

Sergeant William Frederick Osborne
4th Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
Diary kept in his Field Message Book covering the period Aug-Nov 1914

War v Germany

War declared 4-8-14

13 August 1914:

Left Newport for Cowes. Had long halt in Cowes.
Treated well by inhabitants, good send off.
Arrived Southampton about 12.30 after unloading boat embarked at once on
SS MARTABAN.
Left 6.15, after uneventful voyage arrived at Havre, France 13-8-14.
No beer. No blankets. (unreadable word) to eat. Huddled on board SS like
sardines.

14 August: Reveille 3 am after a fitful night sleep. Took on board French
pilot shortly afterwards who piloted ship into Havre harbour.
Splendid place. Got fine reception especially from French troops, our own
sang Marseillaise many times.
Disembarked about 6 am without incident and waited in big store shed
until disembarkation was complete.
Fell in. Marched to No 8 Rest Camp. About 9 miles. What a march. RF
leading, RSF¹ in rear.
About 40 fell out. Chiefly reservists who are getting out of hand
already.
Come to conclusion Begley damn fool. Wallace very bad.
Marched well myself (unreadable word) feel very tired.
People of France very glad to see us, splendid ovation from them.
Rifle and feet inspection. Lights out 9.45.
During evening French ladies brought many flowers to camp and distributed
them to officers and others.
Terrible thunder storm during night. Horses broke loose. Troops who were
in open wet through, under cover myself.

15 August

Reveille 5 am. Breakfast 6 am. Pitched camp in rain after breakfast.
Moved into same.
Raining all day. Everything wet through.
Troops singing all day.
Heard rumours of English troops doing good work in firing line especially
1st battalion (unreadable) - unconfirmed.
Done nothing all day.
Played bridge tonight and lost.
Part of 9th Brigade moved to destination (unreadable) after tea.
Expect to move ourselves in morning.
Got badly bitten by mosquitos. Right (unreadable word) and left arm
swollen badly.
Troops very lively especially (unreadable).
Many French visitors in camp, especially ladies.
Heard Japan at war v. Germany.
Bad night's rest. Rained nearly all night. Had straw in tents.

¹ Osborne used RF for Royal Fusiliers and RSF stood for Royal Scots Fusiliers who were also embarked aboard the
MARTABAN.

Sunday 16 August

Reveille 6 am breakfast 7 am (no milk in tea). Still raining.
Paraded at 9 am. Marched back to Havre. After waiting there until 3.30 entrained and started our journey towards Belgium frontier in cattle trucks with one little oil lamp and 30 in a truck.
Most awful journey.
Stopped at every big station and received a fine ovation from the inhabitants who gave us tobacco, flowers, fruit etc.

Monday 17 August.

Stopped at Rouen at 8 am. Had coffee - very bad stuff.
Entrained again about 8.30 am. Very bad night's rest.
Arrived at LANDRECIES about 8.30 am.
Troops very tired and worn out after journey.
Marched from LANDRECIES to Noyelles (6 miles) and billeted in barns etc.
Rotten place. Can buy nothing scarcely.
Had several inspections during the day and managed to get some beer, few people here who are very generous.
Officers getting more like bullies every hour. Had nothing to eat but bully and biscuits during the last 48 hours.
Went to bed about 10 pm.

Tuesday 18 August

Had good night's rest. Reveille 5.45.
Breakfast 7 am. Bread. Bacon. Tea - no milk.
Parade at 8 am. Did drill in a field nearby until 9 am.
RFC² motor transport went by.
Paraded for route march at 11 am.
Whilst on parade ASC³ Motor transport passed us.
Only went about 2.5 miles out.
Had swim in the afternoon.
Several aeroplanes passed over towards Belgian frontier this afternoon.
Having inspection after tea.
N.B. Rumoured staying here till Thursday.
Strange to say no war news available.
Nothing happened during evening.
Noyelles sold out of tobacco and matches.
Strolled about village all night. Bed about 10pm.

Wednesday 19 August.

Same programme as yesterday except (unreadable word) route march 9 am about 6 miles. Very hot.
Had several inspections after parade.
Troops trying to learn French rather a failure.
Village sold out.
Bed about 9.30 pm
Very cold at night.

Thursday 20 August

Reveille 5.45. Breakfast 7 am.
March to TAISNAIRES about 2.5 miles. Very hot marching.
Dinner- boiled meat and bread. Tea jam and bread.
Brigade route march. 2.30 pm. About 7 miles. Very hot.
Returned to billet in barn about 5.30 pm. No inspection.
Paying out but too late.

² RFC - Royal Flying Corps.

³ ASC - Army Service Corps.

Had swim in evening.
Rumoured that 2500 French are hors de combat; got caught in pass.
Also that we have 90 miles to march during next 7 days.
Battalion in state of constant readiness.
Expect to move at 5 minutes notice. Awful suspense.
Hear we shall be in action probably tomorrow.
Everything very quiet.
Two letters from home, one dated 12-8-14 the other 14-8-14.
Expected one from (unreadable) but no success.
Settled down to sleep 9.30 pm fully dressed.
Battalion rather widely distributed, very inconvenient.
Detail being given out now. Reveille 3.30.
Breakfast 4 am unless alarm goes.

Friday 21 August

Marched from TAISNAIRES to La Longueville. About 12 miles.
Good march. Billeted in school. Plenty of news re Germans, but saw none.
Stayed the night billeted in school.
Nothing of importance happened.

Saturday 22 August.

Left La L. at 5am.
Marched to NIMY north of Mons about 16 miles.
X Company advance guard.
Road all the way paved with cobbles, made marching very hard.
Passed over battle field of Malplaquet.
People very enthusiastic. Reached Mons. Everywhere en fete at Anglaise soldiers.
Hear Germans near have killed 10 horses. We captured 5 Germans and killed 10 (MX)⁴.
Went on out post duty with number 6 platoon. Lots of firing on flanks in woods but saw nothing.
Relieved by MX about 3 pm.
Inhabitants gave us dinner tobacco, bread, almost anything they had.
Returned to Nimy station for night billet.
Barricaded High Street NIMY with railway sleepers in case Capt Ashburner now on outpost is forced to retire.
In the evening visited several houses for the purpose of raising a barricade if necessary with Lt Bagley.
German aeroplane flew over about 6 pm - fired on by many troops but got away.
Filed up for beer. No ration issued, bought our own if we did not have them issued.
Good night's rest until about 5 am.

Sunday 23 August

No letters, much looked forward to.
Orders to move at 15 minutes notice.
One Belgian civilian shot through foot by German stray bullet.
Got up at 5am. Got our own breakfast where we could (unreadable)
Inhabitants very good. Still gave us anything they had.
Orders to move at 15 minutes notice.
Artillery fire started all round.
Thought our own but soon found mistake.
No casualties up to now.
Middle of morning German officer brought in wounded.

⁴ MX – Middlesex battalion.

Action apparently commenced.
All platoons out to reinforce outpost except no. 6 platoon.
Hearing that hundreds of Germans are being killed.
Wounded being brought rapidly to the dressing station.
But no definite news yet.
Ordered to retire all platoons. No. 6 to hold on to last moment.
All retired except ourselves.
Saw hordes of Germans and opened fire.
Several Germans from line on right dressed in khaki overcoats - didn't recognise them so held fire. But soon recognized mistake.
Shortage of men.
Wonder when we are going to retire.
Ordered to retire and did so under murderous fire through MX lines holding barriers.
Got back but lost 2 men (Lineham, Manser - transcriber not certain of names)
Retired about 4 miles and bivouacked in some private grounds.
[transcriber: note in margin of diary reads: NIMY 8 killed 13 wounded 16 missing. Outpost company heavily pressed.]

Monday 24 August

Got up at 2 am, very cold.
Did night march to position south west Mons.
Soon got into action and took up another position preparatory rear guard action.
Many exciting times.
Not many casualties in R. Fusiliers.
No rations issued.
Chief in (unreadable) water.
Long march back until after 10 pm when we arrived in cornfield and slept amongst corn out at BERMERIES.
Marching very hard. Also retirement.
NF⁵ many casualties. Also MX and Scots Fusiliers.
Very pitiful to see inhabitants leaving their homes.
Heard that we get 48 hour rest.
Also that French army is near.

Tuesday 25 August

Moved off at 5 am.
Marched about 20 miles.
No casualties. Reached INCHY about 5 pm and billeted.
Hear German army 4 miles off. Also that French army has joined up.
Two companies on outpost.
Moved at 10 pm nearer outpost line to fresh billets and slept in equipment.
Wet through as got caught in thunder storm about 4 pm.
Opened fire on German aeroplane and brought it down.
Both airmen killed.

26 August

Got on move at 6 am and relieved outpost line.
Withdrawn soon afterwards and entrenched position north of INCHY, waiting to go into action.
Shells bursting all round. Artillery duel going on.
Many casualties already through shrapnel.
Hell let loose at least it seems like it.

⁵ NF – Northumberland Fusiliers.

Feet very bad myself and very tired. (1020 pm)
Under heavy artillery fire.
One shell burst amongst RF and did much damage, others passed harmlessly over trenches.
Reports arrive that French are on our right.
Also that they have captured CAMBRIA.
Germans losing heavily and retiring.
RFs in reserve.
Hear that Cheshires are wiped out except 1 officer and 2 men
Also RSF and (unreadable) suffered heavily.
Dinner of boiled mutton in firing line. Lull in firing about midday.
Think we are (unreadable) easily.
About 3 pm ordered to retire at once. All German artillery concentrated on us.
Retirement fairly orderly under circumstances.
RF as usual in rear doing all retiring action.

Thursday 27 August

Marched in heavy rain until 12 noon. Had 1.5 hours halt and moved on again.
General line of retirement south.
Had halt at 10 am. Many fell out on march. Very wet and bad for marching.
Halt till 1pm given out. No rations issued except 2 biscuits and jam and bacon per man.
Hear Germans are near at 1130 and move to again fight retiring action (3.40)
Note: Still retiring with NFs.
General (unreadable) directing operations.
Rain has ceased, but very dull.
Inhabitants still leaving their houses. Very pitiful sight.
Feet very bad- had boots on since 22-8-14.
Got into billet in field about 6 pm and rested until 12 midnight.
Awful time of it. Men sticking it well. Marched miles with nothing to eat.

Friday 28 August

Moved off 12 midnight. Marched all night and all the next day with exception of entrenching one operation for rearguard.
(unreadable) as usual there at HAM. Most awful time.
Dinner (unreadable) eaten marching through HAM.
Marched all afternoon still going south.
Saw no Germans all day but hear they are near.
Billet about 7 pm. Had supper of boiled chicken etc between three. Also breakfast.
Officers say we have broken record of marching.
Message received from Secretary of State for War congratulations.
Had good night's rest.

Note:

Passed French cavalry in afternoon.
Hear that our second line transport is captured including all (unreadable) staff.
No food practically for 3 days.
Our cavalry did good work.
We did little fighting the last 3 days but were always ready.
R.Fs always rearguard.
Many men fell out on the march and were brought in by motor.
Own feet very bad. Roll on England.

Saturday 29 August

Reveille 6am.

Good breakfast at cottage (eggs etc).

Order given to remain here all day.

Later order to move at 2 pm.

French in action about 6 miles north.

Hear gun fire quite nearby.

1100 orders to get ready to move at (unreadable) minutes notice.

Fell in and started retiring southwest.

4th battalion formed rear guard to (unreadable).

Waited until nearly dark at CRISOLLE (sp? CROSELLES?).

Germans Uhlans (unreadable) opened fire on 5 but only saw one empty saddle.

Retired under cover of darkness.

Passed through Lincolns and RIR⁶ barricading roadside etc.

Marched till 2-30 am Sunday and halted in a field for one hour.

Sunday 30 August

Moved on to town of CUTZ.

Had tea only in street.

Moved off again. Very hot. Marched till 10 am.

Heard bridges blown up in rear over Seine.

Halted till 3 pm and moved on again until billets were reached.

Estimate marched about 170 miles during last week.

Monday 31 August

Reveille at 5 am. Breakfast 5-45.

Moved off at 7 am. Retire south.

Several messages read from Smith Dorrien and French and (unreadable).

Very hot day.

(unreadable)

Marched off again at 1 pm. Still going south.

Had splendid reception going through towns.

Reached VANCHELIERS.

Billeted in sugar factory.

Got into single men's quarters and bed alright.

Very trying march, hot and dusty roads.

Letters from (unreadable) 18-8-14.

Hear that Guards bayonnetted the Germans during a night attack at LANDRECIES.

Troops at present cooking their own dinner as fresh meat was issued this morning.

Many men fell out on march.

German aeroplane flew over this morning but did not fire at it as it was out of range.

We were rested on side of road.

Tuesday 1 Sep

Reveille 3 am. Breakfast 4 am.

Waited until 6 am before moving off.

During time waiting had message read of 12th Lancers victory, two French victories and (unreadable) victory.

Hear that German cavalry are near so take up observation line and wait until about 12 noon then march off, still retiring.

See nothing of enemy.

⁶ RIR - Royal Irish Regiment.

Stopped in village in open all night.
Got there about 7 pm after a very tiring march.
Ordered to sleep with arms and equipment handy ready to move between 12 and 1 am.

Wednesday 2 Sep

Didn't move until 4.30 am.
Did long and trying march in heat till 1130.
At present having one hour's halt for dinners.
Moved on after dinners and billeted the night at PENCHARD.
Half of X Company on outpost (no. 7 and 8 platoons).

Thursday 3 Sep

Reveille 4.45. Moved off at 6.35.
Had long halts during the first two hours out.
Lt Hartes (sp of name?) says we are shortly to take up position to give battle.
Marched on through town of MEAUX and NANTIELS.
All bridges at MEAUX blown up after we have passed them.
After much delay got into billet about 4.30 pm
One Section of my platoon on outpost.
Passed by enormous orchard of apples, peaches and pears.
Had good night's rest. Hear that we are entrenching all day tomorrow to give decisive battle to enemy.
Heard no big guns firing today for first time since 22nd August.
German aeroplane flew over about 6 pm - was opened fire on by troops but failed to bring it down.
Probably out of range. Hear that artillery brought it down but didn't hear it go off.

Friday 4 Sep

Reveille 5 am. Breakfast 6 am. No rations issued.
Ordered to stand by until orders are given to march off (now 7.15 am).
Moved at 2.30 pm but only about 1 mile then stayed there until about 10.30 pm.

Saturday 5 Sep

Marched off in northerly direction till 7.30. Arrived in billet.
Very bad road.
First reinforcements arrived and posted to C Company (except Sgt L [name unreadable]).
German aeroplane passed over about 7pm 4-9-14. Fired at it but did not bring it down.
Another passed over this Saturday morning but did not fire at it.
Good billet, purchased plenty of food. No bread issued. [CHATRES]
Rested all day.

Sunday 6 Sep

Reveille 4.45 breakfast 5.15. Move off 6.30 am.
Biscuits and bully issued.
Marched about 2 miles and rested at side of road waiting until we are wanted.
Hear heavy firing on our right.
Ourselves advance again in north-east direction.
(unreadable) on right.
5th Division on left.
4th RF advance guard to right column of 3rd Division.
Captain Carey bullying platoon commanders again.

General French (unreadable)
Inhabitants stopped trying to pass us.
(unreadable) and put under escort. (Time 1 pm).
Waited till 2.30 pm and moved off in direction of north west LUMIGNY.
Hear that 1st Army Corps is engaged with enemy and that enemy is retiring.
Ordered to proceed to Lumigny and if possible cut off enemy.
My platoon advance points.
Arrived there but saw nothing of enemy.
Waited about until dusk and then billeted in barn at LUMIGNY for night.
During day one woman and child shot by Germans believed to be a mistake while firing at some stragglers of our own.
1st Lancers did good work.
Germans have retired.
Great difficulty in getting water as we are afraid it is poisoned by Germans.

Monday 7 Sep

Reveille 5 am. Breakfast 6 am.
Bully and biscuits and (tea and sugar and iron ration) issued only.
Heard firing since 3 am this morning.
Did half hours skirmishing and fire and movement within full view of enemy under Captain (name unreadable) (9.30) Standing by waiting for orders.
Moved off about 2 pm going through several villages looted by the Germans.
About 100 reinforcements joined up.
Got into a field about 7.30 pm and stayed the night.
Rum issued, had a good sleep.

Tuesday 8 Sep

Moved about 5 am. Hadn't got far before we were on enemy's track and opened fire on him as he was crossing a road across our front.
Germans defending a river.
NF and RSF many casualties.
RFs in reserve but did not do anything.
Germans offered a lot of resistance and were severely handled by our artillery.
Enemy retired about 6 pm leaving us in possession of their position.
All towns looted by Germans.
Got into an orchard about 8 pm and stayed the night.
Captured about 40 German prisoners.

Wednesday 9 Sep

Reveille 3 am. Moved to alarm post at 3.30 am.
Had breakfast- bacon, bully, jam, cheese, biscuits, bread and tea issued.
Moved off 5 am. Passing through ORLY which had been looted by enemy.
Lovely place lying in a valley with river running through it.
Germans must have retired in a hurry as they forgot to blow up the main bridge before retiring, but shelled it as soon as we crossed it this morning.
Under shell fire all day (now 3.30 pm) as the Germans are offering a lot of resistance.
Many of the Brigade wounded but none of the RFs yet as we have not been under rifle fire up to now.
Had loaf of German black bread from motor car left by Germans. Jolly good after having so many biscuits.

Battle still raging. Hear that 5th. Division are just coming up on our left.

Have been waiting for them all day (3.45 pm).

Stayed and did outpost duty all night. Heard firing about 2 am.

State of readiness all night. No sleep.

Thursday 10 Sep

Moved off 5 am. Rations issued at road side. But had to leave some as we had no time to pack them.

Started the advance with 4th RF as advance guard.

'D' Company head of (unreadable) Guard.

After marching north about 3 miles came in contact with enemy.

4th RF pushed forward with all speed. C company and half of B took up position on ridge and saw enemy convoy moving away from us.

Also enemy rear guard about 700 yards distance.

Opened rapid fire and column of enemy fled to village near in great disorder.

Lt Bagley and my platoon ordered to advance on left and take up position nearer enemy position and near a wood.

We advanced through the wood and took up position.

Came under very heavy fire.

Lt Bagley shot from rear, also Ruby killed, also (name unreadable) and 5 others wounded.

Ordered to retire.

Retired under my orders, retired and formed up in line with C company and opened fire again on the enemy.

Just after this Lt (name unreadable) shot very near the heart and message arrived from Beagley explaining retirement to Capt Ashburner.

Battalion had many casualties especially C Company.

Enemy retired from village of CREPY in great disorder.

Saw just afterwards enemy showing a white flag about 100 flags in all.

So formed up and advanced through village. Had good victory and captured about 1500 prisoners and many wounded. Enemy left trenches full of dead behind.

Marched about 3 miles to small village and billeted.

(Unreadable) helping wounded to rear.

Friday 11 Sep

Moved about 7 am and marched until about 2 pm.

Nothing exciting happened.

Marched into an orchard and bivouacked

Started to rain and kept on - very miserable.

Lit big fires and got lots of straw to try and keep warm and dry.

Rain stopped about 7 pm. Had a fine night.

Saturday 12 Sep

Moved at 6 am. No rations issued except tea and sugar.

Did a long march towards Braine.

Heard heavy firing the whole time on right and left.

Had a long halt near BRAINE.

Hear that enemy are very near.

Advanced through BRAINE.

Passed over river with about 200 shells (unreadable) of enemy.

Saw (unreadable) fortified by Germans. Passed dead officer and hear that he is Lt Trench. Caught and shot by Germans.

Many wounded passed. Also German prisoners.

4th RF advanced through wood in two lines but saw nothing of enemy who had apparently run away.

On forming up, Private (name unreadable) shot through wrist by stray bullet.
Still heavy firing in distance.
Noticed absence of enemy's big gun fire during the last few days.
Heavy rain all day - roads very bad. Marched to small village - billeted in barn during the night.
No rations issued yet so stewed up some bully and potatoes.

Sunday 13 Sep

(side note: passage of Aisne won)
On parade at 4-30 and fell out to stand by.
Heavy firing going on to right and left.
Ordered to move at 8 am (time now 7 am).
Moved towards SOISSONS and took cover from very heavy gun fire till 6 pm.
Moved on again and found bridge had been built temporarily by Royal Engineers.
Crossed river and did night march towards some high ground at Vallei.
Took up position and fortified it (barn and outbuilding my platoon).
Several shots fired during night (no rations).

Monday 14 Sep

Germans attacked with vigour at day break and did enormous damage with shellfire.
RF in the thick of it. Forced to retire about 10 am. Myself sent to watch right flank and opened fire on by two machineguns of enemy.
Retired a few hundred yards to better cover and stayed there until dusk.
Had awful time all day.
Many casualties including Lt Lett.
Enemy's shell fire and machine gun very deadly.
No artillery support for ourselves until late in the day.
Hear that Royal Engineers cannot bridge river - fire too heavy.
Moved about 7pm to advance into barn previously held during morning and fortified it: loop holes, barricades etc.
Saw Germans in distance by light of big barn very near which is on fire.
Sent with one man by (unreadable) and captured two prisoners with wounded N. Fus.
Took patrol of two men into the back yard and came across 6 Germans getting water.
Called upon them to surrender but they resisted.
Made a stab at one with bayonet but it slipped and he got away wounded but yelling.
Shot one in doorway, one against wall, one in the open, one against a door.
Killed three and wounded one which was afterwards brought behind the barricade and bandaged up with half my first aid bandage.
Slightly wounded myself in left side but able to carry on.
About 12 midnight the Germans attacked and bombarded us with machinegun and rifle fire.
Sent to CO for reinforcements just in time. Remainder of company came up just as attack started.
Most terrible time. Could give no orders as the noise was so great. The Germans were repulsed after about one hour by the remainder of the Battalion.
Rifle fire going on all night.
We retired about 4-30 am next morning to entrenched location.
B Company 3 killed (unreadable) wounded.
"A" company lost 97.

Tuesday 15 Sep

Had rations and (unreadable) issued (full issue) and took cover on side of road in wood. (Time now 8 am).

Artillery duel gang on. Terrific cannonade.

Moved into position at 2 pm and entrenched.

Hear a lot of rifle fire.

My platoon on its own to try to stop flank attack.

Entrenched and had bread and bully to eat.

Firing started about 12 midnight but saw no enemy.

Very thick mist.

Lasted about an hour awful noise.

Don't know of any casualties.

My wound very painful.

Rained the whole night long so got wet through.

Wednesday 16 Sep

Still raining.

Rations issued.

Artillery firing.

Hear that village in rear of us is in ruins. Not a single house standing.

Rain stopped about 8 am. So got to work and improved position.

A lot of sniping going on chiefly on our side.

Saw nothing of enemy except that they are entrenching about 800 away.

French had big success yesterday.

Position of armies in Line: French, ourselves, 1st Army Corps, French.

Had rather a busy day but no firing thank goodness.

Enemy artillery fire very demoralising.

About 10 yards in front of our position is the grave of Lt Collins killed by one of our own shells.

Expect decisive battle at any time. Time 5.30 pm.

Feeling very tired. No proper rest the last 3 days.

Nothing really happened after this.

A lot of shooting took place during the night but saw no enemy.

German siege gun (60lb) on the go all night, no proper rest again.

Feeling more tired than ever.

Party of men left to draw rations at 7 pm and returned at 4 am.

Had full issue of rations.

Thursday 17 Sep

Artillery duel still going on, our own artillery appears to have moved farther round.

Heard nothing of 6th Division up to now.

No fresh development in battle as far as I know. (9 am)

Spent remainder of day improving trenches.

Many alarms.

German heavy gun busy all day.

Stood under arms all night.

Friday 18 Sep

Morning broke fine, very cold but dry.

German gun ceased fire during night.

Party sent for rations last night returned this morning.

Rum, tobacco etc.

Spent day improving trenches.

Lt Watts killed by shell.

Enemy and ourselves doing a lot of artillery fire.

Major (name unreadable) considers there is a big battle raging.

Sniping going on all day. Many alarms.
Hear that RMA⁷ are up in line with us.
My wound much better, though still uncomfortable.
4.30 pm standing under arms.
No attack followed but a lot of sniping was carried on on both sides.
Murderous artillery fire of enemy still raging.
Still in trenches, very cold and wet, no rations.

Saturday 19 Sep

Morning broke fine and cold.
Position appeared the same.
Many false alarms during the day.
Private Kenton shot in hand. Sgt Jarvis shot in arm.
Much firing heard.
Expect Germans to attack at any time.
Attack commenced about 6 pm by enemy.
Very wild attack appeared to be no control of Germans, buglers sounding what seemed like the charge but enemy did not respond.
Managed to beat enemy off after about one hour's hard fighting.
Another attack about 10 pm, but was beaten off.
Stood to arms all night.

Sunday 20th Sep

German big gun fired 4 rounds at 2.45 am as signal apparently for advance to start an attack which started at dawn.
Germans advanced in their thousands but we had the superior position.
German machineguns dangerously near our line but did no damage.
Had about three hours hard fighting and managed to beat them off.
Counted 35 dead Germans on sky line afterwards.
Germans retired to farm nearby.
Much firing going on afterwards.
Saw enemy entrenching gun about 1000 away, all of them walking about and getting picked off by our fellows.
(Unreadable) captured one German prisoner.
Attack cause much excitement.
Our people very cool under fire as the German guns did no damage.
Very few casualties considering the number who attacked us.
Germans have no heart to attack.
Very quiet day.
CO sent message round congratulating troops on splendid work.
Also message from Hamilton and Shaw.
After being in trenches for 8 days and 7 nights we are relieved by the Lincoln Regt.
We slept in Lincolns' trenches well behind the firing line.
Aroused at 1 pm to move further back.

Monday 21 Sep

Marched to Courcelles and billeted in private house.
Had plenty of food but feel knocked up.
Had first wash and shave for 8 days (Time 3 pm).
More reinforcements joined up yesterday.
Note: marched through Aisne and found town in ruins caused by enemy shellfire.
Also smelt very bad.
Bridges had been (unreadable) by RE⁸.

⁷ Abbreviation RMA not known.

⁸ RE – Royal Engineers.

Very trying march as everyone is fatigued owing to having no proper sleep during the last 8 days.

My own feet rather tender.

(Unreadable) better.

Many cigarettes received from (name unreadable) (London).

Précis of splendid order by French Gen 17-9-14.

Expresses deep appreciation of splendid behaviour of troops throughout battle of Aisne (evening 12th -17th).

Battle of Marne (morning 6th- evening 10th).

Ended with flight of enemy.

Immediately brought to (unreadable) with position of extraordinary strength.

13-14 position attacked gallantly by British forces and passage of Aisne affected.

Says he is unable to find adequate words to express admiration for magnificent conduct.

French armies on flanks making good progress.

Says that self-sacrificing devotion and splendid spirit of British Army in France will carry all before it.

Signed French Field Marshal CinC BEF⁹

22 Sep

Had a good nights sleep but woke up during night and heard big gun firing.

The Germans apparently had another try last night to take our position but naturally failed.

Reveille 6 am breakfast 7.30, plenty of rations issued.

Lovely morning. Rested all day.

During the afternoon German aeroplane dropped bomb onto English aeroplane but missed it and did no damage.

Smith Dorrien has been chatting to troops about French and praising them up.

Reinforcements arrived, nearly all under 20. 51 to B Company.

Wednesday 23 Sep

Routine as yesterday.

Rested in same billets all day.

100 shirts and socks issued.

Battalion gradually refitting.

Started (unreadable).

Thursday 24 Sep

Routine as yesterday.

Very busy with rolls etc.

Friday 25 Sep

Routine as yesterday.

Battalion paraded at 5pm and marched to Vallie and relieved RIR in trenches in a position on the left of previous position.

Myself drawing rations all night consequently no sleep.

Artillery fire cannot be heard except in distance.

Saturday 26 Sep

Troops standing to arms at daybreak.

A lot of sniping going on but no attack.

⁹ Commander-in-Chief British Expeditionary Force.

The RIF¹⁰ left rotten trenches.
My troops trying to improve them.
Only appears to be X Company on duty.
MX in rear and on right of us (time 5.30 pm).
Letter from Connie. She still says that she is receiving no letters from me.
On duty in trenches all night.
A very quiet night, though the artillery are very busy.

Sunday 27 Sep
Under arms 4 am. Issue of rum.
Rumoured that 50,000 Germans are advancing but afterwards found that they are not.
Relieved from trenches for the day but go back tonight.
Another night of anxiety.
Artillery firing the whole day and shells dropping all round. But no casualties occurred up until now.
Hear that the RSF trenches are being shelled very much- must have several casualties.
Letters from ? and ? (names unreadable) say that they have received one of my letters.
Sentries sniping all day (3.20 pm).
In trenches all night, very cold.

Monday 28 Sep
Standing to arms as usual at dawn.
In trenches all day but having a rest at Company Headquarters.
Very quiet day.
Big gun firing going on.
About 10 pm Germans attempted to break through our right (Buffs¹¹) but are repulsed.
Lots of firing.
Very quiet the remainder of the night.

Tuesday 29 Sep
Moved to reserve Company billets.
Stayed there all day and night.
Had quiet time.

Wednesday 30 Sep
Moved up to D Company (Z) trenches.
In trenches in rear all day and moved to forward trenches under cover of darkness.
Very quiet. Not much big gun fire.
The worst of this place is that we cannot light fires to make tea or anything.

Thursday 1 October
Everything much the same as yesterday.
Trenches day and night.
Hear that we are going to be relieved.
The absence of war news is very disconcerting, scarcely any firing.
Very cold night. Sharp frost.

¹⁰ RIF – Royal Irish Fusiliers?

¹¹ Buffs – Royal East Kent Regiment.

Friday 2 October

Same as yesterday (3 pm).

Appointed ACQMS¹² 20-9-14. Authority GOC 9th Infantry Brigade.
(unreadable) all day.

Moved at 7pm. Relieved by Buffs.

Marched till 4 am to Seruany and billeted in farm.

Saturday 3 Oct

Took extreme care to dodge aeroplanes as kept under cover the whole of the following day.

Marched at 6pm to TROESNES and billeted.

Same routine as yesterday.

Sunday 4 Oct

Marched at 6 pm to CREPY and billeted in private houses.

The last three nights we did about 15, 15 and 20 miles.

Got into billets about 3 am very tired.

Monday 5 Oct

Have been marching in a westerly direction. (12 noon)

All troops allowed in town, shops open, well stocked with provisions.

Madame came into our bedroom selling sweets.

Marched at 6pm. Had glorious send off.

Tuesday 6 Oct

Arrived at Guidote (sp of name?) about 2 am and billeted in farm buildings.

Marched off again at 7 am to entrain (6 miles).

Entrained at 1-30 pm and left for destination unknown.

Stopped the night in train at Amiens.

Trying to boil water by candles.

Passed over many bridges which had been blown up by Germans but since repaired by French troops.

Scores of train loads of troops passed during the night.

Wednesday 7 Oct

Rations issued, bully and biscuits about 6am.

Troops all buying bread.

18 of my company got 168 hours No.2¹³ for leaving train etc.

Moved off about 10 am (destination unknown).

Arrived at Pont Remy about 1130 am.

Marched to Buigny St Macloud near Abbeville - billeted for night.

Thursday 8 Oct

Reveille any time.

Rested in billet all day.

Nothing unusual happened.

Friday 9 Oct

Marched at 1.35 until about 7 am to Calmolt (1 kilometre South) and rested.

Saturday 10 Oct

Marched at 1230 am about 5 miles and halted till 8 am.

¹²Transcriber note: possibly stands for Acting Company Quartermaster Sergeant.

¹³This is reference to a punishment.

Taken up in motor lorries and conveyed to Saint-lex-Pernes.
Went on outpost duty at 4 pm [5&6].
Passed uneventful night except that we could not get in touch with NF.

Sunday 11 Oct

Marched off around 7 am about 12 miles.
Passed lots of French troops but otherwise very quiet.
Got into billets about 6 pm at Busnies.

Monday 12 Oct

Marched off at 6.30 am.
Hear artillery very near.
French cavalry had battle in vicinity yesterday but was not decisive.
Halted at present on side of road about 5 kilometres from enemy.
French cavalry in front (10.30 am).
Moved forward a few more miles and took up a position covering a village.
One platoon went into village.
Lots of sniping by Germans but saw none.
Hear that village was taken and lost three times by French during previous night.
1st Royal Scots advanced through us and attacked a wood held by enemy.
Hear they lost 4 killed and 60 wounded.
We retired about 1 mile and billeted for night in farm house.

Tuesday 13 Oct

Moved off 4-30 about 3 miles into Vielle Chapelle and halted apparently in General Reserve.
RS Fusiliers and NF and Lincolns in big attack.
Saw church which Germans shelled yesterday and burnt out.
9 prisoners taken this morning all different Regiments.
RF billeted for night 7 pm.
Spent quiet night.

Wednesday 14 Oct

Standing to arms at 5am but did not march off.
Heavy firing going on in the vicinity all day.
RFs still in reserve.
General Hamilton killed with a shell.
Fell in on artillery post about 6.30 - 8.00 pm.
Big battle raging in the vicinity or not far from the village.
Firing died down and we spent a peaceful night.
174 reinforcements joined.

Thursday 15 October

Same programme as yesterday. Lots of firing. (11am)
Paraded at 12.50 (consequently had to abandon apple pie).
Marched through VC about 2 miles.
X Company attacked with W on its right.
Company ordered to take a road said to be held by German cavalry.
Took road and held it for the night.

Friday 16 Oct

Moved off about 7.00 am and marched some distance towards another village.
X Company to attack. Z Company on left.
Made the attack.
Private Youngman (sp?) shot in thigh.
Held ground for the night which had been taken.

Saturday 17 Oct

Operation resumed at 6-30 am.

Battalion advanced through Aubers and attacked in easterly direction another village.

X Company had very busy day. Attacked two positions and took them.

Stayed night Hiliers on outpost duty.

No one apparently knew where X Company were until next morning.

Sunday 18 Oct

Ordered to resume operations at 6.30.

Still in village of Hiliers.

Lots of sniping going on.

During the last three days casualties: 1 killed 6 wounded.

As usual Sunday the Germans very busy.

Lots of heavy gun firing going on.

X Company in reserve all day, been relieved by Z company. (Time 5 pm)

Germans attacked during night, but X company not required.

Monday 19 Oct

Operation resumed.

Lots of shell fire. Still in same position.

In the afternoon RIR attacked and took village to our left front.

Firing going on nearby all night long.

Tuesday 20 Oct

Operation resumed at 6-30 am.

Germans shelled our billets heavily.

One shell burst next door leaving 2 killed and 4 wounded.

X company moved to a safer place.

About 10 am ordered to attack.

Two platoons went forward under very heavy shell fire and machine gun fire.

Could not use their rifles after lying there about 2 hours.

Forced to withdraw on being reinforced by RS Fusiliers.

Captain Carey, Sergeants ?, Woolmer, ? (names unreadable) and 23 others wounded and 1 killed.

Company dug more trenches and spent night in them.

Wet night.

Wednesday 21 Oct

No rations. Ordered to eat iron rations.

Company still in trenches under heavy shell fire.

No casualties up to now (3 pm).

Hear that (unreadable) Division had big success yesterday.

Next entry is Sat 31 Oct.

During past few days have been in very heavy fighting.

Retired one night and took up new position about three miles back.

Very hard time in trenches.

Had big fight on 25th and 26th caused by RIR leaving trenches.

On 26th had fight in afternoon.

Lost 125 NCOs and men including all officers.

Myself and 12 men only came out of the trenches after the Germans charged.

Held trenches again afterwards other companies had a bayonet charge and had many casualties.

Withdrawn from trenches on Thursday last and marched in rear of line some miles.

Moved daily from one billet to another, gradually getting nearer the left flank. Direction Ostend.

Next entry 4th Nov

Arrived at Bailleul yesterday, a big town. Billeted here.

General Smith Dorrien inspected battalion this morning and told us we were second to none in the British Army.

Next entry Wednesday 11th Nov

Since last entry we marched from Bailleul to Ypres and occupied trenches 3 miles east of Ypres.

Germans attacked with great vigour night and day but were repulsed at all points.

Very hard fighting under awful artillery fire.

Germans generally attacked at 2 pm or 6 pm, then again at dawn, first preceded by awful bombardment.

Tried to reform X Company yesterday but was struck by a shell in the right shoulder and head.

Spent the night in dressing station.

Germans appear to have been reinforced and attacked very vigorously this morning and succeeded in breaking through.

Drove RFs back by artillery fire.

Myself made my way back to hospital at Ypres and had wounds dressed.

RFs reinforced by about 150 men of 6th battalion yesterday who are very (unreadable).

Many men suffering from shock.

Casualties killed and wounded very heavy.

Moved to Poperhru (sp?) same night.

12 Nov

Moved to Gazebrouk by motor bus.

1000 wounded admitted.

13 Nov

Entrained for Boulogne.

Arrived there early morning and admitted to hospital.

Date?

Sent to No. 4 Convalescent Camp Boulogne.

16 Nov

Short route march.

17 Nov

Route march at 11.00 am. Feeling much better.

Diary stops here.