

IE TCD MS 10821

WWI diary of Charles Howard-Bury, 29 May to 8 September 1916

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diary of C.H.B.

May 29th. We left Charing Cross soon after 7 am in a train crowded with officers. There must have been between five & six hundred of us. Our valises were bundled into vans & we were told we need not bother again about them as they would go through to Boulogne. Trench, Davies, Sladen & Bennett, Warner & Dewhurst came with me from Sheerness. It was a beautiful summers day & the country was looking beautiful. On arrival at Folkestone we found that some of our names were not on the list, but after some arguments we were allowed on board. The ships decks – it was one of the Stranraer boats – were crowded with officers. Every regiment must have been represented. The sea was as calm as a mill pond & no one could have been ill. We were all served out with life belts, & were escorted by an airship which kept flying round us, also by occasional destroyers. On arrival at Boulogne, we had to put our watches back an hour as there is no day light saving bill over here. The scene of confusion on disembarking was extraordinary. The Landing Officer completely lost his head & temper on seeing the numbers arrive & kept every one hanging about for an unnecessarily long time. At length finding that we had to report at the station at 5 pm, we all went

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off to get some luncheon at the Hotel de Paris, where the food was not at all bad & the Barsac quite good. After a good meal we drove round the town & also paid a visit to St Aubyn in his Censors office, where he seemed very fed up with his job. At five we returned to the station & found a special train waiting for us, which took us at a very slow pace to Etaples, a little over an hours run. Here I hurried out & saw the R.T.O. who shewed me where to report, which I hurried to do, arriving first & getting it over. Two hours later I passed the place & saw officers in line <still> waiting to report. All the luggage was dumped down into one place, some six hundred valises, so there was much trouble in finding it in the dark. We found ourselves posted to the 12th. Divl. Camp, three of us to a tent, so we are not over crowded. The mess that [was] built to accommodate about 40 had to provide dinner for about 150 & very nasty it was. I was lucky in getting my valise as everyone did not find theirs. I tried my new air mattress for the first time, & found it quite a success.

May 30th. After a fair night, we awoke to the sound of battering rain on the tent, which laid the dust outside. Breakfasting at 7 am we had to parade at 8 & go down to the training ground. For over two

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miles we had to walk through tents & huts. It was an impressive sight, this vast camp on the sand dunes stretching for miles in every direction, but in a wind it must be terribly dusty. I hoped we were going to learn something new on the training ground, but instead found captains as well as subalterns treated as privates & made to do squad drill & bayonet fighting as such. We were drilled by N.C.Os & second lieutenants very badly. I was rather amused as for the last year I had been training 800 men & 15 to 20 officers every day myself, & to find myself as one of the men <was

rather a reverse of fortune>. I was enabled to see things more from their point of view. I objected however to the language of the N.C.O's towards officers & the way & the way we were generally treated. This lasted till 1.30 pm & we were then marched back to camp which took about an hour. At 3.30 pm there was a lecture but officers that had been out were excused. There we found an officers Club at Etaples & so we went there for dinner. It was quite a comfortable place & we had an excellent meal there, very different from the food in the mess.

May 31st. A hot summers day. Had to parade at 7.45 am & march off to the training camp ground. This time they took some trouble to sort us out, thanks to the

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fuss we & others made yesterday, & some were put on bombing & Lewis Gun. I was put in charge of a party of over 100 officers of which over 50 were Australians. They were most of them quite good & the work was not very strenuous. We got back to camp about 2.30 pm & had a very nasty lunch, after which we took the train from Etaples to Paris Plage. It was about 5 km away & the road led through very pretty woods most of the way. Paris Plage on arrival turned out to be a quite new seaside resort, but on wanting to bathe we found the tide very low & we should have to have walked nearly a mile across wet sand to get into the sea. There was a big steamer on the sands, broken in half, probably torpedoed I should think & then beached. After tea we returned to camp by the train & finding there were no orders for us, went out to dine at the Club in Etaples, where the food was quite good.

June 1st. Slept very well on my air mattress which is a great success. We are lucky in having such delightful weather which makes life in camp very pleasant. Went off as usual to the training camp where we spent a peaceful morning with the Lewis Gun & doing bombing. The Major in command of the training camp was at times offensively rude to officers. In the afternoon we went off to Paris Plage where we had tea in a bakers shop & also got a good

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hot bath there. In the evening dined at Etaples at the officers club: our table covered with beautiful roses, La France & others. On thanking Madame, she told us we might take them away with us. Still no orders about leaving.

June 2nd. Routine as usual. Marched out to the training camp at 7.45 where we spent a peaceful morning, returning back to camp at 2.30 pm. In the afternoon there was a very dull lecture & in the evening we dined as usual in the Officers Club. Still no orders about leaving.

June 3rd. A Route march in the morning through the very pretty Le Tonquet woods & round by Paris Place [Plage]. On the way I passed a number of my company who have been sent out to the 20th & 21st Bns. They gave me a great cheer when they saw me. Today we lunched at Etaples & then went out by train to Paris Plage where we had a good swim in the sea which I thoroughly enjoyed. There was quite a good surf. We then tried to find where the Cavalry spots were & wandered for miles through very pretty woods. At length we found them in a charming spot; <it was> quite like a picnic in peace time. I met several old friends of Pindi days there & am to lunch with the Xth Hussars

tomorrow. The cavalry have had a very pleasant time there now for several months. Dined as usual afterwards at the Club

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Sunday June 4th. A peaceful day. I heard that I am posted to the 9th Bn, a new Army Battalion, for which I am sorry as there is no one there that I know, while all the others are going to the 2nd Bn where I know everyone. Spent the morning writing letters, then walked out to Merlimont about 7 Kms away to lunch with Brock. The cottages along the road side were surprisingly neat & tidy with very pretty flower gardens & some looked most attractive. Brock gave me an excellent lunch in a farmhouse & we spent the afternoon reading & talking as it started to rain. After tea he lent me one of his polo ponies & we rode back to Etaples. In the evening we had a cheery 4th of June dinner in the Club with champagne.

Monday June 5th. A very wet & stormy night. Some of the tents were blown down, but ours luckily held. We went off to the Training Camp, but as it started to pour with rain we were all sent back. So we lunched in Etaples & went off to Paris Plage for the afternoon. It was blowing a gale & the surf there was very fine. On return to camp, I found orders awaiting me to proceed up the line that night: the others that are going to the 2nd Bn were not to leave till the morning. I found myself in command of the train with about 60 officers on it. After a good dinner at the Club I went down to the train which

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was waiting in a siding. We were due to leave at 1.50 am but did not actually start till 5.30 am, so that we missed the connection at Abbeville.

Tues. June 6th. On arrival at Abbeville about 8 am, I found no more trains going up to rail head that day, so we have to wait till the following morning. We went to a hotel called the Tête de Boeuf in the town, a very old fashioned but quite comfortable inn & very fair food. The whole morning it poured with rain, but the afternoon proved finer. There are one or two very interesting churches in the town especially St Walpurgis which dates from about 1500 A.D. It has an extraordinarily lofty but short nave which gives it a queer appearance. There are many very old fashioned houses in the streets which are narrow & paved with cobbles, which gives the town an old-world look. I took a good walk in the evening along the banks of the Somme which runs in a most picturesque fashion through the town. In places gardens & fine trees line its banks & higher up were large Red Cross barges moored along the sides. Retired to bed early as we have an early start.

June 7th. Left Abbeville at 6.30 am in the Supply Train. I travelled up with the R.T.O. who gave me a breakfast in his compartment. We passed through quite pretty coun[try]

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[coun]try on a small cross country line & arrived at the railhead for our Division at Tincques about midday. Here I found a supply lorry going to the Divisional Supply Park at Avesnes & travelled in it as far as Avesnes. Here after lunch a ASC officer took me & my kit up in his car up to Berneville where I

found the Quarter Master of the 9th Bn. He arranged to put me up in a billet with the Padre for the night, as it was no use going up to the trenches as the Battalion comes out tomorrow. We seem to be in a fairly peaceful part of the line & there is not much shelling going on. A good many German aeroplanes are flying over reconnoitring, but though much fired at, never seem to pay any attention to the Guns. From a hill just behind the camp, I got a good view of the Vimy Ridge in the distance & Arras lying in a hollow about 5 miles away.

June 8th. A quiet morning. Went up on the hill behind the camp & watched the shelling on Vimy Ridge. After lunch I walked up to the trenches which were about 6 miles away to have a look at them. On the way it started to rain & as the soon became very muddy. After going through miles of communication trenches, I eventually reached Battalion Headquarters & Benson who was commanding the <Bn> took me round. It was a regular maze of trenches & our front was a very long one. I got

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quite lost after a while & very dirty, as the soil was chalky & it was raining. I then returned back to Berneville, but the Battalion did not come out till after dark & they had a very wet march as it poured with rain. Poor Kitchener, this sudden death is perhaps best for him as he was at the height of his glory.

June 9th. The Battalion slept & rested most of the day after being eight days in the trenches, but in the afternoon I paid out & had kit inspections. It amused me to watch all the schoolchildren here going to school, each carrying a satchel with a gas helmet, instead of copy books. Poor little mites, I hope the gas will never come here. Old men & women are to be seen working in their gardens & fields at Achicourt where not only are they constantly shelled but where they are under direct rifle fire. Nothing of interest to record. Received my first letters today.

June 10th. Ordinary parades all the morning. The discipline in the Battalion is not good. It is very much New Army I should think. The chief fault is the lack of good NCO's: there are occasional good ones, but the majority are indifferent. In the afternoon I rode over to Acq about seven miles away to try & see some of our 7th & 8th Bns. On the way I was caught in a heavy thunderstorm & had to stop while it lasted at a small village. On ar[rival]

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[ar]rival at Acq, I met several men that had been in my company at Sheerness & who had come out in drafts. I eventually ran Maurice Crum to ground & Wormald gave me tea at Hd Qtrs & asked me to come over again tomorrow & ride on & see the 1st Bn who are not far off. In the evening dined with Drury who had some good champagne.

Sunday June 11th. After Church parade in the morning, I rode off to Acq & lunched with the 7th Bn. After lunch Maurice Crum, Wormald & I rode off to the village where the 1st Bn were, but found that they had gone up to the trenches the night before. A heavy thunderstorm came on, so we stopped with the ASC Colonel, a friend of Maurice's until it was over & then after tea at Acq rode back here. There was very little activity on our front all day & very little shelling.

Mon June 12th. A very cold day with constant showers. In the morning I took the Company for a route march, through rather dull country. In the afternoon attended a gas lecture & in the evening a concert, which was really quite good.

June 13th. After a very wet night, it rained most of the day & the mud is almost worse than Sheppey mud. In the evening we had night operations.

June 14th. Started out with Lacy at 6.30 am & rode out to inspect a reserve line of trenches. The going was very heavy

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as it had poured all night & the trenches were very wet. We then had breakfast with some gunners who lived close to these trenches & who had got a very comfortable mess. Their guns were most beautifully hidden & from even a few yards away, it was impossible to discover their position. In the afternoon I rode over to Hauteville to the Divl School for officers & then dined with D Co[mpan]y. Tonight we put our watches on one hour. The weather still remains very cold & wet.

June 15th. Drizzling & very cold. Held various company inspections during the morning. Receive orders that we have to march into Arras tonight. Richmond & I were sent on ahead to Brigade Headquarters on Special business & after making certain of the places at which to rendezvous, we dined at Brigade Headquarters. The General I found that I had met at Ranikhet many years ago. We have got quite comfortable quarters over an Estaminet & the company are billeted in empty houses close by. They did not arrive in till nearly midnight. Arras is quite a nice old town with delightful old lime avenues everywhere & picturesque houses & churches. By day the streets are very deserted, but by night the town wakes up & after dark all the shopping is done. There are not many of its original inhabitants left, but the few that there are make quite a good thing out of it.

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Most of the churches & the larger buildings have been ruined by shelling, but looking down the streets casually not much damage is apparent.

June 16th. Another cold morning. There was not much to do, as the men are not allowed out by day. I explained the scheme to them & what the work is that has to be done each night. In the afternoon I went into the town, past delicious lime avenues & had a good big bath. There is very little shelling going on & the streets give one the appearance of a quiet cathedral town, many miles away from the war whereas we are here only a few hundred yards from the Boche lines. There are many nice gardens hidden by high walls & full of roses, which seem to thrive in this soil. After dark, I had to arrange & marshal my parties for carrying "accessories" up to the trenches & I did not get back till 2.30 am. It was a bright moonlight night, but with a cold wind & I did not enjoy the long wait. There was a big rat that amused me for some time, hunting for food all round where I was sitting. It was a quiet evening with but little shelling: occasional bullets whizzed overhead & flares were going up on all sides.

June 17th. I did not rise early after our nights work, though the guns were rather more active than usual in the

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morning. They were especially busy at firing at aeroplanes, for as the weather has become finer, so they have become more active in reconnoitring. In the afternoon Warner & I took a walk round the town. We made our way first to the Cathedral, which has suffered terribly. Except for one arch the whole of the roof was gone & all one wing had fallen. The big museum close by had been also destroyed & the aspect of these ruined buildings was very forlorn. We then went on to the picturesque squares surrounded by most delightful old fashioned buildings. There were arcades all round the squares & one or two shops were still open. The inhabitants had remained there throughout the bombardments – poor souls, they said that it did not matter if they were killed, so they might just as well remain in their homes. Of the beautiful 16th Century Hotel de Ville & its great belfry scarcely any thing remains & all the houses in the neighbourhood were completely wrecked. The Boche still puts shrapnel over the square every day in hopes of catching a few people. After dark we carried on with our secret work & got back again soon after two o'clock. Everything went smoothly. Very little shelling or rifle fire. I was amused at the A.S.C. officer who came up with the accessories who asked 'what all the funny lights were?' It was evi(dent)

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(evi)dent that this was the first time he had been so close to the front line.

Sun June 18th. The weather still continues very cold. There was a voluntary service in the Riding school in the morning. The Boche aeroplanes were very active. Yesterday & today they sent over battle squadrons of five & seven apiece which gave our guns a great time firing at them. They say that one was brought down, but the shooting appeared to me to be very wild. In the afternoon I took a walk round the park where there are some very fine trees. While we were having dinner, there was a great deal of shooting, a Boche aeroplane squadron & one of ours were having a fight up in the air, all the guns were going, & some Boche "pipsqueaks" were dropping shells just beyond us. The same night work as usual. I did not get back till 2am.

June 19th. Another cold raw day. Had a good bath in the afternoon preparatory to going in the trenches in the evening. We started from Arras at 9.30 pm & it took us about an hour & a half to get to our trenches. There seemed to be miles of communicating trenches, we went through tunnels & past countless other support & reserve lines until I was quite lost & had no idea in which direction

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we were proceeding. We relieved a Company of the Rifle Brigade & found that the trenches were not too bad & that I had a very comfortable dug out for my Headquarters. Most of the night I spent wandering round to try & get my bearings & see that everything was alright. There are two rooms in the dug out, one where we have our meals & another where there is a bed, so that we are very well off.

June 20th. It was a cold night & a ground mist early in the morning. We had to stand to arms from 2.45 am to 4.45 am after which we had some breakfast & then retired to sleep for a few hours. During the hours of daylight, I am beginning to find my way about in this maze of trenches, but even now I get lost in the numerous support trenches. We had one man killed by a sniper early in the morning, otherwise the morning was quite peaceful. From two till half past we were shelled with

4.2's & whiz bangs, but they did no damage & during tea <we had> with vane bombs, crackers & whiz bangs <over us>. The communication trenches are looking very pretty with all the poppies & cornflowers hanging over the edges. On my dug out table I have a bowl of paeonies(sic) & cornflowers & life in the trenches is altogether different now to what it was when I was out here before. Rats are everywhere, big, middle sized & small. Some are

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almost the size of rabbits & very tame. One ran over me while I was asleep last night.

June 21st. During the night we had several working parties out, some mending wire & others cutting grass which is very long now in front between the lines. The Boche also had several parties out cutting grass & mending wire, so that neither side liked to fire for fear of hitting their own men. The result was that we had a very quiet night. Ferard went out on a patrol along the enemy's wire to inspect their work & brought back a good report. We stood to arms for 2.45 am to 4.45 am & had one man hit by a sniper, who later on broke all the periscopes put up on that part of the trench. He must be an exceptionally good shot as the target is only 2½" by 1½". The morning & afternoon were very quiet & uneventful. At night we had patrols out in front of the line & parties mending barbed wire. The Boche fired some Machine Guns at them but without effect.

June 22nd. A very quiet & peaceful night with but little firing. The first fine & hot day. The morning was very quiet & peaceful, but in the afternoon the big minnenwerfer (sic) got to work & fired a good many shells, which burst not very far away, making an appalling row. Finn bombs, small mortars, 77mm & 5.9 guns were busy firing at us

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for nearly two hours & it was wonderful how much stuff could be put over our heads without causing any casualties. Our dug out had one narrow escape from a 5.9 with delayed action fuze which badly shook it. The night was very stuffy & beyond a good deal of machine gun firing was fairly quiet.

June 23rd. A few rifle grenades came over during the night. I got very little sleep, bey being constantly disturbed. After breakfast just as I was lying down for a few hours rest, the minnenwerfer, finn bombs & all the unpleasant enemy's missiles started to come over & made sleep impossible. Our retaliation was I am afraid nil. Went down to Batn Head Quarters where we had a conference about the work to be done. Henry Porter had arrived here, whether to command or not I do not know. A heavy thunderstorm came on in the afternoon & the water poured into our dug out. It rained most of the night & the trenches soon got into a very bad state, full of mud & water. All the afternoon there was a ceaseless bombardment to the South of us: the heavy guns were going all the time & the air quivered with the vibration.

June 24th. It rained all night & while we were standing to in the morning, so the trenches are in a horrible state. Luckily it cleared up in the course of the morning. The

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heavy gun fire to the South continues without [ms damaged<intermission>]. Poor Fritz must be having a poor time of it & I am glad that I am not in his shoes. The morning was quite peaceful but in the afternoon we had our usual compliment of missiles. They were too close to be pleasant to our dug out & up in the front line, the finn bombs made it equally unpleasant. A spent piece from one hit me quite smartly on the shoulder. The night was fairly quiet except for machine gun fire & there was luckily no rain. The bombardment continued throughout the night without stopping. I keep killing rats as I go round the trenches. They are very bold & are all over the place.

Jun 25th. The bombardment still goes on without intermission a constant roar in the distance. I am very glad that I am not undergoing it. The mud in the trenches is still very bad, but is drying up slowly. The morning was peaceful & I walked down to Battalion Headquarters to talk over our little show here. In the evening we had rather a bad bombardment from all kinds of weapons for nearly two hours. We had only one man killed & another injured, which was very lucky as many fin[n] bombs landed in the trenches, but the men are now getting pretty smart in dodging them. The night was very quiet & the Germans occasionally turned a search light

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onto our trenches.

June 26th. The bombardment to the S[outh] continued all last night & throughout the day. The whole air quivers with the sound of constant explosions. At times to the North near Vimy there is a great bombardment but it does not last so long. The day was rather showery & the wind very changeable. It has been so ever since we came in & has been of no use to us. The poppies are wonderfully pretty in the communication trenches & in some of the deserted trenches: they hang right down the sides. Towards evening the rain set in steadily & it poured a good part of the night. There was a little shelling in the evening & machine gun fire otherwise the night was quiet. There was a great bombardment going on near Vimy during the night & the flashes from the guns & the lights from Star shells & [?] pistols made a wonderful display. To the S[outh] the great cannonade continues with redoubled intensity all day & all night.

June 27th. The trenches were in a horrible state at the early morning stand-to arms & I did not enjoy floundering about in the mud. The day turned out fairly fine with showers but there was a steady Westerly wind. Our trenches were filled with gas cylinders & as the wind was at last favourable they were to be let off at 3 pm. I hate the game as it seems a mean

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& underhand trick, but the Boche was the first [ms damaged < to start it>]. However I shall be glad to get rid of it from our trenches, as we have had it there now for eight days & I was always afraid of a shell hitting one of the cylinders & gassing our own people. At 3 o' clock in the afternoon though it was raining slightly the gas was let out: it was a most uncanny sight to see the greyish yellow vapour pouring out of the pipes & flowing along the ground towards the German lines. It kept at first very low only about four feet deep, but as it spread further on it rose a little & formed a regular wall of fog about fifteen to twenty feet high. The fog took only about 30 seconds to reach the nearest German trenches so that they had not much warning. There was a little rifle fire at first, but this soon stopped & for about five minutes there was silence. Then the guns & trench mortars on both sides started & for an hour & a half there was a terrific bombardment. We were well scattered in

small trenches everywhere & in spite of the tornado of flying missiles, we had very few casualties. Ferard was wounded but not badly & three men: another one became deaf & dumb & one or two suffered from shell shock. Two were gassed: on[e] of them a R.E. corporal who died very soon after. It is a most deadly stuff, a couple of strong whiff[s] are sufficient to

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to [sic] kill & it finds out any weak points in the [ms damaged <gas helmets>]. It is more merciful than the German gas as it is so deadly & there is very little suffering or struggling for breath with it. If the Germans were unprepared for it, it must have killed everyone in front who received it fairly strong. It is however not warfare, but a war of chemistry & machinery. All vegetation in front withered away, all the thistles & plants turned yellow & died so powerful was the volume of gas. Except for a few shells from a long distance the night was quiet & very dark.

June 28th. I got very little sleep in the night being constantly disturbed by messages & also by our guns which fired salvoes periodically during the night. In retaliation the Boche at Stand-to plastered our trenches with shrapnel: one man was badly hit at the beginning. Every half hour or so afterwards he would suddenly put over twenty to thirty shells, so that this part of the line is no longer a quiet part & there is more to come yet I am afraid. Our trench mortars replied with 'Tadpoles', 60 lb bombs on a long stick which were very effective & frightening. The whole morning we were being steadily shelled, the 'crackers' are the noisiest, but the 5.9 do the most damage. No sleep was possible during the morning as

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as [sic] big shells were falling all round my dug out. The afternoon was quieter as I think the 'cracker' has used up its supply of shells. Two or three miles away I could see a gas attack going on, clouds of gas & smoke rolled along like a great fog over the enemy's lines & a constant roar of artillery forming a barrage on either side was heard & the shrapnel could be seen bursting in long lines. How the Boche must regret having started using gas as the prevalent wind is W[est] so we get plenty of opportunities & he gets none. The evening passed quietly, the Boche being evidently very nervous from the number of flares that he put up.

June 29th. The night passed quietly & I was just leaving my dug out to go up into the front line for the 'stand to' when I was greeted with bursts of shrapnel. I just managed to get as far as the signaller's 'dug out' where I at once telephoned to the artillery for retaliation. For half an hour our fire trenches & support lines were very heavily shelled. Two men were killed just outside the signaller's dug out & four more were wounded in the fire trench. The fire trench was badly blown in in several places & quite impassable for a time. They have absolutely got the range of it & burst most of the shells right on the parapet. At 5 a.m. we had another heavy shelling for half an hour, blowing in more of

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the trenches which are luckily very weakly held, which accounts for our having so few casualties. Our tadpole was later on in the morning very active sending some 70 of them onto the Boche trenches, but he was only able to retaliate with six crackers, as we have stopped his transport coming up close

the last two nights by shelling the roads & so he is short of ammunition. There was not much shelling during the afternoon & evening, but another gas attack could be seen to the North. The nights are very dark now as there is no moon.

June 30th. We had a disturbed night, as at midnight our guns opened rapid fire on the enemy's trenches & then put a barrage behind them. A raiding party of the RB, the Ox & Bucks & a patrol of ours were to go out & try & capture a prisoner, but I have not heard the result yet. Intermittent shelling & showers during the morning combine to make the trenches in a very bad state. To the South there is a great bombardment again today. The day was a fairly quiet one with very little shelling on our sector on either side. I hear that the Ox & Bucks killed six Boche & bombed several dug outs, without getting any retaliation. The night was very dark & the Boche was exceedingly nervous sending up several flares

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every minute. We had three listening patrols out & an officers patrol, but they did not see or hear anything.

July 1st. A very quiet night to be followed by a strenuous day. In order to frighten the Boche we were told to send over a smoke cloud, which he would imagine as a gas cloud. We were given 500 phosphorus bombs & 500 smoke candles, each company & over three divisional fronts the smoke cloud was to be let loose. It was a most extraordinary sight to see the stream of smoke flowing over towards the Boche lines: it started first on our right & then crept along towards us. For an hour we kept the cloud of smoke up & the Boche bombarded us with every kind of gun but most erratically, while our guns & trench mortars replied at the same time. I think we really frightened him. It was however only a demonstration & to make him put on his gas helmets, as often there is gas mixed with smoke. The real attack is taking place further S[outh] & we had a message to say that it was going on successfully & that we had taken three lines of trenches. We had intermittent shelling from the 5.9 & 4.2's all day, but our retaliation was good & we had only four casualties. We were to

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be relieved by the Ox & Bucks at 11 pm & I was awaiting them when suddenly a few minutes before they were due the Boche opened rapid fire with rifle & machine gun & all his artillery on our fire trenches & supports. We did not know whether it meant an attack at first but as he put up so many lights we knew that it was his object & we found out afterwards that he blew up a very big mine further along the line at the same time & that this was to cover his attempt to seize it, which was foiled by the 8th Bn. After some delay we were able to carry out the relief & arrived back in Arras about 2.30 am.

July 2nd. We slept long & rested in beds after the twelve days in the trenches. A few shells were fired into Arras in the course of the day & I noticed that a good deal of fresh damage had been done while we were away. Went to bed early.

July 3rd. A lovely summers day. Nothing of interest to record. I had a good bath in the afternoon & then went over to see Maurice Crum.

July 4th. I had intended to go up & look at our new trenches but it was so wet that I put off going. In the evening dined with Maurice at 41st B[riga]de H.Q. &

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spent a very pleasant evening there. They had a delightful walled in garden full of roses & fruit.

July 5th. A few shells were sent into Arras, but they passed over us. In the morning I was on a Court Martial & after lunch I walked up to our new trenches to have a look at them. The trenches were very muddy after the rain, but seemed to be fairly quiet. The poppies everywhere on either side were lovely. In the evening there was quite a good regimental concert in the theatre.

July 6th. Our short period of rest is over & we are to move up into the trenches tonight but to a different sector. Where our company will be is supposed to be fairly quiet & this time we have to remain in for nine days. I had a good bath in the morning & after lunch walked over to see the 8th Bn : I saw Verdant Green, Maurice Crum, Frewer & Nixon & several old friends. After tea I walked back to our billets, just in time to avoid a downpour of rain, which lasted for a couple of hours & made the communication trenches very wet & unpleasant. The relief was completed by 11.30 pm & I then wandered round the various posts which took me till 1am & very wet it was.

July 7th. The weather is still very bad, constant

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heavy showers, which made the trenches in a horrible state. The poppies, cornflowers & delphiniums are a wonderful sight, growing right down both sides of the trenches & a perfect blaze of colour, scarlet predominating. I should love to be able to do a water colour of some of these trenches. The day passed quite quietly, there were a few shells over in the afternoon, & if it had not been <for> the rain, the day would have passed quite pleasantly. I was on duty from 1 am till 5 am & it poured steadily the whole time.

July 8th. It rained hard most of the morning, but our fire trench is surprisingly dry. The communication trenches are however in a very bad way & have fallen in in several places. After lunch our trench mortars started firing which caused the German ones to reply & there was a good deal of stuff flying about for an hour, fin bombs big & little trench mortars, whizz-bangs, 4.2's and & few 5.9's. One of our aeroplanes returning from a reconnaissance was brought down yesterday afternoon by the Boche anti-aircraft guns opposite us & fell in flames. The others came back safely in spite of being very heavily fired at. The evening turned out finer, with a beautiful sunset.

July 9th. A quiet night, without any alarms. We had our usual wiring parties & listening posts out in

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front. The day turned out to be a delightful one: it makes all the difference in the trenches. I saw [sic. Recte sat] out & basked in the sunshine reading. The communication trenches are still very wet. The day proved exceptionally quiet, only a few fin bombs & whizz bangs in the evening. A foraging party in the derelict gardens of Ronville produced some artichokes, new currants< potatoes>, currants & raspberries which proved a welcome change to our fare.

July 10th. The weather still keeps fine & the trenches are beginning to dry up. The Divisional General & Brigadier came round this morning. The former is a small man & so did not mind all the overhead

wire in the trenches. I bless our steel helmets every day, which have saved my head many a time from bumps & this horrible overhead barbed wire. I am getting used to their weight. Sgt Bayless was wounded during the night but not badly. He was on the parapet repairing damage done by the rain. In the afternoon some 4.2's came over & also some 8" behind the next company: luckily no damage was done.

July 11th. A beautiful starry night & very quiet. I was prowling round till 1 am & then again from 2.45 am till 5 am. The morning was quite quiet, but in the afternoon we had a bombardment of Beaurains. I walked down into

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Arras & had a very nice bath there, which was most refreshing. The Boche retaliated very little to our bombardment.

July 12th. A fairly quiet night, though Boche patrols were reported. The weather is very unsettled at present & looks like more rain just as every thing was drying up. In the afternoon there was another bombardment of Beaurains & the brickfields which for a while were completely hidden in a pink cloud of dust. The Boche retaliated a good deal more & sent over some large crackers, 8" shells & a new gun about 6" as well as small mortars & fin bombs. The night however passed off quietly: the Boche had a big working party out & so kept quite quiet.

July 13th. The wind was blowing from the S.E. today, so we had a gas alert, but it luckily changed to S.W soon after & we were able to resume normal conditions. It started to rain however but eventually cleared up. In the afternoon I wandered down through the deserted gardens of Ronville where I found much fruit & many flowers. I went up to the Observation Post & had a good view over the country, then went to tea at Headquarters where I found we were to have a busy night, worrying the Boche all the time. It had already started when I got back & I found our guns busy cutting the

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wire. The Boche stood this for a couple of hours & then began to answer back with every kind of missile & we had a pretty heavy bombardment for a couple of hours though very scattered. As soon as it was dark we sent out two officers patrols to try & capture a Boche, but not one ventured outside their barbed wire. At 12.30 am our guns opened heavy fire on their lines & woke them all up out of sleep: all the trench mortars were firing too & there was a fearful din. It was however quite a pretty sight. They retaliated soon afterwards & we all retired to our dug outs for a while: we had two men wounded, who would poke their noses outside to see what was going on. After about 1 hour things quietened down & I thought but alas we were not allowed to get even a few minutes sleep. A lot of Phosphorous bombs were supposed to have been sent up, but some had gone astray & our company was unable to make a smoke screen. The Battalions however on our right started a smoke screen at 2.55 am & a wonderful sight it was. The Boche at once sent up red rockets & their guns & ours opened heavy fire which lasted for about an hour & a half. We had two more men wounded. After the show was over there was a regular kind

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of smoke fog everywhere. I picked up several shell cases & nose caps in our trenches afterwards.

July 14th. I did not manage to get any sleep till 10 am & there only for a couple of hours. Everyone was sleepy & so the day passed very peacefully, no shell or rifle fire all day. In the afternoon I wandered down into Ronville where I found some excellent raspberry bushes. After dark we again sent out an officers patrol with a Lewis gun & soon afterwards Benson came up & wanted to see how they were getting on, so we went out from the gap into No Mans Land where we remained over two hours. The Patrol spotted us & proceeded to stalk us & I was fully persuaded that a Lewis gun was going to be turned onto us: we heard suspicious clicks but eventually we managed to let them know who we were. We had a beautiful view behind us as we were on higher ground: some aeroplanes came over & dropped some incendiary bombs behind the German lines. We eventually got up close to a German working party who were chattering away at the top of their voices: they were unfortunately behind their barbed wire, which was very thick here & unbroken. We however turned the Lewis gun on them & several were seen to fall. We

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then hurried back to our own trenches to avoid retaliation as the moon was full.

July 15th. A quiet morning & very little shelling. An officer from the 11th Divn came up to be attached to us. I wonder whether they are going to take over our trenches & give us a rest. In the evening we were relieved & came back to Arras for a three days rest. There was a bright moon so the relief took a very short time & we got back to our billets by midnight.

July 16th. I had a real good nights sleep in a comfortable bed & thoroughly enjoyed it. It rained unfortunately most of the day & night, which will make the trenches most unpleasant again. The news from the South seems quite good, especially the capture of some big guns. I saw Maurice Crum in the afternoon & had a walk with him round the citadel & through some very pretty gardens full of nice shrubs, copper birches & other fine specimen trees. During the night we sent out a raiding party to try & get into the German lines, but they found the wire far too thick to get through & though they spent four hours in the pouring rain trying to cut it, they made very little impression.

July 17th. Another wet day. The trenches will be in

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a very bad state I am afraid. I had a good bath in the afternoon. Not so much shooting all round.

July 18th. Another wet night, but the day improved as it went on. I managed to find a coiffeur in Arras who had not fled & who cut my hair for me. He was at the time having a quarrel with his wife. We have an officer & a platoon of the Sherwood Foresters attached to us for instruction. In the evening we went up into the trenches into a sector that I had not been in before. The trenches were in places badly knocked about by trench mortars, but ordinarily the place is quite quiet.

July 19th. A beautiful day & the trenches are rapidly drying up. We had luckily a very quiet day, scarcely any shelling & life was quite pleasant. These trenches are full of all kinds of rats & mice. The night passed quite peacefully, only a few small mortars were sent over. Besides patrols trying to catch a Boche & wiring parties mending our wire, most of the men were employed in digging out some of our trenches that had been filled in by shells & mortars.

July 20th. Another fine day. The morning was quite quiet. We were told that some generals were coming up to visit our trenches, but they never

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turned up. For an hour after lunch we had quite a heavy shelling with showers of fin bombs & trench mortars which blew in the trench we had dug out last night. Several men had extraordinarily narrow escapes & we were very lucky to have no casualties. One mortar landed within two yards of a sentry, knocked him over & covered him with earth, but did not hurt him at all. The evening was quite quiet. A great bombardment was going on to the North.

July 21st. Another fine day. Hear the pleasant news that we are to be relieved tomorrow. This means however that we are destined for the big show further South. A very quiet day. No shelling. In the evening the C.O & 2nd in command insisted on patrolling in front of our line. Quite wrong.

July 22nd. Our dug out, though very deep & safe is extremely damp & I feel rather rheumattick in consequence. No shelling again during the day. Several from the 6th Battalion have come to join us. The new Battalion arrived very late at night to relieve us. They have just come from Egypt & so this trench is very new to them. The relieving took some time but we got back to Arras by 2.30 am, just before day light & I promptly retired

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to bed to get a little sleep.

July 23rd. A pleasant day, though full of excitements. All the afternoon the Boche threw big shells into Arras which fell all over the place & I am afraid killed several people. Just after dinner a great bombardment started & we could not hear ourselves speak. The Boche was bombarding the trenches preparatory to a raid, which he carried out, but it was not very successful as only eight succeeded in reaching our lines. The remainder were caught by our artillery fire. Just as the shelling was quieting down a [?Strom] went off & the bells started tolling the tocsin for gas. Everyone started to put on their gas helmets, but noticing that the wind was from the West, I went to Headquarters to get on the telephone & find out what had happened. It turned out to be a false alarm & all the Staff were trying to get the blood of the culprit who was in one of the new Battalions that had just taken over from us. Eventually everything quietened down & we [were] allowed a quiet nights sleep.

July 24th. I was awoken at 7 am by three large shells falling close to our house & sending fragments all round. The Boche has brought up some new big guns &

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every now & then amused himself by shelling Arras. I was nearly caught in the afternoon by a big shell when out for a walk. Otherwise the day passed quite quietly. There was a great bombardment going on all the afternoon & evening towards the South, but this has become a common occurrence now. The night passed quite quietly.

July 25th. A peaceful morning to be followed by a noisy afternoon. The Boche put over a lot of shells into the town & one unfortunately set alight to a store of 6 inch shells. Clouds of smoke rose into the air, whereupon the Boche amused himself by sending over shrapnel all the afternoon round the smoke in order to prevent anyone putting out the fire. The 6" shells were meanwhile going off with loud reports as the fire reached them.

July 26th. We hear we are to move out tomorrow into the country to be fattened up for the push further South. No one is particularly pleased but realize that it has got to be done. The weather is still gloomy & grey & most unlike summer. I dined with Maurice Crum & then we went on to a regimental concert which was quite good. A quiet night & very little shelling.

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July 27th. The sun actually came out & it turned quite hot. We did not start till the evening to march to Sombrin about 8 miles from Arras, so that it was fairly cool. We did not arrive there till after dark & the transport did not turn up till 3.30 am. The billets were very poor & most of us slept on the floor of a shed, where the rats were very lively & several times I thought my toes would be bitten. Benson ran all the way from Arras in order to get fit, & passed many of the 21st Div who all thought he was running away & called him all kinds of names.

July 28th. We did not start till 10.30 am & it turned out to be a really hot day. The men after all their months in the trenches were absolutely unfit & their feet in very bad condition, so that today's march accounted for many of them. No less than 88 fell out & over three hundred have very sore feet. We have not had a chance to do a march or to take any exercise, as we were not allowed to leave billets in Arras by day, for months now. A heavy pack, steel helmets, 120 rounds of ammunition & a rifle make a heavy load. The road was quite pretty but rather up & down hill, through pleasant shady villages with picturesque little gardens. We billeted in the village of Beaudricourt

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after going nearly 12 miles. It was a nice shady village with beautiful orchards & rich crops all round. The afternoon we spent lying under the shade of the apple trees. We raised some light French beer, fresh milk, fruit & eggs from the village, which was very refreshing after the hot march. I had a tiny little room in a farm house, very clean where I spent a good night. Some preferred to sleep outside in the orchard under the apple trees, but they were rather disturbed by wandering cows during the night.

July 29th. We did not start marching till 11 am & so had the hottest part of the day for the journey. We passed through very pretty country & delightful villages. Ivergny was a charming spot, lovely gardens & orchards & the house quite hidden under big shady trees. The march was not a long one, only 10 miles but it was very hot. We had our packs carried for us today in a motor lorry, otherwise many would never have arrived in. Towards the end, the road led us through shady woods of beech & oak at the bottom of a narrow valley until we came to the village of Occoches where we were to billet. The billets were very comfortable & the village lay among grassy water meadows with fine trees everywhere. At the back of it

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was the River Authie, deep & cold, where we all of us spent the afternoon bathing & lying under the trees on the bank. From here we can just hear the distant murmur of the guns, but it is all so peaceful that war might be very far away.

July 30th. Another glorious summer's day. To our great joy we are to be allowed a day's rest here. It being Sunday, a church service was held in a natural church formed by the tall poplars on the river's bank – one of the prettiest that I have seen. In the afternoon I wandered along the shady banks of the river & read & bathed. A very pleasant way of passing the time. In the evening there was a concert. There are delightful flowers in all the cottage gardens, begonias & phloxes seem to be favourites; everywhere are rose bushes & a bright red handsome flower whose English name I do not know, but the French call Croix de Jerusalem. Late at night orders arrived that we were to move on tomorrow. I wish we could have stopped longer in this pleasant valley.

July 31st. The staff have at last awoken to the fact that the middle of the day is the hottest for marching & as some of the battalions in this Brigade have had over 300 fall out & several deaths from heat stroke, we are to(day)

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(to)day to start at 7 a.m. At that hour the mists were still lying thick in the valley, but we speedily climbed above them. The country is wonderfully well cultivated, crops everywhere & not a yard of ground wasted. There ought to be a very good harvest this year: it is extraordinary how they go on & keep the ground so clean & free from weeds with all the male population away at the war. The women & children are always to be seen at work. Our march was a short one to Fienvillers, only 5 miles & here we billeted. It is not such a pretty village, but I am in a comfortable cottage, looked after by an old grandmother, with I do not know how many grandchildren playing about.

August 1st. As we are not moving, we went for a route march in the morning before breakfast in order to get the men into training & then after breakfast practised bayonet fighting in a shady cider orchard. This is a great country for cider, there are great big cider orchards round every village. The day was a very hot one & in the cool of the evening we did some physical Drill.

August 2nd. This morning I took two companies for a run before breakfast & discovered that the 8th Bn were in the next village. They were still most of them asleep when we arrived there. There is a big aerodrome close here &

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aeroplanes are flying over us at all times of the day. I paid them a visit & watched some of the flying. They are busy every day raiding behind the German lines dropping bombs on their aerodromes, railway stations & other points of military importance. They had just come back from raids on Valenciennes & Mons where they had set some ammunition stores alight, which they said went off with loud reports. In the evening while the company went over to bathe at Bernaville, I rode over to see the 8th Bn in the next village. They were very comfortable there & there was <in> a very pretty old chateau there with a beautiful park behind. I stopped in to dinner & had fresh sole & champagne & other delicacies.

August 3rd. The weather still keeps hot. The usual running & other parades in order to get the men fit as soon as possible. In the evening I rode out to have a look at some woods in order to practice wood fighting the next day.

August 4th. A run before breakfast, then wood fighting all the morning in a pretty oak & beech wood. In parts the undergrowth was very thick, but it was good practice; the weather was cooler.

August 5th. Before breakfast we went out to see a de(monstration)

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(de)monstration of the Stokes Gun of its power of forming a barrage, or searching a wood by exploding the shells in the air. There were 4 guns which fired 40 rounds in under half a minute & made a deafening row. There were only 4 casualties among the spectators <including two officers>. After breakfast the general came round to make a speech to the Battalion as we're are probably moving tomorrow & may be shot into the battle any day now. Ordinary work for the rest of the day.

August 6th. All our kits & the transport went off in the morning as they have a long way to go & we are to travel by train the following day. It being Sunday we had a Church service in an orchard near our billets in the morning. The weather still continues very hot. The men are getting very much fitter & better for their rest & steady exercise.

August 7th. Work as usual in the morning. In the afternoon we marched to Candas 1 ½ m. where we entrained. We were due to leave at 4pm but the train did not arrive till 7pm. We had tea on the platform & also some champagne which we found in an [?] close by. We were an enormous train, four engines were required to drag us along: the GRB, the General & various officers were on the train. We went through Amiens at

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night: it was nice to see electric lights a big & busy station again. After waiting about half an hour we went on up the valley of the estaminet close by. We were an enormous train, four engines were required to drag us along: the GRB, the General & various others were on the train. We went through Amiens at night: it was nice to see electric lights & a big & busy station again. After waiting about half an hour we went on up the valley of the Ancre & got out at Mericourt soon after midnight. Opposite us was a great cage with German prisoners in it, which caused much interest to the men. We only had a mile & a half to march to Buire sur l'Ancre where we were given billets, but it was not till 2.30am before we were settled in.

August 8th. We are living in tents in a field & in this fine hot weather, it is the pleasantest spot. The roads all about here are horribly dusty & in very bad condition. There is a loud continuous roar from the big guns the whole time, & the Boche must be having a poor time of it. In the afternoon we all bathed in the Ancre; the water was muddy but pleasantly cool.

August 9th. A very hot day – bathed in the river which was very refreshing. In the afternoon I rode over to Corps H.Q. but found Currie out. The guns are somewhat quieter today. We have orders to be ready to move at three hours notice as the attack on Guillemot has apparently failed & with heavy casualties to us. There was a display of flammenwerfer in the afternoon – a terrifying

folio 44 recto

sight. After dinner we practised digging in by night.

August 10th. A change in the weather. We woke up to drizzling rain, but the weather is much cooler & the thick dust will be laid. The King passed through this morning & went up to Fricourt through Albert where there were many shells dropping. Currie came over from Corps H.Q. to tea this afternoon. The Italians are now doing surprisingly well on the Carso & it seems as if their cavalry have got through. The Russian news too is good. I heard our 1st Bn lost 15 officers the other day in 'Devils wood': they did very well however. The 16th Bn too was nearly wiped out.

August 11th. In the morning I was on a FGC Martial. The first one that had ever been held on an officer. The day was very damp & foggy & the view very circumscribed. There was an unfortunate accident to D Coy in the afternoon. A rifle grenade exploded at the muzzle of the rifle & killed two men & wounded an officer & seven men besides. Had a good swim in the river. We are to move early tomorrow morning towards the Somme battle. Heavy firing all the night.

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August 12th. We started off from Buire about 5 am in a thick fog: this did not lift the whole way & we arrived at our camping ground in the thickest of mists. The march was only 7 miles but the road was very badly cut up by the vast quantity of traffic along it. We passed enormous dumps of stores & shells on the way, shells of every size. When the mist cleared we found our camp pitched on the slopes of a hill, a little behind our original first line & with wonderful views over Fricourt, Caterpillar Valley & right away to Bazentin. The ground appeared covered with a maze of trenches & it seems marvellous that we <were> able to advance at all. Fricourt, Mametz Contalmaison & the other villages are absolutely flat: there is literally not one brick left upon another. German shells were falling here & there all over the ground & particularly beyond Fricourt wood. Our bivouacking ground looks almost like a moon in the distance owing to the enormous number of thistles which have sprung up everywhere. A couple of months ago no one could have wandered here by day. After lunch we went up King Georges Hill, across our old front line: it was really a wonderful sight: between the lines were a succession of huge mines, fifty & sixty feet deep & one running into another. We

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wandered all through the old German lines, where were clothes, bombs unexploded shells etc. lying about everywhere. Our artillery fire had completely destroyed all the wire & most of the trenches. We went down into some of the German dugouts that had escaped destruction: they were beautifully built & extraordinarily deep: the entrances were the only places where they could be injured. We met native troops & many others wandering all over the ruins of the trenches which were really wonderfully interesting. Far away to the right there was a great artillery battle going on & in front great German shells were sending up clouds of black smoke. That we have got command of the air is evident: I did not see any German aeroplanes up, while at one time I counted seventeen of ours up together & eighteen sausage balloons. One of these went adrift over the German lines, but the observer came down safely in a parachute. The ground everywhere is covered with camps of artillery, horses, infantry, pioneers, cavalry: no attempt is made at concealment & it looks far more

like proper warfare, than perpetually living in trenches. During the night there was a circle of fire all round from the guns bombarding the German lines, everything from 15" shells downwards[.]

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Near here there were tiers upon tiers of heavy guns making a horrible row.

August 13th. A rather disturbed night owing to the numbers of guns firing, but we have made ourselves a comfortable bivouac. Church Service was held in the field near our bivouacs. After lunch I took the company for a bathe in the Ancre near Albert. It took us an hour to get there & then we found that the river was not very deep. Some 11 inch shells fell within a few hundred yards of us. The Church Spire with the leaning virgin was a very curious sight. We passed our 8th & 16th Bns on the way. After dark there was a wonderful display from our c of lights from the trenches. We could see red, green, yellow & white lights going up by hundreds all along the horizon, & mixed in between were the vivid flashes of the bursting shells. We sat up for a long time watching this very pretty sight.

August 14th. A rather wet night. In the morning I practised the company in making an attack on the old German trenches near Fricourt. We started from our support line & made it as realistic as possible. It was most interesting & the men thoroughly enjoyed it. In the afternoon with Brady we walked round to some of the 6" Gun & Howitzer batteries & saw them working & had their

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mechanism explained to us. We then visited a 9.2" Howitzer battery, much bigger & clumsier Howitzers than the latest pattern 6". After seeing them we went to some enormous craters N[orth] of Fricourt, they were quite 60 to 70 feet deep & we went round the old german lines there & inspected some of the dug outs. The number of observation balloons we had up today was 28 & I could count actually 7 German ones besides. I am told that the reason we have so many up at a time, is that the Corps commander likes to see them up & that a good many of them go up empty. After dark we had a wonderful display of Bosche [sic] fireworks again, all colours & also a kind of golden rain. The firing round Thiepval & Posieres was very intense all night.

August 15th. A showery night followed by a showery day. Today is my birthday & it proved an exceptionally unpleasant one. The day was uneventful, but at 6.30 pm I had to parade with a fatigue party of 300 men to go & dig a communication trench through Longeuval to Delville Wood. The distance to where we had to begin work was over six miles & the men were laden with rifles & ammunition, a pick & a shovel apiece & some sandbags. The tracks were very slippery & what with

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shelling on the way & other obstacles we did not get to our destination till 10.30pm & between that & 2.30am we dug 500 yards of Communication Trench. This was supposed to be an impossible task & three Divisions had said it could not be done as it lay right through the Boche barrage. I have never seen any country to equal the scene of desolation: there was not a blade of grass to be seen anywhere, the ground had been so shelled & shelled that all the shell holes overlapped, some were enormous, some were quite small & through this we had to dig a trench. The latter part lay through

orchards & ruined houses of which there was nothing left. The stench was too awful we kept digging up corpses, they were lying every where, ours & Boche dead, heads, arms, limbs, in the most advanced state of decay, crawling with maggots were to be seen & smelt on all sides. The horror of the place is almost impossible to describe & the revolting sights were almost beyond belief. Barely had we started digging before six or seven large shells landed within a few yards of us & hit two men: never have I seen men dig so quickly after this, within half an hour they had buried themselves & then began to join up the holes to make a trench.

folio 50 recto

I tore my puttees & breeches badly from all the barbed wire that I kept tumbling over while walking about. Our guns never stopped firing the whole night, thousands of shells passed over our heads & must have given the Boche a most unpleasant time. His retaliation was poor but he sent up some wonderful firework displays. Just as we were leaving a few more shells came over & some very nearly caught us again later on the way home, coming very close to us & right on the road that we were going. Everything was horribly slippery & muddy as it was raining steadily the whole night & we were all dog tired by the time we reached camp at 5am.

August 16th. A quiet day after the nights work. In the evening I climbed up King Georges Hill & watched the battle together with the Padre. I hear that we may have to attack Givenchy in two or three days time.

August 17th. The usual work in the morning. In the afternoon I wandered up King Georges Hill & beyond & watched a great bombardment going on all around. I also found a German pistol there. In the evening there was a terrific bombardment going on all round: a constant [...]of guns.

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August 18th. The usual work in practicing an attack. Two of our brigades attacked during the afternoon & reached their objectives alright, one battalion capturing 279 prisoners. We played the guards at football & were beaten by 1-0. At 9pm an appalling bombardment started between Thiepval & Posieres which lasted all night. It was the heaviest bombardment that I had yet heard. I am afraid it was a big German attack & towards dawn we could hear Machine Guns plainly which looked as though our line had been driven in.

August 19th. We received orders to be ready to move at 8.30am, as the Division were evidently nervous about what had happened during the night. It was a wet & misty morning & we could see nothing. We did not move at 8.30am but stood by all day waiting for orders & eventually the battalion left about 7pm for Montauban. I was left behind with 10 officers & a number of spare NCO's, Machine Gunners & others to replace first casualties. Our new camp is only a mile from the old one, but we have a lovely view of the firing line from our bivouacs. The night was a very noisy one & the 6" & 9-2" inch Howitzers that are close by kept on firing at intervals all through the night.

folio 52 recto

August 20th. After a cold night we are beginning to settle down in our new camp. I rode over to the Transport Camp in the morning: there were miles upon miles of horses everywhere. Just as I was passing a 6" shell burst prematurely & killed two men & wounded about 8 or 9 others. I saw Nixon & Aylwyn Cavendish & had a long talk with them. In the afternoon I rode up to Montauban to see the

Battalion: they were very comfortable, living in a very wide trench. After spending an hour or so there I rode back to our camp. The night was a very noisy one, constant shelling all the time.

August 21st. The guns were firing rapid all the night & life in the front trenches must have been very unpleasant. While we were having breakfast, several Boche aeroplanes came over & had the impertinence to drop a number of bombs on the camps all round. Some 17 Anzacs were killed & wounded & a good many horses I believe. I then rode over & found that the 2nd Bn had just arrived back from High Wood where they had been having a very poor time. The last 24 hours they had been heavily shelled & constantly attacked & had suffered very heavy losses. I shall see them again tomorrow & hear further details. Geoffrey Moore

folio 53 recto

was in command, as Atkinson was hit. Wilson was badly hit & poor Stokes killed after doing extraordinarily well. In the afternoon I rode up to Montauban to see the Battalion & had a few high shrapnel over me on the way. There was a terrific bombardment of Guillemont going on while I was there: we were also making an attack on Devils Wood. Every gun & howitzer was barking as fast as it could & there was a ceaseless stream of shells passing overhead. Everyone seemed very cheery & the Battalion were going up to the trenches that night into Devils Wood where I hope they will have a peaceful time. Our 11th & 12th Bns are close by & Hughes & Paul rode over to dinner.

August 22nd. A beautiful day & a fairly quiet night. I went over to lunch with the 2nd Bn & saw many <a few> old friends there, but how many more had gone. Their stories of High Wood were very gruesome. Some Boche aeroplanes came over in the evening but ours eventually drove them off.

August 23rd. An order came to send up all spare officers to Montauban so that I am left alone in the camp. It was a very peaceful day all along the line & the battalion had very few casualties.

folio 54 recto

Our guns were much quieter & scarcely fired at all.

August 24th. The usual mornings work. The Battalion are attacking some time today, but I cannot find out the exact time & it must be some time before we hear the full results. I was watching Delville wood about 3.30pm & I could see a great bombardment going on there. The wood soon after completely disappeared in a pink cloud of dust of [sic] smoke. This lasted for several hours & all along the line & towards Thiepval there was an intense bombardment. I could however get no definite news. Blackett, Smith & Ravenscroft came over from the 2nd Battalion to see me.

August 25th. Alarming reports came in early this morning about the battalion, so I rode over to the Transport camp to find out if they knew anything definitely. Not getting any news there, I rode up to Montauban to Brigade H.Q. where I was told everything. We had gained our objectives & had reached the outer edge of Delville Wood. The Battalion had done extremely well, the General said & he was very pleased with them. Their losses had however been very heavy, almost 450 he thought & a great many officers. Three of the company commanders were killed & the fourth wounded & almost every officer that was up with the Battalion was hit. The principle of leaving several of

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[?] & NCO's behind is certainly sound as now we have a nucleus to help to reorganise the battalion. I joined the Battalion in the afternoon when they were in the A 2 line between Delville Wood & Montauban. From all their accounts it must have been perfect hell & they had the bad luck to strike a bit of the line where the wire was unbroken & the German trench untouched by our artillery, so that the moment they leapt over the parapet they were met with Machine Gun & Rifle fire. Soon after I arrived news came that the Battalion was to be relieved at midnight & we were to go back to the old camp. We did not however get back till 5.30am as the Somersets who were relieving us lost touch & delayed the relief for a couple of hours. It was a very dark night & the ride back along the top of the ridge with guns firing around all the time & the lights going up from the German lines was very weird. I forgot to add that from 8-10pm our guns & the German guns were firing as hard as they possibly could around Guillemont. The row was absolutely deafening so much so that I became quite sleepy from the awful row. The return to camp was a very sad one, as so many faces were missing; in my own Company poor Tiny was killed, Pat Gould is missing & pro(bably)

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(pro)bably killed & George Warner wounded.

August 26th. A day of complete rest. Most of the men were completely tired out & slept all day.

August 27th. A very wet day, constant heavy showers. Towards evening there was a great bombardment between Thiepval & Posieres. Our ammunition supply seems to be quite unlimited.

August 28th. The weather is still showery. The welcome news has just come in that Italy has declared war on Germany & Rumania on Austria. This ought to make a great difference & ought to speedily wind up the Balkan shows & about finish Austria. In the afternoon paid a visit to the 9.2 Howitzer battery & watched it firing. It is astonishing how far one can see the shell go after it leaves the muzzle of the gun.

August 29th. Work as usual in the morning. In the afternoon a very heavy thunderstorm came up so rapidly that the balloons had not time to come down & to my horror I saw two of them struck by lightning, which fell down in a sheet of flame; both the observers must have been killed I am afraid. Another balloon broke loose & drifted away over the German lines. All day the French kept up a very intense bombardment to

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our right. The night turned out cold & wet with a high wind. Webb & Drury from the Oxfords came to dine.

Aug 30th. We moved today back to Dernancourt. After a very stormy night, it set in to pour with rain which continued all day & it turned bitterly cold also. My insides are all wrong & so did not enjoy life. The roads & tracks were horribly muddy & at Dernancourt we found ourselves in tents & the men in barns. Staff arrangements were very bad & we were kept hanging about a long time in the rain before moving off. The guns round Thiepval were very busy all night.

August 31st. We had an early start & marched to Albert, about 3 miles where we entrained. The day was luckily fine but the roads were very muddy & many of the camps flooded. Our train consisted of cattle trucks for officers & men into which we were bundled. We collected some boxes to sit on & so

were not very uncomfortable & as the train travelled but slowly & had frequent halts we were able to see the countryside well. At Amiens we laid in some provisions & I also met Rooke, whom I had not seen for some time. The train from Paris passed us here with its Dining car & first & 2nd Class inhabitants who eyed us in our cattle trucks with disapproval. We left the main line at Longpré

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& went up a branch line to Airaines where we detrained & then had a rather tiring march of 11 kilometres to St Maulvis. Many of the new draft fell out on the way. The country was very pretty & quite hilly & eventually about 5pm we reached our destination. St Maulvis is the most comfortable village that we have yet struck: there is no one else here so we have plenty of room.

Sept 1st. The villagers tell me that this place is renowned for its eggs & certainly they are excellent. I have a fine billet in a large house & with a very fine & well kept garden, which is at present full of flowers. A comfortable bed & sheets were a welcome luxury, also a bath. This is a most old fashioned & out of the way place. There is a town crier who goes about with a drum, crying out the price of eggs or any other news of interest. The baker has a bugle to announce his arrival & the butcher a bell. I spent all the afternoon on a tiresome court of enquiry, on some officers which we were unable to finish

Sept 2nd. This rest here is delightful. As Porter was away, I was left in command. I inspected a new draft of 200 men that had just arrived: most were from the 5th & 6th Bns. They seemed quite a good

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lot & there were several among them that I knew.

Sept 3rd. I was again on a board most of the morning. In the afternoon went for a ride with Henry Porter. Very nice country round here & the crops are mostly cut. Just got back in time to avoid a thunderstorm with a downpour of rain.

Sept 4th. Usual routine of work in the morning. In the afternoon rode over to see the 8th Bn at a village about 2 ½ miles off where I had tea. Their Brigadier also came in & had tea. In the evening it poured with rain & streams came down in torrents past our billets. How thankful I am that I am not in the trenches.

Sept 5th. Still resting at St Maulvis. The weather very threatening. In the afternoon went for a ride to [?] & got very wet.

Sept 6th. Usual routine of work. More drafts arrived & we are now quite up to strength again. In the afternoon rode over to Brigade HQ & found them in a very pleasant chateau. The country is very pretty well wooded with charming valleys & little hidden villages.

Sept 7th. Started to try & get to Fontainebleau. I left St Maulvis at 9.15 am & rode to Brigade HQ

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where we caught a motor lorry which arrived at 12 o'clock at Abbeville. Here we lunched & I then caught the express to Paris which alas arrived half an hour late & caused me to miss my train at the Gare de Lyons by 5 minutes & so had to wait to midnight before I could catch the next one.

Sept 8th. Arrived at Fontainebleau at 2 am & had to climb over the palisade to get into the Hotel as the outer bell would not ring.