

DIARY of Capt Vernon Carlisle Brown: 1917 - 1918

Foreword

This is the diary of Captain Vernon Carlisle Brown in the period 1917 and 1918 while he was serving as a medical officer in the Australian Army in France. In transcribing the hand written material of the diary into digital text I have tried to be as accurate as possible. In some sections personal names and place names are hard to read. I have consulted maps of the area to improve the accuracy of the place names, but I have not been able to do this with the names of people.

I have added punctuation marks at various places in the text where I thought it appropriate and occasionally I have added a word which seemed to be missing; whenever I have done this I have put the words in italics. In several places I have added comments of my own, but always these are in brackets and italics with my initials: *RHB*.

In preparing this transcription I have been amazed at how the diaries were preserved in an extreme environment and the elegant reporting of the tragic events happening around Vernon Brown at that time. He seems to have been able to keep a clear analytical mind operating in very unpleasant conditions. He also demonstrates a sense of humour in reporting small issues that occurred; such as the cow that tried to sleep with him and the cat (good ratter), which was on the official register of supplies at an aid to post! From time to time he philosophises about the stupidity of war and human reactions – bravery, compassion, inhumanity and other values.

Robert Hallows Brown
(Son of Vernon Carlisle Brown)
Avenel, Victoria.
17 July 2008

DIARY of Capt Vernon Carlisle Brown: 1917 - 1918

Qualified (MB BS) Dec 1915

Enlisted and posted to camps Seymour & other spots, left Australia 23-12-1916

Reached England 18-2-1917 after an exciting trip dodging subs etc.

In Rolleston Camp to 15-8-17, then France to No. 2 ACH ordinary Hospital routine

15-8-17 arrived in France. Reported at No. 2 AGH at 6 pm. Found Phil Sewell at hosp.

16-8-17 Made orderly Officer and in charge of tent 7, about 100 patients. In morning had a look around hosp. At 3:30 pm asked to assist in theatre; finished at 12:30 am

17-8-17 Commenced orderly officer duties. Out of bed 6:15 inspected AANC (?) orderlies; held sick parade; returned to bed for ¼ hr; had a bath; inspected men's breakfast. Did my round in tent. Inspected the Hosp. Poked my nose into kitchens, latrines and various other dirty places. Had to growl at orderlies for having untidy kits etc.

12 pm inspected the men's dinner. I had dinner.

1:45 commenced assisting in theatre till 9:30

9:45 went round the camp to see that lights were all out.

This is a typical day of orderly officer at No. 2 AGH

18-8-17 Nothing different to previous day

19-8-17 Sunday; same as usual; anaesthetics for 5 ½ hours.

20-8-17 Not so much today, no theatre work. Camp inspected by two British Generals.

21-8-17 Another beautiful day; warm strong sunshine = to a perfect Australian spring day. Usual routine in morning. In afternoon sent to gas school where we were issued with apparatus to keep out the Hun gas.

22-8-17 Glorious day, hot in afternoon; visited the beach and had a most enjoyable swim.

23-8-17 Cold day

24-8-17 Rained, cold very wintry. Attended a meeting of Boulogne Base medical society at No. 32 Gen Hosp.. Proceedings commenced by afternoon tea given by sisters and nurses of hospital (some rather decent ones present – will probably go there again if opportunity occurs). The real object of the meeting commences at 5 o'clock, subject: "Gun shot wounds of the head"; proceeding opened by Col. Sergeant then discussed by many leading lights of profession. (Col. Gordon Holmes English Cushing (?writing not clear- RHB) American (?writing not clear- RHB). 2 ½ hours very profitably spent listening to these men.

25-8-17 Weather improving. Sergeant held a sports meeting, acted as judge; quite a pleasant afternoon. Met 2 nurses who were at No 11 AGH Caulfield. A most excellent concert given by YMCA in morning.

26-8-17 Sunny morning. Went for a walk along coast with Phil (*Sewell*); left at 2 pm went about 2 ½ miles; met a friend of Phil's, N2 VAD, she invited us to tea at 5. At 5 duly arrived at No 54 General Hospital; met several more entertaining and interesting VAD nurses. A severe rain storm commenced while we were thus pleasantly occupied. Anyway we left about 7:30 and wound our way home through sleet; got very wet. The rain had a slightly damping effect on our spirits, but a large

bundle of letters waiting in my room raised those falling spirits to an enormous height. These were the first letters I had seen for 6 weeks.

27-8-17 In morning received orders that Phil and myself were to proceed up to the line on 28/8/17 at 3:30 am

In afternoon ran across Jim Thompson, in charge X ray department at No2 AGH. Had a long talk with him in the afternoon.

28-8-17 Ambulance car arrived for us at 3:30 am; reached the station and train left at 4 am. We had no idea what town we were bound for; all our information was a certain army corps. We went as far as the train would take us – about 6 miles from the actual trenches. Apparently this town had never been occupied by the enemy, but a few buildings were knocked about by shells. Of course we were well within range and this town was occasionally shelled. Nothing very exciting happened on our arrival.

Our next stunt was to find our HQ. An obliging soldier (Aust – the way they are nearly all Aust here; one would think he had been “dumped” back in Australia). We were told it was behind the Cathedral, but we found that it had been moved. We therefore found it necessary “to ask a policeman” – Australian military police you know. We were told the HQ had been moved to a town 6 miles away. It was not so difficult after all. All that was necessary was to wait until a motor car, going in the required direction, came along. This same MP eventually found a magnificent Rolls-Royce and Phil & I buzzed off. Arrived at HQ of 2nd Anzac – No one knew anything about us. Anyway we were sent off in another car to HQ 4th Div. This meant another long run. We were drafted our final destination. Phil to 13 FA (*Field Ambulance*) and myself to 12 FA. Arrived very tired, but just in time for dinner. This ambulance is at present running a rest station about 4 miles behind the line.

29-8-17 Now for one’s impressions on coming into a fighting zone for the first time. Possible Fritz is fairly quiet just now, but so far things have not been very exciting. The rumble of the guns is just audible – so far. I have not seen any actual shells coming over. This afternoon a few explosions beyond camp could be heard, possibly a few shells were sent over the camp by the Hun. They tell me German aeroplanes are very active with their bombs at night in this neighbourhood, but we were not visited last night.

Living is quite comfortable here. I have a weather board hut about 10x14 two windows and door, a couple of boxes as furniture and, strange to relate, an iron bedstead with a soft mattress. – a room that is much more luxurious than I had on the plain (*his previous accomodation? RHB*), except that there is no electric light, one has to be satisfied with a candle here. Food is as good as I have had all along; and plenty of it.

30-8-17 A typical day’s work here; rise at 8 am wash with aid of sponge and a small canvas bucket, shave, breakfast 8.15: porridge, mince on toast, coffee made with milk, white bread and butter (rather margarine) peach jam, honey.

9.15 visit wards - about 50 patients, minor injuries and mild sickness.

11.15 morning tea

11.25 order ambulance to examine prisoners at neighbouring prison camp – about 1 ½ miles drive. Examination takes 10 minutes and day’s work is ended.

Dinner (lunch) at 1 PM: soup, cold mutton, potatoes and vegetables, bread and butter, tea.

2-4 reading and writing, guns audible this afternoon.

Afternoon tea 4 PM

Dinner 6.30: soup, roast beef, roast potatoes, vegetable marrow, Welsh rarebit, bread and butter, honey, tea.

Went for a walk in evening; saw site where an ammunitions dump exploded by Boche aeroplane.

31-8-17 Visited prisoners, made admitting officer; nothing to do but wait for patients and admit them. Aeroplanes very active around here this afternoon, all British, some marvellous exhibitions of flying given; beautiful moonlight evening, 9.30 Fritz aeroplane appeared over camp commenced to act the goat with a machine gun. Gives one a nasty taste in the mouth; thank goodness he soon cleared out.

1-9-17 Received instructions to retire about 30 miles back for a long rest (This division has been in line nearly 12 months) – feel somewhat disappointed that I have not seen the ‘dinkum oil’ before going back. One has to pluck up a certain amount of courage to come to the front and to go back without seeing something is rather disappointing.

In afternoon just as we are having afternoon tea there is a tremendous bang a screeching noise overhead and then another furious bang. This happens about 4 times. Fritz is putting big shells over our camp site into Bailleul, an adjacent town. Everything then becomes quiet until evening. It turns out an ideal evening for Fritz – absolutely no wind. Full moon, but sufficiently misty to make it difficult to see the planes. Went to bed early 9.30 – knowing that we had to be up at 6 in the morning to commence our long route march back - The distant rumble of guns was not sufficient to prevent sleep.

Everything went sweetly until at exactly midnight when I was rudely awakened by a furious crash. One immediately realised that the Boche was out with bombs. I am precise about the time for the first thing I did was to look at my wrist watch. In about 1 minute a 2nd crash occurred – nearer and much louder. The aeroplane could be heard; it seemed to be immediately overhead – a veritable tornado of explosions then took place. These were anti-aircraft guns attempting to destroy that beastly hun. The next and alarming sound was to hear great chunks of metal, from the exploded antiaircraft guns come hurtling down around the camp; some of these would weigh as much as ½ lb and come down at such a rate to sink several feet into the ground (at least ½ a dozen such pieces lobbed within 100 feet of our hut during the night).

To attempt to describe one’s sensations is impossible (I had often wondered what one would feel like under fire). This experience was truly terrifying. To be suddenly awakened out of a sound sleep by a fearful explosion is bad enough, but to have it followed in 60 seconds time by a long drawn out scream which ends in a terrific ear splitting explosion apparently right over the hut. This performance is kept up for about 10 minutes. Fearful explosions occurring all round one. The row is so extreme that one feels certain that the bomb is only a few feet away and one wonders if one has been hit. All sensations are numbed so one cannot be certain if he has been put

out of action or not. All this time the archies (*anti-aircraft guns*) are firing furiously and these terrifying bits of metal, already described, drop around.

At first I wondered whether I should get up and out into the open, but finally decided to stay in the bed. I must confess that I was quite unable to stop trembling and was unable to speak – I suppose on account of fear.

The 1st act lasted 10 minutes, as I said, and no pieces actually came into the hut and I found I was uninjured. At this stage I counted my pulse rate and found it was doing 180 per minute. Silence reigned for 20 minutes and the drone of another plane became audible. In about 1 minute's time another crash occurred and the whole performance was repeated. This time I was able to control myself somewhat; able in fact to speculate with my room mate where the next bomb was going to fall. I cannot say I was not frightened, but I was able to adopt a more fatalistic attitude.

In all there were about 6 raids during the night. Naturally sleep was out of the question, but as a matter of fact I dozed off before the last (about 5 o'clock). This I think is further evidence that the fatalistic attitude can be adopted. The first raid made me intensely frightened, but after that I was able to look at the affair from a more impersonal view – "I may get knocked out – I cannot do anything to help myself, so why worry".

Examination in the morning revealed the fact that none of our unit were hit. Several large pieces of iron had fallen within the camp without doing damage. 1 large bomb had fallen into the camp, but failed to explode. Outside the camp there were, within a radius of 300 yards, at least 5 large craters, some as large as a room. A great number of civilians were killed in the neighbouring town and many houses completely destroyed. I do not want another experience like this. I must confess that I was glad to retrace my steps with the ambulance the next morning.

2nd Sept Ambulance moved off at 9 am, self walking. Travelled about 5 miles then secured a horse from another officer and rode remainder of march. Most interesting country passed through 1st class land all under intense cultivation. Not large crops but thousands of small patches: wheat, oats, lucerne, potatoes, beans, hops, mangles, maize. Every inch cultivated right up to the very edge of road.

Reached destination at 2:30 – a number of picturesque farms. We were of course billeted. It is a curious system. Every house in France has been examined and its capacity determined, i.e. the number of officers and men it will hold. Any troops marching through a district get permission from the military authorities to billet there. The owners of the particular houses are not consulted, but the necessary rooms are taken possession of. Naturally the inhabitants are liberally paid and the French no doubt make a good thing out of the troops, some of them claiming fearfully high rates. It is a very marked feature in all villages; the shop people always have a enormous price for necessities of soldiers.

An aeroplane visited us again in the evening, but did not get closer than a couple of miles so no damage was done.

3-9-17 An early start made 22 miles to St Julien; our next billet (*there are several towns called St Julien in France and this one seems to be also known as Erny Saint Julien or Sint Juliaan, near the coast of France – note VCB's remark in the entry for 27/10/17 – RHB*). Only a small village, very poor accommodation; men sleeping in barns, stables, cow sheds and lofts. A few stuffy rooms available for officers. 2 of us, Capt Bloomer and self, have a bell tent.

4-9-17 Commencement of routine of training; bathing parade in afternoon

5-9-17 Programme of procedure: Men have ½ hrs physical jerks before breakfast. Breakfast at 8.30 Parade at 9.30. All officers have to be on parade. Finish at 12. Afternoon devoted to sports.

You note that there is no medical work at all, merely military procedure. Severe thunderstorm this afternoon; distinct strain on capabilities of our tent; leaking in a few places – nights are getting cool now.

6-9-17 Rained all last night; dull grey morning. Route march – about 6 miles without stopping – very hot morning. Therefore very glad to get back to camp at about 12 o'clock. Had a most delightful swim and then an excellent lunch. Sports in afternoon.

8-9-17 Usual routine drill in morning; sports in afternoon. I have had no medical work at all for a fortnight – duties are purely military.

9-9-17 Sunday. Usual 9:30 parade; church parade was not possible as there was no padre and no protestant churches in the village. RC's were marched off to a small neighbouring cathedral. The remainder had rather an exhausting kit inspection. Today's work ended at 11 am.

10-9-17 Orderly officer. Before breakfast took charge of ambulances for physical exercise. Duties of orderly officer are quite simple; must not leave camp, inspects all meals and inspection of billets made once during the day; any other odd jobs are liable to occur. Went for a swim in afternoon; as usual the water was exceedingly cold.

11-9-17 Severe frost last night; great difficulty in keeping warm, convinced that some extra blankets will be necessary for the winter. Route march of about 6 miles after breakfast; quite a hot morning; returned and found several letters awaiting me. In afternoon a message came from a neighbouring farm asking for a doctor to see a youngster. I strolled down the road and found a boy about 12 apparently very ill (104 deg temp). He was lying in an absolutely filthy bed - room absolutely stinking. I soon realised that the boy would probably die if left there. The next proceeding was to tell the mother that the boy must be sent to hospital. About a dozen (people) then started to talk collectively to me at a great rate. I was stumped for I am bothered if I could make head or tail of their statements. Anyway I cleared out and got an ambulance and sent the youngster off to hospital. This is the only medical work I have had in this neighbourhood yet.

12-9-17 Usual routine

13-9-17 Unit sports held quite a successful day.

14-9-17 Usual routine – orderly officer – weather a little cooler.

15-9-17 Brigade held a sports meeting – marched our unit about 6 miles to sports ground – usual foot races, various fancy dress get-ups created great amusement – returned in afternoon and found a letter from home.

16-9-17 Sunday church parade at 9 am; held away out in the fields – a very impressive service and interesting sermon. After parade was able to borrow a horse and with Capt. Blumer set out on an exploring expedition. Heard that the 3rd Pioneers were at a village about 10 miles away; we made this village our goal. Passed through very interesting country and met Ken Purcell and Phil Sewell on (*the*) way. Lost our way several times, but after travelling about 15 miles we reached the particular town, but found the Pioneers were still 10 miles in another direction. As time was getting on and we were still 9 miles from “home” and considering that our horses were borrowed, we thought that it would not be a fair thing to attempt the other 20 extra miles, so turned our horses homeward once more.

It had been a most beautiful day and an interesting, though rather unsuccessful as far as finding the Pioneers was concerned, was brought to a conclusion by a swim in the canal.

17-9-17 Usual routine in the morning – Major Johnson (the section commander) was orderly officer, so I had to take charge of the section and attempt to instruct them in wagon drill. I made preparations to borrow regimental bicycle in afternoon to make a further attempt to reach the 3rd Pioneers. Unfortunately these plans were rudely smashed. The powers that be decided that we should move out in a few days. I was billeting officer – lord knows why. Anyway I was given a car, an orderly and a batman and told to find an abode for the ambulance on a certain area consisting of 4 farms. I left at 4 pm and I can assure you there was some fun. My knowledge of French is limited and of course the farmers knew no English. I had to bargain for rooms for 9 officers and 240 men. Barnes have to serve for the men, but when the harvest is in it is very difficult to find the requisite room. The farmers resent the wholesale intrusion of soldiers, even though we are fighting for their country. I “parley-vous” all day and altogether I had some good sport trying to get what I wanted.

18-9-17 Did not sleep well. The French bed is far too soft after what I have been used to. My hostess was good enough to provide sheets and white blankets. The batman carefully made the bed in the approved style, but I could not sleep. The sheets seemed funny. Anyway I finished up by throwing the sheets away and getting my old sleeping bag into commission and thus getting a fair sleep.

French beds are curious arrangements – very massive affairs and quite a height from the ground (about 4 feet). They have an enormous amount of soft material; goodness known what it is. When one gets into bed one seems to sink down about a yard at least.

I got up about 9 this a.m. And then commenced looking round for rooms. Eventually things have been straightened out and I am ready for the arrival of the ambulance.

19-9-17 Slept excellently last night; I suppose because I was rather tired and had become used to the French bed. Did not get up till 9 am. Breakfast cooked by batman not very successful – sardines on toast was the essential keystone of the meal. CO and 2 officers arrived at 11. Remainder of ambulance arrived about 3. Fritz sent some very large long distance shells into a town 2 miles away this afternoon. Our present situation is fully 15 miles from the front, behind Ypres. The noise of these shells bursting does not fill one with confidence.

Tonight I had to give up my comfortable bed to the CO and adjourn to a tent. As it is not very cold yet, sleeping in a tent is quite good.

20-9-17 Went for a route march several miles. Very pretty country, undulating and all intensely cultivated. All sorts of cereals appear to be grown round here. Fritz has never actually occupied this area so, except for a very occasional shell hole, it is quite uninjured.

21-9-17 Moving once more. Stuff packed up and moved off at 11 am – reached a large town at dinner time, Cassel, and came to rest at Steenvoorde about 5 in afternoon. Guns extremely audible once more.

22-9-17 Usual camp routine.

23-9-17 Sunday a very early rise and movement closer to line commenced. Tents struck at 6.30, (a) march of 2 miles, then got in huge motor buses; a very long column being thus formed. A rather bumpy ride over very dusty though interesting country brought us to rest at the rear of Ypres at Belgian corner. Guns now easily audible and rather nerve racking. Some of unit were billeted in dugouts, but Phil and I occupied a tent. A rather rowdy road did not tend to make one sleep and one of our big guns in the near neighbourhood made a furious row every few minutes, added to which the scream of an occasional enemy shell overhead, did not make one sleep well.

24-9-17 Rested all day.

25-9-17 Phil and I went with 100 12th Field Amb stretcher bearers to line, at least Phil (Sewell) went half way with bearers to complete the journey next day.

I proceeded with the Colonel of 4th Field to have a look at the various aid posts last recorded. We travelled about 3 miles per car through that renowned ghostly city, Ypres – torn and battle shattered – not a single building in the whole city being intact; not even one room being left – all the normal inhabitants gone and now only occupied by soldiers and men connected with war – living like rats underground, shells still occasionally fly overhead to burst in some area and perhaps tear it to pieces a little more. The car was stopped at a place with the name “hell fire corner”. This suggestive spot is the limit to which cars travel; the reason being obvious. There were still about 3 miles to the front trenches.

A glance at the country made one feel that the name was quite justified. Slightly undulating slope, which under normal circumstances would look beautifully green, now presented a dismal brown aspect; every square inch having been repeatedly

turned over by shells during the last year or so. Everywhere deep holes appeared. One would have difficulty to walk across unless one continued along the recognised roads. These are continually being ripped up by shells, but the dauntless Pioneers just as constantly repair them and thus traffic is seldom blocked day or night. Naturally the road is not the only thing that is hit. Dozens of smashed wagons litter the road side – frequent gory patches demonstrate places where horses have been killed. A slightly more careful examination usually reveals the dead carcass on the road edge. Sometimes it is rather high, but as a rule (it) is quite fresh for it is not necessary to quickly bury them – most are covered by fresh shells.

The scene presented to our view on this particular morning was not one to make one feel happy. As the car pulled up I had to step out some distance over a pool of blood. On looking into the gutter the source of it was made evident. Apparently a shell had burst there that morning and caught a mule team, smashing the cart and killing both the mule and driver. As I stated before, nothing is allowed to stop the traffic, so the whole concern had been pushed into the gutter waiting removal.

On almost every hundred yards during the mile and half walk to the aid post I saw similar evidences of tragedy. All the time high explosive shells bursting over the area, fortunately none were nearer than 75 yards. One just walks along wondering when one is to explode near and end the game.

We reached the post; a strongly built German concrete dugout “Pill Box”, without mishap. I had only come up to have a look at these posts, but when we got there I received orders to relieve an MO (*Medical Officer-RHB*) already there. I was not sorry as I thus avoided the rather unpleasant walk back. Shelling became very severe in the afternoon.

The 4th Pioneer, building a road past, received casualties. I had the job of fixing them up - 3 died before I could send them further. Some were very badly knocked about – one chap had the whole of his face blown away (a most horrible sight). He was still able to speak in a sort of a way and appeared quite cheerful. He was still alive when evacuated. Another chap had his arm blown off at the shoulder. This gave some trouble in stopping bleeding, but I eventually succeeded. Several had severe compound fractures of the skull. Cases like this were brought to me all night. I was kept going, but not rushed.

At 10 pm our advanced party of bearers arrived, one unfortunate being killed on the road. At 1:30 am Phil Sewell arrived with the rest of the bearers, none being killed or injured.

26-9-17 Dressing wounded cases continued during the early hours of the morning. A wounded hun was brought in at 2 am. I forthwith got a button and have it as a souvenir.

At 3 (am) one of those stunts commenced, according to the daily papers one sees an official account of a successful offensive. Away in Australia one receives such news with pleasure, but cannot get any idea of the awfulness of the proceeding unless one is on the spot.

At precisely 5.50 am an intense barrage opened – thousands of British guns suddenly belched forth death and destruction. The row was indescribable. This continued for 1½ hours then ceased or at least eased off. German prisoners then began to come down and we realised that we were having success. Then come the wounded in all stages, some walking, some with limbs missing, some cheerful, nearly all quiet and very few complaining. Nearly all had been seen by doctors further up, so all I had to do was to readjust the dressings and send them on. This sort of proceeding continued all day and night. I managed to have a sleep from 9 pm till 11.30 pm then continued seeing patients and doing odd dressings.

27-9-17 A new bunch of bearers arrived at 7 in the morning to relieve our bearers and incidentally an MO to relieve Phil and I. Out of our crowd we were the last to leave. Our walk of about 2 ½ miles to the advanced dressing station was rather uneventful though I can say that our pace was not particularly slow. One does not feel inclined to crawl along if there is a possibility of high explosive shells about. We reached the ADS then caught a car and got back to our headquarters about 12 midday, tired, dusty-dirty, not having taken off any clothes for over 50 hours, but quite happy. A wash from a canvas bucket, a good meal and a sleep reinstated a state of equilibrium.

That evening the boche recommenced his usual nightly bombing raid making a terrific row, but fortunately I slept peacefully all night (for 12 hours to be accurate) and was therefore quite unaware of any danger.

28-9-17 Our bearers moved to dugouts a mile nearer the line and rested, preparatory to going in next morning. I took the bearers in by myself to a tunnel while Phil returned to our unit.

In the evening with the aid of a mouth organ our chaps organised a concert. All the well known rags had their turn and then they got onto the well known hymns. About 9 o'clock an Australian mail was sent down to us. Our considerate Colonel had had it sent on with comforts just before going into the line for the second time. Naturally the concert came to a hasty conclusion and letters were eagerly read (I was not left out in the cold for there was a fine long letter from mother). Sleep then ruled the roost.

29-9-17 We arose at 5 am breakfasted and established ourselves on motor lorries which conveyed us within about 2 ½ miles of our destination. Padding the hoof then commenced. Walking up to the line is not nearly as pleasant as walking away from it. Orthodox military formations are not adopted when proceeding up - single file with a space of a couple of yards between each man is the order of the day. The officer in charge, of course, leading. At 7am I reached the post successfully and got the bearers allotted to their particular jobs – my own of course being to do any local dressing and to see the patients passing through.

Up to 10 (am) only a few Fritz shells came over to worry us. Then for some reason or other Mr Fritz became angry and commenced to shell most unmercifully; our Relay post being singled out for a special dose, probably because we had a large body of men making a decent station there. At 11.30 am all men that could be spared had to be sent away as it was too dangerous to stay. At 12.30 shelling became still more intense; evacuation of wounded through our post was then suspended. A few we had, had to be housed in dugouts. Some local casualties of a frightful nature were coming

in – both legs blown off, great gaping abd. (*abdominal - RHB*) and chest wounds, head wounds and many other fearfully gory conditions. These had to be dressed and given as much shelter as possible. The remaining bearers were sent away for safety; only three medical officers and a couple of orderlies remaining in the concrete dugout. A direct hit then blew up our QM store.

This fierce bombardment continued all the afternoon. At 3 pm a badly wounded man was brought in. One of his knees was shot away and he had a fracture of the opposite thigh. Major Welch and myself attended to this man. I fixed one leg while the Major fixed the other. A stretcher bearer was standing between us, but about 18” outside the dug out; 8 wounded men were inside the dugout. The job was almost complete when a shell exploded almost at the feet of the bearer mentioned – blowing off his left arm and seriously wounding him in the chest (he died a few hours later). Major Welch received a wound in the back and head. All the men in the dugout were wounded again except the man we were dressing. I have no idea how the metal got past me without hitting me. I was knocked down, but the only mark I could find was a slight dent in one of my stars. (*A captain has three lapel stars - RHB*)

I fancy that the shelling must have been so intense, or else I must have been dazed, at all events I did not feel frightened or shaken. It did not occur to me at the time that I had a wonderful escape. Apparently the human mind is too limited to grasp such facts. Previously I had often wondered how any one could carry on with any rational action after such an experience. I am convinced that the higher susceptibilities are dulled and one acts mechanically.

I grabbed a tourniquet, tied it tightly round the bearers arm, then sent for another doctor (Major Fletcher) and commenced to dress Major Welch’s wounds. After this was done we carried on dressing the other men who had been re-wounded. We then evacuated these men straight through the barrage to safety – every one that was able, assisting. Personally I helped carry Major Welch to safety.

After we had reached comparative safety (probably ½ hour after the original burst) I realised the extraordinary escape that I had had. I then felt a bit nervous or “got the wind up”, as the soldiers say. I felt disinclined to go back to that shell stricken spot, but after a little hesitation I managed to pluck up sufficient courage to dash up from shell hole to shell hole until I reached the post again.

For the rest of the afternoon I felt very unhappy when I had to go out and dress fresh cases. Shells continued to burst all round us until about 6 o’clock in the afternoon. About 4 o’clock I had to make a trip to another post about ½ mile away. While doing this walk a shell went off about 100 yards away. 2 large pieces of metal flew all that distance and passed within an inch of my leg, hitting my breeches without actually tearing them. I picked up the bit and have it as a souvenir.

After 6 o’clock the shelling settled down. I was then able to get a little sleep, but we had practically nothing to eat all that day as all our rations were destroyed by those cursed shells. They tell us this was an example of exceptional shelling. I hope it is a fact for I am sure one could not last with this sort of business for long.

(The events of this day, 29th September, are cited in the award of the Military Cross to Vernon Brown – RHB)

30/9/17 (Sunday) Commenced duty again at 12 am. Only occasional shelling now – a beautiful moonlight night. The job of going out and looking for the bearers we had sent out earlier in this day, fell to my lot; not at all a nice job after yesterday's experience. I set out amidst comparative quiet – got about 100 yards across very rough country, every inch of which has been hit with shell; great holes from 4 – 10 feet dia. When our guns opened out, making a fearful row and thoroughly unnerving me once more. I jumped into a shell hole for a while and then realised that it was our own guns that were barking, so got up and continued.

Well, I walked up and down this beastly rough country for 1 ½ hours, quite alone and not feeling particularly happy. I eventually found the bearers and got back to the post. Nothing eventful occurred till daylight when another MO and relief bearers arrived.

During 29/9/17 we had 3 bearers killed, including Jimmy Agnew and VK Anderson; Old Scotch boys – these two bearers killed by one shell. A E Hougate (*Howgate? - RHB*) killed about 2 feet away from me. There were 3 other bearers seriously wounded and 4 less seriously. The stretcher bearer's lot is a hard one and they deserve no end of praise. They have to carry patients quietly and calmly through fearfully severe fire, not watching or thinking where the shells are lobbing. The work is exceedingly hard. To carry a big man over this terrible country is an ordeal, which any might shirk even if there were no danger. If there is a rush of patients they must be got away, no matter how fatigued the bearers are. One bearer may be killed or wounded; another takes his place and they carry on until they are settled.

As soon as our own relief was fixed up I cleared out and very glad indeed to get away from the rotten spot. After I had gone Major Fletcher who stayed on was wounded, so that I must consider that I had a very fortunate day's outing. We got back to Belgian Battery corner, boarded motor carriers and went right back to our main headquarters; away from the greater part of the shell fire. But aeroplanes come over here, as everywhere else, and drop bombs.

1/10/17 Slept the sleep of the just. Many aeroplanes came over and dropped their unwelcome eggs; none actually hit our camp and yours truly was dead to the world, so everything in the garden was alright. Wrote several letters and rested today.

Have to go to a main dressing station tomorrow with a possibility of returning to (the) line once more. Captain Blumer and Phil Sewell were detailed to take the bearers in on this occasion

2/10/17 They left this a.m. for CMDS – a distance of 5 miles. I was kept back at DRS to act as orderly officer. The authorities considered that I had earned a rest. In the afternoon an order came from division stating that Phil was appointed RMO to 50th Batt and Capt Blumer to another Batt. As I was the only bearer Capt left I was ordered to go to the CMDS and take charge of all the bearers by myself once more. Arrived at about 3 pm; Phil and Blumer departed and I was left in sole charge of the bearers once more. Stewart Cowen was stationed at CMDS.

3/10/17 Sat tight and awaited orders. At midday Capt Morgan reported to CMDS to take place of Phil. Nothing doing all afternoon; retired to bed at about 9.30. By the way, our accommodation was very good at this camp - Capt Morgan and self shared a large hospital marquee. We each had a fine bedstead with sheets and any quantity of blankets. At about 11 pm, just after we had got nicely to sleep, an orderly came on the scene and rudely disturbed us with the news that we must move off at 7 in the morning. I had then to get up and arrange to have 48 hour rations drawn and a lot of other details for the early start. I got back to bed about midnight and had a fair sleep before daylight.

Everything was A1 in the morning and we got away per motor lorry at 7 without any hitch. We had to report at Belgian Battery corner; a distance of about 5 miles. Arrived there and found that we had to go into the line immediately. Walking was then the order of the day.

4/10/17 At 9.30 we arrived at the advanced dressing station Menin road and reported to the Col in charge of evacuation. He informed (*me*) that he wished 60 bearers to go on up the line. As I was in charge of the party and as Capt M (*Morgan - RHB*) had not yet been in the line I felt that I must go into the scrap once more. I therefore gave Morgan the job of the ADS and set off with my 60 bearers. We went along the same track which I had travelled along previously, past "Hell fire corner" and along the corduroy track. I have already described the horrors of this track. They were much intensified; dead horses, mules and men were stretched out at intervals. Smashed wagons and timbers were strewn everywhere. (This being purely a personal diary I have not attempted to describe the general military situation at all, but it is well to remember that the English were delivering the great sledge hammer strikes during the October offensive in Flanders. Fritz of course was able and did continuously counter attack furiously. It was only natural that he should punch (? -*RHB*) line of com (*difficult to read - RHB*) and this particular track was singled out for a special dose. And, as I have made it clear, he had attained quite a lot of success).

We negotiated half the track without incident when a couple of shells lobbed about 50 yds. to one side and a little bit ahead of us. We moved on about a dozen yds and another shell lobbed fair on the track some 60 yds in front of us. Another almost immediately followed just a little to the right of the road. I noticed that all the shells had fallen either on the track or to the right of it. It therefore seemed logical that we should make a slight detour to the left. I only went about 50 yds to the left, but our move was amply repaid for we saw a few more large shells hit the road and they must have got at least some of our long string of bearers had we continued on the road. I was congratulating myself that we had successfully negotiated a nasty spot when a terrific explosion went off right alongside me. It completely deafened me for several minutes and was sufficient to send me sprawling. I must say it gave me a much greater shock than the one going off some days previously killing the one man and wounding several others. The thought passed through my mind "That must have been a big one. Why am I not blown to bits? How many has it accounted for?"

Well I eventually came to my senses a bit and looked round and was surprised to find no sign of a shell hole and no damage whatsoever. The explanation was that I had wandered into one of our own guns and the blooming thing had gone off just behind me, giving me a nasty jar.

We travelled another mile and reached a place designated the tunnels. This was previously a German "Pill Box", but was now used as a relay post. My final orders were obtained here – 50 bearers were to go right up to within 200 yds of the front line and, as the 22 Batt RMO had just been wounded, I was to go forward and take his place. I was told that there would be no difficulty in finding the way as I had simply to follow the track. Up to this point there was absolutely no difficulty as we had a corduroy road to guide us, but it ended here (Germans had occupied this land only a week before). I set off at the head of a long column of bearers all carrying stretchers. We got on famously for the first ½ mile and reached the most advanced relay post. The area of regimental aid posts now came into view. My particular post being the most advanced. As a matter of fact being situated right in the front trenches of the previous night (There had been a stunt this morning and Fritz had been pushed back a bit) so it would be a little way from German territory.

After leaving the last relay post trouble commenced. Shells had ripped the ground up and partially obliterated our track. Anyway I took a wrong turn and after a fair walk found myself and bearers in the wrong area. We reached a "Pill Box". It was an RAP, but Capt Southey, belonging to another div altogether, was in possession. It was nice to meet a familiar person, but it was not at all a nice place to meet ones friends in. I said good day and buzzed off across country to find our proper track again. Shelling of this particular area was not very intense, but it was rather disconcerting to see huge columns of earth spurt up every now and again. Some would be some miles away, but some would lob within 100 yards.

There are other things beside the shells that make one uncomfortable. The roughness of the ground is really only a minor difficulty; everywhere there is a honecomb series of shell holes – some 6 feet deep, some greater and some perhaps less. One has to carefully work along the edges of these craters. Every few yds there would be visible the last remnants of poor fellows that had "gone west". (This land was all recently (a few days before) won, so one might expect to see evidence of the fighting). To see bodies in all stages of disruption and decay in an area like this is not at all pleasant – a leg would be lying in one spot and not far away other human remnants would be ruthlessly scattered about.

About a half hour's walk over this sort of country brought us to another "Pill Box", this time on the right track. I found there was still a mile to go, so pushed on, but after going about 800 yds succeeded in losing myself once more. We therefore had recourse to a tacking process up and down the field hoping thus to strike the required post. Unfortunately Mr Fritz began to lose his temper and commenced to shell the area heavily; some coming unpleasantly close. To look back and see my long string of bearers made it seem a moral certainty that some of them must get hit. Anyway we plodded on and a last saw a heap of bricks, or should I say a heap of smashed bricks. I knew that the second most advanced post was at a brick kiln, so I felt certain that this must be it. Further I knew that Capt Frank McMahon was established there and as the shelling had become very intense I thought it was a fair thing to seek some shelter for the bearers. Just as I and some of the bearers got over the edge of the crater a shell lobbed and caught one of the bearers (a chap named Brown). Fortunately no one else was hit and we soon got the rest into one of the brick kilns where they were safe from splinters, but not from any direct hits.

Mac gave me a nice warm welcome. We had been corresponding for months, but this was the first time that I had seen him since he left St Vincent's. He then told me that all Major Craig's (the chap whose place I was going to take) staff had been knocked out, that his RAP was badly bent and as the stretcher bearers were bringing all the patients to this post, I decided that discretion was the better part of valour. So I established my RAP at this spot with him (*McMahon - RHB*).

Our little home was formerly a brick kiln; some 40 ft long, but collapsed in the middle, thus being divided into 2 huts. The roof consisted of 18" of earth and 2 layers of bricks. This seems a lot, but actually it afforded very little protection. The constant shaking caused by shells falling near had loosened all the mortar so that the least touch brought down showers of bricks on one's head. The effect of a direct hit could easily be imagined – an antemortem burial would surely result.

I have already stated that there had been a stunt on during this morning. Its success was soon evident, for about midday droves of German prisoners began to file past – some wounded some unwounded. The latter were grabbed to act as stretcher bearers *to take* back, both their own and our men.

At about 2 o'clock things quietened down somewhat. At this time a rather distinguished looking prisoner, though a private, was brought in. He spoke English fluently. Mac dressed him and as there was not much doing we kept him for about 20 minutes, yarning. Most prisoners who talk English put up a bluff stakes, saying that things are rotten on their side, that they are being completely bashed by our artillery – that their prisoners are well treated – that the Australians are very fine fellows. In fact they say everything hoping thus to be treated well. This chap was quite a different type – a Prussian of the Prussians. He told us he was a doctor of philosophy and had spent about 8 years in England getting the best out of our libraries. He told us there was good stuff available in London and Oxford. From the way he spoke I do not think he was there as a spy, but merely as a student.

We next tapped him on his views about the war. He said that no Germans wished it, but it was inevitable. They were ready for peace, but that was impossible if any suggestion of the restoration of Alsace and Lorraine were contemplated. He was absolutely loyal to the Kaiser; stating that he was everywhere loved and that their government was ideal.

Submarine warfare was next discussed. He admitted that it was apparently barbarous for neutrals, but *he* considered it was quite allowable in war. He even thought the sinking of the *Lusitania* was justifiable.

At about 5 pm Fritz was busy again. Very large shells were being used, making a terrific noise and ripping great holes in the earth. I got up on top of our post for awhile and viewed the scenery. Before the war there was a village just near (*Zonnebeke*) now just a few mounds of rubble marked the site of houses *and* a few smashed stones indicated the site of the village church. Roads, streets and fields were all absolutely obliterated. It was a scene of utter desolation. (By the way our own guns had brought about most of the destruction for this territory had only been captured for 2 days; now Fritz was doing a bit of smashing). One could not stay long

and think of the frightful destruction to property. Things are far too lively to allow a deeply contemplative mood to overcome one. There would be an explosion and one would see a great volume of earth and brick rising to a great height in the air; many tons would rise to a great number of feet. This might be ½ mile away, then there would be a series all in a different direction.

A working party or fatigue party would be seen bringing up rations or doing other jobs and a shell lobbed amongst them; some are killed and the rest scatter. I watched this sort of thing for about 15 minutes. Then several lobbed fairly close; one about 50 feet away. A few bits of dirt hit me from this chap, so I considered it was time to get under cover. Flying bits of metal sometimes give nasty wounds or kill one at 100 feet or more.

In the kiln we were safe from flying bits, but Fritz started a counter attack and all our guns commenced to bark and make an awful din, but they drove Fritz back.

By 10 pm things quietened down as far as the arrival of patients was concerned, but shelling was still intense. Anyway Mack and I decided to have a bit of a rest. There was no room to lie down, but just enough to sit. There were puddles of water all over the floor – our attempts at making a floor with broken bricks were rather futile as the water came through the cracks. A little bully beef and biscuit served as food and, as darkness had to be insisted on as much as possible, our outlook could not be described as very cheerful. The spot I chose was very springy. Investigation in the morning revealed the fact that there was a thin layer of bricks over a dead German. We considered that he had been dead about one week, so the springiness was easily accounted for.

Every time a shell came at all close a brick or two would fall. It was therefore necessary to keep our steel helmets on continuously (an exceedingly wise precaution we discovered later)

5/10/17 At about 1.30 am a whiz-bang lobbed 2 feet beyond the edge of the kiln. This is a comparatively small shell and as it lobbed just beyond the arch of the kiln it was not sufficient to wreck the whole show, but was enough to bring down 2 -3 tons of bricks from the roof. Our luck was again in the ascendant. Mack and I were sitting together. Fortunately the greater part of the fall lobbed on a bench containing our dressings immediately beside us, but all the same we received sufficient bricks to completely cover us. A load of bricks falling from a dray would probably be equivalent. The fact that we were sitting in a crouched position and wearing steel hats was, I am sure, the only thing that saved us from severe injury. As soon as the commotion ceased I was surprised to be quite conscious and felt quite alright. I started to kick and found that with a little effort I could free myself. Of course the place was in absolute darkness, but soon someone found a torch *and* switched it on, depicting a scene of utter desolation. No one was hurt, but all our dressing gear were completely buried.

As soon as daylight appeared we commenced salvage operations and rescued some of our stuff. Our work continued all day without any particular incident. Quite a number of patients were brought through at about 11 pm. A Major came along with fresh bearers and a relief for Mac. I was ordered to carry on for the rest of the night

by myself, but at 12 pm relief arrived for me. As it had been raining all day the whole surface of the shell stricken area was turned into a sea of mud. At about 12.15 I commenced my homeward trip.

6/10/17 We flopped along for 3 hours through mud and slush; sinking well over my knees in thick mud. In this three hour stroll only about 2 miles were completed but we came to a "Pill Box" and, as there had been great difficulty in finding the way, we decided to remain until daylight.

Up to this time we had been 36 hours without an opportunity to lie down. Now we were able to stretch out and although it was only hard ground – without any blanket covering and even despite the fact that our feet were soaking wet up to the knees, we slept soundly until 7 am. I then woke feeling cold and miserable; *my* feet did not appear to belong to me at all.

Myself and batman set off immediately for the A.D.S., a distance of about 4 miles, arrived there about 8 am. Had a fair breakfast, caught a car and got back to the C.M.D.S. about midday. There participated in an excellent dinner; messed about in *the* afternoon fixing up bearers. Got to bed about 8.30 and slept like a log until 8.30 next morning in spite of the fact that Fritz had been busy with bombs all night.

7/10/17 – 11/10/17 Rested at C.M.D.S

11/10/17 Col Wassel and remainder of ambulance came to C.M.D.S. Our division were ordered to go into the line once more. Capt McCoz and Capt Morgan were given the job of taking the bearers up on the final trip. My job was to stay at the A. D. S. This was a comparatively safe job and one that did not have particularly bad conditions attached to it. I left at about 11 am with the tent section for the A. D. S. situated on Menin Road; reached the spot alright without incident. This is the first place men get any decent dressing and is fully 8 miles from the line but is situated in advance of Ypres. Shelling is occasionally more or less intense and bomb raids take place, of course, every day.

The A.D.S. was once a factory of some sort. The building has been absolutely shattered, but its cellars -- rather strong affairs -- have been reconstructed and patched up making good dugouts. The dimensions are 10 feet by 30 and a small room 10' x 10' x 6'. The latter was used as an officers quarters and 6 of us slept here. All day long there is complete darkness so we had to depend on Acetylene lamps for all illumination. The Menin Road is one of our main lines of communication so Fritz frequently paid great attention to it.

15/10/17 Fritz rather busy during the night, several bomb raids and long distance naval gun shells at road, 2 were very close to us, one lobbed immediately at the back door. It made a crater 6 feet deep and if it had traveled 20 feet further it would have cracked our kernel. As it happened we required a large hole at this particular spot to put rubbish in so it saved our men a lot of trouble. About five minutes later a large shell hit the road immediately opposite our front entrance. There was only a space of 40 feet between these two shells and our little cellar was situated between, so we had some luck. This sort of thing is a daily occurrence in the front area and after a time

one does not bother very much about these narrow escapes, but accepts them as part of the game.

The usual dressings took place all day and night. The cellar was damp and the air very stuffy so the Col. (*Colonel – RHB*) thought it's advisable to go out for an hour once in 48, chancing the shells, but getting a little fresh air.

16/10/17 I went out for a walk in the afternoon and explored Ypres. Quite a book might be written on this ruined city. There is not a single building left that is habitable. Most of the roads have been cleared as all the traffic must pass through the city to the front. One can pick out various buildings first there is the railway station, absolutely smashed -- not far away there was a fine area, which must have once been a beautiful garden now a mass of rubbish and shell holes -- the neat iron fences all ripped and smashed -- lamp posts once artistically grouped about, now all twisted and bent -- statues all smashed into powder. One then walks along some of the principle business streets, the same scene of desolation and destruction meets the eye perhaps a bent chimney stands in one spot or a half broken down wall. This is the only skeleton of a one time hive of industry. The streets are all clean but there is a continual stream of traffic along them. Soon one reaches the heart of the city and comes out in the vicinity of the city Square. To the left stands a very much twisted tower and a view crumbling walls. This is all that is left of the wonderful Cloth Hall. Even with this more or less complete destruction one realizes that this must have been a beautiful structure.

While wandering around this building I came across a few men from the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. I asked them where their headquarters were and found they were only about 200 yards away. I made tracts "toit suite" but found that Uncle Dick had only a few days previously been sent to hospital, while Uncle Jack and Tom Fleetwood (*they were relatives and friends from Gippsland – RHB*) are were a little further back with the transport. My hour's leave was almost up, so I had to start back for the ADS.

17/10/17 a similar sort of day to yesterday a little rain not very busy.

18/10/17 on duty for 18 hours yesterday (went to bed at 3 am) so did not get up early this morning. Arose about nine went out of our dark dungeon and found the sun is shining brightly in fact a beautiful spring morning. There were no guns firing and a superficial look at the countryside made one imagine that a war could not be in progress. I was beginning to feel quite poetical after the beastly weather and other unpleasant experiences of the past few weeks.

A series of whizzes through the air followed by loud bangs with the inevitable volley of dirt. On this occasion a tent, fortunately unoccupied, formed part of the volcano about half a mile away. Brings one back to earth and knocks all the poetry out of one. Still one's appetite is not affected, so I went and indulged in an excellent breakfast. Our food is quite good here; just as good as when we were out of the line.

Up till 11 p.m., very few cases were brought in for dressing and we were congratulating ourselves that Fritz was giving us a holiday. At that hour was dressing a slightly wounded chap. He was quite cheerful and was congratulating himself on his chances of getting to Blighty. Suddenly a loud and rapid series of explosions

acquainted us with the fact that Fritz was overhead with aeroplanes. Quite a number of camps are scattered round quite near our ADS and of course he hit a lot of our poor chaps. 50 yards was the closest to our show, but a bomb would have to actually hit the place to do us any damage. The raid was over in 15 minutes, but the sad procession then commenced; stretcher cases coming from all directions to be fixed up. It took four of us (MO's) each with a team of orderlies several hours going at full pressure to clear the station. The wounds were as usual with these bombs, many and serious. The first chap that came to my table had his lower jaw blown away and his right arm hanging by a few tendons. I decided to complete the amputation, but noticed that though he was quite conscious and able to talk quite well, his general condition was bad, so I looked for further injuries. In addition his left foot was blown off, left femur fractured, compound fracture right tibia and fibula, yet he was still able to take an interest in life and asked for a cup of coffee. His wounds were so many it was hard to know where to start first. As a large number of patients were brought in at this moment and as I realized that he hadn't a ghost of a chance of living, I gave him a blanket and put him aside to die. Poor fellow only lasted about half an hour. The next chap was a Tommy, a corporal and a fine chap too. He had an extensive wound in his lung, but was quite cheerful and implored me to go on with more seriously wounded chaps. Many others more or less seriously wounded passed through my hands. One chap gave me a lot of trouble. He only had a small wound in the calf of his leg so received the ordinary dressing, but the jolly thing commenced to bleed furiously. I had to use a tourniquet; many attempts to pick up the bleeding vessel with forceps were unsuccessful, so I had to resort to packing, but was at last successful. Dressing cases of this type continued without any stop until about 3 p.m.. Most of them were then temporarily fixed up so we got a little food.

We were just about satisfied when a distant drone of aeroplanes arrested our attention. After our mornings experiences we rather anxiously rushed out and scan the sky. Sure enough there were dozens of German Taubes (*recognisance planes - RHB*) coming over straight for the camps in our vicinity once more. They rapidly became closer and we were able to see a large fleet of Gotha's (bombing machines). They got almost overhead and bombs began to fall once more, but this time a fleet of our own machines came into view and a fierce battle of the air ensued. Unfortunately it was my duty to go below and continue with the dressing, so I was not able to see this scrap. The result was that the Germans all cleared off at home without doing very much damage.

At about 6:30 p.m. another raid was carried out; a few more tents being ripped to pieces and a few more men hurled into eternity. We seldom have so many raids in one day, but on almost every night just after teatime we have Mr Boche over dropping his unwelcome eggs. The dressing station only protects us from splinters. If a bomb hit us squarely it would be the end of the show, but fortunately there has been none closer than 50 yards yet.

19/10/17 Letters arrive from home, two from mother. Our postal corporal had rather a sticky trip up with them. When he was coming through Ypres a bomb lobbed unpleasantly close -- killing a couple of chaps near him and perforating his mailbag, but my letters were safe and sound. Captain Morgan badly wounded this morning with a shell splinter.

Last night the Hun used a lot of gas so I was given the job of examining so-called gassed patients as they came through. These men, most of whom could walk were not brought into the cellar, but had to be seen in a little hut on the road. It was not an exceedingly pleasant job sitting in this hut all day as the protection was very insufficient.

20/10/17 things were rather quiet, still seeing gassed patients. 2 MO's passed through (Capt Fay and Capt Ellis), pals of mine. Nice sunny morning went for a walk through Ypres. Thoroughly explored Cloth Hall; met two officers of 3rd Pioneer Battalion. They knew Uncle Dick and informed me that he had been evacuated with shell shock just about a week previously. I then visited their headquarters and found that Uncle Jack and Tom Fleetwood were just outside Ypres. So I decided to continue my walk and to go and visit them. I reached the spot indicated, but found that they had left on that afternoon for the back area.

21/10/17 (Sunday) Beautiful fine morning, still seeing gassed patients. As is usual on a Sunday Fritz got up in rather a temper and at nine o'clock he commenced to shell our road. Fortunately, for a long time he confined his attention to an area situated about half a mile further down, near "Hell Fire Corner". About 9:30 am I noticed that the shells were beginning to creep along towards our position. Soon one lobbed fairly on the road about 70 yards down. This was a big shell and blew a wagon and team to smithereens. The next one was fortunately not quite so accurate for although it was immediately opposite my hut it was about 40 feet to the right of the road. It did no damage to living men, but created an enormous crater in this cemetery and blew out several corpses that had been buried during the last 14 days. Several more shells lobbed in the vicinity, but none was as close as those two.

In the afternoon Mr Fritz began to pay great attention to Ypres shelling it unmercifully; all traffic had to stop. For five hours we were unable to send away the patients, with the result that we soon had about 40 waiting for removal. About midnight things began to settle down again and the usual run of things recommenced, **22/10/17** Still looking after gas; strolled down the cellar in the morning and found Purbsuck of Leongatha slightly wounded.

23/10/17 Doing some dressings for a change. Col sent for me during the morning. I wondered what I had been doing that I should not have. When I reached the office his congratulation mystified me. He then told me that I had been awarded the MC. It was an absolute surprise for me as such a possibility had never entered my head.

24/10/17 Made billeting officer. Our division were to move out for a rest. Travelled by motor car to Poperinge (*?Poperins? – writing not clear – RHB*); past 6th Battalion on the way and saw Clarrie McLeod. Train was supposed to leave the last mentioned town at 5 p.m., but on arrival later found that there was no train till next morning. A place to rest one's weary head had therefore to be found. The officers club not far away was as I found later an excellent place to make for. A very fine dinner and most comfortable bed was available. You can imagine that these two items after the month's stay in the line were much appreciated .

25/10/17 Caught train at 9:30; other officers from 12 Brigade were also aboard. As they were all billeting offices and making of the same destination we completed the

journey from then on together. We had a rather comfortable carriage, but the train was terribly slow. Still we got to St Omer a distance of about 20 miles at one o'clock. We had to change here, but had the rather unpleasant news that there was no other train on that day. Our orders were to reach St Julian by the 26/10/17 so we could not afford to stay the night at St Omer. Further investigation revealed the fact that by going to a village 9 miles away we could catch a train. The majority of officers and men had bikes so there was no difficulty for them. I unfortunately had a lot of luggage so could not walk. Therefore I had to hire a French vehicle, a curious affair; a sort of cross between a carriage and phaeton drawn by a weary old moke that seemed to be in great danger of falling to bits at the slightest provocation and driven by an old Frenchy who had apparently seen many summers. This being the only thing available I had recourse to use it. We wobbled along the road and at about 4:30 reached Lumbers, the town from which the train left. An excellent little cafe was found and we ordered dinner from seven. All the billeting officers at last turned up and we had an excellent dinner and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. At 7:30 the train was caught and we rumbled off into the darkness once more. After a three-hour run we were dumped out onto a small village siding at Fruges. It was raining cats and dogs -- was exceedingly cold and we had a very poor prospect of getting any bed. There was no public accommodation. It was therefore necessary to find some billets.

Eventually we found rooms for our men, but we had great difficulty ourselves. At last we managed to find our way into an establishment. They supplied us with a fine supper and were able to put up three of the party. Another room capable of holding 2 was discovered and as I had my valise I was able to stretch it out and would have been fairly comfortable. Madame saw my preparations and thought I would be very harshly treated if I had to sleep on such a bed. Anyway she buzzed off and came back with a great pile of cushions so that we really had a first class bed. In the morning she brought hot water for shaving and an excellent cup of coffee. We all gathered at the establishment and had an excellent breakfast.

26/10/17 There was still a distance of 6 miles to St Julie. After looking round the town a bit we found a motor lorry bound for Aire. With a little judicious palm oil we succeeded in getting him to deviate slightly from his route to take us to Bomy. There we met the staff Capt and were allocated to a particular area. The rest of the day was occupied in wandering round looking for rooms. I've finished my crowd fairly satisfactorily by the evening and then sought a spot to sleep myself

27/10/17 Remainder of ambulance arrived and gradually settle down in the new home. By the way, Erny St Julien was the village we were in before going up the line last time. Most of the people were glad to see us back once more. I know that Madam, in whose backyard I was formerly camped, spotted me walking down the road. She immediately came out and shook hands warmly and then enquired very kindly after all the other members of the ambulance. I considered this good enough so promptly went inside and claimed one of her rooms for myself and one other officer. She was delighted and gave me a cup of coffee to start off with. In the evening all our officers (except Morgan who was wounded) turned up for the mess. This was the first occasion we had been together since we first moved up to the line, so we had quite a merry party.

28/10/17 Nothing doing, rested all day.

29/10/17 Made preparations to commence our course of training. I was in charge of A section.

30/10/17 First day's drill. Visited Wavrans and paid uncle Jack and Tom Fleetwood an official visit. I rode over to their camp, I reached there just about dinnertime and enjoyed an excellent though simple meal. I sat out in an old cart, which served the place of dining room, mess room and every other room for them. Still I enjoyed it immensely and it was fine to be able to yarn about old times etc.

31/10/17 Received orders that I must relieve Capt Parker for a fortnight's leave, so I have shifted my home once more and have again found people who are treating me very well, giving me coffee in the morning and again in the afternoon if I wish it. A very flattering letter of congratulation arrived from General Birdwood. This is the first letter with the title M. C. after my name that I have received.

1/11/17 12th Field ambulance had a dinner in honour of our return from the line. The RMO's and DAOMS were their guests. A most magnificent dinner was provided and we had a very jolly evening. A lot of toasts and phizz flying round.

2/11/17 Usual routine

3/11/17 a divisional parade held at Guette (*this may be incorrect; writing is not clear – RHB*). Representatives from all units in the division were present. Those who had earned a decoration during the last stunt received their medals and ribbons from General Birdwood. The parade finished up with a march past and we came home. General Birdwood is extremely popular amongst the Australians and I am sure that the reason is largely due to the personal interest he seems to take in his men. His treatment of myself will serve as an example. Well over 200 decorations were awarded (this is about three months collection and includes officers and men) the AAMC officers (two of us) were the last to be decorated. Every man and officer had received a few words of praise, still the general had sufficient energy to receive my salute and speak somewhat as follows "Brown I know what work you did and warmly congratulate you, I am sorry I only have a ribbon to give you, but you will receive your medal from the King". No doubt he gave a similar speech to all the others, but I must say it has such a personal element in it that one appreciates it very much.

4/11/17 (Sunday) Inspected whole battalion for scabies and in afternoon wrote letters. Air is beginning to become chilly.

5/11/17 Usual routine. Madame at my billet brought her three months old youngster to my room this morning for treatment. The kid had a nasty excemations (*eczematous? - RHB*) condition. I gave her a pot of ointment and she seemed well satisfied. The old girl treats me very well indeed. For the last few mornings she has personally brought me a cup of hot coffee to my bed. Previously my batman did the job, but this morning and yesterday morning Madame has brought it in at the very early hour of 7:45 a.m., before my batman can get up. This evening when I came in to wash for tea I find that she has brought a bowl of flowers to brighten the room somewhat.

6/11/17 wet miserable morning, inspected camp, completed morning's work about 11 am so have come along to my billet to read the papers and read a few letters. Madame strolled in about half an hour ago with a cup of coffee and commenced to yarn to me. This old girl is very communicative and likes to talk at all possible occasions. She struck up a conversation on the high cost of living this morning. She tells me that eggs cost 10 f. or about 7/- (*seven shillings - RHB*) a dozen. Before the war they could be obtained from 3' to 6' (*3 to 6 pence - RHB*) a dozen. She showed me some fish which cost 1/6, previously worth 2' (*2 pence - RHB*), tea costs 7/- a lb (*pound - RHB*) -- so economic conditions are not too flourishing.

7/11/17 Wet day; rather miserable outlook. Nothing much doing, went for a walk in afternoon with Padre.

8/11/17 Nothing extraordinary.

9/11/17 Cold day, witnessed 2 football matches Phil (*Sewel - RHBl*) rode over from Lugy had a long yarn. A Coy. (*A Company - RHB*) had a concert, quite a good turnout.

10/11/17 Usual routine, inspected whole battalion for cases of scabies. Madame's baby is progressing famously; the rash that had been getting worse for months is rapidly improving. The fond mother thinks I am just "it". Found another patient this evening. A girl about 12 was knocked down by a wagon this morning. I found her crying with pain and utterly miserable. She had a badly sprained foot so I sent her to bed, fixed up the foot and administered a fair dose of aspirin.

11/11/17 A fine sunny morning, but by 8 a.m. the whole sky was clouded and drizzling rain set in which continued until about 4 p.m.. The rain then stopped so I went off for my usual walk. I travelled some distance and climbed a rather steep hill overlooking the front. Of course it is fully 30 miles to the front line, but as it was a perfectly still night the rumble of the distant guns was easily audible and as darkness was setting in, the numerous flares that are constantly being shot into the air were easily visible. I was absolutely alone on this hill. No living thing about, except occasionally a fast flying bird seeking its roost. Dense low clouds help to make the scene still more gloomy. Situated thus one's thoughts quite naturally turned to war. As there was no possibility of instant obliteration one could contemplate quietly and at one's leisure, the utter idiocy of war. Here before me were nations endeavouring to smash each other to pieces. A brisk half an hour's walk back to the village helps to bring my thoughts back to the present and to forget the war once more.

12/11/17 Very frosty night, ice on all puddles this morning. Fine sunny morning, first time the sun has appeared in over a week. Usual routine in morning -- afternoon was so beautiful that I decided to go for a ride. Horse was brought to my billet at 2:30 p.m. The Doc's horse of this batt. (*Battalion - RHB*) is very good. Harness very well polished; altogether it was a turnout that would satisfy the most critical.

I set out with the intention of visiting Cpt Purnell at Bomy and Phil Sewell at Lugy; the first place being about a mile away and the latter about 8 miles. It was a really interesting ride very undulating country through many quaint villages. Winter ravages have not yet got into full blast, but the more gentle influence of autumn had

beautifully tinted the leaves. Most of the fields had been ploughed for next year's crop and the damp brown earth everywhere reflected the sun's golden rays, the whole producing quite a dazzling picture. I reached Ludy at about 4 p.m. and found that Phil was away. Still I had had a most enjoyable ride. At 4:30 the sun dipped below the horizon and the shades of night commenced to fall. I might also add that the cold became rather intense. At 5 p.m. there was complete darkness. At that hour I reached Bomy once more and found Ken Purnell at home. I had a yarn for about 20 minutes and then wended my way "home" once more. A batt (*Battalion - RHB*) dinner was arranged for this evening in honour of our Brigadier General who has been granted leave to return to Australia. A most magnificent dinner was provided and a very happy evening spent.

13/11/17 Ordinary routine went for a walk in the afternoon.

14/11/17 Heard that our division is destined to spend a month or so on the sea coast in the vicinity of Abbeville. Invited to have dinner at 12th Field Ambulance in evening. Had a very jolly evening; there are a great lot of chaps there.

15/11/17 Reveille at 5 a.m.; cold dark and frosty; held sick parade at 6:30 am; breakfast at seven and removed out of camp at 8:30 for another home. We are to march to the coast and it is to take about a week, marching about a dozen miles per day. Of course I have a horse so should enjoy myself. We reached our first day's destination at about 3 pm. Our billet is an old Chateau. Many years ago it has apparently been some rich landowners dwelling, but it has been long deserted practically all furniture gone -- wallpapers all torn -- signs of dilapidation everywhere -- very few beds, or at least usable beds, were to be found in the house so I, with the other officers, had to roll our valises out on the floor and sleep on the hard boards.

16/11/17 At 10 a.m. on the move once more. As usual my position at the rear of the batt. Anyone that fell out had to be examined, but as we only marched about 7 miles today things went smoothly. We passed the ruins of *an* ancient castle, which was once occupied by Charles VI of France. This was at Fressin and is historically interesting because it is near the battlefield of Agincourt, and after this particular battle the English amused themselves by coming down here and bombarding this old castle. Our destination for the night was Wavencourt (about 2 miles further on than Fressin). These various villages were only small so the Battalion was scattered somewhat with the results that I had to ride about 8 miles in the afternoon to the various companies to see the various sick men. I may say that as one company was handy I rode back and carefully examined the old ruined castle. There is one other interesting fact about this march. I understand that no Australian soldiers have ever passed through this area. Anyway the people do not seem to have seen any of us before. As we pass along the roads they rush out of the houses and from the fields to gaze at us in wonder. Most of them seem pleased to see us.

At 7:30 Captain Parker turned up from leave so my job with the 45th Battalion is at an end.

17/11/17 We moved off at 9:30 this morning with about a 12 mile march in front of us. I was walking this time as I am no longer acting RMO. There was no opportunity to get back to the ambulance so I had to walk. We had lunch on the wayside and

reached our destination (Tortefontaine) (? *difficult to read this place name – RHB*) at about 2:30 p.m.. This time we are billeted in a huge Chateau. There must be hundreds of rooms. It is four storeys high and extends over an enormous area of ground. It is another deserted dwelling, but I should guess that the war is responsible, for it looks as if it has been used within the last three years. All the magnificent furniture is still in the rooms. Mosaic oak inlaid floors are all over the place. A most beautiful white marble stairway leads up to the upstairs rooms. The dining room forms a most excellent mess room and each of us have a bedroom fit to accommodate a King. Just behind this magnificent castle the ruins of a very ancient monastery are gradually crumbling away and nature is doing her best to obliterate the work of man. Only a few turrets and columns are left, but many acres of ground are covered so that the building must have been exceedingly large. I spent about an hour this afternoon roaming through the ruins.

I went up to my bedroom at 9:30 and found that my valise was missing; further investigations brought to light the fact that all my belongings had been lost. I have stated that the bedroom was fit to accommodate a King everything was there except the bedclothes so that the valise was very essential. Anyway I had to do the best without it and I spent a rather miserable night.

18/11/17 I departed by 7:30 a.m. by ambulance car to the 12th field ambulance as I have completed my job with the 45th Battalion. I pick the unit up at Laulchoy (? – *difficult to read- RHB*). Just as they were commencing their days trip. I thereupon joined them and marched to “Machiel” a distance of about 10 miles and through extremely pretty, undulating country. We reached this town at 1 p.m. so had lunch and then commenced to look around. This little village is only about 1 mile from Crécy (*presumably Crécy -en-Ponthieu – RHB*) the town that gave its name to the famous battlefield. Naturally we wended our way towards the site of this famous field. We could not find much evidence of strife, but at any rate walked over the ground which had once been freely sprayed with English and French blood. I then examined the famous Crécy wood and returned to Machiel just after dark, tired hungry and ready for an excellent meal. About 7 a stroll down the road to my billet and wrote a long letter home (by the way it was this evening that I had received photographs and two letters from home) I had progressed fairly well when a tap at the door was audible. I called out *entrez-vous* and Madame the owner of the billet walked in bringing a large juicy apple. She also invited me to come and sit by her fire and make myself quite at home. She was rather old looking, probably well past middle age and the extreme appearance of sadness about her made one curious as to the cause. Further investigations revealed one of the biggest possible tragedies of this war. I have described the scene of desolation and suffering I have witnessed, but nothing has affected so much as this poor woman's tale. She was living absolutely alone in a beautiful little cottage, wonderfully clean (a most unusual thing in France) and she has a most beautifully kept garden, both in front and at the back of the house. To see such a garden is very rare indeed in France. Her solitary existence rather amazed one but after awhile the explanation was forthcoming. She had a husband and four sons in her family and they all went to this war. First her husband had been killed then the sons one after another until only the last was left alive. A few weeks ago she received the news that the last remaining member of the family had been killed and she was left alone in this world. *In* the majority of billets we enter, there is

at least one relative missing or else killed and in no village does one ever see a fit man unless it happens to be a soldier on the leave.

19/11/17 2:30 a.m. There was a loud knocking on my window and a voice calling loudly for Capt Brown. I answered and was informed that I must have my gear fixed up and be prepared to start at nine o'clock for our destination to arrange the final billets for the ambulance. I thought I had finished with this sort of job. It is a game that I am not at all keen on. One has to act the bully a bit and it does not altogether suits me. Still I had to obey orders and buzzed off at 9 a.m. per amb. car. I certainly got out of the 50 mile walk still to go, but as I was rather enjoying it, I was sorry.

We passed through Crécy wood down to Abbeville and to Gamaches, where I met the Divisional Staff Capt and found our final destination. We then pushed on to Tully, a small town near the coast to which our ambulance was allotted. I had six men in the car and I can tell you we created some stir. No Australians had ever been near this village before so we were looked on as curios. People rushed out of their houses and shops gesticulating wildly. I drove slowly through the town looking for the Maire's (*Mayor's - RHB*) office. As soon as we stopped in front of the house people began to stream from all directions to see the new animals (Australian soldiers) fully 200 collected and openly stared at us. I went in and found the Maire and try to explain my object. He understood me in a rough sort of a way, but he was one of those Frenchies that get wildly excited and talk at a terrible rate with the result that I could not understand a word he said. He raced round and found one of his understrappers who could speak a little English, but he was so rotten that I got no further ahead with his aide. He was quite decent and wished to fix us up. Eventually I succeeded in getting a room for myself and six men. The men draw army rations but I intend to board at this Frenchies place for the three days. In the course of this afternoon an interpreter came to light and I managed to explain exactly what I wanted. I am to meet the Maire again in the morning to see exactly what can be found for our accommodation.

20/11/17 Met the Maire at nine o'clock. During the night he had fixed some of our men at each house. This morning he walked around with me and bullied the inhabitants insisting that they should accommodate our men. It was very decent of him and saved me an enormous amount of trouble. He is an exceedingly good natured old chap and seems to glory in a joke - e.g. at one place they had their key outside the door. When we got near he winked at me locked the front door from the outside and politely knocked. The owners of the establishment came and of course could not open the door. The Maire then informed them that he and an Australian officer were outside and wished to inspect their dwelling. He next upbraided them for being so slow, winking furiously at me all the time. Eventually the lady of the establishment came panting from the back door and apologised profusely for not being able to open the door. By the end of the morning he was in fine spirits; I gradually learnt to understand him and he began to understand me. This afternoon I went round by myself and made some further arrangements. Tomorrow I shall complete the job.

I am having quite an interesting time with the Frenchies where I am boarding. I'm living with them and thus have an excellent opportunity to see exactly how they live. Their menu is limited and curious. The first dish they presented to me was a black looking concoction resembling stewed mushrooms, it was rather bitter and not a

particularly nice dish to eat. I asked what it was and discovered that it was our old friend sorrel, stewed. Fortunately they give me, as the main basis for my meals, fried beef and potato chips so that I need not eat the fancy dishes unless I wish. Their bread is beastly black and sour stuff compared to ours. Frenchies drink wine for almost every meal and as it is rather rotten stuff I asked for a tea and coffee. The concoction they give me, calling it tea, is a work of art. I had about 3 cups of it before I realised that it was supposed to be tea. My progress with conversation is quite good today. There are three mademoiselles and one old dame. I have managed to get most of the family history (a brother has just been sent to Italy) I discussed the country and then told them a lot about Australia. Later I told them something of our own house, showing them some photographs of it.

21/11/17 Stayed in bed until a fairly late hour -- had breakfast at about 9 p.m.(?9 am - *RHB*) Then sallied forth to interview the Maire once again. Two dames refused to supply billets for three of our officers so I decided to interview the Maire on the question. He was very put out to think that some of his people would refuse to help us. He then sent for them and bullied them at his office. They still refused. His next move was to send for the Town Crier and he instructed him to go round the town reading a proclamation that Australian troops were to be treated decently and that good accommodation must be found. It was very funny to see the aged Crier walking around beating a drum and reading this proclamation for all and sundry. The effect was most satisfactory for there was no further trouble with billets.

It has been a miserable wet day and as it is almost dark at five o'clock I was quite glad to get back to "my little home" and hence have a good warm at the fireside. They gave me a most curious dish tonight, calling it soup. The time passed quite quickly yarning to my hostess and her daughters. My conversational gift seems to be improving. One of the demoiselles has a nasty abscess on her cheek and had sent for her doctor. They told me they expected his arrival almost immediately. At about seven o'clock the old chap came in. One could tell he was one of the fraternity immediately. At the least, he had exactly the same style and bedside manner as one of one's own country physicians -- making quite a big fuss of the patient and all the rest - - quite different from the attitude that must be adopted in the army. One has to get most of one's sympathy well under control and be more or less harsh with would-be patients. The old chap soon discovered that I was an Australian doctor. He looked at me in a very surprised way and expressed much astonishment at my youthful appearance (I think I shall have to grow a moustache for one gets tired of these personal remarks). Anyway the old chap appeared pleased to meet a colleague from over the seas. The language question prevented much conversation, but he told me that he had retired before the war, but as the military required all the young men, he had come in to practice once more and he is now the only practitioner in a very extensive district. I also gleaned from the information that his only son, also a doctor, had only recently been killed at the front.

22/11/17 at 11:30 a.m. ambulance troops arrived at Tulley and for a couple of hours I had rather a busy job getting the men settled in their new billets. It was rather a relief to see people who spoke English once more, but I must say the past four days living as a Frenchman, were interesting.

22/11/17 Left at 9 a.m. per ambulance car to take over the duties of RMO at 48th Battalion. Have met most of the officers and I think I shall have a happy time here. This is probably the last of much moving about and changing units.

24/11/17 Commenced duties this morning not very much to do. Living in a very pretty village called Friacourt. Met remainder of the officers belonging to the Battalion today.

25/11/17 Sunday -- photographs of officers taken this morning. Very cool wind blowing in the afternoon. Myself and another officer went for a walk in the afternoon to the sea coast. We inspected one of France's interesting watering places. No doubt in the summertime and especially before the war there was any amount of gaiety in this little town of Ault. A few snowflakes fell this afternoon -- the first we have seen this winter -- wind it was bitterly cold; examination of the thermometer revealed a temperature of 1 deg C. A heavy fall of snow predicted tonight.

26/11/17 Aroused at 6:45 am by stirring martial music -- our band goes all round the village to stir up the weary soldiers. At 7 a.m. my batsman appeared with a cup of tea. By 7:15 I was dressed and strolling down to my RAP to hold sick parade. The prediction concerning snow did not eventuate, as the weather underwent a complete change during the night and for some unexpected reason became comparatively warm once more. By 8 a.m. the 20 odd men awaiting my reception were disposed of. Breakfast then becomes an important item. At 9 a.m. my gee -- gee (*horse- RHB*) is brought to the front door and it is my duty to ride about 2 miles to another village where one of our companies is billeted and hold a special sick parade for them. Having completed that little job I must return to the headquarters town and have a look at the camp area -- see that the men have clean billets and that they are in a satisfactory sanitary condition. Later in the morning I have to lecture and instruct the stretcher bearers. This is always an important item when a Battalion is out of the line. In the afternoon there is not much to do -- perhaps I go for a ride or visit neighbouring battalions. Sometimes I have to lecture in the evening. Thus a typical day out of the line is passed.

27/11/17 Received an invitation to visit 12th Field (*Ambulance*) to attend a farewell dinner in honour of Major North who departs to No. 2 A (? *No 2 Amb? - this is not clear- RHB*); a very interesting evening spent thus.

28/11/17 Usual routine.

29/11/17 ADMS paid an official visit and requested me to establish a small hospital to avoid sending men away from Battalion if possible.

30/11/17 weather still beautifully mild no sign of snow; received a large bunch of letters (Australian) this morning.

1/12/17 Nothing unusual.

2/12/17 Nothing unusual.

3/12/17 Instructions received to be ready to move at a moment's notice. Visions of a comfortable winter in this spot have gone. Rather a coincidence, but today we have succeeded in getting a decent mess together and the official opening was to take place tonight. We held the opening dinner and it was some dinner too; toasts were plentiful and by 10:30 p.m. many members of the young mess "were more or less 'merry'".

4/12/17 Preparations for move completed. The prospect of leaving my comfortable little room are not at all pleasant to contemplate. After having become used to an excellent bed, especially in this cold weather, one hates the thought of having to doss anywhere.

5/12/17 Closed our mess -- established a large fire in the mess room and had a pleasant sing song. At 11:30 p.m. we commenced our travels once more. It was a beautiful moonlight night, very cold, but quite fine and an ideal night for the 6 mile march to the station. At about 1:30 a.m. we reached our railway station; duly collected all the staff on the train and at 3 a.m. steamed away into the unknown. (The trains are quite extensive affairs in this country. It took 35 carriages to move the show -- one train served to shift the lot.)

6/12/17 At 2 p.m. a rather pleasant railway trip was at an end. We had covered about 120 miles and were in the Pyrenees region once occupied by the Hun. This has been a fine town, but is now almost completely ruined. Thousands of acres of once fertile country are now barren and deserted -- not a single house remains in a condition fit to live in, orchards and plantation's are all destroyed -- this town (Peronne) gives one the impression that it must have been a very beautiful place with its series of natural and artificial lakes, its parks and artistic grouping of buildings. Now nothing but heaps of smashed masonry lies scattered everywhere -- dirty mud holes and rubbish indicate the site of lakes and parks. Our final destination was about 5 miles nearer the front. We completed this by walking and arrived at our camping area at about 4 p.m. had some food to eat and promptly went to bed.

7/12/17 Got out of bed at 8:30 a.m. and investigated the camp. We are in huts -- officers and men. A Nissen (corrugated iron affair) serves for the 6 HQ officers. A stretcher and valise serve as my bed and with the aid of a very dilapidated and queer looking stove, which in spite of very careful stoking and infinite care, persists in either smoking like the deuce or else going out, serves to keep us fairly comfortable. There has been an exceedingly heavy frost for the last few days with the result that all water in the neighbourhood is frozen hard and was in a good condition for skating, if skates were available. Great rumours circulate as to why we are here and what we are going to do -- one minute we are told that the Germans have broken through and are smashing everything with intense cannon fire, assures one that something is doing and considering the fact that we are under orders to move right up into the scrap within an hour's notice, makes life rather exciting.

8/12/17 Still standing by, anticipating a quick move -- cold miserable day.

9/12/17 Things are quieter and it is rumoured that we are going back -- drizzling rain all day, went for a walk and visited 12th Field ambulance.

10/12/17 Intense fire audible again, warned to be ready to move in an hour.

11/12/17 Quiet day; furious bombardment in evening.

12/12/17 Same state of affairs.

13/12/17 -- 16/12/17 Usual routine; getting very cold; roads are not so slushy, as they are now in a more or less frozen condition.

17/12/17 Grey very cold day -- went to Field ambulance in afternoon, very heavy snowstorm in evening about 6 inches of snow all over the ground in the morning. One's nose almost freezes these mornings and one wakes up wondering if one has any face at all. Military situation quietening down; the much advertised enormous attack by the Hun is fizzling out. One of his planes was in the neighbourhood during the night -- dropped some bombs but none near us.

18/12/17 Very cold very heavy frosts. Snow is all in a powdery condition; absolutely no water is now lying about -- all frozen solid. Roads are all like slabs of ice and very difficult to walk on -- went for a long march this morning. Brigade were going through an attacking stunt for training purposes so the AAMC section had to be present. Establishing an aide post and sitting down to wait in the snow is a very cold proceeding, but we at least returned with an excellent appetite in plenty of time for dinner.

19/12/17 Cold as charity -- very little excitement, guns make a row occasionally, but do no damage near us. Winter sports in afternoon progressing famously.

20/12/17 Major Brown, 12th Field, invented a rather thrilling toboggan course. Had many attempts at it this afternoon, but only succeeded once in completing the show. Managed to tear the seat out of my breeches and to produce many beautiful bruises, but on the whole had an enjoyable time.

21/12/17 Very cold.

22/12/17 Beautiful day -- sun is shining -- usual work and amusement.

23/12/17 Hun plane over tonight, dropped bombs quite close to us, but no one from our camp hit.

24/12/17 Majority of Battalion away digging bomb protecting trenches, so I was able to spend the whole of the afternoon on the ice and tobogganing down the snow-covered hills. Unfortunately on one slide I attempted the impossible -- I skidded down the hill at a tremendous rate, but about 15 feet from the bottom the sleigh seem to imagine it was an aeroplane and carried me right out over the ice, coming (*down*) with a very nasty thud. The fall knocked all the stuffing out of me and it was some time before I was able to move, but as nothing was broken I was soon able to get on my feet and hobble "home". No special meal was arranged to celebrate the Christmas Eve. After mess we had various songs. Two neighbouring battalions had their bands out and played carols until midnight. I could not sleep well as my back was rather sore.

25/12/17 started to get up as usual to hold sick parade, but remembered the day in time and as arrangements had been made to have sick parade after breakfast, rolled over and went to sleep once again being finally roused by my Batman bringing a plate of porridge. This is the first occasion that I have had such a luxury since I left Australia so it was rather a good way to celebrate the day. At 10 a.m. dressed and held my sick parade. Sick men were rather fortunate today; Red Cross supplied me with dainties for sick men so I was able to give them quite an excellent dinner.

At 1:15 p.m. our own dinner (officers) became the chief item of the day. It was surprising what a fine dinner was arranged considering the adverse conditions. Roughly our fare consisted of soup -- turkey -- roast beef, peas, cauliflower -- roast and boiled potatoes -- plum pudding fruit -- nuts -- coffee and a few other odds and ends. A number of toasts and humorous speeches brought things to a conclusion at about 4 p.m. Things were then fairly quiet until about 8 p.m. or at least as far as I was concerned -- my back was rather painful so I could not move about as freely as I would have liked.

At 8 p.m. I was sitting at our fire and wondering whether it was too early to go to bed or not when the door of the hut burst open and the whole staff at the 12th Field Ambulance came in covered in snow and making a deuce of a row. All the MOs from the Colonel down were there and acted like a lot of schoolboys. No doubt some of them had had a little thoracic lubrication, but they were happy and we quickly joined them -- sang a bit and generally acted the goat. Thoughts of going to bed were dispelled; I put on a coat and strolled out with them to visit the other officers in the brigade and to stir things up. My back was still sore so I had to act more or less as spectator, but still it was a happy way to conclude the day. Such actions may seem frivolous and unbecoming of officers, but on occasions such as this a little break away from the usual demeanour makes life endurable.

The weather was rather unpleasant today -- cold but fine in the morning; a heavy snowstorm in the evening which continued right through the night.

26/12/17 In the same old spot -- usual routine adopted once more. Phil Sewell came to see me in the afternoon. He is camped not far away.

27/12/17 usual routine.

28/12/17 Major Garnet came to relieve me while on leave.

29/12/17 started travels -- bad start; car refused to budge, so missed 7:15 a.m. train from Peronne. Caught train at 10 a.m. reached Amiens at 3 p.m. Had a look round town; bought P-C. Caught 6:20 train and arrived in Boulogne 1 a.m. -- found a bed.

30/12/17 visited No. 2 AGH hunted up a few friends, found Phil Sewell who had gone ahead when I missed first train.

31/12/17 crossed channel without incident; cold as blazes. Got to London at about 4 p.m. could not get rooms at R.A.C. -- finally became established at Berners Hotel Oxford Street. Went to Theatre in the evening: "Little bit of Fluff" Criterion Notre had show.

1/1/18 cold day some snow. Visited Robinsons in evening had dinner with them.

2/1/18 Theatre afternoon. Visited Wimbledon Park in evening.

3/1/18 Theatre afternoon -- pictures evening. Caught 10:30 p.m. train for Scotland arrived 8:30 in morning. Had breakfast -- looked around Edinburgh in afternoon. Visited Donald MacKenzie (*a Scottish author and a relative of VCB – RHB*) and had a long yarn. Back to city - saw some fine buildings.

4/1/18 Went all over Edinburgh with Mr MacKenzie – theatre in evening.

5/1/18 went to St Giles Church -- Forth Bridge in afternoon. Out to Mr MacKenzie in evening.

6/1/18 Went to Stirling Castle. Wallace Monument etc. Left by 10 pm train.

7/1/18 Reached London 8 am; breakfast; theatre.

(End of first Diary book – RHB)

(Start of a loose leaf diary – RHB)

14/01/18 Caught train at 7:30 for Folkstone; travelled by Pullman car. Had an excellent breakfast – reached the sea coast at 11 o'clock and found the boat did not depart till 1:15 pm so strolled around the town of Folkstone. There had been a heavy fall of snow so things were interesting. I had an excellent meal, later taking the boat. There was no wind and as no tin fish molested us we had an uneventful trip across the Channel hitting Boulogne about five o'clock. Ordered a room at Louvre Hotel, next visiting RTO and discovering that our train left at 12:54 p.m. that night. Anyway we returned to the hotel and turned in for a few hours.

15/1/18 Caught the train at 12:54 a.m.; travelling for the rest of the night and reaching Poperinge at about 10 a.m.. Had an excellent breakfast of bacon and eggs at this rather shell shattered village. The hunt for the Battalion commenced. Found division after travelling for about four hours per foot, per ambulance car and per motor lorry. After another two hours got to 13th Field Ambulance and in another hour found 12th Field ambulance; stayed the night there. Received a few letters from mother while here.

16/1/18 commenced my travels once more -- looking for 48th Battalion transport lines. The 12th F.A. gave me the use of a car for the first few miles then I had to walk about 1 mile through mud and slush carrying a small portmanteau. By the way I had been wearing all my London clothes during this travelling about and they certainly were not improved by such travelling. Still I reached the lines at about 11 o'clock. Fished out my valise and got into my war paint; this must be used in its literal sense. I then ordered my horse and rode within 3 miles of the trenches. I then had to dismount and foot the rest of the way. This entry into the scrap, though somewhat lonely, was far less exciting than on the first occasion. There was mud and slush everywhere (a few warm days had melted the ice and snow) of course the ground was all ripped to

pieces by a shell fire, but lately conditions had been so bad that only occasional shelling was resorted to and by the help of duck boards quite an easy path led to my headquarters. There were no corpses and other unpleasant sights as there had been very few casualties lately and during the whole trip I only saw about 4 Hun shells burst. After a bit of searching about I found my RAP and relieved Major Garnet who was taking my place. A great stack of letters awaited my arrival at the post my thoughtful batman had them ready for me as soon as I arrived. Excluding the two I got at the 12th F. A. this was the only mail I had received for over 7 weeks. Later in the afternoon I strolled on to Batt HQ, saw the CO and other officers; had a yarn with them then back to my post, practically no shells disturbed this walk in spite of the fact that the line is only a few hundred yards away. This sort of thing in the front line was a revelation to me after the terrible shelling at Ypres in the latter part of last year.

17/1/18 Cold night; snowed a lot -- slept soundly; no casualties during night and not disturbed at all.

Description of my little home. It is situated on the side of a canal being just a hole in the ground going down by steps about 20 feet into the ground, then passages lead off into 5 small rooms. The roofs are timbered and sides held up with galvanised iron. I use one room to live in; there is a table and a couple of bunks made of wire netting. Of course one never gets undressed, but simply lies down covered by a blanket. One room is a dispensary, another a small hospital and another is a living room for my staff and the 5th is spare. There are three openings so that if one is blown in, I can escape by the others. This system of dugouts gives protection from all but the largest shells and is really comfortable. Constant dripping from the roof in wet weather is rather an annoyance, but one must not grumble when one gets a palace like this. To complete the luxury it is illuminated by electric light.

Outside mud, slush and desolation greet one on all sides. The mud is terrible and if it were not for the fact that duck boards are strewn over the most important tracts (*it would be difficult to move*). No casualties today; a few men were rather sick, but that is only to be expected. Snow fell all the morning. Fritz fairly quiet; he throws a few shells over but none near us. My batsman managed to cook quite dainty dishes with rabbit and bacon as basis and by the aid of a Primus stove.

18/1/18 slept well all night -- not disturbed by fairly adjacent shell fire -- no casualties. Got up about 8:30 a.m.; quite a simple proceeding for one only gets off the bunk and puts one's boots on. It is of course not possible to take one's clothes off at night -- breakfast consisted of rabbit and a piece of dry bread. Spent three hours seeing sick and pseudo-sick men, then went up on top to have a look around and get a little fresh air. There were a few shells flying about so I did not linger more than half an hour; weather warmer, snow all melted once more -- mud and slush everywhere. Things are rather lively this afternoon many Fritz shells coming over. One rather big chap lobbed very near my post and shook the whole show. A lot of mud and stuff thrown up into the air lobbed at my front entrance, 2 officers coming to pay me a visit just missed this chap. No casualties today only a few sick men.

19/1/18 crisp clear morning no rain. Got up and breakfasted as usual about 9:15 a.m. then strolled out for some fresh air. I stayed there some time and *then* a few shells began to come over. One lobbed about 50 yards away so I deemed it advisable to

retire to the mud hole once more. In spite of the fact that quite a lot of shells are coming our way not one of our men has been hit. Their escapes are really wonderful.

The cold wet slushy conditions are beginning to tell on the men. I now have eight patients *that I* have had to send away this morning. A couple of letters from mother and others arrived today. A lot of rats run about in our dugout. If any food is left about it is very quickly consumed by these gentry. Shells are beginning to fall all round of the dugout - bang - one very close, d...., a blanky shell has hit our electric light outfit and we have to depend on candlelight now.

20/1/18 (Sunday) Fritz was very angry last night sending shells all round, several rather unpleasantly close. Had a job fixing up various patients this a.m., some were sent via timber (*might be 'limber' - not easy to read - RHB*) and some had to be evacuated as this is to be our last day here for a time. Relieving MO arrived about 4 p.m. handed over my store and post and sent my men back. I then went to Batt headquarters to come out of the line with the CO and Adj. (*adjutant - RHB*). Our horses had been ordered to come quite close to the line so that we should have a nice trip out. The whole Batt were relieved at 8:30 p.m. and the three of us commenced to walk out. We had about 1 mile to go but as it was dark and we were not used to the track it was rather hard to find the required spot. At last we came to a branching track and were not at all sure which road to take. At the psychological moment a shell burst about 50 yards along directly along one of the tracks. We allowed this sign to direct our footsteps and immediately took the other track and trudged on under a fairly heavy load and finally became lost. Well we wandered about for an hour and a half, fortunately not being shelled in the whole time; only one other chap came within 100 yards. Eventually we found our nags and were exceedingly glad to get into the saddles. Apparently these animals had become rather fed up waiting for us and were rather eager to clear out. As a matter of fact Captain Twimy's (*?spelling? not clear - RHB*) and my horse bolted with us over a very rough track winding amongst shell holes. It seemed certain for a few moments that we must come a crash. Fortunately we got our nags under control without accident, except that we lost our useful steel helmets. Anyway we arrived safely in camp (Garick camp) (*?Garick? - not easy to read - RHB*) about 12 p.m. and were very glad to undress and get into our valises once more.

21/1/18 got out of bed at about 9 a.m. spent the whole morning examining sick men. Received cable from home. In afternoon ordered my horse and tried to find 1st Division, which is somewhere in the neighbourhood. Travelled about 6 miles and located in the 6th Batt or at least a portion of them -- discovered that Cyril was up near the line and heard that he would be out with the Batt in a few days.

22/1/18 Nothing of importance doing.

23/1/18 usual routine -- camp duties.

24/1/18 same -- revisited 6th Batt and found that Cyril was evacuated to a hospital with scabies only two days ago. Witnessed an exhibition of foolishness this afternoon; a fleet of aeroplanes came from the line towards our camp. One chap was apparently very cocksure or else in excellent spirits. He persisted in coming along very close to the ground -- neatly jumping trees. He swooped down within a few feet

of our huts then up again. After he passed the camp he neatly jumped over a row of trees then shot up into the air and looped the loop. The exhibition was very fine, but it seemed to me that he was taking a lot of unnecessary risks. Anyway at this stage his machining jibbed; one plane became detached and he crashed very badly -- he and his machining being smashed into a fearful mixture.

25/1/18 usual work in morning; got my horse in afternoon and chased around the country in neighbourhood of Ballieul to find 1st Division rest station. Found the place eventually, but gleaned the disheartening information that Cyril had been sent back to his unit 12 hours before, so I jumped on my horse and cantered homeward. After proceeding about ½ a mile I ran across a 3rd Pioneer chap and enquiry elicited the fact that Uncle Jack was only a short distance away. I therefore sought him out -- found both he and Tom Fleetwood in excellent health and spirits. Asked Johnny to come and visit me on Sunday; later reached home safely.

26/1/18 Ordered my horse for the afternoon and started off to 6th Batt once more. Asked for Cyril and was told he was due for a fatigue up the line -- learning a cable; still I saw him for two minutes and told him to come out to our camp next day. Rode home through the fog -- it had been a nice mild morning, but a fog had set in, in the evening. Went to a concert arranged by our Battalion, quite an excellent show was put on considering conditions.

27/1/18 Sunday, went on church parade -- a march of about 4 miles. As it was held in the open on the bleak top of a hill and to a whole brigade one could not hear much and therefore could not derive much benefit from the sermon. Still proceedings ended up by presentation of medals by General Birdwood to some of our fellows for gallant work, so that it was an interesting parade. In the afternoon Cyril put in an appearance and we talked for hours. He is looking really well and is in excellent spirits. Uncle Jack came later and the three of us sat around the fire in the evening and yarned for quite a long time. Received four letters from home today.

28/1/18 a most beautiful sunny day, quite mild considering the time of the year. This beautiful weather seems extraordinary. Usual work in morning; in afternoon our Battalion played football against 27th Batt. I met several officers who were at Rollestone with me. It was very nice to see these chaps once more. Evening -- went to one of our divisional shows - a pierrot concert. An old building is taken and a really good show is put on. About two of the best artists in each division are taken away from the firing line and do nothing but run these concerts. It is an excellent idea for it gives the men a chance for a little recreation when out of the trenches although not actually out of shell fire. The term resting is really a misnomer, it is used, but as a matter of fact it usually means very heavy work. Men cannot be kept in the trenches long, but we are brought back for a rest. They, there, undergo strenuous training and are put on all sorts of fatigue work, such as mending roads, salvaging material etc.

29/1/18 Another beautiful day, the same routine - officers played a football match against NCO's and scored a victory. Colonel's hut and all his gear was burnt this afternoon. Received a letter from mother.

30/1/18 fine day. Cyril visited me; stayed afternoon and evening; we yarned again for hours.

31/1/18 cold bitter day heavy frost. Usual camp routine. Fritz sent some shells over our camp today shrapnel bursting very high up but fortunately hit no one.

1/2/18 cold as duce. It is rather a job to get warm when carrying on usual routine. Mud and slush all gone on account of fact that everything is frozen solid. One wonders if one's feet are part of one's anatomy or if they belong to someone else. We have a game of badminton (a sort of miniature tennis). It is quite good fun and helps to keep one warm these days. The ice on neighbouring pools is not thick enough yet for skating, but if it continues freezing I shall have an opportunity to use my new skates.

2/2/18 sun came out, fog gone -- not quite so cold. One of Fritz's planes came over our camp today. Apparently British anti-aircraft barrage became too hot when the blighter got immediately overhead. Anyway he commenced to dodge and twist about at a height of about 2 miles. We could see our bursts getting very close to the plane, but it was rather disconcerting to hear pieces of our own shrapnel falling down all round our camp. One piece hit the earth about 15 feet from where I was standing. Fortunately none of our men were hit and unfortunately Mr Fritz got away without injury.

3/2/18 Sunday again -- usual routine. A large party of men wanted for fatigue, apparently considered that they had had enough work for the week, so 80 reported sick. I could see that they were rather sick of work and felt rather sympathetic towards them, but all the same had to do my job and had to mark about 50 for duty. These men, for attempting to malingering, therefore were dealt with severely, being given a 6 mile route march and a lot of extra work. This is the sort of scheme which will not allow any funny business. Rather a bleak day and nothing else of note happened.

4/2/18 More trouble with men -- moving to line tomorrow. Candidly I sympathised with the men for during the last 16 days, when we were supposed to be resting after our 16 days of holding the line under appalling conditions, the work that fatigue parties were asked to do was simply staggering. During this resting period 2/3 of the Batt (sometimes more) were daily detailed to leave camp at 5AM -- it being pitch dark, icy cold, sometimes slushy rain or driving snow. They had to march 6 -- 8 miles to the forward area; graft like niggers all day digging new trenches placing barbed wire entrenchments; and then marched back to camp at 8 p.m., again in the dark, to repeat the performance next day. It is easily understood that at the end of the 16 days (of the so-called rest) the men were thoroughly worn out and inclined to be mutinous. Still it was my duty to refrain from excusing these chaps unless they showed signs of definite illness. Men who paraded to me as being sick, if I mark them for duty, were then automatically punished. I always avoided the step if possible, but now it had to be done. Considering the terrible experiences they had gone through I hated the job, but war is war and this exhibited one of the most brutal sides of warfare. Later events proved that this slave driving was entirely necessary. During the early part of the winter, reports were constantly coming to hand that Fritz was preparing a tremendous offensive. The Australian Corps therefore put every ounce of energy in preparing every possible defensive measure. If every other unit had acted in a similar manner the disaster, which was to almost overtake the British Army would not have occurred.

When our corps took over this particular section from a Tommy unit we found the defences in a deplorable state and Fritz, had he desired, could have broken through with utmost ease. Our higher command immediately got to work and by enforcing every man to work like a nigger got things into shipshape order. Fritz became acquainted with these excellent defensive and aggressive measures and therefore when he did attack left the Australian section severely alone -- at least until the corps were withdrawn from the section. The work was therefore amply repaid, but unfortunately events proved that we should not be allowed to remain in the section where we had built up excellent defences, but were hurriedly rushed off to stop the victorious Hun in sectors which had not been so carefully defended. Of course at the time I was not aware of this, nor were the men. At all events they were glad that orders were received for them to return to the trenches where there was more danger, no dry place to lie down and unlimited wastes of wet and misery, but less exhausting manual labour.

5/2/18 a beautiful clear sunny morning -- rather cold but a day one enjoys being alive. Usual routine in morning - ie sick parade and breakfast, a couple of men were sent away to rest station. At 10:30 a.m. all gear was packed up and we prepared to go to the scrap once more. There was a march of a mile or so to a small railway siding (my old horse carried me thus far). We then boarded one of the light railways; little things that I used a lot -- small engines and miniature open trucks. We travelled a dozen miles towards the scrap. This trip was most enjoyable over pretty -- hilly - though fearfully devastated Flemish country. The morning was beautiful and were it not for the extensive signs of destruction, and the intermittent boom of the guns and the scrap we witnessed between aeroplanes, one could not help feeling that we were out for a picnic and not proceeding into the shell stricken area again.

About 1 p.m. we reached the end of the railway and then had to walk a mile or so on a wooden track to our final destination in support of the system of trench dug outs. Our home for the next week or so is fairly safe though not particularly pleasant. It is really a series of tunnels not high enough to walk in an upright position and constantly dripping from the roof. There is a certain amount of water on the floor; there are brackets along the wall on which wooden shelves are fixed. We sleep on these; it is rather cold but few shells could reach us, so one is glad to be able to occupy the place.

6/2/18 fixed up a few sick men then got out in the open air and went up to the line to test the water supply and see how some of our men further up were getting on. This little jaunt occupied my time till dinner. It was a fair distance and as I walked rather fast I felt a little bit weary on the completion. Fritz was fairly quiet and only sent a few shells over, the nearest to me being 200 yards away. In the afternoon I walked back to amb (*ambulance - RHB*) to order supplies so I was quite ready for dinner at 6 p.m. Food in a place like this is fairly good. Things can be cooked and we managed to have a hot meal three times a day.

7/2/18 Sunday. (*VCB has made a mistake here, 7/2/18 was a Thursday – RHB*) Only went out for about ¼ of an hour all day. There was no need to go out. Phil Sewell visited me in the afternoon, his Batt were moving out and as he was in the neighbourhood he dropped in to have a yarn.

8/2/18 a fair amount of rain today -- usual job in morning -- saw a few sick, gave them medicine. I am running a small hospital of 10 beds. Men get influenza and other minor (*?minor? - word not clear - RHB*) conditions who, with a couple of days rest in bed and a little decent diet, are soon fit for duty at. If they are sent to a definite hospital they are away from the unit for a long time and this means some loss to the Battalion. I therefore always run a small hospital if it is possible.

At about 6 p.m. after dark I received a message that there was a chap at a forward post who was ill and not fit to come and see me. I therefore take my small bag of medicines and set out to see him. It was very dark outside and the duck boards wound in a most bewildering fashion around the shell holes. It is necessary to keep to the wooden paths for the open country is fearfully muddy. Once I stepped off the track and immediately somersaulted into a shell hole containing about 2 feet of water and mud. This did not make the trip very pleasant, still I reached the spot where the chap was; fixed him and returned to my RAP without further mishap. It never rains but it pours, for as soon as I got in I found a man writhing in agony. His condition was curious and troubled me quite a lot. His signs and symptoms strongly suggested an acute abd (*abdomen - RHB*) (very like a strangulated hernia). I felt very much inclined to send him straight to a GCS, but it was a very rough track and pitch dark so I observed him for a few hours and eventually decided that he did not have an acute abd. Anyway I gave him a dose of morphia and he secured some rest.

9/2/18 my patient of the night before had improved, but I had to send him to hospital. I visited all the companies this a.m., involving in all a walk of about 3 miles. Fritz was comparatively quiet, only occasionally sending over a shell just to remind one that there was a war on. After visiting one of the companies I went to one of our observation posts situated near the line and saw, for the first time, a few Fritz running about in their native state. Furious bombardment tonight 9:30 p.m. our chaps carried out a successful raid, a hundred Germans being killed and 50 captured.

10/2/18 Rather a quiet day, walked back to ambulance to order stores.

11/2/18 Usual round, wet muddy day.

12/2/18 While out on usual round to D coy got a little hurry up from Fritz. Had dinner with C coy officers

13/2/18 Relieved 47 Batt from front line and returned to old posi I was occupying about three weeks ago. Conditions have improved immensely there being less rain and constant drip has ceased. The formality of receiving stores and medical material from outgoing MO did not take long. The last item was rather interesting and amusing. In bold English it was described as 1 cat (good ratter). One might quarrel with this item being classed as medical or trench store, but that is merely a technical point. Further investigation revealed an intelligent and active tabby cat, which my predecessor had soberly requisitioned from the Q. M. for the purpose of waging war against the countless mice and rats. Apparently puss enjoys the job immensely for she is chasing around constantly and acquainting the aforementioned animals that there is a great war in progress. Puss apparently realises that she is an important personage in the establishment if one judges by the way she struts around the RAP. Anyway she

showed her appreciation of the fact that I had signed for her by curling up on my bunk in the early hours of the morning.

14/2/18 got up at 9:30 a.m.; quite a simple proceeding as one is always fully dressed in this area (getting up merely means putting one's boots on and removing oneself from one's bunk). There were a few men on sick parade. Next follows my visit to my little field hospital. I have accommodation for about 10 patients in an adjoining dugout. Certainly the air is not particularly healthy 15 feet underground, but it is fairly safe from shell fire. I have to keep men suffering from trench fever, influenza and other minor complaints. It seems hard that sick men should be kept in the forward area and in a stuffy dugout, but this is one of the results of the failure of conscription - sick wastage must be kept down to a minimum and a man has to be very bad before I can send him away from the Batt. This job lasted till dinner time. Then I had to go out and inspect the sanitary state of affairs of the Batt in the trenches -- water required examination. This kept me going for about three hours and involved a fair walk. It was a foggy day so Fritz was very quiet and lobbed very few shells over. My appetite for tea was good and it was quite a relief to sit down afterwards and browse. I indulged in a luxury this evening; I had a petrol tin of water heated, stripped and had a fairly satisfactory sponge. This is the first occasion that I have taken my clothes off during the last 9 days.

15/2/18 usual proceeding in morning -- fixing up sick. After dinner I went out for a walk -- fog had disappeared and sun was shining brightly. The "White Chateau" was my first objective. This was formerly the beautiful summer residence of the King of Belgium and as a matter of fact the whole ground we occupy is the private grounds of the King. I understand that these grounds and the Chateau were once wonderfully beautiful. There is nothing at present to indicate their beauty. Nothing but desolation and destruction on all sides. The Chateau itself is just a mass of ruins -- even the solid masses of stone are all completely crushed. My own dugout is situated right on the bank of a canal which apparently ran behind the Chateau and between the two an extensive wood used to be -- now not a single tree remained standing -- no signs of gardens remain, nothing but shell holes and smashed timber. One stands on an eminence and views the same type of country in all directions. Signs of life are not marked, but occasionally one gets a glimpse of mud coloured figures moving about evolving some fresh schemes to produce still further destruction. Loud crashes followed by screams through the air make it clear that we are still pounding away at the Hun. Similar screams through the air but followed by the crash and a young volcano rising skyward, perhaps a mile away perhaps 100 yards away, make it equally clear that the Hun is still anxious to obliterate us. And a few more rather adjacent volcanoes to make one become rather less interested in the former grandeur of this great king's summer residence and rather more inclined to make tracks back to the cold and miserable canal cave (a similar feeling I should imagine is felt by a rabbit when it comes out on a fine evening for a browse and is spotted by a huntsman).

16/2/18 usual work in the morning -- no men hit, but there is a fair amount of sickness. In afternoon I walked round the trenches. It was a fine sunny afternoon and not much shelling, so I made the town to examine the sanitary arrangements. This particular country is quite high and overlooks Fritz, so an excellent opportunity was available to see Fritz. By the aid of glasses I was able to pick out several of the blighters working away. A few miles further on the large town of Comines was easily

visible. I reached home in time for tea. This seems funny when you realise that home is merely a hole in the ground.

17/2/18 (Sunday). Did not leave the dugout at all during the day. An endless stream of more or less sick men kept coming to me all day.

18/2/18 A fine sunny day - Fritz livened up a bit -- 2 aeroplanes brought down some short distance from us. As far as I was concerned it was a quiet day. About 7:30 pm I was informed that one of the company commanders in the forward posts was ill so I went out to see him. It was a clear half moonlight night. The walk to support trenches was uneventful but after leaving the shelter of the trenches and strolling out into the open country. There are no trenches in the actual front line but a series of outposts so that no man's land imperceptibly merges into our own. Therefore if one desires to visit a post it is necessary to know the way, for a person could easily get between the posts and quickly find himself in no man's land. There was a good guide to my destination so I had no trouble. Three trench mortar shells lobbed about 60 yards away from us en route but did no damage. Found Captain Carter too ill to carry on, so advised that he be relieved. Got safely back to my own little dug out about 9:30 p.m. had some coffee and went to sleep.

19/2/18 Another wonderfully beautiful day; a sharp frost followed by limitless sunshine. There is no doubt that Fritz is a fortunate chap. The papers all say that he is about to launch an enormous attack against us. If he is, he is having most perfect weather to make preparations. There was one rather interesting incident this a.m. at about 12:30 a.m. the whirr of an aeroplane and loud sound of machine-gun fire acquainted us with the fact that there was a Fritz aeroplane in the close proximity. Investigation revealed the fact -- 5 of our planes were having a scrap with one lonesome Fritz. Needless to say he came off 2nd best and crashed about 100 feet from the mouth of my dugout and almost immediately burst into flames. An act of chivalry was shown by one of my men. He rushed over and managed to extricate the pilot before he was burnt. Stretcher bearers then appeared and brought him into my dressing station and I was able to fix up his wounds, which were several. A leg broken in two places -- a skull fractured and a gunshot wound in the face - make one rather chary of his chances.

Feel a bit seedy today (probably dugout life is beginning to have its effect on me). No doubt the organism of trench fever, especially as several of my patients are laid up in my little hospital for the condition, is temporarily gaining the mastery over my antibodies.

20/2/18 A rotten night unable to sleep -- very severe pains in all joints and limbs; temp. 101°f crawled out of my bunk in time to see men reporting sick. A note came through from B.O.R. with the news that our unit was to be relieved tonight. I was exceedingly pleased to hear this, but it meant a lot of extra work arranging transport for my sick, having my medical stores catalogue and RAP fixed up for the incoming M.D.. Still I did as much as possible from my bunk and got up as little as possible all day. As usual I had to be the last to leave the area. I staggered out of the dugout at 9:30 p.m. in the drizzling rain and eventually got as far as the advanced dressing station. I decided to have a bit of a rest there and, as always, the 12th field chaps made me feel quite at home and wanted to relieve me of my job for a time. Anyway I

got them to give me an ambulance car to take me to a post where the rest of the unit were embussing. This was about 1½ miles away and the lift was exceedingly helpful. An hour's cold ride in a bus followed and I had to then walk about 300 yards to camp. I felt exceedingly wobbly on this stage and had great difficulty in completing it. I had hopes of falling straight into my valise and going to sleep (my batman had gone ahead to prepare this). Unfortunately the T. O. (*Transport Officer?*) had misplaced my stuff and nothing was ready. It was just to 1 a.m. my temp was 103°f, so I had reached a state of not caring what happened to me. Anyway some blankets were forthcoming and I soon got stretched out. I'd had hopes of sleeping in next day and thus getting a chance to recover, but the fates willed otherwise. Word came through in the early hours of the morning *saying* that I had been detached to attend a school and had to leave at 8:30 next morning.

21/2/18 crawled out about 7:30 a.m. feeling very shaky still running temp 101°f. I considered the question: would I back out and go off to hospital instead. It was a fine sunny morning. I thought I would give the change in the open air a chance so I whizzed off in the car to Bailleul; getting at the destination about 12 p.m. (*noon presumably - RHB*). I took it easy in the afternoon and immediately after tea went to bed -- with the luxury of clean pyjamas, clean sheets, fine bed and an excellent room (This, by the way, is the first time I have had these luxuries since I left London). Sleep was sound and I awoke feeling much better next morning.

22/2/18 First day at school commenced. This, of course, is a medical officers school and deals with subjects that are useful at the front: gas -- measures for avoiding and methods of treatment. This infernal means of warfare is becoming very diabolical nowadays and is daily becoming worse. MOs have to be thoroughly conversant with all possible measures to outwit the wily Hun. Unfortunately there are still thousands of casualties occurring amongst our troops. There are many other technical points that are necessary to an RMO and a school such as the present saves him a lot of trouble worrying out the points for himself. The procedure is lectures in the morning and visiting some practical demonstration in the afternoon. This afternoon we visited a practical demonstration at a military gas school. We examined and had a good look at all the Hun's abominable gases then after adjusting our masks had to go through the gas attack; first clouds then in an area where gas shells were rained down on us. Next we had a demonstration of the method used by us in administering a dose to the blanky Hun. We then came home to an excellent meal. At this school we are billeted at some of the best houses in the town. I have an excellent room about 30' x 10' fairly well furnished; of course sheets and blankets on the bed. One is somewhat disturbed when coming into the house to see that the front is lavishly pitted with marks of bombs. This town being so near the front, well within shell range, is frequently shelled and bombed. Many houses have naturally been utterly destroyed. This one only being a little bent. I only hope that the bending process is not continued while I am an inhabitant. We all mess together (12 of us) in a large house at the other end of the town. From 5 f (*franks? - RHB*) per day, with our army issue, we live very well.

23/2/18 Lectures for 3 hours in the morning. Afternoon cars called for us to take us to Remy. A group of CCS 4th Army medical Society were having their usual weekly meeting. Gas from its medical aspect was discussed and a very profitable afternoon.

About 200 MOs present so I heard quite a number of views. Met Jack Williams, Jimmy Henderson, Southy, Eric James, Major Fletcher Fox and many others.

24/2/18 Sunday. Still working -- lecture and demonstration of working of baths. These are a very important institution in France and a big factor in maintaining a satisfactory standard of health. Skin diseases are kept under control, notably that constant bugbear, scabies. Lice are also kept in check by this institution. In afternoon we visited No.1 Australian CCS and saw a demonstration of the application of a Thomas splint in the field.

25/2/18 A series of 4 lectures during morning and afternoon. In the evening visited daily variety show given by 1st Aust Divi. Quite a first class show given by this Pierrot troupe who call themselves "The Sentimental Blokes". It was a most beautiful moonlight night and naturally Frits was out on a bombing expedition, but did not come anywhere near our quarters.

26/2/18 Lectures in morning. The afternoon visited 68th Aust Flying Squadron and gained an insight into the workings of this crowd, saw many photographs.

27/2/18 Visited No 2 Aust CCS and saw exactly how of this clearing station is run.

28/2/18 Lectures.

1/3/18 Examination on the work we had done during the week. In afternoon returned to old unit 48th Battalion. This week's school gave us a splendid opportunity to find out exactly how other people are running things and are proceeding with the business of carrying on the war and it gave us an excellent change of work.

2/3/18 Began to pick up the threads of regimental work once again. At present the Battalion is at Meteren (*? not easy to read, but Meteren seems likely – RHB*) and it is very scattered so that I have quite a busy time chasing around and seeing that everything is all right.

3/3/18 2nd anniversary of the formation of Battalion. This was celebrated by a special church service in the morning (being Sunday). My duties kept me going all morning so I could not attend on this auspicious occasion. In the afternoon a football match was played. This is not at all an unusual event for Sunday in France. In the evening the officers had a large dinner and a general speechifying effort.

4/3/18 Usual routine work carried on -- sick parade at 7:30 a.m. another sick parade at 9 a.m. owing to widely distributed nature of country it is necessary to held to sick parades per day. From 9:30 to 10:30 there is a certain amount of clerical work and arranging for evacuation. At 11 a.m. I take my stretcher squad and attempt to teach them and keep them familiar with the rudiments of first aid. Dinner then becomes an important item. The afternoon is devoted to riding round the various farms and seeing our schemes of sanitation etc are in fair order. With is approximately 800 men camped in an area there are a lot of details that must be attended to by an MO.

5/3/18 usual procedure in the morning; in afternoon rode into Bailleul 4 km away. This was partly a social call on the 12th Field Ambulance and partly on duty.

6/3/18 A glorious sunny day, ice and snow has faded and it is really a pleasure to live (this is a changing climate we have frequently had -- these flying changes to be later followed by a return of Jack Frost in all his fury). This morning work was varied by the taking of an official photograph of all the officers. This afternoon I visited the Companies per foot so that I could get a little exercise. After walking about 2 miles it got comparatively hot and certainly made me feel that winter was a condition of the past. I've fixed a couple of sick men at two companies and then had afternoon tea at their respective messes. So felt in excellent form. During this walk I met a couple of French girls who spoke excellent English. In Australia they would be considered rather rapid, but in France their standards are different to what we have been accustomed. One cannot live long in this country without becoming accustomed to the altered conditions and taking their actions as a matter of course.

7/3/18 a fairly busy day; but attended to usual sick in morning and delivered two lectures - one to stretcher bearers and one to A coy. (*company – RHB*). In afternoon visited more sick; finished up by visiting a little cafe frequented by many of our officers. There are three rather fine looking girls at this spot who speak English fluently so a most interesting hour and a half was passed having a cup of coffee. They are exceedingly sociable people and quickly make one absolutely at home. One gets a good opportunity to observe their customs and manners (Boche etc. (*writing not clear – RHB*)).

8/3/18 rather a strenuous day. Delivered three lectures today on various subjects. As they were all hour lectures, I felt a bit blown out at the finish. This is a game that that I never thought I should be called on to do, but one never knows what is in front of one. I gave one lecture to stretcher bearers, the other to 12th Battalion and the other to 2/12 infantry Battalion School. As there was nothing much to do in the evening I strolled off with two other officers to the little establishment where we had dropped in on the day before. Madam and the three girls greeted us in a very friendly manner and seemed very pleased at our visit. They produced a pack of cards and attempted to teach us one of their games, but their instruction was rather defective so the cards were soon given up as a bad job. Music was the next item, they have a piano and all the well-known English songs "A perfect day -- -- and so on". One of the girls acted as pianist and songs were soon forthcoming. This particular family seemed to be very intelligent. Previous to the war they knew. (*sentence not finished – RHB*)

9/3/18 Received a note from Phil giving me the information that he was attending MO's school at Bailleul so I strolled off in the afternoon to that town and looked him up. Got back to Meteren (*?not easy to read, but seems likely place – RHB*) in time for tea and spent the evening quietly writing letters.

10/3/18 (Sunday) a glorious day. 1st official day of summer; at least summer time has been adopted which means that the time has been put on an hour and we have thus be (*?been – RHB*) done for one hours sleep. Annual Battalion sports held today – foot racing, tug-of-war, stretcher bearers contest. This created quite a lot of interest and a number of other athletic exercises completed the programme. A day such as this gives the men a big lift and really gives them something to live for. A personal event for myself was the arrival of two parcels from home. Apparently they were intended for Xmas, but anyway they have not be (*?been – RHB*) lost en route.

11/3/18 another glorious day beautiful sunshine; warm, just like our typical spring days. One naturally looks round for wattle blossom and flowers but there are none here.

12th Field Ambulance had their Xmas dinner and anniversary. Owing to our rapid rush to the Cambrian Front it was not possible to hold this annual Function. The CO of the Ambulance had sent me an invitation so I travelled into the town of Bailleul where they were established. They were billeted in a big school and as there was one enormous room the whole unit, approximately 300, were seated at once. The usual rule was for offices to mess together, but it is the custom in this ambulance that once a year at a really first-class dinner is provided for the whole unit and a most enjoyable evening is spent. We had a band and numerous artists gave excellent items. Naturally many of the chaps got very merry and of course there was any amount of row.

A couple of little incidents concerning this dinner impressed me immensely. First the room was decorated with wattle blossom. I do not know where it came from but it was true wattle blossom and gave the room quite a homely look. Second I had received a letter containing clippings describing the riots and actions of anti-conscription during December, that afternoon. The reading of those clippings made me feel very disgusted with some Australians. One toast at the end of the evening made me feel exceedingly bitter against those infernal slackers in Australia. A Lance Corporal of the unit proposed a toast to the memory of members of the unit who had fallen in battle during the last 12 months. The evening had been lively and rowdy up to this point, but while this toast was skilfully proposed there was absolute silence in the great hall. All were thinking deeply -- some of their best pals who were gone from this earth for ever -- some considering the possibilities of their being wiped out themselves before long. These were my thoughts, but I also remembered the actions of those infernal antis in Australia -- men who were supposed to be my fellow countrymen. Could anything but bitterness fill one's breast under the circumstances?

12/3/18 Another beautiful day, usual routine proceeded with Fritz sending over some long-distance high velocity shells of this morning -- 4 shells lobbed in Bailleul. Very pleased to receive two parcels intended for my birthday. Afternoon tea was going to be an event this afternoon! After opening the tin and extracting the cake, found it was mouldy and unfit to eat -- even the fine icing was impregnated with fungus.

13/3/18 Many French people interviewed me today and asked for treatment. I usually do what I can for them, but they made it a bit of a welter today. A kiddy with pneumonia was the first patient, then there were 2 or 3 cases of minor illness who visited me at my dispensary. Then a frantic female besieged me to come and fix up her brother whose hand had just been crushed in a thrashing machine. This was 2 miles away so I rode out rather hurriedly and fixed things up as well as possible. I advised them to get their own doctor, but for some reason or other they had no confidence in him and desired me to treat the case, promising to bring the patient in to Meteren (*?Looks like 'Metren', but may be mis-spelt - RHB*) to be near. I pointed out that this was impossible and they agreed to get their own doctor. Well at about 6:30 p.m. they came back in a hurry and told me that the wound was bleeding freely, so I buzzed off to the farm once more and administered morphia and fixed it up once more. I considered that operation was urgently necessary, so told them that an amputation of the arm would be necessary. They said go ahead, I replied that I would

not do anything without the French doctor, but offered to assist him if they would send the patient into the local hospital. At 9 p.m. everything was fixed and they sent for me again saying that the doctor was ready to receive me. He was quite a decent chap and spoke English well. He told me that he was a physician and therefore could not attempt any surgical work, but suggested that I go ahead. I thought for a moment and wondered if I could call myself a surgeon. Anyway as I have done this operation before I reckoned that I would have a go, so strolled off to the hospital. I were sadly disappointed as there were no facilities for operating and no instruments. Decided that it would be rash to attempt a major operation under such conditions, so I had to insist on having the patient sent to another hospital.

I got home at about 10 and found another messenger on my doorstep with the story that there was a very sick girl across the road. I've felt like saying go to blazes, but all the same I went and did what I could but told them that they must send for their own doctor in the morning.

14/3/18 a beautiful sunshine in day -- keen but bright. Guns roar very prominently today; Fritz is beginning to sit up and take notice. He is beginning to sling shells about -- sent 7 or 8 into Bailleul at 11 a.m. this morning. A few people were killed. A motor cyclist dispatch rider had bad luck. Apparently he got a shell all to himself. After the explosion, a small piece of his bike and one boot were found but there was no trace of anything else; everything being blown into atoms. Usual routine of work.

15/3/18 a day somewhat similar to yesterday. In the afternoon a football match was played by a team chosen from our brigade against a team from the Belgian army. They played soccer (*for*) the Belgian national. They only defeated us by one goal, so that we consider it an excellent performance.

16/3/18 Saturday -- usual routine 2 shells came over today. The civilian inhabitants got rather scared and rushed out into the country. 2 people killed and about ½ a dozen wounded.

17/3/18 Another beautifully fine day. Officers of Battalion had photograph taken. In the afternoon (*I*) went for a ride with Challen; fairly soft roads were found so we had a very enjoyable spin. In the evening a couple of visitors came to mess -- Col Leone and a Belgian Major. We heard the story of the trials of the Belgians in the first stages of the war, first-hand, and were much interested.

18/3/18 usual weather and work. Received a Christmas parcel from Australian comforts. Every man and officer received one. Mine came from NSW. Very enjoyable musical evening with the. French people across the street -- expert violinist and pianist. All the old chorus songs went with a swing.

19/3/18 shelling Bailleul rather heavily -- some civilians were killed. A few shells came further than Bailleul and almost reached our village. They are rather nasty things and, as they come nearly 12 miles, they had to be H. V. (*?high velocity?*)- huge naval shells and naturally they do a lot of damage wherever they lob. Fortunately they hit a paddock just outside the village and no one was hit, but they certainly keep one acquainted with the fact that there is a war on. We invited a party of nurses from an Aussie CCS to dinner. 6 came and made the evening very interesting. We

obtained the use of a piano and had some fine music. It was very nice to speak to Australian women once again.

20/3/18 a dull cloudy day. I made a complete tour of inspection of the companies today with the aid of my horse. While going round, a couple of shells lobbed about 200 yards from one of the company HQ. During the night there was a fair amount of shelling around the district, but nobody was hit in this village. I slept through the greater part of the night but just at daybreak one of Fritz's aeroplane bombs went off with a deuce of a crash and woke me rather suddenly. I thought the blooming house must have been hit but apparently the bomb was a long way off. I heard quite a number after this, but other villagers actually received them.

21/3/18 a fine and warm spring day once again. Usual routine. In the evening visited our friends across the road and enjoyed some music. Another family had come to live there from Bailleul. At 1 a.m. this morning about 200 civilians flocked out of the town on account of the shelling. It is pretty rough on civilians to be sleeping peacefully and suddenly to be disturbed by shells and bombs. Of course many were killed but the rest seek shelter in neighbouring farms. They stayed away for a day or two, then gradually make their way back to their homes but the same process is repeated and life is really a constant dread for them.

22/3/18 Fritz attacked on a wide front, but not near us. A beautiful day but shelling in our neighbourhood has been a bit spasmodic all day. No shells have come at all near, but they make a beastly row and as they fall all round the town they have very effectively scared the civilians. This afternoon was gloriously sunny and was spent festively by our unit. A first-class football match (Australian rules) against 12th Field Ambulance was part of the programme and a Brigade transport show completed the day.

It never rains but it pours -- no less than 4 parcels arrived from Australia today. Evening is beautiful moonlight, but unfortunately one never really appreciates the clear night for Fritz loves to come over and lay great numbers of their rotten eggs on such occasions. Already he has been round and deposited about 6, which exploded with considerable bang about a mile or so away. No doubt there will be many more visits before morning. I slept soundly until 1 a.m. when ear splitting crashes began in rapid succession all round the town. I realised that Fritz was shelling the town. I came to the conclusion it was useless getting up so lay listening to the fun and wondering if any would come near us. Fortunately it was the next town, Bailleul, that received the greater part of this undesirable ironmongery. The civilians consisting mostly of old men, women and children became frightened and commenced to leave their homes in droves. The shelling continued intermittently all-night and by morning one could witness the sad sight of the droves of people hurriedly leaving home with a few belongings, perhaps wheeled in a perambulator or wheel barrow. Old people hardly able to walk were attempting to get out into the open country. Some kept up their spirits well, laughing and joking, others look serious while others were completely unnerved and jumped at the slightest sound and quivered all over as a shell streaked overhead. Much help was given to these unfortunate people by the soldiers. All ambulances and wagons that could be spared were put at their disposal. One frequently saw strong Aussies carrying babies and goods out of the towns. Of course all the civilians did not get clear of the towns without accidents; many being

killed. Sad and harrowing incidents occurred often. I know (*of*) one family, consisting of a French soldier, his wife and three children getting clear, but the wife had to return for some valuables and was unlucky enough to get into the main street in time to meet a shell and was killed instantly. Several kiddies were also killed and, as usual, quite a number of Aussies.

24/3/18 at midday our Battalion received orders to be ready to move at an hour's notice. This was most unexpected news as we knew things were quiet on our front and our time for returning to the line was not yet up. Anyway things were hurriedly packed and preparations made (the explanation of the move was the fact that Fritz had successfully commenced his offensive against the Tommy's away down South and we were to be hurriedly rushed down to stem the tide).

25/3/18 Our Brigade mounted motor buses at 9 a.m. and started off into the unknown. We bumped over the rough French roads until 11 p.m. that night travelling fully 90 miles then found that we had to march about 5 miles to our destination near Arras. We got there about 1 a.m. and found resting places in a thoroughly destroyed town by 2 a.m.. We had to be up and ready for action at 6 a.m.

26/3/18 At 11 a.m. word came through that the Hun had broken through and was rushing towards our position in armoured cars. This of course meant instant action. The brigade hastily rushed out into hastily prepared positions on the roads. I established an RAP in a small hole in the road and awaited events. We expected to be scrapping in real earnestness within half an hour. An hour passed, nothing happened; 1 ½ - 2 hours, then word came along that the cars had been smashed up 2 miles ahead and we went back to our positions in the village and commenced to look for grub. Word then came along that we were to march off at 7 p.m. (2hrs. later) for the front line to act as support to one of our brigades, 4th, who proposed to make an attack. Preparations were made and, at the stated hour, in spite of weariness, the Battalion fell in and commenced to move off. Just as we were starting, another order came along cancelling the first. Our next order was to stand to for two hours and then commence a 17 mile march down to Senlis near Hennincourt (*?both place names difficult to read - RHB*). This seemed a terrible ordeal to ask tired troops to do but it had to be done. It was not so bad for me as I had an horse but as a matter of fact the horse was not an absolute blessing. I only had thin clothes on as it was comparatively hot when we left Meteren (*? again, difficult to read - RHB*) And this night was intensely cold. I therefore walked practically the whole of that 17 miles.

Under ordinary circumstances this would have been an exciting match, but everyone was so tired and sick of rushing about that they did not care what happened. We went right along close to the Hun front and as he had been pushing so furiously we were likely to run into him at any moment. We had to march the whole night and really put up a creditable performance by completing the journey at 7 a.m. on 27/3/18. I was very tired and must admit that I fell asleep on two occasions, once when riding I woke up with a start and just succeeded in avoiding a buster. The second time I was walking and found myself walking into some men in front of me and I thus became thoroughly awakened.

27/3/18 Reached our destination at 7 a.m. Found the town deserted. The Hun had been pushing furiously in this neighbourhood and everyone had cleared in terror. We

rooted round, found comfortable billets and helped ourselves to available edibles. I had just finished an excellent breakfast and was considering the advisability of turning in for a well earned rest. More orders came to light; we were to turn out immediately in fighting order to act as support to a Tommy division in the front line. I had to rush round to get what dressings I could and prepare for action. At 10:15 a.m. we moved off once again covering a distance of about 6 miles and came to rest in an open field about 2 1/2 miles away from the Hun. We had absolutely no protection and old Fritz was throwing quondams over at a great rate. I looked round and found a small hole in the side of the road. This I decided would serve as an RAP. Fixing it up was quite a simple proceedings. I only had about a dozen shell dressings to meet all emergencies so my chief worry was to get messages back for more medical material. We were not in position from more than 20 minutes when word came back that Fritz was running rings round the Tommies in front, so we had to go over the open fields in broad daylight to relieve them. A very pretty manoeuvre then took place; the whole crowd opened out in artillery formation and commenced to walk slowly across the fields to the front line. Green fields, partly cultivated -- not the usual shells stricken country passed over. No doubt Fritz observed us, anyway he commenced to throw large shells amongst the advancing troops. It was a pretty thorough, somewhat nerve racking, spectacle to see the huge volcanoes fly up alongside the many groups. Luckily not a single man was hit until we got quite close to the front. I came near the last and got a most excellent view of the whole proceeding. I was fairly worried for I had such a sketchy supply of material and if any number of casualties occurred I should have been in the soup. Still after about 1/2 an hour dressings arrived and my cares were at an end. I half finished the trip and fixed an interim RAP to fix any casualties that might occur en route. I was rather lucky at this stage -- two (*see continuation after the following section that has been inserted by VCB in this part of his diary – RHB*)

WRITTEN 9 MONTHS LATER

The strenuous existence spent during the last 5 days did not allow much time for reflection on our apparent defeat by the Hun and the miserable performance put up by some British Divisions, but now one has a chance to reflect and one cannot help feeling very proud of the magnificent way in which the diggers acquitted themselves in the great emergency. The attack at Herbuterne, (*this should probably be spelt 'Hébuterne' – RHB*) arranged for a whole division, was at the last moment, successfully carried out by a single Brigade. Certainly this attack was a minor affair, but without support they successfully held the line for 3 whole weeks. Our own Brigade (the 12th) relieved what was once a complete English Division. When we relieved them on the 27th they were thoroughly beaten by the Hun and were retreating in a wholesale manner, yet the next few pages indicate that our few diggers by wonderful resolution and pluck were able to stem the Hun onrush. We received news that our third division were sent in to the South of us and in just as successful a manner, stopped the onrush in the region of Villers Bretonneux. These two spots, Albert and Villers Brett., were undoubtedly the key to the Southern Hun push and it is an absolute fact that both positions would have been irretrievably lost had these two divisions failed. This would have meant the separation of the English and French armies and quite likely

the utter demoralisation of fighting in France. Fritz did not fail to attack again and again on these vital spots, but my diary shows that he never once succeeded in driving the diggers out. The 2nd and 5th divisions were brought down and did their share in holding these vital spots but, as history proves, right until the end of the war “the powers that be” were not game to put other troops in this vital sector. Late in April an English division was put in to hold Villers Bretonneux in order to give the diggers a rest, but history also shows, that at the end of a week Fritz attacked and captured the village. The tired Aussies were immediately ordered to return and recapture it. The wonderful and daring capture of Villers Bretonneux on April 24th is now an epic in history, but right on to August 8th no troops but Aussies were entrusted with this vital spot. No one who has not been through it can appreciate what a terrific mental strain the digger had to undergo to successfully do this work. Every night there were the raids and rumours of huge offensives being launched -- yet during the whole period he had to remain in the line 5 weeks at a stretch and 10 days in support; during the six months never once being out of shell fire. Then history shows that he did this and on the memorable August the 8th -- the date which “Ludendorff” gives as the final crash of the German chances -- he went forward from victory to victory. One does not like to make odious comparisons but one cannot help remembering that on this occasion the Tommy failed once again.

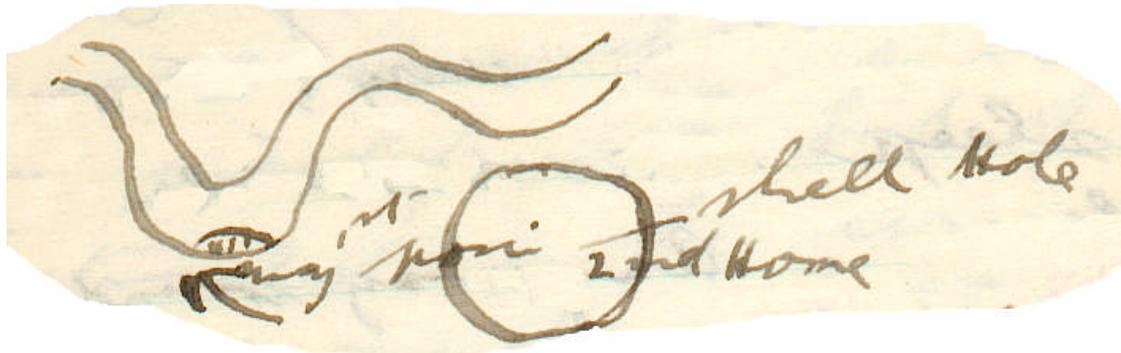
Three corps had the honour of attempting this extensive attack; the 3rd English corps, the Australians and the Canadians. History states that the stunt went off with a snap. Eye witnesses know that this is true as far as the Canadians and Aussies are concerned. The Canadians in the South and Aussies in the centre went forward with irresistible dash, but the Tommies failed to make much headway at all. “Chipilly” will always be a bad memory to me (More is written of this later). The part played by our 1st division during this period is also an epic of heroism. They were rushed South to help us, but the Hun pushed in the North so they were rushed out there and were hurled headlong into the critical spot. History also tells how they saved Hazebrouck, the key to the northern sector. Probably these perfectly true facts will never be fully written, if for political reasons, but those who were present know perfectly well that the colonial troops -- Canadian and Australian absolutely saved the British Army from destruction during the early months of 1918

fairly good positions were found comparatively close together. I was undecided which I should use. Eventually I picked one and settled down. I had been settled less than half an hour when wallop came a 5.9 right into the position I had not chosen. My next anxiety was how to get the wounded away. This is the Field ambulance job, but they had not yet put in an appearance. Hence my worry. After three hours I was delighted to see them come and my trouble then ended. The continuous stream of wounded was set in motion and things went smoothly. I then moved my RAP about 1 mile nearer the line. This time I had the use of a shell hole. The description of my trench and shell hole home now follows.

On getting into position one rather unfortunate incident occurred. The Tommy division were thoroughly beaten and had not even been able to send their correct location back to HQ. Many English aeroplanes were inching overhead and we could

not understand why they would persist in firing at us advancing over the fields (later we were informed that they had received instructions to fire at everyone they saw East of Lavieville and we were at this time nearly 2 miles east). It was exceedingly unpleasant to have our own planes pinging at us. Fortunately they were not very accurate shots, but just before we got into position and our Colonel was getting very wild at this peppering, he started to wave frantically attempting to signal to them but they continued to splash bullets round us, but just managed to miss the Colonel; though they got one of our signallers through the head. It was curious but this misunderstanding was adjusted by a Hun, unwittingly of course. One of his fighting planes came over and engaged with our chap. The most exciting duel took place just over our heads and our chap came off second best. A burst of fire appeared around his engine and a whole plane was soon a burning mass.

Home in the trenches -- imagine a wavy gutter 4 feet deep and 2'6" wide cut out in clay soil.



(this is a sketch photocopied from the diary – RHB)

Not a palace perhaps but better than on the surface. For my own private home I chose the place indicated. I got my batsman to scrape out a hole 6 inches deep and shaped so that one could be comfortable. A little dry grass served as bedding. Considering the fact that there was a very cold wind, considerable frost, no blankets and only a comparatively thin overcoat, one could not expect much sleep. But as I had had only 2 1/2 hours sleep in the last two nights and had had a very strenuous time, sleep was possible anywhere. Anyway wounded continued to come in; a fairly constant stream till 12:30 a.m. Things seemed quiet then so I decided to retire to rest. The process was quite simple, merely lying down. Naturally it was cold and a few moments of shivering followed, but sleep soon deadened one's senses and restful oblivion followed till about 2:30 a.m. By then the cold wind had increased to such a rate that the cold stimuli overcame the power of sleep and I woke. I was so cold that further sleep was impossible so I got up and went for a bit of a run, stimulating the circulation well and thus fitting myself for further sleep. At 6 a.m. I finally rose and commenced fixing more patients.

On the second night(28/3/18) I carried out some minor improvements. The hole was dug 18" deeper and more grass placed in position, further a water proof sheet was fixed (as per diag). This shut out all wind and if the night had been like the last would have been ideal, but nature seemed to be bent on making us as uncomfortable as possible. About 5PM a steady downpour of rain commenced and continued until well after midnight. The worst part of this constant rain was great difficulty in keeping

dressings dry. I had to make small holes into the side of the bank, but the crumbly earth frequently fell in and covered everything in muck.

28/3/18 Sun came out after daylight, but after 20 minutes clouds came over and rain came down in torrents. At 8 a.m. we were very delighted to see a group of 30 Hun prisoners coming into our headquarters. These chaps had carelessly approached our lines thinking they were up against the troops they had been for some time. One of our officers challenged the lot -- being only armed with a revolver. They threw down their arms and were brought in triumph. At about 9 a.m. the fun started. Fritz commenced one of his massed attacks. He pitched hundreds of large shells all round our position. Several splinters fell into my shell hole but did no damage. Many large shells lobbed within 50 yards but all managed to lob where there were not many men. By 10 a.m. wounded began to trickle down and later came in a furious stream. They kept me going full steam ahead all day, but as night came on the number slackened. But still odd cases came to light right through the night. Rain continued to drizzle down all the time and made the sides of my hole so slippery that it became impossible to get patients on stretches into it, so I had to commence dressing on the top. Of course it was then impossible to use a torch so the dressing had to be very rudimentary and frequently had to be left altogether. Fritz was mown down in hundreds, but did not succeed in breaking our line. He had to go back without gaining an inch. We had 90 casualties. Two officers killed were Captain Elliot and Lieutenant Whittle.

29/3/18 A lull after the storm of yesterday. Apart from a few quondams loitering round, things were fairly quiet. I was able to get a party of men to chase round and find some galvanised iron and thus we've managed to make a small shelter to keep stuff dry. It was only 4' x 8' 4' but it seemed a palace. There were a couple of interesting incidents. I picked out an old dilapidated RAMC manual lying in one of the trenches. It was wet and apparently discarded. I opened the first leave and found Sam Fitzpatrick's (*a relative of VCB – RHB*) name written by himself on the fly leaf. Further investigation made it certain that it was Sam's old book, which he bought in Melbourne before he left Australia. I'm made further enquiries and discovered that one of my stretcher bearers had found it lying in a deserted house in our former village, Metren, and had taken possession of it.

The second interesting incident was a visit from a cow. This animal had been wandering round the country and had apparently become thoroughly dazed and upset with the intense shell fire. Anyway the blooming thing had attached itself to one of my stretcher parties bringing in a case and had followed them like a dog to my post. The worst of the business was the urgent desire of that cow to come and share my little hole with me. I am not a very particular individual, but I certainly object to the company of such an animal in such a limited post. This cow was particularly obstinate and it took us fully half an hour to persuade it to depart. It was then past midnight and as things were fairly quiet, crawled into my little mud hole and was soon sleeping soundly. I was lucky enough to continue sleeping until about 6:30 a.m. when the first case put in an appearance for dressing.

30/3/18 A nice quiet day, no rain sunshine at times. Occasional quondams loitered round our position and only a few of our men were wounded and came through my hand. As soon as it was dark another battalion came and relieved us. We only went

back about 2 miles to another position in an open paddock. HQ officers last to leave. I walked out with the Col. (*Colonel – RHB*). It was just past midnight and a nice clear night. We came across several smashed aeroplanes (many are brought down in this kind of fighting. The ones we saw this evening were our own). While on this trip I saw one rather unpleasant sight; a shell had apparently struck one of the soldiers fairly and it made a very bad mess of him.

We reached our destination at about 1 a.m. - found that our batman had prepared a fairly decent meal. We did not take long giving it fits. There were 4 letters from Australia awaiting me, but I must admit that I was too sleepy to read them thoroughly. I am merely glance through and rolled myself in a blanket and went to sleep, but they were devoured next morning with much gusto.

31/3/18 Our new home; a fine grass paddock partly cultivated, ploughed in places young crops in others and grasslands in still others - undulating beautiful country. Two small and very pretty villages are situated comparatively close together on a small hill and just behind these villages there is a steep bank -- apparently old chalk pit's. This is the spot where we are resting. Absolutely no cover from the weather. If a large number of men were asked to line up in such a place at home there would be considerable grumbling -- not so here. They merely get spades and entrenching tools and each man gets to work digging small holes in the sides of the bank covering with an oil sheet or a piece of galvanised iron salvaged from the village and later lining these holes with straw, also salvaged from a neighbouring haystack. These make excellent shelters and one sleeps very soundly.

Closer inspection of the villages reveals a sad state of affairs. Shelling has been fairly heavy and many of the houses have been utterly destroyed. Others show signs of having been very hurriedly left. The civilians had very little warning and had to rush out leaving everything -- food, personal effects, all left. Naturally the soldiers make the most of things. It is wrong but I consider they are justified in taking food, for if it were left, it would be destroyed. Fowls find their way into the pot. Unfortunately in some cases men failed to stop there, but destroyed furniture etc.

The HQ officers established ourselves in one of the houses so we can have excellent meals and in comparative comfort. The only object (*?objection – RHB*) to this is the fact that shells come into the village constantly and one is apt to get hurt. Still this is a detail for Fritz throws shells all over the place and one is just as likely to get hit out in the paddock. (It is rather a sad fact, but right from the beginning of the war Fritz has never penetrated as far as this, but it is very gratifying to know that he has not gained a single inch since we arrived.)

1/4/18 Still in our possi. Fritz throws shells over but has fortunately hit no one in this area.

2/4/18 A lot of shells lobbed round our position today, but in spite of the fact that men were all round the place only one man was wounded. He seemed to have a spot marked just near a battery. This particular spot was on a bit of a hill between my dugout and the house where we dine. It therefore necessitated 2 attempts before I got up to tea. He (*Fritz*) persisted in sending salvos of shells over. On the first occasion he wounded one of our chaps and I had to stop and fix him up. Then was nearly

stopped myself, but all the same I got to the desired destination and enjoyed an excellent meal. One does not allow a few shells to stop one from getting one's meals.

3/4/18 dull dismal day not very much activity as far as we were concerned but Fritz has been pushing away at all day without mercy. Tonight we are for the front once more. I was going to say "trenches" but so far there are no such things. At 5 p.m. the Battalion commenced to form up in lines under the shelter of a friendly bank. Soon after this Mr Fritz commenced his usual evening strafe; unfortunately tonight he had much more luck than usual for till today we had only had one casualty at this place. This evening he managed to get several lucky shells over the bank and amongst our men. A couple were killed and 6 wounded. I had a lot of walking about fixing these chaps up.

As soon as darkness set in small groups of men moved out towards the line. The men are always spread out so that one shell cannot possibly kill many. I moved out at the rear of the last group and slowly plodded my way across ploughed fields. The trip up to the line was uneventful -- silent except for the plonk-plosh of feet moving sluggishly over muddy ploughed fields. The only other sound was the occasional screech of a shell overhead and sometimes the explosion of a bursting shell somewhere in the neighbourhood.

By 9 p.m. we reached our abode and took over medical stores etc and settle down for the night. Wounded began to trickle through at about 11PM. The first chap showed wonderful fortitude. In spite of the fact that he had one leg blown off, the second fractured and one arm badly smashed yet he was very cheerful and joked away as if there was nothing wrong with him. There were about 2 other cases through the night.

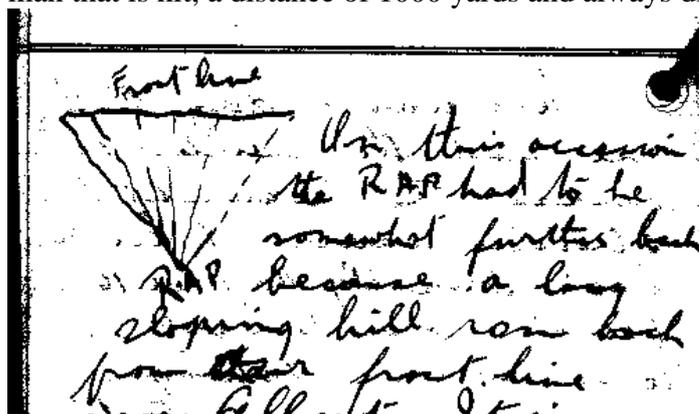
4/4/18 A wet slushy day. There were periods of activity; Fritz apparently feeling his way by making violent attacks on various parts of the front and throwing shells over in great profusion. Some fell unpleasantly close this afternoon especially when one has no the protection other than a sheet of galvanised iron. I am glad to say I had very few wounded men through my hands today. It is a rotten business to see fine fellows who have put out an excellent fight and done their duty nobly to be brought in smashed to pieces. I got hold of a piece of a January "Table Talk" this afternoon and I must say that looking at some of the pictures and reading certain paragraphs produced mixed feelings. I looked at some pictures of daily holidaymakers; apparently strong looking young fellows wearing dapper blazers enjoying themselves at popular seaside resorts. I was not allowed to look through the paper without interruption - a few of our unfortunate wounded chaps were brought in and had to be dressed. These chaps presented a very marked contrast, careworn, covered in mud from head to foot and suffering pain. Very little prospect of enjoying life is to be the lot of these fine fellows until this infernal war ends. Nevertheless these other chaps are allowed to have all the plums and to disport themselves a la "Table Talk".

5/4/18 A day of days in the history of the 12th Brigade. At exactly 10 minutes to 7 a.m. Fritz opened a terrific barrage on the whole of our front line. Shells of all sizes reined in a continuous stream all over our area. There was a continuous shriek of shells and the bursting produced an almost solid roar. We had absolutely no protection and had to go on dressing the cases in the open, hoping that no shells would actually lob on our position. To stand up and look round one felt that life could only

continue for a short time. All round huge volcanoes continued to rise skywards. There were so many that it was only possible to see for a short distance (about 200 yards) flying pieces of metal continually whizzed about our ears. Several times I felt great pieces whizz past within inches. This sort of thing continued without cessation till 15 minutes to 11 a.m. and then gradually eased off. Investigation later revealed the fact that the closest shell hole was 8 yards away and inside a ring of 60 feet about 20 shells had fallen. At the end of such a bombardment one's head ached and one felt fairly sick. Still Providence had decreed that our earthly career was not yet ended.

In spite of the extraordinary intensity of the bombardment the casualties in our small posi were not heavy. In an area of about three acres there were only 5 killed and 8 or 9 wounded. This only meant HQ, in the brigade area there would be well over 100 killed. When the barrage eased the fun started; Fritz attacked in very strong force.

This was the day that one had the privilege of seeing the regimental stretcher bearer at his best. Normally there are 16 bearers to a Battalion with 16 in reserve. I always use every bearer, attaching 8 to each company i.e. two bearer parties for each company. A Battalion front is usually about 1000 yards or less so I, as a rule, have my RAP 1000 yards behind the actual line. By this arrangement the bearers have to carry any man that is hit, a distance of 1000 yards and always directly away from the enemy.



Copied from diary – RHB)

On this occasion the RAP had to be somewhat further back because a long sloping hill ran back from our front line near Albert. It is absolutely necessary to have one's RAP beyond the crest of any hill such as this for the possibility of direct observation is fatal. There are always many men standing around an RAP and if Fritz could see such a group he would immediately exterminate it. So on this particular morning my bearers had to carry every casualty who was unable to walk, a distance of 1 mile and during most of the time they could be seen by the enemy. Still through this terrific barrage they continued to dauntlessly carry men in without any thought of their personal safety. One company, during the first half (*reads as 'house' with 'half' crossed out, but 'half' seems to make more sense – RHB*), had every bearer knocked out -- 3 being killed outright. The shelling became so intense that it was pure foolhardiness to continue walking thus through the open, so I considered it wise to stop all evacuation until the shelling eased somewhat (of course there was no shelter and one ran almost as much risk sitting in bits of holes or small trenches). The last carry completed by the unlucky B company was an example of great courage. I watched the gallant 4 coming over the rise of the hill about 200 yards away. I saw a shell lob alongside them and one bearer fall. The other three managed to save the stretcher from slipping and dropping the patient. They continued to plug along; a

nearby digger grabbing the vacant handle. They came on and at 50 yards another shell lobbed almost on top of them killing the unfortunate chap who had grabbed the handle. Even then they continued on and safely deposited the patient in my mud hole.

The Fritz force was massed thickly probably 6 to 1 of our men. Rifles and machine guns cracked incessantly; artillery of both sides chipping in all the time. As the afternoon wore on in spite of the terrific numbers of Fritz killed he slowly managed to force his way ahead and by the evening he succeeded in pushing back our line a distance of about 1000 yards. I understand that 4 hun divisions attempted to smash their way through our poor ½ a division on this occasion and to think that at the end of the day our line was still intact was really a wonderful performance. I did not alter my position at all and now Mr Fritz was comparatively close. He was able to spit machine-gun bullets around our ears now so it was necessary to keep one's head below the level of the trenches as much as possible. Conditions in our trenches were very rotten by this time; traffic and more or less continuous rain had turned up the mud until about 12" – 15" of liquid sticky mess lay in the bottom and one had to stand with this stuff almost up to one's knees. Stretcher cases were brought in and simply dumped in the mud. Dressings had to be adjusted as well as possible, but attempts at asepsis were quite hopeless. During the whole day a solid stream of wounded floated along; many able to walk, others on stretchers. The walkers cleared off to the rear as fast as they could travel and the stretcher cases were taken off also as quickly as possible. One had to urge badly wounded men to struggle off with the aid of a stick or a less severely wounded man, for in the middle of the afternoon it seemed very certain that Fritz was going to get through and that meant capture or death, so the only thing that mattered was to push everyone off.

At about 5 p.m. a reserve Battalion was pushed up and they gallantly pushed straight into Fritz and succeeded in driving him back a little way. This meant a big increase in the stream of wounded and another fierce, spiteful, bombardment from Fritz, but soon after dark things settled down a little and one was able to get a few mouthfuls of food. By midnight the greater part of the artillery fire ceased and except for the birdlike buzz of machine-gun bullets a great silence reigned. It seemed that both sides were utterly worn out and were temporarily resting. During a day such as this one does not get much time to reflect. One curious thing that arrested my attention was the loud and beautiful singing of a number of larks immediately after the first intense bombardment.

During the night I gradually sorted out my medical stores and straightened my little section of trench -- eliminated a little mud and attempted to get as much comfort as possible. There was a drizzling rain all night so one felt fairly miserable. Anyway at about 4 a.m. I was very tired, but as things were quiet, I lay down in the mud and had three hours sleep.

6/4/18 A fine sun shining morning; cool certainly but the warm sun's rays felt great and quickly raised steam clouds from one's damp sodden clothes. One only occasionally heard the explosion of a shell. The tremendous exertions of yesterday necessitated rest on both sides, but each party continued to throw a salvo of shells into (*the?*) gun area and anywhere they thought there would be many troops; fortunately few were hit. During the whole morning and part of the afternoon I basked in the sunshine. Certainly conditions were even now far from pleasant; mud was still

everywhere and one's clothes were soaked; great cakes of liquid mud clinging with great affection to all parts of one's anatomy. At about 5 p.m. the quiet ended. I do not know exactly what happened, possibly Fritz was organising a new attack. Anyway our S.O.S (*this could be '505', but it seems to refer to the start of a salvo – RHB*) went up and all our guns within miles opened fire and continued to blaze away at a great rate. Naturally Fritz was not going to remain quiet long under such a tornado so he promptly commenced a furious bombardment. Everyone's nerves were somewhat on edge and as the furious shelling cut off all communication we were absolutely in the dark as to what was happening. Bullets began to zip zip over our position in great profusion and this made it appear that Fritz was coming on in a great force and had apparently broken through. Some men apparently received an order to retire a short distance and this action nearly commenced a riot: 20-30 men jumped out of the trench and commenced to run to the rear at a great rate. They had to be stopped at the point of the revolver. The barrage was very heavy and bullets thick, so the safest posi was in the trenches. 2 men at least, who jumped out near me soon discovered this to their cost. One chap travelled about 2 yards and a piece of shell neatly blew off the top of his skull. A party of dauntless stretcher bearers hopped out after him, but did not bring him in as they considered his case hopeless. About ¼ hour later he is still seem to be alive so strolled out -- found that he was still living, but it was useless attempting to do anything for him. Several others received similar wounds though not as severe. I must admit that I did not feel happy at this time. There was absolutely no information and one could only wait to see hordes of Huns coming over the crest just in front. As a matter of fact this did not occur, as darkness began to set in the firing gradually slackened, but no Huns got near us. Just after dark the glad news came through the various battalions were on the way to relieve us. I thereupon collected my gear for it had become distributed all over the place in this little dust up. Rain came solidly now and continued practically all night. Captain Orr, 23rd Battalion relieved me -- handed over my gear and then waited until I could move out. I had to stand in mud up to my knees and with rain coming down in torrents. It was pitch dark except for an occasional flash when a flare went up. To make things more miserable I attempted to travel from my post to B.O.R. I departed a little from my path and fell into a deep trench getting my head almost completely buried in mud for a second or so. At 12:30 I set off accompanied by another officer, Captain Anderson. We had about 4 miles to go. Well we sliced through the mud frequently falling into shell holes and getting a little more muddy and wet. At 2 a.m. we reached the village 'Braille'. We were expected to sleep in trenches again, but we chanced the quarantine (*?question – I don't know why the village was quarantined – RHB*) and went into the village. Of course all the inhabitants had departed so we went into the best looking house, found a decent cellar, dragged bedclothes and bedding from various rooms and was soon sleeping soundly in spite of wet.

7/4/18 I crawled out about 9:30 a.m. feeling better, but still no bunch of daphnes; sought our batmen and they fixed us with a meal. We stood by in the field watching events all day. It was a rum sort of a day; bursts of sunshine followed by rain (photograph) (*No photograph is attached, so this is not clear – RHB*). At 5 p.m. the 23rd Battalion relieved us. I met the HC of Currie (*I don't understand this, writing not very clear - RHB*)

At 5:30 p.m. we started off for another town to rest and be in reserve. It was fully 12 miles away and all men in spite of the terrible time they had experienced in the

preceding fortnight trudged off cheerfully. My horse was sent along so I am all right. Anyway I walked the greater part of the way as I was wet and cold. Most of my clothes were wet and terribly dirty. My trousers were badly torn. I had not shaved for 10 days and altogether rather a dirty looking affair. 2 pairs of socks were the only articles I had seen since 23/3/18. At half distance we stopped for a meal and then plodded on amid rain and cold. At 11:45 p.m. we reached our destination, Bussy-les, and found a hot meal awaiting us. We were able to at last remove our clothes, don pyjamas and sleep in our valises. It is hardly necessary to say that I slept like a log till 10 next morning.

8/4/18 Personally I spent rather an active day. I inspected every man in the Battalion. This entailed a lot of travelling about, but it was worth it. The endurance and self-sacrifice of the men is wonderful. They do all this work without a murmur. Not a single man gave in during the march yesterday and very few reported to me as sick. To go through a stunt such as this and to see what the men are made of makes one feel proud to be Australian. War waged as it is nowadays seems to be nothing but savage butchery. One sees a fine specimen of a man and talks to him. A few moments later he is brought to one's post crippled and broken -- frequently one sees a number of men blown to pieces. They have no chance of saving themselves. This, and unfortunately it is the aspect usually presented to me, is the scary side of warfare. Nevertheless there are some redeeming features. One sees great examples of self-sacrifice. The sight of a stretcher bearer running into the midst of intense fire to pick up a comrade is quite a common occurrence. One also frequently sees a slightly wounded man helping a more severely cracked-up chap.

Our casualties during the last fortnight were not fearfully heavy considering the intensity of the fighting -- about 260 altogether. Capt. Elliot, Lt. Whittle Lt. Maynard killed; Capt. Carter Lt. Parry, Lt. Shepperdson, Lt. Downes, Lt. Houlton wounded; Major Garnet badly wounded Capt. Alan wounded (*Comment –these names are not easy to read and may be incorrect – RHB*)

9/4/18 Still at Bussy-les-Daours; feeling much better, slept well. A fair amount of work to be done -- sick parade. This town was in a very dirty and insanitary condition so I had to make arrangements to improve matters. A few French civilians sent urgent appeals for me to come and see them. Sick people in times like these are very badly treated. There are no doctors and they are absolutely at the mercy of army doctors. If a sudden flit has to be made from a town the difficulties are much increased if someone is sick. I usually make a rule of seeing them if possible, but one has so much work that it is often impossible to fix them all up.

10/4/18 Moving once again. We had an 8 mile march to a town called Coisy near Amiens. We started at 11:30 a.m. and arrived at our destination at 3:30 p.m.. There was much difficulty in finding sleeping accommodation. The town, a miserable little village really, was packed with refugees from forward. After a lot of seeking everybody was securely settled, but pigsties, cow sheds and stables had to be freely used. Even the officers were difficult to fix; 3-4 had to sleep in every room and only lucky ones got a bed. I shared one with Challin (*?Chablin? - RHB*).

The old Dame in our billet was a very decent old soul. She was much concerned as to our being cold. She invited us to come near her fire and I must say we did not take

long taking advantage of this invitation. Next she produced a hot brick (*?broth?*) as a further comfort. The old chap (*of the house?*) jabbered away at a great rate; he said Australians were good troops and he felt safe if they were holding Fritz.

I have just discovered that the 6th Battalion occupied this village yesterday and probably Cyril was here. They have been hurriedly sent North to stem the Hun onrush.

11/4/18 A fairly quiet day with us; resting has been the main occupation. The men have thoroughly earned this rest. There were a lot of jobs for me. News came through that Fritz had broken our line in the North and had captured many valuable ridges. Also 1st division had been sent hurriedly there to attempt to stem the onrush. It seems that they cannot do without the Australians for they only just brought us all South.

12/4/18 Moved out to Beaucourt (*?not easy to read – RHB*) In the forward area once more. Probably we will be scrapping very soon once more. Beautiful sunshining daily, quite warm in fact. The march about 8 miles was really fine. I rode most of the way. At one of the halts I thought I would be charitable so allowed my horse to pick at the fresh green grass. The blighter thanked me by attempting to roll and then being a bit fresh cleared out at a gallop; the SM's and QSM's (*horses-RHB*) also followed. They went scampering across French crops and we forlornly chased them on foot. Eventually we got them, but found a lot of saddlery broken. Our new home was a little better than the last; I am living with Major Moges (*?writing not clear - RHB*) and we have a fairly decent room.

13/4/18 A cold misty day once more. A lot of activity today and an attack by Fritz is expected. Usual routine; these quick and frequent moves require a lot of attention to details of sanitation. A Battalion moving in and out makes a fairly considerable mess of things.

14/4/18 Sunday; a wet cold and miserable day, still sitting tight; rumours of war. Rather a mournful procession passed through the village this afternoon. A machine gunner was killed last night and they gave him rather an imposing funeral today. Our band played the dead march and his company marched with reversed arms behind the ambulance carrying his body. The sight was very impressive. Such spectacles are seldom seen at the front -- not that one does not see any amount of corpses, but conditions seldom allow such a spectacular funeral. The usual procedure is very much simpler -- a hole is dug, the body wrapped in canvas, a short service read and then the hole is filled in. And then there are thousands who have much less formality, even than this..

15/4/18 Unusual routine; strolled over to the 12th Field -- spent a pleasant evening with them.

16/4/18 Still no word of a move. We are quite content so are not worrying.

17/4/18 cold miserable weather -- usual routine of work. Received a parcel containing a very acceptable pair of socks and various nice edibles.

18/4/18 routine unvaried; heavy barrage, things are currently lightening up in this area. Fritz apparently being held in North.

19/4/18 cold wet and miserable day; fairly heavy fall of snow. One thought that snow was a thing of the past of this winter, but here it comes once more. Certain tense atmosphere today another huge German attack is expected probably tomorrow and near here -- hence the tense atmosphere.

The fortitude of the French is a fact which will always appeal to me in this war. A great advance such as the Fritz put up in this area is a terrible strain, not only on troops, but for civilians it is an ordeal which causes terrific suffering. Just a month yesterday since the first offensive; in 7 days they travelled over 30 miles. Of course the first 20 miles was over ground laid waste by war, but the last part was through very rich country and densely populated. Naturally the inhabitants had to depart immediately there being no time to pack up personal belongings and everything had to be left as poor old people had to trudge off for their lives. It is a great honour to be with troops who were able to stop this state of affairs. The wonderful bravery of the English troops has been written up in English papers, but those that have been on the spot know that a great many English divisions have absolutely failed to stem the Hun tide, but have ingloriously run. French civilians notice and there is no doubt that the English man's name as a fighter is gone for ever. The only satisfactory thing about the recent debacle is the fact that nowhere have Australians retreated a yard. The 3rd Division same as ourselves. 2nd have held. 1st Division has gone north and halted Hun. French people appreciate this.

20/4/18 received letters galore -- 4 from mother, 1 Gwen (*Vernon's sister - RHB*), 1 Georgie (*Vernon's cousin - RHB*); cold day.

21/4/18 lovely day. Long and interesting ride with Geoff Seare (*?Seane? - difficult to read - RHB*); had several races. My horse proved to be the fastest. Saw Ray Lawrence at 6th Field Ambulance.

22/4/18 Same job; no signs of a shift. Frank MacMahon blew along, had afternoon tea and a long yarn. Went along and saw some confreres at 6th Field Ambulance who are living in this village. Men are in good condition and are feeling in fine form for another scrap, which will no doubt soon occur.

23/4/18 usual work in morning. A rather puzzling case occurred today. Capt. Hammond informed me last night that he was off-colour. Examination made me think it was simply a mild attack of influenza, but today a rash very like smallpox appeared. I've finally come to the conclusion that it was varicella (*chicken pox - RHB*). Cases like this are very worrying when there is so much fighting to be done, as an epidemic would be disastrous. Saw Bernard Fethers, he was with 6th Field Amb., and had a long yarn.

24/4/18 rather an interesting day. The Hun attacked near outpost fiercely, so we were ordered to be prepared to move at an hours notice. Everything was packed and complete preparations made accordingly. In the afternoon orders came through that it was very unlikely that we should move. So had afternoon tea and settle down once again. At 5:30 p.m. orders came through that we would move out at 6:15 p.m.. This

meant some rush, but by 6:30 we were all on the move for Pont Noyelle, about 6 miles distance. Reached this town and settle down. We had orders that we might be called out at any hour during the night to proceed immediately into the front line. Nevertheless we all found beds and in spite of the fact that our guns were making a terrific row all the time I managed to sleep peacefully.

25/4/18 A fairly calm morning; at least the guns were quiet, but all the same there was considerable fighting in the forward zone. At 11 a.m. orders came through that we were to be prepared to move at 1 minute's notice. This naturally left us on the extreme alert all day. Anyway nothing happened. At nightfall orders became a little more lax, for we were then given ½ an hour to prepare if necessary. Our Ambulance and the 8th Field were just down the road so I took the opportunity to blow along and visit them. McColl-Bertran had gone out; McLean was at 8th. A very entertaining hour was spent at 12th Field Amb. I then strolled back to my domicile, rolled in a blanket, and was very pleased to get another hour's sleep in peace. It is rather extraordinary how one becomes used to this hellish business. One gets into a blanket, not daring to remove one's boots even, and knowing that one may be ordered to go straight into a scrap. Guns boom intermittently all-night shaking the house to its foundations with every discharge, yet it is possible to sleep peacefully.

26/4/18 Conflicting orders came through, at varying times during the day; that we were going into the line this day. At 2 p.m. at last a definite order came that we would move at 2:30 p.m.. Punctual as usual the whole brigade moved off to the minute and as usual I brought up the rear on my trusty nag. We marched about 6 miles through interesting country -- beautifully rich Somme land, but beginning to be destroyed by the arch destructor War. Young crops and beautiful pasture lands were all being flattened by troops and war material being moved into the fight. Occasionally one saw gaping holes where shells had burst and at times one saw the volcanoes, before described, rising up.

At 5 p.m. we reached the spot where we halted and had a meal, a rest, and then off again. Horses were left here and we had to wait till dark before moving to the forward area as the beastly Hun might spot us and commence to strafe with huge quondams. At this point the Battalion broke up into small groups making a very long line -- the front being 1½ miles in front of the rear. By this proceeding one shell can do comparatively little damage.

The trip up was fairly uneventful as we got within a mile of our destination before a single shell came over and then none lobbed closer than 100 yards. As my posi was as usual in the rear I reached BHQ last. A Tommy was waiting for me there to guide me to my RAP, where I was to take over from 2 Tommy RMO's. Our Battalion, as has frequently been done lately, was asked to take over the work of two battalions. Of course I am a non-combatant and therefore not competent to criticise military operations, but I must say I have very little time for the Tommies. Australians have not got a fair deal in the scrap and are being asked to bear the brunt of the fight. Since the beginning of the ritual, we have been rushed about and pushed into any position where Fritz is having success. The 13th Brigade saved the situation near here yesterday and in every place where we have been shoved, Fritz has no longer advanced.

In spite of the terrific battering all divisions have received since 27/3/18. The Australian Corps, minus 1 division, are now asked to hold a whole army front. My home at present is quite good, being a large and beautiful Chateau near Villers Bretteneux. I am occupying a room on the ground floor and am therefore quite comfortable. The only nasty part about the show is the fact that Fritz frequently throws shells at it, and if he can succeed in hitting it things will be very rotten for us.

I have never discussed military operations as a whole in this diary, but the performance put up by the 13th and 15th Brigades is so fine as to demand a note. The sector from Cachy to just north of Villers Bretteneux was held by the 3 Divisions from end of March to the middle of April. This included the town of Villers Bretteneux and the most important wood, Bois L'Abby, which overlooks completely the city of Amiens. In the middle of April this important sector was entrusted to the care of the 8th English Division (This I believe in the early part of the war was an excellent division, but events were soon to prove them wanting). On the morning of 24/4/18 just before daylight Fritz brought down a terrific barrage and then attacked in mass formation driving a wedge right through the town of Villers Bretteneux, finally breaking the Tommy line and began to establish himself almost through the Bois l'Abby. He did not get quite as much as he primarily desired, but he still had taken the key to Amiens and had beaten, thoroughly, the 8th Division.

On this particular morning the 15th Brigade were in support to the sector immediately to the north and the 13th Brigade were awaiting at Pont Noyelles, about 6 miles away; our Brigade (12th) being further away still. It was essential that this vital position must be immediately retaken. The 13th Brigade were in the early afternoon ordered to march in fighting order to (*the*) wood just behind the sector and then wait for darkness to set in. The hurried plan fixed on was for the 50th and 51st Battalions to go up on the right of the wood through Cachy; 49th and remnants of the 8th Division were to go right through the wood. The 15th Brigade were to deploy from their sector and join up with the 13th Brigade. This movement seems simple enough on paper, but the execution was full of difficulties -- the country was absolutely strange to the 13th Brigade; information was very uncertain as to the actual position of the enemy or even our own positions -- darkness was intense and satisfactory artillery preparation was impossible. Still these great difficulties were all faced and at 10 p.m. the jumping off time was passed and before Fritz knew a counter attack was contemplated, he was surrounded and well over a thousand had to surrender.

I understand that when the 13th and 15th Brigades joined up they had much amusement snatching Fritz fatigue parties. It is the custom to bring food up at night and Fritz was bringing up rations for the men in the newly captured positions. Instead of supplying their own men they walked straight into the arms of Aussie's. Thus this vital position was regained and the 12th Brigade relieved the 13th and remnant of 8th Division.

Though well over a thousand Germans were captured, it was no walkover victory. As soon as they realised they were being attacked they fought like demons. When we came up a few isolated snipers were still hiding in the wood and shooting at anyone they saw, despite the fact that they were completely cut off from their own line. All round the wood one could see where there had been machine-gun posts, their whole

crews having died fighting. Dead Germans and some of our own chaps too were to be seen lying about everywhere.

(FRAGMENT – “up to date he has managed to knock bits off it in two places and...”
– *this does not seem connected with other sentences* – RHB)

27/4/18 Had a fairly decent night but as we have to sleep in our clothes, stone floors and one blanket are not particularly conducive to sleep. Added to which a furious strafe by Fritz at 4 a.m.. One would imagine that sleep would be impossible, but nowadays when I am tired I can sleep anywhere. I slept well on this night at all events. In the morning a report came through that the M. O. of the 50th Battalion was missing. This was a big blow to me, but I felt that there must be some mistake. At all events and enquiry was held in the afternoon and they came to the conclusion that Phil (*Searle- RHB*) was last seen near his RAP, but could reach no definite finding. I of course made all sorts of enquiries, but unfortunately could not leave my post to personally investigate.

28/4/18 In the morning the melancholy news that Phil's (*Searle- RHB*) body had been found, reach me. I felt there was a big possibility of him having been taken prisoner, but this news was very nasty. I immediately dug up a Padre and asked him to find out all details for me and to arrange his burial. The Padre (our own as a matter of fact) soon found all the details. Phil had followed his Battalion into the big attack 2 days previously; established his RAP and later commenced to dress odd cases. Shelling as is usual in these stunts was terrific, but unfortunately Phil's earthly career was ended by a sniper's bullet. The wound was such that he died where he fell, the bullet having passed through his neck. Admiration and praise for his work was freely expressed everywhere and as this has all been from men and officers of our own Brigade it must be considered a great compliment. His own Battalion thought the world of cheery Phil. I shall take the first opportunity to find out all I can concerning him. In the afternoon I had to make a reconnaissance of extreme forward area as our Battalion is still in support. I have visited all of our own men in their trenches and then had a look at the neighbouring RAPs in the event of my having to occupy one. I also walked over the field (although I did not know it at the time) where poor old Phil had breathed his last. His death has upset me very much. He was always so cheery and optimistic. He had a great habit of discussing his future career with me.

30/4/18 Quiet day did not leave my RAP received many letters from home.

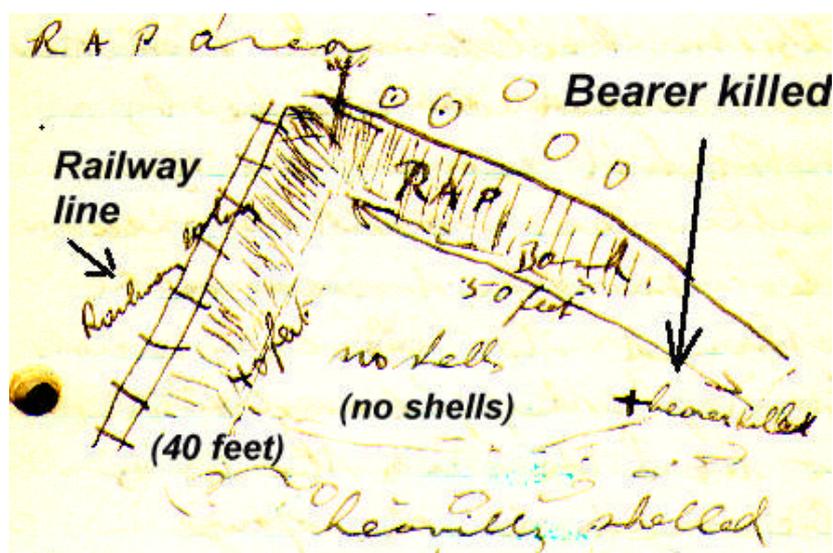
1/5/18 Ordered to establish a foreword RAP as our Battalion was going to attempt to sneak a piece of ground from Fritz. I chose a bit of bank within 50 yards of the front line. The bank was 10 feet high so it offered a little shelter from shells.

2/5/18 Feeling very seedy; have been for several days. Very busy day making preparations for the attack. Left Chateau with my men at about 9:15 p.m. (just as darkness had set in) and tramped our weary way up to our new position. Placed our dressings and generally made things shipshape.

3/5/18 At 2 a.m. our show was timed to start. By this time I had my RAP in working order and awaited events. There was only a short bombardment (2 minutes) but in that time thousands of shells were thrown at the area we were going to attack. The

bombardment finished, our men jumped over and attempted to rush the particular spot. Terrific resistance was met but they at least reached the position they desired to capture, but they were counter attacked very strongly and were forced to move back to the original line. Later it was found out that 1200 Huns were defending the sector attacked and they had 150 machine guns. Our attacking force was small; still we captured many prisoners and thus secured a lot of information. The sad and hateful procession of wounded soon commenced. At 2:15 a.m. the first arrived and then there was a very heavy stream till after midday. At 4:30 a.m. things became rather rotten I had 15 stretcher cases (some fixed and some not). At this time Fritz commenced to throw quondams over in thousands and he seemed to single out the area around my dressing station for an extra special dose. The protection I had was very inadequate and it seemed very hard that shells now killed the wounded men. Nothing could be done but place them as near the bank as possible and trust in luck. Many Wizz-bang's burst on the top of the bank and just over the edge but fortunately only got 2 of the wounded men and then not severely. One of my bearers had bad luck. A piece from a shell hit him in the head and he died about ½ an hour later. As the morning advanced shelling became less heavy and my anxiety for my patients therefore became less.

My choice of a position for an RAP was once more most fortunate. Not a single shell falling actually in the RAP area.



Fritz showed himself to be a gentleman as far as getting the wounded away was concerned. He not only did not fire on our stretcher bearers but he allowed them to go right over to his trenches and collect with impunity and moreover he handed back some of our men who were badly wounded and who had reached his territory before being hit. One man who had been hit in the stomach and captured was asked by an English speaking Fritz whether he would sooner be a prisoner of war or be returned to us. On receiving the reply that he would like to go back to us the Fritz beckoned to one of our stretcher parties and handed him over. Another absolutely true incident; Fritz beckoned some of our bearers but these chaps were not very trusting. They went over but carrying a Mills bomb with pin extracted. One of the Fritz, an officer, noticed this and in English wanted to know what he meant by it. Our chap said that if there was any funny business all would go up in smoke together. The officer replied "You are hard, but all the same here is your wounded man".

The Battalion were relieved at night the last group getting away at 12:30 a.m. and left at about 1 a.m. and had a weary walk back to the chateau where we rested for about ½ an hour. Myself and the last of the Battalion (a party of signallers) picked up a guide there (*and*) commenced the last stage to Blangy Tronville, where we were billeted. It was a distance of about 4 miles but it seemed like 40. I had been very seedy or day and it took me all my time to finish this little bit. To make matters worse the jolly guide managed to lose us and took us 2 miles further than he should have. Anyway by 6 a.m. and I was in my valise in an exceedingly dirty French house. That mattered not for I went to sleep and did not wake up till noon next day.

4/5/18 Felt very rotten; strolled round saw a few sick men and arranged to inoculate others; went to bed immediately after tea.

5/5/18 Sunday. Got up as usual. Held a large sick parade at 9 a.m. then struggled round doing duties of M. O., which are always many when a Btn. comes out of the line. In the afternoon I was surprised by the visit of an M. O. from ADMS. Apparently he had heard I was off colour. He had sent a relief and I was sent off per car to 12th Field Amb., who were running an M.D.S. near Amiens.

It is in a deserted French hospital. I have a large ward, a very fine springy bed and a thing I have not seen for over two months -- white sheets.

6/5/18 Browsing in bed in my new abode all day. A couple of days of this will fix me up to go back to graft soon again. 4:30 a few shells passing overhead into Amiens. This is rather a curious position to be in. One hears of a gun distinctly then a pause of a few seconds and the screech of the shell occurs, another pause and then the explosion in Amiens. The blighter dropped 4 shells into our village in the afternoon. One chap exploding in the garden about 100 yards away. It is pretty tough when one gets 8 miles behind the line and finds that shells still fall unpleasantly close. Anyway it did not interfere with my sleep.

7/5/18 Still in bed feeling a bit seedy, but vastly improved. The Col. and the Major seemed to consider that I was not in the best of health, so sent me off to a C.C.S. which was situated some 12 miles further back. I was packed up on a stretcher and carried out to a car like an invalid. The trip itself was not much of a joyride the bumping being rather disturbing. Still in due course I reach the required destination and was duly admitted to the C.C.S. I was rather looking forward to becoming a patient, partly for the opportunity of having a decent rest and partly to discover the patient's outlook on life. (I had seen a fair amount of it from the other side, so it was interesting to get the patient's view).

The treatment meted out was exceedingly kind, but it seemed rather strange to have nurses (I should say sisters) coming along at odd times and ordering one to take evil tasting medicine or bringing milk or some such food at specified hours and saying drink this (one's personal feelings are not considered at all).

8/5/18 At 2 p.m. I was ordered to don a large pair of socks and then rolled up in a blanket and carried out to the car once more. We had a 2 mile run and then transferred to an ambulance train. These are most luxurious affairs. Bunks run along

the length of the train in tiers of 3. The middle bunk is on a level with the window. The patient lucky enough to get this obtains a beautiful view of the country as the train travels along (I was given a middle bunk). Nurses and ordinary hospital staff are on the train and routine goes on just as in hospital. We travelled all night arriving at their destination, Rouen, at 11 a.m. next day.

9/5/18 The last 4 hours of the train run were really fine. The morning being clear golden sunshine flooded the rich valleys through which we passed producing a picture that would delight the eye of an artist, but even I who am no artist and on this morning not feeling in the best of health, viewed the scene with great admiration. I was again carried to a car and finally deposited at No 8 General Hospital about 5 miles from the railway station and situated in an old castle. It is an enormous quadrangular affair with large grounds thinly planted with magnificent oak trees. It is capable of accommodating 1,000 patients and so it is no small affair. Rather an interesting fact concerning it is that in 1870 the Germans also used it as a hospital. Well on arriving at this institution I was put to bed.

10/5/18 Still in bed feeling fairly fit, but the MO insisted on my remaining in bed for a few days. The experience of being a patient is a new situation to me. It has some good points but I should not like it for a lengthy period.

11/5/18 In bed feeling better but still satisfied to lie and sleep most of the day.

12/5/18 same as yesterday.

13/5/18 Allowed to get up in the afternoon -- pretty shaky.

14/5/18 Up all day sitting in the sun. Rather surprised at the extent of my weakness; the walk upstairs was quite an effort.

15/5/18 Allowed out of hospital. Went by tram to Rouen; a distance of about 3 miles. The hospital is on a very high hill -- tram winds round and round descending all the time. Very steep and irregular hills thickly covered with oak trees are seen on both sides of the road. Small two-storey dwellings are dotted all over the hillside in amongst the trees, the whole making a very fine picture.

Rouen itself is a fairly big town -- I should say about 1/2 of the size of Melbourne. Two magnificent cathedrals are situated in the heart of the city. The ornamentation that is lavished on these structures is wonderful. No buildings in Australia can in the least compare with these structures for detail. The streets are very quaint and interesting, but I did not explore very much as I was still rather wobbly on my legs. I was glad to get into a picture palace and rest, at the same time seeing how France entertained her people. The type of picture was very similar to that we have been accustomed to seeing even in Armadale. They exhibited one very harrowing picture of the Hun brutality in Lorraine. At 6 p.m. I was glad to get back to the hospital, have a good tea and returned to bed once more.

16/5/18 Feeling much better though still somewhat shaky. Hospital very crowded and I therefore requested the MO to discharge me today. I left hospital at 5:30 p.m., taken by Ford motor car to DDMS office, there temporarily attached to No 1 AGH. Same

motor car drove me to final destination. A very interesting chauffeur controlled the car, so the ride was quite enjoyable. At No 1 AGH met Lt Col Dunhill, Major Langlands, Capt Williams, Capt Fenton, so was immediately made quite at home.

17/5/18 No job allocated to me so took advantage of Capt Dunhill's invitation to see a few operations. In afternoon went to Rouen to purchase a few very necessary articles of clothing.

18/5/18 Still nothing doing, an excellent opportunity to look round and acquire some very useful information. Again went to Rouen, visited Omnie Theatre and later the officers club.

19/5/18 Sunday, nothing to do in morning -- orderly officer in afternoon, exceedingly hot.

20/5/18 Still instructing myself.

(It appears that 21/5/18) was left out – RHB)

22/5/18 Given charge of a ward with 90 patients; did three operations this morning.

23/5/18 Went for a tour down river to Bouilly; returned by train.

24/5/18 Routine work.

25/5/18 Received instruction to return back to front. Went to Rouen in morning and had a good look at Cathedral, had lunch, returned to hospital to participate in a tennis party, also received 18 letters. Caught train at Rouen and travelled all night, reaching "Pernois" at 11 a.m. Sunday.

26/5/18 Walked to Bertacourt to 4th Div Wing. Stayed night -- wired division

27/5/18 No word from Division so decided to adopt lorry hoping to reach destination. Allonville was only 17 miles away, but no lorries went direct, so had a nice hunt. With this game one stops every motor and asks for a lift. The first went 3 miles in my direction. An ambulance car came along then, but was going in the direction of Amiens. This helped a bit though it was not direct. A French lorry was next stopped. This took me into the heart of that desolate city. Three months ago it was one of the gayest cities in France, now it was almost completely deserted and was more or less destroyed. Many thousands of shells have been thrown into this stricken city and countless bombs have been dropped. While we passed through, about a dozen shells dropped in various parts of the city, but fortunately none lobbed closer than ½ a mile away. I did not wish to stay in this region of death longer than necessary so got out of the French lorry and stopped an army Rolls-Royce car and safely got out of the city. I then managed to find an Australian motor lorry going approximately in my correct direction. I travelled about 2 miles in this and then had to get out. I walked along the road a bit and at last found a lorry going direct to the village "Allonville" where I wished to go.

I visited the ADMS office and found that I was to be posted to the 13th Field Ambulance. I should have liked to have got back to the 48th Battalion, but was informed that I had had my share of Battalion work and must now return to the Ambulance.

28/5/18 Rather a disturbed night at Querrieu (location of Field Amb.). Fritz very fond of bombing and shelling this village and on my first night in forward area made things rather unpleasant.

29/5/18 Made orderly officer. Met Cpl McColl, an old schoolmate of Donald's (*Vernon's brother, Donald Montague Brown – RHB*).

30/5/18 Same old job.

31/5/18 Fritz sent about half a dozen large shells into our village in the early hours of the morning, but fortunately only managed to wound 2 men, but 3 French homes have been destroyed. Nothing else eventful happened until night. Went to bed as usual, but at 10 p.m. Fritz came over and bombed the town heavily. Fortunately none came very near our palatial abode. Still the noise was very disturbing and one constantly expected to feel the flimsy house falling about one's ears. At about 12:30 a.m. Fritz commenced to throw large shells into our village. This seemed a bit too much of a joke so we decided to leave our comfortable bedroom and adjourn to the cellar. Otherwise the night was uneventful.

During the night Fritz lobbed some lucky shells into Allonville and caused 98 casualties amongst Australians.

1/6/18 Reveille at 5AM. Moved at 7 a.m. up towards line. My job was to supervise evacuation and supplies stores to 3 Bns. Of 13th Brigade. My HQ. was a little village called Hamelet, just about 1 mile behind Fritz line. Of course all the inhabitants have long since departed and beside ourselves (i.e. self, a corporal, a cook, 4 men, a Ford motor car and two drivers) there is practically no one here. We have rather a fine house and perhaps what is more to the point several excellent cellars. Our predecessors have been very active in the salvaging stunt. They took a billiard table to pieces – found it up the street -- and reassembled it in our dwelling. A cow was found loitering and was also here for a week or so, giving unlimited quantities of milk. All sorts of other conveniences have been rigged up so, provided we do not get shelled out, we will be alright. Did not do much on the first day beyond taking over medical stores, etc.

2/6/18 Had a fairly decent night (we naturally sleep in the cellars) a fair amount of shelling was done. One must expect this in an area such as this. The house next door to us was knocked rotten by a rather large quondam and another small shell lobbed in our yard. Visited my 3 RAP's, involving a walk of about 2 miles. Fritz was good enough to avoid throwing shells about during the round. During the daytime we live upstairs, have meals and play billiards. If shelling commences we retire to the cellars, but on this day nothing lobbed nearer than 200 yards and one does not take much notice of quondams at this distance.

3/6/18 The first part of the night was rather rowdy, fairly heavy and scattered shelling all over the place. A building immediately across the street was flattened out. At 4 a.m. all shelling ceased. This is the time one feels greatest anxiety, for it is just before daylight that a big offensive would commence and an ominous silence like this made me fear that we were about to be attacked. I am glad to say nothing happened.

3/6/18 (*Note that this date is repeated. It may be that this is the continuation of the above entry, which essentially covers the early morning of 3/6/18 -- RHB*) Got up at 9 a.m. had breakfast and did my usual round. Fritz was a gentleman once more as far as shells were concerned; at least we just finished in time. The last RAP is just 1 mile away and to reach our little village we have to cross a field, a growing crop of wheat as a matter of fact. Well we, i.e. self and one stretcher bearer (one seldom travels around the country by oneself for if one gets wounded there is a possibility of being lost if alone), just got across the field when bang-bang went to a series of shells right on the track we had passed over. About 15 H.E. and 10 gas shells were thrown over, so we must consider ourselves lucky. My next duty was to write the daily report and send it to the CO. Had a sleep and a game of billiards this afternoon -- no patients coming through at all for evacuation.

4/6/18 I had a rather worrying night. In the afternoon I received instructions that our artillery were at 9:30 p.m. and at 3:30 a.m. going to plaster Fritz with gas. This of course means that he will probably retaliate. I warned all bearers and personnel of the expectations. Sure enough at 9:30 p.m. our guns spoke for some time, but Fritz did not reply to any extent, in our vicinity anyway. At 10:30 p.m. I went to sleep and woke with a start at 3:20 a.m.. In these days I seem to be able to wake at any hour I desire.

Sharp at 3:30 a.m. our guns roared out hurling thousands of shells containing deadly gas. In 15 minutes the attack subsided and Fritz commenced a hurling great numbers into our lines. Gas shells have a characteristic explosion and with practice one becomes expert in detecting them even amongst H.E. shells. I listened for a while and then decided that I had better stroll out and see if I could smell any of this brutal gas. (We always have a gas guard, but I thought I should better investigate personally) It was an absolutely still morning so although shells fell within 250 yards no gas or at least not sufficient concentration came near our post to cause any inconvenience. I then returned to bed and slept soundly till morning. After breakfast did my usual round without mishap.

This evening I played billiards with my corporal (Corporal Williams, an ex. Wesley Collegian). We played for about an hour and Fritz began to wake up and throw shells about. We continued for a time but at last 2 rather large chaps lobbed in a garden 2 houses away, so we took the hint and hastily departed for the cellar.

5/6/18 (*Note that two days are covered in the above entry for 4/6/18, so it may be that this entry should be 6/6/18 and the error overcome by the rather non-descript entry for 8/6/18 -- RHB*) Fairly quiet night except for usual strafe and counter strafe. At 2:30 a.m. I woke sneezing -- eyes sore and nose parched. I thought I was in for an attack of influenza but realised where I was and came to the conclusion that some of Fritz lachrymatory (*tear causing - RHB*) gas had invaded our cellar. I got up and toured round outside. There was not much about so I put the gas screens down and

returned to sleep once more. It was a bit unpleasant but by morning had all disappeared. These constant and irregular gas shell bombardments are very worrying. Visited all the RAPs. Till 10:30 a.m. things were quiet, just got back in time for dinner at 1:30 p.m. My batman had a nice potato pie prepared. After dinner we retired to the billiard room but a few Fritz shells lobbed in our neighbourhood so considered that the cellar was the best place (when there is a possibility of getting a fair shelter you do not think it a wise proceeding to remain in the open). One of the just mentioned shells lobbed into a group of infantrymen and as a result I have just sent 4 of them, all with nice Blighties, lucky fellows, (*this seems to indicate wounds that will send them to "Blighty", as England was called {?} - RHB*), off by car to M.P.S.

6/6/18 (*may be 7/6/18 - RHB*) Relatively quiet night; usual proceeding. Captain Purvis reported to assist me and gain experience. In the afternoon Fritz commenced a new past time. He pitched great 5.9 shrapnel shells into our village. The shells exploded just over our back yard and cut fruit trees down as cleanly as if they had been sawn.

7/6/18 (*may be 8/6/18 - RHB*) Quite a nice day, usual routine in morning; a few adjustments to be made and requisitions to be fixed: returned to A.D.S. rather hot and blown out. DADMS dropped in at lunch time. In the afternoon crossed the canal and visited the left section to inspect a new line of evacuation in case our show became blown to pieces. It entailed a walk of about 3 miles across very pretty country -- winding canals with the most beautiful verdure right to the water's edge gladdened the eye. The scene appeared so peaceful that one could hardly believe that Fritz was only 2 miles away and could at any minute utterly obliterate any portion of the landscape if he desired it. Fortunately he was in a rather peaceful mood today allowing us to complete the whole tour of inspection in perfect safety, accept that as we return to our original post he sent a few large woolly-bear 'shrap' over. These chaps make an awful row, but unless they burst near the ground do not do much damage. Things have been fairly decent today and only once were we forced to the cellars. In the early afternoon we were peacefully sitting in our dining room when bang came several salvoes of whiz-bangs not far away. These little bursts of hate are a usual practice in this sector.

I have retired to my cellar now 10:30 p.m., guns of both sides have been fairly active. About 10 minutes ago I detected a peculiar popping of gas shells somewhere within a radius of ½ a mile but I cannot smell the infernal stuff so things are OK for the present.

8/6/18 (*see comment at 5/6/18 - RHB*) Nothing unusual.

9/6/18 Rather a disturbed night -- intense shelling of forward area by enemy. At midnight the unmistakable sound of thousands of bursting gas shells revealed themselves to my ears. None were really close but there were so many that I deemed it necessary to investigate. I got up, strolled around our back yard, and smelt a weak concentration of Phosgene (Fritz' most deadly gas). Our gas curtains were immediately secured and the cellars thus made comparatively safe. There is one article that one values enormously in this cursed country, i.e. the Box respirator; one never dares to move unless it is present - at night one sleeps with it on the pillow and ready to put on at a moments notice. If a shell containing Phosgene bursts near one, a

few breaths is enough to cause death. One other great friend of the soldier is his steel helmet. These articles are all that are necessary in the forward area. Shelling continued intensely all night and one naturally felt that there was a possibility of being overwhelmed with huge masses of troops as soon as day broke. On the contrary daylight brought comparative quietness. I received orders to report back to Woollen Mill at Daouis; this meant going back some 5 miles. This place is a huge mill situated on the banks of the Somme. Of course all civilians are gone and we now have the full run of the place. 2 fine rooms serve as our home. They give absolutely no protection from shell fire, but up to date the beastly Hun has not sent stuff closer than 200 yards. So, for the comfort, one is prepared to take some risks.

10/6/18 fairly quiet day. Major Elwell ?? went up to see forward area in morning. In the afternoon I paid a social call on the 48th Battalion who are camped about 1½ miles away living a mole life in the side of a bank.. It seemed like coming home to get amongst them once again. Officers and men all seemed pleased to see me. I was invited to dine at several places. I stayed 4 hours with them and just at dark retraced my steps back to the old woollen mill and turned in. Had a long yarn with Major Le Messurie and Capt Anderson; heard the mournful news that Ken Purnell had recently been killed. This makes still another friend and colleague of the old shop (*i.e. the University of Melbourne - RHB*) gone West. Who's turn next becomes an interesting question.

11/6/18 Had a peaceful night -- at least I slept soundly and took no notice of the constant row that continuously surrounds one. It has turned out a fine summer's day.

12/6/18 Another glorious day. Went up to line to have a look at R.A.P. and loading posts south of area I had been in before. At this game it is necessary to know as much as possible about the front. Walked about 6 miles altogether and arrived back at the mill rather tired and blown. It was surprisingly quiet in the forward area. No doubt a terrific storm is going to break out sooner or later and then we shall have our work cut out to get the wounded away. There was nothing to do in the afternoon so I wrote some letters and went for a quiet stroll along the riverbank.

Some days ago one of our lads rescued a couple of kittens. They are settling down in this home in fine style; one, particularly, a tabby, seems to have become perfectly at home. It delights to come into our little messroom and seems to take great joy in crawling up one's trousers and perching on one's shoulder.

13/6/18 Nothing very exciting -- General Featherstone and General House inspected the ambulance. They only came as far as HQ and did not look at the forward posts so I did not have the pleasure of seeing them. Several HV (*high velocity - RHB*) shells flew overhead today. For a few minutes it seemed that Fritz had at last decided to destroy this old Mill, but fortunately for us he was interested in some batteries not very far away, so our palatial abode still boldly stands. It is very mysterious that such a large building should be left untouched for so long.

A diary such as this seems to be more or less a chronicle of passing shells. They are very real things and attract one's attention very considerably when in any forward area, but as years roll on I expect their interest will pale into insignificance.

Another beautiful day; the wind just a little cool so the excellent swimming hole did not tempt me. Beyond dressing a few wounded chaps and fixing up a few sick, my day's duties merely consisted in waiting for something to happen. This eternal waiting gets on one's nerves a bit, so I usually like to take a walk forward frequently.

14/6/18 Major Lind visited us today, quiet otherwise.

15/6/18 Usual routine -- a little interesting this morning; several large HV shrap burst almost immediately overhead this morning. No damage was done. These chaps usually do not do much damage, but Fritz uses them to get his range for dangerous H.E. (*high explosive – RHB*) shells. As he got correctly over the mill we have expected shells all day. I reconnoitred all round for a cellar, but none exist -- so all that can be done is to send all who can be spared, out into the paddock some distance away. The afternoon has now passed without the appearance of any shells so perhaps we are going to be left alone a little longer.

16/6/18 A beautiful day full of expectancy but comparatively quiet as far as the war is concerned -- received a very fine budget of letters.

17/6/18 A very disturbed night; many shells were cast at neighbouring batteries. None lobbed nearer than about 100 yards to our establishment, but with large shells this is far too close to be pleasant. Casualties were comparatively high. The 45th Battalion were very unlucky for on this evening they were moving up to relieve a Battalion in the front line. Just as they were crossing a cutting just near our establishment a few unlucky shells lobbed right amongst them killing one and wounding about 10.

In the early hours of the morning I was lying awake. It was a moonlight and absolutely clear night. The drone of several Fritz aeroplanes became audible. They passed overhead and I thought to myself there will soon be some dirty work at the crossroads. Apparently Amiens or some town further inland was his objective. At any rate he left us severely alone. About half an hour later the same squadron returned, but this time he dropped 10 bombs in quick succession and in the very adjacent neighbourhood. Right throughout the day shells continued to pass overhead none lobbed near us for he seemed to be bent on bending several adjacent villages. Received more Australian letters.

18/6/18 Spent most of the morning answering letters and doing several odd jobs that turned up. Witnessed an exciting episode this afternoon; Fritz apparently objected to one of our balloons, which was moored a few hundred yards away. Anyway one of his planes sneaked over, hiding in the clouds. He got well above the balloon and then like a hawk dived onto the helpless prey pouring a stream of bullets into it. Both observers jumped out from the height of perhaps 2000 feet. One fellow's parachute failed to open so that he was dashed to pieces. The other chap was more fortunate for his opened and after a rather rough ride (for the wind was blowing strongly) he landed safely. The balloon in the meantime burst into flames and Fritz turned round and skedaddled home with every archie (*anti-aircraft gun – RHB*) and machine-gun in the country firing at him.

19/6/18 Comparatively quiet day Captain Purves returned from Hamelet MLP and I went up per Ford car to take his place. The village has been rather knocked about in my absence, but our house still stands in spite of the fact that many shells have lobbed unpleasantly near it. Several more fruit trees have been destroyed.

20/6/18 Rather a rowdy night; many hundreds of shells hurled at Hamelet. Our latrine was smashed to bits and a couple of bits knocked off the roof of the house. I therefore decided that as Fritz is becoming so ungentlemanly it would be necessary to reinforce the cellars. I therefore had tons of old bedding placed in the rooms immediately overhead and then had a layer of bricks superimposed. This should serve as a good bursting space if we get a direct hit. Did the usual round of R.A.P. in afternoon - reconnoitred an alternative MLP on the other side of the canal. The winding paths along the banks of the canal were just like fairyland. In former days these walks must have been absolutely beautiful. Even now it was a pleasure to stroll round and view the beauty. It was rather a warm afternoon so I stripped and dived into the water and had a swim round. Returned safely to Hamelet and enjoyed an excellent tea.

21/6/18 Fritz was quite a decent cove during the night for no shells were thrown closer than 200 yards. Usual proceeding during the morning. In afternoon I sat out in the back yard reading. Something must have annoyed the wily Hun for at about 4:30 p.m. the well-known screech of shells commenced with the series of explosions rapidly following. With such a long tour in the line one becomes very expert in judging where the shell is going; in this case I could tell that we were not fired at, but guns three quarters of a mile away were getting it so I did not go below. While I was writing this account another screech of shells commenced. There was no doubting the target this time for 2½ minutes Hamelet got it hot and strong with whizz bangs. All my party got below without being hit. My little cellar looks rather festive tonight for my batman has cleaned it out -- has found various vases and filled them with excellent flowers. No doubt the colours do not blend very wonderfully and there is a definite masculine stiffness about the arrangement, but all the same the place looks rather homely.

22/6/18 Quiet night -- did my usual round of RAP's. Must consider myself rather lucky this AM; I got about half a mile from one RAP when Fritz commenced to lob whizz bangs at a spot on the track which I had just passed over. Needless to say I accelerated my pace considerably but luckily none came as far as my august person. In the afternoon I strolled across the canal and inspected the work of our new MLP; later played billiards.

23/6/18 Much straffing during the night; another corner of our house damaged, but it still bravely stands. Fritz has been a bit spiteful during the day. I must confess I am feeling just a bit fed up today; 23 days in forward zone is rather nerve racking especially when one knows that the enemy has sufficient strength to, at any moment, swarm over in thousands and commence another huge offensive. The suspense is really trying. Another batch of letters just arrived and rose my spirits 100%.

24/6/18 Fritz started a new trick last night. He sent planes over and those seemed to find great pleasure in dropping bombs all round the forward area, but they did not succeed in hitting Hamelet. A few big quondams loitered very close to our dwelling though not a very exciting day except that I indulged in the luxury of a hot shower. In

the evening I strolled out on to an eminence and watched a straff. Some of our batteries about 2 miles back apparently decided to throw things at Fritz. He also decided to sling things back. The result was that there was a continual screech of shells directly over my head. I could see the quondams bursting on our battery area, but was not able to see the same effect on the Fritz side. The thought passed through my mind, 'well this is a silly way to settle an argument. Here are apparently civilised human beings pitching great masses of iron filled with deadly H.E. at each other - this is war.' Later things quietened down and I strolled round "our" garden (possession is nine points of the law in this part of the world). We found this out to our cost the other day. Amongst the various things we salvaged for "our" little home was a cow. She was rather a good milker and for about a fortnight supplied us with rich milk. Two nights ago she apparently came to the conclusion that Hamelet was an unhealthy neighbourhood so she broke out of her stable and made a bee line for the front line. The ever ready infantry rescued her and tied her up at their headquarters about half a mile away. In spite of the fact that we had looked after her for a fortnight we could not induce the "new owners" to return her and as our part are inferior in numbers we could not forcibly remove her, so our fresh milk is now "nah! pooh".

25/6/18 Quite a hot day. Except for great aerial activity it has been a quiet day. At one stage there were 13 hun aeroplanes immediately over our village; they apparently had a good look and then went home. Such an invasion is quite unusual nowadays and as a matter of fact it is the first time I have seen such a number of Fritz this year. Later in the afternoon our own planes came over in droves; dropped bombs on the hun line and apparently did a lot of observing work. At one time I counted 30, all diving about and acting the goat like a lot of schoolboys.

26/6/18 a dull day and some rain has helped to make things a little more dull. The usual round comprised the morning's work. The Aussie digger is an irrepressible cove. They are always up to new dodges. One little joke (not that it is new) - they seem to glory in getting in to old civy clothes (of course in bad areas, discipline demands they dress in the usual drab regimental khaki) but in the forward zone especially in the neighbourhood of partially destroyed villages like this, the digger fossicks out old civilian clothes from the debris. The result is often ludicrous; one sees a cook carving out the meat in some smartly dressed top hat and frock coat. Further on one is surprised to see a hefty female digging a trench. One remembers that Fritz is only about a mile away and momentarily rubs one's eyes. There is no need to wonder it is only an Aussie somewhat tired of his khaki uniform. Notices painted up on walls by of the same type of soldier often have a very humorous touch - sometimes pathetic and sometimes a little coarse perhaps. Today one in very bold black lettering attracted my attention and produced a reverie of home. It was quite simple "12,000 miles from Griffiths Brothers". The car driver brought a gramophone up from HQ so we have been favoured by much music this afternoon. Received a letter from Uncle Jack tonight. It contained the dismal news that Cyril had been killed while fighting for his country. This news hit hard for I can consider Cyril and Phil Sewell as my only intimate friends.

27/6/18 Nothing doing.

28/6/18 Rowdy night -- Fritz threw a very large number of shells into the village; one distributed quite a large quantity manure into my cellar and a fair sized piece of metal also splashed into the open door. Still the house stands and the billiard table is intact.

29/6/18 Returned to Woollen Mills. A couple of 3rd Pioneer Battalion men past near our dwelling tonight and I learned the fact that they were camped within a mile.

30/6/18 Strolled over to 3rd Pioneer Battalion store Uncle Dick, Jack and Tom Fleetwood. They are all well and I spent a very excellent afternoon in their company.

1/7/18 Remained at Woollen Mill all day. In afternoon received orders to return to Hamelet to take charge of that post in the forthcoming attack on Hamel wood and village. It in the evening Uncle John strolled over from his camp and I had a long yarn with him. Later I got into a Ford car and proceeded to the front. We reached a village (Fouilloy) {About half way to our destination} and bang went one of our back tires. This was a village into which Fritz usually pours countless numbers of shells and under the circumstances the delay was not highly pleasant. Anyway, Fritz was temporarily in a good mood and we eventually reached our destination in safety.

2/7/18 Back in the village of Hamelet several more houses have been dislocated but my house still stands. In the morning I had a big tramp for it was necessary to view all the proposed sites for the new R.A.P. A fair amount of care was necessary as the bosche had excellent observation. It took me all the morning looking over the right sector. I had to crawl along through communication trenches to avoid being seen. Finally the front line was reached. I crawled along the trenches and at last Capt Trumble was able to point out the spot in no man's land where he proposed to establish his R.A.P. It was a sand bagged dugout and probably occupied by some slimy Fritz, but of course he could not see us and fortunately no other of the same gentry spotted us to attempt to snipe at us as we peeped over the top of the parapet. I selected another spot in our front line where the bearers could be relayed. A fairly decent road ran back to the quarry where our HQ were to be. At 2:30 arrived back at Hamelet thoroughly tired and very hot (I had the bad luck to lose my pay book when on this excursion).

3/7/18 Another very hot morning but it was necessary to have a look at the left sector. This meant hours of struggling round communication trenches, along support line trenches and then along the front line. Every now and then I had to cautiously peep over the top and view the country. A couple more RMO's Capt. McDonnell and Capt. Kehn(?*difficult to read - RHB*) were with me and were able to approximately point out the position of the proposed R.A.P.s. Anyway these two days reconnaissance were enough to give me an excellent idea of where all the RMO's (8 in all) would be as the stunt progressed. This knowledge is a wonderful help to get bearers up and get patients away when a stunt is in progress.

In the afternoon I received stores -- stretchers, blankets, dressings -- and had them transferred to the quarry where we intended to have our headquarters. Dumps were arranged and the whole place made ship shape. At 9 p.m. I sent 2 bearer squads away to 43rd and 44th battalions to bring the first patients down and to act as guides in bringing others to the finally established R.A.P.s. This cleaned me out of all available bearers but at 10:20 Major Elewell (*?might be Llewellyn or Stewellyn - RHB*) arrived and

two more sections of bearers. All other RMO's were similarly allocated with bearers and I personally took 4 squads to certain positions in our front line where they could act as relays. When returning from this tour I encountered a very large number of tanks (about 30) moving slowly up to their jumping off tape. The type they use now are wonderfully silent and wonderfully agile. They looked like huge monsters and seem to take a great delight in crawling up the steep banks and then slithering down the other side. They must be a terrifying spectacle to one of the enemy for there is absolutely no hope. If the attacked one remains in his trench, the tank simply waddles over the trench and squashes it and everyone who are in it; if he runs, machine gun bullets immediately destroy him.

(4th July 1918 – RHB)

At midnight our part of the show was complete, so I turned in for an hour's rest. The turning in simply consisted of lying on a stretcher and getting under a blanket. A little before 3 a.m. our barrage opened, countless guns had been brought up for the stunt and they collectively produced a terrific roar. Then the 2 brigades patiently lying on the tape rose and cautiously followed the barrage across no man's land and into Fritz front line. Some opposition was met and the bayonet was freely used; still they advanced continuously and as soon as the first line of Fritz trenches were taken, the various RMO's established their RAP's in the sites previously picked and commenced their sad task of fixing up wounded. At about 4 a.m. wounded began to stream back along our lines of evacuation, fixed the night before, to our HQ where cars were waiting. The stream rapidly increased to a flood and absolutely swamped the supply of Sunbeams and Fords {we had four of each doing a run of 5 miles}. Fritz prisoners, of which there were over 1000, and returning tanks were the main cause of the rapid evacuation. Never have I seen such a rapid collection of wounded. It was quite impossible to foresee such a rapid evacuation. Urgent messages had to be sent back for more cars. In a few hours we had 12 cars and horse ambulances – 'gg wagons' -- and a variety of other vehicles going like blazes. Still in spite of this we got at one period a collection of 120 wounded lying in the open road with no protection from shell fire. It was a very anxious time for one should expect Fritz to begin his counter shelling at any moment and blow the lot to smithereens. I felt very glad that the responsibility of the evacuation did not rest with me. At midday the inevitable shells commenced to come over and a group of Fritz planes came over a couple of hundred feet up. At that particular time I was taking a party of reserve bearers into Hamelet to get them out of danger. Several shells fell rather adjacent to us, bricks and other parts of houses fell all around us, but I got all the men into safe positions. But when returning to HQ alone, a Fritz plane made me hop very quickly into shelter. As I was walking along the track the blighter began to throw machine gun bullets about in a very nasty way. On finally reaching the quarry HQ I was delighted to find that no shells had come anywhere near (I think Fritz must have seen the rows of stretches and considered that many of his men would be there so that he refrained from shelling). The men were disappearing fast now and by 2 p.m. every stretcher case was gone. This was extremely satisfactory and almost constitutes a record. All objectives had been gained and the stunt was a complete success. This was one more startling victory for the Aussies and at a spot where Fritz has been threatening to hurl a huge offensive all this year. The Australians are such aggressive soldiers that it is freely stated that Fritz is scared of them and therefore is not game to attack while they hold the line. This is also the explanation why we have had no rest for close on 5 months and very little prospect of any in the future. In the afternoon we

visited all the RMO's in their new positions and attended to their wants and in the night we had to dress and fix the constant, though easily controllable, stream of wounded.

(The events of this day, 4th July, are cited in the award of the Bar to the Military Cross to Vernon Brown – RHB)

5/7/18 Very little sleep possible but the front is settling down somewhat -- went round RAP's for curiosity's sake. I had a look at the country captured by us. Dead Fritz were scattered all over the place -- some blown to pieces by shells -- some dead from rifles -- others bayoneted. These latter chaps always have a most agonised expression and must have had a terrible death. I have never bothered about souvenirs but on this occasion I took a gas respirator and numeral from a dead bosche. The little shelling is rather remarkable except for pouring a tornado of fire into Hamel there is nothing to speak of during a long walk (many miles) there was no shell nearer than 1/4 of a mile. In the afternoon I took a sergeant and party to reinforce a relay post -- we ran right into a spot where Fritz commenced an area strafe. We immediately lay down behind a bit of a bank and although many whizz bangs lobbed near us no one was wounded.

6/7/18 Guided the DADMS round all the new posts and fixed up some medical arrangements. Another quiet day, but just as we were returning to HQ some gas shells came over. One lobbed 20 yards to one side of us another 50 yards on the other side and a third in front. They made us feel uncomfortable.

7/7/18 Getting into a routine stride once more. Very much surprised to see Sam Fitzpatrick (*a cousin of VCB, who was also a medical officer - he set up a practice in Hamilton, Victoria, after the war – RHB*) walk into the dugout in the morning. He is now in the 9th Field ambulance and in a very few days they expect to be taking over from us. In the evening I was relieved and returned to the ADS.

8/7/18 Had a glorious sleep and in pyjamas. As my clothes had not been removed for 10 days imagine the pleasure of returning once more to my valise. In the afternoon I walked across to Blangy-Tronville and saw Phil Sewell's grave (sheet 62d SWN29C3.5). When returning in the afternoon I met Dick (*probably Dick Foote, a cousin by marriage – RHB*) and had a long yarn.

9/7/18 Remained in camp all day.

10/7/18 Went to Pont-Remy, a total distance of 80 miles, first 6 miles were per ambulance. I then rode on an ordinance motor lorry. It was a magnificent trip right along the Somme Valley. On the return journey we travel through the city of Amiens. In the last 3 months this unfortunate city has had approximately 100,000 huge devastating shells thrown into it. Almost every building shows some scratches and a great many are utterly destroyed. Still for a whole fortnight not a single shell or bomb has fallen into it. This fact has induced quite a number of people to return to the deathlike city. The call of home, or possibly the curiosity to see how the old home has fared, seem to act like a magnet and draw people back into the dangerous zone. The motor lorry ended its journey about 6 miles from "home". I was therefore dumped on the side of the road with my case of whisky (for mess purposes). Soon a

staff car hove in sight. I stopped it as it was empty. Its destination was near mine so I was able to persuade the driver to take me right into camp.

11/7/18 Remained in camp.

12/7/18 Orderly officer preparations made for moving once again.

13/7/18 Moved out of camp at 8 am, marched with ambulance to Rivery, a suburb of Amiens.

14/7/18 The officers of the ambulance stayed in houses in the city while the men occupied tents out in a wood. It was pleasant to get into a house once again but unfortunately this was not a particularly healthy neighbourhood. Bombs dropped in fair profusion during the night. At midday I left by car for Ailly sur Somme to proceed to T.O.'s school. Reached station punctually at noon as directed, but was told that the train did not leave till 7:30 p.m. I therefore had to fool about for 7 ½ hours in the small French village. There was some difficulty in getting food but considerable search and 'beau comp francs' brought forth the necessary. At 5 p.m. a sergeant walking down the street informed me that the train had changed its mind and decided to leave at 5:30 instead of 7:30. This is typical of travelling in this country so I was not upset. I caught it at all events and we bumped along at a snail's pace till 11 p.m. and then reached "Romescamps" and were told to change to catch a train leaving at 2:30 a.m.. A neighbouring canteen supplied some nourishment and a couple of hours rest secured and then the bumping business continued once more. The final destination Forges les Eaux was reached at 7 a.m. The extensive period of time occupied in completing this train run would make it appear that a terrible distance was covered. As a matter of fact in the 18 hours we only travelled 73 miles. We walked to No. 7 Vet Hospital and were told to go on to No. 8. Arrived there and were accommodated in huts.

15/7/18 Were allowed to rest all day.

16/7/18 Course of instruction in horse management commenced.

17/7/18 Routine. Had dinner at a Hotel Drumonton (? *Might be Dumonton - RHB*) (Forges les Eaux)

18/7/18 -- 22/7/18 Worked and amused myself in No. 8 Vet Hospital.

23/7/18 Visited Rouen; left per train at 10 a.m. and arrived 12:30 p.m.. Discovered that we had to return by a train at 4 p.m.. This gave us very little time in the city of Rouen (Capt Drinkwater and Capt Slight (*not easy to read this name - RHB*) were my companions). We did the best possible thing; that was to go to the Café de l'Opera and indulged in a royal feast. It cost 35 francs each and was good.

24/7/18 Course of instruction at hospital came to an end with an examination and many regrets. The 10 days have passed very quickly and I personally derived much benefit from the rest in this peaceful area. This evening was gloriously calm and brilliantly moonlit -- very conducive to meditation as a matter of fact. I therefore strolled alone out into the evening air, across a couple of most exquisite fields and

eventually came to rest on an old fence and cogitated for a couple of hours. All sorts of thoughts passed through my mind. Similar scenes at home were prominent. The quietness and absence of the destructive agencies of war could not fail to conjure up thoughts of home. I also remembered that this day just three months previously, in a scene vastly different to this, Phil (*Searle – RHB*) was killed. Cyril also was seemingly near. These thoughts made me realise that I would soon be adjacent to the infernal war once more.

25/7/18 Left Forges les Eaux at 8:30 am, boarded train at 9:30 a.m.. Had to change at a place called Romescamps about 20 miles away. Despite the fact that the train started at 9:30 a.m. it was 1:30 p.m. when the Camp was reached. The jolly thing travelled at a snail's pace all the time and when it reached the camp apparently decided not to stop. After it had gone about 1 1/2 miles passed the station we reckoned it was time to get out and forthwith pitched our luggage out and followed. There were 10 officers and 40 O.R. but all managed to land safely and meandered round to the R.T.O.'s office. This train was the most cosmopolitan I have ever seen, for it contained troops of all the allies. There were Italians, French, Chinese, English, Americans, Scottish, Australians and even Russians. One of the latter, a Russian private (a Cossack by the way) came near our carriage and became communicative. He told me in rather broken French that he had been a prisoner and had escaped from Berlin having passed through Germany, Austria and Switzerland, finally reaching France where he volunteered for active service again. He was exceedingly happy as he was on this evening proceeding to the front once more and expected soon to be in the midst of the present successful counter offensive.

After arriving at the R.T.O.'s office I received instructions to wait at Romescamps until 5:30 p.m. Had lunch and in due time bumped off in the train once again. This time only a cattle truck was available so the remainder of the run was not very comfortable. At all events I reached the rail head Ailly-sur-Somme by 9:30 p.m. and was lucky enough to find an ambulance car going right past my unit HQ near Amiens. I then had a good meal and was soon fast asleep.

26/7/18 Moved up into camp in wood; had a look around transport.

27/7/18 Repeated yesterday's performance -- went all over wagons etc. with Major Evans. It was necessary to find out as much as possible before taking charge of the whole show.

28/7/18 Fritz gave us rather a warm reception during the night as he bombed the neighbourhood for 3 hours with great malignancy. There were none near our camp but it was a still night and the crashes made a beastly row. I do not know exactly how many diggers were knocked out but at all events 20 very badly wounded chaps were brought to our ambulance for evacuation {bombs nearly always produce most terrible wounds and in this instance quite a number would die within a few hours}. The day dawned brightly and the usual routine proceeded.

29/7/18 Nothing extraordinary. Received word that we shall be moving in a few days; this time to take charge of a main dressing station.

30/7/18 With the Col. and Q.M. we inspected the site of our new home. I of course having interest in a place for putting my horses, wagons and motors. On returning a confidential letter disclosed the fact that I had been awarded a bar to the M.C. -- surprises never cease.

31/7/18 We Left Camp at 7 A.M.. As this was my first move at T.O. (*Transport Officer – RHB*) I felt very anxious until we actually got going. The fact that some wagons were at one camp and some at HQ made it rather worrying, but luckily things went fairly smoothly.

Gap in the diary record - RHB

5/8/18 Everything packed up once more preparatory to another move. On this occasion we had to leave just after dark and marched to our destination, Daours (1 ½ miles away) at night. For the last three days there had been continuous and hasty preparations for a coming offensive. All moves took place at night in order to catch Fritz napping. I had the job of intelligence officer as well as transport officer so recommended the roads before setting out on the march. One always travels with the aid of a map. It is no joke in this country for roads interlace in the most bewildering fashion. At all events with the help of a Ford motor car I picked a fairly good, though not main, track. For a few days before a stunt such as is expected the traffic on the main roads is something terrific. Long strings of wagons are met many miles in length. Oh! well on this occasion after my return to camp I had tea; the cavalcade was hitched in preparation to moving off. The start was rather unpropitious for it rained heavily and was as dark as pitch. One got wet through quickly and felt a bit uncomfortable, but such a little trifle did not worry us in the least. In fact such a night was excellent for a move because Fritz could not come over and bomb us. On fine nights he delights to come over all the main roads and bomb passing traffic. We reached Daours without incident at 1 a.m. This was very satisfying to me for it was inky dark and with such complicated intersecting roads one can easily miss a turning. One slip is disastrous as the men are all carrying heavy packs and if their officer loses them, they feel very sore and in the future have no confidence in him. There was one little hitch when we reached Daours. It then became necessary to cross the main road and thus cross the main stream of traffic. At the time there were 200 tanks lumbering along the road and it therefore took us 1½ hours to cross the road. By 3:30 a.m. our wagons and horses were fixed; the men under cover and we, i.e. offices, had a chance to roll into bed.

6/8/18 Preparations going on all round for a great offensive. At 8:30 p.m. I went up to Fouilloy with Major Morlet to open an M.D.S. These stations are usually 5-8 miles from the line but this was only 1½ miles away. We would thus be able to easily receive patients long after a considerable advance had been made.

7/8/18 The show opened with great éclat, after a heavy barrage, our chaps moved forward with great dash. Our job soon commenced. I was admitting officer and had to decide whether a chap should be sent straight on or wait to be dressed and drafted generally for the requisite hospital. It was a perfectly safe though very fatiguing job and by 12:30 a.m. had seen 1,800 patients.

8/8/18 Advancing satisfactorily; myself being still engaged on the dud job. Sammy Fitz. (*Sam Fitzpatrick - RHB*) blew-in in the afternoon.

9/8/18 Things are quietening down a bit.

10/8/18 Ordered to close M.D.S. and to be prepared to move at half an hour's notice.

11/8/18 Tommy division North of Somme had not been successful so 13th Brigade and some Yanks were formed into a liaison force and ordered to take the place of the first mentioned lot. To the 13th Field (*Ambulance - RHB*) fell the responsibility of clearing the whole forward evacuation. It was therefore necessary to move much nearer the front line. At 10:30 I moved off with my transport to Sailley-le-Sec and established transport lines in a gully which was formerly an R.A.P.

12/8/18 Had a car run round the much contested village of Chipilly there were a few shells flying about but I got back safely.

13/8/18 I went forward about 2 miles to Sailley-Laurette to the A.D.S. to help at dressing cases. Before this stunt this village belonged to Fritz and our dressing station was a battalion HQ.

14/8/18 Liaison force disbanded and our ambulance were therefore sent back to Fouilloy, the move being very successful and uneventful.

18/8/18 -- 26/8/18 Cooling off at Fouilloy - bombed heavily not far away on two nights and shelled once, otherwise we had a very peaceful time.

26/8/18 Moved once more right back to Amiens. We all feel confident that the division is at last to get a decent rest. This is the first occasion since the beginning

(End of loose leaf diary book tied together with string - RHB)

(Start of third diary; loose leaf with clips - RHB)

23/9/18 Left London via Pullman car to Folkestone; magnificent run to coast; immediately embarked and passed across the Channel without much trouble. Comparative calmness made the voyage quite pleasant. Stayed for a night at the Louvre Hotel Boulogne; blew out to Wimereux and saw Colin Friend; roamed on the beach and returned to Boulogne. Slept like a top, in fact failed to hear the noise caused by Hun air raid.

24/9/18 Caught train at 7:45 am and proceeded towards line presumably to railhead at Peronne. When we reached Lompr y I noticed several lorries moving along the road and containing 14th Btn. men. I immediately smelt a rat and promptly got out as the train stopped. A few enquiries elicited the fact that the 13th were billeted at Lavieux (*?could be Savieux - RHB*) near Ailly sur Somme and a convenient passing car brought me right home again.

25/9/18 Had a look at the transport - found things very dirty but they had had very strenuous work so this was to be expected.

26/9/18 – 29/9/18 Ordinary routine.

30/9/18 A dismal wet Sunday. Afternoon went for a walk to a couple of neighboring villages with Major Elwell (*?Llwell - RHB*).

1/10/18 Usual routine in the morning; in the afternoon, with Capt Hyett, I went and had a look at that renowned city of Amiens. The cathedral was the first place to be inspected. Although many shells have lobbed in the vicinity of this wonderful structure and one has actually gone through the roof, the damage done was not great considering all circumstances. My next duty was to attempt to purchase some edibles and cups for our mess. Prices were terrific; I had to give 6' (6 *pence - RHB*) each for eggs. Anyway we then went to an exclusive officers cafe for afternoon tea and we had to pay 5 francs each for this simple meal.

2/10/18 Rations had to be taken to 4th Division concert party which was entertaining No. 3 AGA. Our Ambulance had to supply transport so I took advantage of the opportunity to visit that city and to see what I could pick up there. I was very unsuccessful once more but at all events I had rather a pleasant day and managed to go and see Evri (*? Difficult to read – RHB*) Foote for a few minutes.

3/10/18 Still in the same village -- usual routine.

4/10/18 Went to division and heard the news that Turkey had surrendered -- much jubilation.

7/10/18 Unit sports meeting in the field behind Saveuse - concert in the evening, highly successful.

11/10/18 (*Note- the entry below is also shown as 11th, probably this should be the 10th – RHB*) 13th Inf. Brigade sports meeting at Bovelles - our unit represented but competition too hot, saw many from 48th Btn. - Capt Twining, Capt Downs, Col Perry, Major Allen, Brig. General Leane – the latter gave me a very cordial greeting.

11/10/18 Preparation for G.O.C. inspection.

12/10/18 Reveille 5:45 a.m. - grooming and final polishing for G.O.C. inspection -- rotten rainy and misty morning, still promptly at 8 a.m. unit moved out on 5 mile route march to parade ground. Travelled about 3 miles and we were overtaken by a motorcyclist and notified that inspection was cancelled and so we had to turn round and proceeded home. All our preparations being wasted -- such are the joys of the army. In the afternoon I got on my horse and rode to Revelles to dinner at 48th Btn Mess. I was very cordially received by all the officers from the Col. downwards. After mess played cards and generally had a good time. At 10 p.m. my horse was brought round and I started for home. It was an absolutely pitch dark night and the road was quite unfamiliar and the darkness was so great that it was impossible to even see the track. It is therefore not surprising that I soon missed a turning and completely lost myself. Eventually I struck a village and discovered it was well out of my track. I tried to retrace my steps but the road I took ended in a dense wood. In attempting to get through the wood without the aid of a track I lost all sense of direction and finally

found myself in an area protected with trenches and barbed wire. It was no good to ride through so I had to start walking. After many hours I got out of the forest into an open field. This was not much better for I was still at sea -- to make matters still more unpleasant it was raining copiously. I was just about deciding that the best thing I could do was to lie down and sleep and thus wait for dawn. Anyway I went 50 yards further and ran into a railway line which was familiar to me. I therefore followed it and reached home about 2 a.m.

13/10/18 Sunday -- received an excellent bunch of letters -- generally took things easy.

14/10/18 Usual routine in the morning. Took a car in afternoon to Amiens to purchase provender. The city is rapidly regaining its former gaiety. I made for the markets and brought a whole lot of vegetables, fish etc. I merely purchased stuff that took my fancy and an orderly carried it out to the car.

15/10/18 Nothing much doing.

16/10/18 Rainy day.

17/10/18 Went for a long and very enjoyable ride with CO.

30/10/18 Ambulance inspected by Col Barber. We had the honour of being very warmly congratulated by him on our turnout.

31/10/18 Marched 4 1/2 miles to be inspected by G.O.C. Div with the rest of the Brigade. Congratulated again but also informed that we would be called on to proceed to the line in performing one more stunt.

1/11/18 A notable day. In the morning papers we gleaned the information that Turkey had surrendered and in the evening a wire came through to the effect that Austria had also caved in. It is extraordinary but such an important series of events seemed to make no difference to us. One seems to have become so used to the usual routine that one is not surprised and not over elated at the prospect of the end of the war. Apparently one's senses have been so dulled that the significance takes time to soak in.

2/11/18 A most interesting roundup took place today. In our corps there are many deserters. These blighters have formed themselves into a bandit herd. Rob their former mates, not stopping at murder on occasions. In this area one never goes out at night in safety. These blighters lurk round corners and knock one down and then rob wholesale. Well today every Australian soldier was issued with a pass and then various battalions were sent into neighbouring villages and the diggers examine the passes; any man without a pass was arrested and thus 45 deserters were bagged. One chap resisted and was promptly shot. It was an excellent performance to catch such a lot of the rotters.

4/11/18 Very interesting Divisional boxing competition held in aerodrome Bonelles..

6/11/18 Orders to hold ourselves in readiness to move at an hours notice to forward area. Hence crash our prospect of a long spell.

9/11/18 News of great importance. First word has come through that Germany has sent plenipotentiaries to us for an armistice. I did not expect this so soon. This made the news so much more delightful. The second event was word that we were to entrain that afternoon. It was necessary to buzz round and complete arrangements. 2 hours before setting out time, word came cancelling the whole show for 24 hours.

10/11/18 Sunday at 3:30 p.m. had teams hooked in and sharp at 3:45 p.m. I am moved out at the head of the column, reaching Ailly-sur-Somme at 5 p.m. just as it was getting dark. The slow and tedious business of entraining then commenced. The 45 horses were run up the ramps into trucks and the 23 vehicles had to be pulled up similar ramps onto trucks also. At 9 p.m. loading was complete and at 11 p.m. the train moved out.

11/11/18 At day light we woke feeling a little stiff but on the whole having spent a fairly decent night. Investigation revealed the fact that we were just on the outskirts of St Quentin, that terribly knocked about and important city on the Hindenburg line. This was far out of our predestined route, which was to have been through Peronne, and news soon reached us that the reason for the change of route was due to the fact that one of the Fritz delayed action mines had blown up about 200 yards of the permanent way. Eventually we go into the city of St Quentin and risked leaving the train for a few minutes to explore the ruins. Not a single house is habitable and the whole place is simply a rubble heap. The train journey continued all through the day and far into the night. I had hoped that we would not reach our destination before daylight next day for it is a beastly business de-training and organising a camp in the dark. Our hopes were not fulfilled as we reached the place Roisel at 1 a.m. and had to commence unloading immediately. Despite the dark and the fact that there was a very heavy frost we got everything off, hooked and on the road again at 2:30 a.m. and at a quarter past 3 a.m. we were settled down in our new camp again.

It is curious, but ever since the beginning of the show I've felt that the excitement on the completion of a permanent armistice would be intense. Still this was the day on which the great event occurred and the official news reached us while we were on the train. Nevertheless except for a certain feeling of satisfaction there was no evidence of anything unusual.

12/11/18 We did not commence the day's duties very early, but took the opportunity to rest a bit after our tiresome trip per train. The village of Roisel is absolutely destroyed. We are occupying an old German camp -- the huts are very rotten but are much better than bivouacking in the open, especially on these frosty mornings. At 3 a.m. orders arrived that we had to move off at 8:30 a.m. for another town 18 miles away (orders always seem to have a nasty habit of coming at this ungodly hour).

13/11/18 This order did not trouble me much as I had my part of the show ready packed to move at an hour's notice. I merely had to warn my W. O. and sergeants to go to sleep again and rise strictly at 6:30 a.m. to partake early breakfast. This time the bearer and all other officers preceded by light railway while I conducted the transport by road. It was another glorious day and we travelled through most interesting

country right through the renowned Hindenburg line. We passed through the village of Bellicourt, that spot where Napoleon commenced his huge underground canal and which the Germans in the war drained and used as a huge underground barracks. All together they extend for about 7 miles. It was here that the 46th Battalion captured 750 prisoners and killed 200 Germans in a few minutes. Of course all the villages are absolutely blotted out, the field is all completely ruined and devastation in evidence everywhere. At midday I halted the column, had the horses fed and fed ourselves -- a huge fire was lit and we soon had the big pot of tea going. After 1 1/2 hours spell we took to the road again and reached our day's destination (Frasnoy) at 4:30 p.m.. This touring business is most interesting especially when one knows that one is not likely to have to participate in any more fighting. One has to have one's wits about one for the country is quite unfamiliar and a map is the only available guide. To lose oneself is unpardonable and may bring serious trouble to the unit.

Fresnoy is quite a large town and just on the outskirts of the area where terrific artillery fighting took place. It is certainly bent, but is still quite habitable; at all events we have found good billets and will be quite comfortable for a few days to refit in order to commence our long march into Germany.

14/11/18 Cleaned things generally and explored the precincts of the new home.

15/11/18 Went for a joyride via car to Bellengese, the village through which Fritz has made a wonderful network of tunnels.

24/11/18 Marched to Maurois.

25/11/18 to Le Petit-Fayt passing through le Cateau.

27/11/18 to Sains.

28/11/18 Detailed to attend refresher course at Abbeville. Travelled by car and then train to Abbeville ambulance

2/12/18 at No.3 AGH

4/1/19 left for Staples (*?difficult to read – RHB*)

9/1/19 left by train at 8 a.m. travelled by cattle truck to Chorleron arriving 5 p.m. on 12/1/19.

13/1/19 Motor lorry to Dinant (*?not clear – RHB*). Crossed river and visited ADMs office; discovered that I had to return to Abbeville with transport.

15/1/19 left Dinant (*? – RHB*) – arrived Florence.

16/1/19 to Beaumont

17/1/19 to Avernoes

18/1/19 to Le Cateau

19/1/19 Masniers via Cantaing

(The Diary concludes with this extract in VCB's hand writing – RHB)

EXTRACT from 'Figaro', Paris

“It is nearly 4 years since they left their distant land. What losses they have sustained! And they have not had one single home leave. But their spirit has remained the same as in the first days of the war. They could not defend their own villages more fiercely than they defended ours. Our country has become theirs. All the ideals of the nobility of our common cause dwell in the broad bosoms of these bronzed men who come from the Antipodes and resemble the Warriors on the bass reliefs of the Aegean.”
