

BERT HENSON DIARIES (No 2) continued from file "Diaries2.Doc" (Saturday 29 July 1916 - Sunday 12 Nov 1916)

Saturday 29 July 1916 Trenches C129 Was on duty 4 a.m. till 10 a.m. Went into Hdqrs this morning and got stuff requisitioned for - also 25 francs pay. The day has been very fine and warm. Received 2 letters from home. Tonight at about 10 p.m. Fritz sent across a few aerial torpedoes etc. Our aeroplanes were busy today. Yesterday morning I observed through an observer's telescope a part of Fritz's trench where he was evidently making a M.G. position. Could see through a kind of loophole Germans passing and working. Watched for some time one of them looking over parapet. Artillery will blow that up anon.

Sunday 30 Trenches Beautiful weather, but rather warm. Things were very quiet all day until this evening when Fritz put over a few minnewerfers along the way a bit. Our artillery retaliated. Later, about 10 p.m. a number of aerial torpedoes came over, some of them landing about our "bivvy." Some medium "minnies" landed a little way along. A nuisance when one wants to get to sleep. One of the snipers asserts he got the Hun who was looking thro' loophole yesterday.

Monday 31 Trenches Beautiful weather continues. In the morning however a fog hangs about for some time. Then when the sun breaks through it's warm. The most enjoyable part of the day is from about 6 p.m. till 9 p.m. I was sitting outside this evening, the sun was getting low and I was enjoying the cool. Everything was very quiet and as I sat there quite still a number of rats came out from the lairs and ran about. "The rats around me hopped and played, their thoughts I could not measure, etc etc."

Tuesday 1 August Trenches Last evening some splendid news came through. Russians are in Lemberg and have taken 75,000 prisoners. Also Roumania is joining the Allies this week. Tres bon! Beyond a good deal of rifle and M.G. fire last night was quiet. Was on duty 4 a.m. till 10 a.m. I spent most of the day sleeping or at least trying to. The day was again very warm oppressive in fact. Very quiet.

Wednesday 2 August 1916 Trenches Weather very fine and very warm. After dinner went with Johnny Mac for walk down Subsidiary way. Through a telescope I had a good view of Frelinghien, or what remains of it, which is just over the way opposite. Our planes have been busy today. Believe a fleet of nearly 30 passed over. I saw one lot of 5. Fritz's anti-aircraft guns were busy, but despite shells bursting about them the planes seemed to sail on serenely.

Thursday 3 Trenches Fine -Was on duty 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Our artillery has been doing a bit of work. Fritz dropped a good deal of heavy stuff back towards town evidently searching for a battery. A few planes about. The news I heard about Lemberg etc seems to have been a rumour. In the trenches here there is very little to record. One day is just like another. Never-the-less time doesn't seem to hang as much as one might think.

Friday 4 Trenches Today at 11 p.m. it is two years since England declared war against Germany. A lot has happened since then but the end is not here yet. Rather expected a bit of a demonstration today by one or the other, but beyond a bit of activity on the part of our 18 prs

things have been quiet. The day has been fine although the sky looked a bit angry tonight. Dave, Norman T and Corpl came down this morning.

Saturday 5 Trenches Weather fine. Our artillery has been going on and off just about all day, harrying old Fritz. Later in the afternoon he dropped some H.E. on Irish Av. or near it. Then our howitzers coughed some heavy metal well over. Things were very peaceful in this part of trench though.

Sunday 6 Trenches Sunday again. One seems to lose count of the days in here. I didn't realise the day until I looked here. Was on 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. After tea went for walk round to C122. On the way back witnessed rather remarkable sight. 5 or 6 of our planes were cruising about over Fritz's lines. One must have dropped an incendiary bomb for looking up I noticed a cascade of falling smoke. It streamed down to the ground from thousands of feet up. They must have been after observation balloons for I could see a parachute coming down. Five of these bombs were dropped in different parts.

Monday 7 August 1916 Trenches Weather fine Our artillery has been harrying old Fritz intermittently all day. Fritz has been using a little gun, probably pom pom, firing a very small shell. A great little toy. Think he uses it trying to get on to machine guns.

Tuesday 8 Trenches to Tissage Fine. Last night, at about 2.15 a.m., artillery suddenly sent over about half dozen shells over near brasserie. It shot pom pom up. I have had a sleepy day. Had a really good sleep and rest. I'm doing latter all the time. Our artillery has been throwing a lot of metal at Fritz during day. A lot of heavy stuff went over. Very little reply was received. This evening at about 8 p.m. we were relieved by Otago Sigs. We then proceeded to Hdqrs and later I came along to Tissage where I have been before. There are about 7 of us here so we will have very easy hours. Today could hear sounds of heavy bombardment in the south.

Wednesday 9 Tissage It has been a glorious day. This morning just before dinner time went along and saw the Corp at C133 (L.B.). After dinner went for a walk with Bill Henry through the old rambling grounds of chateau. Very pleasant here. A little later went down and had a swim in the R. Lys. This was most enjoyable. Our artillery has been very active today, banging away very consistently. Scarcely any reply. We seem to have great superiority here. Tonight there was a strafe on up at front. Quietened down at about 11 p.m.

Thursday 10 Tissage Weather this morning was dull and rain fell about dinner time but cleared a little later. Went into town with Jack Norman. There I met a great number of old chums. Was standing on pavement talking to Bob Fearon when Cousin Bert came bowling along. We both were delighted to "discover" one another. This was about 5 p.m. Jack N. went on and I went with Bert to his billet. Later had tea at an estaminet. We had a lot to talk about. Was with him until after 8 p.m. Among others today saw Ivo McLennan, G. Hill, Baker of PN. Today 5 of chaps

from here went down to Hdqrs where they will get extra instruction etc

Friday 11 Tissage Beautiful day. Was on duty noon to 6 p.m. Took phone outside onto table in the shade of tree where it was very pleasant. Things have been quiet all day. In evening went down to Hdqrs. Received pay 45 francs.

Saturday 12 August 1916 Tissage Fine again. At about 9.30 a.m. went along to an O.P. to fix up a phone there. After dinner went into town. Went round to Bert's billet to look him up but found out that he had been transferred to drivers Pont de Nieppe so did not see him. On return called in at Hdqrs and got my valise. The boys down there are having any amount of practice rubbed into them. For the last day or so the artillery has been quiet but tonight at about 10 p.m. it suddenly woke up and strafed Fritz furiously for about 2 hours.

Sunday 13 Tissage Fine weather. A fairly quiet day. A raid was made on Fritz last night, hence the bombardment. Believe it was carried out by 2 officers and 22 men. A machine gun and 1 or 2 prisoners were brought back. The raiders all got back safely. The Brigadier was very pleased about it. First German M.G. captured by the Division. Heard that when bombardment started last night a German came across and gave himself up. Thought the "Big Push" had started here. Today Fritz dropped a few shells over town way.

Monday 14 Tissage Was on duty this morning 2 a.m. till 6 a.m., now on again 6-10 p.m. Some rather heavy rain fell about dinner time today but cleared up in an hour or so. This afternoon I saw the captured German M'gun. It is somewhat similar to our Vickers but a little heavier I think. Made in Spandau. We sharpened our bayonets this afternoon. Won't take much pushing now. Harry Prebble and Jim Callender came round this evening. The R Coy changed over last night and 9th H.B. are now up here.

Tuesday 15 Tissage Was on duty today noon to 6 p.m. A little rain fell during day. Capt Scott is now Major. Fairly rapid promotion. Nothing startling to record.

Wednesday 16 Tissage Was on duty this morning 6 a.m. till noon. For some time past we have understood that we would be going out of this part soon. We thought perhaps that we would go out tonight. However, we're still here. Will most likely go in morning. During afternoon did a little washing. Expended a lot of labour on a few articles. Hard work. Tonight the Coy signallers went back to their respective units. There was a pay but I did not draw. About 6 of our planes were flying around overhead during afternoon later.

Thursday 17 August Tissage - Armentieres Was on duty from 2 a.m. At 4.50 a.m. was informed that H.B Coy were moving out at 5 a.m. We were then no longer needed at station. Gordon Highland signals arrived and relieved us about 5.30 a.m. The Coy had been previously relieved. We bade farewell to D129 and went down to Hdqrs and a little later with all Battln Sigs went on to Municipal College in town. After dinner, about 2 p.m., started out with Coy on route march but had to turn back on a/c of heavy rain. Had several other inspections etc today. A nuisance. No leave from billet was granted.

Friday 18 1916 Armentieres to Blaringhem Reveille 6 a.m. Fell in, ready to move off at 9.15 a.m. Started out from Armentieres en route to Steenwerck Stn 10.30 a.m. The morning was fine and we found the going rather warm. 7 miles. Arrived Steenwerck after noon. Had some tuck. A

heavy shower rain fell. A little later we entrained in a train which had just brought in a load of "Scotties." Leaving Steenwerck at 3.10 p.m. we passed through Hazebrouck 3.50 p.m. Arrived at Ebbilinghem at about 4.20 p.m. and detrained (rail journey was for about 15 miles) then tramped for about 4 miles to destination, Blaringhem, where we were billeted. On our journey we passed through beautiful country. Harvesting operations etc.

Saturday 19 Blaringhem Reveille 6 a.m. Signalling practice during morning while in afternoon there was an inspection parade. Major S (H.B.) was not in good humour. Diligent in finding faults. In the evening most of the Section had quite a merry time. Good wine (and champagne) needs no bush [?word]. Saw G. Haxton. When we arrived last night, the billet allotted the section was a stuffy loft underneath one end of which was a pig sty. The "perfume" which floated up from the latter was too strong for me. With some others went and made myself comfortable in a cart shed where the air was fresh. Had plenty of good straw. (pre-war pop' Blaringhem 1675)

Sunday 20 Blaringhem My feet being a bit sore after Friday's tramping, and it being known that we are to go out of here tomorrow I went down to the chiropodist this morning and again in the afternoon. Was excused duties. This is a very pretty little village. It has a fine old church bearing on its tower the date 1679. It is rather elaborate inside - contains a good deal of statuary. The district here is chiefly agricultural and at present the crops are being cut and stoked. Nittes, the village at which we were billeted in April when we first landed, is only a few kilos away. Saw Ivo McLennan this evening. A little rain fell.

Monday 21 August 1916 From Blaringhem - train This morning we left Blaringhem at 10.30 a.m., en route to Arques. The march, a distance of about 7 1/2 miles, took us near Nittes and Racquinghem [?name]. Passed along some roads with which we had become familiar when in this part in April. Crops which were then young and green are now being harvested. Arrived Arques about 2 p.m. and entraining left at 4 p.m. Passed through Saint-Omer which is a very fine town and then on to Calais Jctn which is on the outskirts of town. Here about 5.50 p.m. Then down south again. The country after Calais is beautiful, undulating and produces extensive grain crops. Passed through Boulogne at about 8 p.m. A fine place. Decent to see the briny. It was now getting dark so lay down on floor and had a little sleep.

Tuesday 22 Train Airaines Slept (in a kind of way) until about 1.30 a.m. when we ran into a large station. Abbeville. A short time here and we continued our journey for about another half hour until Pont Remy was reached. Here we detrained at about 3 a.m. Started to march out to Airaines, a

distance of 8 miles. We were not sorry when our destination was reached at 6 a.m. The road out was very fine, trees lining each side. There were few houses. The countryside was all in crop which was in stooks mostly. Section was billeted in a shed or store. There was a parade at 2 p.m. (Had a bit of sleep before dinner). Dismissed 5 p.m. After tea had a stroll round the town.

Wednesday 23 Airaines Twelve months today since I went into camp Trentham. A long way from there now! Reveille 5.45 a.m. Parade 6.30-7 a.m. Fall in again 8.30 a.m., marched to parade ground (a paddock about half a mile distant) and until 5 p.m. carried on with signal station work. Took lunch with us. Near where we had lunch was an old flour mill (which the miller said was over 100 years old) run by a water wheel. Had a look over it. Primitive. After tea went for walk up on hill. Had good view of surrounding country. It is fine beautifully undulating. It is solely agricultural. As far as eye could see crops in process of being harvested.

Thursday 24 Airaines Reveille 5.45 a.m. 6.30-7 a.m. parade. Flag drill. Breakfast. Parade 9.30 a.m. March out to grounds and practice signalling all day till 5 p.m. Took lunch with us. More on station work. After tea went for a stroll with H. Prebble. Airaines is a very quiet little place. The buildings are mostly very old. There's nothing very imposing about the place. The town is in a gentle valley and on the slopes of the surrounding hills. A railway - single line runs through the town. Don't think there are any manufactures here. It is just a little town surrounded by an agricultural country.

Friday 25 August 1916 Airaines The usual programme of drill. Tonight I went to a concert in the "cinema hall." The items, singing etc, were given by soldiers, some of the Tommy A.S.C. and our own fellows. It was quite a success. Very enjoyable. One's time here is fairly fully occupied. Anyhow from 6 a.m. till 5 p.m. one is kept going fairly well. Then after tea etc one feels like a little relaxation. Have to be in billets by 8.45 p.m., lights out 9.30 p.m. One consequence is that I have not done much letter writing lately.

Saturday 26 Airaines During morning were on our ordinary work. Heavy rain fell but sun came out again after dinner when we went up road a little further. Here we took part in an "attack" by the Battn. After this concluded we were inspected by the Colonel. Had to produce our iron rations. A large number were found to be without these necessaries. There's trouble brewing for the delinquents.

Sunday 27 Airaines This morning there was held (out in the paddock where we usually parade) a church parade. Rain fell shortly after we got out there but fortunately ceased before we got soaked. In the afternoon just after dinner went out for walk up hill with H. Prebble. Returned about 2.45 p.m. This afternoon a football match between H.B. and [blank], played over in parade paddock, resulted in a win for H.B. 8 to nil. The game for most of the time was played in very heavy rain.

Monday 28 Airaines There was an "attack" carried out by the Brigade today. Left here at about 9 a.m. and marched out Allery way. Had a wait up the road and moved on again. In some of the cottages near which we halted saw some old fashioned "looms." The women were working them. They were worked by treadle and were busy click-clacking away. We passed thorough Allery after lunch time and on the slopes beyond there the manoeuvres were carried out. Wgtn Battn was in reserve so we didn't have such a great deal to do. Returned via main road. Rain fell in morning but afternoon was fine.

Tuesday 29 Airaines This morning there was a bath parade and inspection by Col. Punishment of several prisoners found guilty on different charges. Sentences ranged up to 2

years H.L. This afternoon marched out beyond Allery again where another "attack" was carried out. Getting us ready to take part in the "Push." During the manoeuvres there was a solid thunder storm and very heavy rain fell. There was some vivid chain lightning. Some of our chaps who were on phone got a decent electrical shock. Made pace coming home. Received 25 francs pay tonight.

Wednesday 30 August 1916 Airaines Weather today has been very wet. There was no outside parade. A kind of wet day syllabus which didn't amount to much. Steam fumigator came along and our blankets went thro' process. Usually do this before we go into trenches for any time. There's a good time coming "Somme time." Expect we will be in to it shortly.

Thursday 31 Airaines This morning with the rest of the Brigade our battalion paraded in a paddock near billet, and were addressed by Major Campbell who spoke to us on "bayonet fighting." He wished to instil into us the great value of the weapon, also how to use it. He is a very good speaker and his add' was very interesting. At this parade General Braithwaite handed Military Medal ribbon to Sgt L. Nicholas, W. Holmes and (blank). At conclusion of parade we (Wn Battn) marched out other side town, where carried out more manoeuvres. In evening I attended lecture on "Balkan Tangle," given by Prof Atkins of Sheffield University. Exceedingly interesting.

Friday 1 Sept Airaines Parade, and inspection during morning. Back early for lunch after which went for route march. My new boots which I got the other day were not very comfortable. Suppose this will be so until I get used to them. On return journey had a swimming parade in the little stream which runs through the town. During tea time received instructions to have blankets rolled and sent round Q.M's store by 6 p.m. Short notice. Moving out tomorrow sometime. Day has been fine.

Saturday 2 Sept Airaines Cavillon Reveille 5 a.m. Started from Airaines 8 a.m. Weather was fine and warm, as was the marching. The roads we tramped along were splendid although with my new boots I found them pretty hard. For a good part of the way the road was lined with fine trees on either side, a feature of many of the roads in this country. Cavillon was reached about 11.30 a.m. and we were billeted. We of Sig' Section landed in an old shed with an undulating earth floor. Not very luxurious. Appreciated a good wash after the tramp. In afternoon did little more than a little washing. Had a good rest in the orchard. In evening went for a pleasant walk through woods at back of chateau. Bn Swarm.

Sunday 3 1916 Cavillon Breilly Cavillon, I might note, is a very small village. An estaminet or so, didn't find a shop. We of course didn't have any blankets last night. Rather cold. Reveille was at 5 a.m., breakfast, and we got on the way again. Left Cavillon about 8 a.m. en route to Breilly, which we reached after a two-hour tramp. We were soon billeted. This time we (the section) found abode in a shed in which there is plenty of hay. The people (whose shed we are in) seem very nice. In the afternoon we went on swimming parade, down to the Somme River which is only a few chains away. It is fairly deep and swift but not very wide. After this we attended church parade up on hill. Trents passed through here this morning just shortly after we arrived.

Monday 4 Breilly I have not yet had much time to look around here, but can make one or two notes on what I have already observed. The village, which is small, clusters on the slopes which run down to the R. Somme. The railway dup' line runs close on left bank of the river, and trains pass every few minutes. It is a busy line. Rain fell last evening as I was starting out for a walk and again this morning as we were getting out on parade there was a heavy downfall. We came in again after getting pretty damp! Weather cleared up after lunch and had an " attack," after which we had a route march. On returning we went round and passed through Picquigny which [is] a fair sized place about 2 kilos from Breilly.

Tuesday 5 Breilly Today we have been out on the slopes at the back, on phases of attack, barrages etc. The weather was cold and inclined to rain. The Sig Section were out with flags marking trenches, barrages etc. Near ground where we were drilling was a small camp of German prisoners. During the morning saw three motor lorry loads of them pass out, off to work I expect - probably road repairing. Through binoculars could see them very plainly. This evening with 3 others went for a walk down to Ailly-sur-Somme, which is considerably bigger than this village. It is a little over 1 kilo from here.

Wednesday 6 Sept Breilly This morning at about 9 a.m. we started out en route somewhere for more manoeuvring. Passing through Ailly-sur-Somme we crossed the river and canal alongside it, on through the village St Sauveur and away out onto the fields some distance beyond. The weather was fine and we found the tramping fairly warm. From out there we had a pretty good view of Amiens. The atmosphere was rather hazy though, but most prominently could be seen the great cathedral, the smoke of factories etc and other big buildings. After our manoeuvres we returned same way we had come out. During day noticed many planes. Plane was also overhead in conjunction with our operations.

Thursday 7 1916 Breilly - Rainneville Today at 12.15 p.m. we left Breilly. We had lunch at 11 a.m. Our hostess treated the boys to a jug of beer, a mark of esteem of our good behaviour! Passing through Ailly-sur-Somme we marched out through St Sauveur. Halts were every half hour and the march wasn't really very hard. The country through which we passed was all agricultural. In fact it seems to be agricultural about here. Passed the aerodrome near Bertaugles [?spelling]. There are many

hangars there - great numbers of machines. Watched one land. It came to rest as gracefully as a seagull alighting on the water. Splendid control. We arrived at Rainneville at 4.45 p.m. where we were billeted. R' is a small village - could plainly hear sounds of the artillery.

Friday 8 Rainneville - Camp Left Rainneville at 8 a.m. During our night here we could hear sounds of intense bombardment. Might mention here that we could hear the rumble at Breilly. The day was fairly warm. I wasn't sorry when we arrived at our destination. A camp about 2 1/2 miles from Albert. En route we passed through La Hooze where there is an aerodrome. At the camp we went into tents. Shortly after we arrived the 1st Bgde came up and camped near us. As they passed saw numerous old boys I knew. After some tea I walked about a mile and a half to some water taps where I had an enjoyable wash. Came back with Hooper and Pegram. On the way up today saw hundreds of Hun prisoners working on roads.

Saturday 9 Sept Camp (near Albert) The tents were all very crowded last night, some having over 20 in them. We were not quite so bad with about 16. Still there was a jumble of feet around the pole of the tent (bell). Reveille was at 6 a.m. Went out this morning and did signalling. After lunch went down to creek about 1 1/2 miles distant and had a bit of a swim (River Ancre). In the evening some of the 1st Bde boys gave some music. Binny came over, also McLennan. The road which runs past camp leads on to Albert (about 2 1/2 miles further on). There is an enormous amount of motor transport traffic. Hundreds of lorries.

[..... At this point the diary entries break off until Friday 15 Sept when there is the brief entry across the page ... "Commenced Somme advance again." Pages from here again blank.]

Seperate undated [probably about Sept 16, 1916 during 2nd Battle of the Somme] hand-written note scribbled on a "Messages And Signals" form in Bert Henson's handwriting, with the notation "Attack Le Sars" written across the address space:-

A few notes on what I observed from Div Visual Stn. R A Advanced Stn. about a mile behind Flers ----- Commands splendid view. The country slopes down towards Flers and beyond for some distance then rises again towards Bapaume. About 3.15 p.m. artillery opened out and put up a hellish barrage right around from [space left blank obviously intending to fill in later] on the right to [space left blank] on the left (my field of view). Rows of 18 pounders a few hundred yards behind us and bigger guns made a terrific din. In a valley on our right could see rows of 18 prs spurting forth their flashes. The ground was trembling. Above the barks of the 18 prs one could hear the heavy shells rushing high overhead. The barrage extended right around but the attack was on the left. Through the telescope could see the fellows advancing behind the barrage. It was great to watch them walking steadily forward. ----- Noticed some firing from kneeling and standing positions evidently at retreating Huns. Magnificent to see how steady they were. The barrage (white

puffs of shrapnel in the air and black H.E. on the ground) soon obscured them and the countryside from view. Even R S [word indecipherable] obscured for a while. (later) At about 4.20 p.m. the [indecipherable - ?artillery] died down considerably, though of course there was still a good deal of metal going over. By about 4.40 p.m. there appeared a number of prisoners coming over from the left. Off back to the enclosure. I gather that the attack was very successful, the lines being pushed forward about 2000 yards on left and a lesser distance towards centre of salient.

Diary re-commences on Thursday, 5 October 1916.

Thursday 5 October 1916 Nr D Redoubt to Nr Fricourt There wasn't much rain last night after all. I was quite cosy. Got up about 7 a.m. Had breakfast, waited about till after 10 a.m. for

rations and then with rest of 2nd Bgde chaps marched down to camp nr Fricourt. The road we came down - the Fricourt-Montauban Rd - had an enormous amount of traffic on it. An unending stream of motor lorries, cars and horsedrawn wagons, limbers etc. The camp, horse lines etc have come up a long way since I came up this way to trenches on 14th ulto. Arrived at camp about midday. Recd parcel of socks and handkerchiefs from Nellie. Splendid! Just what I wanted. Very opportune.

Friday 7 Nr Fricourt - On train Left the camp this morning. The Division is off out back. Left camp about 4.30 a.m. Last night we were issued with 8 hrs rations. Waited about until 11.30 a.m. when we left. Marched out through Dernancourt to a siding about a mile from there. Arr 1.30 p.m.- had lunch. Numbers of Hun prisoners were working about, some at YMCA cookhouse. In siding was a magnificent hospital train - Princess Christian's. Great deal of motor traffic about. In a few minutes counted 34 motor buses and many in lorries loaded with soldiers - pass station yards. Entrained and left 4.30 p.m. Decent to be on a train again and to be getting away for a spell (!).

Saturday 7 Oct On train - arr Pont Remy Last night at 10.30 p.m. we arrived at Longprey Jctn and there detrained and set out on "shanks ponies." It was a pretty hard affair. After being in the trenches or lines for about a month we were not feeling very much like a solid march with full packs up. The road we travelled followed the line practically all the way to our destination. The irony of it was our empty train passed us shortly after we had started out. Great numbers fell out and bivouacked on roadside. A march of about 7 miles brought us to destination near Pt Remy. Section was billeted about 2.15 a.m. in sheds of M'sieur le Maire. Had practically nothing to do today. It earlier rainy.

Sunday 8 The billet into which we landed Friday night was pretty rough - so yesterday the Corpl looked around and got another for us. We came around to our new home that evening. Our luck is in. The billet is a cosy shed. Clean hay and plenty of room. This afternoon leave to Abbeville was granted to 25% 4 of our chaps went in (and came back). Rather heavy rain fell last night and today the sky was overcast. Rain fell in afternoon. It is very decent to be back here in unspoiled country out of the sound of guns. Went for stroll up hill. Beautiful house and park.

Monday 9 1916 Nothing doing this morning. Yesterday a couple of hens and a rabbit turned up (dead) from somewhere with result today we had a splendid dinner. Just adjoining is an old empty house with a fire place in it. Here Len Williamson has established himself as chief cook. He is not bad either. Then in a number of parcels from NZ Pat. Societies we received pineapples in tins milk etc. Bien. This afternoon got leave for Abbeville about 9 kilos distant. Walked along rlwy and then bank of Somme. Very pretty. The town is a busy place. One could imagine he was a "civvy" [sic] again. Fine cathedral. I liked the town very much. A change to be in a town not smashed about by shells.

Tuesday 10 Today has been very fine. Beyond a little washing did nothing all day. We are not worried by any drill just now. There is any quantity of apples about here at our door. Our cook has very successfully cooked some. Not bad. Would not mind spending the winter here. Think would get fat tho! Yesterday E.B.E. and P.A.G. went into town. Dined well. P.A.G. arrived back about 11 o'clock. He was very comical. Said he had left E.B.E. helpless somewhere by canal (the

snails will crawl all over him. They'll crush him. I'm sure they will. He's like a jellyfish!). Believe we are moving out in morning (E.B.E. arrived home this morning, 11th).

Wednesday 11 Oct In train We left our little home this morning with not a little regret. We were having a really good time. It was, alas, too short. Packs up and at 9.15 a.m. we marched down to the road where about 11 a.m. we picked up the Coy. Heard that poor old Alex Hooper had been killed down Somme. Bad news. With Coy we proceeded to Pont Remy Stn where we waited until 4.20 p.m. at which time having entrained our "express" started on the journey. We travelled in covered-in wagons and there being only 16 in ours we had plenty of room. Had plenty of hay on floor. Darkness came on soon after passing through Abbeville and we made ourselves cosy and went to sleep. Passed Etaples 6.50 a.m.

Thursday 12 In train -- Strazeele Was very comfortable in the wagon and slept fairly well. Don't remember any places after Etaples. Don't know whether we came via Calais or the other way. Anyhow at about 2.40 a.m. woke up and found we were being shunted into siding. Here we detrained, the station being Bailleul. Were served with cup tea and biscuits. We set out at 3.30 a.m. to some village where we were to be billeted. After covering about 8 kilos and passing through several villages, reached our destination, Strazeele, at about 5.30 a.m. Section was billeted in farm shed a little outside town. Slept most of morning. This afternoon at 4 p.m. went to hot baths about 3 miles away. Believe we move out tomorrow to trenches Armentieres.

Friday 13 1916 Strazeele to Armentieres We are off back to Armentieres alright and taking up our old section of line. Handed in our valises this morning. At 12.30 p.m. after lunch set out and tramped through Strazeele and about a mile along Bailleul Rd. Here we picked up motor lorries or rather they picked us up. Left at 2.20 p.m. 25 on each lorry. There was a big fleet of Peerless, much ahead of walking! Passed through Bailleul which is rather a fine town, not despoiled by artillery. Reached

Armentieres 3.30 p.m. Felt pleased to get back "old home." Town practically same as when we left it, perhaps quieter. Fewer civilians. Went to billet for night I went with Hdqrs to Bde Hdqrs.

Saturday 14 Oct Armentieres - trenches We relieve the Australians here. Coming in yesterday passed numbers marching out. Had cosy bunk last night but was up early this morning about 3.30 a.m. The "good pioneer" who woke us very kindly brought us a drink of tea. At 5 a.m. started out to Cambridge House on X route. Great to be back in the old familiar surroundings. It was intended that I should be on old C129 but as that station is now cut out I went up to C126. Arrived there at 7 a.m. The concrete dug-outs which were started upon before we left before are now completed and occupied. They're fine. Ted Arnold and others had already arrived. The remainder of day was quiet (very).

Sunday 15 Trenches We are again well installed in our old lines which, I might add, are not in too good order. Believe the Australians carried out a very successful raid here a few days ago. In retaliation Fritz dropped a lot of "minnies" over and made rather a mess of parts. Repairs are not yet complete. Our concrete dug-out is very secure and solid. Have heard it has already withstood the shock of a couple of "minnies" on its top, so it can't be so bad. There are 4 of us here, Arnold, Holmes, Russell and I. Spot and I went down for water 'smorning. Scored ten

biscuits. Things have been very quiet today. Have just (11 p.m.) received 4 letters. Hooray! Excuse me pse.

Monday 16 Trenches A little rain fell last night and this morning the trenches were rather muddy. "Spot" and I went out and reeled up some wire. Nearly got sniped too. We were standing in trench disentangling some wire and must have had our heads showing above level of parapet. Things were quiet and we serenely occupied when "crack" and a bullet clipped the sand bags and sent the dust over us. A little better aim and he might have made sure of one of us. Last night we were issued with leather waistcoats. They're very fine. Day has been very quiet. A shower this morning. Rather cold.

Tuesday 17 1916 Trenches The Coy in this trench just now is A.A.C. The trenches, wires etc have been let get into rather a bad condition by our predecessors. About here anyhow there doesn't seem to have been anything done since we left. There will be a good deal of work getting things in order again. Ted and Spot went into town this morning and returned about 4 p.m. We are not overdone with tucker just now so they got a few extras. At 3 p.m. our chaps greeted Fritz with a few Stokes bombs. A few minnies (most of them duds) came back in retaliation. Tame affair. The afternoon has been dull and rain commenced about tea time.

Wednesday 18 Oct Trenches A rotten sort of day. A cold drizzle. Trenches are not in best of conditions. The O.C. A.A.C. met with misfortune about 11 o'clock this morning. He went out with some Stokes mortar people to point out some Bosche M.M.G. position. He had been out only a few minutes when we heard he that had been wounded. Pipped by a sniper. Don't think the wound is likely to be fatal tho'. He (Capt McKinnon) had been speaking

about anticipating leave. He will get there sooner than he expected. Will miss winter here. Capt Urquhart is new O.C. This afternoon Spot and I went down to C129 for water. Place is badly knocked about there.

Thursday 19 Trenches 87 The miserable cold wet weather continues. This time "in" the cook-houses are back in S.S. lines which means that we have to tramp back there about 600 yards to get our tucker. A bit of a nuisance, especially this weather. Winter is approaching fast. The weather is becoming noticeably colder and it's dark about 5 p.m.. The vegetation on banks of the trenches is dead and dying and the place is beginning to look bare. Our mortar people had another bit of a go this afternoon. Got a few minnies etc back. Capt Webber turned up (from England - leave) today. We go back to S.S. tomorrow.

Friday 20 Trench 87 to S.S. I was on duty 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. this morning. Yesterday the water made its appearance through the concrete roof of our bivvy, dripping I suppose through a slight crack probably made by the minnies which landed on top. Rather disappointing. At about 7 a.m. our relief Otago Sigs were along. Packing up Ruscoe and I went ahead, down to old C115 in S.S. lines, the same station at which I was for a few days from July 16th. It was still about the same. This afternoon Ruscoe and I went into Div baths which we enjoyed. On return journey met Glasgow with whom we had tea. Eggs and chips etc. The town seemed very deserted. Got back here about 7 p.m. The day has been very fine though the air is very keen. A welcome change.

Saturday 21 Oct 1916 Subsidiary trench There was rather a sharp frost this morning and the day was bright and fine. When in town yesterday saw Ivo McLennan round at Ecole Professional. Today Ted and Spot had a stroll round deserted houses at Houplines which is just at the back of us. Ted made a little brazier and having secured a little coke this evening we have enjoyed the luxury of a fire in the bivvy. It is going as I write. Makes the place very cosy. Understand that fuel will shortly be issued to the men. The day being fine a number of planes were up. A Hun managed to get across and bring down one of our balloons. He was quickly chased back.

Sunday 22 Trenches (Subsidiary) A fine day. Rather sharp and keen. The sun hasn't a great deal of power now. There was a fairly heavy frost this morning. About 2 a.m. the fire in the grate "went cold" on me. Just about suffocated the boys trying to start it up again but it was "no go." Coke would not take. Ted and Spot went into town today. Brought a few stores back. Was paid 40 francs this morning. This afternoon went down to Chateau de Rose and got new box respirator. There was a bit of strafe on this afternoon. We put over good number mortar bombs.

Monday 23 Trenches (Subsidiary) A keen frosty morning, though not quite as bad as yesterday. Last night I received some papers from E.P.B. About 11 a.m. Ruscoe and I went into town again. I sent a cable home. Day turned rather hazy and I felt pleased to land back at our bivvy where Ted had a glowing coke fire going in a new brazier which he had made. The first one wasn't quite a success. Tonight we received a ration of coke 1/2 sugar bag full. Mustn't forget about the rum ration! What!

Tuesday 24 Subsidiary Line Light rain commenced last night and continued pretty well all day. Slept during most of the morning. One gets very lazy here. I am afraid I am neglecting my correspondence shamefully lately. I must settle down to "yards of letters." This evening received another paper from E.P.B. and a Free Lance from Mr Dixon. Good of them to think of me. Jack Mills is in W.W.C.Coy. Joined up down at Somme. See him often. Not as fat as he used to be. Dib has returned from leave.

Wednesday 25 Oct 1916 Subsidiary Line A dull day. Again spent most of morning in "land of nod." At about 3.30 p.m. Ted and I took a stretch down to Hdqrs (D138-old). This Sig section is run on great lines. Besides the Sgt and Cpl there is only one battalion man on hdqrs and he would be little use anywhere. Company men seem to run things there. The days are very short now. It is dark soon after 5 p.m. This morning Fritz put a few whizz-bangs over into Houplines at the back of us. He quickly got retaliation.

Thursday 26 Subsidiary Line - Support (GRQ) This morning battalion went back into front line again, W.W.Coy going into support. Ted went on ahead round to GRQ while the rest of us followed later. The station is in the new concrete dug-out. It's very OK! 3 bunks, chairs (including an arm chair), a fine little oak table and a carpet for the floor. We also found 4 or 5 blankets here. The adjoining room is not yet occupied by the O.C. I think he is down in Subsidiary. More room for us. We strafed Fritz this afternoon with Stokes. He replied with several minnies and "pineapples."

Friday 27 Support (GRQ) Ted and I went down to Hdqrs this morning and then out to

GRQ. Here I heard that Robertson (of Tahora and 8th Rifles) had been killed by a Hun grenade during yesterday's strafe. My informant was not positive about this and I sincerely hope it is not true. "Robbie," who was in M.G. section, was a very fine chap. The weather is becoming pretty wintry now. This state of affairs prompted Spot and I to go down and search for a stove or heater in some of the long-empty houses in Houplines. Result was we landed back here about tea-time with an absolutely "top-hole" heater and some stove pipe. We will have our abode well furnished soon! Trouble is we'll have to leave it.

Saturday 28 Support GRQ Today Ted and I took a stroll down to Houplines in search of some coke for our heater. We came back about dinner time with 2 sugar bags of coke and 2 s'bags of wood, also with the knowledge of where to get more coke. While down there we also came [across] another splendid little heater. We hid it, I hope safely. It will do for the next dug-out we go to. It will be hard to have to leave this dugout now that it is so comfy. However all the signal bivvies could be made equally as cosy. I wouldn't mind stopping in here the whole winter. In afternoon Spot and Bill went down for water, while later in evening Ted and I went down to dump for rations.

Sunday 29 Oct 1916 Support GRQ Last night I received 2 letters and a parcel from home. Such a parcel, too. Everything. The cake, cigarettes, sweets and fruit was absolutely first class condition. Splendid! Spot went down to toil at Hdqrs this morning. Our heater is going fine. Keeps the place beautifully warm. We keep a jug of hot water on and can always have a cup of cocoa whenever we feel inclined. A couple of 15th Rifle officers, Hogg and Natusch joined up Tar'ki today. They are occupying the other half of this dug-out. There was a good deal of "strafe" on this afternoon. Stokes puddings, minnies and artillery. Weather dull overcast and wintry.

Monday 30 Support GRQ Slept during most of morning. Dinner was at 2 p.m. W.W.Coy went back to subsidiary lines but we remain here. We are very satisfied to do so. There was trench mortar strafe at 2.30 p.m. and later in evening at 6 p.m. things were very lively up to about 8.40 for a while.

Tuesday 31 Support GRQ The cook-house having gone back to Subsidiary we got our wet rations from cook this morning and all looking after our own culinary dept. Quite a success too. Porridge, bacon, steak and fried bread on menu, with tea, cocoa or water (unadulterated). The now usual afternoon strafe was on again. We got a new switch-box in today. A fine affair. Understand we go out into town billets tomorrow. Today has been fine for a change. Sunshine enjoyable.

Wednesday 1 Nov Support GRQ to Armentieres DRB At about 8 a.m. we were relieved by Otago Sigs. We were rather sorry to leave our "home." Went down to Barber arne [?word indecipherable] Sq first, but a little later went on to DRB. There will be 5 of us on this station - which is for 2 corps, H.B. and W.W.C. Our office is in the basement. Not a bad place. We require a few bunks though. See about them tomorrow. There is a stove here so expect we will be able to do our own cooking. Cookers are too far away. Armentieres is very dead, practically all shops closed. Dib is now wearing his MM ribbon which he received yesterday.

Thursday 2 Armentieres (DRB) Yesterday there was a good deal of running about etc fixing

up about rations. However think things are fixed up alright now. We get all our rations sent up here. There was a good deal of rain this morning. A couple of the boys went to the baths. The house in the basement of which is our signal office is a very fine one. The grounds at the back must have been splendid. Went out for a bit of a walk this afternoon to canteen etc. Received some more papers from E.P.B.

Friday 3 Nov 1916 Armentieres (DRB) Times are pretty easy out here. 6 of us now - Ray Barrell has come down. We are working 2 hours on and 15 off. Not overworked. We are getting quite a decent lot of rations, meat etc, and the cooking is no mean success. This evening Bill Ruscoe and I went to a concert at YMCA - given by "Dink" band and Mr Corrie of Lena Ashfield [?name indecipherable] party. Enjoyed the entertainment very much. Auck' made a very successful raid tonight. 2 prisoners and several Hun killed. We had no casualties.

Saturday 4 Armentieres DRB Nothing much to chronicle today. In afternoon went along to Ecole Professionale and saw Ivo McLennan. Enjoyed the luxury of splendid hot shower bath at Ecole. It was fine. After having tea with Ivo went with him for a walk. Got back early.

Sunday 5 Armentieres DRB Stopped in about the place all day. Rain came on in the afternoon.

Monday 6 Armentieres Went out with Ted and Bill this morning. Anticipate going into the front line again tomorrow so we purchased a few extras, smokes etc. Had dinner out and returned about 3 p.m. Rain fell today.

Tuesday 7 DRB Armentieres - Trenches GR15 This morning at a little after 8 a.m. we left our comfy home. The day was very dull and there was a deal of rain at times. What with rations, two blankets and other gear I had a good load. Had a rotten time coming up Irish Ave. The trench was in rather bad order with the wet and in places was very narrow. Kept bumping my gear against side and in one or two parts had difficulty in getting through. Made one say nasty things. Then we met outgoing Coy men! The mud is pretty plentiful and deep. 6 days in here will be ample for a stretch. Mackay is with us now.

Wednesday 8 Trenches GR15 We are in a concrete dug-out here. Like the others, it adjoins the O.C's. It isn't so bad. There are unfortunately one or two leaks but have rigged up a ground sheet to catch drips. With this contrivance accidentally gave Ted a couple of shower baths. It was very funny -- not for Ted! This afternoon our artillery strafed the Huns who put back about 16 minnies and a few pineapples. Trenches here are not very pleasant just now owing to wet. The bivvies for the men are not very "flash" nor plentiful. Sigs are fortunate in this respect.

Thursday 9 Nov 1916 Trenches GR15 Today has been bright but the sun doesn't sit very high now. The shadows are long all day. The water is pretty bad. The low ground on the other side of the river is flooded - a big sheet of water. This morning at 4.30 a.m. gas was pushed over by us from along the way a little. At the same time a hurricane bombardment opened up. It did not last long but the Huns must have got a "start." I think there was only one minnie sent back here. Our chaps have noticed old Fritz bailing the water out of his trench opposite. Don't think he is having too good a time.

Friday 10 Trenches GR15 The Hun put over a number of minnies today, most of them in no-man's land by the tunnel. The latter I understand has been blocked up by us, thereby causing the surplus water to flood back into Fritz's trench. S'pose he is trying to remove obstruction. Tonight I understand there was to have been a strafe but it didn't come off. Wind unfavourable. Two or three casualties occurred today. Don't know the chaps.

Saturday 11 Trenches GR15 Today has been fairly lively altogether. The Hun put over quite a number of minnies, one landing on spot where the lats were, obliterating them and killing a s'bearer, Peters, and wounding a runner, Harris. In the bivvy here we got a bit of the concussion. Put the candle out and tore down a sheet which was hooked on nails across doorway. Last night there was a man shot while on patrol - he did not answer challenge of our sentry who then fired on him - while this evening another on patrol was wounded. Our artillery retal' was rather slow and poor today.

Sunday 12 Trenches GR15 Again today the Hun continued strafing us with minnies. He kept tossing them over at fairly regular intervals pretty well all day. In our corner things were rather warm. The Sigs were of course fairly OK in the bivvy but same can't be said for all the others. Remarkable tho' there were no casualties. Gen Powles [Powley ?] came round. When he was out in trench a minnie came tossing over. In wake of Capt Webber he made bivvy in good time. Late in afternoon howitzers got going and observers say got one shot right on to one of the guns (mortars). About time they shut them up. Place is badly knocked about.

Diary continues on file "Diaries4.Doc"