

# THE WAR DIARY OF LANCE CORPORAL

JOHN NOPPEN

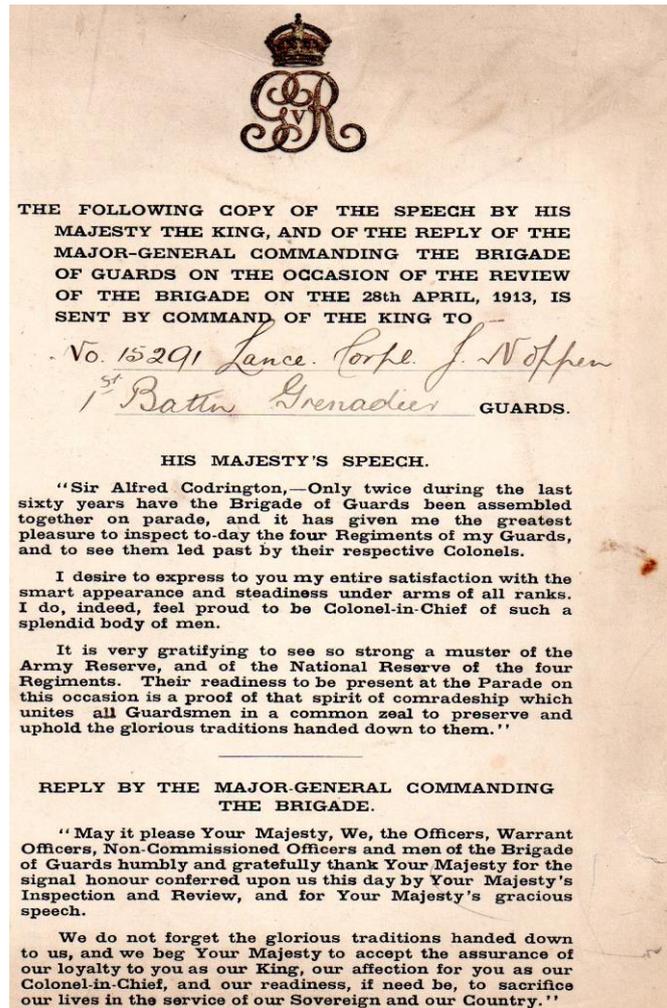
No 15291 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards



*John Noppen (standing)  
with his brother Eric who was killed in 1917*

## Introduction

**John George Noppen** began this Diary on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1914, the day he left England with his battalion for Flanders, age 26. He had joined the Guards well before the recruitment fever at the start of the war in August 1914.



*This personalised copy of King George V's speech to the Brigade of Guards in 1913 shows that Noppen was in uniform well before the start of the war.*

He wrote entries every day until his admission to hospital in Leicester on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1915 after being severely wounded at the Battle of Neuve Chappelle.

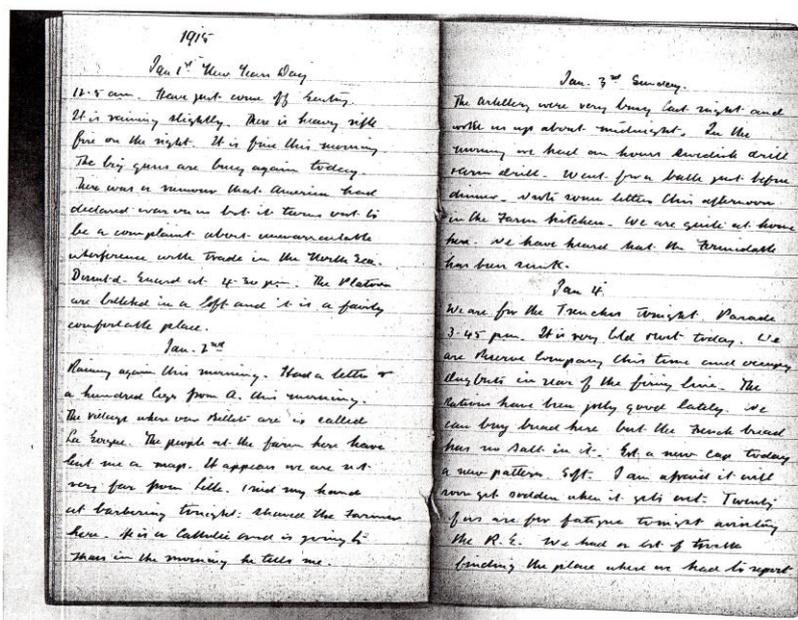
He refers to receiving letters from 'Rica' and 'E'. 'Rica' is probably his older sister Hendrika, 'E' an unidentified female friend.



Noppen's sister Hendrika and his niece Eileen in 1914.  
Eileen maintained close contact with Noppen and his family  
until her death in the 1990s

Noppen's family, originally from Holland, lived in Cheshire, though both his parents were dead by the start of the war. Before joining the Guards he may have worked as a shipping clerk. A fuller biography follows after the Diary.

Entries up to November 12<sup>th</sup> were written in pencil and are occasionally illegible. Some pages in January were torn so words are missing altogether. Words or phrases that have proved impossible to decipher are indicated by a dotted line. Punctuation, use of capitals etc. are as they appear in the original diary, which has not been edited in any way.



A panoramic view of the action that John Noppen was part of can be found in *The Grenadier Guards in the Great War 1914-1918* by Sir Frederick Ponsonby, with maps by Emery Walker. This clear day-to-day account has good descriptions of the people and places Noppen describes. The University of Toronto Robarts Library allows it to be read online at:

[www.archive.org/details/grenadierguardsi01pons](http://www.archive.org/details/grenadierguardsi01pons)

The original Diary is now held by the Imperial War Museum.

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**1914**

**Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup>**

We marched off from Lyndhurst at 7.15 pm and arrived at Southampton at midnight. The road through the outskirts of the town & the town itself were lined with people who cheered us enthusiastically. We spent the night in a shed on the quay and embarked in the early morning. Our boat was a cattle boat called the Turcoman. We did not move out till evening and then only went half way across the water. Early on Tuesday morning the 6<sup>th</sup> we left the water and went along the coast as far as Dover. It was a fine morning but cold in spite of which we spent most of our time on Deck. We could see the shore quite plainly through glasses and it was interesting to study it. The sea was quite calm.

In the afternoon we anchored outside Dover Harbour. We were the second to arrive of the seven ships which contained the Division. The view of the harbour with the Castle in the background was very fine. We sailed late in the evening escorted by torpedo destroyers. I spent most of the night on deck. It was a lovely night & the water quite calm. We arrived at Zebrugge without accident.

### October 7<sup>th</sup>

We disembarked and stayed for sometime underneath the harbour wall and then proceeded by train to Bruges. There were 40 of us to a cattle truck. In Bruges we were received with much enthusiasm and had quite a triumphant march to St. André. -----<sup>1</sup> the bar parlour. There was plenty of clean straw and we were very comfortable. I had not had my boots off since we started and my feet were jolly glad of the rest.

We could buy stuff at the café & would go out into the street in which the café was situated. The people were awfully good and did all they could for us.

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

The next morning before we marched off they donated a box of cigars amongst us. We marched off about 8am and halted in a by lane a few hundred yards further on. Close by on the main road were some shops where we bought cakes & apples & coffee. We stayed here for about an hour & then marched to a small town about 5 miles away. Here we halted on the canal bank at the entrance to the ----- and took up position. Our section was just on the right of the road. We dug a trench which Captain Colby gave us high praise for. A few hundred were further back down the road in an hotel & from there we got some tea. Jolly good tea too. At night we were issued with our blankets. We slept on the top of our truck. Sgt. Holden's section formed a group out in front and we had instructions not to fire until they came in should anything happen. My feet have been rather sore. I changed my socks which improved matters immediately.

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

The night passed quietly enough and about 5am next morning we marched to Ostend, a distance of about 5 miles. At one place where we halted on the way some people filled our water bottles with hot coffee. Arrived at Ostend and halted near the Railway Station. Here we were issued with more ammunition & rations. The first time we had Maconochie's<sup>2</sup>, one between two of us. We saw many wounded Belgians here who had lately come down from Antwerp. To which place we believe

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<sup>1</sup> Missing lines here and in the entry for October 8<sup>th</sup> appear to have been written in the lower margin and are very indistinct.

<sup>2</sup> Maconochie Stew, a tinned meal served cold with the gravy congealed. It was described as barely palatable when hot.

we are going. From here we went by train to Ghent. On the way we put on our clean linen and threw the old away. It was too hot to carry surplus shirts. Looking out through the carriage windows it seemed to be raining socks shirts etc a perfect deluge of them. Not to mention hair brushes, holdalls & other articles which it was possible to do without. The train travelled very slowly & there were many stops. The people came onto the line and gave us apples & cigarettes on these occasions. We arrived at Ghent about noon and marched to a piece of spare ground at the top of the town. This seemed to be the residential part and the people were awfully good to us. They brought tea, coffee, wine, jam, sandwiches, cake, sweets, chocolate & bread & butter & a case of cigars, cigarettes tobacco.

One of our chaps went to a house & asked if he might have a wash. They immediately placed the bathroom at his disposal & when he came down had an excellent meal ready for him. We also had some picture P.C.s given us but I doubt if they were allowed to go through. We marched off from here about 6pm to a farm about 1 1/2 miles out of the town which lay off the main road about 300 yards. No 2 & 3 Coy. were in a factory just close by. Our billet was the barn & with the aid of plenty of straw we made it quite comfortable. I was on guard. During the night we could hear big guns in the distance. This was the first time we had heard them.

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

The farmer was awfully kind and had hot coffee for us in the morning. He also gave the Company 100 loaves of bread in the morning. I went with one of the farm hands down to Ghent to fetch the bread. He was a jovial fellow & on the way back entertained me by singing English comic songs of which he knew several. We had a hot dinner today, the first since we left England. We did not move today nor has anything exciting happened up to the present. During the night we stood to arms but it turned out to be a false alarm.

### **Sunday October 11<sup>th</sup>**

Spent a quiet day during which a number of civilians had a walk around the farm presumably to have a look at us. Around 6pm we marched down to Battn. Hdqrs. & lay in an orchard for about an hour. We made a big fire in the road as it was a cold night and stood around it singing. Quite a merry party. Around 7.15pm we fell in and marched back to Billet. We were told to sleep fully dressed with our equipment on as

we should probably be called out at a moments notice. At about 9pm we fell in in a hurry & marched off. As we passed through Ghent the people all turned out to bid us goodbye. B---- have greeted us in pathetic tones as we passed and we were all really sorry to go. No smoking and no talking was the order and mile after mile we marched in silence. Perhaps the hardest thing was not being able to smoke. There were frequent little checks, not halts but just temporary checks which tire one terribly on the march and we got no rest until 1.15 when we halted for 15 minutes. Here it was passed along that we might smoke. We arrived at our destination at about 2.30am.

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

Our company was on outpost duty and our position was on a canal bank. Our platoon was on the right of the road and we mounted a guard the far side of the bridge. The rest of us had to get a little rest. I was very tired and my feet ached horribly. I lay down on the bare stone floor of a Coal House and slept gloriously till about 6am. We then got some bricks & blocks of stone & made a little cover along the canal bank in case we should be attacked. The Germans we heard were now occupying Ghent & we might expect a brisk brush with their cavalry. However nothing occurred. We saw a large number of refugees pass through. Several train loads and many on foot. It was a sad sight to see old women struggling along with a huge bundle on their backs and touched us very much. Others were driving cattle along with them & others were in carts which were crammed full of their belongings. About 2.30 pm we marched off and executed the hardest march of the whole advancement. The roads were very bad and our feet suffered terribly. At last we reached a large town and of course thought it was our destination. But no. On we went straight through & out on to another of those long & straight roads which seem to be endless. Mile after mile we marched till many of us could hardly walk. When there was a check which during the last few miles was often, men literally fell down in the road and went to sleep. We reached Thielt, our destination at midnight and I doubt if many of us could have gone much further. I took my boots off and rubbed my feet with brassic ointment which eased them immediately. We had a comfortable Billet in an empty home. The people next door brought us Coffee & Bread & Butter.

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

We had Reveille in the morning in the form of sharp rifle fire about 6.30 am. We heard it was the Belgians firing at an Aeroplane. We marched off at 10am. About 2 miles outside Thielt we had to take cover from Hostile Aircraft. Our company went into a farm yard. My section formed up round a Hay stack. It poured with rain & we were more than happy. The old lady of the farm brought us some pears which we enjoyed immensely. We eventually marched off at about 2 pm and arrived at Roulers at about 8 pm. Here we had a ripping billet in a factory in the town. One of our chaps went out and bought some Rum and Coffee in. I never enjoyed anything quite as much in my life as I enjoyed that drink.

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

We had a ripping breakfast of fried bacon in the morning thanks to the people in the house opposite who were kind enough to allow us to fry it there. We marched off at 8 am and reached Ypres at noon. We are once more for Outposts. We went straight through the town and halted for some time on the railway crossing and about 2.30 pm we advanced as far as the canal along which we took up position. We dug trenches here and another chap and I took up position in a loft from which we had a fine view of the front. While we were digging a cavalry scout came along whom we brought down in fine style. An officer passed in a motor with a German officer whom he had captured. The German saluted us cheerfully. The cavalry scout, it appeared, belonged to a patrol, the remainder of which had been captured by a patrol of ours. The old chap who owned our loft was a decent old boy & gave us some excellent cigarette tobacco. About 5 o'clock we were relieved by No 3 Coy and we marched back a couple of hundred yards down the road & bivouacked on the roadside for the night. During the night it rained heavily but with our oil sheets well over us it did not interfere very much with our sleep.

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

Early in the morning we crossed the canal & marched through a small village to a spot about 1 1/2 miles beyond the canal. On the way we were warned to keep a sharp lookout to the left as the enemy were believed to be in close proximity. We commenced to dig a trench in a garden in rear of a house but in about an hour we were relieved. We marched back to billet at a farm a few hundred yards in rear of the

canal. Here we had a mail. The first since leaving England. In the afternoon we finished off the trenches along the canal. We had a good nights sleep in the billet. Our section was in a loft and was very dry.

### **October 16<sup>th</sup>**

We marched off at 11.30 am. Our company was the vanguard. It was considered probable that we should meet the enemy's scouts and we had several alarms and got in extended order. We questioned peasants whom we met on the way but got little information of any value from them. We took up a position on the outskirts of a large village on a slope & along trenches. From these we had an excellent field of fire excepting from those on the left of the road where it was obstructed by a wood.

When we had finished our Trench we had to change into these Trenches and did not like it for they were still unfinished. At night we placed a lamp in the hedge on the right of the road about ten yards from it so that in case the enemy should attempt to advance up the road we should be able to concentrate fire on it.

I never spent such a night as that. Our unfinished trench was too narrow and we could neither sit down nor lie down nor turn nor do anything in fact. How I did manage to get a little sleep I cannot say but I managed it somehow. There was some firing on our left during the night but we had a quiet night.

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

The first thing we did in the morning was to finish off the Trenches. We had fried bacon for bfast. which the people at an inn just behind our trench very kindly fried for us.

About 9am we got the order to Stand to Arms and man the trench but nothing exciting happened. At 3pm we were relieved by No 3 Company & marched to Billet in the village in rear. From our billet we have an excellent view of a village in front of our trenches which was in flames. This was our first view of the Horrors of war.



*Noppen kept many postcards: their black trench humour  
made light of the Horrors of War*

### October 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday

We marched off early and halted in the village. Here we were told we could write letters which would be collected in ten minutes time. We hastily scribbled a few lines on any piece of paper which came handy. Those who had no envelopes were readily supplied by the villagers. A mile or so out of the village we halted and had to get in the ditch as there were some German aeroplanes about. There was a heavy artillery dual in progress on the left and we could see the shells bursting quite plainly. In the evening we went back into the Trenches on the right of the road. We had a quiet night in them.

### October 19<sup>th</sup>

In the morning we got some eggs from a small farm near the trenches & had quite a ripping Breakfast. We marched off about 9am and halted in a field. There we were issued with rations and were informed that in the afternoon we were going into action. Our Cavalry had occupied the village of Menin and we were to attack an Outpost. We marched off at about 1pm. Further up the road we came under rather heavy

shrapnel fire and took cover behind some Hay stacks. Eventually we entered some Trenches which were not quite finished and we at once set work to finish them. We did not attempt any attack any Out post. Everything passed off quietly during the night.

### **October 20<sup>th</sup>**

In the morning with the assistance of the engineers we made shrapnel proof cover for our trenches. We got poles from a Tobacco Rick near by and used Straw Battens instead of Brushwood to hold the earth. These straw battens are used to shelter the Tobacco while it matures. The walls of the enclosure are also made of them. They are quite solidly made and so strong that it is very hard indeed to pull them to pieces to get the straw out. Our artillery were shelling heavily all morning. At about 10am the Germans replied. In the afternoon the enemy shelled us very heavily and made an attack on the left which they kept up right through the night.

At night we were ordered to get out of the trench and told we should have to sleep out on the top. As it was raining heavily this was indeed cheering news. We got very little sleep that night for in addition to the rain we had to stand arms several times. The attack was made on us though the enemy apparently concentrating all his energy on our left. A machine gun which opened fire from a wood to our left front was quickly silenced by our machine guns.

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

We entered the trenches soon after the dawn. During the morning the enemy shelled us very heavily. Our section commander Sgt. Whitehouse had a narrow escape. He was running back to the trench when a shrapnel shell burst directly over his head but fortunately he was untouched. A large piece of shell came through the top of my loophole.

In our trenches Lawrence & another man were wounded. About 2pm the shell fire eased off and at 3pm the enemy made a fierce attack on our trenches. From the trench I was in we had an open front of only 250 yards where the view was obstructed by a hedge. While we were waiting for the enemy to appear I turned my head to light my pipe & as I did so a bullet whizzed by just where my head had been a second before. A narrow escape that. Our artillery excelled itself that afternoon and compelled the enemy to retire on its own. At night we put double sentries out in front of the

trenches. I was on sentry with a man named Butcher. Suddenly we heard something moving in the hedge in front. In the hedge was a large gap & behind this gap far in the background was a rick on fire and in the glow we fancied we could see figures pass the gap. Butcher went back & informed them in the trench & came back with the order that we were to fire if we saw anyone. Before we had time for further parley however the enemy opened fire from the hedge. How Butcher and I got back to the trench through that hail of lead I do not know but we did it in record time. Eventually the enemy withdrew and we were not attacked again that night.

### **October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

At 3am we were relieved by No 3 Company and marched to some dug outs about 300 yards in rear of the trenches at Bttn. Hdqrs. We hear today that the Battle of the Aisne has decided in our favour. Our dug outs are in rear of a deserted farm. There are many chickens about and we have caught and killed some. We have also cut up some potatoes, turnips and cauliflower and are boiling the lot for dinner. The dinner was not bad but the chickens were not very tender. The enemy have been shelling us heavily all day. At night we went up to the firing line again and took up position in a ditch in rear of No 3 company's trenches to reinforce in case of attack. The enemy however were very quiet.

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

At about 2am two platoons of us were sent to reinforce on the left. As we marched down the road we saw several dead Germans lying about. Men who had got through our lines never to return. We took up a position in a ditch behind which ran a high bank and a wood. A field path ran alongside and in front, with a field between, a road ran parallel. To our left was a small village and to our right front on the road stood a couple of houses. We were told to dig like hell and make some cover for ourselves. While we were digging everyone passed it down that we had a patrol unit in front. Very soon we saw a party of men and two men on horseback going along the road in front towards the village. The light was still dim but we could see they were not our troops. It turned out we had no patrol out and no one knew where the order about them came from. We opened fire at them just as they neared the village but did little damage as far as we could see. In a few minutes we could hear them digging along the road opposite. Soon they opened a heavy fire on us. Rifle & machine guns which

they had on the horses. We were compelled to crouch down in our ditch with our backs to the enemy & by this means could just get some cover. Every man who showed himself was shot. Wheeler of our section was the first. Sgt. Maynard was the next. Jones and Ford were also killed. The bullets knocked the loose earth of our little parapet down our coat collars. Mine was nearly full.

At last we got the order to retire. Sgt. W. Brown & myself were going to dive through a gap in the hedge just behind me. We got ready & during a lull in the firing we made the dash. We shot over the bank like a flash. I had rifle, bayonet fixed in one hand & entrenching tool in the other. We got through the wood to the road and on to the road at the other side. Hessel, M Culloch & I were the last. Dick Lilly was in the wood the other side. Hessel said to me "are you going to make a dash for it?" It was simply raining lead. Before I could reply Major Colby cried are there any Grenadiers there? Yes Sir I replied Come on he shouted & away we went. We stumbled through the wood somehow. On the way I passed Lt. Walters. He was standing looking back. A moment afterwards he was shot through the head. Mj Somerset also was killed. We eventually reached the dug outs by a round-a-bout route. On arrival the Roll was called. It was our first experience of that solemn ceremony.

Cpl. Warren had only one man left but two or three more turned up at night. In the afternoon we advanced across the fields to the right of the dug outs. We were under a heavy shell fire. Sgt. Bl----- was badly wounded. Cpl. Lewis Clay & I were sent out to a farm to the right to find out what was going on the other side of it. We reached the farm safely and remained watching for sometime but could see nothing of importance in progress. The shells were falling near the farm & we shifted to a gun emplacement about 150 yds away. We had just reached it when the farm was struck. We then met some Staff Officers who told us that everything was all right on the right and the Scots were coming up. We could see our fellows retiring so we also retired. We stayed for a few moments talking to some gunners who were firing an 18 pounder just at the bottom of the field. From there we returned to the dug outs where the company had already returned. At night we were turned out again & lay in a field for some time. A bullet grazed my sleeve & another my puttee while we lay there. We were in reserve but were not required & returned to the dug out towards morn. We then carried rations to the Kings & then to No 3. We were then issued with a Ration of Rum & turned in. Not bad day for the Reserve Coy.

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

We have had a quiet night. The rations are very good this morning. A good ration of both bread and bacon. A party of Kgs. Coy. men have joined our company & we are now awaiting orders. Had a letter from E. & one from Rica today. We are now ordered to get fully dressed. The enemy are shelling us heavily and we cannot leave the dug outs. At about 2pm we were called out in great haste. The Germans are mounting a heavy attack and we have to go & reinforce the trenches. We got in extended order and advanced by platoon across the ploughed fields to the left of the dug outs. We came under a very heavy fire. At last we crossed the roads and got through the Tobacco plants. The fire was terrible and seemed to come from all directions. Rifle maxim & shrapnel. The German infantry were in great force. We gave them 15 rds rapid. Capt. Colby got badly hit also Chamberlain. Colby refused to be carried back & leaned up & cheered the boys on. We drove them off eventually but when we got back we had not got half the company & only one officer Sir. G.D. King left. Major Colby died of his wounds. Lieut. Antrobus was killed & Cpt. Leatham wounded. I was slightly wounded & went down to Hospital. It was a sight for the Gods down there. The house outhouses were full of wounded & more lay in straw out in the yard. Others who could stand moved about in groups. The ambulances were getting them away as quickly as possible but more men kept coming in. The nurse asked any who were only slightly wounded to help the stretcher bearers & I went for one. The first one we brought in was Chamberlain. He lay in a ditch a little beyond the road. The stretcher bearing cook made some chicken broth for us which we enjoyed more than a little. We got little rest that night.

We sent a party bringing in Sgt. Massy. He was wounded in the legs & back. There was one poor boy who kept crying out for water. It was pitiful to hear him. Col. Jeffries lay out in front of the trenches & began shouting for the stretcher bearers till he was fetched in.

### **Sunday October 25<sup>th</sup>**

Got no rations. Our company had gone down to Batt. Hdqrs. for a rest. They sent for a party of stretcher bearers from Batt.Hdquarters & I went as one. When we arrived there we were told to sit in the dug outs as the shell fire was very heavy. Eventually we started off under Mj. Hope to search the village behind the trenches for wounded. The shell fire was terrific & we did not expect to get back scatheless. They were

shelling the village into blazes. When we couldn't find any wounded hanged if Mj. Hope didn't start collecting ammunition & loaded up with a few hundred rounds a piece.

We got back safely eventually but had some narrow shaves. There were heaps of rats in the village and also some dead horses.

Nearly all the houses are half blown down. By the time they have finished this morning there will not be much left of the village at all. In the afternoon the shell fire was again very heavy. Our Battn. & the Scots Gds. were in the thick of it. In the evening the wounded began to come in again in large numbers. Among the wounded are several Germans with one of whom I have had an interesting conversation. He is a Cpl. in the 242<sup>nd</sup> Regt. which he tells me is a Volunteer Corps. He has spent a year in London & speaks English very well. I told him of the rumours we had that the Russians were near Berlin & that the German fleet had been badly defeated. He denied these. There are, he said, no Russians or French in Germany and there has been no big Navel engagement. He is of opinion that the war will last a year and that Germany will win some land. He does not, however, expect them to win at sea. Soon, he continued, the winter will be here and then 'till spring there will be little doing. He also believes we shall lose this battle. There are three Army Corps against us he says. He gave me a whistle which he used when in sent charge of a patrol. He seems a decent chap & is undoubtedly well educated.

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

The battle is still raging this morning and the shell fire is very heavy. Many shells are falling quite close to the hospital. The stretcher bearers on their last journey had to take cover in a ditch. Sgt. Dobson came in this morning with a slight shrapnel wound in the shoulder. During the morning some men of the Staffords rushed in stating their company was cut to pieces and enquiring the way to the nearest town. We suggested that they should stay with us but they would not and rushed off again in the direction of Batt. Hdqrs. They appeared to be quite unnerved. They had thrown away their rifles and kit. We hear that the Germans have broken through our lines but do not know the true state of affairs yet. We can see small parties of troops crossing the fields to the left but cannot say if they are troops returning or what they are. It is now 12 noon. This afternoon the shell fire is heavier than ever and I fear the hospital will soon be struck. I am going to make the list of the wounded. By 3pm we had got all

the wounded away except two stretcher cases and the Germans. The M.O. decided to retire. They are now lining the roads outside and the shell fire is terrific. I should have gone with the last of the wounded but my wound is going on all right. The M.O. let me remain as he needs all the help he can get. We have got everything packed on the Mattress Cart & have given the spare ammunition lying about to the chaps lining the road. Someone has removed my rifle & I have got an old revolver. We tried to carry the two stretcher cases but cannot take the Germans, who are very anxious that that we should do. They also beg of us to put up the Red Cross Flag. I shall not forget that journey. We struck off across country to the right, the M.O. leading us. We had to plough through two woods through which there was no path. It was a dreadful job carrying the stretchers. We carried them about 3 miles before we found the Mattress Cart. We were pretty well fed up I can tell you. We attached ourselves on to the tail of an ambulance train. On the way we saw an aeroplane fired. It was an impressive sight. It was just like a huge sheet of flame descending from the sky. The airman jumped out. It was one of our own 'planes fired on by our own people by mistake. Along the road we could hear the heavy artillery which seemed to be in the woods just on the left of the road. We also passed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Artillery. They had come from the Aisne. On the way into Ypres we saw Lord Arden. It was some time before we could get any information about our Battalion. We were all foot sore and very tired. At length we did find them & we all were sent to the Kgs. Coy. Billets for the night. I had a chat with Harry Randall who gave me some cigarettes. They had had 11 pkts. each given to their company. They also gave me some tea which I enjoyed.

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

In the morning I enjoyed the rations. We got paid today. 25fr. It was rather difficult to spend the money as everyone wanted change. The one shop in the street was sold out. We could not get any cigarettes or tobacco. The beer in the café was vile stuff. We are marching off at 2.30 pm but we do not know where we are going to. The boys hear rumours of going back for reorganisation. We saw Kings & 3 march past us while we stood on parade. They appear to be about 120 strong. We are 43 strong with one officer, Sir G.D. King. He is mounted today!!!

We marched in the direction of the firing line for about two miles & then turned off down a by lane to the right and bivouacked in a wood. It is a fine evening and we

fetches straw to lay on and are quite comfortable. An aeroplane passed over us and one of our aeroplane guns which was placed just outside our wood fired a tremendous number of rounds at it but did not touch it. It dropped some lights to the right of us. They are shelling Ypres now. We can see the shells bursting over the town.

### **Wednesday October 28<sup>th</sup>**

A fine morning. We had a parade to reorganise the company. We are now divided into two platoons. There is a rumour now that we are going into Garrison but it does not look much like it. This afternoon we have orders to be ready to move at a moments notice, so have all packed our packs & got our kits ready. The Germans are now shelling Ypres heavily. Wrote a P.C. to E. Eventually we drew a shovel & pick each and marched off about 5 pm down the road from Ypres in the direction of the firing line. The country along that road looked the typical Battlefield. Here & there a burning Farm or house. We halted opposite a Farm which stood back on the right. Just then firing started on our left and we had to get down in the ditch as we were in the line of fire. When it cooled off we formed up in the middle of the field & then came back to the road. Firing started again & once more we took cover in the ditch. Later a party of us were detailed to go for some ammunition. I was one of these lucky men. The Sergt. in charge seemed to have a very vague idea of where he had to get it from. We were all dreadfully tired & fed up and we grouched splendidly. At last we lay down in the middle of the road for a rest. Sgt. went & made some enquiries & found he had come about 2 miles too far!! On the way we passed the stretcher bearers who were fetching the Coldstreams who had been wounded. A shell fell among them as they were coming up the road & caused about 30 casualties. We got the ammun. eventually and got back safely to Hdqrs. & handed it over to the Adgt. The Hdqrs. Dug outs were in the corner of the field in front of the Farm. The Adjutant guided us to our trenches which were to the left. rear of the farm. We passed No 3s trenches on the way. When we got to the Trench we had a little sleep which we were very glad of.

At Stand to Arms Major Stucley came round with two R.G. officers. He wanted someone to guide them to Battn. Hdqrs. I went. We were told an attack was expected at 5 oclock. My recollection of the way was rather vague & I think the officers began to think they would be lost if they trusted in me but I got them there eventually. I stopped for a few minutes talking to Butcher & Golding. While we were chatting the

attack began and as it was not possible to get back to the trenches I got in the Hdqrt. Trenches, it is now of course -----



*Noppen's identity disc, spoon and pocket Gospel.*

*It isn't known how the spoon sustained damage but his daughter Muriel said it had accompanied him in the trenches and through the action (perhaps it also did battle with the notorious Maconachie Stew).*

*The Gospel, clean and un-annotated, does not appear to have been much read.*

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

Soon we could hear the boys shouting & it was obvious that a charge was being made. Shortly we saw the Germans coming across the road towards the Hdqrs. Trenches & we were compelled to vault them. We went for some distance along the Ypres Road. At a corner of the village of Zillebeke we met an officer of the Artillery. He asked us if we could tell him where the enemy were situated. He said he had a battery near but dare not fire as he had no idea of the disposition of the troops. The shell fire here was very heavy. The Germans were evidently trying to destroy the village. Just then a Coy. of the Gloucesters came along who were going up to reinforce & Vic Houlden Br----- & I went back with them. As we were going along a bullet went through one of Vic's pouches & crumpled up the bullets but did not touch him. It was a narrow squeak. When we got up we found Sir G .D. King and about 20 Grenadiers. They were on the right of the road. We advanced across the road into some tobacco plantations but soon got the order to retire again. Later some reinforcements from the Scots Guards came up & we advanced again but once more had to retire. My wound

was hurting me and I was advised to go to a dressing station which was near to. The shell fire was now terrific, especially on the road the range of which the enemy had to an inch. On the way I came across a chap bandaging two fellows up and he asked me to wait & help him with one of them. We lay under a high bank & while under there a huge shell presumably a Jack Johnson<sup>3</sup> fell just on top of the bank. The dressing station we went to belonged to the artillery but all Regts. were being brought in to it. There were a lot of horses behind it & these kept coming and going. I believe the German observers could spot them for the shells were dropping all around. Simply shattering the place. One chap was brought in literally saturated with blood. Those of us who could walk walked down to a big general dressing station. A chateau on the Ypres Road. On my way I met Cpl. Morris. He told me that the C.O. was very badly wounded. At the dressing station they put us in a cellar and gave us some tea. Later we were moved into a Coach House. About 7pm a doctor came round and inspected our wounds after which we went in motor ambulances to a hospital on the outskirts of Ypres. Here we lay in a long hall. We have straw on the floor and blankets. I lay opposite a door and was disturbed twice during the night for them to carry out men who had died of their wounds.

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

We got Bully and Biscuits for Bfast. & Jam but plenty of really nice tea. After the doctor had been round to see that we were all right we were told we should soon be off. An orderly brought us in some bread and chocolate. About 12 noon we went in motor ambulances to Ypres Station and from there to Boulogne. Venn was in my carriage he was wounded in the shoulder. We had our dinner on arrival at Hamertinghe and they gave us a tin of jam & a loaf between 6 of us for tea. Had an interesting chat with a Frenchman at one of the stops. At Boulogne we went to a hospital which they had rigged up in the Railway Sheds. It is not a bad sort of a show.

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

Had a decent nights sleep. My wound is almost better. There is a little bar just behind the hospital on the station where we can go (if no one sees us) and also a large Buffet. Rowbottom came in today he has had his arm shattered. There is a fellow

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<sup>3</sup> British nickname for a German 15cm artillery shell that exploded in a cloud of black smoke. Named after the Black American boxing champion.

here who has been struck blind but gradually recovering his sight. Venn has gone to England looking bad.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Nothing eventful on these two dates.

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

Went by Motor Ambulance to a Convalescent Camp just outside Boulogne. In the evening we went for a walk and went into a café. We went in a private room where there was a piano and as one of our chaps could play we had a little sing song. A Frenchman came in and brought his family (wife & daughter). They were very much entertained. We had a decent bed here – plenty of Blankets.

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

Had a medical inspection this morning. I have been marked “Light Duty” “B” we are to join the Base Details this afternoon & shall be put on some light duty until we are fit once more. Went for a nice walk this morning. There is a ripping sea view from about half a mile down the road. Arrived at the Base Details Billets about 4pm. We are in a loft. Les Cox is here. He had a slight graze very similar to mine. At night Les, another chap & I went for a stroll round Boulogne. In one café we went in there was a French soldier who was drunk. He was in a most joyous mood, so much so in fact that he made himself rather a nuisance. We also went to the soldier’s home. There is a billiard table here & a piano. Also a bar where one can buy loaves biscuits & cake and Woodbines. 3 for a ½ d when they are not sold out. No one is supposed to have more than a ha’poth.

### **November 5<sup>th</sup>**

Six other chaps and I are going to No 7 Stationary Hospital (R.Cross Hostel)<sup>4</sup>. Bush, Parth, Thompson and I got jobs as Officers Servants. I have to do Mess Waiter also but believe the duties are not heavy. I am servant to Major Kiddle and Lieut. Wright. There is an R.A.M.C. chap with us who is servant to the Colonel & the Q.M. He assists me as mess waiter.

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<sup>4</sup> More information about 7 Stationary Hospital can be found online.



*No. 7 Stationary Hospital Boulogne, based in the Hotel Christol  
(IWM Image)*

### **November 6<sup>th</sup>**

They have given us some kit in the way of towels, shirts, pants, rough knife, fork spoon hairbrush comb & tooth brush. Our quarters are at the top of the building. From our window we have a splendid view of the town & from the officer's windows an equally fine view of the docks & the sea. We have straw palliasses we to sleep on & plenty of blankets so are quite comfy.

### **November 7<sup>th</sup>**

At the side of the hotel there is a little café where we go to fetch the beer for the officers. The people who keep it are awfully decent and allow us the use of their kitchen if we wish to sit down & have a drink. It is not really a café but a shop but they sell stuff for consumption on the premises.

### **November 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>**

Nothing at all of any importance has happened during these two days.

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

We were paid today 15 fr. each. We get jolly good grub & plenty of it. In fact it is a sin to see the stuff we are compelled to throw. We put this refuse in a tin & have to take it across the road to the incinerator which is behind the latrines.

**November 11<sup>th</sup>**

Usual routine. Bfast. 8 Lunch 1 Tea 5 & dinner at 8.

**November 12<sup>th</sup>**

We heard a rumour today that the Germans have taken Dixmuid. In yesterday's paper is an account of the destroying of the Emden. Capt. Von Muller is a prisoner. I have heard that Sgt. Sharpe is killed.

**November 13<sup>th</sup>**

Nothing of importance. Usual routine.

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

Lord Roberts has succumbed to pneumonia after visiting the Indian troops in the trenches.

**November 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>**

Usual routine. Awful weather.

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

See in the casualty list that Capt. A. G. Mulholland is killed & Lord Arden wounded. Lt. Col. Earle wounded & missing. I expect he will be a prisoner. Went out today. Had a stroll along the Front. It rained a little while I was out but I managed to get back before it came on heavily. We are for a medical inspection tomorrow. Probably to see if we are now quite fit. Miller and Lloyd have been killed. The Prince of Wales has come out to join Sir John French's staff. Arrived at Boulogne yesterday.

**November 18<sup>th</sup>**

Usual routine. Medical Inspection. Marked A.

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

See in the Casualty List Tufnell & Gordon-Lennox killed & Tudway wounded. The Russians have retired a little. Ypres still holds out and Calais seems to be as far off as ever to the Germans. The weather is still rotten. It has been raining heavily again

today. It is no longer stormy however. See an account in the paper of Bob's<sup>5</sup> funeral at Englemere Ascot. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battn. G. Gds. took part so the rumour that they have come out here falls through. About tea time today it commenced snowing. It must be rotten in the trenches this weather. The mail is late tonight. It is now 7 o'clock but it is not here yet. Had a letter from Rica tonight.

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

The snow was not very heavy but there has been a keen frost during the night. It is a lovely morning. I am going out this afternoon. Had a letter from E. She also sent me a pair of ripping socks.

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

Hear this morning that we are to be relieved today. Rather rotten. Just settling down to it. Left the hospital about 3 pm. Had a walk round the town and a few "small beers" and eventually landed at the Base details Barracks. They are in a different place now. Round the corner at the top of the street. The place is dreadfully crowded and there is not room for us. I went out at night, after we had reported, and called round at the hospital to see if there were any letters. Had a 2 fr. Dinner at a café. The worse dinner I had in my life and a small bottle of the vilest wine I ever tasted. We slept in the old place as there was no room in the new. They gave us two splendid blankets each. I had quite a comfortable night.

### **November 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Rose at 7 am. Biscuits & Bacon for Breakfast. Rather a change. Went for a short route march round the outskirts of Boulogne in the morning and another in the afternoon. Those who came in before Friday got paid this afternoon.

We left Boulogne about 7.30 pm after fooling about the station for about an hour. We are now on the way to Havre. Stopped all night at Amiens. Got out & went to a café just outside the station. Got some butter there & a bottle of Cognac.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Bob(s)' is the troops' nickname for Field Marshall, Lord Roberts, a distinguished 19<sup>th</sup> century soldier and last Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in 1904. He was 82 at the time of his death in 1914.

### **November 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Thompson's unit were going to Rouen. We left Amiens at 7 am. There is a great deal of mistletoe about here. One can see two or three bunches of it on one tree. Arrived at Paris at about 12. 50 pm. At the Gare du Nord. Had to change here & cross to the Gare St. Lazare. We went via Rue St.Quentin. Rue Lafayette & Boulevard Hausman. The streets of Paris are very fine. The architecture is quite artistic. We passed a huge emporium very similar to Lewis's - Lafayette's. Our train leaves at 3. 30. Went to a café outside the station & had a chat with some Belgium refugees there. We got some Bread & Butter here. Train left at 3.37. We had a Belgium conscript in the carriage with us. He was a decent sort & could speak a little English. We reached Rouen at about 9.30 where the party for there left us. Arrived at Havre at about 1am.

### **November 24<sup>th</sup>**

We detrained & spent the night in the waiting room on the station. In the morning we marched via Boulevard Strasbourg & the Rue D'Etretat to a camp outside the town. When we got there it turned out that the 7<sup>th</sup> Div. had moved its base to Rouen a few days ago. There were a few others who were at the wrong place also. There were 500 men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Battns. here. Reinforcements for the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>. They arrived last night. I went and made enquiries for the Maj. but neither had come out. Am now attached to the new fellows of our Division & the 8 who are here. There are not many of us. We occupy two tents. We have two blankets each but there are no tent boards in our tent. Still we are fairly comfortable. I went across to the canteen in the evening & had a chat with one or two of our fellows. Could not find anyone I knew. They sell the beer in bottles here. It is not up to much.

### **November 25<sup>th</sup>**

Had a decent night. It rained very heavily during the night but it is fine this morning. Sent P.C.s to E., R., J.S., & R.C.D. Went down to the canteen & found it closed; the boys had pushed the counter over. They make them line up to get their Beer. We have orders tonight to parade at 8.30 am tomorrow to proceed to Rouen.

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

Had a decent night, & a jolly good Bfst. in the morning. The rations were very good today. A French Boy Scout guided us to the station. On the way met another scout dressed in khaki jacket, putties & a Glengarry cap. Looked awfully neat.

Arrived at the station at 10.30 am. There were some French women in the carriage with us. We gave them some bacon & they returned the compliment by giving us some butter. We arrived at Rouen at about 3 pm. I went down to Camp in a taxi with an officer of the London Scottish to help him with his kit. It was an awfully long way. I was jolly glad of the lift. He told me Mj. Hope was wounded in the head & that it had slightly affected his brain. On arrival at camp I was attached to No. 4 Company of the Base party. I hear Chamberlain died of his wounds. Jasper Tomkin & Williams are here and several others whom I know. Les Cox is here also. They have heard that Charlie Gransden, Palethorpe & Pickering are killed & Algy Thompson a prisoner. Went round to the Canteen to get some beer. It is a game of patience to get it. One has to line up & there are hundreds waiting. I have no blankets for tonight so expect it will be a trifle cold. I hear Platt is now full Sgt. Had a fairly decent night, a chap lent me a blanket.

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

Saw Rowe this morning, he is L/Sgt. now, he was a Cpl. in the 3rd 13<sup>th</sup> U.R. He came out to replace Grillis who had been reported missing but has since turned up. He is now acting postman to the Base party. He tells me that Phillips wants an assistant. It may be a clue. A draft is leaving here today. None of the chaps who have out are for it. It is a lovely morning. The boys have been for a Route March. Had a sleep in the afternoon. The troops went for another Route March. Spent the evening having a chat with Jasper.

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

Have been put on Camp Fatigues. It seems to be something in the nature of a sinecure. I gave the Pay Sgt. (Ian Hughes) a list of the kit I require today. Saw Butcher & Paul Jones this morning. I hear Sgt. Tyler is killed & Freddy Meakin wounded.

**November 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

The boys are for Church. Camp Fatigue do not attend. The majority of the men down here are Section D. Many have S. A. medals. Have not seen Sgt. Phillips yet. Hear he is billeted in the town. Sgt. Baylis is here & Sgt. Trotter is in hospital here. Heard Banker Lloyd is killed.

**November 30<sup>th</sup>**

Usual Routine.

**December 1<sup>st</sup>**

Rained heavily last night and is still raining this morning. Tea was very late at B'fast time. I do not think there will be a route march this morning. The troops are "standing by" now. I have had no letters here yet. It has cleared up now and the boys are for the route march after all. We may get paid today. Capt. Stewart is leaving for the front today. Saw his servant Avis just now.

At dinner time an order came for a draft to proceed at once. Les Cox, Williams, Coles Paul Jones & Butcher have gone with it. They have a rumour they are going to Paris. Probably but they wont stop long!!

There are large numbers of Troops leaving camp for the front today for different Regts. The camp fatigue were going to have a tent on their own but abandoned the idea as one or two have gone with the draft. Someone collared my coat but I have got one back for it. Slept tonight in a tent with a chap named Anderson. Only the two of us in the tent as the others were all on guard. Made a comfortable bed with spare the blankets.

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Usual Routine. See in the paper King George in France. P.O.W. met him at Boulogne. My left ear bled this morning after I had washed it. I do not know if anything is the matter. Shall see how it goes on. Got paid today 10fr. cash. There is now a Coffee Bar where we can get tea. H.A.C. fellows serve.

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

Usual Routine. The Company were for a Bathing Parade this morning. Have transferred to another Tent now where there is more room. Mead is in here. He used to be T.S. in my room at the Depot. A chap named Mann who is here told me Roy

came out with a draft at the beginning of Nov. Met another chap tonight who told me R.C.D. was with No. 3 & had asked him to remember him to me should he see me.

#### **December 4<sup>th</sup>**

Usual Routine. Drew 120 rounds Ammunition today & a rifle. Have no equipment yet.

#### **December 5<sup>th</sup>**

A very wet night & our tent was very draughty. Saw Cocks of our Section today. He has been wounded by shrapnel in the face. His eyesight is affected and he cannot open his mouth very wide which is perhaps as well. He says he is going to have glasses. It is an awful night. Stormy & wet.

#### **December 6<sup>th</sup>**

My Birthday. There has been a keen frost this morning. But now at noon it is dull and threatening. It is very cold and must be rotten in the trenches. Gladeye<sup>6</sup> is here and is on camp Fat. with us. Had my Hair cut today by Whalley. He nearly pulled my head off!! Had no letters. I cannot understand it. There is a ripping Recruiting Cartoon in the Weekly Dispatch "Will they Never come"<sup>7</sup> It should get a few recruits. A chap named Shattock sang some song this evening. He has a decent voice.

#### **December 7<sup>th</sup>**

A very wet morning. All the boys in our tent are for Guard so shall have plenty of room tonight. Usual Routine. See in paper Sgt. Mally died of wounds. Still no letters. It has been a stormy wet day and is still the same tonight.

#### **December 8th**

Had a good night. Heaps of room, only Andy & I. It is a lovely morning. Usual Routine. Cocks has got a permanent job in the Stores. He says he will not have to go back to the front. Heard Sgt. Meakin died of wounds.

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<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly a nickname, perhaps based on the tactical recognition flash on Guards uniforms in WW1, known as a 'Gladeye'.

<sup>7</sup> This popular cartoon, which appeared in the *Weekly Dispatch*, inspired a famous recruiting poster and an Australian propaganda film, now lost.

### **December 9<sup>th</sup>**

Usual Routine. Pay day. Another bad night tonight. They have just warned a draft but no one out of our tent is for it.

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

Usual Routine. Still no letters. Had a medical inspection today. I was quite fit. Mead is unfit. The draft have not gone yet. It is an awful night again.

### **December 11<sup>th</sup>**

Usual Routine. The draft left this morning. It is a rotten wet afternoon. Had a letter from E. Not much news in it. It is an awful night again.

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

Had a rotten night. Whalley was very restless!! and the people in the tents in rear were kicking up a row. It is a lovely morning. Usual Routine. Rotten afternoon raining hard. Awfully unsettled weather.

### **December 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

A fine morning. Most of the company are for Guard. Usual Routine. I saw in the paper the Germans have commenced another attack in the on the Yser. Rotten night. Raining hard.

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

Fine morning. Usual Routine. I see in the paper Great Serbian Victory & the Russians have taken a large number of prisoners. Started raining & kept it up all day. Tonight there has been a heavy hailstorm which I was out in.

### **December 15<sup>th</sup>**

Very wet morning. Usual Routine. Another draft has just been warned. Holden, Pullant, Chidrey & Mellor are for it from our tent. Seymour is down here now he came in yesterday. I have got a rotten cold. Still no letter from Rica. It is a very wet night again. Camp is getting in an awful condition. It will soon be a bog.

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

Another wet morning. Usual Routine. Pay Day. The draft went away at 1pm. It is a showery day. There are now 6 in our tent. It is a lot better. Heaps of room.

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

Slight frost during the night & it is fine this morning. Have had a new job this morning. Carrying sand to put down between the lines to dry them up. Labour in vain I fear. There is a rumour that the Division is going to move its base from here. One Regt. is under orders to stand by for something. Had a letter & newspaper from E. today. It is a lovely frosty night. Only Andy & I in the tent tonight. The rest are on Guard.

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

Rotten Morning. Raining hard again. Rumours of General's inspection of Camp. "Heaps of wind". German Cruisers have been bombarding Whitby, West Hartlepool & Scarborough 74 killed 240 wounded and the cruisers have escaped worse Luck. Rather a serious business. Rained dreadfully tonight. Wrote a long letter to J.A.D., hope it gets through.

### **December 19<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. Usual Routine. Got some equipment and an oil sheet today. Shall soon have a full kit again. Still no letters. It is an awful night simply pouring with rain. Couldn't get to sleep for hours owing to our friends behind kicking up a row again. If it hadn't been so wet we'd have gone to see them about it.

### **December 20<sup>th</sup>**

Usual Routine. The boys are all for some Fatigue out of Camp. Baker arrived here last night. Said he'd heard I was killed! Cheery chap, Baker. It is a lovely morning. Bright & frosty. Rained again in the afternoon & evening.

### **December 21st**

Still raining. Cold & windy. Usual Routine. See in the paper Enemy driven back near Arras.

There is now a Picture Palace in the Camp. Entrance Fee 2d There is to be a football match & a Boxing Tournament on Xmas Day. A draft has now been warned and nearly all the men who have not been out are for it. Morley is in waiting.

### **December 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Frosty morning. Very cold. Pay day on account of Draft. Draft left at 1pm. There are now four in our tent. Seymour, Baker, Morley & I. Had some Xmas pudding today. Shattuck had one sent him from home.

### **December 23<sup>rd</sup>**

A lovely morning. We are all for Fatigues today at No. 9 General Hospital. There are only about 30 Grenadiers in the Camp now. The hospitals here are at present canvas but they are building a large number of wooden sheds. The country round here is lovely. Wide stretches of Heather and Pine woods. There is a fine view from the Plateau where we are but it is not very clear this morning. To finish up with we helped to carry some stretcher cases to the motor Ambulances. There are a lot of wounded going from here to England tonight.

### **December 24<sup>th</sup> Xmas Eve**

Got turned out early this morning and have been warned for a draft. Everyone who is fit is for it: Baker is not as he has no kit. We passed the Medical Inspection, shouldered kit and marched off at about 1 pm. There is a lot of draft going to different Regiments. I had two letters just before we marched off. One from E. She has had a parcel she sent to me returned. The other from Stolle. The latter was posted on Nov. 27!!

It has been a long march to the station. We have piled Arms and are now waiting to entrain. Some chaps lit a fire near one of the sheds. A French officer came along and kicked it out. Got fearfully excited about it. We entrained about 2 pm. 40 in a Cattle Truck. We have got Biscuits, Cheese & Jam to eat. There is also some Bully but it is so salt that we dare not tackle it. It is very cold to the feet & confoundedly uncomfortable. We managed to sleep a little during the night.

### **December 25<sup>th</sup> Xmas Day**

A lovely frosty morning. No one seems inclined to sing any carols. Biscuits & Cheese for Bfast. Biscuits & Jam for dinner. What a Christmas feed! At around about 2 pm at a place called Merville, and are now lying in a field near the station. The Terminus had some hot water ready for us and we made some tea which we enjoyed immensely. We marched off from Merville at about 3pm. Frost & Clutterbuck were late for the Column & are under arrest. It was a long & heavy tramp to Saily-sur-le-Lys and when we got there we could not find the Battn. At last we found someone who put us on the right track. We called at a pub & had a couple of glasses of Ale & didn't we enjoy it after the march. At last we found Battn. Hdqrs. S.M. Parkin told us off to Coys. I am now in No 3. No 9 Platoon. R.G.D. has gone to England with frozen feet. Canham is here and Berty Canham is now a Corpl. Mills is machine Gun Sergt. Jack Bray Corpl. The Battn. is in Billet at a farm at present. It is rather a crowded place. They get heaps of cigarettes here from the Fund<sup>8</sup>.

### **December 26<sup>th</sup> Boxing Day**

Had a decent Bfast. The rations are not bad. Bacon, Cheese, Jam & half a loaf of bread for the day. There are also Biscuits if required. We parade at 10.30 am. Drill Order. Coats. To show Rifles, Bayonets etc. Major Trotter (Wingy) is our Company Commander. Earl Stanhope 2<sup>nd</sup> in command and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts Lord W. Percy & Westmacott.

The firing line is about five miles from here. The trenches we are in are on the right of Fleurbaix. We practised forming up to dig trenches on parade this morning. No other parades today. Had a chat with G.M. Parkin this morning. Made out a will for the C.S.M. tonight. We go in the trenches tomorrow night. They say the Scots Guards & the Germans have been playing football together today. It is rather hard to believe.

### **December 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

During the night we got the orders to "stand to Arms". Our Artillery were firing heavily but there did not seem to be much response from the Germans guns. We were not required to move off & eventually went back to Billet with instructions to have our kit handy. This morning we went into Saily for a bath. A large factory has been

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<sup>8</sup> Likely to be the National Relief Fund, established by the Prince of Wales to aid civilian hardship during the War, and to purchase home comforts for soldiers.

converted into a Bath house. There is heaps of hot water. One can also get ones hair cut and a shave. We parade at 3.15 pm to march to the Trenches. It is a very cold showery day. I received my Princess Mary gift-box today. There must be something in the yarn about the Scots playing football with the Germans. On the way to the trenches we halted and were told that there is an unofficial Armistice between us and the Germans and we are not to fire unless we see anyone interfering with the wire. The trenches are awfully muddy. In one part for about 30 yards it is knee deep. Almost impassable. The Dug Outs are rotten. We are going to make a new one tomorrow. We had a lot of digging to do. Filling sandbags to make a dam. We also had to go to one of the houses on the road to fetch some planks. There are three fields between the Trenches and the road, a distance of about 350 yards.

### **December 28th**

Stood to Arms at 6 am. when it got light. Two or three Germans came halfway to our trench & two of our chaps went out to talk to them. I intend to go when I get a chance. We have made a new Dug Out for four of us, but it is not a very good one. It is awfully cold and tonight it is raining heavily. Did 5 hours sentry to begin with tonight while the digging was in progress.

### **December 29<sup>th</sup>**

Fine this morning but dreadfully cold. The Trench is getting worse. We are all covered with mud. One thing about it, it is a clean clayey mud. Our Dug Out roof fell in last night so we have the job of repairing that this morning. Some Germans came over again this morning. Lord W.P., the S.M. and I went out to meet them. One of them could speak English quite well. He was a German American. He told us the yarn about the Scots Guards who were taken prisoner. It seems when they went across, the Germans had been relieved and the other Germans not knowing about this armistice took them prisoner. He says he has some letters from them which he will give to us if we will come for them this afternoon. I am going out at 3 pm. to fetch them. Buckley & I went out in the afternoon and got the letters. The Yankee chap brought them out to us. He said he was quite fed up with the war and did not care who won if only it would end. Anyone he said who had been out as long as he had and said he was not fed up with it was in his opinion a "God damn Liar". He thought the war would last about another two months. We finished our Dug Out and it is now

quite a snug place. Felt rather rotten tonight but was better after a couple of hours sleep.

### **December 30<sup>th</sup>**

A lovely frosty morning. Not too cold. I went out to buy some bread. Got it from a shop on the road behind the Trenches. Rather plucky of the people to remain in the houses there with shells flying about. Had a parcel from R. this morning. Contg. among other thing three pairs of socks which are jolly welcome. They are pretty busy on the right this morning. We can hear a good deal of firing. The big Guns are also doing a bit.

### **December 31<sup>st</sup>**

New Year's eve. It has been a fine night and is fine this morning also very cold. We are to be relieved tonight. There is heavy artillery firing on the right again this morning. Major Trotter is now 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of the Battn. Captain Stanhope is now O.C. Company. It has started raining heavily again this morning. I am afraid the Scots Guards will find the Trenches flooded. Our Artillery are shelling the enemy's trenches very heavily this afternoon. At first it was chiefly on the right but now they are shelling the Trenches in front of us. There was little reply from the German Guns. The relief arrived at about 6 pm and we marched back to Billets. I am for Guard tonight. The guard room is at the house where we are billeted and fairly comfortable. There are two on sentry at night. One by the Guard Room and one at the corner of the road which leads to the other billets. Morris & I are on sentry together. We do two hours at a time.

## **1915**

### **January 1<sup>st</sup> New Year's Day**

12.5 am. Have just come off Sentry. It is raining slightly. There is heavy rifle fire on the right. It is fine this morning. The big guns are busy again today. There was a rumour that America had declared war on us but it turns out to be a complaint about unwarrantable interference with trade in the North Sea. Dismtd<sup>9</sup> Guard at 4.30 pm. The Platoon are billeted in a loft and it is a fairly comfortable place.

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<sup>9</sup> Dismounted Guard, i.e. military term meaning to come off guard duty.

### **January 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Raining again this morning. Had a letter & a hundred Cigs from A. this morning. The village where our billets are is called La Gorgue. The people at the farm here have lent me a map. It appears we are not very far from Lille. Tried my hand at barbering tonight: shaved the farmer here. He is a Catholic and is going to Mass in the morning he tells me.

### **January 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday**

The Artillery were very busy last night and woke us up about midnight. In the morning we had an hours Swedish drill & Arms drill. Went for a bath just before dinner. Wrote some letters this afternoon in the Farm kitchen. We are quite at home here. We have heard that the Formidable has been sunk.

### **January 4<sup>th</sup>**

We are for the Trenches tonight. Parade 3.45 pm. It is very cold & wet today. We are Reserve Company this time and occupy Dug Outs in rear of the firing line. The rations have been jolly good lately. We can buy bread here but the French bread has no salt in it. Get a new cap today a new pattern. Soft. I am afraid it will soon get sodden when it gets wet. Twenty of us are for Fatigue tonight assisting the R. E. We had a lot of trouble finding the place where we had to report. It was dreadfully dark. Absolutely black and one couldn't see ones hand in front of one. We got an axe each and found our way somehow to the scene of action. We had to chop the branches of some willow Trees and then carry them to an orchard, two of the Hedges of which had to be blinded, that is made so that the enemy could not see through them. The R. E<sup>10</sup>. were going to make a Redoubt there. At first we could only see when the Germans sent up a star shell a sort of Roman Candle affair. They looked ripping. The intense darkness adding to the effect. Later on, however, it got lighter. The Leicesters passed us on their way out of the Trenches. They said the Germans had asked them to fire over their heads if they got the order to fire & they would do the same. We knocked off at 9 pm. And had a lot of trouble to find where the Company was billeted. We got down at first in a ruined cottage but had to shift from there. No

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<sup>10</sup> Royal Engineers

4 Section had a jolly decent Billet. A room in a house which had not suffered much damage. There was plenty of straw and we had a jolly good nights rest.

### **January 5<sup>th</sup>**

We are very busy putting roofs on the Dug Outs this morning. We have to finish them today. We got the tiles off the houses near by to put on the roof, first putting boards and a foot of earth, so they should be fairly weather proof. Captn. Stanhope<sup>11</sup> is helping to carry beams for the Dug Outs. He is a fine chap ready to give a hand at anything. The artillery are pretty busy again today. We are using unthreashed straw for the Dug Outs. It is an awful shame. The waste of good stuff is really terrible. Carried Rations tonight a jolly wet & muddy business. However we finished early & had a good nights rest.

### **January 6<sup>th</sup>**

It is a lovely morning. We are putting the final touches to the Dug Outs today. The Artillery are quiet this morning. The Horrors of War are very much in evidence round about here. All the ruined houses which have obviously been very comfortable homes and dead cattle lying in every field. In one Shippon just down the road there are several cows which were burnt to death. The poor beasts were tied up when the building was struck and fired by a shell. We have a stove in the Dug Out and I cooked some haricot beans for dinner, they were not bad. There are heaps of them in a shed behind Btn. Hdqrs. also potatoes. There has been very heavy firing on the right tonight. It lasted for about half an hour. We were for digging tonight but did not go as it was too dark. The rain came through the Dug Out roof tonight and we had to fasten our oil sheets across the roof.

### **January 7<sup>th</sup>**

We went digging at 5.45 am. this morning. We were working on a Fort at the corner by the Shrine. We carried on until daylight. Just behind it there is a graveyard where several of our chaps are buried. There was a burial taking place as we passed on our return. It is raining again this morning. Tonight we carried Rations to No 4 Company. They are in our Trenches. It is up to the knees in mud across the fields.

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<sup>11</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Earl Stanhope, who gave Chevening to the nation. *The War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope* reveal a conscientious and humane officer.

On our return journey we came across a wagon drawn by two horses wandering about on their own near the shrine Bridge. We took it back to the village & found the owner. We got caught in a terrific rain storm and got soaked to the skin. We had to prop our Dug Out roof up to stop it from falling in. I was very wet & cold all night.

### **January 8<sup>th</sup>**

Another change. Frosty & fine this morning. The artillery are busy again today and the Germans are replying. They have dropped several shells dangerously near our Dug Outs. We got relieved tonight & marched into the Brigade Reserve Billets which are not very far away from the firing line. We are at Battn. Hdqts. Our billet is a barn and is a fairly comfortable place. It is raining heavily tonight. The country is very flooded in places, in some parts the roads are almost completely under water.

### **January 9<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. Very cold. Had a wash in the ditch in front of the farm. It is flooded. Had a letter & Xmas card from J.A.D. today. In the afternoon we went to work on the Redoubt at the corner of the road by the Shrine. It is nearly finished now. I heard Jerry Long was the chap they were burying the other morning.

### **January 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

Church at 9.15 am. Had a very decent service in our Barn. It is a fine morning and after church we had a game at football. The Germans dropped a good many shells round about here today but did not hit the Billet. I see in the paper the Germans have been reinforced near Ypres and may try again to break through there. The Prince of Wales was here today. He looks awfully well. It is an awful night. Stormy and raining heavily. The artillery are at it again tonight.

### **January 11<sup>th</sup>**

It has been an awful night but it is fine this morning. Went down to Sailly for a bath this morning. The low lying ground North of the main street is flooded. The floods come right up to the walls of the factory where the baths are. Saw Chesterman on way back. See in the paper Zeppelin says he is ready and is expected to make a raid this month. Heard from S.B. he is in England. Lucky beggar. Went digging tonight from 6 to 9 pm. The redoubts are to be used only at night. During the day the troops

are to be billeted in the houses in rear. There will only be a small number of Troops in the trenches who will be relieved every 12 hours. Mj. Westmacott told me he crawled up to the German Trenches the other night and found they were very thinly manned.

### **January 12<sup>th</sup>**

A Fine frosty morning but rained later. Went back to the Trenches tonight. No.9 platoon are on duty the first 12 hours. The remainder are billeted at a farm in rear. Had a quiet night and a fine one. We could hear the Germans singing very plainly. Towards 5 am. the artillery started blazing away and just as we were being relieved there was heavy rifle fire on the right. The enemy's Artillery are replying to our cannonade.

### **January 13<sup>th</sup>**

The enemy's shells are dropping in the fields in rear of our Billet. Had a good rest during the day. At night I went to take coke & wood to No.4 section. The fields are muddier than ever. One can scarcely get across them. Later I took some Sandbags down to Sgt. Langley's section. We are going to make Dug Outs in rear of the Billet to retire to in case of Shell fire.

### **January 14<sup>th</sup>**

Went back into the trenches just before dawn. I am in a different section this time and on the right of our line. Our Trench is very wet and bounded at the other end by dams. We have no wood to make things worse. The enemy shelled our trenches during the day but did not do any damage. The snipers also were very busy all day. We got relieved at 6 pm. We are to carry on with the Dug Outs tonight. We are to work in 3 hour shifts. I am for it at 12 am.

### **January 15<sup>th</sup>**

Did three hours digging from 12 to 3 am & then had a sleep. It has been a stormy sort of night and is the same this morning. We are for the trenches again tonight, Rotten rations today. Two loaves between 14 of us. Of course there are biscuits. During the afternoon the enemy were dropping shells round our Billet again but did not hit it. We got back in the Trenches without mishap. Made a light for the Dug Out with a tin of Dubbin & a piece of Rifle rag. A rotten night. Very cold wind. Sentry-go rather rapid. One hour on two off.

Germans have an electric light in the Trench and just behind of which they are -----  
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### **January 16<sup>th</sup>**

Very cold morning. They expect our Billet to be shelled to-day. The Aeroplane Scouts say the Germans have got a lot more guns up. The Terriers on our right were blazing away like fury all night. We sent out Patrols every hour during the night as it was too dark for the sentries to see what was going on. We were told off for the Dug Outs as soon as we got back into Billet. Got relieved tonight and went back into Division Billets.

### **January 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

Very Cold biting wind. We got a change of Underclothing to day and went down to Sailly for a bath. The floods there have subsided considerably. Heard Germans have recovered the Aisne with heavy losses to the French. Capt. Stanhope is going on leave today. It is a dreadful night hailing and raining.

### **January 18<sup>th</sup>**

Cold morning. Started snowing about 8 am. Wrote some letters today. It is a beastly wet night.

### **January 19<sup>th</sup>**

Rotten wet morning. Lord Brabourne inspected the coy. this morning. Read out two Court Martials. Two men shot for attempting to desert. They belonged to Middx. Rgt. In the morning the Farmer came up into our loft for a chat. He told us the Germans took 100 bottles of wine 60 sacks corn, two horses & a cart from his farm when they were here. He is of opinion that the war will last a year. One of our chaps asked him to sing the Marseillaise. He said Frenchmen could not sing now. When the Germans were driven out of France then they would sing again & not until.

### **January 20<sup>th</sup>**

A fine morning. We are for the Trenches tonight. We are to do 24 hour shifts this time. 9 & 12 Pl. will be first for it. 12 Platoon will be for the fort tomorrow night. A wet night in the Trenches and the Dug Outs are bad ones. Did not feel well during the night. While I was on sentry there was a sharp attack on the right. It was like a big

firework display. The Machine Guns started and star shells went up in dozens then the rifle fire started and the Big Guns opened fire from the rear.

The star shells were now going up all along the line & one could see as plainly as by day. The sky was literally ablaze with them. The row was deafening. Soon it began to die down and we knew that all was over.

### **January 21<sup>st</sup>**

Baker and I went out on Patrol at 12.30 am. We did not see anything of a startling nature. We got relieved at 6 am. We got some Tinned Salmon today which has been given to the Troops by British Columbia. There has been a heavy artillery duel today. There is a battery in rear our Billet.

### **January 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Went back into the trenches at 6 am. It is a lovely morning. There has been a slight frost during the night. The Trenches are awfully bad. We have brought some planks to put on the bottom and were very busy bailing & draining this morning. We mean to make them a bit dryer somehow.

There are a lot of Aeroplanes about this morning. We got the trench into a fairly decent condition by about 4 pm. The snipers had us dated when we were bailing. Our Artillery dropped few shells over the German Trenches which were greeted with ironical cheers. Cheeky beggars!

It is a lovely night. Starlight & moonlight. There was a bit of an alarm during the night about twenty shells came over to which we replied but nothing came of it. I went out on Patrol. We could hear & see the Germans working. They are putting up more barbed wire.

It is a bitterly cold night but we have a jolly good fire.

### **January 23<sup>rd</sup>**

We are for the fort tonight. A section at a time 3 hours relief. Have had a quiet day. Got turned out about 8.30 pm. to help carry some planks down to the Trenches. It was a rotten job the mud is terrible, especially when one is heavily laden. The night is fine and mild at present. We are for the fort at 3 am.

### **January 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

It was dreadfully cold in the fort. Was jolly glad when the 3 hours were over. When we got back to the trenches we found them very wet. They had another false alarm during the night. We set to work and got the Trench in a decent condition once more. Mj. Westmacott told us that it has come out in orders that everyone who has been out three months can have leave. 4 per Company at a time. We got relieved at 6 pm. and marched back into Brigade Billets. We are on the next road beyond where Battn. Hdqrs. are. Two Platoons of No. 4 are with us. Had a parcel and a letter from A. tonight.

### **January 25<sup>th</sup>**

All who are eligible for leave went to see the S.M. this morning for the purpose of having their names registered. We do not know who goes first yet. Parade at 11 am. Inspection of Rifles. The Troops are playing football in a field near the billet. There was a jolly little French kiddie watching with great interest. Was highly delighted when allowed to have a kick and simply chuckled with joy. We are “standing by” tonight. No. 4 are digging in the morning.

### **January 26<sup>th</sup>**

Frosty morning. Had to break the ice to get a wash and shave. The latter was a jolly cold job but we are getting accustomed to these things. Parade at 10.30 am. Inspection of Arms. An aeroplane has just passed over quite low down. Hear the 1<sup>st</sup> Division have been attacked & driven out of their Trenches but retook them with heavy losses to the enemy. Also that a German cruiser has been sunk and two others damaged. Have been playing football all morning. We have a match this afternoon with the R.A.M.C.<sup>12</sup> During the night we heard heavy rifle fire on the right. The Artillery have been firing heavily also and the noise woke us up several times.

### **January 27<sup>th</sup>**

A fine frosty morning. Parade at 10.30 am. for hymns. A little bit of “Knees up” will no doubt do us a world of good. A draft arrived last night. No one I know amongst them. Chiefly recruits. We beat the R.A.M.C. yesterday, 3:1 by the way. No. 4 have

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<sup>12</sup> Royal Army Medical Corps

orders to sleep fully dressed & have their kits packed in case they should be required in a hurry.

### **January 28<sup>th</sup>**

Keen frost during the night. Very cold morning. Went digging this morning. Finishing off the parapets of a Fort behind the Borderers Trenches. Our Artillery were shelling German Trenches. We had a fine view of the shells bursting from our fort. There was an artillery observation post on a Haystack just to the right of our fort. The Germans dropped several shells near us. One almost hit the haystack. We had to take shelter in the Dug Outs in the Fort for a time. We are for the Trenches tonight. We are second relief this time. Tonight we carried rations to the Troops in the trenches. It is a lovely frosty night and moonlight.

### **January 29<sup>th</sup>**

A fine frosty morning. Our first job this morning was to bail out the Dug Outs in rear of the billets which have been flooded. We then collected all the wood we could find to take with us to the Trenches tonight. Our artillery are blazing away this morning. In the afternoon the enemy shelled our Billets and we had to retire to the Dug Outs for about half an hour. We reached the trenches all right about 6 pm. It was a rotten journey through the mud with all the kit and a heavy load of wood but we got there somehow. Lord Stanhope told us that a German officer who had been taken prisoner at La Bassée had remarked upon the good shooting of our snipers and excellence of our force discipline. The Trenches are in a pretty bad state. The parapet is very low. We filled in the parapet on our right and front and raised it to the necessary height but could not do much to the left. The artillery dropped a few shells on the German Trenches at about 8 pm.

### **January 30<sup>th</sup>**

Went for water just before dawn. It was rather light on the return journey and the snipers had a shot or two at me but they were wide. It is a fine frosty morning. During the night we have had snow frost rain and hail in turns. Went over to 13 London's Trenches last night. They are different to ours in fact they are not trenches but simply a breastwork. They have some decent Dug Outs. The German Snipers were very busy while I was there so they stood to Arms and let them have five rounds rapid. This is their usual custom when the snipers are active I was informed. It was

about as light as day and I had to hop it across the open coming back. The snipers are very active again this morning. Several of our aeroplanes are up this morning. Just after dinner the Artillery bombarded the German Trenches. Later the Germans replied and dropped one shell in an unoccupied part of the trench about 20 yards from us. We are for the Forts tonight. It is thawing fast at present. It is a fine night but very cold. The Dug Outs in the Fort are ripping and we are quite cosy. The sentry go is easy. One hour on and six off.

### **January 31<sup>st</sup>**

Went into billet at dawn. Had a ripping sleep during the morning. Busy all afternoon fortifying the buildings of our billet. We are making loopholes and putting iron plates over them supported by sandbags which we have to fill in the field in rear. Our Artillery have been firing heavily all afternoon and the enemy have replied. They are dropping their shells about 500 yards behind our billet. We can hear them whiz overhead. They must have found someone's billet. We can see some Troops scattering in the fields in rear.

Saw Jones & Benstead today. They are staying in our billet. Nicholls is going on leave tomorrow. Went back to the trenches at 6 pm. It is a lovely night, and awfully moonlight. One can see to read or write. The snipers are very active tonight and there is heavy rifle fire on the right. The artillery have been shelling the German Trenches during the night on the right. We could see the shells bursting quite plainly. They have the range to a T. The German Artillery have been firing tonight which is rather unusual for them. Nicholls has gone on leave tonight. He was sent for about 10 pm.

### **February 1<sup>st</sup>**

A quiet night except for the snipers. Just before dawn Cpl. Knight & I went out to fetch some planks. We got spotted coming back and a couple of shots came rather near but we got to the trench all right. The German snipers are very active again this morning. I bagged one of them. Spotted him through the glass. Knight took the glass and I got my rifle. Next time he came up Knight gave me the word and I fired and got him fair and square. The sniping was much quieter afterwards. Our Artillery shelled a Farm house just in rear of the German Trenches this morning. The German Artillery are also active but are not shelling the trenches at present.

More shell fire in the afternoon. A few dropped near the Trenches but no damage done. We got relieved at 6 pm. It was very dark and there was no sniping. We marched back to Divisional Billets. We are at a large farm and in an enormous Barn. The largest Barn I ever saw. There is a broken window above my little spot and it rains in a little.

### **February 2<sup>nd</sup>**

A wet and stormy morning. We are for the baths. We have to go in Marching Order! Knight has gone sick so Horley is now I.C. the section. The order re going to Bath in Marching Order was cancelled later. This afternoon we have a rotten job. It is to get the straw off the bottom of the Barn. There are tons of it and it appears to have been here for years. I mounted guard at 4.30 pm. Wrote some letters. Very dark during the evening. The Germans are sending up some splendid star shells they light up the country as far as our Billet. Cleared up later on. A lovely moonlight night.

### **February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Fine morning. Had two nice cups of coffee while on sentry. One at the House by the railway and the other at the House opposite the Billet. The company is for a Drill Parade this morning. Tonight we can hear heavy rifle fire on the right towards Port Arthur. The Artillery are also firing heavily.

### **February 4<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. Very cold. The Germans are shelling one of our Aeroplanes but they are very wide of the mark. It is a clear blue sky and the smoke from the shells hangs like a little white cloud. We are for a drill parade this morning again. Got great credit for our drill! At about 8 pm. we got the order to "Stand to Arms". There was an attack on the left. We were not required to march off and eventually returned to Billet to rest undisturbed for the remainder of the night.

### **February 5<sup>th</sup>**

Quite a spring morning. Had another Drill Parade this morning. We are for the Trenches tonight. We are the Reserve Company and shall be in the Dug Outs at Battn. Hdqrs. Parade 4.30 pm. We went a different route tonight. Turned to the left at the cross roads and went across the fields. Our platoon carried rations to No. 2 Company. There was heavy rifle fire on the right again. At 8pm the Artillery behind

us started bombarding the Trenches in front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division. The Germans must have expected an attack. They were sending star shells up by the score. Quite a brilliant firework display. Our fellows did a good deal of firing during the night but nothing exciting happened.

### **February 6<sup>th</sup>**

A gloomy morning. Raining slightly. Nothing doing in the morning. In the afternoon we dug a grave to rebury a man who had been dug up in a communication Trench. The artillery on both sides have been hard at it all day. Our Guns shelling the German trenches & the Germans trying to find our Guns. They very nearly found our dug outs once or twice. All along the line behind the Trenches now strongly fortified by means of sandbag breastworks and forts. This is our second line of defence and if the Germans should by any chance break through the first line I fancy they would find the second a stiff problem. Many of the houses and buildings are also fortified and loopholed. Tonight we carried ammunition to the fort near the Shrine. The enemy's guns found our Billet today. The one we use when in the Trenches. One of their Aeroplanes came over and spotted the Troops about. They did not do any damage fortunately. An engineer was killed in the Fort by the Shrine last night.

### **February 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

Fine morning. Our first job was to carry water to the forts. There are two tubs in each fort which have to be refilled at frequent intervals. Tonight we carried sandbags to the Kings Coy. and rations to no. 2. The firing was rather hot so we went a different way to No. 2 where there was a little more cover. It was an awfully muddy way and we had one or two ditches to negotiate. Of a party which went digging tonight one was killed and two injured. We have heard that the Russians have had another big victory. Cpl. Knight has come back from Hospital tonight.

### **February 8<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. Got new bacon issued this morning. Had it fried for a change. We are for Brigade Reserve again. Have heard there is going to be a general bombardment of the enemy's trenches shortly. Another of our chaps got wounded in the stomach this morning while standing outside the Bomber's Dug Outs. Went on fatigue at 5 pm. with the R.A.M.C. burying dead cattle. There was one in the ditch along the road leading to No. 2 Coy.'s trenches which we roped and pulled

out. The stench was dreadful. When we got him on the bank the R.A.M.C. Sergt. threw chloride of lime over it. The Germans sent up some ripping star shells. Later we went to bury one in a field beyond the Shrine Bridge. The Germans got the Maxim on the road and one or two came very near but none of us were hit. The German searchlight was on the go looking for aeroplanes. There is heavy rifle fire on the right and also heavy big gun fire still further on the right. French guns I imagine. A draft has arrived tonight. There is one man for our section. Nothing exciting during the night.

### **February 9<sup>th</sup>**

Our new chum is our chief worry today. He was at Ypres and does nothing else but talk about his daring deeds. We'll quieten him in time though. The Artillery have been much quieter today. We got relieved at about 5.30 pm. and marched back into Brigade Billets. We are in the Estaminet at the corner of the road this time. There is heavy rifle fire on the right again. In one part I believe there is a wood between the Trenches and a fire has to be maintained to guard against surprise. Our billet is rather crowded but otherwise it is a very good one. We can get beer at the Estaminet, two pints per man being allowed.

### **February 10<sup>th</sup>**

A fine frosty morning. Had to break the ice in a ditch to wash and shave. We parade at 10 am. for inspection of arms. After parade wrote some letters. We parade at 4.30 pm. for digging. We had to report at Hdqrs. where we had to wait sometime. We drew tools and had to carry brushwood hurdles with us, one between two. Our work was to make a fort in rear of the Borderers Trenches. We turned off the road about 200 yards below Hdqrs. and as we were going thro' an Orchard a star shell went up and the next minute the Germans had a Maxim on us. We dropped the hurdles in the mud and lay down on them. On the way thro' the fields which were in an awful state half the party got lost and we had another lay down while they were retrieved. The fire was pretty hot and the "whisperers" were well in evidence. At last we got on the move again. We had several ditches to cross which was an awkward business with the Hurdles. While we were at work the enemy got their searchlight on us and there were more "whisperers"<sup>13</sup>. The searchlight is a splendid one and it is believed is worked from the Electric Power Station at Lille. We knocked off at 9.30 pm. When

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<sup>13</sup> A type of shell, so-called because of the noise it made before impact.

we got back to Billet the cooks had some soup ready for us which we enjoyed more than a little. We had one casualty, a chap shot in the thigh.

### **February 11<sup>th</sup>**

Fine frosty morning. Parade 11 am. Inspection of Arms. Got our clean washing returned this morning. The Corpls. have had half an hours "Shouting Drill" this morning. You should hear 'em grousing! Digging again tonight. We drew tools from the Gordons Hdqrs. and went to dig in their Trenches which are on the left of where we were last night. It was the most awful journey to get there. Knee deep in mud all the way. Heaps of barbed wire to get over, several very narrow and shaky bridges to cross and one deep trench full of water with no bridge at all. One good thing there was very little firing. We were only 20 yards from the German Trenches. The Germans were singing nearly all the time we were there. They sang the German & Austrian National Anthems and shouted to us to sing. One chap shouted Gentlemen, Long Live the King & then laughed heartily, evidently thinking he had made a huge joke. They sent up a lot of star shells but there was no sniping. We knocked off at 9 pm. as usual. Had no casualties tonight.

### **February 12<sup>th</sup>**

A rotten morning. Rain and sleet. Parade 11 am. Inspection of Arms. A court-martial was to read out to us on parade. A chap got 28 days Field Punishment for a day absent off leave. 110 men required for digging tonight. Our platoon is for it. An order has also been issued to the effect that men proceeding on leave are not to take uncensored letters. The German Artillery are busy today and a shell has just dropped about 100 yards to the left of our Billet. Went digging tonight a little to the left of where we were last night. The approach to it was a little better but not much and was made up for by the bullets which were fairly plentiful tonight. We had fairly decent cover where we had to work which was fortunate as the enemy had their Maxims on the go. It was a very wet place where we had to dig and consequently hard work. A lot of star shells went up while we were on our way back but there were no casualties. We got coffee on our return instead of soup.

### **February 13<sup>th</sup>**

Reveille 7.30 this morning. A wet morning. Parade as usual 11 am. Inspection of Arms. We are going into the Trenches tonight. Three platoons will be in the trench and one in billet this time. The Trenches are much drier than they were and one can now walk right along them. The Dug Outs are very poor. The bottom of the trench is still very wet but there are planks all along and if one keeps on these one is all right but step off and one is knee deep in water. We have been digging from 10.30 to 1.30. It is a dreadfully cold night.

### **February 14<sup>th</sup>**

A cold morning. There appears to be something doing on the right. We can hear the incessant roar of the French guns. The German Trenches look nearer but I think it is because they have made the parapet higher. The snipers have been very quiet today. It has been a dreadful day. Raining incessantly morning and afternoon. We get relieved tonight. We carried rations to No. 12 platoon. It was a rotten journey, knee deep in soft mud. We are all wet through. Near the trenches we got among a lot of holes and old disused Trenches & drains all full of water. It was like finding your way out of a maze. Had a ripping nights sleep after it all.

### **February 15<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. We hear that an attack is expected tonight or tomorrow night. Two Germans gave themselves up the other day and said an attack had been planned for the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>. We return to the Trenches tonight. We each carried as much wood as we could manage to the Trenches. I had a devil of a load, and four pieces about 20 feet long and a devil of a job with it across the mud. When we reached the Trenches there was no fire for us and the Dug Outs are unfit for occupation. Cheerful What? It was a quiet night but rained heavily. The Germans sent up a lot of star shells.

### **February 16<sup>th</sup>**

A lovely morning bright and fine. The night has been quiet. No attack so far. The Germans were shouting at us this morning and so we sang "The Good Rhein Wine" for their especial benefit. There are several of our aeroplanes out and the Germans are shelling them but the shells are all going wide. It is awfully hard to get anywhere near them. We have made a new dug out today. We have got some sheeting for the roof

and so it is a jolly good one. Our section is to be relieved tonight rather a surprise for us. It seems a Platoon and a section are in Billet. We had to go digging at 8 pm. in front of the King Coy. Trenches. We had a listening Patrol out in front in case of attack. The ground was like a bog and it was awfully hard to work. The sod wouldn't leave the shovel. The Germans were singing and cheering like blazes on the left and the troops on our right were blazing away all the night but no attack was made. Had a jolly good rest when we got back to billet at about 1 am.

### **February 17<sup>th</sup>**

Got up at 9 am. for Bfast. and then went to sleep again. In the afternoon I went to take over billets as we get relieved tonight. On the way down we stopped to watch the artillery firing a 4.7 gun. It recoils about 4 yards and they fire it with a Lanyard. It is marvellous the rapidity with which they get the gun back into position and loaded again. The shock of explosion brought down two small birds which happened to be flying by. We are in the same billet we were in when I rejoined from the Base. Part of it has been condemned so a platoon and a half will have to go to Hdqrs. which is opposite. It is dreadful night, windy and wet. No 9 platoon and half No. 10 are to be billeted at Hdqrs. It is a decent billet in the loft over the House. I think we shall be very comfortable here.

### **February 18<sup>th</sup>**

Lovely morning. Had a ripping night's sleep. We are for parade at 2.30 pm to do a practise attack. This we did across a ploughed field in rear of the Billets. No 9 platoon led. Each man was supposed to have a pair of wire cutters and our duty was to cut the barbed wire. We had bomb throwers with us on the Flanks. After we had cut the wire No. 10 & 11 platoons would rush through and take the Trenches. No. 12 following with the spades and sandbags to reverse the parapet. The Artillery were supposed to have bombarded the Trenches for 15 minutes before the attack and most of the barbed wire would be blown down at least that is the theory. We did it in quick time as it was drill. Wrote some letters this afternoon. There is a canteen just down the road which is open from 12 till 2 and 6 to 8 pm. It is awfully crowded.

### **February 19<sup>th</sup>**

Fine morning. Got paid today. Did another practise attack this afternoon and did it at the double this time. We are to do it before the General tomorrow.

### **February 20<sup>th</sup>**

A fine morning. Went down to Sailly for a bath this morning. In the afternoon we marched to Brigade Hdqrs, to do the practise attack before the Brigadier. It poured with rain the whole time. We got simply soaked. The field we did it across was deep in thick clayey mud. I don't know what the Brigadier thought about it but it was impossible to put much dash into it across that sticky ground. The Germans dropped a few shells close by to make it look a little more real! You should have heard the language!

### **February 21<sup>st</sup>**

Went to church at 11 am. Rather a good sermon. We are for the trenches tonight and are going in the ones on the left of the road by the Shrine. We arrived at the trenches at about 7 pm. The old trenches which ran alongside the road have been abandoned and are now full of water. We are in forts about 50 yards in rear of them. Our section is in the third fort from the road. From the left of our Fort a hedge runs down to the road and as this prevents the sentry from seeing what is going on to his left front we have placed a "Listening patrol" at the corner where it joins the road. The line of trenches is in the form of a Z and we are now on the centre line of the letter. As the forts have only a low parapet in rear we can be enfiladed from the left. To safeguard ourselves against this we are building a parapet in rear. The German trenches are about 250 yards away at this point and we can hear them working and singing very cheerfully. A little further to the left they are only about 80 yards away.

### **February 22<sup>nd</sup>**

It has been frosty during the night and is fine this morning. Spent a very quiet day. Tonight the next fort finds the Listening Patrol. We are taking it in turns. We finished off the parapet tonight and have dug a trench to drain the fort in case of heavy rain. Sharpe No. 10 platoon has been killed.

### February 23<sup>rd</sup>

Fine morning but misty. Cleared up later. We spotted a Telephone wire behind the German Trenches and tried to cut it with rifle fire but without much success. Two sections are being relieved tonight. Our turn comes tomorrow.

We find the Listening Patrol again tonight. The Germans were very busy again tonight putting up more wire. Nothing exciting during the night.

### February 24<sup>th</sup>

Fine frosty morning. The Brigadier paid us a visit this morning. He is going to have some more wire put up in front of us and spikes put in the old trench which will impale anyone who jumps into it. Quiet day. Rained heavily in the afternoon. Just as it became dark the Germans gave us a volley, rifle and machine gun. Tried to catch us napping I expect, but we were all under cover. We sang them a few songs including "Soldiers of the King" and "We've got a navy"<sup>14</sup>. Later on we got relieved. It is an awful night. It is bitterly cold and while we were coming out there was storm half rain and half snow. We arrived in billet wet through and nearly frozen. We are billeted at Hdqrs. in the farm opposite the Dug Outs. An officer's servant gave me some tea which we enjoyed immensely. It warmed us up gloriously.

### February 25<sup>th</sup>

Had a good nights rest. It has been snowing heavily during the night and the ground is white this morning. Did nothing all day except sleep. Got relieved about 6.30 pm. and marched into billet a few hundred yards beyond the cross roads. We are in constant readiness in case of attack. It is a decent Billet a loft over a Farm.

### February 26<sup>th</sup>

We are loosing our Captain. He goes today to take up an appointment on the Staff. We are all very sorry for he is immensely popular.

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<sup>14</sup> Probably the 1899 song by Harry Dacre, *The Lads in Navy Blue*, whose chorus runs:

*We've got a Navy, a fighting Navy;  
Our neighbours know it's true;  
And it keeps them in their place;  
For they know they'd have to face;  
The lively little lads in Navy Blue.*

. German naval losses had just been reported in the press

I am for guard tonight. Mounted guard at 4.30 pm. While we were on parade this afternoon in a field near the billet a shell dropped in the next field and failed to explode, it ricocheted right across our field through the midst of us but did not hit anyone as of course we could see it coming. It is a bitterly cold night and freezing very hard.

### **February 27<sup>th</sup>**

A cold morning. A Thaw wind. Then mounted guard at 4.30 pm. There is an Estaminet a hundred yards down the road which we are allowed to use as a canteen. I went down for an hour tonight. It was rather crowded as the rooms are only small and we are many. In one room there are shelves all along one side and these are filled with loaves for sale to the troops. The pictures in the Estaminets are always either of a military or religious character. There are some fine specimens of fret work in one room.

### **February 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

A cold fine morning. The German shelled our billet this morning and we had to scatter in the fields. One shell fell near the Cook House and our dinner had a nervous squeak. Another shell fell in the ditch which runs under the wall of the house along the road. The shelling ceased in about an hour. We paraded at 11.15 for Inspection of Arms. There are heaps of rumours flying about. I believe the Canadians relieve us on Wednesday but do not know what we are for.

### **March 1<sup>st</sup>**

Cold strong morning. Typical March weather. Wrote letters all morning. Two of British Columbian Regiment were here this afternoon. We go in the Trenches tonight and are to be relieved by the Canadians on Wednesday. We are in "B" Fort this time which is second from the road. I went out for wood with another chap. We pulled a house down the other side the Shrine and got as much as we could carry. It is a fine moonlight night. We were digging from 12 to 2.30 am.

### **March 2<sup>nd</sup>**

A fine morning. We fried some potatoes for dinner. There are heaps just in rear of our fort. About 4 pm. the Artillery bombarded the Trenches to our right front very

heavily, later they shelled all along the line. The enemy's reply was very feeble. Went for wood again at night. Called at the café at the cross roads to get a loaf and some coffee. Had a job to get any wood. It is beginning to be rather scarce. About 11.30 pm we sent up a star shell and spotted the Germans out working. We opened fire with rifles & maxims. The Germans sent up two red lights which appear to have been a signal for a few minutes later their artillery sent a few shells over. It is a beastly wet night. I came off sentry at 3 am. I lay down on a couple of sandbags in the bottom of the Trench and slept beautifully until 5 am.

### **March 3rd**

A rotten wet day. The Canadians relieved us about 6.30 pm. We went into billet in a farm just in rear of the Firing line on the same road as the Bread shop. The people are still living there. One of the men is a Belgium who has been wounded and invalided out of the Army. Our platoon is in a loft. There is plenty of room and we are very comfortable.

### **March 4<sup>th</sup>**

We are not moving until tonight. Paraded at 11 am. for Inspection of Arms. The Germans have been shelling our last billets which are just to our left rear and we could see the Troops scattering in the fields. We march off at 7 am. and have a twelve mile march before us. We marched off about 7.30 after standing on parade for half an hour. It was a pitch dark night and the Germans were sending up heaps of star shells. They look lovely on a very dark night. We marched at an easy pace and very few fell out though most of us had had enough. We reached Vieux Berquin at about 12 noon and are billeted at a farm along with Headqrs. Our billet is very crowded but otherwise it is all right.

### **March 5<sup>th</sup>**

Did nothing today. Had a good rest wrote some letters.

### **March 6<sup>th</sup>**

A wet morning. We can hear the guns going in the distance. Had a lecture by the M.O. this morning on the first field dressing and how to use it. He also lectured us on

the importance of inoculation. I have been done, in fact he persuaded the majority who had not already been to be done.

### **March 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

We march off at 12. 45 pm and believe we are going back to Estaries. We are out of the Divisional Billeting area here. On the way we passed a Grave outside a Cottage gate. It had a cross on it made from Battens of straw with flowers in the centre. We are now billeted at a farm about three quarters of a mile from Estaires. As the remainder of the Company are billeted lower down the road Morris & I are cooking for our platoon. We share a little shed at the Top of the Garden with the Headquarter cooks. It is a bakehouse. Just the very place. Had a rotten night. Couldn't get to sleep for a couple of hours.

### **March 8<sup>th</sup>**

The Company have gone on a digging expedition near Leventie. We are to get breakfast ready for 11 am. They are for parade again at 2.30 to practise advancing in Artillery Formation. We were to move today but the order since has been cancelled. We hear the Russians have captured 150000 prisoners, let us hope it's true. We made a jam roll for supper. We burnt it, the cloth caught fire, and most of the jam ran out but it was jolly good all the same. It is a very cold frosty night.

### **March 9<sup>th</sup>**

A lovely morning. The people are threshing here today so our platoon have had to turn out of the Barn. They are at present sitting on their kit all round the yard and look very forlorn and homeless. We hear we are moving sometime tonight. All Blankets have been collected. It looks as if there is something in the wind. I am to be the Captain's clerk and my duty is to go with him wherever he goes and write out messages when required, which will be sent by the signallers or carried by the runners. After many rumours we now have definite orders. We march off at 6.30 am tomorrow morning. A big attack is to be made in which 48 battalions will take part. Our 4th Army Corps and the Indian Division are to attack the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army Corp. In his message to the Troops the General says that we are in a position to expect success will attend our efforts. We have heavier and better Guns than have so far been used in the war and more than have ever before been concentrated in the same

area. There is to be no retiring. Men are warned that no one has the authority to order them to retire. Nor he continues are combatant men to remain behind to tend the wounded. This must be left to the Red cross men. He concludes by warning men against starting exaggerated reports of casualties. Casualties he affirms are the natural outcome of battle and war cannot be made without them. They must be looked upon philosophically. He feels sure that we shall display that cheerful courage for which we are famous and is confident of our ability to perform the task before us and inflict a crushing defeat upon the enemy. He also mentions the fact that our aircraft have practically driven the Germans out of the air.

### **March 10<sup>th</sup>**

Rose at 4 am. Bfast. at 5 am. Have not heard much big gun fire yet. There was heavy rifle fire about 4.30 am. It is a lovely morning. We marched off at 6.30 am. I and the rest of Coy. Hdqrs were in front of the Coy. with the Captain. We are now at the Rendez-vous which is a field just through Estaires on the La Bassée road. The bombardment has now begun and we can hear the incessant roar of the Guns. There is a tall square Church Tower just in rear of us which the artillery are using for an observation post. At present I am afraid it is too misty for them to see much. A single German shell burst over us but did no damage. No more have come since. We have cut down the wire fence of our Field so that we can scatter if we should get shelled. I made some tea just now and had some lunch. There are quite a lot of little fires here and there. Everyone seems to be making tea. Have just heard that the 8<sup>th</sup> Division have broken through and captured 200 prisoners. The news is now confirmed. A number of prisoners have just gone past escorted by French soldiers. There was an officer in front who looks a vicious customer. We have just had a message read to us to the effect that the attack is progressing very favourably. Dispatch riders on motor cycles are dashing up and down the road. A lot of R.H.A.<sup>15</sup> Horses and drivers have just gone by. I believe they are going to advance. One or two more parties of prisoners have gone past and the Ambulances are beginning to bring our wounded back now. There seem to have been a fair number of casualties. We marched off at 2 pm and went into some Dug Outs in rear of the firing line. On the way we passed the remains of one of our Aeroplanes which came to grief this

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<sup>15</sup> Royal Horse Artillery

morning. It was just like a bundle of broken boxes. Both the airmen were killed. We can see our Troops sending up star shells too show the artillery where they are. This is a new idea. They look like silver stars in the daylight. Our artillery are bombarding heavily. We can see the shells bursting from our dug outs. The enemy's reply is nothing in comparison. They have dropped a few shells rather near our dug outs. One battalion had to make three attacks to capture the trenches owing to the fact that the bombardment did not blow up the wire entrapments but they got through in the finish and everything has been a success up to the present. We have seen several of our wounded go by. One chap on a stretcher had his head completely covered with bandages except his mouth in which was the "eternal cigarette". Soon after dark we moved from the dug outs and are now billeted at a farm close by. The people are still occupying it. Coy. Hdqrs. are in a shippon in which is a bull. The Bull is only fastened up with a rather slender rope and is doing his best to get at us. Rather Cheerful? We were disturbed in the middle of the night to draw rations. Raw beef and raw bacon!

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>**

Rose at 3.15 am. made a fire and cooked or I should say half cooked our meat & bacon and breakfasted in a hurry. Marched off at 4 am. We marched along a railway for some distance and at last came out on a road. We are to reinforce the troops in the advanced trenches. We are now in one of the rear lines of Trenches awaiting the order to advance.

We advanced by platoons No. 9 platoon leading. The Captn started with No. 9 platoon and of course Hdqrs went with him. There was a pretty hot fire and the shells were also coming fairly plentifully. The Germans had got more guns and reinforcements up during the night and were making a counter attack which rather checked our plans a little. We had about 6 lines of trenches to cross to get to the advanced Trenches and were doing it by platoon rushes. While we were waiting for No. 10 I had a look at one of the chaps who dropped in the first rush. He was shot through the head and I fear done for. I hadn't time to bandage him up before we had to push on. Hdqrs were pretty busy and we never once got a chance to get in any of the trenches. Half way we lay down behind a Trench for about ten minutes and that was the only rest we got. There was a wide ditch to cross with no proper bridge over and a good many got wet. The Captn. halted about 10 yards from the advanced trench

to speak to one of the Platoon commanders and got hit in the stomach. Hulston and I began to bandage him up. It seemed we were the only survivors of Coy. Hdqrs. The two signallers and the other runner had all been hit on the way. Just then Hulston got hit in the arm. A chap crawled out of the trench to give a hand and he got hit. I managed to finish the job off and was handing a jack knife to a Sergeant who had crawled out to bandage the other two up when I got hit in the shoulder. Another chap crawled out and bandaged me up. It was not much use thinking about getting in the trench. It was absolutely full and there was scarcely room to lay behind it so I remained where I was. The other two crawled up to the side of the trench and one of them got hit again in the foot. How it was we were not hit again is a miracle. There was a roll of wire about three feet from my head and I could hear bullets hitting it repeatedly. A shell fell within four yards of us and dug a big hole in the Ground, covering us with mud but being laid flat the splinters went over us. Several times we could feel the bursting shrapnel burn our faces. The row was tremendous. Every now and then we could hear the huge shells from our big Guns rush overhead with a sound like an express train and smaller guns were incessant. One peculiar thing was that now and then for about three or four seconds there would be a lull and almost dead silence then it would start off again as furiously as ever.



*Neuve Chappelle March 1915: after the battle*

About 1 pm I decided to make my way to the dressing station. The rifle fire had died down and it was a little quieter. The shelling was still as furious as ever. There were some gruesome sights to be seen. One dead man lay half in a ditch. I found our Medical Officer behind one of the remaining walls of a house which had been

knocked down by shell fire. He wrote my particulars on a ticket which I took with me and directed me to where I should find the Ambulance cars. Our Artillery were now bombarding the German Trenches more furiously than ever. The row was appalling it was as if the Heavens were being rent asunder by continual thunder. I could see all the shells bursting like lines of fire all along the German Trenches. It must indeed have been Hell. I found the Ambulance Cars at the corner of the La Basée road and got on the Box of one. The road to Estaires was full of Transport, Artillery and Cavalry. It is evident they are expecting to advance considerably. When we got toward Estaires we met our Sgt. Major and had a little chat with him. I heard from one of our chaps that Capt. Douglas Pennant and Mj. Darly were killed. When we arrived at the dressing station in Estaires we had a bowl of soup after which we had our wounds properly dressed and were inoculated against Lock jaw. We left Estaires at about 7.30 pm and went by motor ambulance to Merville. We stayed the night at Merville. I have had a fairly decent night but can only lay on my back.

### **March 12th**

We are to leave here today and expect to go anytime. We left Merville at about 10 am and went by motor ambulance to Aire. Here we have had our wounds dressed again and some dinner. We left Aire about midnight and went by motor ambulance to St. Omer. I was very feverish and felt dreadfully ill at the start but felt better when we got about half way there. We arrived at St. Omer about 3.30 am. The nurses and doctors at Aire were all Canadians and awfully decent.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup>**

It is much better here. We have proper cots and are far more comfortable. They gave us 50 cigarettes each this morning. We may leave here anytime or we may not go until tomorrow.

### **March 14th**

We have had orders to get dressed and be in readiness to go at any moment. We went to the station once and had to come back again. Eventually we went to the station again and got in the Train. It is a decent train all first class carriages. We had some soup for dinner the alternative was a Maconochie ration!!

We arrived at Boulogne at about 5 pm. and are now in No. 2 Stationary Hosp. We shall probably go to England in the morning. The Doctor came in the middle of the night to inspect us but as he marked us "England" we very kindly forgave him.

### March 15<sup>th</sup>

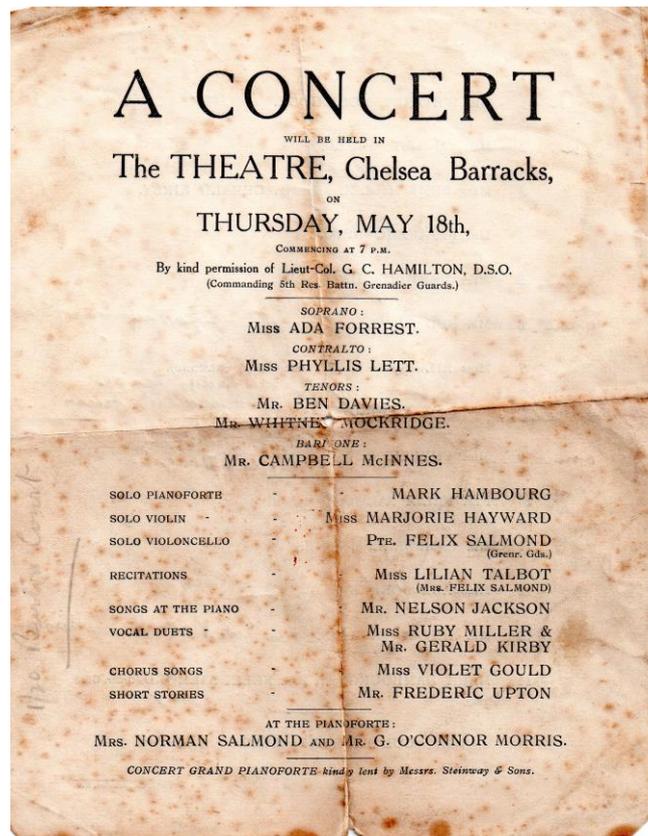
Left No. 2 Stationary Hosp. at 10 am and we are now on the Boat. We expect to sail about 1 pm. Had a decent dinner on board. It was quite calm crossing and we reached Dover without encountering any submarines. We went to No. 5 Northern General Hospital at Leicester. It was a tiring journey and I was jolly glad when it was over. At Leicester Station there were ladies with Tea Urns, chocolate, biscuits and cigarettes for us. The Tea especially was awfully welcome. We went to the hospital in Motors and received an enthusiastic reception from the people who cheered us all the way. On arrival at Hospital we had our wounds dressed, some supper and went to bed and were jolly glad to get there.

And now as this is supposed to be a War Diary I will close it as I do not think I shall have anything very startling to record during the next few weeks.

*There is no record of John Noppen returning to the front after recovery from the serious wound he received at Neuve Chappelle. From his personal papers it appears that he probably spent the rest of the war in Chelsea Barracks, perhaps as a clerk.*



*John Noppen (standing 1<sup>st</sup> left) at Chelsea Barracks*



*During this period at Chelsea Barracks he probably courted his first wife, Martha Bown. This concert programme suggests a happy, social time before her death in the Influenza epidemic at the end of the war.*

*His brother Eric was killed in Flanders in 1917. John was discharged as no longer fit for war service in March 1919.*

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## **John George NOPPEN (1887-1951)**

### **- his post-War life and link with Brentham Garden Suburb**

**JG Noppen**, author, journalist, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, one-time Press Agent for the White Star Line, and authority on the history and architecture of Westminster Abbey, came to live at 24 Ludlow Road with his second wife Clarice and twin babies Muriel and Eric in 1924. He had married Martha Bown in 1918 but she died later the same year in the influenza pandemic that swept Europe after the War.

His Ealing Tenants Limited tenancy began on 20<sup>th</sup> August that year; the monthly rent of £3-2-0 stayed the same for the next 32 years. (Rent books covering the period 1933 to 1958 are lodged in the Brentham archive.)

His wife Clarice, a schoolteacher before their marriage in 1922, stayed on in the house with Muriel after his death, until she died in the early 1970s. Eric (named after his brother who was killed in the First World War), a junior sports reporter for the Middlesex Advertiser, died in a riding accident while on service with the Army in 1945. Muriel, a well-known local character who cycled unsteadily to the Pitshanger shops on her ancient bike and liked to join in May Day and Brentham Society events, continued to live at number 24 until she went into a nursing home shortly before her death in July 2006.



*John and Clarice Noppen, the twins Eric and Muriel  
and family friend Edith Hammond in their Ludlow Road back garden in the 1930s.*

Muriel had talked to neighbour Pat Baxendale (18 Ludlow Road) about her father's work and books and had indicated that his papers should be preserved and donated to appropriate organisations after her death. When she became ill the collection was retrieved from the dresser cupboard in the back room before the house was cleared.

Though Noppen is a long-forgotten figure, in his working lifetime he was a prolific writer and a noted authority on Westminster Abbey. He was born in Wilmslow in 1887, the son of a Manchester merchant. He was privately educated but does not seem to have undertaken any formal art or art history training. Everything he knew about Westminster Abbey was self-taught or learned as a disciple of Professor WR Lethaby (1857-1931), founder of the Central School of Arts and Crafts (later Central St Martins), an art historian with a special interest in the Abbey and part of the circle of William Morris contemporary Philip Webb. Muriel spoke of her father having been at Oxford, possibly reading Law, but there is no documentary evidence of this.

Though of a younger generation, Noppen had connections with Emery Walker and other scions of the Arts and Crafts movement through Lethaby, and he was a contemporary of William Morris's daughter May and Emery Walker on the Committee of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). In a notebook are a number of quotes from Lethaby that obviously guided his own work.

In the 1920s before - or possibly during the early part of - his art history writing career, he was a Press Agent (a PR person) for the White Star shipping line.



*On deck as a White Star Line Press Agent.*

*He often sailed on maiden voyages and met many celebrities.*

His papers contain many photographs of celebrities of the day including Lillian Gish and Charlie Chaplin on board White Star liners, commemorative menus for Press dinners, and small, rather crude models of the ships, including (according to Muriel) the *Titanic*. These may have been small table gifts for the Press at these dinners<sup>16</sup>.

The first of Noppen's three authoritative works on Westminster Abbey *Westminster Abbey and its Ancient Art* came out in 1926, soon after he moved to Brentham. This was followed in 1937 by *Westminster Abbey and the Coronation* to coincide with the coronation of King George VI.



*Published in 1937 for the Coronation of King George VI, his personal copy has notes dated 1939 and 1940 about arrangements for protecting the Abbey during air raids.*

Noppen extensively revised and extended this for *Royal Westminster* (for which he was paid an advance of £25), published in 1939. The latter two were published by *Country Life*, for whom he contributed dozens of articles over the years. A copy of *Royal Westminster and the Coronation*, signed by Noppen and dedicated to Roland JH Shelley 'with warmest greetings and regards' and dated March 1937 is lodged in the Brentham archive.

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<sup>16</sup> This ephemera and the red leather box with his heraldic device (see below) were sold, in accordance with Muriel's wishes, in aid of St. Barnabas Church funds.

In 1929, as Honorary Secretary of the Council for the Protection of Westminster Abbey (a lobby group set up by Noppen and others), he was a prominent force in a successful campaign to prevent the building of a new sacristy that would alter the Abbey's exterior. The letters and correspondence about this controversy with the Dean and Chapter forms part of the Noppen papers and makes compelling reading for anyone interested in conservation and a good argument<sup>17</sup>. It is a pity he did not survive to see the formation of the Brentham Society, as he was an experienced and knowledgeable conservation activist.

His knowledge of the Abbey and its royal connections brought him into contact with the College of Heralds and he assisted with the Heralds' Exhibition of 1934.



*Noppen (left) with Lancaster Herald at the College of Arms,  
working on the Heralds' Exhibition of 1934*

His collection contained Christmas cards from a number of Heralds (including 'York Herald and Mrs. Toppin') and his own heraldic device in red leather box with seals.

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<sup>17</sup> Noppen's papers relating to Westminster Abbey are now held in the Abbey Archives.



*The Noppen Coat of Arms.*

*His daughter Muriel said that it refers to his interests and Dutch ancestry.  
It now appears that the device was based on that of a different Noppen family.*

Noppen earned his living through journalism. In addition to *Country Life*, he also wrote regularly for *The English Review*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Burlington Magazine*, *The Society of Antiquaries* magazine and – bizarrely – *The Brewers Trade Review* (this may have had something to do with his interest in pewter ware).



*Noppen joined a number of societies and had many friends in journalism and the arts.*

Little is known about his activities during the years of the Second World War, though he continued writing articles and was a member of the Press Censorship Division at the Ministry of Information. Muriel's personal papers reflect a warm picture of their family life in Brentham, where father and son worked an allotment, and music (father and daughter were both musical) played a prominent part. Noppen appeared to be a loving husband and father who enjoyed his family, though he didn't mix a great deal with neighbours. A charming picture of him with Clarice holding their twin babies, taken in the back garden of 24 Ludlow Road soon after they moved in, seen below, is held in the Brentham archive.



*John Noppen with his second wife Clarice and twins Muriel and Eric  
in the garden of 24 Ludlow Road c.1925*

Noppen died unexpectedly in Harefield Hospital on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1951 age 63, leaving no will, and was cremated at Golders Green.

His obituary in *The Times* of 5<sup>th</sup> February ('Mr. J. G. Noppen, Authority on Medieval Art') records: '*He was a very modest man with shy and friendly manners. He did not wear this learning on his sleeve, but he was always ready to help the layman in quest of information.*' This seems to be reflected in his choice of a verse by Cowley, written at the front of his notebook:

*If ever I more riches did desire  
Than cleanliness and quiet do require  
If ere ambition did my fancy cheat  
With any wish so mean as to be great  
Continue, Heaven still from me remove  
The humble blessings of that life I love.*

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