

1914-1919

THE FIRST WORLD WAR DIARIES OF

JOHN HARWOOD WILSON



J.H.WILSON.....BORN 8/9/1892, DIED 25/11/1977

1917

New Years Day: Celebrated very quietly. Very mild day.

2nd: Fritz sent some heavy stuff over at night but did not do much damage.

3rd: Nothing of any importance occurred.

4th: A bright day. Aeroplanes very active.
A bit of a strafe at night but had some retaliation.
Fritz has got our dressing station spotted.

5th: A bright day. Much aerial activity. It is a very interesting sight to watch the manoeuvres of some of our planes.

Ltd Col Hodder has rec'd the D.S.O., Lt. Sattie the M.C. & Sgt Powis the D.C.M. for services etc during our last stay up here & the attack on the 1st July. All the above to date from Jan 1st 1917.

Notes

Major HODDER, A. E., M.A., B.Ch. (D.S.O. L.G. 1.1.17); (actg. Lt.-Col. while commanding the 3rd North Midland Field Ambulance, 46th Division.
Born 10.5.1876; son of C. Hodder, Master Mariner; educated at Bedford School; King's College. Cambridge; 2nd Class Hons, Natural Science, St. Mary's Hospital; Hon. sec. St. Mary's Hospital Medical Orderly and House Surgeon, St. Mary's Hospital; Served in Europe 1914-18. Major A. E. Hodder, D.S.O., M.B., relinquished his actg. Rank on ceasing to command a Field Amb. 13th, May 1917

John Powis entered the war in France on the 4th March 1916. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He has performed consistent good work throughout, and has on many occasions showed great courage and coolness under heavy fire.

John Powis was my grandfather. He served with a Field Artillery Battery attached to the 46th North Midland Division T. F. having joined up in 1914 with his future brother-in-law William Northall. John Powis would not "bear arms" so elected to join the RAMC rather than go back down a coal mine as he was a professional coal hewer in the family-owned mine at Sedgeley. Decorated for bravery under fire in July 1916 at Gommecourt Wood, he was "Honourably Discharged" on 7th April 1919 with his certificate being signed by the King.

We have this framed with his medal and ribbon for posterity

Unable to confirm information regarding Sattie.

6th: More rain etc. "Dug Outs" flooded & falling in all the time & so cause a great deal of work day after day.

7th Sunday: A bright day. Much aerial activity.

Fritz spotted our men at work on the dressing station entrance which was finished at night.

About 7 p.m. he dropped a shell right on it & spoilt a weeks work.

Heard that the 59th Div'n are about to come out after two years in "Blighty". It comprises our second line (2nd N.M. Div)

8th: Heavy rain in early morning, followed by showers remainder of day. Fritz sent some heavy stuff over at dinner time wounding about ten men.

9th: We “strafed” Fritz all day who did not reply very much.

10th: Heavy bombardment by both sides.

11th: A terrible “strafe” on our right.
Believe that we have attacked & taken Serre.

12th: Snow fell in the morning.

13th: Wet & cold day.

14th Sunday: No services up here at all.
Bit brighter day.

15th: Sharp frost. Went for a short stroll round the village. Saw some fine deep dug-outs.

16th: More frost. Fritz strafed us before dinner but did little damage.

17th: Heavy snowfall in the early morning, making this ruined village a pretty but pathetic sight.
Col Dawson of the 2/2nd T.A. came on a tour of inspection.

18th: More snow & frost. Quite a change from the mud and rain.

19th: Had a grand walk to Saily au Bois.
It has been heavily shelled recently & the roads are in a terrible state for traffic.

20th: Heavy bombardment on all morning.
Captain came down & played bridge with us in our cellar. Quite a nice evening.
Still Freezing.

21st Sunday: Had a nice walk to St. Amand.
They went on leave. Sgts Powis & Webb paid us a visit at night.

22nd: Yesterday we had the first wounded man through for eight days. A record for this place I believe.

23rd: A lovely clear & keen frosty day. The trees & hedges presented a beautiful fairy like appearance in the morning sun. Much enemy aeroplane activity. Two Bosches brought down. S. Maj paid us a visit.

24th: A most clear & beautiful day. Much aerial activity again. It was most exciting.

The cold is about the keenest I have experienced for a long while.

25th: Still freezing hard & very bright & clear again. More planes up.

26th: Everything is frozen hard. Mustard bread milk etc. The roads are like a sheet of glass & the wind the coldest, keenest piercing wind I have known for many months.

My trousers split all down the back seam.

27th: French mortar strafe by us at dinner time 11.30 – 12.30
A lovely bright & frosty morning.

28th Sunday: Still freezing. I cannot remember such glorious Winter weather. Snow on the ground, glorious sunshine, a cloudless sky & freezing all the time.

I have heard it likened to the Swiss climate, by those who have been there.

If it is a true likeness, I should like to spend a few months there.

Bombardment has been going on without ceasing on our right for three or four days.

No rations came up till very late & then only bully beef & biscuits. Evidently a smash up on one of the main lines. The first time we have been served like this in two years.

29th: Hard, bright weather continues.

Leave is stopped again. Cap't Harris came over from Bienvillers.

30th: More snow fell. Orders rec'd to move to Gaudiempré on the 1st Feb'y.
Thank goodness we are going from this hell of a place. At times it is hell. At others delightfully pretty.

31st: Fritz started to "strafe" us about 9.0 a.m. & kept it up. We had a very painfully busy day.

More "strafe" at night & very close too.

Everyone will be glad to get away from here I think. This is our ninth week within 1000 yds of Fritz. Our longest spell up the line. But still we have passed two of the winter months in cosy quarters.

The frost has now lasted fourteen days. What these dug outs & trenches will be like when the thaw sets in, I dread to think.

Thank goodness we are leaving it all behind.

FEBRUARY

1st: Part of "A" Section were relieved by the 2nd.
Still bitter cold.

2nd: Left Foncy's & very glad too for many things. Arrived at our old hospital at Gaudienpré. Had no sleep on account of the cold. It is awful.

3rd: 29° of frost were registered here. It is absolutely awful. I never remember such a winter.

4th Sunday: Bright & frosty. Met Will & Tom. Nothing doing.

5th: Paid out in afternoon. Bitter N.E. wind now blowing. It is enough to kill men.

6th: No sleep again making the third restless night. I wonder when it will thaw. Goodness only knows it is cold enough to make one sit on a fire.

7th: Weather still bright & clear but wind as bad as ever.

8th: Nothing of importance occurred.

9th: Slight change in the wind.
Had a pleasant time at night with Will & Tom.

10th: Much warmer. Wind dropped.
One or two "Bosches" passed over this hospital.

11th Sunday: No service. Nothing of any importance occurred.

12th: Leave is still closed. Prospects of me going home for a few days are not very bright.
A welcome thaw set in.

13th: Lovely day. Much warmer.
Rumours of a move next week.

14th: Warm sunshine, frost again at night.

15th: D.D.M.S. paid a visit to Berles & caused a fine stir.

16th: D.D.M.S. in company with two eminent French medical officers made a tour of inspection round the hospital.
Much warmer. Slight shower of rain, the first for about five weeks.

17th: Thaw set in in real earnest. Oh!, how delightfully muddy everything is.
Hope 'twill soon dry up.

18th Sunday: Dull & foggy. Nothing of importance to record.

19th: About 100 more patients admitted yesterday. More alterations.
Very foggy at night.

20th: A patient gave us a marvellous display of card manipulation. He was "Wilfred the Mystic" of some fame. One never can tell "Whos Who" in Khaki. Fancy meeting him & playing "nap" or "solo" for money. What a shock!

21st: Several of our men have gone sick. Weather still dull.

22nd: Nothing of any importance occurred. Leave still at a standstill.

23rd: Particulars of service taken. Some say tis for medals. Heard from Frank who has just landed in France.

24th: Very foggy all day. Rumours of the Germans evacuating from Serre, Miraumont etc.

25th Sunday: Brighter weather. Nothing of any importance occurred.

26th: Captⁿ Miller left for temp'y duty as D.A.D.M.S.
A beautiful day just like Spring.

27th: Good news. Rumours of the 24th confirmed. Bosch's shelled one of our planes & brought it down ten minute walk from this place. Paid a visit to it in the evening & was surprised at its compactness. It is the first one I have ever inspected & it interested me greatly.

28th: Heard that our men entered Gommecourt & that it had been evacuated by the Bosch's.
In the evening we had some wounded men in from Gommecourt itself so now we know its true. Good old 46th.
A lovely day.

MARCH

1st: Good news continues. Weather much brighter & clearer.

2nd: Nothing of much importance occurred.

3rd: Parade on full marching order for C.O.'s inspection.

4th Sunday: Bright day followed by fall of snow 6" deep at night.
Paid in the afternoon. Lads had a night out.

5th: Cold day again. Germans still retreating.

6th: Return of the frost & NE wind again. B section returned from Berles.

7th: Germans used gas shells to bombard villages nearby & just behind the line.

8th: La Herliere shelled. Canteen burnt down at Gaudiempré, great blaze.
Several short sharp falls of snow accompanied by strong N. wind. Bitter cold, but bright between snow-falls.

9th: More frost & snow. Nothing of great importance occurred.

10th: Showery day. Orders to be ready to move at a minutes notice.

11th Sunday: Bright day but a bit showery. Nothing much doing.

12th: Orders for a bearer party to be at Foncquevillers to-morrow.

Rumours of a Div'l charge coming off.

Very showery.

2nd N.M.F.A. have had several casualties at Foncquevillers.

13th: 30 Bearers left at 8.30 a.m. for Foncq's, I was detailed to march away at 4.30 with forty more. One says we are after Bucquoy.

2 p.m. Rumours that the Bosche has evacuated & that move is cancelled.

Marched off with 45 NCOs & men at 5.30 p.m. for Foncquevillers.

Had a lively reception with gas shells from Fritz. Five to ten minutes of perfect hell. Luckily they were tear gas shells or some of us would have "gone West".

Spent a night in the wet dug out. Talk about experiences! One gets enough in a day to last a year of civilian life.

14th: What a night! Rain from the dugout roof, tear gas everywhere & awful headaches all round.

Woke up at 6.30 a.m. & received instructions to report to H^dQ's Roosendaal Wood to collect from there & from Biez Wood.

Passed through what remained of the village of Gommecourt. What a mess. Scarcely a wall was standing.

The ground behind has been absolutely ploughed up by our shells & Fritz must have been having an awful time. Reached the wood after a rough journey. The bearers had a carry of 5 kilometres often to their thigh in mud.

It was a very hard day's work for all concerned & everyone was thankful to get back to Foncq's

15th: Had another rotten night & eventually were relieved at 5.30 p.m. How grateful we all were for scarce a man was not thoroughly exhausted.

I feel as if I could write for hours for my experiences were many, both novel & exciting.

The 2nd NMFA had 1 man killed & two wounded & we had two men slightly wounded. We had some wonderful luck though.

What a sight we looked. No wash or shave for three days & smothered in mud.

The newly taken territory is very pretty, & I should say twill be grand in the Summer. but at present -----

16th: Had a day off to rest & clean up.

Had breakfast in bed. What a treat to have a good nights sleep once again.

We were all regarded as heroes more or less.

Weather much better.

17th: A grand day. Eight or nine hours bright sunshine.

Orders to stand by for a sudden move.

G.O.C. visited the hospital & brought the news of the capture of Bapaume.

Rumours of trouble in Russia which we hope is false. Large reflections of a fire behind the Bosche line behind Monchy way.

18th Sunday: Left with 80 NCOs & men for work for the Graves Registration Officer at Foncquevillers.

Marched to the scene of last Wednesday's attack & saw a modern battlefield after an attack. It was gruesome in the extreme. The damage done by our artillery to the Bosch wire is surprising.

We collected the dead from between Bucquoy & the Bois de Biez, & had to carry them a distance of four kilo's for burial. I consider it an awful scandal that dead bodies should have to be carried so far when there is plenty of suitable ground less than 1 kilo'e away. The bearers were absolutely dead beat in so much that the A.D.M.S. (good old stick) found billets for us in German dug-outs in Gommecourt.

Passed a cold but dry night for we were only too glad to get a rest.

19th: Went to Foncquevillers for breakfast.

No body owned us, wanted us or knew what to do with us. Eventually after a lot of messing about I received orders to return to Gaudiempré & very thankful too.

The G.O.C., Divi'l Major, A.D.M.S. & OIC of us complimented us on our work. An awful stormy night & once more were we more than thankful to get back to our own billets.

After two years of active service we have done just one week of real field work but how interesting to traverse freshly taken ground especially Gomm't.

Part of "A" section gone on c/1.

20th: Cold and wintry day. Snow sleet etc.

Expect to move on the 22nd or 23rd inst.

Exceptionally good news from all fronts.

21st: More good news, Fritz still on the run.

Lovely afternoon again. Rec'd orders at 10 p.m. to move to-morrow.

22nd: Packed up & marched away at 1.30 p.m. via Pas & Authie to Bus les Artois.

Heavy snow storms at intervals. Just like summer in between. Roads very bad indeed. Saw our engineers laying a new railway, & lots of Bosche prisoners at work on the roads.

Hospital where we arrived at not up to much.

23rd: Had to unpack wagons to pack 'em up again later.

Orders to move again to-morrow. Rumours of a five day march train ride etc.

Had a little music in a coffee shop.

24th: Left Bus for Contay. Very bad march. Passed through Acheux, Varennes, Walloy.

Saw Anzac troops for first time.

Passed shell dumps hundreds of yards in length & breadth. The largest amount of explosives etc I have ever seen.

25th Sunday: Time advanced 1 hour (Summer Time)
Beautiful day. Left Contay for Villers Bocaze.
Slept in the Town Hall.

26th: Left V.B. at 1 p.m. & travelled by motor buses passing through Amiens & arrived at Saveuse where we were made welcome by the villagers. 2nd party of English soldiers.

27th: Cold but bright day. 25% of unit allowed to visit Amiens.
Expect to move tomorrow. Had a walk to Ferrières.

28th: Move cancelled. Rec'd permission to visit Amiens.
Had a grand time, lovely hot bath & a good feed, in fact it was as good as a day's leave to me.
The cathedral is a grand place, but all its most important & valuable sculptures wood & stone carving etc., entrances, are all amply protected from destruction by aerial bombs by sand bag barricades finely built.

29th: Marched away at 9.30 a.m. for station at Balouel. There had been a train smash two or three Australians being killed & several horses.
Entrained & started for "somewhere" at 4.30 p.m.
Travelled all night & snatched a few hours sleep.

30th: Awoke at 4 a.m. & found myself at Berguette.
Unloaded the G.S. wagons. Rained all the time. Had a rotten two hours march on an empty stomach. Found decent billets at Esquedesques near Lillers.
Passed near our old billets of Jan. 1916.
Spent the afternoon in bed.

31st: Madame brought us hot coffee at 7 a.m. while we were still in bed. Didn't we enjoy it! Nothing much doing during the day.

APRIL

1st Sunday: Cold & showery day. Service in the field after dinner.
B Section left for St Hilliers. We took over Capt Strange's bed & billet, just got settled when we were turned out by another officer. Hard Luck.
As I was taking my bed out I swept the cloth off the table toilet set & all smashing them to smithereens. Oh La. La. What a smash. Ten francs out of my next pay day gone "West" "Ce ne fait rien" C'est la guerre.

2nd: Nothing of much importance occurred. A. section inoculated, T.A.B.

3rd: Heavy snowfall all morning followed by bright sunshine in the afternoon.
Paid in forenoon.

4th: Showery day. Rumours of a move. Good news in the papers. Capt'n Miller ret'd from D.A.D.M.S. & very pleased we all were too.

5th: Inspection in full marching order.

A real Summer's day. Spent a few hours in a nice orchard. Heavy rain at night.

6th: A showery day. Nothing of any importance occurred.

7th: A fine day. Had a walk to Isbergues where we used to be billeted. Good welcome. Many alterations in the place.

8th Easter Sunday: Attended Holy Communion in a school nearby.

Church parade in a farm-yard.

Our unit played the 5th N.S.R. at football, & beat us 7 goals to 0.

The warmest & brightest day of the year.

9th: More wintery weather. Woke up to a white world after summer weather yesterday.

Had a div'l route march for inspection by the General, passing through Estreesla Blanche & Norrent Fontes, St. Hilliare & Bourecq. Reached billets 3.30 p.m. after 24 kilo march. It was bitterly cold. From one point we had a magnificent view for miles & miles around, Mont des Cats being just visible.

10th: Went with a party of men to St Hillaire for a bath. Bitter cold day & many light falls of hail & snow.

11th: Weather still bad. Good news in the papers.

12th: Orders to move on the 13th to Béthune.

Rather a surprise. Heard that the 5th N.S.R. were bombed & shelled yesterday as they entered the town. Cycled to Isbergues.

13th: Reveille 4.30 a.m. Marched off at 7 reaching Béthune about 10.45 a.m. Roads very bad for marching.

Saw remaining houses which had been knocked down yesterday.

Took over part of a large civilian hospital.

A beautiful day.

14th: Patient came in having been wounded by A.A.M.G Bullet in the street, after passing through two charges without a wound.

Bosche shelled Béthune about 7 p.m. 15 shells came over of which 8 were "duds".

One exploded & fetched down a tree less than 50 yards from the large hospital. A bit of luck it missed it.

Had a busy half hour getting all patients into the cellars both civil & military. The Sisters of Mercy & Nuns are wonderfully cool and collected during the shelling.

Personally I prefer the line to a large town subject to shelling. No casualties reported.

15th Sunday: Nothing of much importance. Had a short stroll round the town which is unusually quiet.

16th: Bright clear day. Our men were drilling on the large space in front of the hospital when a taube came over & dropped a bomb. Luckily for us it went wide but unfortunately it killed three infantry men, a Gendarme & wounded about eight civilians. Whether the bomb was meant for us I cannot say. Some talk in the evening to the effect that it was not a bomb but one of our anti aircraft shells.

17th: Wet & miserable day again. Is summer ever coming I wonder. Spent a pleasant evening in a variety show run by Tommies, & heard the finest violinist of my life, he was a marvel.

18th: Rumours of a move. Very busy all day with fresh cases. Part of of "C" section moved off at 5 p.m. for Liévin. Went to a picture house in Béthune. Enjoyed the band & show immensely. Many civilians were there too.

19th: Orders to move at 2 p.m. I was fortunate enough to remain behind & come by motor ambulance. Arrived at Aix Noulette about 5 p.m. & was quartered at a large brewery with spacious cellars. The unit arrived at 6 p.m. The village is badly knocked about. Many large guns are in the vicinity & firing constantly. Rumours of hand to hand fighting in the streets of Lens.

20th: A bit brighter. Paid a visit to the Div'l Baths. Passed one or two of our "heavies". 12"

21st: Cold day again. Had a nice bath & change. Fritz straffed us at night. One or two casualties in the village.

22nd Sunday: Practically half of A section bearers went up as reinforcements. An attack is expected to come off. More straffing at night & more casualties. Expect to go up at any minute. All the unit rec'd new numbers.

23rd: Had a rotten night. All preparations made for an extra busy time. Woke up several times by persons getting drivers & bearers up. More men killed in the village. Our Div'n went over the top at 4.30 a.m. Many cases down in the day expect a lot more tonight & it is rumoured that this & other divisions are going to take Lens tonight. 6 p.m. Still expecting to go up.

24th: Staff **Serg't G. Hidens** of our unit was killed in Liévin about noon.

This makes our second man killed out here. We have been most fortunate though. Two other Sg'ts came down with shell shock. A wonder they were not killed with him.

Note

HIDENS, GEORGE Staff Serjeant 421010
1st/3rd North Midland Field Amb Royal Army Medical Corps
Resident of Whitmoreans Wolverhampton
Killed in Action 24/04/1917
Grave Reference: 2. B. 12.
CANADIAN CEMETERY No.2, NEUVILLE - ST. VAAST

25th: Poor George was buried near the spot where he was killed. Col. Hodder & Sg't Warner went from here to be present. Reinforcements composed of old hands arr'd. One or two surprises in the list of promotions. All sorts of rumours are current as to the disposal of certain N.C.O.'s of the 3/3rd. Some of our bearers ret'd from the line after what they declared to be the worst time they have had in the war. The shelling is awful, houses etc going up in the air all day long.

26th: Much better weather.

27th: Nothing of great importance to record.

28th: Lovely day. Had a pleasant walk in the evening.

29th Sunday: The trees & hedges are already showing the benefit of the bright sunshine. Church parade after dinner. Took a nice bath & spent a pleasant evening. Saw a Kite Balloon change quarters.

30th: A beautiful day. Pitched tents & marquees for personnel. Had a night in one but got little sleep on account of our terrific bombardment & thoughts of what would happen if Fritz replied.

MAY

1st: Went with a relief party for C section to the A.D.S. White Chateau Liévin. Very hot & tiring march. My word he (Fritz) has left in a hurry. Surprised at the amount of civilian clothing & property lying about. Did not get much sleep at night although I had a spring bed to sleep on. The noise was awful.

2nd: Fine weather now seems to have set in. Busy morning clearing out cellars etc.

3rd: Usual shelling took place.

4th: Very hot day. A sharp half hours bombardment after tea.
Fritz bombarded Liévin with large high explosive shells. Ten men & myself went after some wounded & I had the hottest half hour of my life shell dodging. Houses were going up all around.
Luckily we all ret'd safe.

5th: Change in the weather. Thunder & light shower of rain.
Cap'n Miller ret'd from leave & joined us at the White Chateau relieving Cap'n Harris.
More heavy reciprocal bombardments after tea.

6th Sunday: Much cooler. Saw one of our planes brought down in flames. An awful yet pretty sight. Fritz bombarded the vicinity of its descent with great intensity all afternoon & evening.
Had some fun with a boy's bowler hat found in the cellar.
Mail got lost, Rum bottle smashed coming up to us. **HARD LINES!**

7th: A most lively day especially in the air
About 10 p.m. Fritz began to bombard us with gas shells keeping it up for four hours. We had a busy & anxious time many "gassed" patients coming in. It is an experience of its own to work & wear gas helmets at the same time.
About midnight it commenced to rain & by dawn Fritz went quiet & we went to sleep, absolutely tired out.
One of our cars came to the A.D.S. to fetch wounded, thus being about the first British Motor Ambulance to enter Liévin.

8th: An exceptionally quiet day not a plane seen & little or no bombardment in the morning during the whole of which a steady down pour of rain occurred.
Had about fifty wounded or shell gas cases through, none very serious.
Met a French R.A.M.C. Sergeant in the village. He was looking at the remains of his house. Rather a pathetic leave to have.

9th: Warm again. Great aerial & artillery activity.

10th: Rumours of one or two spies being at work.
I wonder "Was that French R.A.M.C. Serg't genuine." If not I have had a chance of £10 & a month's leave & thrown it away. I'll wait for the next I bet.
Rec'd a letter from Edith. First for six or seven weeks. Thought she had gone & married a munition worker. What a difference the receipt of a letter makes to ones feelings on this job.

11th: We have been busy cutting a hole through the cellar wall of the chateau on to the road. It is more than 4' through the wall. It will save a great deal of exposure to shell fire.
Sgt Collins & two men awarded the "Military Medal" for good work during their tour of line work. Well done!

12th: Had a gas (shell) alarm last night, turned all the bearers out, who had a bit of a “beno” getting lost in the wood while wearing their helmets & collecting “gassed” patients.

Finished the new entrance to the dressing room.

Rather a busy day, & still very warm & close.

Heavy bombardment about 9 p.m.

13th Sunday: A great deal of straffing was done by Fritz.

The Colonel was wounded in the head while leaving Sgt Millard's bearer post.

Fortunately it was not serious. Cap'n Miller went down as o/c being relieved by Cap'n Harris. C.O. evacuated to No 1 C.C.S.

Everyone has got the “breeze up” more or less.

Slight shower of welcome & refreshing rain at night.

14th: One of the quietest days & nights we have had since coming here.

The silence of the guns relieved by the singing of the birds is almost eerie & no one likes it much. Of course tis a relief but too good to last.

15th: Fritz sent plenty of stuff over at intervals.

A dull & cool day.

16th: Three salvos from Fritz before dinner & then peace for the rest of the day. What has happened?

Everyone is wondering what is the matter. Has he gone to Lens? Is he coming over to us?

Quietness is awful.

17th: Still very quiet. Reinforcements coming up to night. Wonder what is coming off to night. Believe he will get a dose of our “Rum”?

Heavy bombardment on the right at 12 midnight.

Heard that two men dressed as French soldiers had been arrested as spies.

I wonder if the man I was talking to was one.

If so I deserve kicking for letting such a chance slip through my fingers.

18th: Should have been relieved but was not. Much livelier all round.

19th: Rather quiet again. Relief arrived at 4 p.m. Started down to H'dQ's at 6 p.m. & had a bad journey. How on earth Warner, “Tango” & myself got through I do not know. Took refuge in a cellar.

Everything at Aix Noulette looked gloriously green & fresh it was like coming to Arcadia.

How nice to feel at liberty to move about again.

20th Sunday: Nothing much doing. Had an easy day of it quite a treat.

21st: Sgt Warner went on leave. Things look brighter now.

Fritz bombarded the hospital & village at 8 p.m. wounding seven of our men five of whom had done three weeks in the danger zone & just come down for a rest.

Luckily no one was killed but two were rather badly wounded. Three of them were out of A Section.

All personnel left the tents & slept in the cellars again, passing a quiet night.

22nd: A dull & wet day. Things rather quiet.

Rumours of an attack not far from here & also of the French coming into the limelight again.

23rd: Went with an advance party & took over an A.D.S. in Maroc. Had a busy & trying time.

24th: Preparations made for dealing with a large number of casualties.

At 7 p.m. the attack was launched. It was a wonderful sight from here to see the shells bursting & the stuff going sky high.

From 7 p.m. onwards casualties rolled in including one or two wounded Bosches.

25th: Still busy at it. At 11-12 noon the Bosche put up a terrible barrage on the trench we took from him.

He counter attacked & retook it. More casualties in the afternoon, including Bosche R.A.M.C. man.

Fritz shelled the village wounding badly seven of the Australians of which this place is full.

They are very careless & ask for trouble by loitering in groups about the streets & not wearing their steel helmets.

26th: Rather a quiet day. Took a walk round the Bearers' Posts passing through Petit Loos. It was awfully hot & uncomfortable all day.

27th Whit Sunday: Good news all round.

Heavy bombardment by both sides.

Warm day with a nice breeze blowing.

28th: Nothing of much importance occurred.

29th: Rose at 5.30 & with the Captain made a tour of the Bearer Posts before 8 a.m.

It is much pleasanter and cooler than in the afternoon as well as quieter.

This morning only two shots were fired & those from our guns.

Visited B. Grenay & arranged for relief of posts after tea.

30th: Rather dull & very quiet again. Paid out in afternoon.

31st: Partook of a welcome bath & change.

Warm bright day.

Aerial activity.

JUNE

1st: Delightful weather. Australians have nearly finished knocking three cellars into one for a shelter for our wounded.

They are a fine set of men, tall, well built, mug clean shaven independent & splendid miners.

Rumours of a big "strafe" shortly.

E.C. commenced nursing duties, wonder how her first day's work has gone down & if she will feel very lonely among so many strangers for the first time in her life.

Note, Edith?

2nd: Men relieved at Posts. Rumours that Fritz has gas in his front line.

3rd Sunday: Cellars finished, now we can accommodate a few wounded in safety.

Delightful day again.

4th: Rather a quiet day. Expecting a "strafe" to come off here before long. Awfully hot & close.

5th: Fritz bombarded this village hitting our dressing station. We took to the cellars & just finished transferring the dressing room equipment when the A.D.M.S. paid us a visit. Fritz made a tidy mess of the place but fortunately no-one was hit.

6th: Exceptionally hot day. Heavy bombardment on our right all last night. Things here as usual.

7th: "Stunt" coming off here tomorrow.

Captain treated two of us to a lovely pork chop for supper. It was grand, after which we played him & Lt Jack at Auction Bridge right up till midnight.

A most pleasant evening.

8th: Fritz shelled this place again, no damage.

Rats etc kept me awake all night. Showery evening.

9th: Busy up till 10 a.m. when all was reported clear.

Relieved Sg't Millard at B. Grenay. Hope twill be a nice change for I have had enough line work for a bit.

10th Sunday: Good news from all quarters.

Terrible bombardment in the evening.

11th: Heavy thunderstorms in early morning followed by a delightful afternoon & evening.

Had a nice letter from Edith. Wonder when my turn for leave will come.

12th: Nothing of much importance occurred.

13th: Weather glorious. Strawberries, roses, etc are growing in profusion round about.

14th: Spent a delightful hour & a half listening to the band playing. It is a treat to hear a bit of good music once again.
Fritz shelled Les Brebis.

15th: More shells from Fritz dropped nearby. Raid last night went off well. Few casualties.

16th: Nothing of much importance occurred. Vivid lightning & heavy thunder.

17th Sunday: Extremely hot again, about the warmest day of the year. Met an old friend & spent a pleasant half hour. Rumours of all sorts.

18th: Had a few wounded men of the IX Lancers in. A Cavalry B'de are out digging every night. Went by car to Petit Sains about sun-rise. It was glorious. Fritz shelled us a bit in the morning, no damage done.
Heavy thunderstorms.

26th: Had a little news of coming events in this quarter.

27th & 28th: Weather bitterly cold & wet. Nothing of much importance occurred.

29th: More thunderstorms. Bombing raids again. Fritz must be getting the wind up a bit for we are worrying him to death.

30th: Heavy shelling of Bully station by Fritz in the early morning. Went to La Beuvriere for a few hours. Wet day. Expect a strafe tomorrow. Many bearers gone up.

JULY

1st: Heavy bombardment in the morning. We have attacked & at Pont Grenay they are having a busy time. Is it a repetition of July 1st 1916?
All sorts of rumours are current as to where this Div'n is going after this stunt. Some say Boulogne, Calais or St Omer, while the latest is Ireland.
One thing is certain as a Div'n after last night's affair we cannot be any good for defence or attack. "Nous verrons".

2nd Sunday: More casualties still coming in. Weather bad for operations. 2nd & 5th S. Foresters have had it in the neck.
Relieved from Pont Grenay by Canadians. Move tomorrow.

3rd: Marched away at 12 noon for La Beuvriere passing through Verquin, Fouquières & Fouquereuil where we were twenty months ago.
A terribly hot day, nearly killed us. Absolutely the hardest march I've done in France. Found a decent billet & slept between sheets for the second time in France.

4th: More rain in the morning. Did not get up till 8 o'clock. Oh! my poor feet. Attended a good concert at night in the recreation hall & enjoyed it immensely. Talk about laugh its long enough since I did half as much.

5th: Rather dull day. Prospects of going on leave a little brighter than before. Heard that Frank was back in "Blighty" in hospital & Will on a month's leave. Went through the fields at night. T was grand.

6th: Had a nice walk before breakfast & a swim before dinner enjoying both immensely. Attended the cavalry horse jumping display etc. glorious afternoon & evening spoilt by one officer getting thrown & badly injured. Exceptionally hot all day. Bosche plane came over but did not bomb us.

7th: A lovely day but awfully close at night. Spent a pleasant evening.

8th Sunday: Awful thunderstorm in the early morning, the lightning being exceptionally vivid. The worst storm I remember for a long while.

9th: Very dull & wet day. Nothing much doing.

10th: Still unsettled. Not much prospects of getting away on leave yet. Much material & troops going up the line. Expect a big attack before long.

11th: Beautiful day. Had a lovely swim. Rumours of stoppage of leave. More troops gone up.

12th: Acting A.D.M.S. inspected hospital. Very hot again. Still more troops passed & other stuff for a **Do**. More swimming & walking.

13th & 14th: Nothing of much importance occurred. Still very hot though.

15th Sunday: Service in the afternoon. Walk to Marles after tea.

16th: Hope to go on a month's leave tomorrow.

17th: Left Chocques at 2.20 for Boulogne & Blighty arriving at the former at 8.20 p.m. after a warm journey. Had a decent night rest, much better than the last time I came home.

18th: Left for Folkestone at 9.0 a.m. arriving at 11 a.m., Victoria 2 p.m. Went to find Frank at Balham & missed him. Arrived home again at 8 p.m. How good it is to be home again. What a treat.

19th & 20th: Nothing of much importance.

21st & 22nd: Visited Manchester, Liverpool & New Brighton. Had a good time with a friend.

23rd: Paid a visit to Chester & had a trip up the river Dee to Eccleston ferry, then a walk to Eaton Hall & grounds & nice trip back to Chester & Birkenhead. The river trip is one of the prettiest trips I have had & I enjoyed it immensely, so did my friend. We were also delighted in the old world buildings & the historical associations of the town. What a never to be forgotten day.

24th: Visited one or two museums & then went to a beautiful park at night. Said Goodbye.

25th: Left for home via G.W.R. passing through most delightful scenery. Altogether I have had a glorious week end but am a little disappointed at a few things which occurred.

26th: Met Will who is also home for a month. He has just ret'd from his honeymoon. Spent a pleasant afternoon on the canal at Tettenhall.

27th: Paid a visit to relations & friends at B'ham.

28th: Will ret'd to France at night.

29th Sunday: Attended a good church service again at St Peter's & Tettenhall.

AUGUST

July 30th until Aug 5th: Weather very unsettled hardly got out of doors so to speak.

6th & 7th: Spent at Birmingham & visited many scenes & places familiar with my childhood. How they are changed.

8th to 11th: Nothing of much importance occurred.

12th: Visited Tettenhall old church. Went in the choir just like old times.

13th: Birmingham again. A good time.

14th: Nothing much doing.

15th & 16th: Went to L'pool & New Brighton had a real good time.

17th: Busy packing up & paying flying farewell visits. Pleasant sing song at home in the evening.

18th: Said Goodbye to all at home & spent the night with some friends in London.

19th: Left Victoria Station & spent a few hours in Folkestone. It is a delightful place. Had a good crossing & slept at rest camp Boulogne. My months leave is o'er! I have had a good time & am thankful for a rest from all the sights & sounds of WAR.

20th: Left in the early morning & reached La Bourse 1 p.m. Beautiful day but slow travelling.
Heard that Cap'n Harris had been killed.

21st: Took over hospital duties but they went down a bit hard.
Again it is nice to be back amongst the boys but not to leave the English girls.

22nd: Glorious weather. Bombs dropped near here at night.

23rd: Change in the weather.

24th: "B" Section returned from line duty.
Expect to go to an A.D.S. on Sunday next.

25th: "B" Section took over the hospital.

26th: Packed up before dinner. Marched to Cambrin & took over the A.D.S. It is a fine place well set up & apparently not much doing.

27th: Rained nearly all day. No casualties.

28th: D.A.D.M.S. paid us a visit. Strong wind.

29th: Visited bearer posts & line trenches, also new sector. Uncannily quiet everywhere.
Fritz straffed a little in the evening.

30th: Still wet & cold. HdQ's at La Bourse were shelled. Lt Clarke killed & a few wounded.

31st: Showery day. Visited "Bearer Posts". Trenches lined with beautiful, many coloured wild flowers.

SEPTEMBER

1st: No rain for a wonder. Went on night duty at A.D.S.

2nd: Beautiful night. Heavy bombardment. Fritz came over on a raid.

3rd: Better weather but bitter cold. More Straffing.

4th: One of the brightest days for weeks. It would be A1 by the sea today, I know. Great aerial activity saw a fight in the air & one or two planes fell.

5th: Nothing of much importance occurred.

6th: Visited bearer posts & got a little shelling. Awfully close. Thunderstorms at night, very violent.

7th: Heard that some of our men had been relieved by P.B. men & wonder if we get served likewise.

8th: 25th Birthday. Spent a pleasant evening in our little dug out.

9th: Nothing of any importance.

10th: Beautiful day.

11th: Raid on our front at night.

12th: Much cooler.

13th: Went on day duty. Colonel paid us a visit.

14th: Glorious sunset. Lively evening bombardment.

15th: More straffing by Fritz.

16th: Party of bearers came up. Fritz gave a good send off. Party of Americans visited. A.D.S. taking film photographs. It was a glorious day & I had just had a bath & was enjoying the sunshine in my birthday suit. Rumour has it that I am on film What a Joke!

17th: Men up again. Nothing doing.

18th: Rumours of a move to a place we do not like.

19th: Absolutely glorious day. Much artillery & aircraft activity. Visited Bearer Posts.

20th: Reported at La Bourse & took over duty at M.D.S. Lovely weather still.

21st: Section Officer went on leave. Rather a busy day. Found pleasant billet.

22nd: Aerial activity.

23rd: Most beautiful sunset.

24th: Nothing much doing.

25th: Lovely day. Rather quiet.

26th: Paid a visit to Chocques.

27th: Had a pleasant half day in Béthune. It has been knocked about a great deal by enemy shelling.

28th & 29th: Nothing.

30th: Went to Béthune en route for Arques. Fritz busy bombing.

OCTOBER

1st: Had a pleasant run by motor to Hosp'l near St.Omer. Fritz did a little damage here last night.

2nd: Glorious day. Rec'd glasses & ret'd to La Bourse. More visits from Fritz at night.

3rd: Nothing of much importance occurred.

4th: Went to Béthune in afternoon. Stormy weather.

5th: Attended lecture at Noeux les Meines.

6th: Heavy fall of rain. Visited Cinema at night.

7th: Very bad weather. Ord'y Serg't. Reversion to ord'y time again.

8th: Typical autumn day. Saw a wedding party march from the church. Rather quaint I thought, Bride in white silk, remainder in black, save 'groom.

9th: Visit by G.O.C. & A.D.M.S.

10th: More rain

11th: Nothing of importance occurred.

12th: Bosche plane over in early morning.

13th: Americans visited transport lines. More rain.

14th: Nothing much doing. Paid out.

15th: Brighter weather

16th: Two old members of our unit & now of the 2nd line paid us a visit.

17th: Nothing of much moment occurred.

18th: A day in Béthune.

19th: Some strange events happened in the unit.

20th: Beautiful weather.

21st: **2nd**. F.Ambce bombed. Bright & fresh all day.
Witnessed an air fight. German brought down near Philosophe.

22nd: Showery day. Bombs on Noeux l' Meines at night.

23rd: Wet miserable day. Issue of winter clothing.

24th: League match. We won 3-2.

25th: Strong gale, bitter cold. Marching parade.

26th: Bad weather. Good news from the French front.

27th: A large circle visible around the moon at night. Aerial activity.

28th: Attended early service.

29th: Nothing important occurred.

30th: All ranks classified A or B category. A lot of "BREEZE" about.

31st: Plenty of aerial activity. Paid in the evening.

NOVEMBER

1st: Almost all the French people seemed to be going to church, & no-one worked voluntarily. People were fetching chairs from the estaminets & taking to church.

NOTE. The commemoration of Toussaint in **France**. **French** people commemorate their dead on the **1st of November**. The catholic tradition makes a distinction between Toussaint (All Saints' Day, on the **1st of November**) from the "Commémoration des fidèles défunts" (All Soul's day, on the 2nd of **November**).

2nd: Nothing of much importance occurred. Football, lost 4-2.

3rd: Nothing to report.

4th: Attended a pleasant evening church service.

5th: Paid a visit to that amiable gentleman "The Dentist". Rumours of a move.

6th: Took over night duty at the hospital.

7th: One of our men came down wounded.

8th: Expect to move to Fouquières in a few days where we were two years ago.

9th: Orders to move with advance party tomorrow.

10th: Paid in morning. Troops merry & bright when we march away.

11th: Had a fairly busy day looking round new quarters. What a change from when we occupied these same billets in Oct. 1915. Who thought that we should be here again in two years time.

12th: Heavy bombardment.

13th: Bombardment continues. Ugly rumours afloat. L'Col'l Stidston paid us a visit.

14th: Nothing of much importance occurred.

15th – 16th: Ditto

17th: Attended a 1st class divisional Pierrot troupe at Max Theatre Béthune augmented by artistes from Paris, a grand show.

18th: Sergts v. M.T.S. Great excitement, Sergs L, 7-2.

19th – 21st: No entries.

22nd: Very good concert in the evening.

23rd: A delightful entertainment given by 11th Div'l pierrot troupe.

24th: Glorious day.

25th: Attended two pleasant services. Sgts. Played 1st F.A. Sgts. We lost 5-1. Béthune shelled badly.

26th: Paid a pleasant visit to Labeuvriere.

27th: Rather a busy day. Full marching order parade. No mail.

28th: Two Sg'ts went to school of instruction.

29th: Béthune heavily shelled.

30th: A fine smoking concert arranged & a pleasant evening was spent in Rec. room. Two straw ricks caught fire & proved a counter attraction.

DECEMBER

1st: Much colder

2nd: A beautiful bright & breezy day.

On Friday, the news of Cap'n. Miller's promotion to the command of ½ N.M.F.A. was made public amidst demons'ns of pleasure & regret.

3rd: Lt. Col Miller left us to take over his next duties.

4th: Sharp, frosty day. More bomb dropping by Fritz.

5th: Ditto

6th: Ditto. Number of men going on leave increased.

7th: Frost broke up. Béthune shelled very heavily indeed.

8th: Very mild.

9th: Rained heavily all day.

10th: G.O.C. inspected transport. C.O. had a conference with senior N.C.O.'s on the new War Savings certificates.

Note. War savings certificates were introduced by the government in June 1916. They were designed to be simple, down-to-earth and affordable for ordinary people. A £1 certificate cost 15s 6d to buy and could be redeemed, free of income tax, five years later.

<https://www.rbsremembers.com/remembers/banking-in-wartime/supporting-the-nation/war-savings-certificates.html>

11th: Lectures given by C.O. on War Savings Certificates.

12th: Whist drive at night. Béthune bombed.

13th: A dull miserable day.

14th: More marching order parades.

15th: Beautiful day. Spent morning in Béthune. More bombs at night.

16th: Nothing unusual to report.

17th: Xmas mail began to arrive. Snowed all morning. Sharp frost at night.

18th: Bright, frosty day. Bombs dropped on the church & post office in the town nearby.

19th: Glorious weather. Four new officers arr'd.

20th: Preparations for Xmas Day being made.

21st: Nothing of much importance occurred.

22nd: Béthune systematically bombed at 5p.m. It was a beautiful yet terrible sight & the reports of the explosions awful.

23rd: A repetition of last nights dirty work.
Had a nice motor ride to Allouagne.

24th: Preparations completed for tomorrow. Thaw set in.

25th **Christmas Day**: Very mild till dinner time. Wind changed & snow fell thickly at 7 p.m. thus putting the finishing touch to the "Day".

26th: Quiet day. Had our dinner at 6 p.m. Very tasty & enjoyed by all. Singing & music until 2 a.m. A most happy evening & one to be remembered.

27th: More snow & frost. A few headaches were spoken about.

28th: More snow.

29th: A good entertainment given at night.

30th: Thaw, followed by frost.

1917 December

31st: Nothing doing in the day. Sat up & had a sing song & smoke until 1 a.m.

Sparkling Foam sunk 15th March 1918 Yahoo/Bulk file

Note for January

All I know is from Grandad's family tree - it says he married Elsie on the 1st August 1921, and married Lil on 15th August 1929.

NOTE: After 17th August 1917, Grandad writes only in his small pocket diary and

There are no more notebook entries.....Not so much is recorded. Mostly about the weather, or good times! I wonder after being at home for a month, did he then find it quite difficult being back at war, and he grew tired of writing and recording his thoughts and observations about what he was witnessing, especially the awful stuff? Or maybe there was not so much going on? Or is it just a missing notebook? We will never know!

There are no notebook entries in 1918 until October, the day John returned to France after a period of leave. We wonder if after being at home for a month, did he then find it quite difficult being back at war, and he grew tired of writing and recording his thoughts and observations about what he was witnessing, especially the awful stuff? Or was his 1918 diary confiscated by MPs on his way back? Or maybe

there was not so much going on? Or is it just a missing notebook? We will never know! But when October arrives I will post the remainder of the diaries.

In the meantime Frank Ward and Kathryn will continue to post Kens diary entries, they were so close together that Kens experience will have been similar to Johns.