One weekend in August 2014 there was an exhibition in Eastcombe Village Hall of family memorabilia from World War 1, irrespective of where people came from. This exhibited 'diary' has a very local source, however... The family of Walter Andrews, gamekeeper to Sir John Dorington at Lypiatt Park, lent material that had belonged to two of his sons. Alec died at the Somme, and among his effects the family received his uniform belt, on which were pinned cap badges collected from men he had met in the months leading up to his death. They originated from all over the world. Even more evocative, however, were two little pencil-written notebooks kept by his brother Wilf, or Will, who after the war took to farming at Sheephouse, now in ruins in the fields between Eastcombe and Nash End. Neat and endearing as they are, these little booklets are too precious to permit much handling so I (MB) typed them up for the WW1 exhibition, trying not to interfere with the authentic Gloucestershire voice. That typed version is reproduced here by the kind permission of the Andrews family in the person of the writer's nephew, Robert Andrews. I am asking readers to respect copyright and not copy significant portions of this 'diary' without seeking permission from the copyright holder.

The Diary of
147013 Pte W H Andrews
Signal Section
78th Battalion
Canadian Expeditionary Force

My Life During the European War

Contents

Chapter I
4th August 1914 – 19th July 1915

In Brandon Manitoba on the evening of the 4th of August 1914 I had just retired for the night when I heard the bands playing and the people cheering. I dressed hurriedly and went to see what was the cause of this great enthusiasm. The news had just come through that Great Britain had declared War on Germany. The bands were playing in front of the City Hall and Mayor Hughes made a speech, advising all young fellows to join the army, and strike a blow for the Empire. He was very much interrupted by the outbursts of violent cheering. The bands then proceeded to the offices of the Brandon Sun on 10th Street and played all the patriotic airs while awaiting for further news concerning the war. There was the usual celebrating such as singing, cheering and drinking, also threatening to raid the Flats down near the Assiniboine where the aliens lived, composed mostly of Austrians, Galicians and Poles, but they found out that they would rather sing Rule Britannia, Soldiers of the King and the British Navy. Myself being like quite a number of those present, had very strong socialistic views, and looked upon war, as so many previous wars, as made for the aggrandisement of nations and the benefit of the capitalists.

I got into serious trouble for not taking off my hat while God Save the King was being played, a man struck me with a flag which much offended me so I tried to tear the flag up but it ended in me getting a black eye, while another patriot, thinking the other fellow was the offender, turned in and fought him while I beat a hasty retreat.

During the following two weeks there was a great rush to the colours and the first to leave Brandon was the 21st Field Ambulance in charge of Major Templeton, formerly Dr Templeton MD. Five or six days later they were followed by the 99th Manitoba Rangers and the 12th Canadian Dragoons which left on a Sunday morning on the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) for the east. There were hundreds of people there to give the boys a send-off and as the train pulled out the bands played Auld Lang Syne, the Salvation Army Band played the hymn 'Till we meet'. I wished many friends farewell for the last time, most of them fell in the Second Battle of Ypres. We afterwards learned that they reached Valcartier Camp, Quebec, and were placed in the 8th battalion with the 90th Winnipeg Rifles, better known as the 'Little Black Devils'. I continued to work on the street lighting for the City of Brandon until it finished on the 21st of September. Then I left for Winnipeg. When I got to Winnipeg I stayed at my old landlady's house, the one who I lived with the previous winter in Brandon. Her name was Mrs Gammie, 381 Langside Street. After a few days I got a job at my trade in the New Quebec Bank on Portage Avenue, but it only lasted a month as the war was beginning to make trade slack, but during the winter I did a few odd jobs, such as wiring skating and curling rinks, which of course was very cold, but I was idle nearly four months and I was beginning to think that this war was totally different from others and it was up to every able-bodied man to do his bit.

I tried for the Canadian Army Service Corps, and drilled nights with them but nothing happened, so I tried my luck with the Engineers and only just missed going away in a draft to Ottawa for training, so seeing no chance of getting on, I made up my mind for a job on the farm. I got a job in Cartwright, Southern Manitoba, with a farmer by the name of James Stancombe. He came from Cheltenham 33 years previous so he engaged me for the season at 20 dollars a month, payable at the end of the season. I worked for 5 dollars from 10th March until 1st April, then my 20 dollars a month counted until the end of October, 7

months for 140 dollars.

I liked the farm work very well, such as ploughing and harrowing. I also learned to milk, but I could not get along with the farmer. He was a very selfish man and his wife was worse and like most farmers all for number one, the war did not seem to concern him in the least.

I was his second man, his first man was a German named Julius Ninnmann from Pomerania, Prussia, but he was very illiterate and took very little interest in the war, his heart was not with Germany as he came out to America to escape military service 13 years previous. He only stayed a month as the boss thought him too slow. On July 1st I went to town (Cartwright) to find out about joining up. The recruiting agent did not seem to be very well informed about the Winnipeg units, but said the local doctor was going to be given authority to pass men for the army. I went to see the doctor, and asked if he thought I would pass if I went to Winnipeg. He did not think I would, but I came to the conclusion that he would not pass me when he did get authority as he was a friend of the farmer and would be doing the farmer a good turn by turning me down, as labour was scarce on farms.

I told the boss the next morning about wanting to join the army, but he, being like many more of his sort, thought more about his crop than his country. He did not like it and said he had heard in town that I was talking of joining up, and said he would keep me to my agreement to stay the season out, but I knew he could not, and would have taken him to court . I visited Cartwright a few days later, 5th July, and told the recruiting agent that I was going to Winnipeg to join up, and on my way back to the farm I had quite a row with the old farmer in the buggy, and threatened him to go and see the recruiting agent himself. This he would not do, as my case was too strong for him. He visited town on July 7th and brought back two hoboes to fill my place and the other man's. Hugh Henwood was his name, a remittance man I should judge of a well-to-do English family. We stayed a night at the hotel. Next morning I wished Henwood goodbye. The old farmer did not take long to pack us off and we were very happy to get away from him and he must have been very pleased to get rid of us as he drove us to town, seemingly with the greatest of pleasure. Henwood went to Killarney, Manitoba, while I came into Winnipeg. I stayed the night at the St James Hotel in Logan Avenue east. Next morning I went to see what regiments were wanting men. I found only one recruiting men, the 100th Winnipeg Grenadiers Regiment. I signed out the application form at one of their recruiting offices, in the Industrial Beaurue [Bureau?]. I was then taken to their headquarters on the corner of Main Street and York Avenue, passed the medical officer in the morning and was sworn in in the afternoon of the 9th day of July 1915.

Chapter II
My training in Canada until my departure for England
9th July 1915 – 15th May 1916

After I had taken the oath or was sworn in as they term it in the army I was paraded with several others and placed in No.3 squad as I was one of the first hundred to join this new battalion. We were marched to the university grounds opposite the Broadway drill hall where I had my first instructions in infantry training such as 'right turn', 'left turn', 'about turn', 'form fours', etc. We continued to drill on this ground until the 11th of August. We had been given our regimental numbers a few days previous. Mine was 147013, the

thirteenth man in this unit as my name began with 'A'. We were then called the 78th Battalion, CEF (Canadian Expeditionary Force) and were then shipped to Sewell, 118 miles west of Winnipeg, on the CPR. I did not go to Sewell until the 16th August, as I was sick with tonsilitis. On that day there was 30 of us went down, including our new band, for the 78th Battalion.

When I arrived at Sewell I did not care much for the look of the place, it was very sandy, and the wind was blowing about 12 miles an hour, it was also very hot. The first to greet me was Wallis Mundy who was a bell boy at the Grange Hotel while I was working there. The boys had been reorganized and made into a battalion, our OC was Lt Col Mitchell, an aged veteran of the North-West rebellion. I was placed in eight platoon B Company, our OC of the company was Captain Heron, our platoon officer Lieut Hegan. There were four others who came down with me, placed in the same platoon – Dick Redding, Jim Beasley, Arthur Maskell and Bob Brown. We were unfortunate enough to get into a tent with a fellow that was none too clean and being afraid of getting extra company we were moved into the next tent, at least Redding and I were, but it was jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, as we found out later, as the man had occupied that tent previous, so we all decided to report it to the Company Sergeant Major, who reported it to the Sanitary Sergeant. I happened to be put on guard about two days later, this being my first guard it was not without its humorous side of happenings as I did not know the difference in looks of a lieutenant from a colonel. I was licked into shape in a hurry by the RSM with several others, and was placed on No.1 beat, unfortunately that was the beat the guardroom was on, and where the Field Officers of the day inspected the guard. We looked *some* guard as all the government clothes we had issued was a wideawake straw hat - which was a great catch for the wind, the result was we were several times during the day chasing after it over the prairie – and a sweater coat to wear in the scorching sun.

Knowing my clothes would eventually go to the incinerator for their health, I sold my jacket to a fellow who was going on harvest leave for a dollar fifty. I greatly offended another who was trying to sell his to the same man, but I persuaded him that my coat was the better fit, so I got the cash, but the man who could not make the sale never forgave me.

On going off guard I was informed that our tent had been condemned. The boys who were sharing the tent with me were supposed to be far too unclean even to go on parade with other men, so the Sanitary Sergeant said all our clothes had to be burned, our blankets changed, and we were to get new clothes which were khaki. One of the fellow thought his melodeon had to be burned as well, so we hid it in the bush, but we were pleased to think we were going to be dressed in khaki and be real soldiers at last. So after we had our bath, rubbed ourselves in paraffin, we were paraded out in the midway in our birthday suits with only our boots on, until the Quartermaster Sergeant brought us our khaki. We dressed as quick as possible, then the sergeant said 'by the right, quick march'. I shot out my chest, with my chin in the air, feeling like a real soldier, until a very blunt corporal caught sight of us and said, 'Oh look at the lousy bunch'. My chest fell and my chin dropped, it was more like a convict suit to me then, as those who got the khaki so soon were those like myself who had to get a quick change.

There were eight in our tent. One was a Scotchman named Jack Gillis, a helpless sort of fellow, he was an ex-Winnipeg policeman, and used to bother us about dressing himself. He could not put on his puttees to his liking, so he always wanted some of us to help him, he was also very noisy. Another man was McGowan, another Scottie, who was very tight in

regards to money; and then rather than soil his trousers he finds a pair of old overalls which we found were very much alive. Of course there were one or two of us who roundly expressed our opinions. Charlie Vaughan was another. He was very dry and witty, always had a joke, in fact he never seemed serious, not even later when he was in France. He was the CO's chauffeur and used to have many adventures with the car. He could tell many tales about officers and their lady friends. There was Elverum who was in charge of the tent. He was a very officious guy. He even dressed himself when last post sounded one night and thought it was reveille. Needless to say he was greatly roasted about it for weeks after. The next man was a Russian named Zwypola; we called him Sopolio, the name of an American soap. He was discharged later as he could not understand English very well, but joined another unit and went to England that summer. We said 'Lucky beggar'. The next man was named Belasco, he said he was Belgian but we always doubted it. He had been discharged from other units previous as they could never find out who or what he really was, until the Camp Commandant, Colonel Eliot, spotted him while inspecting us one day and asked him where he had been born. He said Russia, also named the town, but was doubtful so that night he deserted but was afterwards arrested almost four months later, while trying to join a new battalion which was being formed in Winnipeg. He stayed a while but was allowed to transfer to another battalion, the 144th. The last man was Dick Redding, a cockney. He was my best mate and a very gentlemanly little fellow.

During our stay in Sewell we had a change in our command. Lt Col Kirkcaldy of Brandon took the place of Lt Col Mitchell, who was too old. The new colonel was a returned soldier, he was wounded at the battle of Langemark. He, being of course very much up in modern warfare soon licked us into the shape that was needed, greatly helped by Sergeant Major James, an ex-grenadier guardsman who we greatly admired.

There were quite a number of battalions at Sewell that summer. They were the 44th of Winnipeg, 45th of Brandon, 46th of South Saskatchewan, 61st of Winnipeg and ourselves comprised the infantry. The artillery was the 37th and 38th batteries of Winnipeg, two regiments of mounted rifles – the 9th and 10th Canadian Mounted Rifles, two regiments of cavalry – the Fort Garry Horse and the Strathcona Horse, besides the CASC.

We had one big upheaval at Sewell, over the food which was very bad, both by poor cooks and the scarcity. In fact it was so far gone as the boys rose from their tables and made a great demonstration before the OC, as after we had been busy drilling all day our supper was a bit of cheese about an inch square, and a little jam, and if we turned the plate upside down with the jam on it, it would not fall off. But we did get a little better food after that – but things did begin to look a little serious when they began to turn some of the tables over.

Several drafts left for England about the third week in September, including one from our battalion, D company. It caused a great disappointment among the other three companies, and we all wanted to transfer, but of course that was impossible. We were inspected by the Duke of Connaught about the second week in October but there was not very many to inspect as most of the boys were on harvest leave, so our battalion supplied the guard of honour, as being a new battalion harvest leave was not granted to us so we were almost up to strength.

Just about the time the Duke inspected us, a little later, we marched to Douglas, a distance of nine miles from our camp. It was bitter cold, and rained coming back, so we were wet through.

We had sports all public holidays. Labour Day, which was the first Monday in

September, our company B won the 'tug o' war', but C took off most of the sports. We also had sports on Thanksgiving Day, the third week in October. We had a big sham battle north of the camp, our OC was in charge of the Southern Army which was defending the camp against the Northern Army on the attack. The Southern Army composed of the following units, the 78th, 45th, 53rd, 10th CMRs and a battery of artillery, while the attackers were the 44th, 46th, the 9th CMRs and artillery. They had to cross the Grand Trunk Railway grade at four points which was supposed to be bridges over the River Rubicon. After a lot of marching and doubling, shooting off blanks at bush rabbits, the day was decided in our favour. But that march home at night, I will never forget it, how tired we all were. The 44th and 46th left for England a few days after that. How we did wish we were going with them. I think it was the 18th October they left, about 7 or 8 days after the Duke's visit.

We had several minor sham fights, both at night as well as day. Of course we always said we won, the other companies would always have it that it was in their favour.

We had our first experience of trench digging there, which was very easy work among the sand. They seemed so much of a novelty that the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, Sir Douglas Cameron, came from Winnipeg to inspect us and see the trenches. We also had the pleasure of defending them that night against the rest of the camp in his presence. Of course, we again were successful. I was on the guard of honour that day and met him at the train and presented arms. I can remember him walking down the line. He just saluted the officer in charge, Major Heron, and passed down the ranks without hardly a look at us and said 'splendid'. We also had a visit from the 500th battalion which were the Ladies Rifle Association, but of course the officers did all the entertaining.

We stayed at Sewell until the end of October, but it got very cold, especially at night, also a lot of rain. It was very uncomfortable having our breakfast, as the tables were in the open and it was often a case of settling down on the frosty slats, also the wind was biting cold, and the sand was used to sprinkle over our food like pepper.

I left Sewell in the advanced party for the Peg on the 24th October, we were the first battalion to come in from camp. My job was cleaning out the building we were to occupy at the old Agricultural College, Tuxedo Park, about 4 or 5 miles out of Winnipeg in the west of the city limits. The boys were very disappointed at the place being so far out, but we had the streetcars passing close by. This place stood on the south side of the Assiniboine River. The battalion came in on the 27th October, and C and D companies occupied the building nearest the river while A and B the building immediately south of that. The buildings were fairly warm, but ours was verminous so it had to be fumigated.

The 45th battalion went to the Exhibition grounds in the North End, the 53rd in Minto Street barracks, the 61st in McGregor Street barracks, the 10th CMRs went to Portage la Prairie while the 9th CMRs left for England, my chum Johnny Maxwell went with them. The 79th trained all that summer and winter at Brandon.

There were several new battalions that formed in the Peg that winter, the 90th, 100th (our sister battalion Winnipeg Grenadiers), 101st, 107th, 108th (Selkirk), 144th (sister battalion of the 90th), the 90th Winnipeg Rifles perhaps better known as the Little Black Devils, the 190th, 200th, 203rd the (Hard and Drys), 221st, 222nd the district unit, and two Scandinavian units the 197th and 223rd, also the 179th Cameron Highlanders, the 183rd the Orangemen, and the 184th.

As soon as we got properly started I was placed in the company signallers, and had buzzer practice in the cookhouse. I was very busy as drilling outside was very cold as we

had the most severe winter for years. In fact 78 inches of snow fell that winter. The training during winter was mostly physical exercises, rifle exercises, bayonet practice, and lectures, also courses on bombing. We had route marches on Wednesdays and bathing parades on Fridays to the Cornish St baths, and Saturday was barrack cleaning day. We were paid on the 15th and last of every month.

We had four days at Xmas, those who could not get away at Xmas had New Year. I spent my holidays with Mr & Mrs Maxwell, 108 Morley Avenue, and their sister Mrs Copeland and brother-in-law her husband who lived next door, 106. I also used to visit the social evenings at Point Douglas Presbyterian Church, also several friends who were associated with it, who were very fond of playing cards.

There was one big fight between the military and civil police, over a halfbreed Indian, who was drunk. He being a soldier, the military police thought it their duty to take care of him, but the civil police thought different so the fight began one Saturday night. Soldiers versus policemen, there were a lot of arrests, and many were hurt, both police and soldiers. It quietened down at midnight but started up next day (Sunday), the boys made the police liberate those who were arrested. This the police did, it all blew over all right in time, but not until all the windows in the police station in Rupert Street were broken. The public feeling was much against the police, but all the boys got 3 or 4 days confined to barracks. The 78th were well represented in the fight. This took place near the City Hall. Our armoury sergeant went crazy on Xmas night and began to shoot the place up, however he was caught, placed under guard, sentenced to 1 year hard labour but afterwards was put in the asylum. Drink was the cause.

We all paraded on the welcome back day in Winnipeg, as soon as all the units came in from Sewell. It was very cold, and we could hardly keep our feet on the ice. There were always rumours of our going away which always ended in disappointment until we really did go. We had several severe storms there that winter and there were many cases of frostbite. I had frozen ears, nose, fingers and big toes all in turn, but the felt overshoes were a great protection. There were quite a lot of sports, the soldiers had a hockey team, but were not very successful. The 61st won the Allan Cup, therefore were amateur champions of the world, but of course that was easy as ice hockey is only played in Canada and a few Northern States. There was also a boxing and wrestling tournament for the garrison. After the preliminary contest my company B won five out of the10 in our battalion. Bob Ferm was heavyweight champion of the garrison on Winnipeg. He was a fine boxer. Our other boys did not get much further, but the winners of our unit were Bob Ferm and Harry Miller of B, both boxers, while Red Preston, W S Jenkins and George Gray won the honours for our company in wrestling. I am sorry to relate that little George Gray was killed on Vimy Ridge, while Preston, Miller and Jenkins were all wounded. We used to parade to the different churches, until we had our services in the cookhouse.

We were all ready to move out for England on April the 17th but an epidemic of mumps overtook us so the 79th of Brandon took our place. The disappointment was awful, in fact many almost cried, and dozens got drunk over it, but we had only a month to wait when orders came, and after Decoration Day parade, which fell on a Sunday – the 14th of May – next day the 15th was the day. That early spring in Winnipeg will ever be remembered for its floods. The Red River and the Assiniboine overflowed and many houses in St Boniface and Norwood were up to the windows in water. This was owing to so much snow that winter and the ice blockade. Fort Rouge also suffered. Decoration Day of

1916 was the biggest military parade the Peg ever had. The 78th took first place in the infantry as we were the senior battalion. After us came the 90th, 100th, 101st, 107th, 108th, 144th, 179th, 183rd, 184th, 190th, 200th, 203rd, 221st, 223rd, and 197th, also 212th the American Legion. The 223rd and 197th were Scandinavian. We felt quite proud of ourselves that afternoon as it was a grand finish to our training in Canada. We marched from the Union Station, corner of Main Street and Broadway, passed the City Hall where we saluted the monument erected to the heroes of the Riel Rebellion who were killed in 1885, and on through the subway under the CPR, up to Selkirk Avenue. We were marching in line of platoons at column distance but at this point we about turned and came back in column of route, which is in fours. We marched up Portage Ave past Eatons Store and was dismissed just by Eatons in Hargrave Street.

I will never forget the excitement in packing up in the morning of the 15th of May. Everybody was happy, anxious to be ready. It was fine weather that morning, so the transports were soon off for the CPR Depot with a ringing cheer. All the boys were asked to invite their friends up to see them, but the weather was very wet, but we had a big crowd to see us, mothers to see their sons, wives to see their husbands, girls to see their soldier boys. It was a pitiful sight as the closing moments came on, as it was the last time together on earth. Many must have known it. I will never forget Jim Beasley wishing his mother goodbye. Poor Jim is now left on the battlefield of the Somme near Courcelette, also Bob Davidson, Sammy Richardson, Georgie Gray, boys of my platoon who fell in France wishing their girls goodbye for the last time. Little Tommy Wear also had his girl up to see him with her mother. I always took a great interest in Tommy, being that he came from Chalford, and I knew his parents, brothers and sisters.

It was pouring with rain when we started but that could not dampen our spirits as we marched off at 5pm down Academy Road, wishing the old college goodbye, also the little dinky streetcar that used to have such a crowd on when it was making the last trip at 11.30pm. Now some of the boys used to pull the trolley rope to stop the car so they could get on. We also bid goodbye to 'Smokestack Alley' as we used to call it. We crossed the Assiniboine over Maryland bridge, went down Cornish Street, Sherbrooke Street. As we passed the house of the parson, who used to preach to us in the cookhouse on Sunday morning church parade, the Reverend McEllern, Rector of St Matthew's, we let out a roaring cheer as he was one who deserved it. He waved to us, but could hardly keep from showing his feelings. We then turned down Portage Avenue, still singing, and roasting any 90th man we could see as they thought they were going in our places when we were stopped by the mumps. We went down Main Street, turned down Henry Avenue and marched into the CPR yards, where there were hundreds waiting for us.

It was not long before we got on the train and hanging out of the windows, thanking our friends for the parcels we received. I had five or six big parcels, in fact the fruit lasted me until I reached England. Here again were heartbreaking goodbyes. Now the girls used to stand on the car rods holding on to the boy in the car. Now they used to look at each other and could not say a word. I thought myself very lucky that I was not in love so I was spared any grief.

I had Bob and Mrs Maxwell to see me off, also several Point Douglas church people. Among them were Miss Rowe, one of the best friends I ever had, her sister Olive, now Mrs Dark, Miss Crawford, Eddie Dark, now husband of Olive, and many others.

We pulled out about 7 o'clock that night, amid great cheering and the bands playing

Auld Lang Syne. Thus the 78th Battalion of the 100th regiment Winnipeg Grenadiers started on their great and eventful journey for the battlefields of Europe.

Chapter III
The Journey from Winnipeg to Liverpool
15th May 1916 – 31st May 1916

We were about 1159 strong when we left Winnipeg with Lt Col Kirkcaldy in command, Major Simmonds second-in-command. Major Heron was junior major, while Majors Shipman, Linnell, Monserrat and Captain Hawkins commanded A, B, C, and D companies, Lt Hegan the machine gun section, Lt Tuckwell the signals, Lt Carey the transport while Captain Acheson was Quartermaster.

We were placed a platoon to a carriage. A company occupied the four next to the engine, B the next, and C the last four. D company and headquarter sections came on the second train. We soon crossed the prairie and was into the bush soon after dark, and as there was nothing much to see outside I decided to go to bed. Martin Sorensen, a Dane, shared the seats with me, we were issued with blankets and with our overcoat we were fairly comfortable. Bob Brown slept in the rack overhead. We had our kitbags and packs for company. We passed the provincial boundary line of Manitoba and Ontario, and arrived in Kenora on the Lake in the Woods about 1am. Two boys in my platoon belonged to Kenora, they were Billy Wright and Harry Hives. They had quite a lot of friends meeting them who supplied them with all kinds of parcels. They just changed engines as it is the divisional point, then started for Ignace which we reached in the morning about breakfast time. The ground was covered with snow as there had been a storm during the night.

The bush is very thick all the way from Kenora to Fort William, but there are places of several miles burnt black with forest fires, and left just the trunks of the tall trees standing, just big black poles without a single branch on them. The trees that grow in the Canadian forests are considered quite a novelty on estates in England.

We reached Fort William on Lake Superior about dinner time. I was put on sweeping out the car while the other boys went for a route march around town. I was disappointed I could not go with them. As soon as the boys came back we were again moving. The lake looked fine, just like the sea. In fact the Fort is a large shipping centre for wheat which goes to Chicago, Duluth and Detroit. There are several islands in the lake. The big one is called by the Indians the Sleeping Giant, because as you look at it from the shore it is like a man lying on his back with his arms folded. We passed through Port Arthur about three miles from the Fort, in fact these two towns touch each other now, and are the same size. We kept to the lake all that day and well into the night until we came into Schreiber. Here there was quite a crowd greeted us, also several Indians. The journey from the Fort passing through Chapleau to North Bay was rather monotonous as it is just rocks, bush and the lake to see. There were several fine rivers, which had plenty of water in them as it was spring but these rivers mostly go dry in the summer months unless there is a lot of rain. As we left the lake and went into the bush the lumber camps became more numerous, and on some rivers lumber was floating down to the mills. We passed through Sudbury which is a mining town situated in a bleak-looking district. This is the junction for Toronto...until we came to Nipissing lake. There we had another route march, up Klock Street. North Bay is the only big town excepting Sudbury on the CPR until you get to the Ottawa River, but as we left North Bay farms became more numerous, especially around

Mattawa. Passing Mattawa we came to the Ottawa. This is a beautiful river and it was quite a sight to see the lumber floating down to the mills. There must have been thousands of feet of it as whenever we looked at the river we could always see lumber.

We passed through Smiths Falls early morning of the 18th and after going through the prosperous farming district of Eastern Ontario we came to the suburbs of Montreal but Montreal did not give us much of a greeting as they are mainly French Canadian. In fact many of them scowled at us. We passed through several streets until we came to Park Avenue or Avenue de Parc, which is a beautiful avenue. We marched past the famous Mount Royal, noted for its famous toboggan slide, along Sherbrooke West, down St Lauren, across St Catherine's – one of the busiest streets in the city – until we came to the city hall, where we were inspected by the Duke of Connaught, with the 82nd battalion of Calgary.

After the Duke and his staff inspected us we marched down St James Street. This street is rather narrow but it is a very important one as many of the big banks of Canada have their headquarters on it. Passing the big square, Place d'Armes and Notre Dame cathedral, we turned to our right until we came to the CPR depot where our train met us, having come in from the suburb where we left it. We were soon aboard and left Montreal at once, not very sorry as the people took so little interest in us. In fact you would hardly know there was a war on and the only battalion that we could see recruiting there was the 199th Irish Rangers.

We at once had dinner. We certainly enjoyed it as it was our first march for two days but the food was always good on the train. After a short travel we crossed the St Lawrence over a bridge of great length, the longest bridge I was ever over, and continued our journey over the Government Railway, keeping close to the St Lawrence, passing through Rivière de Loup and further on Rimouski, just opposite where the Empress of Ireland went down the year previous. We got off next stop at Mont Joli for physical 'jerks', then continued our journey until we reached Bathurst in Gloucester County. But going through Quebec we got no reception at all, in fact after we left Montreal I only saw one soldier in Quebec. He was looking out of a door of an isolated farmhouse.

We passed through the Matapedia Valley, a beautiful spot, again there was all kinds of lumber floating on the river. We then crossed over the bridge at the point where the Quebec – New Brunswick boundary line is, and found the province of New Brunswick very different from Quebec. We stopped at Campbellton a short distance over the bridge, there we got the best reception we had during our journey. There were a lot of girls taking photos of us at this place, but we did not parade there.

We passed through Moncton just after dark and reached Halifax about 10 o'clock next morning, our second train about an hour later. We had dinner before we alighted, then marched to the quay where we met quite a number of boys who had left us for the east to visit their people. Some of them had been there since the 12th and 13th April before our first order for departure was cancelled, so they had a month's holiday.

Our boat was the Empress of Britain, she had been made into a transport ship and was painted grey. We marched aboard at once and I was quartered on E deck where we had our meals and slept in hammocks hung on hooks which suspended them over the tables. I had a bit of a look around and came on deck to see what Halifax and the harbour looked like. The harbour is almost surrounded by land, and guarded with a fort. It is a very pretty place about Halifax and the town is one of the oldest in Canada. There were a lot of ships in the harbour, also five or six cruisers. There were two more steamships there, the Baltic and

the Adriatic, both White Star liners carrying troops to England.

There were two more units besides us on board, also several drafts. One unit was the 92nd battalion, the Highlanders from Toronto, the other was the 82nd from Calgary. The troops were mostly artillery and the Canadian ASC. There was about 150 soldiers on board who had come from Bermuda.

The 78th had the top deck A for their exercises while the 82nd B and the 92nd C. We were not long in getting our hammocks slung but getting into them was another thing, at least keeping in them. It was quite a trick to keep our balance while climbing in, then when we were in it would fold up like a bag with a string pull. The food on the boat varied very much but on the whole it was not bad.

We stayed in the harbour all next day, the 21st, doing a little physical drill and practising answering the alarm. On hearing it we had to double to our respective decks, ready to get into the boats if necessary. Then next day the cruiser HMS Drake steamed out, followed by SS Baltic, SS Adriatic, our ship His Majesty's Transport Empress of Britain bringing up the rear. As it was an armed ship the gun faced the rear and was a 6 inch. This was the 22nd of May 1916 we sailed from Halifax, making it exactly six years to the very day of my stay in Canada, having landed May 22nd 1910 in Quebec just six years previous, with Walter Skinner who was now on this same ship going back to England with me.

We soon lost sight of Canada, the land of great opportunities, where a man is as good as his master, and no aristocracy to bow down to like it is in many places in England. The sea was very calm, but many of the boys soon got seasick, especially at night when they were in the hammocks. Of course, it was not very pleasant as the port holes had to be kept closed, and the meal tables were directly underneath.

I found the fruit very handy that I had gave me at Winnipeg, as there was not any to be bought on board, so I just used to eat my meals as hard as I could and run up to the decks to be in the open. I only slept down there two nights, until I got on the upper decks and slept in the open with Sammy Richardson. The first night it rained on us so we had to get inside again about 3 am, but next night we slept in the potato rack. I think we did this for three nights running but the potatoes began to get rotten and spoke very loud so we again moved our quarters, this time to A deck.

There was always a scrap about the decks. A deck was our quarters, but the other units used to sleep there before it had to be regulated, then everyone had to sleep on their own decks, but we always had to get up at 4.30 am as the sailors came to wash the decks.

I did not do any drill as I was a permanent fatigue man. I had a wash house to clean out mornings with two other fellows, which was a job of about thirty minutes – my day's work. We had most of our boys on guard, looking for submarines, but I think it was a joke as I don't know what rifles would do with a U-boat.

The sailors on board began a game of crown and anchor which is played with three dice in a cup, with a crown, an anchor, a diamond, a heart, a club and a spade in each of them. The dice are shaken out on a cloth which, too, has the six pieces painted on it. If you back a certain piece you get your money doubled or trebled as the case may be, but this game was stopped by the skipper and several were arrested. There was also dispute about the difference of value between Canadian and English money. The house lottery was permitted. It was not so bad as chances were fairer.

The sea was very calm all the way over. We saw a school of whales spouting in the distance, and at night the 29th of May we sighted our escorts, three destroyers. The

excitement was very great and we gave them a great cheer. They were very swift but very small. The transports took a zigzag course for quite a long time to trick submarines if any were about.

Early next morning, the 30th, we sighted Ireland, the coast of Donegal. The fields looked so green, also the hedgerows. One of the boys, a Canadian, took the hedgerows for ditches and said 'Thought Ireland was a country that had plenty of rain' and thought it a funny thing that they should irrigate the land.

We sailed down the North Channel, having overtook the Baltic and Adriatic which were slower boats. We saw the coast of Scotland, sailed round the Isle of Man, saw Douglas in the distance, also the coast of Wales on the south and sighted New Brighton and Liverpool about 2pm, reached it about 30 minutes later and docked.

There was great excitement coming into the harbour. People came across on the ferries to give us a cheer, all the boats that passed us greeted us with cock-a-doodle-do, we had our bands playing, and as we passed the little gunboats which were our escorts we gave them a mighty cheer. As we looked out on New Brighton and Liverpool, many Englishmen said we had been missing life, shut out on those Western Prairies, and I wondered as well.

Chapter IV
Landing in England 31st May 1916 until departure for France 12th August 1916

We disembarked next morning, 31st May, and proceeded to our train. I will never forget how we all laughed at the coaches, they seemed so small after those in America and many Canadians could hardly believe we had to ride in them. However they soon found out we did, and we were soon on our way, but the boys thought our trucks were very small, holding only ten tons, when in Canada they hold between 35 and 40 tons.

The country looked beautiful, in fact I did not know England, it looked so beautiful. The Canadians would not admit it, but most of them are overcome by the beauty of it. In fact little Charlie Waterman said words could not express its beauty, and the railway system was perfect. Bob Davidson said why did people leave it. I again wondered. We reached Crewe, stayed for a while, passed through Wolverhampton, and stayed for dinner at Birmingham where several girls had tea and sandwiches ready for us. There were three boys in my platoon who would like to have had a few hours here. They belonged to 'Brumm'. They were Fred Silk, Bob Brown and Sam Richardson. We were again on our way south somewhere, over the London Northwestern, we passed through Oxford and Reading, felt very hungry when we saw the biscuit factories. We passed Byfleet as we were now on the LSW line until we reached the outskirts of Aldershot. It was only a short while before we came to Bordon station.

We thought we had to march to Bramshott, a distance of nine fine big miles, but we were happy to find ourselves turning down the alleyway to the huts of Bordon Camp. Of course I at once wrote home. It had to be censored as it was not to be known when we came for a while. We were very tired so we were issued with blankets, made our beds on the hard floor and were soon in them, but we could hardly sleep for excitement, so we had to sing, old SA Johnson leading, ably seconded by Harry Goodridge and Sammy Richardson. When we awoke next morning, the boys were soon about the canteens. Charlie Vaughan said he bought a piece of cake for 'one punce' I went and bought some note paper, and asked for 'six pence worth' having forgotten the correct expression in England. The girl gave me more than I could hardly carry, so I said I would take one pennyworth, as I had forgotten how much paper I could buy for a penny. The boys used to spread all their money out on the counter when they went to a shop, so the clerks used to take the amount required. It was a good job they were honest as the boys could have been done.

There was also an English beer canteen at Bordon. The boys got very high as English beer was then much stronger than the American beer, so the result was we had plenty of singing at bed time, and a smoke room yarn or two from SA Johnson. He always finished up by reading his testament before he went to sleep – it must have been to balance things up. He used to watch the trains coming while Goodridge used to watch them going on our trip through England.

After a day or two I had the news of little Winnie's death. I did not feel very happy in Bordon after that as I only just missed seeing her after so long away. She died 4 days before I left Winnipeg.

I paid a visit to Farnham, about 9 miles distance from Bordon, we happened to get a motor lorry and gave the driver sixpence each. I think he thought the Canadians some boys

as there was about 8 of us. Walter Skinner was with me, also Bill Lawrie and Joe Yeardye. We had a walk around the castle and about Farnham, found it a nice old-fashioned little place. There is also a very nice park there. There were several units of South Africans there. One battalion had a baboon for a mascot, they used to get it drunk which made it more comical. One lad in charge of it used to bring it to our camp. At night it was great fun seeing it sitting on some fellow's chest when he was sleeping, and to see him jump when he awoke.

The two nearest villages to Bordon Camp beside the small village of Bordon itself was Headly, a very pretty place which lay about a mile and a half off the London-Portsmouth road via Farnham, and Whitehill, about three-quarters of a mile farther down the road. We stayed at Bordon Camp about 10 days, then we moved down the road for about 3 miles to Longmoor ranges. We had been expecting to get leave at Bordon but it fell through as our OC was so anxious to get us brigaded so he went on the ranges first, while the 80th battalion who were also at Bordon went on leave. It was during the time we were at Bordon that the Battle of Jutland was fought, also Lord Kitchener got drowned.

Longmoor is a camp just for the rifle ranges. Blackmoor is the nearest Post Office, but the place of Blackmoor is just a hamlet. Blackmoor Church lies a mile off the main road on the left going towards Farnham. The village of Greatham is a little further down, it has a nice church where there are a lot of soldiers buried, also the ruins and graveyard of the old church. About two or two and a half miles from Longmoor is the village of Liss, it is quite a large village with a railway station, and the town of Petersfield lies four miles further towards Portsmouth.

One Saturday while I was at Longmoor I hired a bicycle and went to Frensham, as I had heard Father speak so much about Frensham Pond, I thought I would go and see it. Well, I can say it is quite a big pond, and the people who live in the village of Frensham appear to be a very well-to-do sort. I cycled on until I came to Farnham, stayed a while to have another look around, then on again; but when I got about three miles out I had a puncture. I walked back off the road to a village to get it mended, found the repair man out, but his wife gave me stuff to mend it with. I patched up as best I could, then continued, but had another almost directly. I offered up a prayer or two as I had to walk about eight miles into Bordon as all repair shops were shut in Farnham, Saturday afternoons. When I got to Bordon I bought a new tube, continued to Longmoor, where the man I hired the bike off bought the tube off me. When I got to camp I found the boys had been paid, and no one was allowed out that afternoon, so I pulled the wool over their eyes for once, much to my own regret that I went on the trip at all, as I walked more than I rode, also missed my pay but got it two days later.

I did very well at the ranges. I made 116 points so I passed as a first-class shot; if I could have got 14 more points I would have been a marksman, but I fell down on the 600 yards.

After about 8 days there we packed up and marched to Bramshott. It was an awful hot day, and men kept falling out, all up the road. We were sore and tired when we got to the camp. Bramshott Camp is on a hill about two miles from Liphook. There is no village of Bramshott excepting 'tintown' erected for the convenience of troops. Bramshott Chase was the Post Office, but we had one in the camp. Bramshott is in Hampshire but the three counties of Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex meet just near it, at a place called Shottermill, about a mile away. Haslemere is about two miles from camp, it is quite a big village and very pretty. It is on the River Wey. Hindhead is also about two miles up the road from

camp, while Grayshott lies a mile off the road.

We went into very hard training here, in fact it was heart breaking. We used to go out to Ludshott Common and stay all day. We used to do physical 'jerks', bayonet fighting, and extended order drill. I always went on with the signallers after we did physical drill, so I did not find it so hard as some. We went to practise the review at Hankley Common on the 26th of June as the King was to inspect us on July 1st. Our brigade was the 12th of the fourth Canadian division, the battalions were the 72nd from Vancouver, 73rd from Montreal, both Highlands, the 87th from Montreal, and ourselves the 78th of Winnipeg. I will never forget coming back up that hill from the valley up to Hindhead, it is the biggest hill I ever climbed, it was very tiring especially with a pack on, and I had an idea I was in for mumps as my face began to swell up. I felt very tough that night. Next morning I went to the Medical Officer, commonly called the MO. Of course the verdict was mumps, so I had to report to the camp hospital. After staying in the camp hospital for a few hours the ambulance came for me, so off to Aldershot I was packed. We called at Witley camp on the way. Several fellows there of the Middlesex regiment looked in at me, asked me if I was wounded. I said no, I have the mumps. You should have seen them beat it. Martin Sorensen and Jim Beasley were isolated as they slept next to me. Jim was just in before the Major applying for a pass to see his brother in Norwich hospital who had come from France wounded. The Company Sergeant Major came in and said this man can't have leave, he has to be isolated. Of course Jim offered up a prayer or two about me, but Jim and Martin had three weeks' holiday as there was nothing to do in the Isolation Camp. We passed through Farnham on our way to Aldershot. After arriving there I had a bath, got into hospital clothes which of course were blue with a red neck tie and a white shirt. As soon as I got into the ward the first man I saw was Stacey Johnson of my platoon, he had been sent down a day or two before. I was very disappointed at being sick as Mother and Father was coming up to see me at camp and I had already engaged a room for them in Haslemere, so it had to be postponed.

I found the nurses and orderlies all very nice but the head nurse was an old crank. It seems a funny thing that they always pick the old cranks which are always old maids for head sisters. I was very sick from bronchitis, more so than the mumps in fact. My temperature went up to 104½ degrees, it looked as though I was going to be there longer than the specific time which was supposed to be three weeks. We got very good food there and being more of an invalid than the rest I was fed on chicken for a week. There was an orderly there named Stokes, he was an old soldier, and had been out during the retreat from Mons. He had also been in India. He was very comical and made lots of fun.

The old doctor was a nice old fellow, used to make fun of my nice moustache, said it was a splendid one. Well, three weeks in the hospital got very tiring as I had also heard they were granting weekend leave so I was very anxious to get back to get a leave.

Well, I was sorry I missed seeing the King, but I had a good rest and I had two pays coming. I was recommended for seven days' sick leave by the Aldershot MO but our battalion would not grant it, but I put in for a weekend pass for the next weekend of Saturday the 22nd of July and got it, also that weekend Jim Beasley got a pass to see his brother. I had been doing my light duty all the week, and did not report sick on the Saturday morning for fear of getting my pass stopped, so that at 11am I paid a fellow three shillings to do my work for me, which was washing up in the officers' mess.

We were let go at 11.30am to catch the noon train at Liphook. We certainly did

move and got into the train when it was moving out. We got to London a little after 1 o'clock. There we separated. I went by tube on the Bakerloo to Paddington, my train pulled out at 2.45pm and got to Stroud at 5.25. I thought I never saw anything so beautiful as the West of England. I always have a look at Coates church, just after leaving Kemble, it is not long then before we are into the Hailey tunnel, then the Sapperton tunnel, then out into the Golden Valley, the prettiest part of the trip on the Great Western line. Straight across the valley is Oakridge, Bournes Green, then comes France Lynch and Chalford. On this trip I met a fellow, he was the brother of the Reverend Phillips who was at one time the Rector of France Lynch church. He used to live in Winnipeg so we had a very interesting talk together, and he said Winnipeg must have grown enormous since he left. We pulled into Stroud about 5.35pm and on getting out on to the platform I began to look about for anyone I knew, but it was not until I was outside the station I was successful. There I saw young Maurice Skinner, but it was he who spoke first as I would not have known him, also met Cyril Fisher, Lionel's brother. After waiting for the 6 o'clock from Cardiff to come in we then started for *home*, after over six years. I was very anxious to get away, but far more eager to get back again, even only for a few hours, to the prettiest place I ever saw.

I met Dick Sollars on the Cross. I would not have known him if Maurice had not have told me. I shouted to him so he came up and spoke but did not know who I was. Well, I thought it was come to a fine pass. I hardly knew anyone and no one knew me among the ones I used to go to school with, but however Dick tumbled to who I was at last. We stopped for passengers at the Black Boy School, who were women from Bisley. They began to look through me as if I was a mirror. I was more amused than otherwise, and could hardly keep from laughing at the old talk, was trying to think what 'ouseuwuvur' meant. They called at The Target of course. I was offered a drink but declined, as I thought I was being much delayed in getting home. We got started 'awuvur' leaving the one man of the party following behind us. One of the ladies was at school with me. I could place her long before she knew me. 'Awuvur' Maurice told them who the victim was of their searchlights, of course I was an old friend at once, who was lost and found again. They had actually seen Mr Andrews the 'kipper' a very short while ago, so you see how much I was thought of. This particular one that I knew at school was now the mother of a large family like many more of them. There was also a nice young lady there, she seemed very refined in talk, but she fell in my estimation when she strongly expressed herself on one occasion.

After we reached the top of Stroud Hill we all jumped into the trap again. I was soon talking to the old man about the situation in general, annoyed him very much in giving him my American opinion on the Japanese. He said the English race were the only race in the world, I told him he would not say so in America, as there were others as good. The result was I was called a pro-German, a damned Yankee, and was almost being thrown off the cart. There is one thing, the old boy was a true Englishman. He also said, 'We be agwayin to wiyup um off the feyace or th'earth'.

'Awuvur' I got off at the lodge gates at Lypiatt, being much nearer for me, also for better company for the people going to Bisley. By me leaving the old man, I met old Pocketts and McOwan in the Park, pitching hay on a wagon. He says "ullo Willum', the first time I was called Willum since I left home. He was the last to call me Willum when I left six years ago. Mac of course had a lot to tell me about their Bill, also in France. I came down from Lypiatt along the bottom of Boyswood, a cock pheasant flew up at my feet almost scaring me to death, as I forgot there was such a thing as a pheasant. It was not

many minutes before I was walking into 'our yard', seeing two little boys under the pump. I would have known them anywhere I believe, there was no mistaking them for anything else but brothers. This was the first time I had ever seen them. Mother was ironing in the back kitchen, and wondered who the owner of the strange voice was, but she soon knew. Maggie came in, and if I had met her away from home I would not have known her. I had a lot to say in so short a time, but was disappointed in finding Father gone to Chalford to meet me by a later train. It was not long before I was visiting, but I could only see those who were very near. When I got back I was pleased to find Grandfather [George Curtis] down to see me, he was the same old sort, not altered a bit. Of course it interested him about America as he had been out there years before.

Father was disappointed when he got to Chalford to find I had not come there, so it was a pleasant surprise for him when he got home. When I was home they had the news of Bob Rymer's death, he was killed at Ypres. Of course, it cast a gloom over us all. I stayed until 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon. It only seemed moments to me but I left knowing I would get another leave before I went to France. Father, Maggie, Grandfather and Mrs Curtis came to see me off at Chalford station. I got back to camp about midnight of July 22nd, satisfied that I had a glimpse of home once more.

The next week was a week of hard training, but as I was in the company signallers I escaped the hard part of it, as we only used to do physical drill one first hour, then signalling all the rest of the day. Our training ground was Ludshott Common. We also did a large amount of extended order drill. We were inspected by General Alderson, on our manoeuvres. We also had a test march with a pack full of clothes and 120 rounds of ammunition. We marched through Liphook, Headly and back through Grayshott and camp again. There was a lot who fell out on the march, but I stuck it. I had not been out of hospital but ten days so I did not do bad in sticking it.

We got our final leave the next Friday night: all went whose names began with 'A' down to 'L' so I was well in the fore for leave. We were paraded down to Liphook to catch the 5 o'clock train, but as the whole fourth division was on leave there was an enormous crowd there. The boys were taking any voucher at all if they went anywhere near their destination. Most of them went to London, but it was 10.20pm before I could get away. There were several boys for the west of England with me, and on reaching London I made for the underground railway, knowing the way around better than the rest. I had a trail of the boys following me. We were soon in the tube car and travelling for Paddington, but we missed the train by only two minutes so we went to the YMCA on Praed Street to put up for the night as our next train was not until 5.30am. I slept under the billiard table as all the beds were taken up. I had the company of several Australians for the night. We were up by 4.30, had breakfast and was soon on our way for the west. I telegraphed home from Didcot, and I changed at Swindon where I left several boys for the localities of Bristol and Taunton.

I got off at Chalford and went through Eastcombe, called at Grandfather's and Mr Antill's. Of course, Mr Antill had to tell me about my enormous appetite as a boy while rabbiting, shooting in the Chantry wood. He used to imitate me by getting his cap in his hand to represent the size of the piece of bread I used to eat. As he says, I used to carry meat in one pocket and bread in the other.

Maggie was looking out of the window as I came down the Horse road. They were surprised to see me home again within a week. I had very little time to visit as my pass only extended the evening of the 29th until midnight August 1st, so I spent all my time at home. I

visited little Winnie's grave in Bisley cemetery while I was at home.

I left home about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. This being the final leave I need not mention parting from Mother. Father and Maggie saw me off at Stroud station, and my hope was when I left that it would not be long before I was home again. I was also hoping I would meet Alec in France, but thought then I would have no such luck. I expected to meet Aunt Sis and Uncle Mark at Swindon but missed seeing them through a mistake, also missed seeing Fred Close owing to him being on duty at Woolwich Arsenal. I had the pleasure of meeting Uncle Alec and George Warren at home.

On reaching London I went by tube from Paddington to Waterloo station. There was an awful crowd of Australians there with their girls, some girls I must say, then the Canucks came on with theirs, most of them the same class. We reached camp at midnight. Next day I heard of some of the boys' adventures, mostly with girls of course, much to their regret also much to their debt, but I would not relate any of these adventures.

We had a review again at Hankley Common. This time it was by Lloyd George, then Minister of Munitions, and General Sir Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia in Canada. The next weekend all the boys from 'M' to 'Z' went on leave but they did not get such a long leave as us as they did not start until the morning where we started at night. It caused great discontent amongst us, getting so short a leave.

We won for ourselves by boys going to Aldershot the name of the Greasy Grenadiers through our clothes being so greasy owing to the oil which we were made to put on our harness by the OC of the Winnipeg garrison, Colonel Rutten.

I paid a couple of visits to Guildford. The first I went with Walter Skinner and Joe Yeardye. We broke bounds and went by bus, it is very pretty country between Haslemere and Guildford, a distance of seventeen miles. By bus it took an hour and twenty minutes to make the trip. We ran into two of our officers there. They pulled us up for being so far from the camp, and told us to get back there as soon as we could, but thinking they had no business themselves there we decided to stay. Guildford is an old town, the capital of Surrey. It has two streets that may be called the business centres, High Street I think the busiest is called. There is also the ruins of the fine old castle. I paid a visit to this, but like other old castles, just the bare old stone walls and ivy growing on them when they are in ruins. The museum is also very interesting as there are relics of the Romans there such as pottery and tiles, also pieces of bombs that fell from Zeppelins that came over the town.

The next visit I paid was with Tom Suty. We went boating on the River Wey, but it was very poor boating as the river is so narrow. We had one or two collisions. I knocked a young lady's hat off with my oar, but nothing more serious happened.

We had a busy week before us, as we were expecting to make a move. There was great excitement and we were all wondering when the day would be. The 11th brigade had already gone, and on Friday 11th of August we knew we were to move out next day; so on the Friday night there was a great celebration, singing, cheering, bands playing, drinking, smashing windows, which took all our canteen money to pay so we only got 10 shillings where we should have got 28, but there was crooked work done, as we had over 1000 men, and we did not do twenty shillings worth of damage, but there is no use kicking now as the men who the money belongs to are now lying in France or wounded; but will there ever be justice in the army for those in the ranks?

It was the early hours of the Saturday morning before we got to sleep, we had just our overcoats as the blankets were packed. Between the hours of 12 and 1pm we formed up

opposite the No. 2 YMCA. After a few minutes we were marching down the road to Liphook Station. We waited for about an hour in the field until the transports we loaded on the trucks, we then entrained and were on our way for Southampton. We landed at the docks where we saw the Olympic, also Lascar stokers walking around. We then marched to the embarking point, and after carrying mailbags off the train to the ship we then embarked on this same ship, Lydia. We were soon sailing down Southampton Water, passing Cowes, Isle of Wight, on the right and Portsmouth on the left. By the time darkness came we were well out at sea on our journey to France – the place where we were so anxious to be, but from where so many of our battalion were never to return.

MY 8 MONTHS IN FRANCE

Le Havre, Poperinghe, Ypres, St Omer, Warloy, Albert, Bouzincourt, Pozières, Courcelette, La Boisselle, Bruay, Maisnil-lès-Ruitz, Villiers-au-Bois, Carency, Souchez, Houdain, Barlin, Etaples and Calais

Chapter V
Le Havre and Belgium
13th August 1916 – 23rd September 1916

The sea was beautiful and calm, we were lucky with our sea voyages, both crossing the Atlantic and Channel, but we were very tired crossing the latter as we had to sit and sleep. Those on deck felt very cold during the night, but I was lucky enough to be guarding the rations on the deck just below the main deck, so we were well protected, also could help ourselves when we were hungry. I only did guard for one hour as there was quite a number of us for the duty.

The channel seemed well guarded as we could see the lights of the signals flashing here and there. We sailed into the harbour at Le Havre about daybreak. We were all leaning over the rails of the boat, looking towards the land. We could see other ships in dock, also the hospital ship, the Lanfranc, since torpedoed. She was waiting to be loaded with casualties to sail to England with. There was also little groups of civilians watching us from the streets of the city. This was all so interesting to us as this was the first foreign land most of us had ever seen. After having breakfast which consisted of cheese and biscuits, the boat pulled along the quayside. We then disembarked, on 13th of August 1916, on a Sunday.

The big building that stands on the quayside was made into a military hospital where the wounded were quartered and cared for by the sisters that seemed to be always coming and going to the patients on the balcony who were laying in their cots. These casualties were booked for Blighty as soon as there was enough of them to go.

We were very interested in the little French boys who were selling us English-French conversational dictionaries for the purpose of helping us in purchasing expeditions in France. We were also amused by the French marine who was on guard at the quayside, and how careless he carried his rifle, also the way he saluted as we marched past him, which was casting the rifle up and catching it at the small of the butt with the right hand, keeping the rifle close to the right side and bringing the left hand to the lower band. This is the way they present arms.

We marched through the docks into the city where we could see how different it was from England, in people, languages and buildings. There was no cheering as there were so many in mourning and it was a regular occurrence to see British troops come to this port. We sang of course to keep up the true British spirit. As we marched on we saw the French colonial troops which were black, filling up trucks with coal. Also marched past a guard of Frenchmen in their blue uniforms, they saluted us by presenting arms like the marine did at the docks. We marched through what I should judge to be the centre of the city, a big

square with stately old buildings surrounding it. A little way from here we halted for a short rest as the long march and heat began to tell on us, but as soon as we halted we were surrounded by little French middies, asking for pennies, also singing Tipperary to us in good English and The Marseillaise in French which they seemed to sing with a vengeance.

There were several buildings with the Belgium flag flying as we passed, these were the different headquarter offices of their various government departments as their government moved from Brussels to Le Havre after the invasion. After a zigzag and long march we came to a steep hill. After climbing this we came to our camp which overlooked the town towards the sea. It was a beautiful view. As soon as we told off so many in each tent, we were at the canteen. I made a purchase out of the ten shillings I had, and received my first French money in change, which was two two-franc notes, three one-franc coins, a few French coppers.

We felt very strange here as it was only our own boys we could talk with, as we could not speak French, so we could not pass any compliments to the pretty French girls we saw there. It seemed almost a tragedy but we could make eyes, but it was not long before we could speak a word or two. We had two bathing parades to the beach but the one I was on was too rough a sea for bathing. We found the French ways very different from our own, some very immodest we thought.

There was a Belgium hospital near our camp. We used to talk with them over the fence, they could speak real good English and wished they could have stayed in England when they were there as they came to England as refugees from Antwerp. Some of the boys had very peculiar experiences with the French people by asking the way in French as best they could, very often the Frenchman would laugh and direct them in English. Our boys were soon around the estaminets buying wine, which I found was very good, especially the Malaga, it was also very cheap and not at all strong.

Two days after we landed in Le Havre we had orders to move. We were soon ready and on our way to the town. We certainly did cheer as I never heard cheering before, we were so pleased to do our little bit for our country. The people smiled on us and wished us goodbye and good luck. One Frenchman said I hope you come back smiling and cheering. I will always remember it like all the boys I knew did, that man knew what it was and I do, now. We halted once on our way to the train, and while we were resting a Frenchman entertained us by singing La Marseillaise. He had previously been to an estaminet and he could hardly keep his feet, but he could sing and would make us try on his hat while he would try on ours, and it made us laugh to see Martin Sorensen the big Dane in his bowler, also Harry Hives. It was like a pimple on a pumpkin. One French girl looked so attractive to old Tom Lomas that he slipped out of the line and kissed her. Old Tom seemed to have nerve enough for anything.

When we arrived at the station our train was waiting for us, which was made up of cattle trucks with the following writing on. 8 chevaux 40 hommes which meant 8 horses or 40 men, and as we happened to be the latter 40 of us piled in, at least they said it was forty, but I doubt it as we were a very tight fit, but we greeted the boys in the neighbouring trucks with baas and moos, but I well believed it was used for horses as we all had the smell as if we lived in a stable. This affair put me in the mind of a circus, but we were the goats all right. It was not long before we settled down, but talk about a tangle of legs and arms, to see the mass of legs in the middle of the car, we wondered how we would know who they belonged to. It was a good job they were fastened on the bodies of the different individuals.

It was about midnight before we moved out. It was an awful journey. Our rifles and equipment kept falling off the nails that were driven in the walls. I was laying down over a flat wheel, so the result was not pleasant with the continual bumping. It was just about now the fancy expressions began to come into fashion, and our troubles in France began. The train came to a stop about 8am, we got out and had breakfast at the side of the railway. The dixies full of hot tea went down fine, we were away again in about thirty minutes. The railroads in France are not so well laid as they are in England, as the Nord that we were on had no chairs, the rails were just screwed down on the sleepers. The wonderful crops we saw coming up was the biggest talk. I never did see such a fine crop as they had that fall.

All the bridges were guarded as we came up, mostly by elderly men, in peacetime French uniform, which was mostly red caps and coats and corduroy trousers. There were several different places where we saw newly formed battalions of French soldiers drilling in their blue uniforms. They were mostly young lads just called up.

We passed the outskirts of Rouen about midday, then kept close to a river for miles. The road we were now on was the main road from Calais to Paris. After catching a glimpse of the sea again and passing through Calais we then went more inland until we came to St Omer. We knew then we were not far from Belgium, in fact we began to file out of the cars but found out we had to continue. After passing St Omer the land is very low, and well supplied with small canals where most of their transport is done by boats.

At 10.30pm we came to a stop. We then alighted. We were then at the end of our train journey at a point near Poperinghe, Belgium on the 16th August. We could hear the occasional report of a gun on the front. We then knew that war was no myth. After helping unload we then marched about 3 miles until we came to a group of wooden huts. This was to be our home sweet home for a night or two. Each hut held about three dozen men, but there was far more in our hut that night. But we were so tired so we were soon asleep and did not care. We only had our overcoats to cover us and they were wet through in the morning when we woke as the rain came through the roof. But we contented ourselves that we would get worse before it was over.

The camp stood about a mile and a half from the village of Vlamertinge. To the southwest of this village there were two other regiments in this camp while we where there, the 1st CMRs and and a Welsh regiment. We did a lot of drilling, also had practice in gas attacks and went for small route marches where we saw some small graveyards of our boys who had fallen in action. We could hear the guns quite plain from here, also hear the rattle of the machine guns and see the shrapnel shell bursting around the aeroplanes. We could see that the war was now very near us, it was not five thousand miles away now as it was when we were in Winnipeg. We were greatly interested in the country, also the people who seemed very industrious. The land was cultivated to the last inch, also very fertile. There was a fine crop of hops, also a fine yield of wheat, more beautiful crops I never saw, but the people seemed to have very old methods of farming, mostly owing to their limited means.

We were warned for the reserve on the afternoon of the 19th. We packed our kits, was issued with ammunition and iron rations, afterwards formed up and marched off. Only B and C companies went this time. We marched on to the main road to Ypres from Poperinghe. There was an awful lot of traffic up and down that night, the infantry marched in the middle while the transports kept the outsides. There were several halts owing to the congestion of transports, but we were not allowed to fall out. We were very tired as we had not a single rest all the way and the Ross rifle made it worse as it is far heavier than the Lee

Enfield We marched through the ruins of Vlamertinge until we came to a level crossing, and just as my platoon was on the crossing we heard a noise like an aeroplane coming towards us. Instinct told us it was a shell, also report, naturally there was some ducking. Little Percy Taylor ducked in front of me. I happened to be gazing elsewhere so over him I goes. I thought I was knocked down by a shell. I was soon on my feet, and began looking around me. I wondered what had become of all the boys. The first I saw was Percy crawling on his hands and knees up the road. I don't know if he intended to crawl the rest of the way to Ypres which was about three miles farther. However one by one they came out of their different retreats such as under wagons, out of the ditches, and from behind the trees – such is the history of the first shell we encountered on Suicide Crossing as the Tommies call it.

As we entered the city of Ypres everything seemed so weird, the roofless houses, the clattering of soldiers on the paved streets, no shouting of any sort, all men spoke quietly.The only people who entered or stayed in the city were the soldiers, the only company we had was rats by the hundreds. In fact they would crawl over us while we were laying down wide awake. Some battalions would be going in, some coming out. Some would be resting on the street side. A fellow would say 'What battalion are you?' 'The 78th' would be the reply. 'Where are they from?' another would say. 'Winnipeg' would be the answer. 'Do you know so and so?' someone else would call out. Such was the limited conversation of the troops.

My platoon was billeted in the cellar of a fine old house. I should think it was a monastery by the appearance of the ornaments and crucifixes laying broken on the floors. We had several old beds to lay on there, that must have been rescued from ruined houses. There was also a nice garden at the back but two years' neglect had made a difference. I managed to find a few stray strawberries there. The rest of B company were billeted on the same street near the cathedral, the beautiful building now in ruins, also the Cloth Hall. We were soon souvenir hunting. I got a piece of glass out of the windows of the cathedral, some of the boys got a piece off the bell.

About noon our guns opened up. As this was the first time we had heard our guns so close we thought it was shells bursting in the city. It was fun to see the boys getting into our little cellar in a very short space of time. Billy Wright the cook was on guard at the door. He falls flat on the ground, but we soon saw our folly. But it was good practice, we have often laughed at it since then. C company did not come to Ypres, their billets were in a farm to the right. There were also troops quartered in the Belgium barracks. This was a fine place by the appearance of it, but was now badly battered by shell fire. We were only in Ypres 24 hours, when we packed up and made our way back to camp once more, on the 20th of August, about 8pm. The 73rd was in front of us. Our guns opened up on the right as we were going down, but as we did not know the difference yet between the firing of a gun and the explosion of a shell there was some more ducking.

Henry Mann or Long Henry as we sometimes called him fell flat on the ground. He did it so neat that the corporal thought he must have been hit, but he soon was on his feet again, but we made great fun of him over it. All at once we heard a screeching noise in front of us, then a terrible explosion. I saw a great sheet of green flame rise and vanish. This shell fell right into the 73rd battalion in front of us. It killed sixteen and wounded seventeen men. As we passed it was a pitiful sight to see them laying on the roadside, the dead and wounded. We had not gone far when another shell fell in front of us. This one killed five or six men, also wounded several and killed a horse. These men belonged to the transports. We arrived back about midnight, was packed into our huts and were soon asleep.

After 2 days rest at camp we packed up and marched through Poperinghe to Abeele, a village on the Franco-Belgian border about two and a half miles from Poperinghe. There we went under canvas. The battalion did mostly company and platoon drill, while I went out practising with the signals on telephone work. Abeele is a fine little place and has a beautiful church, Roman Catholic of course. I went inside it with Jim Beasley and the priest told him that the people of Abeele built it with their own hands. There was also beautiful lace made there by the old women. It is wonderful to see them with pieces changing so quickly from one hand to another, faster than you could count.

There is also a big aerodrome there, where we saw machines coming and going all the time. We saw several planes come in, the worse for wear, one could hardly get to the sheds. After we had been at Abeele three days we moved again, this time to Reninghelst, about three or four miles from Poperinghe. There we went into huts again on the 25th of August. At the village which is quite a size there is a windmill which was close to the camp, also some good baths that was a brewery before the war. Reninghelst is close to the firing line and the guns can be heard very plainly.

The next day, 26 August, we were warned for the firing line. We packed up and marched towards the south until we came to Locre which is on the road between Ypres and Bailleul. While going through Locre I saw a sign board with 'Transport 8th Gloucester Regiment' on it. As that was Alec's very battalion I was almost overcome. I began to wonder if I would really see him after so many years. I saw a fellow standing and saw he was a Gloucester, I called over, and asked him if he knew Alec. He said he did and told me Alec was on the other road if he was staying in A company. We continued to Dranoutre where we picked up our guides. I was continually enquiring about Alec, but if he was in A company I would not see him as we were not going near their billets. After passing Dranoutre we were split up into parties of about twenty each. I was in the second party as I was attached to A company as a signaller. We turned to the left at Dranoutre Church and marched up the road towards Neuve Eglise. I saw another Gloster in a field as we passed. As we just halted there I called him over and asked him if he knew Alec and knew where he was. He considered a minute and said Alec came from his part of the country so I asked him his name. He said Durn, so I knew him. He said 'Why Alec is in these tents just up here. I'll go and get him for you', but just as he got to the gate of the small field the tents were in I saw several boys come running towards us. The first I could see was Alec with a cigarette in his mouth. He did not see me at first until I removed my steel helmet. I could see his face light up. He came forward and shook hands with me.

How pleased we were to meet after a separation of more than six years. We had very little to say as we were too pleased to speak. Alec was in shorts, he looked like the picture of health, and his hair was still inclined to be curly as it used to be, as he had no cap on.

The boys thought it wonderful to meet in such a way and under such circumstances. It seemed and must have been intended by Providence, but it was only for five minutes but it was worth a fortune, in fact no money on earth could have bought those few minutes. Archie Smith, little Tommy Wear's brother-in-law, came up to me enquiring for Tommy. He was in the Machine Gun Section with Alec, as Alec had been transferred to this section just before I met him. I had an idea he was in that locality as he had written to me a few days before and said he was about seven miles to my right, but I had no idea we should be so fortunate in meeting each other.

We continued on until we came to a few battered houses. Here the communication

trench began. This was Neuve Eglise. This trench ran up under an hedgerow. It was wonderfully concealed, in fact its entrance can hardly be seen from the road. This trench continued through fields, also a house here and there which were headquarters of units, until we came to a farmhouse. Here we got out of the trench and went overland for a hundred yards past this farm which was called RE farm, and entered another trench which was called Durham Road. The first trench was called Kingsway. We stopped at the top of Durham Road. There Major Shipman met a young second lieutenant of the North Staffords, the regiment who we were in for instruction with. He said to the Major, 'The Germans are about fifty yards in front of us'. We could hardly believe it, to see the boys standing or sitting around as unconcerned as could be, but our doubts were soon shattered when we had a look through the periscope at the parapet.

I went to the signalling dugout next to the company headquarters. There we were welcomed by the veteran signallers of the Staffords who were not long up from the Somme, they could tell us some wonderful tales of that famous battlefield. Their dugout was not very big. There were already four of them in there so with three of us which made seven it was somewhat overcrowded, but we crept in, made ourselves at home, the boys treated us fine, even shared their food with us as we were very short.

Here we received our first instructions on the telephone which was the means of communication with headquarters, and other companies. A and C companies came in the front line first for instruction. B and D stayed in the supports at RE farm. We had no sooner got nicely settled when the bombardment started. This was the first we had experienced, but most of the shells and trench mortars went to the supports as heavy stuff seldom fell in the front line when they are so close to the enemy. Some of the shells felt very close we thought, but I don't think they were close now. Our boys were soon acquainted with the situation, and after dark were on the fire step blazing into space. The most of the firing after dark was done by rifles and machine guns. During the night there was nothing much happened but we had our first casualty, old George Dare of C company was killed by a stray shot.

There was all kinds of rats there, the Staffords used to have great fun with them by putting a piece of cheese on the end of their bayonet, then when the rat nibbled it from the mouth of the hole, Tommy pulls the trigger, no more cheese for mister rat.

Next day, the 27th, there was a midday strafe as they call a bombardment at the front. Then in the afternoon the North Staffords were relieved by the 8th Gloucesters, much to my delight, having boys of the old home county with us. As soon as we changed the thing that struck our boys most was the change of dialect. There was a great difference between the Staffords and the Gloucesters. The first thing I did was to go to the machine gun trench to see Alec again but I was told by the sergeant that Alec was down at Floffy post about half a mile down in the valley behind the lines. I got one of the signallers of the Gloucesters to show me the way down there, and it was not long before we were talking about old times. Alec seemed a great favourite among the boys as they were always jossing him. He was the same as ever, the perpetual smile on him. I stayed with him for an hour, then came up to my post at C6 as our station was called. All signal stations are numbered that way.

Nothing much happened during the night, except the usual rifle and machine gun fire.

Next morning Alec came up to see me at C6, we had a couple of hours together and wrote a letter home to Mother and Father in memory of our meeting. There was a strafe about noon but no casualties. At night I went down again to see Alec.

Next day the 29th we got orders to pack and move. On my way down Kingsway I met Alec again, but only had a few minutes talk with him while we were halted. I thought it was the last time I might see him as there were always changes in the course of a few days.

As we came through Dranoutre and Locre the rain came down in torrents. We were wet through to the skin in a few minutes, but we kept on all the time, but when we got to Reninghelst our camp was occupied by the 73rd so we had to keep on until we came to the Cheppawa camp. There we stayed the night. During the night the gas gongs sounded, then the scramble for our gas masks. I grabbed the first one I came to as it was on a nail with Frank McVicar's. I had mine on in double time but Mac was trying to find the good one as one of his was broken. He happened to get mine which were both good but as he could not find a broken one he got into an awful stew. The fact was I grabbed his by mistake but had the good one on. Little Drummer Ferguson began to cry as he lost his mask in the scramble, but he was given a second mask of another fellow's so it was all right; but very little gas got to us as the wind had scattered it before it got that far, but quite a number of our boys lost themselves as it is very difficult to see with these masks on as these glasses get fogged up by the breath.

Next morning we had to clear out to let the right owners of the camp come in, so we went to the tents near the village, it was still raining hard, but the 73rd left for the line that evening so we were back in our own camp once again. There we related our experiences to each other, the boys all thought the Imperials were a fine bunch, especially the Gloucesters. I had introduced Alec to Sergeant Major Le Capelaine B company SM, also to my two platoon sergeants, Tobin and Lowe, and the boys of my platoon, so it was quite a talk of our meeting. Most of the talking between Alec and me was about home. He did not say much about the Somme, but said men laid there like a lot of mole heaps,dead and wounded, and he had been over the top five times and there was only four of his platoon left, he was one of them.

It was mostly signalling we did the next few days and on the 31st August Alec and Archie Smith came to see me and Tommy at this camp, Reninghelst. They stayed and had tea with us, then we went as far as Locre to their transport lines with them. On September 2nd we moved again, this time to the foot of Kemmel hill, into huts as we were reserves. At this place is a nice YMCA where I had the pleasure of some fine entertainment, also some good speakers visited this place. We mostly were at flag drill here. I also had to take a shift on the phone but the battalion did mostly rifle drill, also bayonet fighting. We also got our Lee Enfield stamped with our company number as we changed the Ross for them at Reninghelst, much to the delight of us all, as it was far lighter than the big and clumsy Ross. Every man had to stand to that night from 11.30pm until 1.30am. We moved our stations around. About the 17th Cpl Yeardye with my party went up to the front line, C39 on Broadway Street as the trench leading up to the line was. We moved into the village of Kemmel about the 6th of September. A company was up at Dickebusch while C and transports stayed at Kemmel hill and D company went to York House as this farm was called by the authorities. Our billet was a fine mansion with a moat around it, it was not smashed up by the Huns for some unknown reason but they could see it plainly from the left. There was only one woman that lived in the village. She was making her fortune by selling goods to Tommy.

The Hun used to hold Kemmel but was driven out by the British at the beginning of the war, but most of the village was in ruins. Our artillery was always very active here, and

quite had the initiative. I was on the telephone taking shifts with Joe Yeardye as we were the only two signallers in our company. The rest of my time I used to be up in the mulberry tree, having a feed of mulberries.

The enemy opened up one night. We thought he was coming over, so we had to double up to the line, but it quietened down again. About the 10th the battalion went into the line while I was at Rossinga House, an old estaminet, the headquarters of two of our companies while York House was battalion HQ. These places were about three hundred yards apart. Rossinga was almost half a mile from Kemmel. Our station was D34. Corporal Yeardye was in charge while the fellows on the station were Joe Yeardye, Pichard, Tandy and myself. After being at this station about two days we moved to the supports to C company HQ. There our station was SRP 13. We were here about two days. During this time nothing much happened, then we moved up opposite Kemmel to C55 near the Alberta dugouts. The main communication trench was Gellia. While at this station we had a lot of strafing and lost quite a few men, mostly wounded. Lieut Carlyle was wounded, also Sgt Blythe and Cpl Pounds was blown to pieces by a trench mortar. Our lines of communication suffered through breaks from shells. This part we held was opposite Wyschate. The place we were in with the Gloucesters was opposite Messines.

We had a very heavy bombardment about September 15th. Our artillery had a report in that Fritzie had a new battalion in the line so we were giving him a little reception. Our station was just where it met the front line.

On the 23rd of September we had the news that we were to pack up and move out as we were going to the Somme. So that night we moved out and stayed for the night at La Clyte, just behind Kemmel, where we had a bath, a change of underwear and a night's rest, but here we found when we changed our underwear the first signs of the company we had long been expecting but not welcomed. So winds up our stay in Belgium.

Chapter VI
Our journey to the Somme
24th September 1916 – 12th October 1916

We left La Clyte on the 24th September about 8 o'clock, marched to Locre. Here we took the road to Bailleul, reaching this town about 11am. Just before we got to the town we passed the barbed wire cages where the German prisoners were kept, but most of them was out that morning filling up trucks with coal. Bailleul is a fine old town, very French-looking, and is near the frontier just in France. The town appeared to be full of our boys, who were no doubt quartered there. I was feeling very unwell that morning and the march was beginning to tell on me as I had not been well for several days, so after we had halted for dinner I could not keep up with the rest and was obliged to fall out. This was the only time I fell out on a march.

I walked slowly behind with several others, resting occasionally until we were picked up by motor ambulances. There was over one-third of the battalion fell out that march. The 73rd and 72nd suffered just the same, little parties of threes and fours were trailing up the road as far as we could see. The ambulance took us to Hazebrouck where the battalion was staying for the night. There was a 72nd man in the car with me. When we got off at the big square in the town, a lot of Australians were standing around. One stepped up and shook hands with this 72nd fellow, they were brothers, it was the first time they had met each other

for over 12 years. I did not see much of Hazebrouck, but I saw the big square in the town, it looked an old place.

Three companies of the battalion were billeted for the night in a big school, while B company were billeted in a model school. By appearance they did a lot of sculpturing there, as we saw some fine little statues.

A lot of boys were out in the city looking around but I was too tired for that so I went to bed. Next morning I was stiff and sore. The sergeant asked how I felt, I told him I did not know how I was going to march that day, so he said I was going by train with about 40 others. Just as we were ready to move off to join the rest of the battalion at the school, Alec came into the yard on his wheel. He had heard we had passed through not far from them so he thought we would be staying at Hazebrouck. I had four hours with him as my train went at noon while his pass was until 12.30. This is the longest stay we had together. I left him just as we entered the station, where we took the train for St Omer. After arriving at St Omer we met a trainload of Australians just off up the line for the first time, of course we told them all we knew as we felt like old soldiers then. We laid around the platform to rest a while as we were crammed into a truck when we came down as per usual. After the rest we were hobbling off as so few could walk properly. We came to St Martin au Laert about a mile and a half out of the city. We waited until the rest of the boys came, we then joined our platoons and went into billets.

Most of the evening was given to washing our feet. Our billet was an old house, with a fireplace in, also there was soon a fire in it.

Next day 26th September was pay day, so we treated ourselves to a few French pastries that seemed like soap bubbles to eat as there was nothing in them. Several of our boys got into serious trouble by getting full of 'Vin Rouge' and 'Vin Blanc'. We were moving again, again in the afternoon, this time to Eperlecque, about 7 miles from St Omer, it lays two miles off the St Omer to Calais road to the north. We always had a bunch of women and girls following as they would hang on to us all the way, which was sometimes very embarrassing, but being French or rather in France was different.

I marched to Eperlecque with the battalion but was almost falling out several times but managed to stick it to the last. We were billeted in an old barn, but we had plenty of straw to sleep on. There was a fine stream flowing through the field where we drilled on, it supplied the battalion with water, also very handy for washing ourselves and clothes in. The farmhouse which the barns belonged to that we were in was very old, like all the village of Eperlecque. The church must have been hundreds of years old. The people at Eperlecque were very sociable with us, but perhaps it was because we spent quite a lot of money there. They had a good stock of wine in at the estaminets, some of it was fairly strong judging by the results. I had to help several home but never indulged enough to upset myself. I was mostly out with the section at flag drill, also station work, with flag and flapper.

We had several sham attacks on the hills around, the signals we placed in their different station. We also had a night manoeuvre. The station I was on was near an estaminet, and as there was no officers near it was very handy to get a drink of hot coffee but some spoilt it of course. While three of us was in there who should look in the door but Mr Tuckwell the signalling officer. He shouted for us to fall in with the rest, the result was the two lads who were in with me got turned back to their companies, but he did not notice me as I had my back to him. After a stay of a week at Eperlecque we were on the move again. This time we marched back over the road we came up, which was through St Martin

and St Omer until we came to Arcques. This was 4th October. Here we entrained. Of course, it was the usual cattle trucks, ours we got into was beautifully perfumed by mules that had just been taken out. The result was that after the journey I smelt more like a mule than a man.

We passed through Calais down the coast a little way, then went inland until we arrived at Candas. Here we alighted at 3am and marched to Beauval about 3 miles from the station of Candas. After sleeping a while we had a bath in town. We had a look around. There is a nice church in Beauval but the town itself is very dirty and the shops just like other towns had no display windows like it is in England. Next morning we moved to Bonneville, we had the same kind of billets, a barn as usual, but this was a fairly good one. There was also a good orchard just handy, it had plenty of good apples in but most of us ate too many, much to our discomfort We were very short of bread most of the time, so we bought off the French, their bread was much lighter than ours and was nice for a change but we soon got tired of it. We also bought such food as canned fruit, cakes and chocolate off them, but they charged very dear for it as we could get it for half the price at the YMCA but the latter so quickly sold out.

We drilled in an orchard while we were there but I think there was a complaint about us tramping the grass down. We had one big manoeuvre on the hills around Bonneville, I think it was reckoned to be a success. I got lost with about six others of my platoon, but we found the battalion just as it was forming up to march to billets. Bonneville was about the poorest village we struck in France, both appearance and people, many appeared to be living in mere hovels.

On the 7th we marched to Hérissart, another stage nearer to the Somme battlefield, as we were in the department of the Somme when we reached Candas. We had a very cold billet at Hérissart, as the barn was very rickety. We could not find any straw so it was do without and smile. I went to a concert in the YMCA. There was a host of French kids there as it was free, and the reading explaining the pictures was French so it was 'no bon' for us. The people had a good stock of wine in, they always seem ready to rake the money into their estaminets, in fact every shop has its stock up if they had the least idea of 'soldats anglais' coming through, and almost every house is a shop. There was also several instances there, where the people did not seem disposed to give back the small change. If we bought stuff in an estaminet for 3 francs 50 centimes and gave them a 5 franc note they always said they had no change, but wanted to hang on to the money.

We were away again next morning, 8th October, it was drizzling when we started but poured down about 10am. It was a tiring march, I remember sitting down when we halted, right in the middle of the road, it did not matter about getting wet, as we were soaked already. It was at this halt that we saw the first signs of the army on the Somme, as a column of French transport came through. We marched through Contay until we reached Warloy-Baillon. Here we went under canvas, from 12 to 17 in a bell tent, there was 16 in ours, it was a terror to sleep at night and we were obliged to put a lot of our kit outside and chance the rain to make more room. We stayed here for four days. Our camp was near the Hun prison camp, it was funny to see the boys exchanging buttons and cash over, also any other little souvenir. They would toss them over the barbed wire while the guard pretended he did not notice them.

There was some fine orchards at Warloy and plenty of apples in them which were well sampled by us, also a large YMCA and estaminets galore. We did mostly company

manoeuvring there. We packed up on the 12th October and marched off again, going straight towards the fight. We had not gone far when we sighted a tower with a leaning statue, 'Albert' was on the tip of every tongue. The famous leaning statue we now saw, what we once used to see in pictures and read of.

We marched through Senlis and Bouzincourt, the latter I did not know then was going to be a village of unfading memory in the lives of the family. We marched through Albert up the Amiens road under the leaning statue of the Mother and the Child, which suffered so much from German shellfire, also the beautiful church. We then marched up the Bapaume road and camped just outside Albert on what the British call Tara Hill. We had dinner and bivouacked. We were now at the end of our march to the Somme, having arrived at Albert 12 October 1916.

Chapter VII
At the Battle of the Somme
12th November – 29th November 1916

The ground we camped on was ankle deep in mud, but after about an hour's work with shovels we cleared enough space for our bivouacs, which was an oil sheet thrown over a rope suspended on two poles, about four and a half feet from the ground, in which ten men slept, but it was a close fit, but still we slept but we kept each other warm this way.

This camp was a very extensive one as the whole fourth division of Canadians was there including artillery transports and everything, while the other side was a large number of Imperials and hundreds of horses and mules, also two tanks laid there. Those were the first I ever saw and the Bapaume road was as busy as any street in London. Troops both infantry and artillery were always going up and down, also motor transports, GT wagons, howitzers, small field guns and naval guns were always to be seen on the road. We could see the line of observation balloons extending to the right and left of us, and I have counted as many as thirty up at a time. Aeroplanes could always be seen, also fights in the air were in sight of the camp. The enemy would come over for observation and at night we could always figure on a few shells falling in camp from Fritzy's long-range guns, but they seldom caused much damage but mules suffered at times. There was a battery of fine big guns just by Albert on the side of the Ancre. These must have caused havoc with the enemy as they were firing several hours a day. The land around Albert is very chalky, in fact if a stone was picked up and scraped with an ordinary knife a good sample of chalk is got.

The communication trenches used to begin just outside of Albert as the enemy used to be on the ridge, and the town was then almost deserted of people except soldiers but by the time we got there the enemy had retreated eight or nine miles, so the population were coming back once more to their native place, but many came to grab what they could by selling high priced stuff to the English and Colonials. Our boys were on a working party first night, but there was only a few went. They had one man slightly wounded. I worked all the time with the signal section while the others were drilling. We were also lucky to be excused all working parties, but we had to go on one that was an emergency party. The night of the 13th our boys got badly done in while they were in a working party, the enemy spotted them and opened fire. The result was that the battalion lost fifty killed and wounded, also hopelessly lost themselves and dribbled back in small parties. That night one shell killed one officer and six men near Courcelette. Next night Sergeant Clench was

killed, a great friend of mine, also Sergeant Freeman, in fact every night the boys went out they had losses. On the 19th October when passing through Albert I met an eighth Glosters, he told me the battalion had come back to the Somme again. I was so sorry to hear it as I had some idea of what it was like, and Alec was in the eighth. I had visions of him going through what his battalion went through the previous July. They were supposed to come up from Warloy that very day but it was raining very hard so it delayed them.

The next afternoon we had a manoeuvre over the old trenches, it was there we saw what it was really like, graves everywhere with the man's name and number on and RIP which means of course Rest In Peace but the boys used to say it meant Rest If Possible. It was nothing to see human limbs laying about, in one place would be a hand, another a boot with a leg off at the knee and so on, in some places we would see a grave with a rude made cross with In memory of an unknown British soldier, or German soldier as the case may be. All soldiers who are killed in action on the Somme are buried in shell holes, perhaps four or five in one. A little way out of Albert is La Boisselle. This was the first village to fall in the big offensive. It was the 57th brigade that took it or the 19th division, the one Alec was in. Alec was one of the few who held La Boisselle. I think it was 35 of them altogether. For this the Colonel of the eighth Gloucesters got the Victoria Cross. Alec was over the top on a bayonet charge as some would term it, and he was one of the very, very few left of the old eighth Gloucesters, so if ever a soldier did his bit he did.

The ground is covered with shell holes and it can hardly be seen that there was once a village there. All that is left is a corner of the graveyard but the shells have torn it just like the rest. This is the condition of the ground over where the fighting took place, just a wilderness of holes that a man could stand up in and not see over as thick as they possibly could stick, also graves of thousands and thousands of soldiers, both British and German. When I came back off this manoeuvre and was lined up for supper, who should come on the scene but Alec again. How nice it was to see him. He came from Warloy on a bike, but he was almost giving it up as a bad job at finding me as just as he was off back he spotted a 78th fellow, and being so much alike and knowing I had a brother in the Gloucesters he said 'You are looking for Andrews, aren't you?' I went as far as the leaning statue with him, and he said to me, I wish one or the other of us was out of it. He said all I can see is a Blighty at the best. I can well remember that both of us felt that something was going to happen. I left him at the church but he was around again the next night with his chum Bert Harding, and Archie Smith, Tommy Wear's brother-in-law. We had a nice time that night as I got a parcel from home containing cigarettes and apples. How pleased Alec was with the 'fags' as he called them. They stayed a nice long time that night and we all sat around the big log fire, both 78th and the three boys. The 78th thought a lot of the Gloucesters ever since we met at Messines, and our boys always liked to hear the stirring tales of old warriors. I went with them nearly through Albert that night, also Tommy. It was the most pleasant meeting we had.

The next day was Sunday. We had church parade and a presentation of a medal to an officer, and just as I was coming off parade I noticed the Glosters. I went out in the road of course, the first man I met was Bill West, who I used to go to school with. I went down to where the machine gunners were halted, and saw Alec. He was eagerly looking for me, and still smiling as usual. Archie Smith was talking with Tommy Wear and Sid Halliday, another lad in the 78th from Chalford, when they fell in to march off. Alec took up the lead with his crew and marched off up the road as far as the YMCA. I wanted to give him a can

of peaches I had in my tent, but I had not time to get them. He said 'I will be all right as Bert has a couple of parcels on the cart'. I shook hands with him, he said it was no knowing what will happen up here 'but I'll have a look around for you if I come back', so we said so long. This was the last time I ever saw him. This was 22nd October 1916.

We had very wet weather while at the Somme and several mornings we woke up with water running under us, so we had to build the walls of the tents up with sandbags and dig ditches around them. On the 26th we were warned for the line. What a journey it was, down through Pozières on the Bapaume road, great holes torn in every yard of the road. We had to go down it in groups of sixes and in file until we came to the communication trench. Here we marched up to the line. The communication trench was called 10th street, it ran for quite a distance by the side of the Courcelette sunken road then turned towards Death Valley. Here we got out of the trench and marched across the valley in the open as the trench was here filled with water. We continued our way up the other side of the valley. I was quite close to the guides as signallers always go in first when a company go into the line to 'take over'. I will never forget trying to get up the bank of the valley. Now Halcrow and myself were almost at the top when he began to slip back. I tried to push him up but only succeeded in pushing myself down the slimy bank, him following me. However when we got up we had to pull the others up with our rifles. The shells were now falling around, much to our discomfort. From Death Valley to the front line which was then Regina Trench that had just been taken from the enemy by the 87th and 102nd, was nothing but a sea of mud. We walked overland as far as we dared. Though it was now dark the enemy kept shooting up his Very lights and as soon as a light appeared we had to keep quite still until it went out. I had the misfortune to fall into a shell hole in the valley and had to be pulled out of the mud. It also happened again as we were approaching the front line, but this time it was serious as the shell hole was full of water and I had fallen on my back with the result of getting wet through, lost all my bombs, and got my rifle clogged with mud. I called for help and Frank Doiran, a chum of mine, came over to me cursing me for my awkwardness at falling so much. He grabs at my hand which was all over mud and it slipped from him. He goes head over heels into the trench just behind him which was half full of water with a big splash, then came the roars from the trench. I was now in an awful pickle, the telephone I was carrying was clogged up with mud and soaked with water. The boys who were carrying other signalling stuff like wire and the lamp were just the same, our clothes we could not see them, and by this time many of the boys were falling from exhaustion. We got to the trench at last after wading up the communication trench up to our knees in thick slimy mud. We relieved the 75th and fixed up the best we could. I went on the 'phone for three hours, came off and slept the best I could but it was some sleep. I never felt so rotten in all my life, sitting in the side of the wet trench ankle deep in mud and water and wet through, with whizz-bangs coming over our heads all the time, but fortunately they did not hurt anyone in our company but A company got it back in the supports. They had between 40 and 50 casualties. This is how we existed for four days. During that time we had some fierce shelling, five were killed and five wounded in my platoon with one shell and in six platoon another shell killed two and wounded five. We lost all our snipers on patrol duty, only the officers escaped, so that was the last of the eight snipers. My chum Harry Hives was taken prisoner but Bob Davidson was killed. D company was holding the line with B, while A and C were in supports. Three signallers were wounded in the D company station. They were Westwood, Tandy, and Dighton.

Aeroplanes were busy scrapping, a bullet from one hit a bomb box about 3 feet from me while another bullet came past my ear and entered the ground about 8 inches from my knee, so it was a warm spot. One of our 'planes fell just out in front of us, shot down by the enemy. As we looked over the trench we could see the dead lying everywhere, both enemy and our own. In the trench we held was German bombs, rifles, bayonets, equipment, clothes and gas masks, also many graves of men buried in the trench. When I was digging wires out of a trench I came across a dead German, and times fixing wire up on the top of the communication trench I have seen bodies of men nearly covered by earth and mud thrown out from the trench. Once I saw a boot sticking out, and thinking it was an old boot I went to pick it up, but found it was on a foot. Such things as these happened all day long, in fact life was as cheap as dirt.

A party of Germans tried to enter our lines, but was cut down by the machine guns. In the morning about 40 grey forms could be counted laying on 'No man's land'. The peculiar thing was that we used to look across at each other and even wave. Our boys could go out and bury the dead with the white flag and Fritz was doing the same. Some of our boys even went out and spoke to them, not a rifle was fired, but on one occasion he came out with too many men so we fired the machine over their heads, as five men on a burying party is the limit. There was a block in our trench. Just over the block about thirty feet was Fritz. He held about two hundred yards, then we held the rest. We used to look over the block at each other and they used to show us their eats.

After four days we were relieved by the 72nd, it was terrible, the mud and rain. We went into the reserves at Sugar trench near Courcelette, it was raining in torrents and we were almost exhausted in mud and by carrying equipment. Just as the signallers were crossing a sunken road the enemy opened first with high explosives which kept falling amongst us, we lost and did not know where our post was. It was now dark and the boys kept ducking from the splinters. Another fellow who would not trouble to duck as he did not care what happened would walk on and fall over the man on the ground in front of him. It was a big effort to get up again. We had two men wounded but able to walk, but as the runners had lost their way we had to get somewhere, so the only shelter was a trench, half full of water and filled in by the banks sliding in by rain falling. I was making myself as comfortable as possible for the night, sitting in water up to my waist, but after about an hour or so the runners came back to say they had found the place so they took us to it. We had an old German dugout to stay in, about fifty of us. What a night, packed like sardines and wet through. Next morning as soon as it was light we were outside taking chances with shells.

As I was eating my breakfast a piece of shell cut my chin, it was a very narrow one for me. I went back to my company who were wandering all over creation, but the main part of them found Sugar trench that night and slept in water and mud. Many died from exposure, they had very little sleep for five nights and being exhausted just laid down in the cold and died. Such things as this happened on the Somme all winter. I thought myself hard put to that night, but thank God I was not with them that night. We fixed ourselves up as well as possible. Shells fell amongst us pretty often but only wounded one man. Bob Brown, Fred Silk and myself built a dugout and slept the night in it, but it was very cold and water fell down the walls of the dugout, and we had to get up once or twice to keep warm. Bob did not have any cigarettes, he was busy making them out of newspaper and the little bit of tobacco he had. We had a fair supply of food, even if it was bully beef, also got an onion between us which was quite a luxury.

After three days of this we were again warned for the front line, as the 72nd and 73rd which were in our brigade could not stick it, so wet it was that the trenches all fell in and they were all sick with cold. So it fell to the lot of the 38th and ourselves to take their place for the day. We had the usual performance getting up there but it was far worse and the shrapnel was bursting all around us. However we got there, but what a night, raining hard all the time. Two of us could squeeze in at a time in our little dugout with the telephone while the other had to tramp and kick about outside to keep himself warm. I went to sleep while my chum was supposed to look after the 'phone but he went to sleep with a message in his hand while calling up headquarters. Others could hardly keep awake while on sentry at their posts. Our little shelter what we had in the previous four days was blown up while the 72nd was in but fortunately no one was in it. It was a job to keep warm at night. I could not get the blood to circulate in my feet and my big toes especially, as I had them frostbitten in Winnipeg.

When our relief came we three signallers were the first to move out. We had just got into the communication trench when Fritz opened up on us. What a bombardment, shrapnel was sweeping all around and the phosphorus was rolling down our sleeves and equipment, we could not move an inch as we were in a shallow trench and kneeling in mud and water. At this spot were a large number of dead men. It was a weird time of it as it looked as if we were to join them.

After blundering on and halting very often, we managed to get on to the Bapaume road. It was not long before we put a big margin between us and the line. We were expecting to be shelled even there as on this road there were men and mules laying dead in shell holes. One shell killed three men and six mules. When we got to Pozières the motor buses were waiting for us, the same old buses that are seen in London. We were not long before we were in camp. They had dry socks for us and big fires going, also some soup. I had to cut my socks off my feet, I could even feel them gripping my ankle. What a sight we did look, beards of 10 days' growth, not a wash, and verminous of course, our clothes all in mud and sandbags caked in mud for puttees.

We had a good thaw out before the fire, then went to our bivies and slept about the best sleep I have had for years, even if we were eleven of us in a bivie. Next day we were taken to Bouzincourt, about two and a half miles north-west of Albert. This was the 5th November. We had a bath and Tom Wear and myself were going to Albert to see Alec and Archie, but we heard that the Glosters were in the line again. Next day I was going to Aveluy to see Alec but heard again that they were still in the line. When I got back to billets the mail was given out. It was then on the 6th of November I had the news from Mother that Alec had died of wounds. The blow was terrible, I could hardly realize it, as the time I saw him going up the Bapaume road was his last journey to the firing line. He was in France 16 months and never had a leave, so if ever a soldier did his bit he did, as he was one of the first in the big offensive on the Somme.

As soon as I read the news I told Tommy Wear what had happened. I went to Major Linnell who was OC B coy. to get a pass next morning to Aveluy where the 8th Glosters were staying. It was raining hard all the way and I was soaking wet before I got there, and when I did no one could tell me where he had died or where he was buried, so I went up to the advanced dressing station near Danube Post cemetery but they had no record who had gone through there, but I was told to go to Bouzincourt to the headquarters of the 59th Field Ambulance. So back I goes as I was now near the line and had no steel helmet or gas mask.

On arriving at Bouzincourt I went to the Field Ambulance and found the corporal. Here I got the desired information. Alec had died on the motor ambulance just as he was coming into Bouzincourt, and was buried in the military cemetery, just behind the French civil cemetery. His grave is fourth from the centre in row I on the right going in, or 21st from the fence on the right in the same row.

It was terrible to see his grave when only a few days before he was talking with me in Albert and on the Bapaume road. I had a nice cross ordered to replace the little military cross which was there but this was not put up until after I had gone. I went to the cemetery every day while I was in Bouzincourt and the 15th November was the last time I saw it. I was at Aveluy helping the engineers unloading timber off the trucks and cutting wood in the Aveluy Wood (Bois d'Aveluy). While I was wood cutting we got the order to return to camp. At once we made our way back as soon as possible. The rest of the battalion was moving off when we got back, but as soon as we got our equipment on we were close behind them.

We marched through Albert and up the Bapaume road. We went into bivies opposite Orvillers, about halfway between La Boisselle and Pozières. Next day we were warned for the line, it was the 16th November, we had German 'planes overhead in the morning and I met Maurice Smith in the afternoon. When we were in our bivies several shells dropped a little way from our tents. This was the result of the 'planes coming over. Just as we were nicely asleep we were called out, lined up, given cartridges and bombs and marched off. Just as we were moving several more shells came over but their range was about 20 yards too long.

It was an easy march up the line as the ground was frozen hard and it was snowing a little. We went into reserves at Faber trench as there was going to be an attack in the morning at 6.18am. It was very cold standing around but the barrage at 6.18am gave us something else to think about. What a noise it was. We could see the long line of shells bursting in the distance. Shells were also falling on our guns and two crews were put out of action. Then in came the prisoners, in their 'Dolly Varden' helmets, glad to be out of it. They were a husky-looking lot, but our artillery had broken their morale. They were giving souvenirs away right and left, some were almost exhausted. I saw one man wave his hands in farewell to the firing line. Some of the Hun officers were cursing, and saying what we'd get from them later, but one of our lads touched him up with a bayonet and he closed up.

During the day the ground began to thaw out and the trenches began to fall in. About dusk we moved out to relieve the 38th who had taken Desire Trench that morning. It was terrible getting up to the line, mud and shell holes everywhere and trenches from knee to waist deep in water. The night was pitch dark. As we wandered on men began to fall, many unconscious owing to the great strain. We were wandering for hours. We were hopelessly lost, the night was still, not a shot was fired. At last our company commander gave it up as daylight was coming on, we turned back to get to the reserve trench the best way we could. Most of the boys got into the artillery dugouts and slept the night, while those who were able found the old reserve trench. There was only about six or eight got back, I happened to be one of them. I will never forget how the boys fell in the mud. Some had to stay there until they had rested before they ever thought of getting up.

About 10am we were collected together to go up to the line, it was a mad attempt. D coy. had found Regina trench and stayed there, so they were better rested than we were. We started out again minus half our company which were lost. I was with the Major and

Sergeant Major of our company and two other signallers. We were in the lead, and going up in sixes and in file, about twenty paces interval between each man and two hundred yards between each six. The shells fell all about us but we were so much spread out that they could not have much effect on us, but we lost a few men. We got into Regina trench between West and East Maramont roads, we were then reorganized and sent to the front line in parties of sevens. The first parties went out but it was a mad attempt as only two ever reached there, so it had to be left until dark. The men in the front line were starving from hunger, cold and thirst. D coy. set out from west of the West Maramont road for Desire trench or the Puys road as there was no Desire trench to get to. It was madness as they lost half their company including two officers, also my friend Jack Banstead. We were unmercifully shelled and while I was crawling into a little funk hole a piece of shell about the size of a penny struck me in the seat. It went through all my clothes and stopped against my skin, it was a good job my overcoat was thick with mud and the missile had hit flat. The result was a bruise as big as an orange and I could not sit down for a week without an expression.

Another shell case that was thrown up by an explosion fell between me and a man next to me. We moved out to the new front line after dark. As there was no possibility of working the telephone I was made runner with one other man, to run between our company in the new line and headquarters. I went to the headquarters and waited on messages. We were sent at 6pm with two messages that had been delayed through a runner getting wounded. After we got a little way out we lost our bearings and came accidentally back to headquarters an hour later. We had to strike out again, but this time we got completely lost. We ran into the Royal Sussex, they said they did not know of any Canadians about there. We then came across the Duke of Cornwall's Regiment, here we got the same reply. We turned about, only to lose ourselves again. This time we ran right into an enemy patrol. I had my gun ready if they had seen us. As they went between us and our front line, so we laid in a shell hole until they passed. Our hearts were beating so hard as we could hear them. We turned about again and wandered until we were exhausted, so we laid down in an old trench until we saw we would starve through cold. It was terrible as he was now shelling all around us and in the distance we could see shells falling on a certain target. We though it was C coy. as he had been shelling it all morning and killed and wounded nearly 50 men. When the shelling lifted we went over and were halted by one of our men, he happened to be the man on the extreme flank of the trench so we were almost passing again. We found this was battalion headquarters and it was 4am, we had been wandering for 10 hours. I felt myself failing all the time as there was so little food about and only dirty shell hole water.

When morning came or daylight to be correct we were again packed off to the front line with messages. This time six of us went and they had to go even if it cost the loss of all of us. We came across the stretcher-bearers who warned us that it would cost us our lives to go up there, so they took the messages to the Major under the red cross flag while we waited for an answer. When it came down with them one of the fresh runners took it to headquarters, but while waiting for it we were bombarded severely and the ground around was strewn with bodies of every description, Killies, Canadians, English and Germans. The land was turned inside out and equipment, wagons, and pieces of aeroplanes were to be seen everywhere, it was sickening. The trenches were full of wounded men who had crawled into the few remaining dugouts, also Germans amongst them.

Three of our boys came down with a stretcher with a wounded man on so it was up to me to help them as even as bad as I was I was as fresh as any of them. So off we goes to Courcelette, four carrying the man, one with a white flag, another man with trench feet staggering along behind us. We were shelled going down the Maramont road, just as if we were an armed party. The shell holes and mud on the road was no better, the Red Chateau as the station was called was only about a mile and a half but it took us an hour and a half to get there. We just went out to the trenches and shell holes to pick up equipment to replace those we left behind, but the way the shells fell about the dressing station was awful and as we were in the door of the station several shells struck it. It was pitiful to see the panic of the shell-shocked men. We were relieved by a few 72nd men who could get up with machine guns and stayed in Faber trench.

I got in a deep dugout and slept all afternoon. At night we were on our way to Pozières to the huts, it was fortunate for me I found a bag of rations or I would have starved that afternoon before moving out. We dribbled in to the huts in twos and threes. Most of the boys stayed in dugouts around Courcelette as they could walk no further that night. Some fellows were walking all night and got in just in time to go up the line again. I had a good sleep that night, even if it was cold and we were very wet and burdened in mud.

At night we were on our way again to the line, this time we had rubber boots, but they are very hard on the feet and very difficult to get out of the mud. Fellows were falling out that night. Again it was a serious offence but the extreme penalty could not have made those boys move an inch more. When we got to battalion headquarters we halted until we got the stragglers up, then moved up to relieve D coy. Going up a lot of the boys got stuck in mud and had to be dug out. Our company headquarters were in a fine deep German dugout. I did only one shift on the 'phone as there was four of us there. It did not break down once, even if the shell fire was severe. Four prisoners were brought in who had lost their way and wandered into our lines, we had quite a talk with them. I got some German money out of them by exchanging it with French money. Two were Bavarians and two Saxons. The Saxons seemed very anxious to impress us that they were Saxons while the other two wished they were. They devoured the bully beef we gave them, also some of the officers' rations one of our party procured by some strategic move. We also had long talks as best as we could by using French about the war. They said 'Allies good' but would not curse the Kaiser, so they were true Germans. They were sent out next morning and were made carry a stretcher with one of our boys on. Just as they were moving off they were sniped at by their own snipers.

The enemy prepared to attack us at 'stand to' but our artillery stopped them, but just as we were warned, someone grabbed my rifle so I was left without one. So out I goes running all over the trenches looking for a casualty's rifle. I had not got to go far before I found one. We were relieved that night by the second fifth Glosters, and the first man I saw was the battalion SM. He was a Stroud man by the name of Angel, the son of the Angels who kept the railroad hotel at Stroud. It was the same old game that night getting out, as per usual we signallers went on our own, got to Courcelette, had some soup at the dugout soup kitchen, and went on our way. We were going towards the Bapaume road when enormous shells began to fall in front of us. I never saw such big shells as they was before, so we about turned and in the confusion lost our way. We came to another soup kitchen, again having a fill of soup, and were directed down the dump railway track where the mules came up with the supplies. It was a tedious walk as we kept falling between the iron sleepers and

getting tripped up every few yards, so when we made the road we were a weary-looking lot. It was now after midnight.

We had now forgotten day and dates, and even hours of the day, our time was just daylight and darkness, so I cannot mention dates here as I have no idea what they were. We stayed the night in the huts at Pozières and next day went to Albert. We thought our Somme days were over, but next day we were again for the line. Again it was worse and more of it. We went into supports and got a lot of shelling, in fact I never thought I would ever get out of it alive or even dead. We kept digging and digging. We stopped one part of the trench up and laid on the ground, the splinters were flying everywhere. An officer in the engineers was killed quite close to us that night. Joe Yeardye was sheltering under a stretcher that laid over the trench and as they were calling for a stretcher I takes a hold of that, so poured all the water that it was holding on top of Joe which soaked him to the skin. I will never forget the funny expressions Joe used and shaking himself like a dog. I said 'Didn't you hear them shouting for a stretcher?' 'I thought it was a piece of tin,' he replied.

This was the 28th November when we moved out of the line. After getting to the Bapaume road Joe and I was not long in making Pozières. We went into bivies for the night, laid down on the mud with a blanket each, a wet overcoat and a wet hide.

Next morning we were packed into motor trucks looking a weird and ragged bunch. They were soon off so we said goodbye to the Somme, leaving behind us in the muddy wilderness, with shells screeching over them and shell holes for graves, many of our true comrades. Bill Wilson was killed in the station I was on the last day in the line, while another signaller, Jack Ferguson, was killed by a sniper. These two boys were buried side by side in a shell hole, the fate of the fallen, but the boys came out of the Somme with a light heart. Though I was pleased to get away, it was different with me, as I was leaving behind a true and noble brother.

Chapter VIII
On Vimy Ridge

We passed through Albert and Bouzincourt and arrived at Veiriens after a ride of an hour and a half. We stayed there from 29th of November to December 1st. While here several of our boys went on leave, but it was most of those who were sick or shell-shocked who went. It was for 10 days. We were all in hopes of getting leave but this was the only leave that was given. We again struck out and marched to Orville. Here we went into huts, which only had bare floors of earth but we raided a straw pile in an old farmer's yard and made some good beds, but we had to club up next morning and pay for the straw. It was nice marching that day as it was cold. We passed through Doullens, a nice town I should think in summer time. Next day we marched on, passing through several villages until we came to Neuvillette, which lays a little to the left of the road going from Doullens to Frévent.

As we were marching along in our muddy and torn clothes we passed several villages where new troops were billeted in. It was comical to see them look at us, with such a surprised look. We were also cheered by the French people, but in our ranks it was easy to see the new men who joined us at Albert just as we were leaving, and the boys who went through it. There were not so many of the old boys left, about 400 all told as we lost nearly 700 on the Somme. We always sang and whistled as we marched, very little grousing, only by some of the new draft men. They began to fall out, but the boys who had been through

the Somme were as hard as nails. We marched through Frévent and billeted for the night in Conchy sur Canche, a pretty little village. Here we had fairly good billets and several warm estaminets were opened. Here we used to have peace times over again.

Next day we set out again, cutting across country until we got into the main road between Frévent and St Pol. We marched towards St Pol until nearly noon, then we struck across country again until we came to Marquay. Here we billeted for the night. About a dozen of us were billeted in a fairly good house, which was empty. We started a fire which we made from good timber out of a wheelwright's shop just by, but we were away in the morning before he came to work so we heard nothing more about it. Next day 4th December we set out again for Maisnil lès Ruitz, which we reached after going through Ranchicourt le Comte where the Canadian Corps headquarters were. Here we finished our march from the Somme, as we were now in the Vimy Ridge sector, near Arras.

B coy. was billeted in Maisnil with battalion headquarters and quartermaster's stores, while the rest of the battalion were billeted in Barlin, the part about a hundred yards from Maisnil.

Maisnil was about a mile and a half from Bruay and two and a half from Houdain. We were billeted in a barn. It was very cold and we were not allowed a fire as there was so much straw littered around. We had a real good time at this village as the people seemed more generous and sociable. There were all kinds of real decent shops there and estaminets. We were also paid sixty-five francs on December 17th which was our Xmas money. I had several good feeds out of it, also a drink or two of champagne, which could be bought at a reasonable price in Barlin. I went to Bruay twice but this is too much of a mining town as there was certain restrictions on it. I visited a picture show but as the writing was mostly French we did not get the best out of it, but it was not bad.

We could hear the guns in the distance, also saw two German 'planes come over while we were there. We used to be greatly worried before we were out of bed in the morning by old women coming in to sell us their apple fritters and cakes, for which they used to say 'deux sous' meaning two cents or halfpennies. One in particular we used to call Madame Pomme, or in English it would be Mrs Apple. She made a speciality of apple fritters.

I was mostly working in shifts on the 'phone in B coy. office with Joe Yeardye. I did half a day while he did the other half, which was only a few hours each, so I had an easy time. I wrote a letter here and kept it until I heard of someone going to Blighty on leave. I had not long to wait as a fellow went to his mother's funeral on a special pass so I seized my chance and he took it. It was for home relating the sad affair of Alec.

We moved out of here on the 22nd of December, and about four days before we moved we was notified that one of our stretcher bearers had died of wounds. He was Jim Beasley, a great friend of mine, he was thought a lot of by the boys. He was fatally wounded while dressing an injured man.

We marched through Barlin, and Noeux les Mines, until we came to Cambligneul. Here we went into huts. This village is very small with a church, of course, but it seemed a poor place after Maisnil. We stayed here two days, then B coy. were moved for the line. We passed through Camblain l'abbé, getting on to the Arras road. We left this road to climb the hill on our left and marched through Villiers au Bois just off the top of the hill, we turned to the right, went down towards Mont St Eloy about half a mile, then went into the communication trench. These communication trenches were very long, in fact I never did

see longer ones all the time I was in France. After crossing the Arras – Carency road we tramped a few hundred yards then came to the Bajoli line.

Here we were billeted in the reserve dugouts. This was Christmas eve. It was very misty but the rain had cleared off. The signal station was in an old French dugout, which was once a trench but now covered over. There was also an observation post connected with it which went out on to a little knoll which we could get to by a small ladder. This was a weird Xmas Eve. I slept or tried to on the ground by the fire bucket, but an old rat worried me so much, he actually put his tail right in my face, also scratched at my woollen cap.

Xmas morning came. Breakfast consisted of bully beef and hard tack. I got a piece of plum pudding issued me, about two inches square and half an inch thick. I was one of the lucky ones getting so much. We had no dinner but supper was bully beef cooked in my mess can with an onion and hard tack, but I could not disguise the bully.

There was a big bombardment that night, a few Xmas gifts for Fritz. He gave us some in return. A day or two after Xmas I got three parcels so we made up fine. We did enjoy them immense.

Rain came on and our dugout was flooded knee deep. The doorway fell in so after a stay in this line for six days we were warned for the supports, on the Souchez – Arras road, but we had to get out of our dugout through the observation post. But Fritz could not see us as it was misty. It was terrible going up, he began to shell us. The trench was half-full of water so we had to go overland but could not get far as we had to take to the trench again as he could see us too plainly. B and C coys. were in the supports at Cabaret Rouge but no village existed at all now. Here we stayed from Dec 30th till Jan 5th. The boys had good dugouts built with beds in them, or benches to be correct. I shared a dugout with a signaller named Donald Murray, but we were bothered with rats running over us while trying to sleep. We had a very nice fireplace and always plenty of wood for a fire. The other two coys. were on Vimy Ridge. They had a terrible bombardment while being relieved by the 73rd, and lost over 60 men. The enemy put a box barrage on them. They came out at night.

We stayed at Cambligneul from January 5th to the 11th, then went to the line again. The signal section was now all one as the company signallers were all taken into headquarters. It was a much better arrangement. This time I went on the ridge, with D coy. to the AA4 station. We had a nice deep dugout which our boys shared with the 10th brigade battalions, which were the 44th and 47th. The stuff he used to put over us was terrible, especially his trench mortars. It was very muddy, in fact the trench mats were buried in mud a foot deep. The trenches were continually sliding in but working parties were always throwing out the mud. We had one severe shelling this time in, and Fred McClennan, Morley, and four others of B coy. were killed by minenwerfers falling on the dugouts. The valley was also badly shelled, especially the Souchez dump where the rations were brought to. The 73rd relieved us on the 17th of January. We went to Villiers au Bois and were billeted over the officers' mess. We were warned for the line again on the 23rd.

We used the road through Carency as it was misty. Carency must have been a nice village before the war, but it is a sad affair now. Its church is demolished, only a few pieces of wall left. Carency was entered by the French about May 1915 when they drove the Germans back on to the ridge and out of Souchez. It cost them a terrible price, something like 100,000 men. Skeletons can be seen laying about the trenches and grinning skulls looking at fellows as they are going into the line, which seem to say 'you never know'.

This time we had snow on the ground, but no mud as the cold was very severe. Our

signal station was AA3, right on the shoulder of the ridge, and our door overlooked Souchez valley. We found a dugout that was blown in to be full of iron rations, so had a great haul of sugar, as I had several parcels that time in, with a tin of cocoa in each of them.

We had very few casualties this time, but it was the coldest winter in France since forty years. We were relieved by the 73rd on the 29th and went to Verdrel near Petit Servins. Here we went into huts, but the cold was at its worst and it was terrible trying to keep warm in bed. Our beds were racks, in three tiers, one above the other and covered with wire mesh.

The valley was rather dull, most of the time was spent in the YMCA writing and reading room which was a little chapel lent to them. We were on our way to the line again on 3rd of February. This time it was again cold and our station was in the big dugout again, AA4. It was fun getting into this dugout as the stairs was very narrow, and times I got stuck there. The top of the dugout was on a level with Fritz's line. He used to land his 'minnies' on it, but they could never pierce it as it was well made and very deep.

There was really no front line on the ridge as it was nearly all laid flat with the trench mortars, but Lime street, the second line, was not so bad. Here the main body laid in wait, with the advance posts in the saps about 30 or 40 feet in advance of the front line. The machine gunners and bombers massed there. Our Stokes guns supported them. Vimy Ridge was undermined, and mines were laid ready to explode if it was necessary. The tunnels to them opened into the valley. The battalion used to get into the tunnel when the bombardment started while the boys on the ridge went down the mine shafts. It was like rats running down a hole to see the boys go down them. Most of the shaft is opened into Coburg trench. This trench led up the ridge to the line. It was a terrible trench to get up at times, as so many got killed going up it, and the minnies used to hit it so often, and break our wires. Uhlan trench was the one on the right of it, also a very bad spot. These trenches ran up the ridge from the valley, beginning at the light railway which ran round the bottom of the ridge. The main trenches into the valley were Ersatz and 130th Alley.

The village of Souchez is at the junction of Souchez and Zouve valleys. At Carency there is a big military cemetery, where the French soldiers are buried who fell in taking Souchez and Carency back from the Germans. The front or no man's land on the ridge is a big mass of craters, which were exploded at the times attacks were made.

There were four on my station so we worked it in shifts, two did from noon to midnight, while Joe Yeardye did the shift from midnight til noon, the one who was off shift came down into the valley to our sheet iron shack which we called Whiz-Bang Chateau. It got its name by so many whiz-bangs falling so near it, in fact while Joe and I was in it this shift a shell landed right in the trench outside, but it was a small one – but it filled the shack up with smoke. It was just out of reach of Fritz's trench mortars, they could get within fifty yards of it but no further. One fell and shook the dixie of hot tea over Joe, he thought it was 'fini' which is our trench French for finished.

The rum-jars which we call a certain type of trench mortar can be seen coming, and while going up the trench with our tea one night, when I was about half way, I saw one coming straight for me, but it curved off and fell a little way out on the land, but I got covered in mud. Another followed almost immediately. While going up the trench one dark night I heard a noise like a fuse fizzing close to me, I ducked preparing for the bang when I saw it. It was a Tommy blowing his nose. Just before we relieved the 73rd a shell had come into the trench just near their signalling quarters and killed 3 signallers and wounded 4 more. One was signal sergeant of the Brigade.

We were relieved on the 11th and went to Villiers au Bois. We stayed in Villiers seven days, and while I was there I went to Mont St Eloy to see Harry Phipps who I used to go to school with and Harry Minter who I used to room with in Winnipeg. The weather began to break up as soon as we went in again on the 18th February. During this time in we were heavily shelled. I went to the old station AA4 in Coburg trench. While we were walking up a big minnie fell or blew up the ground and nearly burying us, it also threw a skeleton of a man into the trench in front of us, but skeletons are not by any means rare about Vimy Ridge. The battalion made a raid this time in but it cost us a lot of good men. Our section were almost wiped out. My namesake and friend Harry Andrews was killed, also eleven others, and several were wounded. These boys were never brought in as the Germans took them in at dark. The artillery did not shell them out in a sap which they had made, so the result was our boys were sniped when they made the raid, but the other three sections reached their objective but also lost several men. Sergeant Lloyd bombed a dugout but the ammunition inside exploded and blew the whole dugout up, it came down on the top of this sergeant and several others. During this raid all our lines were broken and we had no communication with headquarters, so we had to mend them and chance being blown up with minnies. While the ration party were at the Souchez dump, the enemy opened up on them. This was a severe bombardment, we thought he was surely coming over, but our artillery and machine guns checked him. No one was wounded but all the rations were lost except one sand bag full which possessed a jar of rum. The old fellow who carried it was not a believer in prohibition. The boys said he deserved the VC. We also made another raid, this time we were completely successful, killing about 30 Germans and losing only a few wounded. Martin Sorensen won the DCM in this raid, by picking up a live German bomb that struck him and throwing it into a crowd of Germans who threw it, killing and wounding most of them. In the previous raid A M Wilson and Pte Warwick won the MMs. The former of these two I saw presented with it in Hastings. We had the 85th battalion in for instruction with us this time, it was a warm time for them.

I had the luck to be warned for a course of signalling at Houdain, a few miles behind the line, on the 24th. I came out the line with Joe Yeardye, Thomas and Condie. We were just leaving the valley when all of a sudden the enemy opened up on the communication trench we were going up. Pieces of shell were flying all over, wounding a signaller who we were just talking to in the elbow, which resulted in a nice little Blighty.

We went out to Petit Servins where our transport lines were and quarter and pay masters. After getting fitted out with new clothes we were on our way to Houdain on the morning of the 26th of February. After passing through Fresnicourt just near the compound where the kaffirs are kept after coming in off the stone pile, we passed through Rebreve and Rancicourt until we came to Houdain about a mile from the latter place. I enjoyed being at the school and did very well at signalling with lamp, flapper, flag and heliograph. We also paid a visit to the aerodrome at Bruay to learn aeroplane signalling.

During the time I was at Houdain I paid several visits to Bruay at night and Sundays, also went to the theatre there. Houdain is a very nice little place with plenty of shops in and the prices were more reasonable than near the line. The first Division passed through Houdain while I was there, giving me a chance of meeting several boys I knew. There was also a nice YMCA there. I was suffering from bronchitis about the 15th of March. On the 23rd I reported sick at Rancicourt and was moved to the next camp at Fresnicourt, but as I did not get any better I was sent to the clearing station (CCS) at Barlin. Afterwards I was

moved by train to the Base Hospital at Etaples, near Boulogne. After being there a week, was again on the train for Calais. Much to my surprise on April 6th we crossed to Dover. I was seasick but never happier than when I landed in Old England again.

Postscript

In the back of Will's second booklet is an undated note by Ernie Andrews, the younger brother who was one of the unknown little lads playing under the pump at Keeper's Cottage in Bismore when Will first got back from Canada.

'My brother never completed this diary. He returned to France from England, and was badly wounded at Vimy Ridge by shrapnel, he was sent back to England to Whipps Cross Hospital and went through an operation for shrapnel wounds. He was finally discharged from the Canadian Army in 1919, and was affected by his wounds for the rest of his life.'

Will went on to farm at Sheephouse, which is in an idyllic situation on the path between Eastcombe and Nash End. A latter-day owner removed and presumably sold the roof tiles, so this ancient farmhouse rapidly became derelict and now not much remains standing. One can just discern the outline of the farmyard and garden, with a few tired old fruit trees still bowing in the wind. At some point after World War II the surviving Andrews brothers built for themselves bungalows where the farm fields bordered the east side of Fidges Lane. Other development followed, and the skyline of Eastcombe changed from fields to rooftops.

A final word about Alec Andrews. How awful – awe-inspiringly awful – it is for us to know that Alec survived the devastation of the 8th Gloucesters at La Boisselle under Adriaan Carton de Wiart, only to lose his life a little later. The history of that battle and those men is worth a Google...