

Bert Henson Diary No 4 1918-1919

[This is a "Soldier's Diary," solid and leather-bound, with pocket and slot for pencil, published by Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, with detachable pages and containing "special military information essential to soldiers on active service," such as military vocabulary, aeronautical terms, musketry notes, military law etc. The fly leaf is engraved "To Bertie from Nellie, wishing you many happy returns of the day 14/1/18." Bert Henson has begun his 1918 diary half-way through the book, on Saturday 25 May, 1918, following on from his previous loose-leafed notebook diary (No 3) [see file "DIARIES6.DOC"]. Then, from New Year 1919, he has utilised the beginning of the diary, changing the date to suit.]

Sat 25 May 1918 Nr Authie I got my valise back this evening and in it this diary. Our valises were left behind at Ailly-sur-Somme, the village at which we detrained on March 25th when we first came up to this part. Later the valises were brought up to the Q.M's stores, but I had not until tonight an opportunity of getting at mine. I was pleased to find everything intact. For the past week we had been in the Support Lines in the left of Colincamps but late yesterday afternoon we were relieved by 1/Otago. We had enjoyed a very quiet week. From there we marched out and arrived down here at a canvas camp in a wood near Authie. Light rain had fallen during most of the day and when we arrived here it was wet and dark. However we got settled down alright. A hot cup of cocoa and a packet of biscuits provided by the YMCA baksheesh was very refreshing after our tramp. Today has been fine. Bagley and I went into Authie this evening.

Sunday May 26 Nr Authie Authie, the village to which Bagley and I went last night is only a small place - a typical Somme village with its ancient, old fashioned buildings, some of plaster mud, some chalk masonry, others the more modern ones, of brick. It doesn't appear to have been damaged by shell fire but suffers from neglect. There are not a great many civilians in it, and even as I went down the street I noticed one family preparing to shift. Shops are few and small but there are half a dozen or so estaminets selling wine and champagne- no beer. There was a good deal of sunshine today, although clouds kept rolling across the sky. This, together with a pleasant breeze, has done much to dry the ground. The camp here in the beautiful wood is very pleasantly situated, but of this I'll say more anon. Yesterday we did nothing but clean up a bit, but today we have commenced training. Ted Arnold, who has had a week in hospital with trench fever, rejoined us yesterday afternoon. There was a very heavy bombardment forward last night.

Monday, May 27, 1918 Nr Authie On Saturday night chaps from some of the Coys caused a bit of trouble, I believe as a result of which, they're now answering frequent roll calls. Only 5% leave is to be granted out of the camp. The last few nights we have had to endure certain gas stunt practice. We have had to wear our S.B.R's for a period of an hour or so and carry on. The idea I expect is to get us used to working in them. Last night we had to wear them from 5.45 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. and

again 9.30 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. Mr Lockie, who went away sick about 3 weeks ago is now in Blighty and we now have Lt Benton as signal officer. He seems a very decent chap. I was on the phone 3 a.m.-5 a.m. this morning. Went on parade at 8 a.m. and carried on with training till

11.30 a.m. After dinner we had a kit inspection and then I came down here in the wood for a quiet hour or two. Last night and this morning the guns were very busy forward. Went to an enjoyable concert given by the Tuis this evening. Later to a gas lecture - parade.

Tuesday 28 May Nr Authie This morning, at about 9 o'clock, we left camp and marched to a field the other side of Vauchelles, where was held the Divisional horse show. Got there a little after 10 a.m. During the morning there was a guard competition which was won by 1st Wellington, 2nd Wellington being second. In the afternoon there were jumping competitions, driving ditto etc and a mule steeplechase which was highly amusing. There were present some French officers and a most refreshing sight was that of about a dozen British nurses in blue (St John Ambulance I think). We took in dry rations avec us and tea was provided for lunch. We left again after 5 p.m. I saw O'Brien of Str'frd. The day was very fine. Sunny with a refreshing breeze. In the evening spent an hour at a concert- battalion talent - in the wood. The Hun put over some naval shells and as they howled over here on the way back to near Authie, they caused alarm among the crowd, as last night a number of Hun bombing planes passed over here in the night.

Wednesday 29 May Nr Authie There are a couple of rumours afloat, one that we go into the line in a couple of days. The other that leave to Blighty opens again on the 1st June. The first is probably correct. I wonder about the latter. I have previously said that our camp here is in the wood and we are in tents. It's about the pleasantest camping ground I've been in in France. Tall trees, oaks, birches, ash and larches, clothed in a wealth of young green leaf; grass, and on the lower slopes of the hill, luxurious undergrowth of young bushes makes a most happy environment. The only drawback is the lack of water for washing purposes. In this part streams are few. The surface and subsoil (chalk) won't hold water. Wells have to be sunk over 100ft before striking "de L'eau." I think this is the most beautiful part of France I've stayed in, and it looks especially well just now. There's a wonderful softness and harmony in all the scenes.

Thursday May 30 1918 Nr Authie When there's nothing else on out here we manage in training during the day. 8.30 a.m. till 11.15 a.m. during which time we have the Coy Sigs, and in the afternoon 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Really not very strenuous. The band is up here with us and during the day cheers us with its practice strains and during the evenings renders beaucoup selections. Even during our dinner hour we have music, made by the Auckland band, which is nearby. This morning we started out early about 7.15 a.m. and marched forward several kilos to a place where the battalion carried out a practice counter attack. Of course we were successful and got back in time for lunch. All around here one sees some very fine grain crops, strong and healthy. Rye

crops are now in ear and quite 4ft high, while other cereals are over a foot tall. There are also luxuriant patches of red clover and rye grass. Wonderfully fertile country.

Friday May 31 Nr Authie Went to another most enjoyable concert at our open air theatre in the wood this evening. It was given by the NZ Div troupe and the items were really excellent. A chap whose turn was a female impersonation was particularly good. His voice and looks, his manner, his carriage was absolutely it he was a natural vivacious girl and did not overdo the part. I've not seen a better made-up girl. Following this, with about half an hour's

interval, was a service held by padre Walls, to which I remained. Last night there were rumours to effect that the Hun has made a big advance down Soissons way, advanced something like 10 miles, while today there was another to effect that counter attack had got back all lost ground and more. It is official that leave for NZ Div commences June 1st but so far the battalion has not received an allotment. The battalion goes into the line tomorrow but I am to remain behind to instruct reserve signallers. The day has been beautiful.

Saturday June 1 Nr Authie to Transport Lines Omitted to say that I went to baths at Bertrancourt yesterday afternoon and had a most needed bath and change. Went to yet another concert last night. The Barn Owls, a 37th Div [?] party. It was a very entertaining troupe. Saw Jimmy Jones, who is a 2nd Lt in Auck. Today the battalion went into the line nr Hebuterne. The companies left at intervals commencing about 6 p.m. Ted Arnold, who has again a touch of trench fever and I came back to the transport lines which are not very far from our late camp but nearer Louvencourt. I felt sorry to leave our shady and pleasant camp in the wood. Here there's not a bit of natural shelter from the sun. There being no tents available, Ted and I rigged up a shelter with the poplin aeroplane signalling sheet. The band has of course come back here also, so we'll still have music.

Sunday June 2 1918 Nr Louvencourt Our bombing planes were extremely busy last [night?] and must have dropped a great deal of hate upon Fritz's head. Some Hun bombers also passed over this way. Simultaneously one could hear the steady drone of our machines and the pulsating throb of Fritz's. There were no parades today other than a church service at 11 a.m. To this I did not go as at that hour I had to see Major Hume re training syllabus. In the afternoon I had a ride on a horse, the first I had had for years. Rode one of the transport hacks bare-back down to the watering place the other side of Louvencourt, but there being no water there we came back and I rode another down to Authie. This time I had a saddle. Later in the evening when it was cooler, Ted and I set to work and dug in about a couple of feet. This digging in is a compulsory precaution against aerial bombs. Over this hole in the ground we stretched the signalling panel. A comfy possie for two.

Monday 3 June Nr Louvencourt Neither Ted nor I have had much to do today. Our signallers-in-training were on fatigue this morning, so we found a little employment in straightening up the signal panniers. We did not parade this afternoon either. Camp routine runs: Reveille 6 a.m., breakfast 7 a.m., parade 9 a.m., specialist training 9 a.m. till noon, lunch noon till 1.30 p.m., 1.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. infantry training, then at night from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. infantry training etc. Really I have my lot for 3 hours only but it's probable I'll have to go on some of the other parades. Bak'sheesh parcels were given out today, all of them I think sent from Wellington Citizens' gift fund. For my parcel I am indebted to a Mr Baillie, of Eastbourne, Wellington. The day has been fine and warm though a pleasant cool breeze has saved us a lot from the heat of the sun.

Tuesday 4 June Nr Louvencourt The 8 p.m.-9 p.m. parade was a washout last night. This morning Ted and I had our classes from 9 till noon. Neither Ted nor I went on the afternoon or the evening parade. These two parades are devoted to infantry training, drill etc, and we're not particularly interested. In the afternoon we went down to Louvencourt baths where we were greatly refreshed by a hot and then a cold shower and a change of underclothing. A really fine

bath-house. Saw Bill Harpur [sic] who is now a sergeant and expects to go away for his commission soon. He told me that Charlie Crockett was now a captain. The boys are forging ahead. Time I did something methinks. Wednesday June 5 1918 nr Louvencourt Hun bombers were busy flying about here last night but I didn't hear any bombs dropped. Our planes as usual were also very active. The signallers were again on fatigue, cable burying this morning so I had another bak'sheesh day. We were paid today. I drew 40 francs (1 NZ). The battalion I understand comes out of the line tomorrow, back to near where it was before going in. This camp is to be taken over by some Tommies and we move out to somewhere near the battalion. This is a shelter-less place and the new camping ground should be more pleasant. A parade of all in camp was held at 9 p.m. tonight but was quickly dismissed.

Thursday 6 June Nr Authie We are back again in the wood. Not exactly where we were last time but not far away. Marched over before dinner and found we had to "dig in" - had to sink the tent floor a couple of feet below the ground surface. This is a protection against bombs. For our tent there were only the two of us to do the digging and we toiled solidly the whole afternoon and completed a very creditable "dis." The battalion in the line was relieved this evening by Tommies and the main party arrived down here a little before midnight. They had had quite a decent time in the line at Heburterne and returned all OK. Tom Hogan received news from Blighty that an NZ mail had arrived there so it should reach us any day now.

Friday 7 June Nr Authie There was little to do today in consideration of the fact that the battalion had just come out of the line. A short inspection in the morning and the rest of the day off. Apres midi I took myself off to a quiet part of the wood and read and rested and slept. After tea went down with several of the boys to the stream in the valley near which St Leger and Authie lie and had a refreshing dip. The first I've had this season. The stream is only a small one. Not big enough to swim in. This evening the band played as usual and there

was a little impromptu concert. Received a latter from Nelly tonight. It contained the news that an aunt (deceased) had left to each of the girls a nice little legacy.

Saturday 8 June 1918 Nr Authie It was inclined to rain a little last night but fortunately refrained and the day was fine. There was little to do today. Headquarters were inspected by the C.O. at 10 a.m. and then dismissed. I was on the phone this afternoon from noon till 4 p.m. A concert was given here tonight by the Div Party and was very enjoyable. The vivacious impersonation was here again and delighted the crowd, and, yes, perhaps made them wish they [were] not in such a girl-less place. No, no, not me! The YMCA is going here and it is pleasant to listen to the piano which they provide there which gets little rest during the hours the marquee is open. The music of a piano takes one strongly homeward.

Sunday 9 June Nr Authie Has been a very lazy day. Church parade about 9 a.m. and then with a party of Hdqrs I went down to the baths. A hot shower followed by a cold plunge, the latter in a big canvas bath about 30ft x 15ft, being very enjoyable. The system of baths shows a great improvement on that in practice a year or so ago. This afternoon I took myself to a quiet little spot in the wood and "droned" and slept. Waking up at 3 p.m. found the sky had become overcast and threatening. The breeze had become a strong "wind." This however passed over in an hour or so and the sun came out again. A light shower fell about 8 p.m. Really nothing to speak of. Part of our NZ mail arrived this afternoon but it had nothing for me. I expected await tomorrow. Our guns forward opened up and maintained a very solid bombardment.

Monday 10 June Nr Authie Rain fell in the early afternoon but the sun came out after 4 p.m., when Bagley and I set out for Pas, a fair-sized village about 5 kilos from here. There are numerous civilians here but some of them I expect are refugees. A great many of the original inhabitants seem to have evacuated. There are not many shops. Sitting in a doorway I saw an old chap who was in Bertrancourt when we went there first. The poor old fellow is paralysed and he was unable to get away - was left behind. Seemed very sad. However he's in better surroundings now. I saw McCormick. He is Group Hdqrs (entrenching Bn) and is having a pretty fair time training a few sigs. Returned about 9 p.m. Mr Benton told me today that Ted and I would remain behind again this time when the battalion goes in tomorrow.

Tuesday 11 June 1918 Nr Authie Parade this morning with the specialists who are remaining behind for training. I have about a dozen sigs to look after. The battalion moved out about 4 p.m. to relieve 1st Wellington in the Purple line round Saily, while we who are to stay behind shifted to another

camping ground a little further along in the wood. Had of course to dig in. I have a little posy to myself with a ground and a Hun sheet for a covering. Received a couple of letters from NZ today, one from home and one from E.V.D. E.V.D. had a little news for me. She is engaged to Dartry Adams. Most sincere and hearty congrats Betty. He's a lucky bounder. I think you'll "endure" city life alright! With letter from home I received a B.P.O.

Wednesday 12 June 1918 Nr Authie Training today. Routine as follows: Reveille 6 a.m., breakfast 6.30, parade and inspection 8 a.m., training 8 a.m. till noon and 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. Ted is still down at the stores acting Q.M for Hdqrs but I think will be up with me tomorrow. Most of the signallers in training here are new to the "profession" and require a good deal of attention. McIlroy showed me a letter this evening which he had received from Harry Prebble. He is back at Napier in his old job and is doing well. Heard news of Bill Glasgow. He is having a great time in Blighty. Gin Armstrong has been out with him for some days, boating on the Thames etc. Lucky devils! The day has been fine.

Thurs June 13 Nr Authie The weather has undergone a change today. It is overcast and

the wind is rather cold. Training as usual. In this lot of signallers I have a couple of middle aged men who are trying to learn signalling. They are willing and keen to learn but find it hard and make very slow progress. I feel rather sorry for them but repeatedly I have observed how difficult it is for a man much over 30 to learn morse. It seems to offer peculiar difficulties. The eye, the ear, the brain seem unable to catch and translate the movement or the sound quickly enough. Boys from 14 to 20 are the most apt pupils, but of course we don't get them much under 20 here. We shift tomorrow to a camp near Henu.

Friday June 14 Authie to Henu Reveille was at 5.30 a.m. when we got up and struck bivvies etc and those who had been using iron etc took that material down to a dump from where it would be carted away in limbers. Carried on training 8 a.m. till 11 a.m. Had lunch and about 13 of [us] set off to march to Henu, a distance of about 6 kilos to the new camping place. The 3rd Dinks were in it when we arrived there but they moved out about 5 p.m.. The battalion arrived down here later in the evening. This camp is rather well situated in a little wood but I can't say it is as pleasant as the one we have just left. But one advantage is, a little stream runs in a valley about a couple of hundred yards behind. It is a beautiful little vale with wooded slopes. I'll spend some of my leisure there, if I have any. We Sigs are in a tent. Some of the chaps occupy tents while others have little bivvies.

Sat June 15 Nr Henu The morning was devoted to cleaning up etc, while the afternoon was one of leisure. Took myself to the wooded valley behind the camp intending to write but instead I read and soliloquised and "droned" until it was

time to return to tea. It is indeed a very pretty little spot and I can compare it with places in NZ and that without a very elastic imagination. After tea went down there again with Jack Norman and wrote a letter home.

Sunday June 16 Nr Henu Another very easy day. Church parade about 9 a.m. which was attended by the 1st and 2nd battalions. The 1st battalion is camped just behind and adjoining us. Following the church parade all were to march over to where the Div horse show was being held but Div Sigs, not keen on being paraded to a horse show successfully vanished diverse ways. Taking some lunch with us, Tom Hogan and I went out for a ramble. Walked over to the little village of Guademprie about a mile distant. Some Tommies are billeted around here. Also saw some Indians. People were going to church when we arrived there and among them were some rather pretty madamoiselles, ever refreshing to behold. Leaving the village we sought a pleasant spot where we spent the afternoon in reading and resting. The Pierrots gave a concert in the camp this evening.

Monday 17 June Nr Henu The old Hun was very active with his bombers last night and about midnight dropped numerous bombs around the locality, none in this camp fortunately.

Heard this morning that a couple of Tommies got bomb shocked but have not heard of any casualties. The planes hung about over this camp for quite a while - so it seemed - and I anticipated some frightfulness to fall close.

Went down to the adjacent baths this morning. The short cotton under pants which they issue now and a shirt, I find is beaucoup under wear, almost too much under wear for this warm weather. Recreational training this apres midi. Got the use of a cricket set and we of the section and a few others had a little game. I succeeded in giving Ted Arnold an abrasion on the nose with the ball.

Tuesday June 18 1918 Nr Henu The battalion went out on a manoeuvre this morning. Moved up an occupied a portion of the red line about an hour's march from here. Everything went off fairly well! No casualties. Between 11 a.m. till noon had to wear respirators, just to get used to 'em you know. Returned to camp about 1 p.m. Recreational training in the afternoon. A little game of cricket down on a rather bumpy turf pitch in the valley. All felt lazy though and casualties were nil. The Tuis were to have given a concert here this evening but they didn't turn up. We have a very decent little stage in the camp. It was put up by the engineers. Received a note from Frank Searle who is at Stevenage. He says Dib is on draft leave.

Wednesday June 19 Nr Henu Rain fell last night and today was for the most part overcast and showery. One shower in particular being very torrential. Nothing doing in the way of training.

Thursday June 20 Nr Henu Did three shooting practices down at the range in the valley at the back of the camp. The little sweepstake of 1fr per man we, of the section, put in was won by Tom Hogan. Apres midi went down to the baths which are near at hand. This bath is a rather well run little show. Hot

showers. It's very decent to be able to have a good bath like this, and then obtain a change of clean under wear. The latter today was new stuff. Oscar, Ted and I set out to visit the Entrenching battalion camp near Pas, but rain coming on when we [were] going through Henu, we did not go further. Saw Donaldson, of Brigade Sigs. We returned to camp about 9 p.m. The battalion moves out of this camp tomorrow morning.

Friday June 21 1918 Henu to Vaucelles We were up this morning - no, not with the lark, but about 6 a.m. and packed up ready to move off at 8 a.m. Tents were struck. We had our valises carried for us. The march was done in easy stages and on the way a little manoeuvre was carried out, this not taking up much time, nor us very much out of our way. Arrived at our new

camp about 1 p.m. It's a rather flash place. Nissen huts, wood lined, painted white inside, electric lighting wires but no generator or bulbs. It has probably been a rest camp or something like that when the front line was near Cambrai. It's very well situated on a hill side, fields around, some bearing crops, and a little wood lies just to the rear. Had a great deal of sport getting some corrugated iron with which to make myself a bivvy, but not completing it. I'll sleep in the hut tonight.

Saturday June 22 Vauchelles The day has been overcast and a fair amount of rain has fallen. I have abandoned the idea of using the bivvy I went to the pains of building yesterday afternoon and evening. At that time I had anticipated about 30 fellows being crammed in but there are now only 24 and as I am in a corner I find it quite comfortable. It is a fine bright clean and cheery hut. Yesterday I received a couple of letters from home and one from Q.D. and today I received another from home. With the home letters came two B.P.O's. I therefore drew no pay yesterday. This afternoon I was inoculated (anti-typhoid) and tonight my chest and shoulders are inflamed and tender. However after the operation one is excused duties for 36 hours. Wrote home this afternoon. Weather has improved considerably.

Sunday June 23 Vauchelles On account inoculation was excused duties all day. Did not attend church parade, nor did I go to the Divisional sports which were held over near Authie, and to which most of the battalion, excluding those who had been inoculated yesterday had to march. I really did not feel inclined for much excursion. In the afternoon, however, about 3 p.m. Bagley and I went over to a neighbouring village, Raincheval, about 3 kilos distant. had a look around the place, which is small, admired the old chateau, the fine old church, listened to a Tommy band which rendered some excellent selections, had a few wines and returned to camp to the following tea which had been kept for us - Roast beef, potato croquettes, followed by a ground biscuit and raisin pudding and custard.

Monday June 24 Vauchelles Nothing to do today. In fact we battalion signallers have done no training since the battalion came out. Neither have the Coy sigs. They have had to carry on with ordinary infantry training and feeling rather discontented about having to do it instead of signalling training. It is really a pity. However it means a most easy time of us of the battalion. Wrote to Q.D. today. Late this afternoon sky became overcast and rain fell as Bagley went into Raincheval. Bagley went in for the purpose of getting some flour for our cook. It is of course rather hard to get as the people are rationed. He got about 25 lbs which cost about 17 francs. Saw by a French paper that Amiens has been again bombarded and that Abbeville had received a great deal of attention from Hun bombers which had dropped numerous incendiary bombs. The officers of 1st and 2nd Wellington are having a dinner tonight here, and indulging in high revels.

Tuesday June 25 Vauchelles The above village, close at hand, is but small and most of its civilians have gone to places further back. As seen from the camp it is a picturesque little cluster of houses whose red tiled and blue-grey slated roofs peep out from amongst a wealth of

foliage. As a matter of fact I have been through it but two or three times and then only when on the march with the battalion. This afternoon immediately after lunch we went through it and in the fields beyond carried out some manoeuvres which took us towards and to the left of Louvencourt. Returned in time for tea. Down along the valley below us winds a little railway (about 1 metre gauge) and on this little trains infrequently come along. Peculiar old-fashioned little engines and carriages, but of course there is not much civilian traffic to cater for up here now.

Wednesday June 26 Vauchelles An easy lazy day, as have been most with me recently. Went out on to the opposite hill with some of our chaps this morning to do some helio reading with 1st Wellington but the clouds were against this work and we came in after about an hour. The longest day has gone now and it is with regret that I regard the shortening of the days now, but winter's a long way off. The battalion got out from camp at about 9.30 this evening to carry out some night manoeuvres. I remained behind and with James established a visual station on the hill just behind the camp. Here until nearly midnight we received and sent messages (by lamp) from and to forward battalion station and one of the Coys. The night was chilly and we appreciated our overcoats. Everything went smoothly. Thursday June 27 1918 Vauchelles Bagley has been given a kind of roving commission to scour the countryside and buy extra foodstuff, vegetables chiefly, for the battalion. I this ever fell into the hands of a Hun he'd say this was proof that we were short of food. On the contrary, we are getting very excellent tucker and ample, excepting fresh vegetables. Having been told this last night, he did not go on the phone and I took the spare shift, commencing at one o'clock. This meant my not getting any sleep all night until about 5 this morning. However, after breakfast I went out to the edge of the wood at the back and made up for a little lost time. Went on again this afternoon from 3

p.m. till 7 p.m. but as there is to be a re-adjustment of shifts tonight I don't expect I'll be on again. The day has been fine and warm. Wrote to L.C. Waikoikoi.

Friday June 28 Vauchelles The band contest was held yesterday. It was merely a quickstep competition with points for music. Resulted, 1st, 2nd Canterbury; 2nd, 2nd Dinks; 3rd, 2nd Wellington. Our band came second in points for music. This afternoon Forbes and I, having secured passes, went into Doullens about [blank] kilos distant. On the main road, a magnificent asphalt way which runs through the village and right into Doullens, we caught a lorry and after 3 or 4 changes, arrived there about 3 p.m. when Bagley, who had biked in, joined us. Had a good look around the town which is a fair sized place. There is a great number of Americans round the town and we were in conversation with several of them. They are an excellent stamp of manhood, of fine physique and should make fine fighters. They have been over about a month and practically all have seen service in Mexico. It's heartening to see them here and know that millions more are available. Except near the station, noticed no signs of bombardment and what I did see was but slight. We got a motor right home to the village where we arrived about 9 p.m.

Saturday June 29 Vauchelles In Doullens yesterday besides the Yanks and Tommies I noticed a sprinkling of Australians, Canadians and a few of our chaps. Around the area one also sees numbers of Indians and Jamaicans. These are employed chiefly on transport work. In Doullens we listened to a very fine American military band. It was more like an orchestra! It

had so many reed instruments. I noted with pleasure the feeling of good comradeship that was apparent between the Yanks and the English and colonial troops. This morning reveille was at 5 a.m. and at 6 the battalion marched out of camp to take part in Brigade manoeuvres. Went down main Doullens road towards Marieux and then switched off to the right and through Authie to a position in front of that village. The stunt went, as far as I know, satisfactorily and we returned to camp about 2 p.m. Received a letter from Dib today. He is still at Sling. A beautiful day.

Sunday June 30 Vauchelles A Hun bomber paid attention to this locality last night and droned threateningly above the camp like a big wasp about to sting. He got rid of part of his load when above the camp on the opposite hillside, killing 2 Tommies and I believe wounding 8. Am not sure whether he got any horses. This morning at about 10 a.m. was held a church parade at which were present Mr Massey and Sir J.G. Ward. At the conclusion of the service they both in turn addressed the boys for a few minutes. Said they were pleased with the way in which they were upholding NZ's name, etc, and wished them good luck. Mr Massey told of the visit of a raider to NZ waters and the sowing of mines, which had already caused one boat to be sunk. He had just heard this news. Sports were held in the afternoon but I did not go to them. Beautiful day. We move into line tomorrow.

Monday 1 July Vauchelles to Line Gommecourt Another beautiful sunny day. Perhaps some might have considered it uncomfortably war. In the morning cleaned up our huts etc and waited to move out. There is a kind of epidemic going about just now. Spanish fever, I think it is, and a number of chaps are being evacuated with it. Yesterday several ambulance loads went away and today 30 must have gone. It was not until after 4 p.m. that we marched out and up to the village where after a little wait we were picked up by motor lorries. While we were waiting here on the road side that Mr Massey and Sir J.G. Ward passed with some of the staff in cars. They were greeted with "Hello Joe," or "Hello Bill," etc. The lorries took us as far as Couin and from there we marched up to a position in the purple line just to the left of Gommecourt and took over headquarters from 2nd 4th Lancs, arriving at about 8 p.m.

Tuesday July 2 Trenches - Gommecourt Compared with what we have just left, this part seems a desolation - which in fact it is. Here is a great system of old Hun trenches which I suppose he occupied up till July 1916. Deep trenches, deep dug-outs, one of which I am in at present, indeed it must have been a very strong place. The hideousness of the shell-torn country is to a certain extent camouflaged now by grass and small vegetation, but even so it isn't a place suggestive of peace. Gommecourt Wood close by (or should I say what is left of it) have still a few trees which have attempted to respond to the call of Spring, but it's a pitiable effort, for all are slashed and torn and broken by what must have been terrific shell fire, and most that rear their mutilated limbs to the sky are dead.

Our linemen were busy today fixing up lines for the disposition of our companies is different from that of the people whose headquarters we have taken over.

Wednesday July 3 1918 Gommecourt This morning three of our signallers, Jack Miles, Jack Norman and Jack Hunter, went out sick with this Spanish fever. That left us with three operators but a chap being brought in from A Company, there will be four. We work shifts 4 hrs on, 12 hrs

off. This afternoon after 5 p.m. Ted and I went out for a look around Gommecourt and its environs. Round in the wood, or what used to be a wood, we explored a system of very fine dug-outs, deep, moderately spacious and well constructed. One big place which had evidently been an officers' mess was well appointed with tables and chairs, had its walls painted white, with stencil designs running around. We went along a tunnel for 3 or 4 hundred yards to another part. Then we had a look around what remains of the village. No more than the remnants of one or two walls stand. The rest is chaos and dust. One would scarcely know the place had existed.

Thursday July 4 Gommecourt The ruins of the village are now to a great extent hidden by grass and wild vegetation. All around here one finds enormous shell craters, the work of at least 12" shells. They are thick and our guns must have given Fritz a pretty warm time. I expect they were attempting to demolish the dug-outs which they knew existed. I understand that Fritz had to evacuate this place when his left flank was driven back in 1916. The following notice which I saw speaks for

itself.- "This spot is being preserved by the French authorities as an historic feature and war memorial. It is strictly forbidden to remove any material from or interfere in any way with this site." This I expect was put up when our line was past Bapaume. Little perhaps did they imagine it would be so near this place again. I saw a couple of Hun graves with crosses dated 6.10.14.

[Friday July 5 page blank]

Saturday July 6 Gommecourt This afternoon we shifted to some dug-outs 2 or 3 hundred yards nearer the village. The Pioneers have been busy for the last day or so white-washing the interior. It's a very decent little show. I got a bunk from a cubicle along the tunnel and, with a big sack of grass which I collected for a mattress, am very comfortably berthed. The battalion was paid today but I did not draw any money. The papers give accounts of the very enthusiastic celebration of "Independence Day" in the Allied countries, especially detailing the celebrations in Paris and London.

Yet another addition to the long list of Hun atrocities, the hospital ship Llandovery Castle was torpedoed and sunk a few days ago. It was this fine boat, then a transport, that brought me from Egypt to France.

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Tuesday July 9 Gommecourt to Sailly-au-Bois For a little while today the sky was overcast and a shower or two fell. The sun, however, soon came out again. This afternoon, or rather this evening, we were relieved by Otago and we in turn relieved the Otago's back in Sailly-au-Bois. With two other signallers I arrived down at the new hdqrs at about 7 p.m. ahead of the other parties. On the way down Fritz sent over a few solid shrapnel shells on to the Sailly - Fonquevillers road but don't think he caught any one although at that time there were numbers about. Here we are accommodated in very deep dugouts, really old chalk mines, and we are about 75 feet under the surface. Fairly safe, eh! Electric lighting wires and bulbs are installing but it is not running tonight. Heard that the Dinks got a prisoner last night, an old chap or a

regiment of old class men.

Wednesday July 10 Saily-Au-Bois Was on duty 1 to 4 a.m. At 11 a.m. got a bike and went down to Couin to get a fullerphone [?word] from Brigade. Went to see Dave Woodhead at Div but learnt that a couple of days ago he had been evacuated to hospital with heart trouble which I believe has been brought on by his being slightly gassed at Messines. He had complained of this to me before. On my return I had a bath at Coigneux. This was about 2.30 p.m. and from that hour till 3.30 p.m. the whole Division had orders to wear the small box respirators. I carried on with my bath instead. It was while I was there that some exceptionally heavy rain fell and this caused me further delay. Got back about 4.30 p.m. The dug-out air is fresh and rather chilly at times. I am fortunate in having secured a kapoc mattress to sleep on.

Thursday July 11 Saily-Au-Bois I was talking to Bagley at transport lines yesterday. He was in Abbeville a day or so ago and saw the result of the Hun bombing there. I have mentioned this on June 24th. The Huns dropped incendiary bombs and then dropped low, fired their machine guns on the firemen who were attempting to put the fires out. He says that part of the square is nothing but a shamble of ruin. A bomb fell apparently right on the monument there. He could see all over the place round here marks of the m.g. bullets. Jack Miles returned from the flu isolation camp yesterday and this evening went away on Paris leave. Bill Berry goes away on Blighty leave tomorrow. Friday July 12 1918 Saily-Au-Bois An NZ mail has been filtering in for the last day or so and today I received 2 letters from home and 1 from E.P.B. I also received a field card from Dave Woodhead saying that he had been admitted to hospital and was on his way to the base. Read in the "New Zealander" of a collision between a train and a motor lorry at Feilding in which a man named Hirst was killed and another named Ross badly injured. Presume this to refer to Norman Hirst and Bill Ross. Hard luck. Both are returned soldiers. Received a B.P.O. with letter from home.

Saturday July 13 Saily-Au-Bois The weather continues to be erratic in its temper. Sunshine one hour and heavy black clouds and heavy showers the next and then sunshine and rain again in turn. This afternoon I took a stroll round the village with Tom Hogan. We visited some old orchards, long neglected, and got some cherries. The fruit was small and poor, more stone than anything else for the trees had outgrown the fruit producing stage and size. However, so far my inner man has not shown an indication of revolt against the inferior product of the orchard. Taylor and Bargh returned from the 'flu isolation camp today.

Sunday July 14 Saily-Au-Bois At last I am to get my long overdue leave. Was informed officially today. I leave here for the transport lines on the 16th and cross the channel on the 21st, all this of course being subject to falling through in the event of any serious exigency such as the Hun becoming "hostile" meanwhile. And I'll not be at all surprised if something like this does baulk me. However, I hope for the best. In an intelligence summary tonight I read that a prisoner captured on the sector here on Friday night last, was under the impression that the Hun would renew his active offensive towards the end of this month. I was interested to note that the Hun had suffered heavily from our bombardment of Rossignol Wood. Also that one of [our] bombing planes had secured a direct hit on a dug-out, thereby causing about 60 casualties.

Monday July 15 Saily-Au-Bois Taylor and I went down to the baths at Coigneux

yesterday, walking down and getting a ride back in a motor ambulance. The paper of yesterday reports the landing of Allied troops at [blank gap] in Russia.

[Diary pages are blank for the rest of July]

Thursday August 1 1918 Kilby to London Rose at 6 this morning. Got ready for the trip to London and breakfasted, after which I bade farewell to the Kilby folk and set out for Glenn Station. Got a lift in a cart which was taking milk to Glenn [note: this is probably Great Glen, Leicester, where the Henson family lived before coming to NZ. Kilby is a village close to Great Glen, just outside Leicester] from where it was to be sent to London. Left Glenn 8.47 a.m. arr Market Harboro where and at about 9.25 a.m. caught the express to London (St Pancras). Went straight to NZ Club where had dinner. Following this I went along to war [word illegible] and saw Mrs Hobson re my not returning to go on to houseboat. She asked me if I would care to go round to Abbotts. I agreed willingly and catching a bus went round to their flat, 6 York Place Mansions where arrived with a letter of intro. I was very cordially welcomed. Here I met Mrs Abbott, Miss Abbott and son Fred, who was home from Morven College. Later the latter and I went round to Mr Abbott's office and then around the town. Did little shopping and returned to flat. About 6.30 p.m. with the family went to the Trocadero. Had dinner and then went on to the Coliseum. Supper at Abbotts. Extremely nice people. Very enjoyable evening.

Friday August 2 London to Boulogne Was up about 5.15 this morning, had breakfast, drew my pack from the store and squared it up. I didn't altogether welcome the height and weight of the unwieldy equipment. Tom Hancock and I left the club at about 6.30 a.m. and got a taxi to Victoria Station. Here we found a big crowd of fellows waiting for the train to take them back to Folkstone and to France. Numerous friends and relatives, parents, wives and sweethearts were down to say goodbye to their boys and many of them looked as if their hearts were full. It's a touching sight to see a troop train leaving Victoria. We caught a train at 8.30 a.m. and a little "graft" with the M.P. secured for us a first class carriage. Arrived in Folkstone about 2 hrs later and marched to a rest camp on the Parade. Wrote some p.c's, had dinner and caught the boat at 4 p.m. Good trip. Reached Boulogne about 5.30 p.m. and marched to "One Blanket Hill" camp where we spent night.

Saturday August 3 Boulogne to Orville Did not go out last night. Even if we had been able to didn't feel inclined. There are numerous recreation huts, canteens etc, and in these places fellows played the pianos and sang and tried to banish the depression consequent upon leaving Blighty. There are numerous W.A.A.C.S. in this camp but one doesn't find anything in khaki very cheering after the other side.

This morning reveille was at 4.30 a.m, breakfast about half an hour later and then, after drawing rations, we marched down to the station. Entrained and left there about 7 a.m. The old train, true to tradition, rumbled and groaned and creaked along at a snail's pace. I made myself as comfortable as possible and dozed and slept and wakened. At one railway junction we got off

and had some tea at a canteen. Doullens was not reached till 5.15 p.m. After an hour's wait I caught another train to Authuille and from there a lorry to the Div Details camp at Orville.

Sunday August 4 1918 Orville to (Bn Camp) Couin Last night at the invitation of S/S Hornibrook I slept in his tent and spent quite a comfortable night. His job here is to lecture the boys going on leave concerning V.D. and he is really well fitted for this work. He has a splendid grip of this subject, is a forcible speaker and commands one's interest and attention. He has had a fairly wide experience in English and French V.D. hospitals (he spent six weeks in St Louis Hospital, Paris, recently) and in England his brother, a doctor, is a leading authority in this branch. He related many interesting incidents and experiences. This morning I left the camp a little after 9 a.m. and in the village caught a lorry which took me within 3 kilos of Couin. Walked a little way and then caught nother to the village. The Bn is out on rest at a nice little camp here. Went to baths this afternoon. Excellent shower. Fine.

Monday August 5 Couin The battalion came out of the line on Friday night. While up there James got slightly wounded but is now at an ambulance camp near here. A couple of Companies, Taranaki and [blank] had a stunt while in this time. Practically no casualties. McCrostie, Taranaki Signals, has been awarded the M.M. Yesterday I received 3 letters, one from Miss McKenzie, one from Lily and one from Parenga. Poor old Bill Berry is taking his return from leave rather hard. Believe he has been busy letter writing. Poor old Wallace! Fullest sympathy. Jack Miles who returned from Paris about a week ago says he had a great old time. I'll bet he did.

[Diary continued in file "DIARIES8.DOC"]