

Diary No 2 continued from "Diaries2.Doc."

(Monday 13 Nov - 31 December 1916)

Monday 13 Nov 1916 Trenches (GR15) - Lock House (C133) This morning we were relieved by Otago. Ruscoe and I came on ahead abt 8.30 a.m. Irish Ave is pretty well flooded in one or two places. The morning was favourably misty so we got out of the trench and walked along the top. We have a very fine billet in Lock House - our term in subsidiary - a fine big bright room with splendid box spring mattresses, table, chairs, cupboards. A little coke heater. Pictures on the walls, ornaments on the shelves, a carpet runner and a lot of other home fittings is our abode. Tres bien. Do me for the duration! Could hear more minnie strafe today.

Tuesday 14 Lock House (C133) This billet of ours is splendid. It is just against the lock on the Lys. The sun (which isn't very strong) shines in the window very cheerfully. Had great sport today with the rifle, firing at bottles floating in the river. Fine practice and good fun.

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Wednesday 15 Nov Lock House (C133) I have missed entering this diary for a day or two and got record on wrong date on previous page [which accounts for the erasure]. In afternoon Bill Ruscoe and I went down to baths and came straight back. The day has been cold. Tonight at about 5.30 p.m. (it is dark before that hour now) the Huns made a raid on T's 87, 88 and 89, the two latter trenches being the ones we were in before we came out here day before yesterday. So we just missed it. Ted and I went out the back from where we could see well. Fritz did throw some minnies over, 4 and 5 in the air at once. Must have been very hot there. W.W.Coy moved up to Subsid but returned later. Sigs remained at Lock House.

Thursday 16 Lock House to Subsidiary (GR13) By what I hear, last night's raid seems to have been fairly successful for the Huns. Think they must have caught Otago napping. They got away with a machine gun and a prisoner or two. There was a good number of casualties (about 30). Don't know what the Hun's casualties were. They would I suppose be able to take their dead and wounded back with them. Rather a bad piece of business. Believe the Huns were all around Coy Hdqrs and Signals but did not discover it. Inside were the O/C and signallers. They had phone communication right through. Very good. This afternoon shifted up to Subsid GR13 relieving Ruahine.

Friday 17 Nov 1916 Subsidiary GR13 We were very loth to leave our splendid "home" at Lock House. This bivvy here is small - very. After arriving up here yesterday afternoon Bill and I went down to Houplines and got a little stove from one of the houses. Also got some piping and fitted the little affair up in the bivvy. It is just A1. We burn coke and charcoal in it. This afternoon Ted and I went for a walk into town. It is very cold outside. The last day or so we have given Fritz a taste of some of our heavy guns. They're solid 9.2's I think.

Saturday 18 Subsidiary GR13 I have contracted a rotten cold which is not making me feel very bright. Remained in bunk all day. This morning there was a slight fall of snow. The ground looked just as if it had salt sprinkled all over it. This is the

first of the season - just a warning. More to follow. It was very miserable outside. Appreciated

our stove in here. We go up to front line 86-87 tomorrow. Hope I'm feeling better in the morning.

Sunday 19      Subsidiary GR13 to Trenches 86-87    Well, we shifted up to front line about 8.30 this morning and relieved Otago. W.C Sigs took over GR8. We had a good deal of gear to shift so Bill Ruscoe and Mackay made a couple of trips. It's great what a lot of stuff one accumulates here. We brought our coke and the stove up too. In the new bivvy GR8 the water gets into the entrance passages and ramp. However in regards this we are "on a win." The O/C's floor is several inches lower than our's. It is therefore his move first! He gets a fatigue party on to the pump. Saves us a lot of trouble! In afternoon Ted and I went down to Houplines and got some timber etc to make bunks.

Monday 20      Trenches GR8    Till about 10 or 11 p.m. last night we were busy fixing up the new bunks. Ted was the carpenter. Result of toil was 3 good bunks (in my estimation a bit short!). They are arranged one above another - the bivvy is about 6ft high this gives us a good deal more room. Mackie [sic] got a table today so we are now well set up - bunks, plenty of blankets, a heater, table and chairs. Had an exchange put in this afternoon. This should improve lines. We have also a f' phone here. Our table presents a technical appearance, what? Went down to Hdqrs s'afternoon. Weather is cold and miserable. Sky overcast. However we are very comfy inside.

Tuesday 21 Nov 1916    Trenches GR8    Was on duty 11 p.m.-3 a.m. Spent remainder of morning in bunk. Did not go out anywhere today. Our rations went astray somewhere with the result that we were not overdone with tucker today. Fortunately had a little stand-by by us. Last night about 12.30 a.m. there was a good deal of solid strafing on the right a bit. Haven't heard what it was. This morning about 7 a.m. the Stokes mortar people paid their vigorous respects to Fritz. He must have found it interesting. Retaliated with a few pineapples. Morning was misty.

Wednesday 22      Trenches GR8    A quiet day. Stayed in just about all day. Weather dull.

Thursday 23      Trenches GR8    Another quiet day. Well, all days have been quiet since we came up this time. Bill and I went down to Houplines for some water and a wash etc. A couple of planes were busy spotting. Huns were interested in them. Their "archie's and m-g's were going. Tonight at about 6 p.m. a "stunt" opened up on our right. Things must have been lively there. Our artillery flopped a lot of stuff in. The old Hun sent up flares galore. Red signals too. I think there must have been a raid on.

Friday 24      Trenches GR8    A dull day. The trench mortar people presented to Fritz in time for dinner, I think, a respectable number of plum puddings. Don't think this sort of luxury agrees with him though. He is being harried a good deal lately. From along here a few rifle grenades were also sent over. The trenches and C Avenue are in rather better condition now. Have not had any rain worthy of mention since coming in this time. Rather fortunate. We go out to billets tomorrow.

Saturday 25    Trenches - DRH B'urre Sq    We were relieved by Otago this morning. Mackie and I went out about 8 a.m. while Ted and Ruscoe followed later. We washed the trench gum boots and handed them in to the store at Houplines. Thinking that we would still be with WWC Coy

we went down to DRB but new arrangements had been made and we had to go back to DRB [does he mean DRH?] nr Barb Wire Square. In afternoon I went down to Ecole Professionale. Saw Ivo McLennan. Had a decent hot bath there. Had tea with Ivo who came up to Burre Sq with me and saw Sgt Harris. Weather has been rotten - rain.

Sunday 26 Nov 1916 DRH Barburre Sq This morning we set to work and gave the place a good sweep and clean-up. We have the phone in the Batt O.O's room as it is warmer than the other. It has a range in it. We are sleeping in an upstairs room. We are very comfortable indeed. Good beds, matting on the floor etc etc. One loses sense of days and dates here. Not until I heard the band on church parade did I realise it was Sunday. There are 7 of us here. We work 3 hours on and 18 off. Not bad.

Monday 27 DRH Burre Sq Understand we move out to Saily some time tomorrow. After dinner Bill Ruscoe and I went out townwards. Visited a "photographers" where a very business-like little man of about 12 years fixed the biz. Don't think they will be overstartling, what? Then continued on our way to baths where there was a big crowd of chaps. I did not go in. Merely had a change of clothing. There was a little sunshine today but it of course was weak. Trees are very bare now. Weather keen.

Tuesday 28 DRH Armentieres - Saily [sur la Lys] Packed our valises this morning and put them out for the limbers to pick up. Valises with blankets were taken from QM Store by motor lorries. Was thankful we didn't have to carry them. Well, it was shortly after midday that we got going and once again bade farewell to Armentieres. Wonder if we will get back again. The day misty and raw. At times the fog was very thick. The tramp to Saily was about 11 kilos (Armentieres - Saily - 9.5 kilos). On arrival had a bit of bother finding Hdqrs where we were billeted.

Wednesday 29 Billets Saily We have struck quite a decent little billet here - the second floor of a house. The room we are in is large enough to accommodate all the signals. I got upstairs first and managed to secure a bunk, a wire netting affair with a straw mattress. Not at all bad. Today we occupied ourselves with buzzer practice etc. Patronised the egg and chip shop a couple of times today. Eggs 4d each.

Thursday 30 Billets Saily Weather is dull and cold. Had a little kick at football this afternoon after 2.30. Seven-a-side. In a bit of a scrimmage I managed to stop the force of someone's boot. Result is that I have an extremely stiff leg. Weather dull, cold.

Friday 1 Dec 1916 Saily Same old monotony. Not growling tho'.

Saturday 2 Dec 1916 Saily More buzzer practice etc, also a little safety drill. The event of the day was our football match. Signals v Taranaki. The match started at 2.30 p.m. The result after a very good game was a win for Taranaki 3 to nil. Consider the match a draw as our man touched down ahead of the other side fellow. However the referee said it was a try. We didn't argue.

My leg still being rather stiff I was not able to participate but enjoyed looking on despite the fact

that the air was rather chilly. Went to band concert evening.

Sunday 3 Saily This morning there was a church parade in YMCA, the first I have been to since the Sunday near Albert. After lunch I again went down to YMCA and spent the afternoon writing. Did not go back to billet for tea. In evening was at church service in same building.

Monday 4 Saily [page is blank].

Tuesday 5 Saily The usual day here. Buzzer practice 9 a.m. till 11.45 a.m., lunch 11.45 to 1 p.m., more practice 1 p.m. till 2 p.m. Rest of afternoon free. Lately I have been going down for a little football practice until tea-time 4.30 p.m. Then usually make down to YMCA for evening. Weather is dull and chill. Sky grey. See practically nothing of sun.

Wednesday 6 Saily This morning at 9.30 a.m. the football team left here for Estaires where they were to play Brigade Sig' Coy. Estaires is about 3 miles distant. Arrived there about 10.30 a.m. Had look around town. Not a bad little place. Had dinner with Bde boys. Match started 2 p.m. The paddock in which we played was one big puddle. I was first emergency and was pleased didn't have to play. Brigade put in a solid team and licked our boys 21 to nil. Had bath after. Then had time until about 7 p.m. free. Left on return at about 7.45 p.m.

Thursday 7 Saily The usual dull sunless grey skyed day and the usual buzzer practice. Received this evening a parcel cigs from EPB and another ltr [?word] from Hornblow per Martin.

Friday 8 Dec 1916 Saily Grey sky, slushy underfoot etc etc. Received parcel cigarettes from EPB. It never rains but it pours. This evening was down at YMCA doing a little writing. The 1st Wellington Band gave a concert there. Rumanian news is not brightest. Just now [?word] Mr Lloyd George becomes premier. We get the home papers regularly. They are brought round by carriers early in the morning.

Saturday 9 Saily Another dull miserable day. Rain fell last night. This afternoon Wellington Sigs played Otago Sigs football. The ground naturally was in a very slushy condition. First half no score. Second half Otago scored and converted, while our boys scored and failed to convert. Thus the game stood Otago 5, Wgtn 3. Hard luck for us. After match met Freddie Dixon down road. He is with 3rd Coy Engineers.

Sunday 10 Saily There was no church parade today, at least not for Sigs. This afternoon there was a football match between Ruahine and Taranaki Coys. Resulted in a win for former, 12 to nil. Watched this for about half an hour. Then went on for a walk with Ted. Arrived out on Douliou Rd. Saw bridge over Lys which runs just at other end of town raised to let barge through. A tug was towing along a string of barges etc. 4 large ones and about 4 other smaller.

Monday 11 Saily There was a little sunshine this morning. The sky was clear and everything bright. We were however privileged to only a morning of this. The afternoon was dull - the usual. At about 11.30 a.m went for walk to get warm. Went up to rlwy line and Saily-sur-

la-Lys Stn. After 2 p.m. went down

to ground near R Lys and had a few kicks football. We have sent a challenge to Canterbury Sigs. Will probably play them tomorrow.

Tuesday 12 Saily This morning a little after 9 snow began to fall merrily. The ground, however, being so wet, melted the snow as fast as it fell. The snow ceased after a while and rain took its place. A miserable day. The match with Canterbury Sigs was put off. No one was sorry not to play in this weather. Stayed in this evening. Have done so for last 2 or 3 evenings. Ray Barrel left today on leave to England.

Wednesday 13 Dec 1916 Saily The usual dull day. Went and saw the football. Wellington v Auckland. Part of the ground was under water. The game was at times "an aquatic carnival" quite a lot of fun - to watch. Anyhow, Auckland proved superior. The match resulted 10 to nil. Stayed in during the evening. Have a rotten cold which doesn't make me feel exuberant. This "bark" seems to be an epidemic.

Thursday 14 Saily The Sgt Dib and Finn went up and had a look around trenches. This afternoon after 2 p.m. went down to the baths. There one gets a little tub to himself - a good idea. Called at Field Cashiers and found out that two amounts cabled from home were OK. The event of importance though today was receipt of a mail. I received 6. Cheers and clap immediately.

Friday 15 Saily After 2 p.m. went down and sent a cable home (Xmas wishes). Called in at the YMCA and while in there met Bert. Was surprised and not a little delighted. Had not heard of him since August. Came back to billet to tea and went down YMCA and met him as we had arranged. He has been here some time. It was a lucky chance I came across him. Norman Tingey went on leave to Blighty this morning.

Saturday 16 Saily As on yesterday afternoon we were engaged on field work during our toil hours. This evening had just taken off my boots and was getting down to an evening writing when Bert came up. Did not expect him as he thought he would have been on picket. Went out with him later - YMCA. We will probably play Brigade Signals footy tomorrow.

Sunday 17 Saily Attended church parade this morning. It was held out in the field and we found the atmosphere none too warm. We did not play Brigade Sigs footy today. The muddy wet condition of the ground and the unpleasant weather seems to have just about killed interest in it (or at least enthusiasm).

Monday 18 Saily Bert came along this evening to billet.

Tuesday 19 Dec 1916 Saily A parade of the battalion was held this afternoon. We had anticipated being inspected by Sir D. Haigh but it turned out to be by General Russell. It was bitterly cold standing out in the field but the section being well turned out was allowed to go off as soon as inspected. Snow commenced to fall about 3 p.m. after we had dismissed. It was however only slight. Sufficient to make ground white.

Wednesday 20 Saily The place looked very pretty after the fall of snow yesterday afternoon. The usual day's practice. Spent evening in billet.

Thursday 21 Saily We were to have paraded this afternoon at 2 p.m. for Colonel's inspection. Got ready and were just getting out of billet when an order came to effect that we need not parade. C.O. was so well pleased with other day's turn-out. Much rejoicing on part of boys! This evening with Ted Arnold went to a concert in YMCA concert hall. Concert was given by Tommy Supply Column chaps - about 60 of them. They were enterprising introducing a French girl into their entertainment.

Friday 22 Saily Ordinary routine in morning. We usually get up at about 8 o'clock, perhaps a few minutes after, wash, breakfast and at 9 a.m. carry on with work (?) (reading or writing perhaps!). This afternoon Sir D. Haigh inspected the troops who lined road Bac St Maur - Estaires. H.B. Coy men of Batn Sigs paraded - the rest dodged and stopped in billets. Could hear the band making a great noise along different parts of road. We go up to trenches tomorrow.

Saturday 23 Saily - Trenches This morning we arose early about 7 a.m. Got busy, packed up, breakfasted etc. Left in parties (station) about 9 a.m. I was very sorry to have to leave the comfortable billet. Didn't altogether enjoy the tramp. Rather a strong wind blowing. Got caught in a heavy shower of rain which made great coat nice and damp. Saw Geoff Hill on the way. Arrived at Hdqrs about 11 a.m. and then went on up to stn H.T.7 and took over from 1st Otago Sigs. The bivvy is very small, or at least low. Sufficient sleeping room but can only sit up on floor. Berry and Scott are with me.

Sunday 24 Dec 1916 Trenches Not a very peaceful Sunday. There has been strafe all day, chiefly from us. Stokes puddings galore. Artillery also busy. Fritz must have found things interesting(!) Very little retaliation though. My station is in support line. The latter is well duck-boarded and drained - fairly dry. There is no parados. Open fields behind. Any amount of trees about, though they are rather scarred and knocked about. Must have [been] nice here in summer. Our planes were busy today. Sgt Edwards left today, going away for commission, Ray Barrel returned from leave. This is a dull sort of Xmas Eve!

Monday 25 Dec Trenches Christmas Day! It hasn't seemed very much like one to me. "Business as usual" if anything a little brisker than usual. The sky was cloudy and there was a strong wind blowing. The sun showed himself little. There was no temporary armistice with the fellows over the way. Right from early morning and continuing till midnight the Artillery left the Huns in no doubt as to our sentiments. They gave them L all day. Fritz must have had an unpleasantly merry Xmas. Practically no retaliation. For dinner had a little plum pudding, tinned fruit etc. Scott got few things from "back" in morning.

Tuesday 26 Trenches Artillery was harassing Fritz all day again. An unfortunate accident occurred up in the front line today resulting in killing of 2 and wounding of several. A premature explosion of a Stokes shell which set other off. One of the fellows blown to pieces. This morning we shifted quarters up to another bivvy - a little concrete place. It is horribly small. Think we would have been better where we were. Received a "baksheesh" parcel between the three of us. Rather a good one.

Wednesday 27      Trenches    Today has been fine. The sun condescended to show himself all day for which we were very thankful despite the fact that he is not very strong now. Aeroplanes (ours) took advantage of the favourable conditions and droned busily up in the blue. Just about sunset after our machines had gone homeward a Bosche flying high showed himself for a few minutes. Artillery is still paying a good deal of attention to Fritz. It is very one-sided (just now).

Thursday 28      Trenches    Am trying to fix up a commutator. With no tools this is rather a tedious job. Went down to Hdqrs this afternoon. Borrowed gimlet and chisel from Pioneers. Norman Tingey is back from leave to England where he spent a very full and enjoyable 8 days.

Friday 29 Dec 1916    Trenches    Our artillery has been fairly active. Doesn't give Fritz much peace. Cpl P.A. Gordon is now Sgt vice Edwards, and "Dib" is Cpl. Berry has been transferred to Btn section. Fritz put a little shrapnel over the way this afternoon. On the whole though this is a home. Artillery activity is very one-sided. Practically all ours. Rain fell this evening.

Saturday 30      Trenches    Yesterday afternoon received the photos (?) taken in Armentieres. They are pretty roughly done. Heavy rain this morning. We had to do a little bailing out. Finished and set up the commutator. A fine piece of craftsmanship. Artillery activity. This is the part of the line where the Australians made a big attack some months ago (see July 19th). Believe there are scores of bodies out in no-man's land.

Sunday 31      Trenches    The ordinary day? Well, no. It was the last in the year. The artillery belched a good deal of metal over to Fritz, who didn't reply much. I came on duty at 11 p.m. tonight and saw the old year out and the new in. Thought there would be big demonstration but there wasn't much. The chaps on the firestep gave a few rounds rapid and the battery put over a salvo or two. From away behind at the billets faintly floated the strains of a band. S'pose the boys were celebrating. Farewell '16.