

The Diary of Ronald HARE

The following Preface was written on a loose sheet of paper accompanying the diary, and appears to be addressed to someone unidentified.

Preface

The following account of about 6 weeks in the life of a before & after his in France in 1918 was written six month afterwards by which time I had been demobilized. Thus although it is not based in a diary or notes taken at the time (which were strictly forbidden) it was soon enough after the events to be reasonably accurate of my feeling at the time.

I would do this myself but my eyes are beyond it and if you cannot accept the narrative it would be better to deposit all the documents with the archivist at the Wellcome Institute who will at least preserve them for someone to accept the challenge in the future.

I am however very grateful for your interest & hope that you will agree to my suggestion.

With best wishes
Ronald Hare

FRANCE

August – September 1918

A Diary
by
Ronald Hare

Late 2/25th London Cyclist Batt.

To C.I.F.V.

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Preface

“Now must ye speak to your kinsmen and they must speak to you,
After the use of the English, in straight flung words and few”.

Thus shall I tell my story of happenings while I was in France in August & September 1918. This is not meant to be a connected story but a description of events and impressions as they occurred, my belief being that nothing would be lost and much might be gained by giving these events exactly as they happened. There is no attempt at elaborate portrayal of all the varied scenery, the wonderful colour, the far stretching battlefields & the horror & carnage of modern war.

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Such description must be left to a more facile pen than mine. I was but a unit in a movement, the result of which was to be the downfall of a mighty empire & however small my share was it was the sum of many such shares which brought about the final overthrow of Germany.

At this period England was about to begin that series of sudden and overwhelming victories which startled the world. Jerusalem had been captured & Allenby was about to administer that coup de grâce which made him master of the East; Baghdad had fallen into our hands and Bulgaria was soon to surrender; the German Navy was skulking in harbour, afraid to fight, the last great German onslaught had been held by the British east of Amiens and the advance which began on August 8 was to go on, here a little, there a little, until Germany was brought to

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her knees with the Americans, French and above all, the hated English in command of the Rhine.

It was hard to notice ones surroundings when, by daylight, ones head might be blown off in an attempt, or doubly difficult at night when one was giddy for want of sleep and fully employed with ones pack. Besides, what profit was there when life might be taken away at any moment. I was not sure even where I was wounded. I thought at the time it was Gouzeaucourt but later research has shown it to be Epeby. I do not yet know where the field ambulance and C.C.S. were.

The Somme battlefields were rolling uplands bleak and drear with few trees and never a stream. There was only a sprinkling of soil which became as slippery and treacherous as ice when wet. The trenches we dug were pure white with the chalk and the debris

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could be seen a long way off if not carefully covered. The villages, or what was left of them were ghastly witness of the intensity and thoroughness of modern war. The ground was pock marked with shell holes, littered with wires, old equipment, old eighteen pounder shells and cartridge cases, and all the flotsam and jetsam left by an army after an advance, and covering everything the dust and the dirt. The fields had not been tilled and the plough had grown all manner of weeds and rank grasses which concealed the furrows and made walking even dangerous. The trenches were everywhere, from the line hastily of scratched holes to the big defensive line built with weeks of patient labour to withstand the bitterest onslaughts.

The men who had made this possible were wonderfull. They grumbled, they were unpolished but they could fight. It needs courage to stay in a trench

pg.5

which you know Jerry is trying to hit; it needs courage to advance against machine guns or go into a trench at night which you know will be enfiladed by machine guns when daylight comes yet these men did it every day of their fighting lives.

The weight we had to carry would make the ordinary person gasp. It was not only the carrying of it but the country was so difficult, wire lying about, shell holes everywhere, trenches, and old ploughed land, and covering everything the thick black darkness when most of our moves were made. Added to the weight of our ordinary equipment was almost invariably a shovel, one or two panniers of Lewis Gun ammunition and one or two petrol tins. To carry this in the dark over such rough country was possible only to well trained men and five miles felt like twenty. We were so

pg.6

tired at times that we almost slept as we marched. The first time I went into the line I got no sleep for 80 hours. But the thing which caused us more trouble than anything else was hunger. Shells came and were gone, equipment might be taken off but the pangs of hunger never left us. They kept us awake and we thought of nothing else but food. I never knew until I had to do without what a debt we owe to tea. To eat ones breakfast after a night of vigil with only a mouthful of cold water was not the ideal beginning for a hard day. Then it was that the rum came round and we certainly had cause to bless Backhus and all his works.

But for all the hardships, for all the cold and the hunger and the peril; the life had its compensations. It was something to have seen the eastern heaven lit up with the Veréy lights and shell bursts, to have heard the rattle of the

pg.7

machine guns, the roar of the guns and scream of the shells; to have stood on the Somme uplands and watched the barrage in the distance, the red glare of the burning ammunition dumps or another time to have watched the German signal lights go up at regular intervals into the quiet heavens; to have seen a valley which three days before had been in Jerry's hands, twinkling with lights like one of our great cities; to have seen the eastern heaven reddening with the first tinge of dawn; to have felt the wind that comes before dawn; and the sun rise in all his splendour, this was the time when the guns were silent as if ashamed to desecrate the birth of Apollo.

But however hopeless things seemed at times, however much we felt baffled and beaten, none of us, even the most uneducated and unpoetic ever lost hope. We all believed that

pg.8

Jerry would ultimately be beaten and although many might fall we knew that in the end.

“By the bones about the wayside, ye shall come to your own!”

pg.9

5 August

Bank Holiday. Went home and got back at night.

6 August

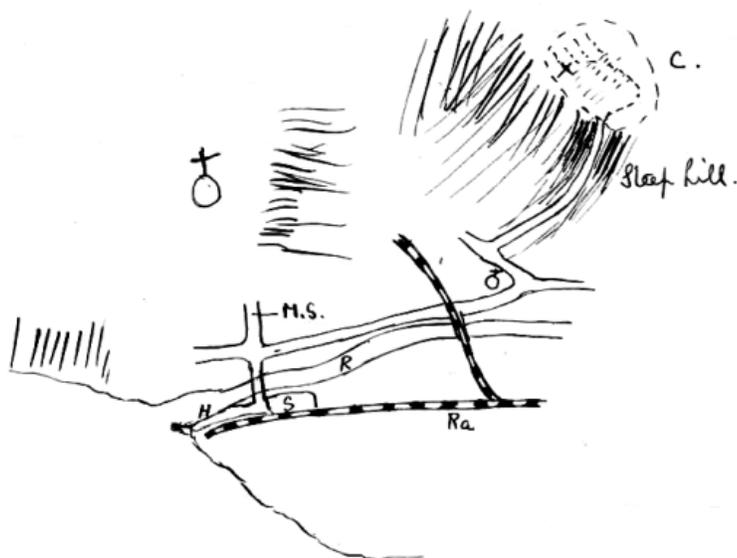
Inspected by Brigadier and left at 9pm. Passed through Waterloo at 11pm. Entrained at Waterloo Junction and arrived at Folkstone about daybreak having passed through Chatham and Canterbury. Spent morning in empty houses at Folkstone. Good food and YMCA, best I've seen. Read “Reports by British Association”. Gravelly beach and sea fairly calm. People bathing. Saw “Blimp” ship with Canadians on board went off in morning. Paraded about 1pm and went on board ship at once. Paddle vessel. People buying pies but most were thrown overboard. Tea out of old tins. Everybody had a lifebelt. Boom across harbour mouth. Saw Pullman cars. Notices

in harbour in French as well as English. There did not seem much activity but very lazy, not what one would have expected.



Two boats in convoy, other a screw steamer, both camouflaged. Two destroyers & one Blimp. Two destroyers started on Port side & one crossed our bows creating a wash which struck paddle wheel and soused those who were just above. Got very wet but dried. Sunny but breezy. Very calm. Big engines. Two hours over journey. Other ship passed us later. Went into Boulogne Harbour backwards. Took a very long time to get in. Not a very good harbour. Hotels appeared very plain, more like boxes. Typically French White Cliffs & desolate hinterland. No hedges. Very dreary looking. Great number of Red Cross cars other side of harbour. Railway along jetty. Mainly

used for goods seemly. Quite a wide river through town.



- H = Harbour jetty
- Ra = Railway
- S = Station
- M.S. = Main Street
- R = River (Wide)
- C = Camp.
- + = Gun tent
- ♁ = Cathedral with ugly dome.

Passed along street marked. Military police carried revolvers. Lots of soldiers standing about. Very dirty streets. English papers on sale, 2d. each. People filthy. Very rickety cars, made an awful noise. Passed up very steep hill to camp at top. Women ran along behind us offering bottles of beer for sale. Suspicious looking stuff. All the houses seemed to sell it though. All houses were dirty and of a particular architecture. Badly in need of paint.

Rest camp with camouflaged tents. Eight to a tent. Was in with the Welshmen. Very jolly. Three blankets very "chatty" and dirty each. Tent very wobbly and leaky. Fine view from hill across town and out to sea. Inland typical down country very desolate and uninteresting. No hedges. Constant noise of sirens from harbour etc. Rations of tea served out. Some Canadians & Maories near us.

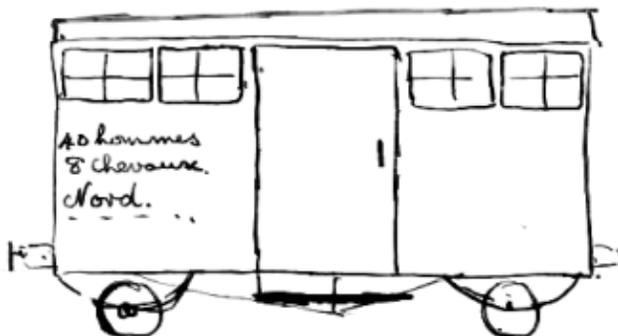
Posted a field card but forgot to address it so did not go off. E.F. Canteens alright. Baccy very cheap indeed. Also chocolate. Had a supper of herrings also very cheap. No comfort though. Went to bed early but had trouble with bedfellows who kicked too much. Legs out of door nearly all night. Rather cold.

8 August

Revielle about 6. Blankets given in. Just missed fatigues. Rations issued early, mainly biscuits and bully. Drizzled in morning. Maories grumbled all the time. YMCA washout, only biscuits and

pg.13

tea at 12pm. Week old papers. Rather pretty outside though. Window boxes of cork and arches. Flower beds in lawn. Chains hanging from
Paraded about 2pm and whole lot
1,000 moved off to station. Very
Entrained 40 in a carriage.
much resembled cattle trucks with
and windows. Very tight fit
equipment which took up so much
could be hung up however.



white posts.
of us, about
disorderly.
Carriages
sliding doors
because of
room. A lot

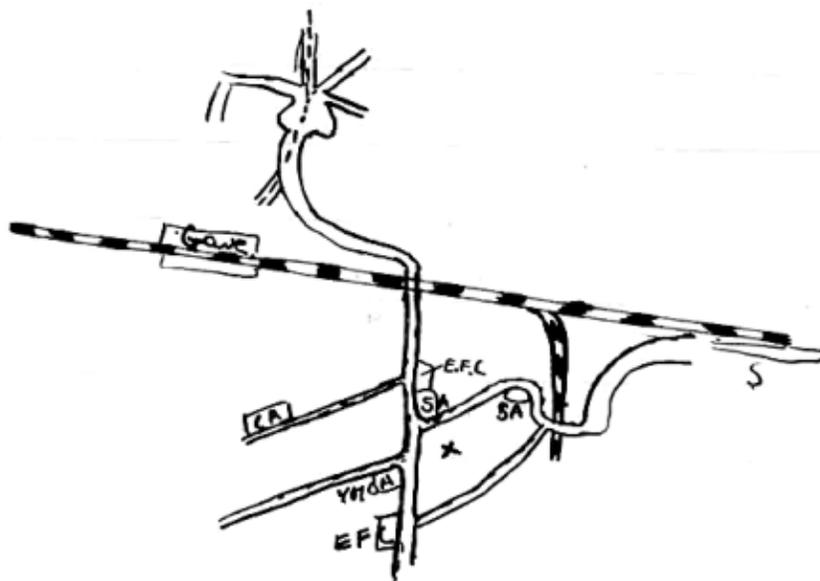
Hospital train (French) on other platform. Same sort of carriages top. Much cleaner. One orderly to

side of
but holes at
each waggon.

Red Cross painted on roof. Journey to Etaples very slow. Kept stopping. Passed a huge dump surrounded by barbed wire fences. Engines worked by R.O.D. [*Railway Operating Division (ROD) of the British Army during WW1*] Ordinary English ones standard pattern painted black with R.O.D. on and number and

pg.14

worked by Royal Engineers.
chalky country but some very
pretty. English looking bits in
between. Lots of chalk being
quarried. Lots of rest camps
along line. Cemetery just
before Etaples with a notice
French) to engine drivers not
whistle so as not to disturb
dead. Etaples about 5pm.
Some Scots arrived just
before us & marked up camp.
Camp all round railway.
Tents. Huge no. of troops.
Could not judge but many
thousands. Very very dusty,
sandy dust all over. 15 to a
with floor sunk 2ft below
ground. Very warm but filthy. Two Salvation Army huts very very uncomfortable but good food 2 eggs & chips 1 franc. Church Army but rather nice, plenty of biscuits etc. A cinema seemed to do very good trade. Scots of all sorts of regts in kilts near us. Scotch sergeant looked after us. Proper Scotsman.



Very

etc.

(in
to
the

thick
tent

pg. 15

1 blanket apiece, not very warm and filthy dirty. Went to bed very cramped.

9 August

Cold in morning. Difficult to get water to wash much less a bowl. Very broad Scotsmen in the kilties. Had nothing to do all day, very hot. Dust terrible got everywhere. Had to be ready to move off if necessary. Trenches all over in case of air raids which were very terrible here. Important railway centre as Amiens route was blocked & only route to Paris. A train every minute in direction or another. Tents tents everywhere. Saw a steam roller with Barnard Castle on it. Syrens all the time from railway.

pg.16

Could just see the sea. Waacs [*Women's Auxiliary Army Corp*] and nurses in great numbers, former with white & blue bands round arm – signallers. Scots went off early in morning, did hear that had been doing labour duties and were to be sent back to trenches for killing 6 military policemen. Had our meals in a dining hall and had to wait our turns, nothing of any note about food. Heard at night that we would not go so most of them went down to town. Some more drafts came and amongst others the 9th London. Saw all the old boys again. Had supper of two eggs in Salvation Army hut. Advised to get biscuits for journey to Le Havre. Sent a letter off, my first since landing.

10 August

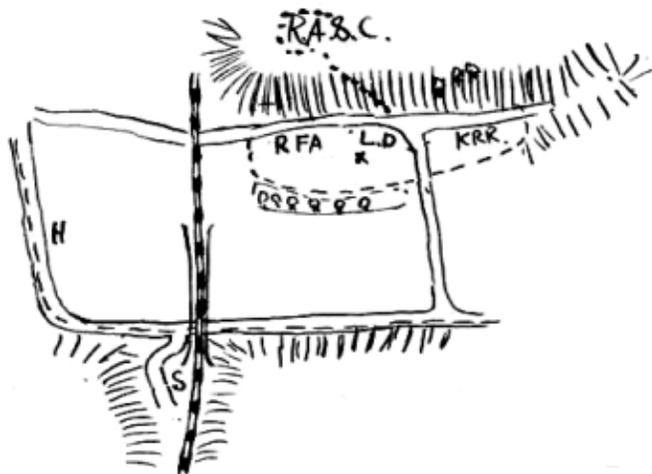
Put on fatigue in morning, Sergeants Mess Had to go down to town with cart. Very dirty and slovenly place. Market place very unhealthy. Filthy trams, dirty shops. Women got days ration of bread from bakers. Had to go in one

pg.17

at a time for it. Big flat loaves. Lots of houses blown down by raids. All inhabitants had wind up at night and many went on to sea shore. It was so fine. Captive balloons went up at sunset but Jerry never came. Got some vegetables at very nasty place and then called at a bottling place for some brew. Very watery stuff in bottles with tin tops. Filled by a funny sort of machine. Girls washing bottles in very filthy water. Altogether very unsanitary. After dinner told that we were leaving that night. Rations issued in afternoon. Paraded after tea with many others including 9th London. Entrained about 6pm. Jerry aeroplane came over and guns fired at him. No bombs dropped though. Got to Abbe'ville about sunset. Very important place. Lot of officers back from leave got on board here. Passed near Amiens. Saw

pg.18

flashes of guns in distance and aeroplane brought down. Were very near firing line, but did not know at time.



11 August

Risen about daybreak. Very pretty place in hills. Lots of tunnels etc. Lovely day and valley of Seine looked lovely. Passed through an entrancingly pretty place on other side called

Malauney. Long wait at Rouen. Slept all morning. Got to Harfleur about 3pm. One of the prettiest places in France. Lovely wooded valleys.

Lots of troops etc. walking about being Sunday afternoon. Got to base camp, feeling very tired. Lovely huts and tents all covered with creepers which were in flower and looked awfully pretty. Gardens all over which were filled with vegetables. Big YMCA very pretty with flowers etc. Prettiest camp

pg.19

and tidiest I've ever seen. Overshadowed by steep wooded hill. All sorts of huts, 2 YMCA's with all conveniences. Catholic, Wesleyan, Salvation Army and EF Canteens all over. Nothing to eat but biscuits, cakes and tomatoes. Had tea in big hall. 15 in a tent and very cramped.

August 12

Paraded for inspection in morning and went up hill to have respirators tested. Passed through R.F.A.. [*Royal Field Artillery*] training ground (very neat & tidy). Very hard work with gas people. Tried to put wind up us. Dinner was fine, plenty of vegetables etc. Nothing in afternoon. Waacs did most of the cooking.

13 August

Paraded in morn and half were taken away to join 3rd London (wind up!). rest of us went with rifles and shot on miniature range under London Scottish C.S.M. [*Company Sergeant-Major*] Had a grand lazy time on grass all morning. Fine dinner again. Lecture by M.O. [*Medical Officer*] in afternoon. Q.V.R.'s [*Queen Victoria's Rifles*] and 3rd London warned for draft

pg.20

(more wind up!). Some went to Le Havre in evening and came back with lurid stories of Rue de Gallienes. A policeman of every nationality at either end of it. Read in Church hut. Washed some clothes and dried them in no time in the hot sun. Had a bath at night. Sort of vapour bath like a Turkish. Not particularly nice although takes dirt off. Wesleyan hut seemed nicest. Nothing much to eat however. Very hot day. In evening were put on to fire and air raid picquet about dusk. Had to stand to in trenches with ammunition. Nobody knows why. Waterproof capes were issued here.

14 August

Drilled etc. with London Scottish C.S.M. while 3rd London & Q.V.R. Got ready to go in afternoon. After dinner carted sandbags about under C.S.M. Mead. Hard work and very hot. Q.V.R.'s getting wind up about going. They left about 3.30pm in great state complete with band. Just before

pg.21

being paid were warned to leave next evening (wind up!!!). Got pay and fags. Got pass and went off to Le Havre about 5pm. Very hot. Train very dirty and uncomfortable. Lot of Aussies inside. 2d. to Le Havre. One car pulling another. Passed through Harfleur, filthy, dirty place. Soon got to the town. Seemed very dingy especially near river. Spent a long time getting a new watch glass and protector. Spoken French very useful. Had tea in a so-called American place. Frenchwoman in charge. Knew no English at all. Got back fairly early, awful crush on car. Went of fire and air raid picquet again, awful nuisance. Hauled at in middle of night as there was a supposed raid on Rouen. Soon got back to bed though.

15 August

Blankets etc. given in morning. Kit inspection and ammunition issued with instructions how to pack it. M.O.'s inspection in afternoon. Another

pg.22

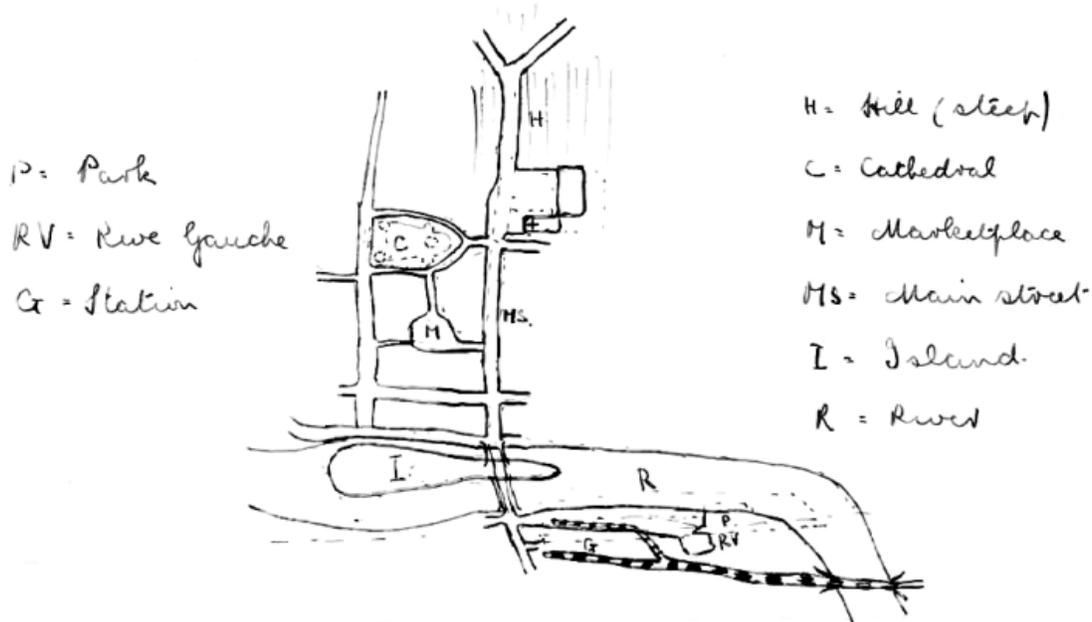
inspection in afternoon. Rations issued, not very much for us. Paraded about 7pm (wind up!!!!). Foster & Wright left behind for treatment. Marched to Le Havre station. Very long way along by docks. Funny looking Belgian sentries. Tow sergeants and Q.V.R officer in charge of us. Stopped in shed at station. E.F.C. [*Expeditionary Force Canteens*] along the way. Had to wait long time in queue before being served. Not much then, biscuits, chocolate and lemonade. Lots of A.S.C. [*Army Service Corp*] blokes about. Air raid reported, all lights out. Great wind up. A.A. guns started but nothing much doing. Given places in train. Several R.B. blokes coming with us. regulars most of them. Started about 11-12pm. Very tired & very squashed. Did not get much sleep.

16 August

Train very slow just after daybreak. Had a wash at an engine in siding, warm water. Made tea a good deal with hot water from engine just behind. Somebody sold somebody else's knife

pg.23

to a French soldier. Dirty looking beggar. Passed Malaunay again in misty morning. Stepped on bridge across river at Rouen a long time. A train stopped a long time beside us. Most of trucks were sealed. Stopped finally at goods station in Rouen. Not very pleasant. All sheds alongside. Marched out of station along river bank to Rive Gauche, a rest shelter where we were to stay the day. Passed ambulance train XV.



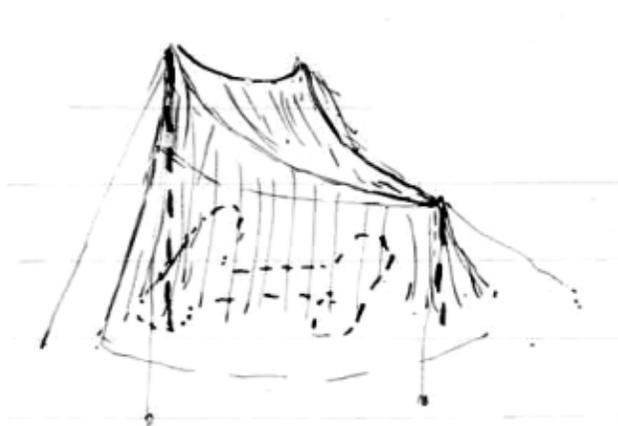
pg.24

Lots of Aussies about. Meals given by E.F.C. Rather decent, eaten in Church Army canteen. All sorts of things to buy and eat. Wandered about on river bank in morning. Not much doing. Went into town in afternoon. Wandered about, saw cathedral, not much but spire very fine. Saw Palais de Justice and walked up hill. Nothing at top except a statue & a school. Bought a medal in a little shop near cathedral. Got some views as well. Market a blaze of colour. Nothing to buy much though quite a clean town, the cleanest I've seen. Some houses damaged by air raids. Barges on river, seemed very swift. Aussies giving away all spare tackle, very wasteful. Paraded about 9.30 and went off to train. Three days rations were carried by some of us, complimented on quick turn out. Went off almost at once. Slept fairly well. Lots of soldiers about on stations passed through.

pg.25

Passed numerous camps etc. Stopped at Canaples – rail head. Some had been left behind in a carriage which had been detached, great wind up. Went to corps headquarters. Lots of men going on leave. Village almost deserted. Rations issued in corps headquarters. Washing and drinking water at a little brook. Proper war zone. Lots of transport along roads. Paraded in a short time and marched almost 3 miles to another village at rail head and terminus of light railway to Albert. Funny petrol engines, armour plated. Now on a windy plateau. Tea provided at a kitchen near by. About 4pm boarded trains of low trucks which had been carrying lime and were very white. Passed an aerodrome where they were stunting. Funny tents used as hangers, all camouflaged. Very high ground this

pg.26



Got out at a station far away from anywhere in the midst of a very productive country. Roads very dusty. Lots of chalk about. Marched for a long way through this country. Very desolate. Passed a few farmers but very few people about. After about 7 or 8 miles got into a long straggling village and then just as it was almost dark passed into Mirvaux. Were met by the fellows from the 3rd and 9th London Pandermonium. Went down street and were billeted in an old shed. Very dirty, lots of holes in the walls and might tumble down with any more. Too tired to do much but tried to find some

pg.27

water to wash in. Came across some in tanks, drinking water, but pinched some. Lots of houses lit up, inhabitants evidently. Very draughty in the aforementioned barn as there were more holes in the wall.
18 August

Y = Y.M. C.A

Wa = Water tanks R.E

W = drinking water

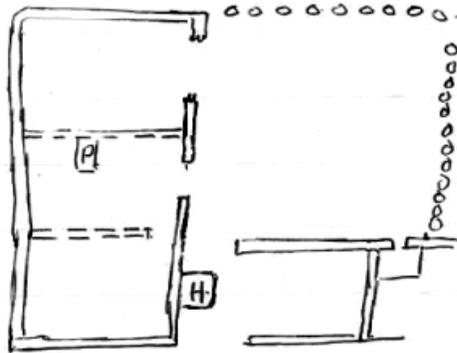
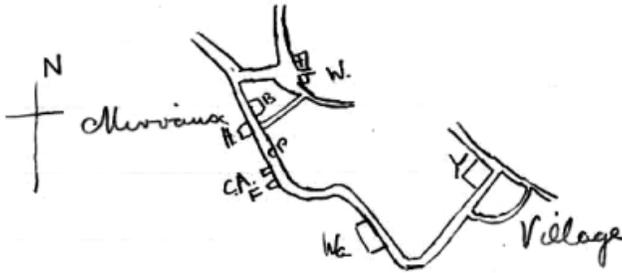
B = Barn.

H = Headquarters

P = Well.

C.A. = Church Army Hut

F = House selling
butter etc



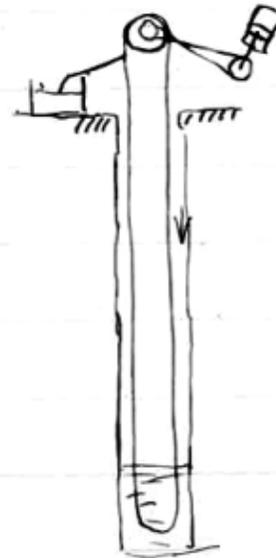
P = My place.

H = Hole to cellar.

Road

pg.28

When up in morning found that there was a well just up the with tins for washing. Served quite a lot of inhabitants, many damaged by shells. Germans were here in 194 never later. to be carried here as it was 20 miles from the line. Very village, lovely day. Did not go on Church parade. Other units water raised from well by a queer arrangement. Endless band engine which brings water up in its pores. Funny little growing on floor. Went to Church Army place. Double tent, Week old newspapers, nothing to eat. Apples on trees which stewing. No sugar though, rather rotten. Bought some



road complete
houses badly
Gas masks had
pretty little
did. Drinking
revolved by
church, grass
very cool.
some were

pg.29

butter at a house about 4f. a lb. Very nice however. Walked to next village in evening. People harvesting in fields. Saw one of our aeroplanes which had come down being dismantled. All inhabitants have to carry a pass which they must produce at every cross road. Went to YMCA. Nothing but biscuits and lemonade. Better than nothing. In a tent. Talked to a Yank. Wrote home. Went to American YMCA for chocolate but just sold out. Walked along fields. Crucifix on path made of bent iron. Very ugly. Went to bed early. Guns very at night especially A.A.'s. Big stunt on.

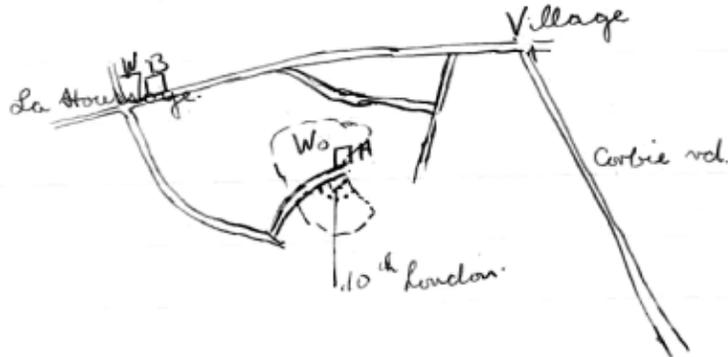
19 August

Had to stand to in morning. First London went off to line. Emergency rations issued. Moved off after dinner. Marched a very long way, over 7 miles to La Houssaye. Men living

pg.30

in dug outs. MP's all over. Shell holes and bivies everywhere. Proper war zone. D.P.'s moving on motor bikes. A.S.C. lorries on main roads. Very devastated and dusty. Trenches and barbed wire about.

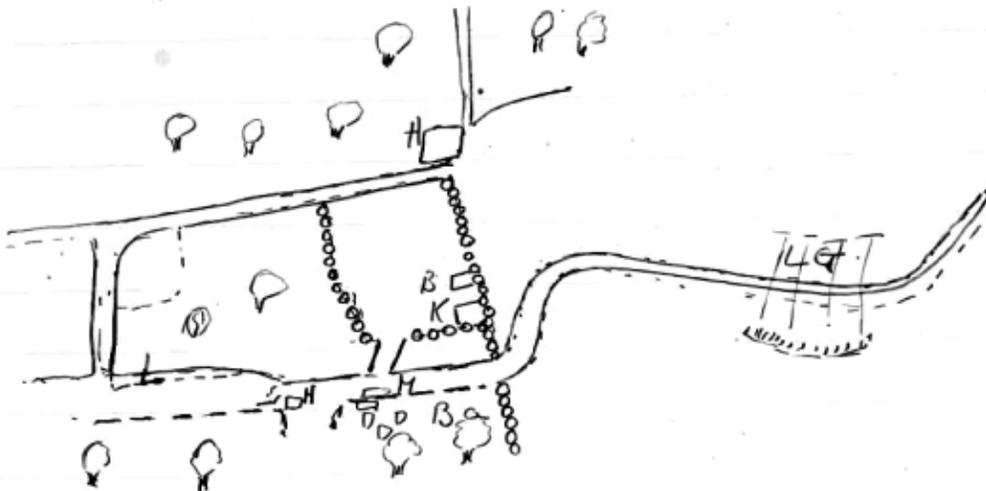
Passed La Houssoye and got in to road marked. Passed along road in wood and got to 10th London HQ. Colonel cussed at us. Doctor found one or two had measles so were isolated. Taken to a separate part of wood and two of us made a bivia between us



W = Water troughs.
B = Bath house.

Wo = Wood.
H = Ruined house

pg.31



L = Lawn. H = Bath-HQ
M = Officers mess K = kitchen
B = bivie LG = Lewis gun range
Ba = Butt lines

Bivia open in front. Very draughty and had to be careful not to roll into ditch. Not much on top. Rotten if raining. Quite a lot of others isolated. Appeared very dirty. Transfers from R.B. Gave us some potted meat for tea. Very welcome. I was detailed to C Coy

pg.32

Hope they are alright. Regimental canteen but nothing to eat only soap. C Coy sergeant major a beast, got a bandage round his head as somebody had hit him on the head when last up the line. The battalion was very badly cut up when last in the line and had had to retreat. (Thought British Army never did). Nothing much doing, went to bed early as was very tired. Gun flashes in sky from line not more than about 7 miles away.

20 August

Went on parade. M.O.'s inspection, drilled all morning. R.S.M. took us a route march. Rather a nice bloke. Nothing much on in afternoon. Canteen open so got some tinned milk and sardines. Almost broke. Letters came at night, none for me. Big gun kept going off all day. Made an awful noise. Heard machine

pg.33

guns up in sky and saw shrapnel bursting, Jerry aeroplane. Very hot day. Barrage going on all night, awful noise. Jerry aeroplane over after dark, wind up.

21 August

Had drill in morning teaching R.B. blokes to do drill. Had lecture from major, "anybody got gassed deserved a court martial". Some went to baths in morning. We went after dinner, old farmhouse at La Houssoye. Spray of warm water from holes in pipes. Looked after by R.A.M.C. Had clean clothes issued but no towels. Got back for tea. Paid in evening. Finished the condensed milk, fine. Wrote home but don't suppose will ever reach there. About 7pm wind up. Told to get ready to move to line. Great enormous excitement. Hauled on parade with everything. Told how to make up battle order à la ligne

pg.34

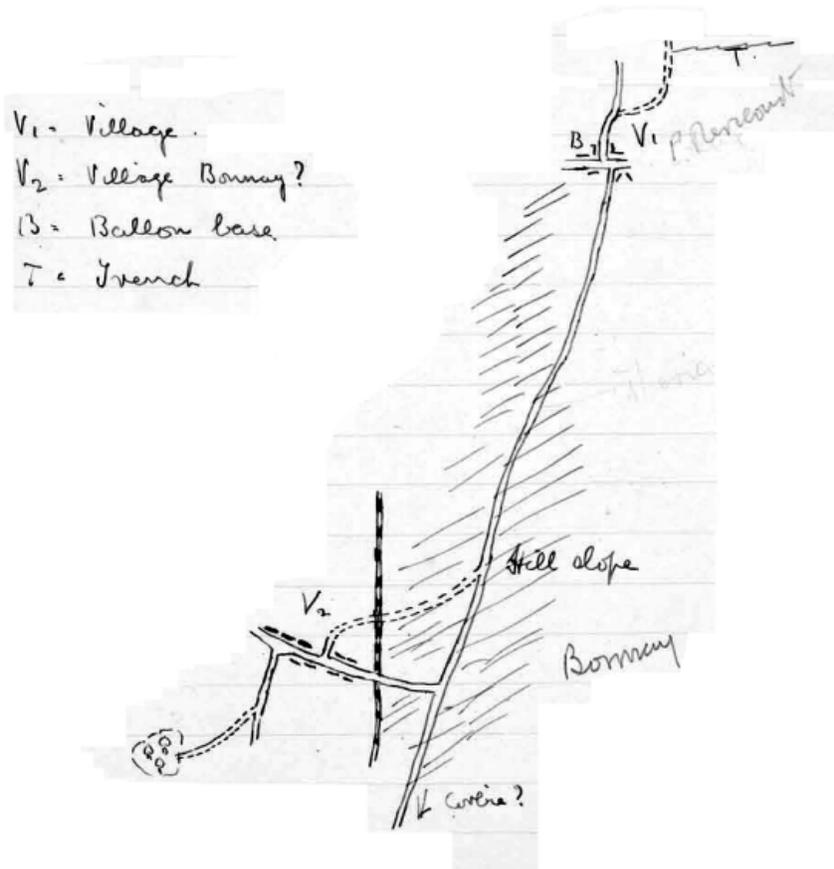
Put spare things in pack which was stored in quartermasters store in ruined house. Like a fool left "Alls Well" and a towel in ditch, thought we might return but never did. All isolation stopped and mixed with rest of battalion. Thought we were safe for a week or two. Detailed to No. 9 platoon. Supposed to be best in the battalion. Rifleman officer's mess very commodious. Wooden shed. Two bands, drum and fife, and brass. Took turns in marching up and down playing. Awful noise. Told to be ready to parade at 4.30am in morning. Went back to bivies. Wind up dreadful especially the kids who had never been in line before.

22 August

Paraded before light, rations issued and moved off with both bands, 100 yards between companies. Went to next

pg.35

village, don't know its name. Saw Red Cross lorries. Village very badly battered. Most houses falling down. Dust dreadful. Lots of troops about and sleeping in fields.



Morlancourt position Aug 22.

pg.36

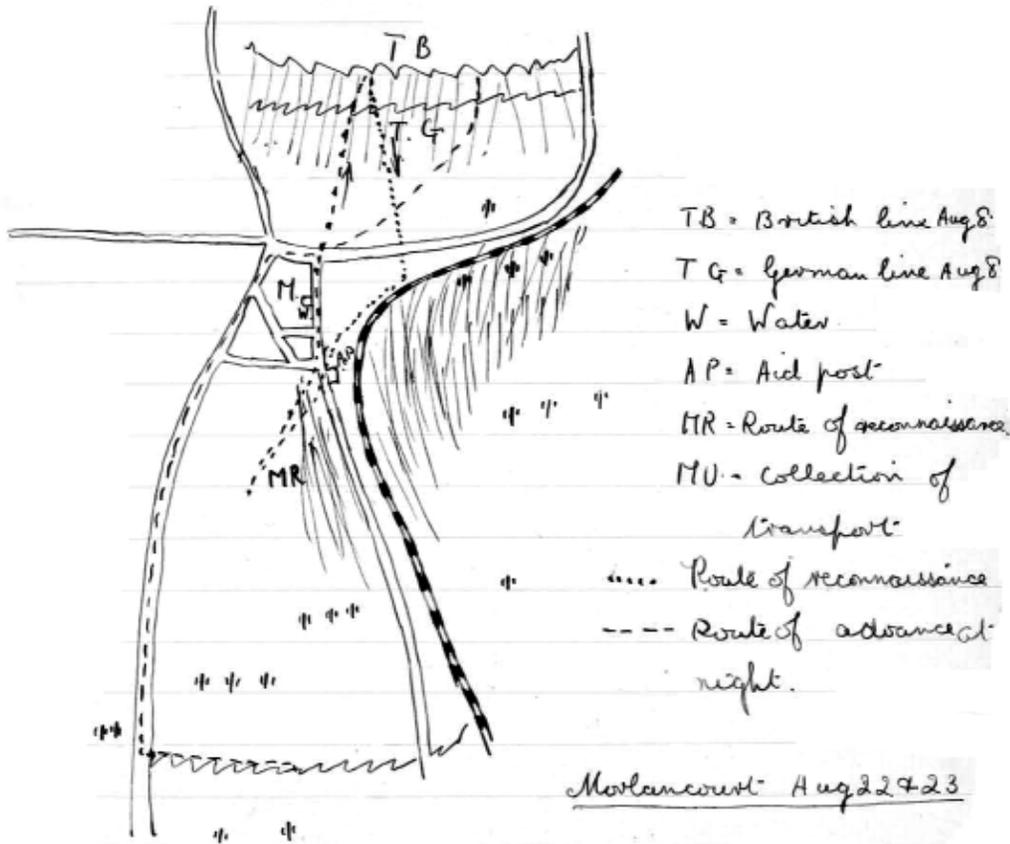
Passed along main road to next village about 5 miles. Many guns on sides of road some of which were firing country very desolated indeed. Bits of wood, barbed wire shell holes and things all over. Guns camouflaged with nets and green cloth. Next village very badly shattered. Notices all over, "Waiter here" "Walking wounded" "Prisoners" etc. Chaps fainting all over now, very hot. Rested in street. Guns going off in village, 9 heavies, awful noise. Several went off while passing them, shock dreadful. Nearly turned one inside out. Passed out into country beyond village. Many wounded coming along, report all quiet, doesn't seem like it with all those guns going off. They went over in the morning and were quite successful. Dirt dreadful. Passed off road into a sunken one. Here Lewis guns and

pg. 37

ammunition served out. Brigadier came past on horse. Went on with ammunition and Lewis guns etc. Shells began to come over as he had seen us with captive balloons. Nothing doing however. Passed along trench where advance had begun, very ordinary one and took up position overlooking Morlancourt. Foot very sore and blistered. Mouldy boots. Detailed to act as Mr Finlayson's runner so had to go out with him after a bit. We were then in Corps Reserve, the front line being about 5 miles away. Had to reconnoitre in Morlancourt. Passed along route marked in map. Saw a lot of wounded being brought in by prisoners. Village in a dreadful state. Hardly a house standing. R.E.'s repairing railway. Many guns about also A.A. guns. Despatch riders continually on the move.

pg.38

Water very scarce and weather very hot.



Aid post on road complete with Ford ambulances. Returned to trench. Passed a supply truck going up and down

pg.39

hill. Jerry shelling road out to right with great oblique 9" shells. Noise dreadful. Could just see Albert away to left and could see the smoke of gun which was chucking shells over. Uncanny. Shelling a collection of horsed transport on hill to right. Made them run. Very much like a drink of tea. Water very short. Heat and dust awful. About 5pm started to chuck mud at us. Shells burst on all sides but no damage to speak of. Wind up dreadful. Rations issued after dark. Not much and very unappetising especially the cold suet pudding and potatoes. Very little bread. May get some jam if the other bloke remembers. Little water issued. Cold tea tasted dreadful through CaOCl_2 in solution. [Calcium hypochlorite is a chemical compound with formula $\text{Ca}(\text{ClO})_2$. It is widely used for water treatment] About 10pm moved off down hill to Morlancourt. Wind up as Jerry was up and also a bright moon. Great

pg.40

howitzer in valley making an awful noise at intervals. Followed Mr Finlayson about. Very tiring. Halted as Jerry overhead got suspicious. Turned his machine gun on us. Wind up dreadful but no casualties. Passed through village looking very ghostly in moonlight. MP's standing about. Passed along road. Badly shelled. Dead horses lying about. Smell dreadful. Men in labour Coys sleeping in holes in the roadside. Seemed fast asleep. Fair amount of horse transport about. Suddenly stopped at entrance to a trench. Horse standing near. Great excitement amongst the heads. Some R.A. men told us to remove horse as battery nearby was going to fire four rounds. Much ado about nothing. Passed along trench and finally came to a halt. Men of London Irish 47 division standing

pg.41

about. 58 division relieved them. They had dug it. Told us that we might expect some bumping cheerful news. That battery started firing. Noise terrific and concussion awful. Had a good long drink out of one of their tins. Much refreshed. Dog tired and was able to sleep for a bit in a hole. Began to get cold.

23 August

Later on at 5am barrage started. Noise magnificent and red light of distant fires was fine. Did ones heart good. Had to shout to be heard. Started to the minute and kept up for about an hour. One of the most wonderful sights I've ever seen. The position in front had been taken by London troops some days before but had been lost. The Australians were then attacking and were able to hang on. We were still in reserve a fair way behind the line. About daybreak he bombarded us for about an hour but no particular damage

pg.42

was done. Lots of machine gun guards in trench. They had cooks etc. and had hot meals. Lucky beggars. Slept a bit in morning. Had a thorough wash and brush up and felt much better. Shells kept coming over especially 9" ones obliquely in front. Awful noise. Some burst near and thought there as gas in them. Had to rush round and wake some of them up and make them put masks on. About 5pm some went down to Morlancourt to get water so followed them. Passed big guns and RE signals. Had a struggle to find water. Got some at last in an old house. Seemed the sort of collection of rain water underground, had to tie bottles to a bit of string. Got it filled though and hurried back. At night fall were told by officers of intended stunt that night. Everybody very glum. It appears that 9th London etc. were to attack at 2am along the railway

pg.43

line and capture Happy Valley and take up position on hill beyond. They were to advance behind barrage and we were to dig in, in support in a new position just about where they kicked off. Jerry's barrage might fall on us or might not. We had to lie low and might get away with our lives. Very cheerful outlook. Told to rest. Some of men from R.B. who had been in transport got wind up and said that they had never been trained to attack. The officers told them off allright though. About 11pm detailed to get rations. Went along trench to road. R.S.M. very bossy. Lots of traffic on road. Our limbers had lot of stuff and also shovels. Had to make two journeys. Two petrol tins very heavy especially with a rifle slung on the back. Rations issued, also a shovel each and buckshee ammunition. Both yesterday

pg.44

and today was unable to eat anything mainly from fright and shock. No ill effects so far though. Stood to.

24 August

Moved off about 12am in direction away from Morlancourt along a path and generally parallel with the railway. Had to make as little noise as possible. After some time ran into railway line and followed it along. No firing hardly at all. Only a few machine guns and verey lights on flanks.

[Very / Vary / Verey Lights, named after their inventor, the American Edward Very.

Sometimes coloured flares used for signalling emergencies, but more often to provide illumination in trench warfare at night in the form of brilliant white flares. They were not used to help one's own side, but rather to see if the enemy were out in No Man's Land, either working (wiring, digging etc.) or patrolling, on a raid etc. When the Germans or British had their own patrols or working parties out, they did not use Very lights anywhere near them. The lights did not burn for very long, unlike the German parachute flares. The best

defence was to stand stock still until the flare went out, hoping it didn't fall at your feet. Movement while the flare burnt was easily spotted and immediately attracted enemy rifle or machine-gun fire.]

Passed large numbers of men dug in along line and in trenches. Asked for Q.V.R.'s [*Queen Victoria's Rifles*] and whether they had got going. Told they would be getting it hot if they did not get moving soon. Lot of machine gunners about. Halted for a bit. 9th London came through us and went beyond towards enemy. Told us we were about our front line. Immediate wind up. Spoke to Howells. Seemed very cheery.

pg.45

Stranded tank across railway. Very bogey. Went forward with officers (Mr Finlayson, Capt. Sturton, Major and machine gun officer) along left of line to reconnoitre. Never knew we were so near Jerry. Verey light went up and although we ducked he had seen us as machine gun bullets began to hum. Had to crawl to railway and followed it back. Deployed on left of railway near tank and began digging. Platoon in front and sergeant officer and I behind in a little trench to ourselves. Coy headquarters behind. Just begun when another officer came up and said he was supposed to be in support on our left and that he had found a trench in front for his men. He said we ought to go further forward beside him. Officer and I went on. Passed one of our tanks moving slowly making no noise. Found a trench about 200 yards

pg.46

in front with his men in it. Officer (ours) said it was alright but he would rather not move so we came back. Then found it was 1.45am and barrage opened up at 2pm so we had to dig like mad. Had to share my entrenching tool for use as a pick. Ground awfully hard. Others were dug in properly by now. Barrage opened with a roar at 2am. Whole line was going over. Two of our coys were in support to Q.V.R.'s right on ahead. Had just got down about 18 inches and very narrow when his counter barrage opened. It was in two lines about 100 yards behind so that we were in between. Had to keep ducking to get out of danger. Dug like mad. Shells kept dropping short and bursting near us. After about 15 min the Major came over and said that there was a pocket of Boche away to the left. We had therefore to

pg.47

all get out of trench and run out to left between the barrage. We came to some Q.V.R.'s who were looking for an aid post as they had some badly wounded. Machine guns going very hard now on both sides. Swore at them a bit and doubled back. On way shell burst about 3 yards away and chucked myself on ground. Felt very dazed for a bit but no worse. Got back to trench and got dug properly in. Sent a message back to Battalion H.Q. in a quarry about 200 yards to rear. Had to go out to right between barrage and then double back. Got into quarry where there was a large collection of Jerry prisoners and wounded. Had rather a struggle to find B.H.Q. as Q.V.R.'s were also there. Found it at last in a deep dug out with lights all about. QVR's reported good progress in front. Got back

pg.48

to trench safely. By this time it was beginning to get light and barrage died away gradually. By this time was too tired to do anything. Had to pick grass to camouflage trench but could not stand to do it was so fagged so had to sit and do it. When quite light two tanks of ours came along and started machine gun firing. Great 9" came over against them making a dreadful noise and putting wind up everybody. After a bit some of our platoon began to gather up their things to run away. Officer got wind up and wanted to know what was matter. They said that there were two Jerry tanks away over to our left across the flat country. Chaps started to run away. Lewis gun ordered to be trained in that direction and everybody began to prepare for action. Tank near us also got wind up

pg.52

Went up opposite side of valley. Very steep but out of fire. RE signals at work with wireless with square metal aerial. Got up to top and stopped for a bit lying down because of sniper. Came to road and had to double across it hard as machine gun was going at us very hard. Had to walk down that road bent because of sniper in front. Q.V.R's on left, Rangers and us on right. Dead horses lying about, smell awful. Had to dig in ditch a good way along road. Was so tired that could hardly dig at all. Got a few minutes sleep in afternoon, was so dog tired although heavy shells were dropping just beyond and making an awful noise. Men kept coming up, machine gunners etc. Some men were taken away for S.B.'s [*Siege batteries?*] Later in afternoon had to move down road to about ¼ mile from cross roads at bottom of hill. Good view on right.

pg .53

Had to dig in again. White pure chalk. Dreadful stuff. Some Aussies came in from in front. Aussies were in position along road at bottom of hill tonight. No sniping much here. Less shelling also. About this time told that we were to go over again that night behind a creeping barrage. Fusiliers were to be in support just behind us. Got a bit more rest until dark but could not sleep. Put on guard soon after nightfall. Rotten job. Could not see much. We had had a rotten time along this road all day. Shelled continuously both with heavies and schrapnel which is a most dreadful form of torture, and harassed by Jerry aeroplanes. Rations issued and had a big drink of rum. Buckshee rations but could not eat much. The rum put new life into me and also made me very unsteady and

pg.54

very jolly indeed. Wanted to sing etc.

25 August

About 1am moved up road and awaited opening of barrage at 2.30am. Shelling and sniping has stopped so were able to walk about a bit. Barrage opened up with usual roar about 3am and we went forward. We had absolutely no opposition and never saw a Hun. After a bit got into our own barrage through walking too fast so had to wait in a ditch beside a road. Great pieces were whizzing all round and it was a miracle there were no casualties. Got on after a bit when one of our guns was firing short. Quite a lot were wounded by it. One in the shoulder by a nose cap making an awful noise as it whizzed. Went on about 5 miles up and down hill. Don't know direction or where we passed Bray but at all

pg.55

events we finished up at daybreak well beyond Bray having somehow moved over towards the right at Trigger Wood. Just before it was light were told to dig in so bloke in H.A.C. [*Honorable Artillery Company*] and I did begin. We were called away and 10th were told to consolidate shell holes. Got into a big one with some others. Very deep one. Light by now but thick fog. Could not see many yards in front. After about an hour were told to leave shell holes and sorted out into coys while a lot of our and other officers had a confab. Mist was beginning to clear and we had wind up that we might be found standing in the open. After much talk we moved forwards and took up position in a very old French trench. Only about 3ft deep. Just got settled when another and I were detailed to go with a

pg.56

Lewis gun forwards to a pit and try and snipe along a road along a hill in front. We could not see much and a Jerry sniper started sniping at us. We could not do anything except lie still as he was busy watching us. We were promised that relief should be sent about 12.30. A whole lot of fusiliers in extended order passed

over and forwards. We were mystified as to what was happening. There was a wood in front and as they entered it a whole salvo of shells burst there. We could hear bombs and lewis guns going as they attacked. Shells began to come over thick and fast and we had the wind up badly what with these and the sniper in front who several times nearly hit us. The sounds of scrapping in front got further off as they advanced.

pg,57

but they did not succeed in doing for the Jerry machine gun who was troubling us. At 12.30 could stand it no longer so leaving other chap doubled back to trench and passes along it to find Coy HQ in a deep pit in a trench. They had had a dreadful time as shells had been bursting all round. Some men had been killed and they dare not move as they were under observation along the trench and the sniper was also busy hereabouts. They seemed very unhappy. Capt. Sturton told me to crawl out to other man and tell him to crawl back, also to bring another sniping group back. The ground was awfully hard to crawl on and it was a good way. The other sniping post walked instead of crawled back, silly fools. Other men could not understand at first but came back. Could not

pg.58

crawl all way back, was so tired so got up and ran. Went along trench and tried to dig in but could not, was absolutely fagged out. Shells were falling too ear to be pleasant also. No water left either. Don't know how I spent the rest of that day but seemed to doze off in afternoon a bit. When woke up he was still straffing hard but our aeroplanes were flying about at great speed and in such numbers. Something on evidently. Shelling suddenly stopped and found that sniper no longer troubled us. The position was now clear. The 173 brigade had gone through and beyond us in the morning and had gone right beyond the hill in front of us and were about 5 miles in front. Jerry had retired shelling us meanwhile and when he stopped was too far away to be of any danger. The front line was

pg.59

therefore about 5 miles ahead. When dark fell were told that we were to be relived by 174 brigade. (7th London) and ordered to prepare for the happy event. Had to go and get the lewis gun and ammunition we had left out in the morning. About 11pm came on to rain and poured in torrential downpour. Collected water in our macs to wet our mouths with as water had been given out in the morning. Had a drink from an empty jam tin which had set up to collect water. Had had nothing to eat all day and in fact could not eat anything at all. 7th London turned up about 11.30pm. They had been lost.

26 August

Went backwards along a road swimming with water and troubled with shell on either side. Somebody behind was wounded by a splinter. Ran into some troops going forwards. Much swearing and noise ensued.

pg.60

Marched back about 2-3 miles and then turned off to some dug outs on right. Here all our platoon were put. I was right at the other end so had to tread on everybody to get to bed. Was put on sentry for an hour outside. Talked to another chap for a bit and then wakened relief and lay down. He had just started shelling so was unhealthy outside. Got to sleep straight away and slept till about 8am. Woke up feeling much refreshed. Corporal Clements was in dugout with a big bit of ham and a stove so we had a slice apiece on bread. We also had some cold tea which we heated and so made a good meal. This was the first proper sleep and meal I had had for 84 hours and did not feel any the worse for it. Two chaps had a slight touch of shell shock and we were very pitiful. They went sick and went to the field

pg.61

ambulance later in the day. Had a good wash and clean up. Some blokes who had been doing S.B. work returned and told us their hardships. They had had no food and had been sniped by shells etc. having had a most lively time. Had boots off for first time since starting and found them in a beastly state. Broken blisters and very bloody. Put clean socks on and felt much better. Had to stay inside all morning as Jerry could see position. Not much doing so wrote home. Gas guards etc. still on duty. Late afternoon field cookers arrived so had a big joint all to myself. Made a grand meal. Went down to kitchens and brought up a dixie of tea. Had to bring it up a very steep bank, very hard and risky work. Tea tasted fine and felt much better for it. Never knew before what a debt we owed to tea and such hot drinks. Slept a bit in evening

pg.62

Somebody had put up a screen at entrance to dug out. This dugout was a hole in the hillside with roof of railway metals and tin. Fairly thick. Floor very stony but quite comfortable. Slept in two rows along walls. Feet very mixed up and overlapping as not quite wide enough. When dark about 10pm put on gas guard outside. Inside of dugout lit up with candle supported from roof by somebody's patent hanger. When came in at 11pm had to tread on people to get to sleeping place at other end as we were so packed. Bloke for relief did not want to go and took a lot of persuasion. Had a struggle to get lain down because of crush. Could not turn over but immaterial. Slept all bight again except once or twice.

27 August

Had proper cooked breakfast of bacon porridge and tea and it tasted fine. Mail came in morning.

pg.63

Some had been dumped and was being looked for. Lot of chaps had papers so were able to read in morning. Went out in afternoon on hillside to have a look around. Saw Jerry sniper pits very recently used. Consists of pits with a roof and only a narrow slit for firing through. No wonder we could not locate any troublesome snipers. New box of German bombs lying about. Somebody who had dumped a gun (Lewis) when going over on 25th found it again. We also completed our quota of spare parts and ammunition from salvage, worse luck. Plenty of German rifles and helmets. Somebody said that the trench we had dug beside the railway on 24th Aug had been occupied by a platoon of Fusiliers that morning and Jerry had found them and wiped the whole lot out. No gas guard in night. Another lot on

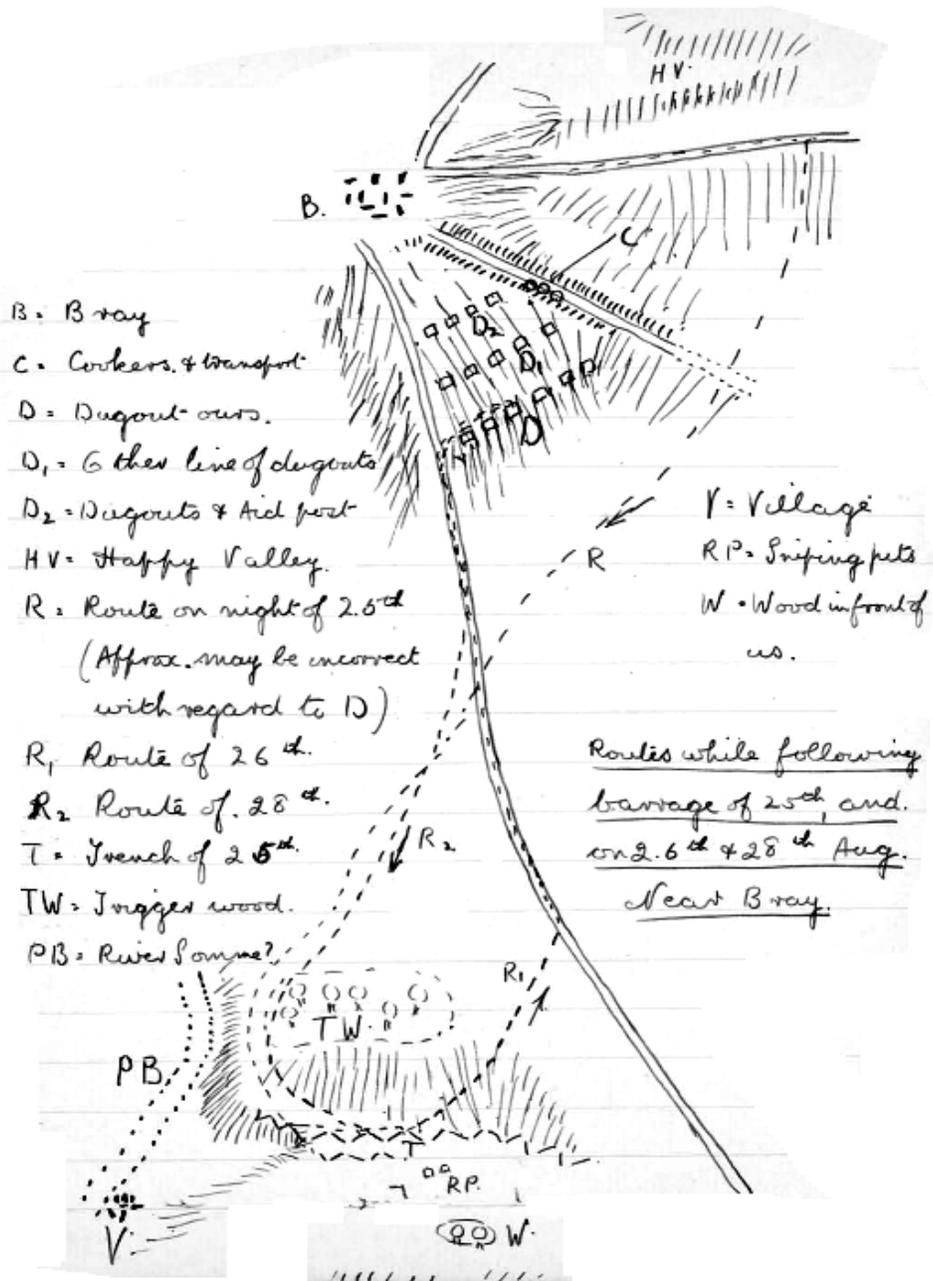
pg.64

duty. Had to keep putting candle out because Jerry was overhead a lot. Heard that 17 animals of Q.V.R. transport had been killed in Happy Valley. Got a good sleep again although it as cold.

28 August

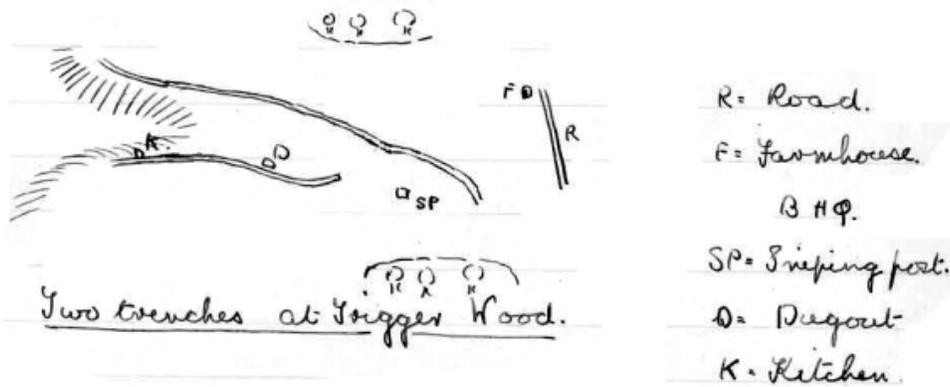
After breakfast told to be ready to move off soon. Casualtie's parcels distributed. Got a lot of cake and papers to read. Did not move off until quite late in morning nearly dinner time. Went back along road and struck off to right across fields. Finally came to previously held trench. Got my rifle which I had left when we came away before. Found that trenches were in a sort of circular formation. We were first of all put out of sight. Chaps began making bivies with tin etc. Some of us were taken after a bit to foremost trench where there were some dugouts. One had half fallen in and entrance all silted up.

pg.65



pg.66

We dug it out and got in. Very damp and bit low but out of wind and cold. If a shell landed on top felt positive the whole thing would come in. Lots of Jerry ammunition in trench in baskets. Some people made bivies of them. Seemed very draughty.



Arrived about 2pm and spent all afternoon reading etc. Had to go on gas guard at night several times because there only were a few of us and one to each bivie had to be on duty. Rations came at night also. Very cold and inclined to rain.

29 August

Two blokes who had been away with shell shock returned at night and

pg.67

came into our bivie. Mostly R.B. fellows. More papers arrived with rations. Quite a week old though. Had to keep out of sight all day. About dinner time tea arrived from kitchen at other end of trench. Very welcome. Had to collect wood in afternoon for it. About tea time told that we were going up to line at night so had to rest. Shortly after two blokes managed to shoot themselves in the foot so they were carted off and would probably be court martialled. Several shells came over into wood to front causing great wind up especially blokes with shell shock. Some people (peasants) in a cart passed us going towards village on right. Brave beggars. Quite a lot of people seemed to be passing along roads hereabouts. Moved off about sun down and got onto road. Passed a good few big guns and great

pg.68

dumps on either side of road. Ammunition and stores all over. Many motor lorries standing about and on move. Field ambulances hereabouts with motor ambulances. Big detachment of M.G.C. [*Machine Gun Corps*] men just getting lorries with all their ammunition etc. Passed motor tractors drawing huge howitzers. Got on to big main road with no traffic on it. Huge trees on either side. Quite a lot of lights away on left also lot of low lying ground. Walked a long way along road. No traffic hardly. Passed a big aid post made of sandbags. Word passed back after about a mile or two to be very careful and make no noise. Got to cross roads when light shells began to drop all round so doubled into shallow gutter trench on left side of road. One shell fell in a platoon just in front doing lot of damage. Had to turn back a bit not without delay and noise. Shells

pg.69

bursting all rounds. Got past safely a second time. Passed high water tanks on right. Lot of shells still falling behind. Good few wounded lying about. After a bit crossed over road to right and got onto a path. Passed along head of a valley and had to go up on to skyline. Jerry machine gun busy hereabouts and had to be careful because he was potting us. Also Verey lights very active indeed. Got on to road and could not find rest of coy so passed along it a bit and came to a sentry post of another coy. In a big hole at side of road. after a bit somebody came and guided us to our trench behind the road. White chalk and enfilade fire. 8th London's whom we were relieving told us to dig in as some chaps had been killed there. Very cheerful. Had to go on sentry and very jumpy

pg.70

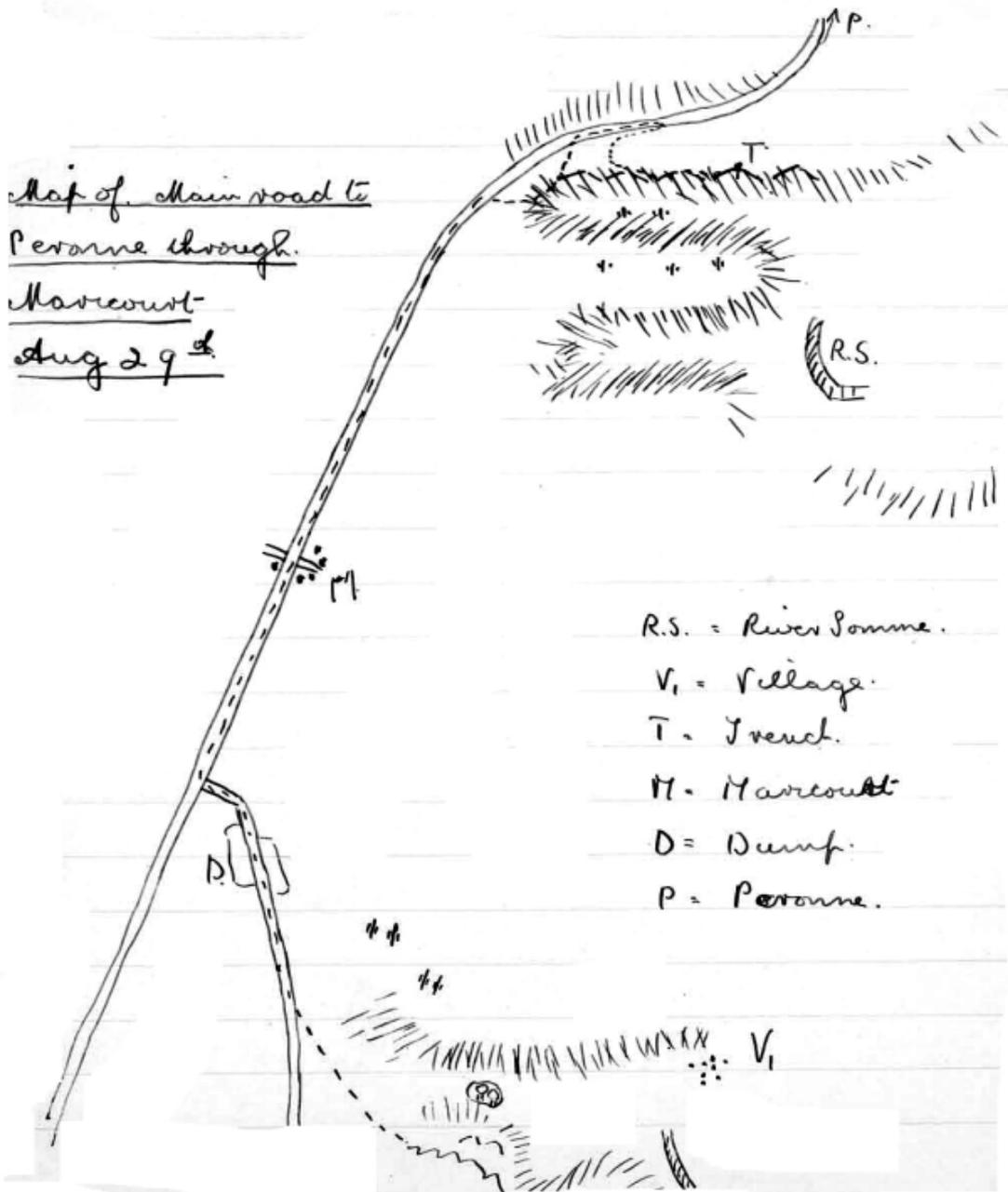
it was as moon had risen. Saw a long line of troops passing along road. Great consternation but caused by one of our patrols out in front. Went off on ration party along road. Lot of wounded being taken back. Very hard work carrying food etc. especially with rifle and having to hurry. Very hard digging in chalk when we got back. Too tired to make much of a bivie. Hardly any shelling. Two chaps with shell shock had fallen out on road when we were shelled so reported missing.

30 August

Few shells fell near about day break but stopped suddenly. When got properly light found could walk about without trouble from bullets etc. River valley on right with marshy Somme at bottom. Valley just behind us. Had a little sleep in morning. Cavalry scouts out and officers on foot about 12 o'clock.

pg.71

I afternoon car went along road. Jerry had run away again.



pg.72

Told we were to go forward so went along to road which we followed for about half a mile. Passed a derelict German motor tractor on skyline looking very forlorn. Went down very steep hillside into valley on left amongst lot of pines. Passed along valley parallel to road. Lot of German huts just occupied. Very well made. Passed a well and horse troughs. Crossed over a road and went over to left of hillside in some trenches. Moved on after a bit along side of hill to a broken down tank. Here we're told to dig in in pits. White chalk very hard and conspicuous. Very hard work. Only got one big enough to sit huddled up. Not very comfortable. Had orders not to go near tank as might be bombed. No trouble from machine guns or shells. Barrage of heavy shells on hill on left and in

pg.73

valley below on right. Motor lorries to be seen on main road! Sent out a Lewis gun post on top of hill. Nothing much doing all afternoon and evening. Very cold after dark and very dewy.

31 August

On sentry, go in middle of night. Very cold. Hole in chalk very hard. and uncomfortable. Had to camouflage them before light as chalk was so white. Clothes and equipment in an awful mess. Could not eat much but did not feel worse for it. In morning cavalry scouts went past us going forwards. Seemed to go a long way over. Half way through morning told we were to go forward about 3,000 yards in two waves. We went in first wave in line in sections. Never had a shot or shell fired at all the whole way over. Fell down and got caught by wire in equipment so had to take it off to get up. Followed in second wave. Passed two great

pg.74

belts of wire, very old and rusty on wooden stakes. Came up to rest at a trench just below crest and all went on but on top were stopped by machine gun so came back to trench. Two of us made a fine bivie. Bit tight but quite all right. Shells began to come over behind us but no trouble from them. In late afternoon Rangers and QVR went through us and over hill. They went, we afterwards heard, another 2 or 3,000 yards ahead with only one casualty. Rather hot time with shells in evening but no trouble when dark. Nothing of any importance during night.

1 September

Rations never came all night nor in morning so would have starved but that luckily had some left over. Lot of transport moving about in hills behind us. Artillery also on move. Rations came in afternoon and had to go and get them.

Map showing
advance on 30th & 31st
August and return
to Marcoust on 1st October

- M = Marcoust.
 R.S. = River Somme.
 T₁ = Trench taken over
 on night of 29th August.
 T₂ = Trench dug by us on
 evening of 30th August.
 T₃ = Trench occupied by
 us on 31st August.
 T₄ = Trench where we spent
 night of 1st October.

xxx = Barbed wire.



Met some of late arrivals from England who had just reached the battalion. Jerry aeroplanes came over so some of them tried a shot with a Lewis gun but it jammed after a shot or two. Battery of R.F.A. came into position near us. They were only barrage guns however. Told they were going out to rest in evening. Great excitement. Felt very poorly about stomach so could not go on guard. Started away for rear about 7pm, 50 yards between platoons. Passed a lot of artillery. Several shells fell unpleasantly close to platoons in rear. Had to pass over skyline, very high & if it were light a wide view would be seen. Met some Jerry prisoners being taken back. Passed some heavy guns in valley. Crossed railway and got onto track. Felt very tired and quite dark by now. Came out ultimately on main road and

most of us would not go any further without a rest so the officer was forced to let us rest. Passed a narrow valley twinkling with lights. They were the horse lines of the 58th division. It was wonderful to see the lights like that only about 8 miles from Jerry and twinkling like a town. Passed along main road until we came to water tanks we had passed before. Turned off to left and along a narrow road. Came to our field cookers. Tea issued and rations, Had a good drink of tea and was gloriously sick. Felt much better so had some more tea. Passed along to a low trench where we were told to make ourselves comfortable for the night. Two of us were put on sentry. Had to keep a look out on mail bag. Felt much better and when were relieved two of us slept together huddled up to keep warm.

pg.78

2 September

Went sick in morning because of nasty place on foot. American M.O. was there but real doctor was a stretcher bearer who told the M.O. what to do. Got light duty. Went and got some corrugated iron and helped a lot of others to build a bivio in the trench. It was quite a mansion and there were about a dozen of us there. We cut the sides of the trench away to make it wider. It was a bit draughty but kept the rain out. It was also a bit cramped for sleeping but that kept us warm. There was a shelf to put our belongings on but there was a constant danger from landslips. The soil was very chalky so we got quite white after a bit. After dinner the battle surplus came up & with them the sergeant-major without whom we could quite well do without. P.T. in afternoon but

pg.79

I did nothing. Short rations in evening because of battle surplus. Wish they had stayed away. About twilight Jerry aeroplane came over & dropped three bombs on camp the other side of main road. Awful noise. When a Jerry aeroplane came over all aircraft lookouts blew three blasts on a whistle as a warning to put lights out. Four blast meant take cover as well. It was a wonderful sight to see the searchlights catch a raider and the tracer bullets could be seen following the searchlight beam as the A.A. machine gunners opened fire. No gunfire could be heard here & the sun set in a blaze of red. Slept very well although cold.

3 September

Went sick again and spent the better part of the morning at the M.O.'s but got light duty again. Rangers camp close beside ours and they seemed

pg.80

to be doing next to nothing. All our men on parade. Got some chocolate at canteen on way back. Very nice. Coy H.Q. had erected quite a house with wood. Very palatial quarters for the sergt. major. Cleaned the travelling kitchen in afternoon. Rather a nuisance but could not be helped. Found some corporal had got some green envelopes so hoped to get some. Had to go with a few others to horse lines in evening for more rations. Went along to valley where we had been in trenches on Aug 29th. Had to wait a bit for rations so spoke to post sergeant about letters. Had a good look at a Jerry machine gun. Very heavy looking thing. Came back over the open country. Passed an abandoned Jerry field gun but had to keep away because of mines. Got green envelope when got back. Great excitement. Told that there was to be a stunt next morning so

pg.81

everybody had to be up by 6.30. Any who wanted to go sick had to parade at 6.30. Awful nuisance.

4 September

Did not wake up until about 7.30 so had to rush to get to M.O. He kept us waiting so it was about 8.30 before we got back. I had been given M.D. so ought to be on parade. The rest of the coy was on parade so could not go on. Sergeant told me he would make it all right & said I had to say I had been given light duty. About middle of morning three of us had to go over to main road to help load limbers with miscellaneous baggage. We had to come back with them to unload at the guard room. Some of our chaps were on guard

and seemed very interested. Got very tired. While waiting went to a canteen across road and bought a big box of bars

pg.82

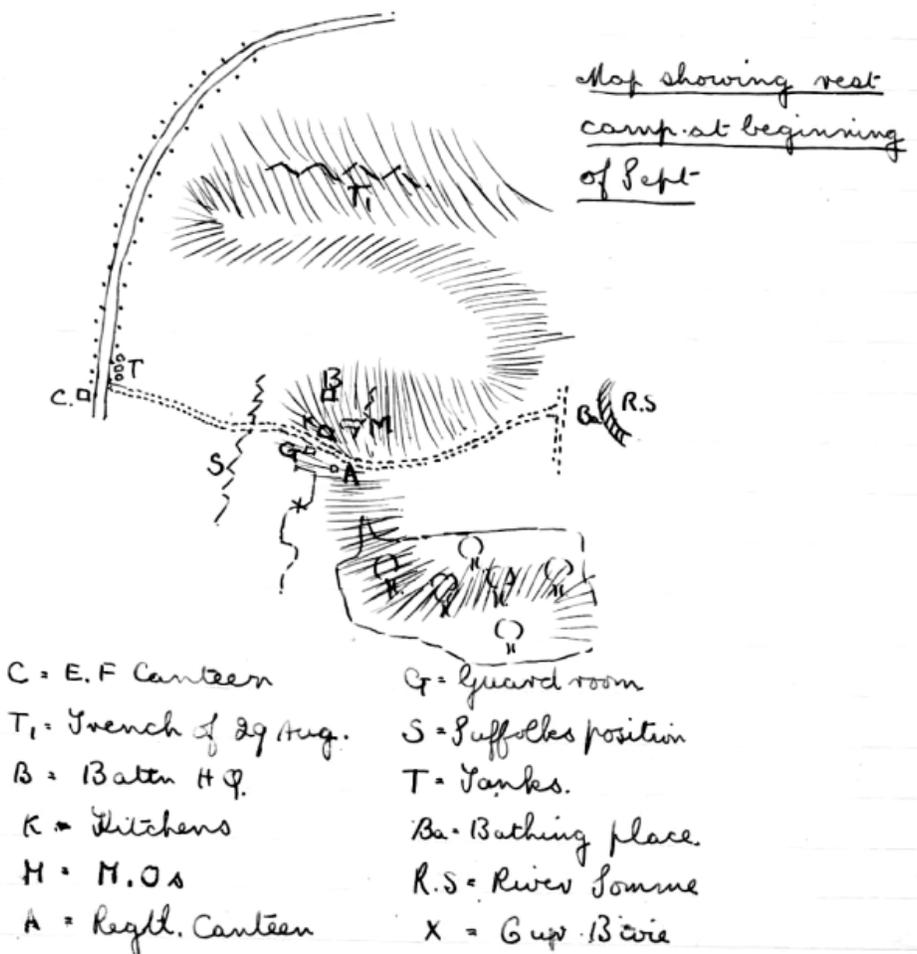
of chocolates for 5f. A great find & ought to make up for short rations. Traffic along main road was enormous. All sorts of cars and transport. No wounded however as the railhead was now at Maricourt. R. Engineers were busy repairing the water tanks we had passed several times before. They put tarpaulins inside and fastened them around the rim. They had to hoist one up an inclined plane. Lot of Americans about. Seemingly with nothing to do. During unloading came across my overcoat. Hoped to get it when they were issued. When waiting for dinner C.O.S. came and said that the sergt-major was on my track and was going to have me up before the O.C. in afternoon. Had to clean myself and equipment in case anything happened. Nothing happened however so put on to cleaning Lewis gun limbers with another chap.

pg.83

In middle of it C.O.S. appeared and took me to Sergt Major and asked him if it was the chap he was after. However I was not the chap he had seen walking about when he ought to have been on parade. All that wind up about nothing. Managed to lose my clean knife that I had just been issued to me but found a rotten old one. I had got a new knife as I had lost the other when in line & they had put it down as destroyed by shellfire. Whole platoon had to go before Coy officer to answer questions as to the fate of certain missing men. About 4 went on parade with rest of company for baths. Went down to river but no time to go in so washed well in a pool of water. Had to hurry back for tea. Helped to move kitchen to near our bivie in evening.

pg.84

They put up a canopy after that to keep the wet off. Wanted to go to E.F. canteen at Maricourt but could not get away as heel was still bad.



pg.85

Decided not to go sick so went on parade. Had to get cleaned up. Awful nuisance. Did drill. Field very hummocky & shell holes about so peculiar sort of drill. Very hot so very hard work. Had a lecture on something or other. Got hair cut by corporal. Very dirty. Sergeant wanted to dismiss us 10min before time but little officer would not allow it. Little beast. Capt. Sturton came & asked whether anybody wanted to volunteer to be transferred to 9th London. Thought that I would volunteer because I was sick of this lot and had plenty of friends in that lot. Good dinner, bully beef stew. Got plenty and was really full for once. After dinner went and saw Capt. Sturton about transfer to 9th London. He took my name etc. & promised to see about it.

pg.86

Told that there was to be a CO's inspection in afternoon so had to get cleaned up. Awful nuisance. Nothing much happened on it so hope it does not foreshadow any future events. Went down to river after tea for a bathe. Had quite a nice swim and got hair clean. Water very dirty. After having got back came on to rain. Fairly poured down. A proper cloud burst. Had great difficulty in bivie as the tin roof had some holes in it. Had to dig a trench down centre to lead water away. Still the floor was very damp for sleeping. Stopped soon after. Most other people had been flooded out so we were really lucky. When went to bed some people were quite offensive as they wanted to sleep with their boots on. I didn't.

6 September

Felt very rotten in morning but

pg.87

not bad enough to go sick. Went on parade and during inspection nearly fainted so had to go round MO's. He was not there so the S.B. there gave me two quinine pills and told me to lie in the shade. Soon after heard that we were to go up to line in evening. Others were brought off parade. They had to go on for inspection of respirators. I had to take mine out and nearly got into trouble as it was filthy and had not been cleaned. Was told to get it put right as soon as possible. Kept quiet all the morning. Did not have any dinner but had a little rice. Made me feel better. Had to get equipment put to ready as were told that we were to parade at 2pm. Just about that time it was washed out until 4pm. Felt much better about tea time so had some and felt quite fit again. Thought it must have been indigestion.

pg.88

Went on parade about 4pm and marched out on to road and then into fields alongside it. Here we were to wait for buses to take us up to line. Had bombs flares and extra ammunition served out. Band was playing the only thing they seemed to know "Where are the boys of the village tonight". Buses came along after a while. We were put into a lorry though. Passed along main road and seemed to go off to left somewhere about Chery but could not see properly. The sun was setting by the time we stopped & we were feeling very cramped and tired. Big guns were going off at intervals near us so we were in for it this time. We were in a long narrow valley with a village somewhere behind us. We passed right up to head of valley & finally landed beside the main road with tall trees on side & feeling

pg.89

very tired. Here we had a short rest. Went on up road having to make deviations into surrounding fields to avoid fallen trees etc. Finally sheered off to right along a tramway (narrow gauge). Very hard work along it as the sleepers were irregular and were not properly buried with ballast. Capt. Sturton on ahead was walking

very fast so we lost touch with those behind. Had a rest in consequence. Nothing else would have allowed us to stop & we were just about ready to drop. Eventually passed out onto a main road. Passed several cross roads and had to dodge telephone wires overhead at these crossings. All these cross roads seemed to have severely shelled as dead horses & mules were lying about and the road was very cut up. Had a long rest in a

pg.90

sunken road. Fell asleep lying on middle of road until someone woke me to let a cart get past. Went on after a bit as Jerry dropped a few shells near. Eventually passed off left of road and came up upon some troops in small trenches they had dug. Proceeded to relieve these. We crossed another road and finally relieved some troops also in small trenches. They told us there was a village behind us called Liéramont. About five of us proceeded to dig ourselves in and managed to get some sort of a trench made.

7 September

Got trench finished before daybreak. When light saw that there was a hill ahead of us to the left & through a valley could be seen a distant town. To right were some sheds made of tin and empty. Had to camouflage our trench with plants. Rather rough on hands. Behind us

pg.91

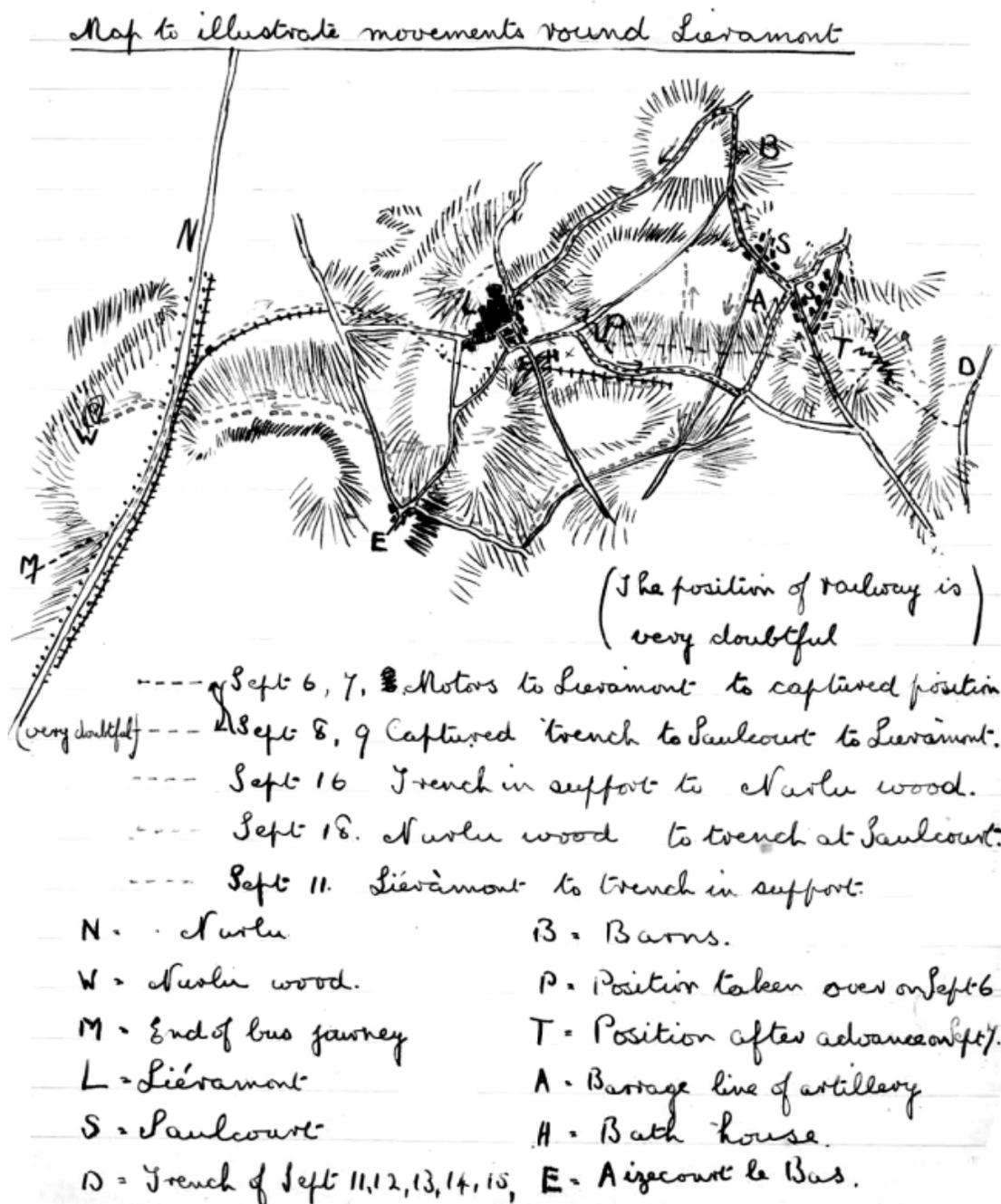
was the village of Liéramont which seemed to be getting most of Jerry's shells. Cavalry were scouting along hillside to right. Also some infantry. Great excitement as some troops were moving about in low ground in front. Everybody thought they were Jerries but don't think they were really. When rations were issued were told that we were to go over top about 8am and capture village (Saulcourt) on the hill in front and then go on as far as possible. There were no orders given us about a barrage etc. so we were in a proper fog. Started off at 8 as ordered in extended line of sections. Went downhill at first for quite a good distance and then machine guns suddenly started to fire on us. We had to chuck ourselves on the ground while the bullets whissed all round us. The Lewis gun team were put

pg.92

out by a shell. Many men were hit by bullets which were kicking up the dust all round. One bullet hit a man in the shoulder & then passed through my mess tin diagonal wise. Did not know what was happening. Fire died down after a bit but had to keep quite still to avoid any more outbursts. Ceased fire after a bit and was able to go on. Crossed road and came to a deep sunken road. Lot of men about mostly wounded. Heard that both officers had been wounded. In fact saw one going back to base. Sergt appeared after a bit looking for a stretcher for Capt. Sturton who had been badly wounded in the neck. By this time we had found out that there was heavy gun barrage on all round by our guns. They were mostly 9" shells and seemed to be getting nearer us. An officer went back

pg.93

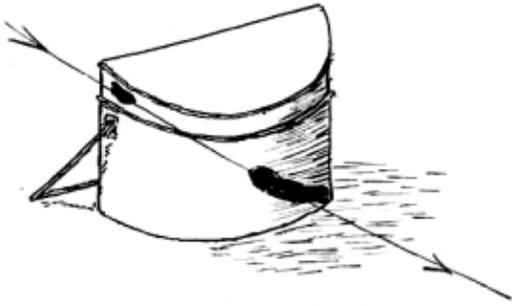
with us, crossed the road and then got right into it. Several dropped just behind us and some were wounded. Got back to place where we had first been stopped and waited for barrage to lift somewhat. Went on after a bit and went right up hill where met rest of Coy. They told us that most of the company had been hit. Went on and came to a plantation with remains of stables about and also the hot ashes of some burnt out corrugated iron building. Had to be very careful because of hiding Jerries. Village seemed to be over to left. Passed over crest of hill and down into another valley. On the other side we waited to reinforce beside a hedge. Noticed some blackberries on bushes so had a good feed. Seemed rather a peculiar thing to me eating blackberries in the middle of an advance.



Went on after a bit over the crest of the ridge where there was a lot of barbed wire. Got into a trench because there were a lot of shells flying about. One went over us very low down making an awful noise and exploding just beyond. Finally got into a shallow trench just behind a small plantation. There was a village over to the right front. Somebody said that the Q.V.R.'s were on ahead in a quarry but not sure about it. Several sniping shots came over seemingly from a long way off to left. Constant barrage going on to left probably on the village (Saulcourt). Village in front also seemed to be getting it fairly hot from Jerry. We were not troubled much with artillery provided we kept our heads down. Found that the company now consisted of two sergeants and about twelve men.

pg.96

Very hot and thirsty and not much water. Sent to get sergeants rations from an orderly up trench. Had to be careful because of observers in front. The ridge in front was still Jerry's so had to be careful. Found that mess tin had been pierced by bullet diagonally and had not damaged the rations inside except for a little soldier amongst the meat. Ought to be rather leaky for liquids such as tea. Got quieter towards evening. Not much doing.



8 September

Rations came before light about 3am. I should think they came in the limbers from Jerry's direction. The drivers had spent a long time looking for us and wanted to know what part of the thin "red

pg.97

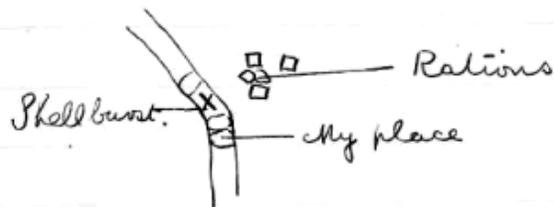
line" we were. When we told them we were the front line the rations were unloaded in the shortest time possible as they seemed to have the wind up. At any rate they dumped the battalion's rations on our parados. Before the day broke all the other companies except B coy had taken their rations and D coy could not be found. When our rations were issued we all had double rations because of the casualties. I got a spirit stove as well. Some rather heavy shells came over to left and began to put the wind up us. When it got properly light D coy turned up in ones and twos to take their rations away. Several shells came over near us and put the wind up us because we should catch it if Jerry got a start on us with his artillery. D coy still came in small parties and we used up our entire

pg.98

vocabulary on them. At last Jerry put a proper barrage up. Shells began to fall all round us and one landed in our trench just round the corner about 6ft away from me. It covered us with dirt and nearly stunned me. It killed one man and badly wounded another but we thought he was killed at the time. The sergeant decided that we should have to move so we skedaddled with our equipment back to a trench at right angles to ours. Felt very rotten for a bit and began to dig in. Shells were still coming over but not near us. We could see the smoke from the gun on the hillside opposite. It gave up after a bit so went back for my rifle and got some rations that had been left. Rifle had been hit by a shell and was a bit chipped about the wood work but seemed alright although

pg.99

very dirty. Got a bit of a pit made but had to be careful about not being seen as everyone had the wind up so very badly. Later in morning they found that the other man was wounded not dead so they took him back to aid post.



Nothing much happened during rest of morning except Jerry bombarding the wood to right. Came on to rain in afternoon. Horrible drizzle

pg.100

which came into my hole and made it all sloppy. Found after a bit that I was sitting in a puddle so had to re-adjust myself accordingly. Stopped after making everything wet. Cooked some meat and tasted fine. In evening word came that we were to be relieved at night. Great excitement. Nothing much happened during evening. Soon after dark we set off passing back through barbed wire & over the ridge into next valley and finally onto road. Here had to wait a bit. Lot of R.G.A. [Royal Garrison Artillery] men about. They had a big bivie at roadside under a tarpaulin. They even had a candle going. Passed back along road. Could not tell where we were but seemed to be moving northwards. Kept halting for various reasons. During one halt took my cardigan off so had to run to catch rest of company up. Got off main road on to a path and passed

pg.101

some barns where Q.V.R.'s were billeted. After a bit came to some more barns and we were put in these. They seemed to be very damp and inclined to be draughty. Some candles were lit & rations were issued. Cpy HQ seemed to be having quite a brainfest. Rest of us went to bed after a bit. Floor was very damp and smelly. It was manure I think. At any rate did not prevent my sleeping. Very cold in night. Lot of shells fell near and towards morning battery near to us started to fire in a barrage which opened.

9 September

Tea issued in morning as one field cooker had come up. Had a good wash and felt much better. Had to stay inside barns as we were under observation or so we thought. Great wind up about 10am as we were told to stand to in case might have to go up to line again.

pg.102

After about a quarter hour word came that we would not be wanted and it was surprising the way conversation started again after everybody had been silent and subdued. It appeared that the alarm was

caused by the O.C. of the 6th London who had taken over our position. He had thought that a machine gun of ours which had been firing over our heads was one of Jerries and foreboded an attack. Silly fool! Were allowed to go outside about midday so had a look at guns near to us. They were howitzers for barrage purposes. I collected a tin cartridge case for use as a drinking vessel in place of my damaged mess tin. Had to leave it when we went away from this place however. After dinner paraded and got on to road. Passed some burnt out German hangers or sheds.

pg.103

There was not much left on them. Passed another trench full of dead Jerries. and all sorts of equipment and machine guns lying about. Came to a cross road and turned to left. Passed a road making gang. Very battered touring car with officers inside passed us on way to line. Came within sight of Liéramont and had to halt on side of road while officers went on. Several gas shells came over to right of road so had to move off to some pits on left of road. Waited very nearly all afternoon. Got rather cold after a bit because of wind. Got back on to road and approached village. Cemetery on left. Edged off to left and passed through several gardens eventually arriving in village street. Our platoon were billeted in a broken down old French Army hut. It was very draughty as the end where we were was mainly out. Two of

pg.104

us appropriated a wire bedhead. We kept the draught from the end of the hut Away from us by a huge door which we had found. Rest of hut was occupied by another Coy who seemed to be having a fine time cooking meat etc. Orders came round that we were not to light any fires. Rained a bit in evening. Battery of heavy guns was firing over hill to north of village and made the whole place rattle. Did not sleep very well because bedstead was a bit loose and we both sand to middle so got in each others way. Still we kept fairly warm

10 September

173 brigade (Fusiliers etc.) had to go up to line about midnight as they were to go over and if possible capture Epehy. Just about 5am poured with rain. Simply teemed down. We were glad to be under cover.

pg.105

Barrage made an awful row. Heard later that they were badly cut up and had about six tries to capture the village but were driven off in the end. Foot was still sore so went sick. M.O. was a beast of a man. Wanted to know why I had not washed my feet. Told him I had not had my boots off for about a week so could not help it. Did not seem very pleased. Lot of R.A.M.C. men in hut. Lot of bully beef lying about. Would liked to have had some as rations were still very short and I was practically always hungry. Had to move our billet later in morning to a Nissan hut occupied also by Coy HQ. It was perfect luxury after the other one. The window was ought but the wind was kept out by an old door. It was lovely and warm as they had a brazier burning wood going

pg.106

and giving out a fine heat. I occupied one corner. Had a proper cooked dinner. Tasted fine. Nothing much on in afternoon. Officers got wind up about gas after a bit so had two sentries on duty and had to wear respirators all the time. One of the chaps had a fit but soon got over it. Chaplain was holding a memorial service over at cemetery for those who had been killed. Most of them went over but I did not as I did not like the idea somehow. Great sensation caused by one of gas sentries who had just come off. He said that a strange looking officer had asked them the whereabouts of all batteries in the neighbourhood. They of

course did not know so he had to go. On reflection they were convinced that he was a foreigner and probably a spy. We all cussed them for not fetching

pg.107

him over the head. Had to go on sentry twice in night so sleep was very intermittent.

11 September

Fine breakfast of bacon and tea etc. also porridge. Nothing much doing all morning. Had a good dinner and went to sleep afterwards. During afternoon sergeant came to tell us we were to go up to line in evening. He also said that there would be no stunts as we were only going to hold the line. Said that the war would not last much longer as Jerry had given up Lens. Everybody very disappointed. Later in evening chap had another fit so one of the S.B.'s went off for a M.O. who had told him he wanted to see him when in one. All the medical talent of the battalion assembled & decided he would be sent to hospital. Had to cart some

pg.108

shovels about for adjutant. Great activity at B.H.Q. About sundown had to parade ready for line and also with shovels. Stood waiting about for a long while and finally moved off along road to Villers Faucon. By this time quite dark. Road very wet and lot of traffic. After a good way turned up lane to left. Very deep and sunken road. Lot of artillery about. Turned off to right after a bit and went down hill. Then up again along a path. Here waited a long time. Officers decided that we were lost as the guide had forgotten his way back. Went on after a bit & eventually landed beside trench we had held before on Sept 8. Occupied by M.G.C. reserves who had made it much deeper etc. Lot of talking going on because officers were losing their tempers & others had crowded

pg.109

on to us from behind. In middle of it all shell burst a few yards away & everyone ran to shelter. Corpl. Counter was killed & lot more wounded. Some of us ran to a trench just down hill [*Cpl. Abraham William Counter of 10th Bn London Regt. #422477*]. Everybody scattered. After a bit he stopped shelling and we were all collected into a proper fire trench which had been in use a great deal because it was properly made. Here we sorted out & then went down hill. The officers did not seem to know the way with any certainty and we got on to a road. Everything was very quiet and everybody had the wind up as we seemed to be walking right in Jerries direction. Eventually the sergeant & officer discovered we were going the wrong way so turned round & went by another track which suddenly dipped into a sunken

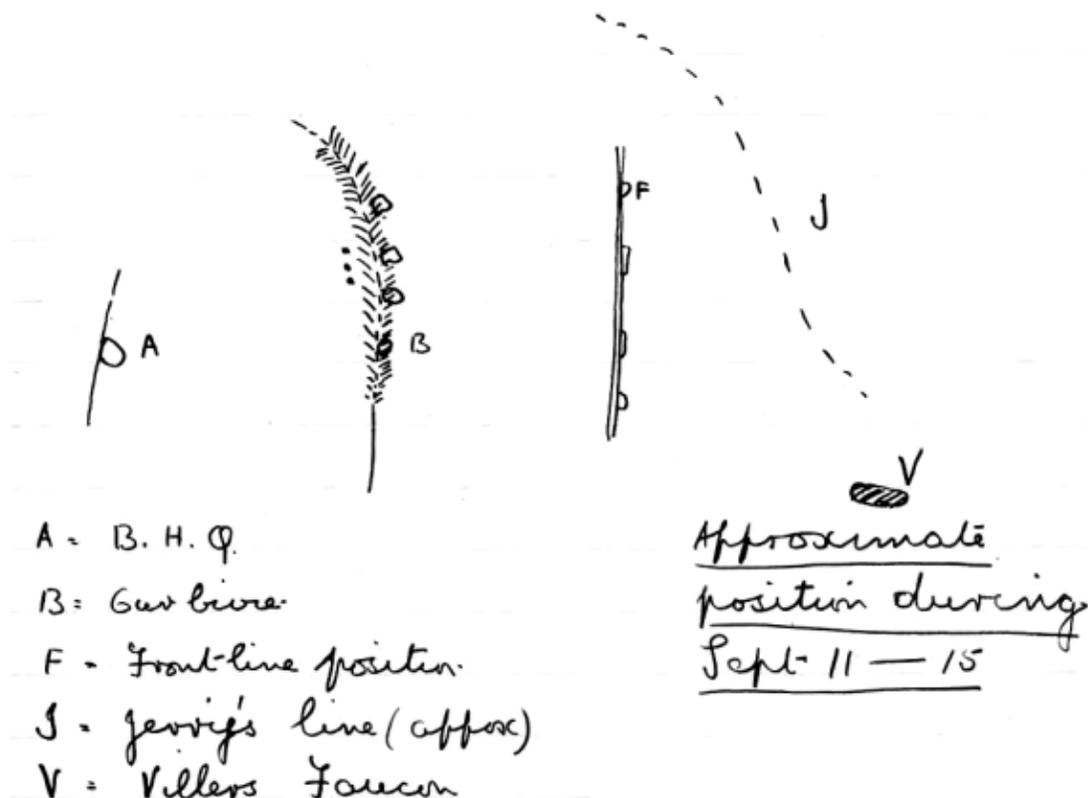
pg.110

track with dugouts along side. Our platoon was put into one of the first. It was a sort of tunnel made of very strong corrugated iron. There was a platform at the far end which we lay down on. It was very cramped. The rest of the day out was muddy with pools of water. There were a few duckboards also. It was much warmer inside as it was fairly well sheltered but awfully dark. Some R.E.'s had been using it & they left a tarpaulin which we appropriated.

12 September

Had to go on sentry before light. Two of us were put on Lewis gun post although neither of us knew anything at all about the gun. Found that we were really in immediate support as the other two coys were along a road in front. Jerry was thus in front of

us at right angles to our trench and the road. We in our position were in support but further along our trench bent to left and was front line.



Directly after sentry got had to stand to so very cold when stood down. We then had to clear up the bottom of the trench which was very muddy.

Gave it up after a bit for fear of Jerry's observation balloons catching us. Spent rest of day either asleep or on sentry go. Was very interesting to hear Jerry's big shells coming over & exploding in village of Villers Faucon. Seemed to be making a fine mess of the place. Was very hungry all day & rations were short. Would have liked a drink of tea but that was impossible. During evening saw an air raid behind our lines. Saw searchlights pick Jerry up & he dodged all over but they held him. A.A, guns got on to him and brought him down in flames. Fine sight. One of our machine guns up in hill behind was very busy sniping all time. Bullets going overhead put wind up us at first as we thought they were Jerry's. Rations came up by limber to back of trench so no trouble for us.

Lot of R.E.'s busy taking gas shells up to line along our trench. They were to do a stunt at 5am and spent all night carrying shells up. They fired them off by a species of trench mortar all at once & then had to run away quick or Jerry caught them. Learnt many new swear words as shells were heavy & the way was rough. Seemed awful hard work.

13 September

Heavy barrage in early morning on left. Had to stand to suddenly about 3am because Jerry was bombing our trench further up. Took a lot of fetching out of bivia. Had to stand to until light so did not get back to bivia

until about 6am. Perished with cold and when rations came next to nothing to eat. Poor lookout for rest of day. Got some sleep in morning as was tired out. About midday list of

pg.114

men detailed to go back out of line appeared. I was not on it so felt very jealous. Corporal brought letters round and there was one for me the first since landing. Was quite bucked at my good luck. Nothing much on rest of day. The party detailed to go off to rear of us left soon after dark. We were then told that two platoons of the 24th London would make up the Coy to be taught trench fighting as they had been in the East previously. Amusing thing was that none of us knew much about it either. They landed somewhere about midnight and some were put in with us. They managed to make themselves comfortable in the mud & we were automatically relieved from further sentry duty. Had a good sleep.

14 September

Had to go on sentry just about daybreak. Was most interesting to watch the divisional aeroplane come

pg.115

over just about sunrise & fly along Jerry's line. His A.A. guns would start to pot at him but seemed to take no notice. The shrapnell made thick black smoke in contrast to ours which made a white smoke. Nothing happened all morning except that sergeant told us to be careful when on lookout as Jerry had been using flame throwers on left where things seemed to be stirring as there was a continual barrage. In our position only a few gas shells came near us. In afternoon the 24's colonel thought that he would be clever so he stood on our parados in full view of Jerry and started attracting his attention by divers movements. Light and heavy shell immediately started to come over and we had a hot time for about five minutes. Several shells burst on other side of trench and wounded man on

pg.116

on sentry. 24th men were terrified while it was on as they had never experienced proper shell fire out in East. In fact they had only once had to wear tin helmets when out there. Many rumours about that we were to be relieved at night. By this time we were always hungry because of short rations. After dark all rumours about relief were stopped by the 24th's being ordered to prepare to go while we were to remain behind. We swore heartily and long at this news. While 24th were busy parading we were brought out to form a fatigue party to carry wiring things over to the other two coys along the road in front. We found that we would should have made two journeys. We each carried a bundle of something. I had some metal posts which made an awful rattle unless I was careful. The ground was very rough

pg.117

and the moon was up so we were in a pretty jumpy state. There was also a ration party busy in the same area. We had to walk along the road to our furthest outpost. We got back safely for the second load which made even more noise than the first and we could see that Jerry was getting excited as Verey lights kept going up and some of them would not stand still so quickly as they ought to have done. We deposited them safely however and were halfway back when several Jerry shrapnell burst high over our trench. We began to run as we could see we were in for it. Over it came, great heavy black 9" shells bursting all around. We all did a proper sprint, jumped down into the trench and into the dugout in a twinkling. We all got off scot free but we got a proper fright.

pg.118

Nothing much on all day except arrival of them who had gone to rear. They said that they had not enjoyed themselves as they had been in a position in a sunken lane on top of the hill behind us. Their trenches were only about 18" deep and they had had a lot more shells than we had had as they were in amongst the artillery. We had had some rain but of course were able to shelter while they had had to get out of their trench as it got full and spend the time in the open. They were not at all pleased. Very little on all day except instructions to keep under cover. In the afternoon the good news arrived. We were to be relieved that night. We were to right back and get tea at one of our field cookers. We were then to march further back still to stop at a camp prepared for us and

pg.119

next day were to go out to long rest by motor buses. Great good news. Soon after dark three of us ordered to go back to B.H.Q. for some ammunition. It appeared that we were not leaving the requisite amount of ammunition behind us in the trench. Had to pick up the telephone wire at Coy H.Q. and trace it back to B.H.Q. There was no other way of doing it. Found B.H.Q. in a palatial dugout on the side of a lane. It was brightly lit up inside by candles and seemed very comfortable. Seemed to be a lot of shells exploding on hillside to rear of us. Ammunition very heavy but got back quite safely. Here were met by very irate signaller who was not at all pleased because we had knocked over his signal lamp which it appeared took a long time to set up. R.E.'s were busy as they were every night along that trench

pg.120

taking up gas shells for a stunt in morning. Had to wait about for a long while before had to parade. Even then had to wait a long while until 7th London who were to relieve us arrived. They had brought their overcoats. We passed backwards directly out of trench and up hill.

16 September

The moon was shining and had to take great care not to make a noise. Landed after much walking on outskirts of village (Saulcourt) (the route on map is very approximate as exact position was not known) where we halted. B.H.Q. coy was just on in front. Two heavy shells landed very close to us so the CO decided we had better be moving. We got into the village street and turned to right. Seemed very much battered. After a few turns got into an open road. Shells seemed to be following us so we did not delay but pushed on. We

pg.121

then turned almost right round to right and shells still seemed to be following us. It seemed as though Jerry was watching us. Eventually we got on to a sunken sort of road. It was almost a quagmire and we had great difficulty in getting along. 18 pounders ranged along side of road. These were the barrage lines and seemed to be off duty. After a long way got out on to a main road along which there was a lot of traffic. There was even a band playing somewhere near. There were no shells near here. We soon turned off on to grass on right of road and came to the cookers. Cocoa was issued to us but no food. I was quite ravenous with hunger. I had eaten all my emergency rations and searched my haversack carefully for any old crumbs. Came across a few and tasted horribly of dirt. I had saved a small piece of

pg.122

of biscuit but it did not go far. Besides it had been carried about for a month and was filthy dirty & soft. We dumped all Lewis guns & other lumber into the limbers and set off. I don't know where we went but we

went a very long way and got very tired. We passed through Aizecourt le Bas and finally halted for a rest on the roadside. After a long rest moved on and got on to a track on left of road and passed along a deep wooded valley. Seemed to be a lot of horses about. Eventually got onto main road with tall trees at sides. Crossed over and came to a wood. Here we met the Coy Q.M.S. who told us he'd some stew ready also some tents. A few of us were put into an A tent and not too many of us to make it uncomfortable. We had a rissole each and a tin full of thick stew. I finished my stew & thinking I should like a

pg.123

second helping went and stood in line of another coy who had not all had theirs. Thus I got another helping. It was fine to feel full again. Rum came round so had a good drink. Overcoats were also issued and got to bed as quick as possible. Fell asleep at once and never stirred all night. Breakfast was issued about 9.30. It was very good, bacon and Maconochi. I had nearly a whole Maconochi as others did not seem to want it. Letters were given out after breakfast. I had two parcels and about three letters. Not much on during morning. Orders came round to parade at 2 with feet & rifle clean. Got feet clean but rifle was not up to much when went on. New officer was there. Two officers to the coy and two sergeants and about 50 men was our strength. He also told us that the General was coming to inspect the camp next day. There was nearly

pg.124

a riot as he wanted us to have all our things clean. Came off parade soon after. Soon after had to go and clean the limbers and set them out in a row. We also had to move the field kitchen out of a wood into open alongside the others. Went on ration fatigue in evening but did not succeed in pinching anything. Reg'l canteen was open but about the only thing they had for sale was soap. When I could not go they usually had some cake but it got sold out in no time. We had to spend some time making a sunken floor to our tent because of air raids. As we were all very tired it was not very pleasant work. Batt had to provide a Lewis gun A.A. post and some of our gunners were on it. Main duty seemed to be standing about with hands in pockets. Went round to tailors to see about a new cap as the one I had was an awful sight. He

pg.125

said I should have to wait as he only had a few for those who had none at all. Got to bed fairly early feeling more or less contented.

17 September

Had to go on parade in morning. Did drill which was a rather peculiar sort of drill as the grass was all tussocks and there were shell holes all over. Wire was also fairly frequent. Officers & sergeants had several arguments about drill and as neither was correct it was rather amusing. It was very hot and tiring. It seemed awful rubbish doing drill when out of the line. We argued that we were not having proper rest. Halfway through morning some of them went away to baths so we had to stop drilling and go back to tents. We went off about 12. We went to Liéramont along the valley and on to road. When we got to bath house found another lot waiting

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so we were not at all pleased because we had had no dinner. It appeared also that Jerry had cut off their water supply the previous night so they had had a little difficulty. However got in after a long wait to find that there was only cold water. We put up with that and got into clean clothes. We also had clean towels. We got back about 3 and found that dinner had been kept for us. Rumour came round that we were to go up to line soon and was confirmed by the officer having us on parade and telling us we might have to go up to

line. The proceedings were further enlivened by the corporal reading out a code of signals to be exhibited by tanks in the battle. We all thought it was to be the "attack without definite objective" the "match to Berlin". Rest of evening was occupied by fatigue parties getting

pg.127

rations issued, and also bombs etc. Went to get water bottle filled & found the water almost undrinkable it had so much bleaching powder in it. The driver told me that it only had half the prescribed amount in it. Just about bedtime great alarm caused by the whizz of a shell and explosion in the valley below us. Great wind up at once but it was only a stray. Lot of people ran and slept in some old trenches nearby. Orders came round that we were to be ready to move off at sunrise somewhere about 5am. Got buckshee jam by being wide awake.

18 September

Awakened about 4.30am pouring with rain and very dismal. Corporal shouting at us to get on parade. Felt very sleepy. Had a very hurried breakfast. Got on parade at last. Heard that one of our S.B.'s had been awarded the M.M. [*Military Medal*] for gallantry at Liéramont. He had

pg.128

really deserved. Poring with rain on battalion parade. Left somewhere about 5am. Passed down valley and on to road. Turned up hill to left and then when over crest halted to take Lewis guns & ammunition out of limbers. Went on down hill & got on to a railway line. Went along it and then up a steep hill to left. Passed observation balloon station. People in front were in an awful hurry and most of us could not keep up so we were straggled all over the countryside. Passed a lot of field artillery busy packing up as there had been an advance. We had crossed the main road from Liéramont to Villers Faucon and also a field ambulance station. Eventually reached some trenches. Adjutant (Mr Finlaison) had lost his watch which we found again for him. Arrived at our trench feeling very tired. After much sorting out eventually about 5

pg.129

of us got together and decided to build a bivie. We dug a deep hole in an old shell hole just big enough for us to sit up in with our knees up. We covered the top with two pieces of corrugated iron. There were some old sheds in front of us so there was no scarcity of material. Did nothing much all day. Felt very hungry and went through the rest of my parcel and finished it at night. Had to go on sentry duty at night several times. It was very cold and had to keep a lookout for S.O.S. signals. Went to get our rations. Very little indeed. Hardly any bread and practically no meat. Officers & Coy H.Q. got all meat.

19 September

Had a good wash in morning. Nothing much happened all morning except occasional turns at sentry. Felt ravenous about dinner time but only small piece of meat and slice of bread. Needed great

pg.130

effort of will to prevent myself eating tea and supper ration at the same time. Tried frying meat over a patent candle stove. This was made by putting some pieces of candle into an old tin with some paper. It made a good hot flame but very smokey. Hence utencils got very thick with soot and in time no more heat came through. Meat tasted fine. Most fellows had finished all their cigarettes by this time so they were smoking cake tobacco in old envelopes. Came on to rain in late afternoon. Managed to keep it out by waterproofs etc. but got very damp. Nothing much happened rest of day except the ever increasing hunger and exasperation

at our being there in open doing nothing at all. We had heard that the motor buses had been ready for us when in wood but the order had been

pg.131

countermanded and we were there in cold, short rations and doing nothing. Had a postcard with St. Anne's on it when rations issued. Even less rations than before. Most chaps eat theirs straight away they were so hungry but I managed to keep mine. Was put on sentry from about 10 to 11. All the officers had wind up because there was an expected attack about this time. Had to keep a sharp lookout for our divisional S.O.S. or at all events and S.O.S. of two red light and a green one. Saw one S.O.S. go up but not ours. Got back to bivie about 11pm. I was told they were starting a new method of detailing sentries as I would not be required for the rest of the night. Sleep was very interrupted as people kept coming in & going out. We had to sleep with our equipment on, and we were very

pg.132

squashed and cramped. We had to have our legs bent right up so had to get out and have a rest every now & again. We never really slept in that trench but only dozed.

20 September

Nothing much happened in morning. I made some tea for breakfast in the patent stove. It was only a drop but put new life into me. One of the chaps in our trench had been in hospital in Newcastle in Jesmond & it was quite refreshing to talk to him. Wrote up a sort of diary in an old notebook. Also wrote several letters to relations for parcels in the new writing pad which had come in the parcel. Very warm & sunny. The back of the trench had a landslip so had to spend some time getting it put right. Did the frying stunt with the meat again. In afternoon some chaps went off to try and get some food somewhere. Some

pg.133

chaps from Rangers came over to ask us whether we had any food but we had none of course. They told us that some regiments near us had their field kitchens with them. It seemed a shame that we could not have ours up there. We should not have been so hungry if we had as we always got better rations when issued direct to us from the cookers. It did not have to pass through as many hands. Halfway through afternoon officer decided that we should do some PT so we were hauled and started with it. None of the N.C.O.'s knew any PT so it was rather funny drill. After about a quarter hour officer came out & sent us back to trench. The colonel had come back and had been round the lines in the morning. Sergeant came round to tell us to get as much rest as possible

pg.134

as we were to go up to line at night. Everybody became very glum at once. There were a lot of boys who were under nineteen years of age with us and they decided that they ought not go up to the line as an order had come out by which they were forbidden from going up to line until nineteen. They wanted to see the colonel. They almost held a meeting in the approved Hyde Park style. A Jerry aeroplane came over and brought down one of the observation balloons in the valley below us. The observers got off by their parachutes, the sergeant had a fire lit in a brazier so we warmed ourselves as the evenings were very cold. They also had some tea in a petrol tin and it tasted fine as it was milky and sugary. The agitators belonging to the "eighteen pounders" and backed up by their constituents departed to interview the

pg.135

colonel. They returned feeling very disconsolate as he had talked to them in a patriotic spirit etc. and the upshot was that they were to go with the rest of us. It was hardly likely that he would give way without them there were only about a hundred of us left and he had been ordered to take about 4 or 500 up to the line for the stunt. The next event was the arrival of the battle surplus of the Fusiliers to prepare bivies etc. for their mess who were coming out of the line that night and were to occupy our trench. The rations came up soon after dark but were not issued at once as they were going to go with us up to the line in the limbers. We got to sleep for a bit and then they decided to issue the rations. I had been wishing all day that they would come as I felt

pg.136

ill with hunger. About 11.30pm we were paraded and put all our lumber such as Lewis guns in the limbers. Had some rum so felt a bit better. One of sergeants was quite drunk. Moved off about 12.

21 September

Passed up road to village and out on other side. Got out on to a path in the opening which we followed for a very long way. Passed several dressing stations and trenches filled with troops. Eventually came to outskirts of Epehy. Turned off road to left of village and halted there to unload limbers. I had to carry a tin of water. Waited here a few minutes. Lots of artillery about, several batteries in village. At bottom of road turned to right along outskirts of village. Seemed in a dreadful condition. Turned left across railway and

pg.137

then came to another railway. Here after a lot of hesitation turned to left and got amongst a lot of dugouts. Here we were told to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Shells were bursting all round. We were in a very deep cutting with two lines of railway. It did not seem to have been very much damaged by shell fire. Dugouts were in very bad repair. The old soldiers seemed to recognise them. I got into one which had no roof but still had some wire bedsteads. I remember looking at my watch. It was one o'clock. I had something to eat. Some boiled bacon which had no particle of lean on but it tasted better than any bacon I have ever had met. We tried to go to sleep but it was too cold and the waterproof caps were too small to keep one warm. Paraded again somewhere

pg.138

about 3am went out along line to where we came in and then turned off to left and seemed to be some difficulty about the way as they kept going backwards and forwards. Seemed a lot of dead lying about. Eventually after passing along a trench a bit got on to a track. Followed this along a bit. Seemed to a lot of shells bursting round about. One landed plump on coy in front and seemed to be a lot of casualties as we passed. Shell holes all over. Shells kept dropping on path. Seemed a very hot spot. One landed about 20 yards ahead just in between two coys. I had seen several land there before so I sprinted past the spot and when I was just about 20 yards beyond another landed. After a few more yards got into a sort of sunken lane running across our path lines

pg.139

with dugouts etc. Lots of troops about. We had got very strung out so we waited to reform. Passed along to left. Passed a lot of M.G.C. men. Seemed to be carrying a lot of stuff and swearing dreadfully. Passed a R.E. signal station, plenty of light inside. Had to go out into open on right and got into a C.T. Passed along this for a while and eventually got into a proper trench. It was well built with duckboards etc. Lot of troops about. Had to be careful to keep low because of snipers. Heard one bullet "snick" overhead. After a lot of

this which we got very exasperated barrage suddenly started. It was four o'clock and was falling about 100 yards ahead of trench. There was also a machine gun barrage on and it was making an awful noise.

pg.140

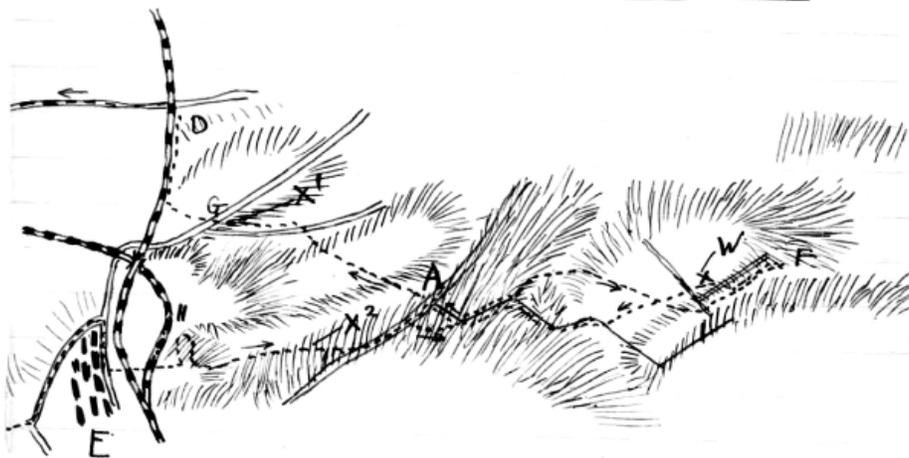
We just dashed out of trench and made our way through the barbed wire which was also here very wide. In doing so my cape which I was still wearing got caught so had to leave it. Went on for a bit. By this time we were all mixed up with other regiments. Nobody knew what our objective was to be or anything. In fact it was a proper muddle. We followed the barrage for a bit. First downhill and then uphill and over the top of a ridge. A Jerry machine gun began to fire and the day began to break. We were on the side of a hill with a valley below us and a hill on the other side. We could see the line in the distance going forward. One of our guns began to fire short so we had to keep well back. There did not seem much doing on the left. I believe we were on the extreme left. There was a

pg.141

road running parallel to the bottom of the valley and we were just below it. There was a flare still burning probably left by a Jerry. Machine gun began to get too obnoxious and as there were several now firing took shelter in a shell hole. Kept going forward in short bursts but had finally to give up as the firing was too strong. They seemed to have us well marked as they sniped us if we showed a finger. Sun got up now so it was full daylight. Barrage had stopped some time ago. After a time shells began to come over so we got even hotter. Rain began to fall and there was quite a sharp shower for about 10 minutes. Was too busy to notice wet. Began to feel very hungry but could not get at rations. Wondered where all others had got to.

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Map to illustrate Sept 21



- E = E pehy.
- H = Dug out in railway cutting
- X¹ = Second shell dodged
- X² = First shell dodged.
- A = Regtl. Aid post.
- W = Place where wounded.

- F = Place where turned back.
- ~~~~~ = Trench.
- D = Dressing station.
- G = Gas region where rested.

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After about an hour of this machine guns began to make even more noise when I was startled by a whole lot of our men running past. They shouted out "Jerry's coming over so you'd better get out of it". I jumped up and sure enough the whole line was running backwards. They were running along the hill on the other side of the valley. The bullets were making an awful noise and a lot of men seemed to be hit. They (the bullets) were kicking up the dust all around. I crossed the road and clambered up the bank on the opposite side. There seemed to be a special machine gun along that road as they fairly whizzed along. Came in sight of sunken road across path and began to think might get back safe

pg.144.

all when smack I was hit in the right elbow. Began to get wind up but dashed for road and landed safely. Here was safely out of the bullets. Managed to get equipment off and left rifle there also. Was frightened that Jerry might catch us there so decided to make a dash for it to the trench behind. Seemed a lot of wounded in the road. Looked back and thought I saw Jerry helmets but on reflection rather doubt it. Was able to run much better without equipment. Men were still being wounded so took shelter in a shell hole for a bit to get breath as the dust was flying all around. At last fire slackened so made another dash and got out of direct fire except for a few long distance ones which did not count. Managed to get through the wire

pg.145

alright and get into trench. Was afraid Jerry might put a barrage on it before attacking so did not wait but passed along. Found that the 9th London were in the trench and were busy standing to. Saw Howell who had joined the Army with me and did not seem at all perturbed. Got out of front line after a bit into a C.T. which had also probably been used for fighting and came out into a sunken road. Here was the regt. aid post of the Q.V.R.'s so proceeded to get done up. R.A.M.C. man who seemed somewhat dazed did the wound up. It had just missed the elbow, in fact at that time I thought it had got into the joint as the orifice of entry was just at the point of the

pg.146

olecranon or elbow and the orifice of exit in the fleshy part of the arm. Was not at all painfull and bled very little. The M.O. seemed to have been wounded. Felt very tired and faint with hunger. Remembered that had left rations in equipment. Had to lie down for a bit as the R.A.M.C. bearers told us they would show us the best way back and were leaving in a few minutes. One of our S.B.'s came along and wanted to know if any of our men were out in front. I told him all the news. He told me to get back as soon as possible as Jerry was rather free with his shells there. He told me the way. Went up hillside opposite beside a trench in which we could get in case of a barrage. Passed a man wounded in both feet and busy crawling along. Got

pg.147

over brow and down other side. Passed some men using an artillery rangefinder. Got on to a path and passed some R.A.M.C. men who told me to be careful as gas was lying about ahead. Took my mask out and used it without putting it on properly. Thought it felt rather peculiar but did not take any notice. Jerry shell came over and landed just ahead. I did not waste time as it was too near to be pleasant but tore along and landed on a road. Another shell landed behind me. Jerry evidently was on the lookout for that path and sniped anybody with his field guns. Some R.A.M.C. were resting behind bank of road so also had a rest. After a bit went on and struck railway. Passed along it to right. Very rough

pg.148

going because of debris lying about. After passing several Jerry prisoners with R.A.M.C. carrying wounded to dressing station. It was a collection of dugouts along railway line. Some badly wounded had just come in so had to wait a bit. Went to kitchen to get some tea. Bucked me up a lot but felt ravenous. Nothing to eat. After a bit went into big dugout & had arm done up properly. Felt very faint from hunger. Went into a dugout which was nearly full. Lot of Scots inside talking to some Jerries. The time was about 9am. Had to keep under cover as a lot of Jerry shells kept coming over and bursting just beyond. Several motor ambulances came up but stretcher cases had to go down first. They were Fords and came

pg.149

up road from rear and turned round other side of railway. When shell fire ceased had another walk round. Gave us each a piece of paper stating our wounds etc. which we were enjoined not to lose. About 12 o'clock went for another drink of tea. Sat on biscuit bag inside but could not pinch any because my wrong arm was wounded and they would have caught me. R.A.M.C. men got a good cooked dinner of stew. Made my mouth water. I had never been so hungry before and hoped never to be again. A few walking wounded were taken off about 1pm but there were a lot of us left. Saw an A.P.M. walking about. Seemed an awful nut. Were told that we should be taken away by horse ambulance when they arrived. On e of our chaps

pg.150

came in wounded in the leg but able to walk. He had had a parcel sent just before going up to line and had it with him. He gave me one of those very small loaves of bread and it tasted fine. It put new life into me and quite bucked me up. Met another of our men also wounded in the arm. He had been in the trench with me at Saulcourt. Met another chap who had been in 9th London and was transferred to Queens. I recognised him at once by his weak face. At last about 3pm two horse ambulances arrived. I got into the second and we lost no time getting off as shells were still falling. Passed a whole heap of rotting horses which smelt dreadfully. Got on to a main road after a while. It seemed

pg.151

beautifully tidy and clean after the awful desolation just behind the lines. I do not know our route at all but believe we passed through Heudicourt, Fins and Equancourt. I know we passed through Fins because it was marked up. I believe the field ambulance was stationed at Equancourt. There was a quite wide river crossed by a repaired bridge. There were steep hills where an advance had been stopped earlier in the year by some of our men. There was also a railway here. The field ambulance was a collection of white marquees. Went inside and had a mug of tea and paste sandwiches given us. Had a good feed & then passed into a larger tent. Here had our wounds dressed again, this time by an M.O. Had an A.T. injection and got each a

pg.152



a luggage label sort of envelope. Inside each was also a card giving full particulars. Passed on into another marquee where we had to take respirators and tin helmets off. Found when had got my respirator that a bullet had entered the canister and left a hole in it. This explained my astonishment earlier in the day when the breath came very quickly. The bullet had only been about ½ inch from my skin at the time – lucky escape. Waited in tent for about half an hour. Send a card off. Lovely evening outside. Sun was just setting in a brilliant blaze of red. Everything looked very peaceful. It

pg.153

was hard to realise we were so near to the war. At last we were out into a motor lorry and set off on another journey. We went a good distance, about 15 miles I should think but it may have been considerably less. Just about dark we arrived at C.C.S. [*Casualty Clearing Station*] It was just off a main road and was close beside a railway. We went into a huge marquee where we sat all around the walls while our particulars were taken. More tea was served out in brass bowls. Went into a hut all white paint inside with operating tables in the centre. It was brightly lit up electrically. We did not have our wounds dressed here but M.O. asked us all about them. I went off with an

pg.154

orderly who took me by mistake to a ward for gas patients. While waiting they gave me supper. Three huge slices of bread and butter and tea. It made me feel full again. Went to another ward where we were occupying stretchers covered with blankets. It was fine to lie down again and be more or less warm. There was a piano playing nearby and aeroplanes continually buzzing overhead. These wards were long double walled marquees with wooden floors covered with stretchers. Did not sleep very well. Felt too comfortable.

22 September

Woke up just before breakfast. Had porridge, bacon, bread and tea. Was fine. Had a walk round afterwards. A train was being loaded up with stretcher cases. There was even a light railway round the camp. Lot of men of Queens in

pg.155

camp so some of their batt. who were on battle surplus near by came and visited them. As had no cap went round with some others to destructor to find old one but there wasn't one there so had to go bareheaded. There was a canteen near by so lot of chaps went off to get some beer. They were unlucky. Dinner was fine, roast beef and rice pudding, best I ever tasted. Got a second helping by strategy. Got into conversation with a chap who was secretary to the Liverpool Medical Society and had a long talk. We expected to go off any minute but trains were anything up to eight hours late in arriving. One of the orderlies was a Welshman and kept roaring with laughter. Nothing much happened rest of day except a rumour that we

pg.156

were to go at 3 o'clock next morning. Had rained a lot in day.

23 September

Slept well and woke much refreshed. Noting much happened until about 10am. Were startled by being told to come and get on board the train. We lost no time at all and were soon in a compartment of a L.N.W.R. corridor coach [*London North West Railway*]. There were stretchers above our heads and I had to go on one. It was more comfortable than sitting up. An orderly came and took our (the occupants of stretchers) boots and puttees off. This was the first time they were off for about 6 days & made me feel much more comfortable. Happened to catch sight of my face in mirror & hardly recognised myself I was so thin. After we had got a start they brought me round some soap. It was a very poor dinner

pg.157

so felt hungry. Passed through Albert. Very queer looking sight only a heap of rubbish. Not a house left standing. Went through Amiens. The countryside was gorgeous. The weather was lovely, very sunny and

farms and homesteads in the midst of a rich harvest. Stopped at a small village just north of Etaples and had to get off here. Got into huge motor charabancs which took us to the 26th General Hospital. Went into a tin shed with concrete floor used as a reception hall. Here we had to wait to be told off to our wards. Went to bath house first. Here we had to take all our clothes off and leave them behind. We took our belongings of course and our boots. Baths were inclined to be cold. Proceeded

pg.158

to get dressed in clean hospital blue clothes. In middle of it all lights went out as there was an air raid on. Had to hurry up by candlelight. Went outside to go to dining hut. Bright moonlight. Went to dining hut. Here we had bread and butter but nothing to drink as the cooks were busy sheltering. Went to our huts with a buckshee piece of bread in our hands. Could hear Jerry aeroplanes distinctly. Went inside hut and got ready for bed. The huts were surrounded by a breastwork of sand bags & the beds were let down just off the floor. Got into bed after a bit. Raid was soon over as they were making for Boulogne. Orderly brought us some cocoa after a while. Slept fairly well. Very comfortable in bed.

pg.159

24 September

Got up and went to breakfast. Other new arrivals stayed in bed. Had to wait in a queue at the hut. Much amusement caused by two gendarmes attempts to catch two newsboys. We kept warning them by signals etc. Boiled ham for breakfast. Quite enough to eat. Got in way generally during morning. Wind up as there was to be C.O.'s inspection. Lovely morning. M.O. came round about 12 and saw us new ones. He seemed to think the joint might have suffered so he marked me for Blighty at once saying "pack him off home at once". They dressed the arm properly this time and went in to dinner. Fine dinner, plenty of gravy and vegetables. Wrote home in afternoon. Walked about a bit. Lovely afternoon. Chinese

pg.160

coolies at work on air raid excavations. went into Church Army hut but nothing to eat. Only a few old newspapers to read. After tea went to get some clothes to go to Blighty in as we could not cross in our blue clothes. Khaki clothes which had been worn & fumigated were issued to us. They were a very poor fit, dirty, and all creased. Still anything would do to get back to Blighty. Got a pair of braces also as well as underclothing. Got a woolen comforter as I had no cap. Got into conversation with a chap from Crook who knew all the people there. Gave him all my spare field cards as he was leaving for line soon. Bread & cheese for supper. Orders came that we should have to be ready at 5am next morning so we decided

pg.161

to go to bed early as we were terrified we might miss the train. Orderly said that he would wake us. Got a linen bag to keep my things in. Soon fell asleep in bed.

25 September

Woken about 4.30am. Orderly had some cocoa and bread and cheese for the three of us who were going. Looked awful sights. Raining outside but went down to hut where we had been received. Clustered round stove as it was quite cold. After a bit more arrived also some stretcher cases. After about a quarter of an hour we were taken away by motor charabancs. Still dark outside. Came to railway and went on board hospital train. We were in a long ward carriage with the bottom layer of beds down and the upper ones folded

pg.162

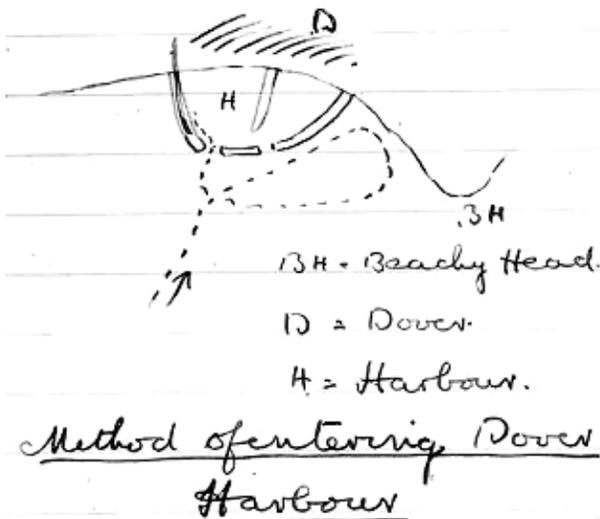
away. We sat along the sides. Train soon started. Breakfast came round after a bit, bread and bully beef and tea. Passed through Boulogne and were en route for Calais. Got into conversation with a man who was a Dane but practically English. He had lived in America a good deal and suffered from his lungs. Took a long time for train to get into Calais and on to pier. Ship was moored right alongside. Small boys hawked chocolate along by train so bought some. Rotten stuff. Not enough fat in it. Jerry prisoners employed as bearers. After a long wait got off train and went down to gangway. As passed on board M.O. looked into our eyes, I don't know what for. We walking wounded were accommodated on deck so proceeded to make

pg.163

ourselves comfortable. Dinner came round about 12 o'clock. Officers seemed to have a fine dinner in the stateroom place. Ship did not start off until somewhere about 2.30 or 3 pm. We were accompanied by a leave ship behind us. Our ship was camouflaged like the rest and had no sign to show she was a hospital ship. It was a single funnel screw vessel. Very desolate look to harbour entrance at Calais. Quite a sharp breeze on outside and several times spray went flying overboard. In mid channel waves were quite big. A French destroyer was escorting us and she was very low about the bows so that the waves broke right over her. She was going at a fine speed though. Lot of ships about. Saw several M.L.'s. Seemed very rocky on board them.

pg.164

Sun came out after a bit although it had been very dull when we started. Quite a lot of men were sick by now. I did not feel any the worse though. when in sight of Dover they started practicing with the gun on the



poop causing much distress to shell shock patients. Tea came round after a bit. Some officers including a staff officer tried to wangle out of the M.O. where they were going to be sent but he explained that he did not know. When we got off Dover went in by a peculiar route. Seemed to go right into cliff to right of harbour & then double back and go in the entrance. The sun was setting and Beachy Head & the countryside looked fine. The cliffs were clean and white & the grass seemed greener than the French variety. Moored alongside railway station. Sailor on a ship

pg.165

near by was semaphoring and seemed to be doing it very quickly. Went into a sort of waiting room off the station where we waited for a bit. About 8pm were taken off & put

into a train which started for London. I was the 81st in the queue so just missed that train but the rest of us were put on to another which then man told us was bound for Epsom. I had struck lucky. Set off soon and went at a decent pace. Much better than the crawling tactics of the French trains. The countryside looked better. Much cleaner neater and better kept. The stations were tidy & clean and things were not covered with the dust of ages. The gardens were green and

pg.166

fresh looking and the people were English. The setting soon sent a gleam over everything and we were really in England at last. We found that there was a railway strike on and only ambulance trains were running. The carriage was a ward car same as we had left in France but white inside & much cleaner. It was

a G.W.R. [Great Western Railway] one I think. Tea came round & the difference between the English bread & French bread was at once apparent. This was bread. Some women were distributing bags and fags etc. Long after dark got to Clapham Junction where we had to wait a long while. Some held conversation with a porter out of the window who seemed to hold strong views about the strike. After a lengthy stay went on again and finally stopped at Epsom. Here we got out but the train went on. There was only the stationmaster about. Everything

pg.167

was in darkness. Motor ambulances arrived after a bit. I got into the front of one with the driver. After about a quarter of an hours drive turned up drive to the side entrance to Horton war hospital. Here we got off and were taken inside and posted to our wards. I was put in E ward. Lots of men about in blue uniform. They were the asylum attendants used as orderlies. Three of us were new arrivals in our ward and proceeded to have a bath. Got into bed and had some supper of bread and butter. Soon went off to sleep. We were in England again and could sleep without fear. The journey was at an end and for that at least we were thankful.

Notes made on loose papers

The following was written on loose sheets of paper and was in very shaky handwriting and extremely hard to read.

pg.1

Fortunately my stay at Epsom came to an end & I was transferred to with others whose injuries were not severe or they were due to be discharged soon.

I was still there when the Armistice was declared on Nov 11 1918 but was discharged soon after & given leave at home.

I then was sent to the London command depot at Shoreham where I spent Christmas & towards the end/middle of January was given another leave to be spent at following when I had to join the 10th London battalion in one of the forts overlooking parliament.

We had nothing to do for whenever the officer in charge of demobilization was about I told him

Pg.2

that if he facilitated my discharge I could take the year MB in July. Because of this I went with 7 chaps to the Crystal Palace in & was promptly given my returned to Birkbeck College

The Author

The author of this account has been a scholar at the Royal Masonic School at Bushey not far from London until the summer of 1917 when he left having passed sufficient subjects in the senior Cambridge exams to enable him to claim passage of the matriculation examination for entry into a university for training as a medical student.

Unfortunately his eighteenth birthday came at the end of August when he would be eligible for recruitment as a soldier & liable to join the army during the next 15 months of a war that was becoming increasingly ferocious.

Fortunately my mother who possessed enormous courage, approached the recruiting officer at Hounslow? to postpone my callup for 3 months to enable me to obtain tuition at Birkbeck College in Bream's Buildings off Chancery Lane to enable me to prove that I did in fact wish to become a doctor sometime in the future.

In the meantime I could not escape military service and was accordingly called up shortly before Christmas 1917. I had been posted to the Queen Victoria Rifles – a London Territorial Regiment in training at Barracks in the Aldershot area where were others of age. I was trained in the dreadful act of killing others.

In April however it was deemed that I would be more suitable as a cyclist than a rifleman & was posted to the 25th London Cyclist Battalion at Saxmundham in Norfolk where we were supposed to be guarding the homeland against a German invasion.

After only a few weeks it was deemed that I would be never suited for an ordinary infantry regiment & was accordingly sent back to Blackdown to join the 10th London Infantry Regiment.

In due course, our training was considered suitable for active service and during July was given 6 days leave to spend with my brother and sister at a small cottage Farnham not far away from Blackdown.

What happened to me during the next 7 months is the subject of my essay Which I wrote after leaving the army in February 1919 and based entirely on my memory because diary keeping in active service was forbidden. It does however give some indication of what a mere boy of 18-19 years of age felt at the time by an amateur scrivener.