas blowing back over us along the line instead of where it should go.*

*It was not my tour of duty at the ADS when the show began. The tent subdivisions opened out in the École des Jeunes Filles, a big building in the town. Here we had hundreds of the more lightly wounded to deal with and get away to trains, which came up into the sidings at the back of the town to evacuate them.*

*Soon after the show started the Germans began a nasty habit of dropping a few large calibre high velocity shells into the town at odd times. Said to be an 11-inch naval gun a big distance away. One thing about these was that you never heard them coming; the first thing you knew was the deafening noise of the burst. One fell on the roadway not far from the house we were using as a mess, smashed up the front of the house, brought down the slates and a conservatory we used to feed in at the back of the house. Our quartermaster had just gone out of the front door into the road when this thing arrived, and he was caught by it, being blown up. No serious wounds, but badly shocked: he had to be sent down the line. There were a lot of casualties from this shell as the road was crowded with infantry who were billeted in the town at the time.*

*While in Bethune I heard a concert in the town theatre given by two singers (men) out from England to entertain the troops. I forget their names. It was before Loos started, and did not happen again.*

### ***About October 1915***

*We had another change, being taken out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and put into the New Army Division - the 33<sup>rd</sup> - as a stiffener in place of one of their Brigades which went into another Division. Not only that, they took two of our regular Batts and put one each into other Brigades of the Division, giving us two Batts of Royal Fusiliers, New Army Batts. The V Scottish Rifles remained with us.*

*Just before this change, our CO, Lt Col Rattray left us to become ADMS of a Division and a full Colonel, leaving me as the only survivor of the original lot who started at the beginning of the war. Rattray tried his best to get me the command of the FA but the ADMS of 2<sup>nd</sup> Div, Col Holt, put his DADMD, a senior regular captain named Brooks Purdon into the job. Had this not been a regular unit, I think I should have got it. Col Rattray when he got to his new Div applied for me to command on of the FAs in his Division, but being in a different army he couldn't work the exchange. They just wouldn't do it, so I had to stay where I was, and didn't feel inclined to apply for a job down the line.*

*The expected breakthrough as everyone knows didn't come off, and our Brigade, being on the extreme left of the attack, finished up in its original trenches at the end of the bulge of the area taken from the enemy near Loos.*

### ***The Loos area***

*For several tours of duty I had an ADS at Cambrin in a cottage by the church which was not at first much knocked about, but as things warmed up, it began to catch it, being a good landmark. There was no cover at the ADS cottage; we began to dig a bit away from it. It was also at the end of a communication trench leading up to the fire trenches, and a mark for that reason, as there was always some congestion there night and day; ration parties, or trench stores carrying parties, to say nothing of the stretcher cases which had to be carried down it.*

*One night as winter began I listened to some ration parties debating whether to start up the trench, or wait a bit, as things were a bit warm. It was settled by a Scotsman saying 'come on, we must get some hot drinks to the boys', picked up his dixies and started off.*

*The rum was carried up in the rum jars it was issued in, and 'the tragedy of the broken rum jar' became a joke. A man would arrive in the trenches with the remnants of a broken jar and say it was broken on the way by enemy fire.*

*Soon after we joined the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division our new ADMS Col Daily came up to the ADS at Cambrin and wanted to be taken round the trenches, so we had*

*a tour, calling on the Regimental MOs on the way. At one place in the fire trenches he was asking about sanitation, which was always a headache for the medicos, when one of the Battalion officers came along and said 'I wouldn't linger here if I were you; the trench mortar people have just been having a shoot from this bit of trench, and we are expecting the retaliation to start any moment'. So Daly thought he had had enough of sightseeing and I took the old man back again down the communication trench. At one place it had been blown in by a HE shell while we were in the trenches and we had to climb out into the open for a few yards, which he didn't like at all. He struck me as being too old for such jobs. Anyhow, he was very done in by the time we got back to the ADS at Cambrin.*

*It was in this bit of the line I believe that another story which became known very widely arose. The Corps commander going round the trucks came across a figure rolled up in a blanket on a stretcher. He drew himself up, saluted and said, 'Your Corps commandeer salutes his gallant dead'. A voice from under the blanket said, 'What's the silly old B - talking about'. It was a perfectly fit stretcher-bearer having a doss.*

*During one of our rests out of the line while on the other side of the town I met Alfgar. He was a sergeant in one of the Public School Battalions, and had not seen very much yet. Later in the war, towards the end of 1917 as far as I can remember, I was having a ride around in a hollow amongst the hills, and I came across him again amongst a collection of tanks. He was then a Lieutenant in the Tank Corps and they were practicing getting over trenches and ditches by laying down before them tightly bound bundles of brushwood, which they carried on the roof, and engaged in the track which carried the bundle down into the trench in front of them when wanted. The tank then walked over it and picked it up behind or not, as required.*

*At this time, although they had been used in the Somme, tanks were still supposed to be very hush-hush. Alfgar's job was to try to recover broken down ones in the battlefield. He took me a ride in one. They had extraordinary powerful engines: Daimler.*

**Autumn 1915**

*When out at rest near 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ at Hinges, I was suddenly sick after breakfast and became a nice yellow colour: jaundice, a rather prevalent complaint at the time. I was sent into Bethune to a house one of the FAs was running as a place to detain sick officers. The Co, a Major Sampson, said, 'What about going down?' I wasn't keen to be sent away, This wasn't so self sacrificing as it sounds, because I knew that if I got to the Base or even across the Channel I should only have to come back as a reinforcement to some strange Unit; and I didn't at this time want a Base job which I could have wangled quite easily, so I stayed a couple of days. It was only a slight attack anyway, and hearing that the Brigade was back in the line, I packed up and rejoined, not feeling quite up to the mark, but Purdon was glad to have me and didn't ask me to do very much for a bit.*

### **Chocques**

*Towards the end of 1915 I was sent to do a locum for the DADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Corps who was going on leave. 1<sup>st</sup> Corps HQ were at Chocques, a few miles back from Bethune. It only meant signing papers and returns, and driving about in a very nice Sunbeam with the DDMS, a very decent bloke who didn't just sit in his office, but visited the forward areas.*

*Here I met Haycroft again, still serving with the same Clearing Station (CCS) which I have already mentioned as not a great distance from Septmonts in the Aisne. I called in a time or two and watched Crisp English operate.*

*This part of the country has a lot of artesian wells about. In the courtyard of the small chateau where Corps HQ B Mess was there was one of these springs bubbling up in the middle of a circular stone paved pool about 15 feet across and about 18 inches deep. Coming out of the mess one pitch-dark night I walked straight into it, and it was a very abstemious mess. Luckily I didn't go flat down, but got sufficiently wet floundering about. The extraordinary thing was the warmth of the water. I tested it afterwards: it was a warm spring. Luckily no one saw me go in.*

### **Loos area**

*During one of the rest periods the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division held a horse show in a field near Bethune at which we did very well with our turnouts. I also got a first*

*in the jumping event, riding a mare we had got by accident from remounts. I had gone to draw a rider and this mare was waiting for the RE representative who hadn't turned up, so the Oi/c said I could take her. Very nice too, said to be from the Argentine. Called her Brenda. She is for Pottinger, another of our reinforcements.*

*The APM of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division, Major Lloyd, a gunner, used to drop in occasionally to our mess. I had no idea at this time that I should be coming to Chirk after the war, when I came to see Dr Lloyd about taking over his share of the practice. I noticed a board with a roughly painted flying fox hanging on the wall of his study which I recognised as the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division sign and discovered that this Major Lloyd was the Doctor's son. He was also a medico, but he no longer practised, having given up helping his father when Salt came to Chirk two years before the war.*

*Lloyd got into hot water over us during the Somme show in 1916. As APM to the division he had the issuing of passes, and was persuaded by Brooks Purdon to give one to a party of five or six of us to travel to the sea at Biray sur Plage, a French seaside resort in the French area, closed to the British ordinarily.*

*This was during one of our rest periods from the Somme. I forget the name of the place we were in, but it was about 40 or 50 k's to the coast. So we took one of our motor ambulances and arrived in time for a walk on the sands and then a first rate lunch at the best hotel, which was full of French civilians. Afterwards we filled in the time messing about until dinner, again a wonderful blow out. We set off later in the dark to drive back, one member of the party Captain Hackett (in civil life MO to the Mountjoy prison in Dublin and later commandant of the Army Medical Services of the Irish Free State) had done himself so well that he insisted on lying on the floor of the ambulance and singing. Harbison sat in front with the driver. A short distance out of town we suddenly came to a railway level crossing with the gates shut. The gates in France consist of a sort of pole which lifts up into the air to let traffic through. Our driver couldn't stop, and ran right into it. The pole shot up into the air taking the steering wheel and the hood covering the driver with it, and hitting Harbison on the nose (which as long as I knew him had a lump on it afterwards). Purdon shouted, 'Drive on,' which the driver did with about half a spoke left on the*

*top of the steering column amidst the shouts and gesticulations of the signal man, leaning out of his box. In this way we arrived back at the Unit in the early hours, just as it was hooking in to proceed for another turn in the line.*

*A lance corporal of the MP had been rather shadowing us about in the town, so I suppose he made a report. There was a devil of a row and Lloyd nearly lost his job. The ADMS got us out of it saying we had deserved one outing after our work in the Somme Battle, or some such hot air.*

*Gurney Dixon went down the line sick towards the end of 1915, and there were many other changes in the officers of the FA. Harbison rejoined after a long spell as RMO to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RWFs, his place being taken by a man named Duire, a middle-aged Glasgow eye specialist who had served in the ranks during the South African war and got a DCM. He became rather well known in the division, being a very stout-hearted sort of bloke. He remained in the same job I think until the end of the war, getting a DSO and MC. I was sorry to lose Gurney Dixon: he was rather a different type to so many of the reinforcements we got. In civil life a GP in Brockenhurst. I met him again after the war, when I went to Beaulieu, several times. He had married and given up practice.*

### ***Bethune area***

*During quiet times when round about Bethune the meeting place for officers was the Café du Globe in the square of the town. Here at about 11am one generally drank champagne cocktails at one franc a time - 10d.*

*We were out at rest near 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ at the time of King George's visit to the troops there - the time he got hurt, being thrown from his horse which had been startled by some cheering troops. In the shouting round for an MO I might easily have been the first on the scene if I hadn't been out riding myself, and really only missed it by a short head. I might have got an MVO!*

*About this time (Bethune area) we heard that Williamson had got charge of a hospital train and that it was just now about six miles away. Harbison and I rode over and found him very comfortably fixed. Felt rather envious of his quarters: a carriage to himself rigged up as a cabin, carrying all his belongings about with him, very warm and dry. He even had a carpenter's shop rigged up in a van to amuse himself with when not on the move. Apparently there were weeks on end when the train wasn't wanted and was*



*shunted on to some dismal sidings. He daren't leave it for more than an hour or two, as orders to move come without any warning, so it wasn't all jam.*

*After leaving the line in front of Bethune and round about we went in and out of the line and up and down the line, mostly in places which were comparatively quiet after the Loos doings. This quietness was a comparative term, and only meant that no large push was on. No part of our line was ever really quiet for the infantry in the trenches. There was constant hate going on and a constant trickle of casualties in the quietest times from sniping, trench mortars, shellfire and from the many raids on the German trenches, patrolling in no mans land, with occasional casualties from longer range shelling.*

### **Spring 1916**

*In the Spring the rumours were more and more persistent that something big was brewing in the south. This of course turned out to be the Somme show.*

*Finally we had another train journey which landed us in the back areas not far from Amiens. This train journey raised a difficulty for us. After the retreat we had bought a mess cart, a single horse drawn baker's delivery type of van. We had managed to keep it all this time, but now there were stringent orders about unauthorised transport, and it was not allowed on the train. It was really rather unfair, as some smaller units than ours were allowed an official mess cart. However after putting the men up to playing 'the idiot boy' and shoving it on as though it was all in order while trying to distract the RTO, he finally spotted it, and off it had to come. It looked like being left at the station. However, the train wasn't leaving for hours. They had allowed two hours for us to load, and we were all on in half an hour, much to the RTO's astonishment. Purdon, the CO, had managed by some means to get our secret destination out of somebody - I never heard how or from whom, but Purdon was a Northern Irishman, a regular soldier, had played rugger for Ireland as a medical student, so had friends, and a way with him. So we got the high draught horse out of the van (Hommes 40, Cheveaux en Long 8), harnessed it up and sent it across country with its driver and another man, wondering if we should ever see it again. However after some days it turned up without having had any*

*serious adventures. They were stopped and questioned twice on the march, but we never heard anything more about it.*

*I was afraid someone might snaffle the horse, which was a particularly good one for the job. We had moved several times after detraining, so they did very well to find us.*

### ***The Somme***

*In time we landed up at Becardal Becourt, a village behind the Somme battleground, and from there to the outskirts of Fricourt, which was nothing but a heap of rubble. The battle had been in progress for about 12 or 14 days when we got there, but we had heard the barrages and they were stupendous after the Loos affair. Alongside us at Fricourt there was a regular mountain of boxes of 18-pounder ammunition. The officer in charge had so much he couldn't get rid of it to the batteries fast enough. A very different story to the battery at Ypres which was limited to five rounds a day.*

*From Fricourt the CO and I went on a reconnaissance to Mauctex (?) village, which had not long been taken, as we knew we were to go in somewhere beyond that. There were dead men and horses lying about, and the fire wasn't very far ahead.*

*Our first show in the Somme battle was that the Division had to assault and capture a thing called the switch trench lying the other side of High Wood, which was said to have been already cleared of the enemy. As it turned out of course it had not been captured and was being occupied by the enemy. The old 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade took a bad knock. In fact it was the end of the regular Battalions as I had known them. although they had had many casualties before, and had none or practically none except some transport drivers and the QMs of the original battalions left at this time, they had never before been decimated in one go as they were in this battle, like many others had been.*

*It was quite a tricky place as far as we were concerned. There was a certain amount of shelter under a ridge along the road under High Wood, where I had a dressing station (ADS) in a scooped out place where they*

*had been getting metal for the road in peace time. Harbison took the bearers on a bit further and we had a very busy time.*

*In a similar sort of position about 200 yards further back down the road another FA had an ADS. This got a direct hit from a 5.9, and a lot of them were killed including the two MOs.*

*Our horse buses came up to the ADS as wanted from some distance back. How they all escaped on that bit of road was a marvel.*

*It was a very unpleasant spot. A gunner subaltern came by looking for the battery he was joining, on the bank above us. He was blown to bits and literally disappeared.*

### ***Somme continued***

*After the above tour we were withdrawn for a rest like everyone else in turn. The VII<sup>th</sup> Division as usual had done better than anyone else, but again the war historians have got all this.*

*The FA remained a day or two near Fricourt. While I was there I saw the Indian Cavalry Division come up and go through the gap which never materialised. It wasn't a very pleasant spot although a good way back. I thing the Germans knew about the ammunition dump and occasionally put an odd one or two over.*

*We were sitting round on the ground having a meal when they put one rather near which sprinkled our food with dirt. I wasn't going to be done out of it at all, being very hungry. I seized the best looking bit of steak, shoved it between two chunks of bread and went off to the horse lines. Another shell had stampeded them, and a lot of them had broken away. We got them all back luckily. The Australians are close by and will pinch anything, especially a horse.*

*There was a story of them stealing a GS wagon one night while the driver was asleep under it without waking him up. There were some guns and limbers just below us and one shell dropped right in the middle of them. A little later their MO appeared with a body on a stretcher to ask me if I thought the man was dead. He was. He had cut his own throat very cleanly*

*indeed. I recommended to the MO to say that he had been killed by the shellfire. I was quite wrong to do this of course, but it would have made a lot of difference I believed financially to his dependants, and it would be better to let them think he had been killed in the ordinary way anyhow.*

*Considering the conditions a man had to put up with and the extreme discomfort and general bloodiness of things during a show like the Somme one, particularly towards the end of it when winter had set in, it was not so very surprising that the occasional self-inflicted wound cropped up, such as shooting off of finger or a toe, but they were remarkably few in the BEF, and suicides much fewer still.*

*We had other turns in the line, going out and getting fattened up and then in again.*

*I will only describe one of these tours of duty, which although I didn't know it at the time turned out to be my last tour of duty at an ADS during the war.*

### ***About December 1916***

*Our Brigade was in front of Les Boeufs which there was to be an attempt to capture, the previous one having failed. The ADS was in some trenches in the village of Guinchy, an the crossroads (always a bad site) but it was possible to get horse transport up to this along a fascine road. Nothing remained of the village except odd bricks . The whole area from back to the other side and beyond Guillemont to the river, in fact the whole Somme area was just a mass of shell craters touching and overlapping each other, mostly filled with water, and it rained and rained and rained.*

*It was a long and difficult carry for the bearers from the Regiments to the ADS, as indeed were all the carries in the Somme battlefield. It was several hours work frequently for four men to carry a stretcher from the RAP or thereabouts back to the ADS, and they were completely exhausted after one carry. Against regulations they did a lot of carrying with one stretcher handle on the shoulder, and these soon became raw. In this place we had bad luck with our bearers too.*

*O'Grady, MO Cameronians, sent a message in that he had a lot of casualties, so I took some bearers up and found him in a sunken lane which was actually the support trench. He had not in fact got any casualties just then, but only rumours that there were a lot in the fire trench which they had not yet got away from the trench. I was a bit terse with him as it was quite uncertain whether there were any at all. However I left him three squads sitting on the bank of the sunken road which was his RAP and went off to see how they were getting on at the RWFs further to the left.*

*It was a bad spot to get to as it meant travelling over some ground exposed to the view of the enemy, and one was visible for a bit. It was rather misty, and visibility was not very good. In any case they don't as rule take much notice of a single figure wandering about in the distance.*

*But soon after leaving my bearers with O'Grady the Germans dropped a shell in the sunken road just where they were sitting, and injured three of them. The Germans must have seen us, as we were just in view before dropping down into the road. I didn't know this immediately as I had made my way back by a different route from the left flank to the ADS and found them being brought in just after I got back.*

*Harbison taking a party of bearers further to the left had very bad luck too. They must have been spotted on the way when near the trenches. The Germans opened on them. Three of four were killed and several wounded; I don't remember the exact numbers. When Harbison arrived back at the ADS he said, and I remember his exact words, 'Hampson, it was awful. If only they had come on after me instead of hanging back, that shell wouldn't have got them'. The first shell had been wide of them.*

*That night there were too many casualties for the whole of our bearers to cope with, so about midnight I floundered back about a mile to where there was a field telephone, and got on to the ADMS for reinforcements. Some hours later what was said to be a company of 5<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles arrived at the aid post to act as bearers, but they were not at anything like company strength. However, I sent them off with our people to get in what they could. It wasn't very satisfactory. There was a tendency to do a carry then lose themselves in the ruins of the village. However, by morning we seemed to have got the better of things.*

*There was only one wide trench to do the dressings in, with no overhead cover that would stop anything. In digging further we began to dig up dead Germans who had been buried earlier by our shellfire.*

*Later in the day, not having sat down for more than a minute or two for a very long time, I lay down in a bit of shelter and went to sleep, to be awakened very soon by a hell of a din. The Germans had started shelling the crossroads just outside the ADS and had just scored a direct hit on our horse bus standing there. I haven't mentioned that we could get a horse bus, with a team of four instead of the usual two, right up to the ADS, which was quite impossible for a motor ambulance, which couldn't get within two miles or so. We kept our bus until we had a load, and then another came up from a more sheltered place a little further back.*

*This wreck was a nasty sight. The driver had been killed, and several of the wounded with which the bus was loaded were killed, or wounded a second time. One horse was killed outright, two were lying wounded, and the fourth was going away on three legs over the shell holes. I shot the two who were lying on the ground with a rifle, of which there were any number about in the ADS, then followed up the one which had got away, and found him 3-400 yards back from the ADS. I didn't know what the damage was so hadn't taken a rifle, but it was hopeless. Luckily a party of infantry were coming up the road so I stopped them and borrowed a rifle. They waited for me to do it, then marched on. Then with one of our other horses I had the body dragged into a shell hole, as he had fallen right in the middle of the track where he was standing: I wouldn't let anyone try to move him on three legs.*

*This shooting of horses which I had to do on several occasions almost more than I could stand, much worse than dealing with wounded humans, but there was on these occasions no one else to do it that I would trust.*

*Next morning Harbison and I were sitting in our dressing trench waiting for our relief to come when there was the usual noise and a shell came ploughing down the side wall of the trench, opening it out in a sort of groove, and we in a split second no doubt thinking, both of us seeing the track of the shell 'well that's it as far as we are concerned'. Nothing happened. It was a dud; Harbison calmly remarking, 'That's a bit of luck'.*

*Harbison was the MO I had taken up to the RWFs in October 1914 when they gave me the rum. He stayed with them a year and then came to us and remained in the forward area for the rest of the war. A bit of a rough customer, but a very stout-hearted fellow. I met him in London after the war when I was doing a Ministry of Pensions job. He was doing medical boards and at the same time working up a connection as a turf commission agent. Later Brooks Purdon told me he had made a lot of money and then lost it all betting, finally going home to a job in Ireland where he died of TB.*

*Our relief having arrived, Harbison pushed off with the men, and I started down a bit later. It was a heavy going tramp of about two miles back to the FA HQ. Not feeling too good before I started, I soon began to feel absolutely done up. I had been coughing rather a lot for a day or two, and had to rest at frequent intervals, arriving at the FA about dark. Our quarters were just a tarpaulin stretched between two wagons. Very muddy damp and cold, I didn't feel like eating anything, so turned in in some blankets.*

*Next morning I had to say I wasn't up to anything, and had my temperature taken. It was 103 degrees, so I was bundled into an ambulance and after some hours of a very rough journey landed up in the New Zealand hospital in Amiens. It was dark by the time I was carried up into a bright warm ward and put to bed with sheets and sisters (not in my bed, I mean!). Obviously a good spot.*

*Having been settled in bed an hour or so, round came the MO. He had a look at me and said, 'Good G - , the man's got measles.' I suppose being so muffled up and not having my clothes off for a week or more, also being very dirty with quite a beard, no one up to now had noticed any rash.*

*So was again bundled into an ambulance and carted out into the country to an isolation hospital in tents. A beastly uncomfortable place, but I have no recollection of the journey or of arriving there. In the morning I saw my temperature was charted as 104.5 degrees.*

*In a day or two I was feeling quite fit and very bored at the idea of fourteen days in that place. On the thirteenth day I happened to see one of our own ambulances which had brought an infectious case in from the*

*forward area. I held the driver while I searched about for the CO. I couldn't find him, so collected what kit I had with me, had it stored quickly, and boarded the ambulance, telling the sisters I was discharging myself, and they could do what they liked about it. In any case, I was out of the infectious stage, having had the disease some days before getting to hospital without knowing it.*

*It took hours on the congested and bad roads to get back to the FA . We found it a last in some miserable place I forget the name of. The only thing I remember about this place was the number of partridges in the stubble fields.*

*Still not feeling very grand and not wanting to go down the line. The ADMS asked me if I would like to go to the south of France to Lady Michelham's convalescent home for officers at Cap Martin near Menton. The answer was, 'Yes, of course'. Off I went, first to Paris where I was met by an agent of Lady Michelham's, who took me to an hotel. He said I could pay my hotel bill for the night if I liked. If necessary it would be paid for me, but I didn't like to sponge in that way.*

*I don't remember anything about the next day's doings, but I just messed about in Paris until evening; the train did not leave the Gare du Lyons until the usual time for the night express, about 8.30pm.*

*Had a very stuffy journey: no sleepers, no dining car. There were two senior French officers in the carriage, three of us and a civilian. Every time one of the Frenchmen dropped off to sleep, one of us would open a window, which woke them up, and they promptly shut it. By the time we got to Marseilles the 'Entente' was in grave danger.*

*I had not been further on than Marseilles before, but was here in 1906 on the trip with Father to Egypt where we got on a ship.*

*Enjoyed the trip along the coast, the line running close to the sea most of the way. Arrived at Menton about 3.30pm, where we were met by a car and taken to Cap Martin, a fine large hotel on a promontary about one and a half miles from the centre of town. Everything was quite free, all expenses being stood by the Michelhams. It was run as a hotel with the usual waiters.*



*Colonel Hickson was the commandant. I had met him in Aldershot in 1913 when he was OC the Cambridge Hospital. He had two regular RAMC majors as MOs, a very nice soft job.*

*There are a few RAMC clerks and orderlies, and a nursing sister in charge of each floor. The life was quite free. You could feed out or in as you liked, and travel about anywhere within reach. The only hard and fast rule was that the doors were shut at 7pm each day, and anyone outside at that time was sent back to his unit the next day, no matter what his rank or excuse. This was rigidly enforced, and while I was there several were returned.*

*It was a wonderful change and almost unbelievable to lead this sort of life, lots of walks about. It is within easy reach of Monte Carlo. We could go into the foyer of the casino, but were not allowed in the rooms. In France also no officers of any nationality were allowed in gaming rooms.*

*We had several motor trips, sharing the expenses. One to Nice, where we landed up at the Ruhl (?) cocktail bar. An ex-mayor of New York was propping up the counter, and he wouldn't allow any of us to pay anything. In fact that was really all we saw of Nice.*

*Lady Michelham, who had a villa near the hotel used to take two or three of us about the place in her car, generally finishing up at the Hotel du Paris in Monte Carlo for tea, which she insisted on paying. She broke a bank while I was there.*

*Lord Mickelham I am told in addition to footing the bill for this place has also equipped and staffed two or three hospital trains, and another convalescent home on the Channel coast. Several times I went to the golf course at Mount Angel above Monte Carlo and had a round. again nothing to pay, and clubs lent to officers.*

*When I came Chirk I met the sister who was in charge of my floor, now Mrs Omrod of Penylan, late Sister Bulkeley, also here husband Captain Ormrod, whom I used to meet frequently when he was transport officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RWFs in our 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade during the first year or so of the war. I met them both the first time I went out with the Wynnstay (hunt).*

*The usual stay at the home was two weeks. Without any wrangling mine was extended by a week. At the end of this time one of the MOs went sick and I was asked to act as a locum, which I did for another week. during this time I heard from the FA that Brooks Purdon had left the day after I went, for another job, and as I was not expected to be fit for forward area work for some time, they had found another regular RAMC bloke to give the command to. This was a bit of a sickened to me, having hung on for the job and having been second in command for about 18 months and acting CO on various occasions, and promised the job when it became vacant.*

*Any numbers of men got a New Army FA at home without any experience, and came out with them as the New Army arrived in France. It was just a question of being in the right place at the right time.*

*However, I was not in the right place at the right time. I was not really sure I wanted to go back except as CO, having had a fair share of the unpleasant dirty work. also I wasn't really feeling too bright at this time, and thought I would have a change which couldn't very well have been refused me.*

*The DMS of the L of C was staying in the place during my last week, as a patient. I had a talk to him and he said certainly he would get me posted to a different job if I wanted it. so I sent in my application for a transfer feeling rather ashamed of it as I had j..red (?) so at the numerous wrangles we had had with the unit. I had seen about 60 to 70 MOs through the unit.*

*When my time came to leave Cap Martin my orders were to proceed to Boulogne and report to the DDMS there.*

### **March 1917, Boulogne**

*On arrival in March 1917 I was posted to a stationary hospital at Wimereux. Another contact from here, Patterson, who was MO, is now chief physician at Ruthin Castle.*

*Our mess was in the golf club in the middle of the links. Not very comfortable, food not very good. In fact I hated the place and the atmosphere. There was really no job for me.*

*By this time the General and Stationary hospitals were staffed by almost permanent MOs, surgeons, physicians, pathologists, x-ray men etc, together with a floating population of MOs from home, from up the line, after discharge from hospital after being wounded or sick etc. Gaunt , a regular captain - old Birmingham student - was here and had been all the war. His brother Eric Gaunt, a very decent bloke, was killed while a Regimental MO.*

*After about a week in this hospital I saw my name in orders to proceed up the line to some Division or other (I forget the number) as a reinforcement.*

*The CO of a hospital like this has no option when called on to supply MOs to go up the line, but to detail those who had no special job at the hospital. He could do otherwise of course, but it was a sort of closed ring. In fact it was really a scandal because those at the Bases, except for the men of civilian specialist standards, ie the consultants, were no better qualified than the blokes in the forward area, but had managed to stick to their cushy jobs. Particularly some young regular RAMC officers like Crawford Jones, who had soon had enough of it and got a job in charge of a medical division of a hospital, only an administrative job signing returns etc, the sort of thing any old man could do. While it is safe to say that by this time most of the Regimental MOs were civilian GPs and many of them not too young.*

*I doubt if there was a single regular doing it at this time. If they join the army as regulars, surely their job is war, and being in it. Many of the juniors (regulars) had started the war as ROM's with the original BEF, and many of them did stick to it for a year or so.*

*Brooks Purdon started as a RMO, but this sort soon got command of a FA with promotion. RMO is always regarded as a junior job. These sort were quite different to the Base wangers. CG Browne, with us at first, could have got a job any time as a surgeon, or any job anywhere, but he was not satisfied unless he was out looking for trouble all the time. I never saw him rattled or turn a hair when things were unpleasant. I could name others, but this is getting rather too personal and rather like an attack on some people. Being private, perhaps it doesn't matter.*

*Really there should have been a lot of rotation of duties amongst the medicos, all except the real specialists, ie consulting standard at home, taking a turn in the forward area.*

*To return to my own troubles, on seeing the posting I went to the CO and told him I should like to get back to my own Division, and not the one detailed for, and would he mind if I saw the DDMS to see if it could be arranged. He said, 'Not at all,' so I pushed off into Boulogne to ask about this. When I did so the DDMS said my posting was all a mistake, that the CO had no business to detail me, as I had been sent to the Base for a rest, and unless I wanted to go back, I needn't.*

*Honestly I didn't want to go back just as a reinforcement to any dud Division, and said I would like to stay at the Base for a bit.*

*The DDMS sent me off to see a Major Best, the Inspector of Drafts, with a chit that I was to be on his staff.*

*Major Best was a very good sort. He had been in the West African Medical Service until retiring, spoke French like a native, and we got on very well together. There were two others with him on the job.*

*My new work was to inspect all new arrivals, Units, drafts and reinforcements. I lived in a hutted rest camp in the hills above Boulogne - St Martin's Camp. Mine was a fairly wide area. They gave me a Ford ambulance with driver to run about in. My first job began at 6am, which was to inspect, at another camp, a parade of men before they marched off to the station. It was a pretty quick affair, just walking down the ranks of men holding their shirts open on the chest. It was surprising how much could be spotted in this way. A man might look ill, or Measles, Mumps, Scarlet Fever, Scabies were always turning up.*

*Then on to other camps. The afternoon was generally taken up with medical boards, and there were frequent night jobs to inspect late landings and movements.*

*I had a small hut to myself, and there was a mess hut.*

*Camp commandant, myself, another MO and two to three officers of other units who had been classified PB (Permanent Base). A dreary existence, but it had some pleasant spots such as a walk in the country or a dinner with Best at the hotel in the Old Town. I don't remember anything of real interest, it was just a monotonous Base job.*

*I only remember one incident out of the ordinary. In addition to my usual duties I was, in rotation with others, orderly MO to the Command. One day I was sent for to see an officer they said had reported sick on landing from the leave boat. He was at the APM's quarters near the quay. I thought it rather queer he hadn't been sent to one of the hospitals. When I got there I asked him if he was reporting sick. He said, 'No, I'm all right,' so I didn't do anything and just pushed off again. On the way back it struck me that there must be something more about it as he was in the APM's place. I had not seen the APM, one of his sergeants had taken me in.*

*Sure enough, next day I was ordered to attend a court martial. On arrival I saw this officer under arrest as the accused. The charge was read out - drunkenness - and the case proceeded.*

*The MPs always watched the disembarkation from the leave boats. This chap had slipped on the gangway and been a bit unsteady after getting up, so was taken into custody.*

*This sort of thing was quite new to me. I had sat on courts martial, but never had any doings over a drunken officer. In fact I don't think I had ever seen an officer incapable from drink. Other ranks of course must never be seen by an officer when put under arrest on this charge. This time I had been called as a witness, and I wasn't quite sure whether they were right under military law in sending for me to see an officer in the pretence of his reporting sick, which he hadn't done, and wondered whether it was just a convenience for them to have expert witness as to the state of drunkenness. This as far as I knew was the job of any officer, especially an APM.*

*There was no time for me to find out the rights of the matter as the case had started. The officer, a New Zealander, and not a young man although in an infantry regiment was returning from leave to go up the line to his regiment. When I was called, the first question was, 'You examined this*

*officer yesterday?' Answer from me, 'No.' This shook the court a bit and they began to push papers about wondering what to ask next. In answer to other questions from the prosecutor I just said what had happened on my visit. The prosecutor, a youngish officer with GS badges, a captain, I suppose in civil life a legal bloke whose job in the army this sort of thing was began to get rather ratty. He said other witnesses had said the officer was drunk, and I must have seen it so, etc. I said, 'Well why ask me, I don't agree at all?' Then all sorts of questions about what could have caused the state he was supposed to be in. I said seasickness and mentioned other medical things, not caring a damn really what I said to him. The president of the court, a decent type of senior officer, then broke in and asked me flat out if I thought the man was drunk when I saw him. This shook me a bit because on considering it, the officer's demeanour when I saw him had struck me as being dumb and uncommunicative. I replied however that whatever might have been his condition earlier he did not strike me from the little I saw of him as being unfit for duty. He was certainly walking about quite steadily.*

*The case against him was dismissed. From the first question I had made up my mind not to be jockeyed into letting them think I had any impression he might be drunk.*

*The whole way of going about it, getting nothing from the APM etc had riled me - doubtless I was wrong in not helping better to get a conviction, but it seemed to be so much one of those things when people should look the other way. A man a bit unsteady on a gangway going up the line to a fighting unit and these velvet arsed b-----s sitting comfortably at the Base. It might have been allowed to pass unnoticed. He might or probably had had a drink or two on the board - who hasn't at times? An hour or two in the train and he would have been perfectly safe. And another thing, if a man can volunteer and come all the way from New Zealand to serve in the infantry on the Western Front, a good deal might be overlooked.*

*I didn't follow up the matter of being called in that way, but should have done on any future occasion, but none arose, and I left the Base soon after.*

*After a time I began to get more bored with the routine and began to think about a move, also I had not had any leave since coming here. Not much was given to junior officers; they were lucky to get it once a year. This was*

*as it should be of course in the soft jobs, but I wanted some and knew I could get it after a month or two in the forward area.*

*First of all finding out where the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division was I wrote to the DDMS of the Corps they were in, a man I had met, asking if I could get back to the 19<sup>th</sup> FA if I applied for the change. As it was approved I duly applied and in due course handed over my job at Boulogne and started up the line.*

### **Arras**

*On arriving at Corps HQ, the usual sort of thing had happened. While my move was being engineered the DDMS had left the Corps for another job, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division had moved out of it to another army. I was offered a kind of Corps job looking after all sorts of oddments in the Corps are round about Arras. This I took, as the only alternative being to go as a reinforcement to some unit I didn't know, and certainly not get, at any rate to start with, the position and possibility of command I should have got in my old FA.*

*I think I really hadn't much ambition left at this time, being in what is now called a 'browned off' sort of state, and didn't much care about anything when this comparatively cushy Corps job was offered. It really wasn't a bad one in some ways. Completely undistinguished, but I was very much on my own which was a great attraction, and after my setback in missing my old unit I wasn't any longer thirsting for what I had had in the first two and a half years.*

*The mystery to me writing this now is that I didn't put up with the boredom of Boulogne and sit there comfortably until the end of the war, which I could quite easily have done.*

*I came across some funny people and had dealings with labour Battalions of Maniparis (?), who eat all the dogs in the district. In a Chinese Battalion where I had to go about a mumps epidemic, it was found that several of them were women; they all look alike.*

*Also Companies of our own infantry who had been downgraded medically and were employed on odd jobs in the Corps area.. I used to ride about the*

*country on a horse, which made life worth living, and call on these various units to see any sick they had.*

*I lived in a mess in a Nissen hut with the CO of a lot of these people, Lt Col Clifton, a regular Duke of Wellington doing this I think because he weighed about 20 stone. A very amusing card who had been seconded from his regiment and was serving in Northern Nigeria before the war. I had several interesting outings with him, one to the reserve support trenches in front of Arras to visit the Household Battalion, ie dismounted Life Guards acting as infantry, commanded by Lt Col who was a friend of Clifton's.*

*Also did a bit of trout fishing. The QM got a two and a half pounder on a lump of paste. Streams rather like our trout streams at home.*

*There were quite a lot of visitors to our mess. 'Tiny' Clifton, as he was known, seemed to be a well-known character. One day the duke of Marlborough had lunch with us, also an acquaintance of Clifton's.*

*HH Sampson was serving in a nearby Casualty Clearing Station as a surgeon specialist; I saw him several times.*

## **1918**

*I stopped with these people when they moved to Roye early in 1918, and in March 1918 got mixed up in the V<sup>th</sup> Army disaster to some extent. Although never very near the line it was exciting for a bit.*

*Ahern, mentioned early in the diary, came in one day during the mix up. On asking him whether he thought I oughtn't to be doing a different job, he said, 'Don't be a fool, stay where you are.'*

*Clifton and his crowd had a motor lorry, and were told to push off in it to Etaples, not being a fighting unit, and I was told to go with them. Clifton did not waste any time in getting moving. He was a man who was very fond of his food and drink. His adjutant said he was frightened to death of being captured and getting starvation rations. So they all packed in: himself; adjutant; QM; orderlies and office staff, and set off. I had a horse drawn cart of medical stores. Clifton said I could have his horse to ride, so*



*I had a party of my own with the driver of the cart and two medical orderlies.*

*We arranged to meet at a place about 15 miles back on the route we were ordered to take. It was rather amusing, because after being on the road some hours the motor lorry party turned up behind us having lost their way and been in all sorts of difficulties.*

*Before we left Roye I managed to repay the nuns in return for what I had seen them do for us on various occasions during the war. I had met some of them a little time before in Roye when I had been called in to see a blind priest.*

*The French authorities had sent a train into Roye to evacuate all the civilians who wanted to leave the town. Several of these religious people wanted to go, but had no means of getting to the station, which was quite a long way. They were too decrepit to walk.*

*That morning a motor ambulance had called to collect some sick of mine, so I commandeered it and took all these people to the station just in time for the train. There wasn't much time to lose. Our troops were falling back through the town, and the dirty work wasn't far away. After this I sent the ambulance off, and started with my little party, which was all ready.*

*I doubted very much whether the ambulance driver ever found his column again in the confusion, and seriously thought of keeping him with me, but decided that he had better push off perhaps to do some more useful work.*

*The chaos getting out of Roye was fairly grim. It was full of returning infantry.*

*Once out of the town it was extraordinary and very depressing to find myself once more amongst civilian refugees, especially as one had the feeling all this time that they thought we were to blame. We didn't know at the time about the extended and weak line which was held by the 7<sup>th</sup> Army and which had to take the initial onslaught. But this is history. How the Germans nearly got Amiens and divided the French and British armies.*

*We had a fairly good idea that something rather serious had happened. I had no idea how great the disaster had been, although amongst our retiring infantry I could see from the mixing of men of different regiments that things were considerably disorganised.*

### ***Etaples***

*After getting here no one knew what to do with us. I was given a sick room in one of the Base Depots to run. Clifton didn't want to use his horse, so I got some quite nice rides every day for a week or so. He borrowed a car one day and we had a run into Boulogne to do some shopping. A motor cyclist dispatch rider piled himself up on our bonnet and was killed outright. We had him taken to a hospital and I never heard any more of it.*

*Several afternoons Clifton and I had a game of golf at Paris Plage. we were nobody's children and had nothing to do: the authorities had not had time to sort things out.*

*When I was beginning to think after a week or so that there must be something better to do somewhere, I heard that my old CO, Col Rattray, had left his division and was now in command of a General Hospital here. It was a big hospital area, and the place where St John's Hospital was smashed up by the German bombers. I went along to see him - found Seymour Barling also there as a surgical specialist. Rattray had nothing to offer me in the way of a job. Like all the others he had got his permanent staff and had no vacancies. In fact after what he tried to do for me before, I didn't think he was very helpful at the time. But I think it was through him that I got a letter a few days later from Browne asking me if I would like to join him and take charge of a division of his Convalescent Depot which he was running near Deauville.*

*I jumped at this offer, and it meant getting a majority. He told me that he had got Williamson and Chandler with him already, two of the old 19<sup>th</sup> FA blokes.*

*Chandler after being at home for a time on completion of his year's contract had rejoined and been for a time an RMO again. He was in the same show at the same time doing the same work at an ADS with Martin Leake, the MO who got a bar to his VC for this action, yet Chandler didn't*

*even get a mention for this very sticky job. I met him twice after the war. He was a physician to the London Hospital, and also on the staff of the Brompton Chest Hospital. A very good sort indeed.*

*In due course I got instructions to proceed, and said goodbye with much pleasure to my present people and surroundings. Train to Harvre, ferry across to Trouville, and motor car to the depot on the hills above Deauville.*

## ***Deauville***

*This Trouville Hospital Area as it was called entirely medical and consisted of three large General Hospitals and three Convalescent Depots taking 5000 men in each Depot, commanded by Major General Hickson. I had met him as CO of the Convalescent Officer's home at Cap Martin, also in Aldershot in 1913 as CO of the Cambridge Hospital. There were a few other oddments REs, ASC, Prisoner of War Companies, etc, for the general running of the place.*

*These Convalescent Depots were a comparatively new thing. Each consisted of five Divisions of 1000 men with their permanent staff. They were places where a man discharged from hospital - not only the hospitals here - who had not been a serious enough case to send home, were given two weeks or more according to their fitness, of complete holiday.*

*The only compulsory duty was the morning parade, march to the beach for PT exercises and games. In the summer there was bathing as well.*

*In the afternoons, voluntarily, various games: football; hockey; boxing; or a pass into the town, of which there were a proportion allowed each day.*

*No drill, no fatigues, no guard or picket duty. All these were done by the permanent staff. All they had to do was keep their huts tidy, the accommodation being in lines of Nissen huts with stoves, bed boards and straw palliases.*

*The duties of the OC of a Division of the depot were general supervision of his lines, daily examinations of men for fitness to return to their Base depots, arranging games and sports, and teams to play other Companies*

*and other Depots, and keeping up to scratch the fat old NCOs of the permanent staff. Plenty to do and interesting.*

*We had some fine bands: Brass, Drum and Fife, Pipes. The instruments were bought out of funds raised in various ways. The most important one the fat factory where the surplus fat was rendered down and sent away to make glycerine and munitions. There was also a very good orchestra and a concert party. A convalescent arriving at the Depot who was good at this sort of thing was liable to find himself on the permanent staff in some capacity or other.*

*Our most notable artist has turned out to be Bud Flanagan who was quite unknown then, although a comedian by profession, he was gunner, bombardier. I have seen his shows in London several time since and always go behind and have a word with him. The last time was in September 1951 at the Victoria Palace.*

*Chandler supervised the music, being a good musician himself, and Captain Parker the PT man the concert parties. There were seven MOs including the CO, and eight to ten others of various Corps doing censoring PT, adjutant, QM, etc.*

*Our mess stood up on a hill at the top of the Depot, a very fine position with views over the sea towards Harvre, and out sleeping quarters were in huts below it.*

*This of course wasn't war at all, but it was interesting and worth doing. The most difficult thing I found was having to mark men fit to return when the time was up.*

### ***November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918***

*As soon as we had the official news we collected all the buglers in the camp, there were about a dozen, put them on the roof of the dining hall to sound the 'cease fire', and then the cheering started.*

*We were a bit apprehensive as to how the troops would behave. They were all allowed into the town, but none of the officers left camp and as far as I know none of us had a drink all day. However there was no trouble. The*

*orderly sergeants were propping each other up a bit at the 10pm parade, but it was very dark, and as none of them fell down, nothing was said.*

*We had been a bit nervous, as a month or two before there had been a mutiny in the Depot next to us, and a lot of changes had to be made there.*

*As soon as it got dark all the lighthouses and harbour lights about Harvre came on for the first time for years.*

*The CO, Browne, had left us some time before this for a more senior job at GHQ. Lt Col Scott, his successor, went soon after the Armistice, leaving me to command the place with everyone clamouring for demobilisation. There were no new admissions, but it was difficult explaining to 3000 or 4000 men why they couldn't just all get on a train at once and go home. Luckily we could keep the concert parties going by holding back those that didn't mind, and we got up a very good panto in the Deauville Casino theatre round about Christmas time. This amused a lot of them every night. We kept it going as long as possible for that purpose until awkward questions came in as to when so-and-so was going to be demobilised as instructed some weeks before.*

*The numbers in the Depot began to dwindle rapidly until by the time I left, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1919, there were very few left.*

### ***1919 - demobilisation***

*I was demobilised on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1919, leaving the depot the day before and travelling via Harvre and Southampton to London.*

*My personal demobilisation seemed a bit of an anticlimax. Up some dirty wooden steps into a dirty little office near Victoria Station, where I was interviewed by a pimply faced youth in civilian dress who asked a few questions and filled in a form. He would hardly believe me when I said 'four and a half years' to his question about time overseas, until I began to lose my temper, and told him to get on with it. So with a travelling warrant, and food coupons, and permission to wear uniform not longer than a week while civilian outfit was obtained, I finished my active service. I remained an officer in the Special Reserve, finally on retiring from this*

*obtaining the rank of Major in 1928, having held this substantive rank for about five years.*

*I suppose it was everyone's fate, but it struck me that we might have been received a bit differently.*

*I am sorry now when it came to writing this that I did not keep a better diary and continue it thought, also that I did not keep many interesting documents.*

*Chirk, December 1951*