

## The War Diary of Captain Mervyn Crawshay

### August 1914

#### Sat 15 Aug. 1914

(Leave the Firs before dawn). It pours with rain, we all go to large rest camp at Southampton, while it continues to pour. A. Squadron officers go into town for lunch and nearly get left behind. A long and tedious day embarking.

#### Sun 16 Aug. 1914

A little peace on the ship. Arrive after lunch, a most difficult dis-embarkation, as the fittings of the boat were constructed in 3 days. My squadron is the last off. Tie up in a huge cotton shed, and sleep on the bales there.

#### Mon 17 Aug. 1914

A route march, practise sword exercises. We go into Havre and dine at a big restaurant. Big thing, the whole place full of "entente cordial". Entrain late at night.

#### Tues 18 Aug. 1914

In train all day, stop for a few minutes at various places to water, the people giving one fruit and post cards all the way up. Arrive at Hautmont in dark and eventually get to a very wet field with long grass, where we lie down.

#### Wed 19 Aug. 1914

Lead off to Colletet. A very Belgian-French village. Go into billets. On the whole we are in clover [its atmosphere of chicken, farm straw *deleted*] etc, attending to horses after their journey. Rode in afternoon with Johnson, the interpreter, and others over the Belgian frontier, and saw the enemies country.

#### Thurs 20 Aug. 1914

Take A. Squadron for exercise over the country. Find it hopelessly wired in, it looks as if one could cross it anywhere, but we took one hour to go one mile. Get back to billets for lunch.

#### Fri 21 Aug. 1914

Marched into Belgium, and struck the pavé. As we were going to billets a large force of Germans reported. A. squadron was behind; we massed in some comotion behind a hill. It all fizzled out. Trecked across roots to Villiers St.Ghislain. Ansell took all the Squadron leaders round all defences.

#### Sat 22 Aug. 1914

This morning busy entrenching my Section. I had a chill after the cold orchard. Detaining motor fugitives and questioning same. News suddenly from 3rd Brigade that Germans were coming. A. squadron to wood to out flank, occupied wood all day.

Saw Germans in distance, one shell within 300 yards. 4 Hussars shelled. Greys opened battle with machine guns. Bays captured patrol in wood. Hear of 4h D.G., change down pavé.

We made long night march over pavé thro' Mons, round and round thro' thousands of shouting people. Eventually drop into a village into a farm billet and get a bed.

#### Sun 23 Aug. 1914

Made night march at a moments notice to the railway line East of Gr., the cavalry are to sight there trenches by night.

Rested all day. Civilian labour eventually comes.

#### Mon 24 Aug. 1914

At dawn continue our trenches.

A gap is left on my right flank, report to Briggs, he says it is not in his section.

Sure enough, the Germans appear exactly opposite this point of weakness. I cannot make out if friend or foe till a shot comes close to me. Then 2<sup>nd</sup> troop fires. After we see them in their grey and spiked helmets, left turn and straight at village which they soon get from the cavalry screen. Soon the village ablaze with shells and fire. We retire, various excited men fall into ditches, and rally up to a big factory; Allenby comes there.

We find shells coming close so follow on with Squadron and join Ansell at Elonges. About 2.p.m suddenly recalled, down a hill thro' a village, and on far side come into thick of it by a haystack. Bullets on all sides. After some hot fighting, retire to farm, several wounded there.

A squadron rear guard to division while it went through village, but Germans never came on.

Retired to Genlain.

#### Tues 25 Aug. 1914

Start at 5.am. We were left of Rearguard of army, Bays on our right. I was sent to Artres, get to top of ridge safely, and 2 troops are watering, when Germans, (2 batteries and 1 regt. of Jaegers) appear 100 yards off. We managed to rally to a quarry, opened on heavily, but quarry protects us. Get out by troops, and back to regiment, a lucky get out.

Regain Division, then are left as Rear Guard.

Ansell holds on, with a section of guns, very long to save Red Cross. Shelled all round us. Dropped some Uhlans at a farm.

French troops cut up in Valenciennes, we cover their retreat.

Put in infantry trenches, pulled out by Allenby. Retire at dark to a town by a mill. Had to clear at very short notice, supposed to be surrounded. Eventually dropped on road near Beaumont. Very cold and wet.

#### Wed 26 Aug. 1914

Slept on road by horse on cobbles, moved a dawn and joined Division at Clary, covering left of 4th Division which was entrenched on high ground South of Le Cateau- Cambrai. We get food from infantry as we are starving. Battle rages all day, very heavy machine gun fire. Machine guns repel 1<sup>st</sup> German attack, but our force driven back by about 5 to 1 later. Cav[alry] Div[ision] inactive, forming flank guard to 4th Division. Get away unpursued.

The Regiment get broken up late at night in village. I saw dead beat infantry and wagons everywhere, a hopeless tangle seemingly, and realised what a strategic retirement really was.

Get into a small cottage where a kindly woman tucked me up and gave me brandy.

#### Thurs 27 Aug. 1914

Marched out early and joined up with Ansell in a hollow by a village. The infantry retirement a sight to have seen. The men were dead beat by exhaustion, but were ready to fight at any moment.

We joined Division at Roussoy at get in touch with a Brigade of French Dragoons. The regiment was put on a forward crest in extended order. I joined up with 3 Hussars.

Several shells very close, a splinter strikes my nose.

We were to be the last squadron to retire, and it looked as if we were badly for it. Carabineers killed in wood behind us, go to another position. After a long trek get to Peronne late. Aeroplane brings in message re Germans. We cleared out, and did the memorable night march, men dropping from exhaustion, etc. etc. We got separated and the regiment dropped in a road at Bethuncourt as it turned out. Saw motor, which we thought was a German search light bottling us.

Johnson, Archie and I rode together.

For five nights the regiment had not had 2 hours sleep a night.

#### 28 Aug. 1914

At dawn I looked at map and found the Germans would soon arrive; everyone was asleep, including Ansell, Balfour and staff.

As I reported, I was told to form Rear guard at bridge with 1<sup>st</sup> Troop. Went to sleep, woken up to say strong column enemy approaching. It looked pretty bad, then another column (cavalry) on right, which proved to be Sordits divisions brought to help us out.

They pushed the Germans back.

We retired to Néry, where we found food by road side, then to Cressy.

We got orders to return North, watered in a peaceful field, bivouacked near town. Bought things and had dinner in an hotel. Everyone much bucked up, thinking retirement over

We lived by requisition and will.

Fugitives (civilians) block the roads all the way, carts, cycles etc.

#### Sat 29 Aug. 1914

Expected a quiet day, but at 8am hear a company of German Infantry at Bethancourt, and the river held there.

Saddle up and away A. Squadron to Ossoy bridge.

At 12 ordered to concentrate at Honfleur.

I was ordered to come back at once, but Archie and Patterson and Oswalds patrol were left out.

A. Squadron took up a position by Lesle to help them get in.

Germans came within a few hundred yards, shelling Lesle, then stopped for lunch.

Get my patrols in, a near thing.

Retired through Cressy, Lagny to Plessis, billet in a billiard room in a small sort of Inn and get a wash at the pump there.

### Sun 30 Aug. 1914

A long hot mornings trek. Watered by a canal where we secured a bottle of white wine.

Arrive at Choisy au Bac on the Oise, much the best billet we have had yet in an artists house.

Expect to get a rest here.

Enjoy a swim in the river.

### Mon 31 Aug. 1914

A long hot march, wine being given to us by the way. Water on the river at Verb and see the French tirailleurs from Nice.

Up a steep hill and come to Néry. I am the right out-post squadron. Get bread in a peasants house and dinner late in a billiard room.

I thought of sleeping in cemetery but in the end did not do so, but slept end of lines on straw, not thinking how many would sleep in this cemetery next day.

## **September 1914**

### 1 Sep. 1914

Had all my things spread out, mackintosh etc, and we were just going to eat some breakfast when a sergt came to say an 11<sup>th</sup> Hussar patrol had encountered a large force of enemy close by. I made the men dress, and we stood to horses awaiting Ansell's order to saddle up. He was in village at breakfast.

Immediately after heavy firing broke out from the Bays and shells and bullets poured into the camp. We saddled up and galloped out losing men and horses, and kit.

Rally squadron in a hollow with B. Squad. Expect to charge, so cast all kit, which I never saw again.

Made a flank attack in thick fog up steep hill, all saddles slipped back.

B squadron dismounted, A squadron struck for a farm.

Suddenly, only 80+ left, a firing line loomed through the fog.

We rally behind haystack, 2 troops in action, Sgt. Largford gets into their led horses and drops 16 and several men.

I wanted to charge with a troop twice, Ansell would not let me, then he called to come out mounted, to look.

We had not gone 3 horses lengths into a hail of bullets when he was hit, I could see full. Turned his horse round the corner, and he collapsed into a small wood. I had no time to help him, left 2 men, and continued 1 shooting.

We drove them back, killed 1 officer and 9 men close together, others further back.

Get into their supports at 1000 a. Order to retire just as shells found the rick. Head lost young Hill and several men in retiring.

We went down into village and re-sorted out killed, wounded horses, etc.

Then had to Néry all my kit looted the place a shambled. L. Battery saved the guns with very heavy loss.

The Bays horses lying in rows, smashed, men, kit, etc.

We got 10 German guns, mostly through Bays machine gun fire.

Gradually we retired to a village.

### Wed 2 Sep. 1914

Marched early at dawn through Forest of Ermenonville, a very ticklish affair, dense undergrowth.

The German Division had evidently gone through at great speed. 9<sup>th</sup> Uhlans horses, coats etc. all over the place.

Water in a village in a hollow, then squadron to a windmill to support 11th Hussars against 2 troops Uhlans but it never came off.

A. Squadron rear guard. Slept in the garden of a chateau on green wooden shutters, get blankets and brandy from the big farm, also fowls.

#### Thurs 3 Sep. 1914

Fell back South at dawn. Long hot march, A. Squadron doing flank protection to Brigade.

Water at a canal by a wood and on towards Paris, beginning to think this strategic retirement to be a myth.

Actually got beer passing through a village.

I ride Ansells horse, napper Tandy, he is a rough, uncomfortable ride.

Get to a huge field very polluted in sun. The whole Division is there. We hear that everything is to be hurled from the wagons and that we are to trek at once. It proves untrue, and I bathe in the swift running Savonne with Winnie.

Tear own regimental meal, all together in darkness, with our fingers.

All the dismounted servants, mist etc. are lost.

#### Fri 4 Sep. 1914

A rest day at last, but the camp stinks and is covered with flies. My particular billet is by a plough. Try to wire V. but its impossible.

Sleep and bathe in the Marne.

#### Sat 5 Sep. 1914

Marched a Peace march by Chennevieres, Boissy St Ledger, Perigny, to Moissy Cramage.

Put down lines at 2pm 2 hours later with rest of Brigade through Verneuil to Aub Pierre where there was no water. A long march of 40 miles, all foot people disappear. Stopped in a chateau for a few hours. Hot weather.

To Luigny which was our farthest point. S. and limit of retirement.

Now begin to advance.

#### Sun 6 Sep. 1914

Marched 6. 30 N.E with a view to attack.

Germans had passed by Paris and advanced S.E to attack French left, and we are going N.E for Germans right flank.

Rest in reserve we go forward 1 mile, then halt again for several hours. At 7pm to billets, some confusion, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade in village and another Brigade going through to billet further on.

#### Mon 7 Sep. 1914

Out of billets 5.30.a.m.

Sir John French's order issued to effect that British Army had had a bad time in retirement, but was now going to advance to co-operate with French Army.

Enemy retreat, pressed by 2 Cavalry Brigades Water in holes in ground.

A 9<sup>th</sup> Lancer appears with broken lance and tells of their 2 troop change v. 1 ½ squadrons Uhlans and how he had speared 3. Also of the 18th Hussars successful fire action.

We passed wounded Germans, and prisoners and a few dead in the streets. At Choisy the whole place upside down, looted by Germans.

#### Tues 8 Sep. 1914

Marched before dawn 2.30a.m. A is leading squadron. Came through French army in town. Tiger advance troop.

Uhlans quite close but cannot be sure if they are English, till C. Squadron is fired on from a village.

Then on ridge above Sablonieres I saw the German Brigade and reported it, but the village was considered to be weakly held and I get orders to take it.

Just then a B. squadron man comes in saying he was the only man left out of Joe Nettlefolds troop, they ran mounted into an ambush.

We get down to road without loss by taking cover, lined road, and pinned Germans opposite.

Partridge and Norwood killed, Martin and J. Nettlefold wounded.

1<sup>st</sup> troop gets on ahead.

A. squadron finds only one machine gun and guns in village, follow right up to Monvilliers.

Get glasses and flag from German wounded officer.

It comes on very wet, went to a farm on a hill and managed to get good dinner.

Pouring rain.

A. squadron the first troops in Monvilliers.

#### Wed 9 Sep. 1914

Started at 2.30.a.m

Cross the Marne about 10.a.m.

Bays on hill shelled by own artillery which could not be stopped.

We saw a village attacked by our cavalry, then I am shoved on contact Squadron to go to Etre Pilly.

Meet Blackburn with a report of 1000 Germans in front of me, turns out to be a convoy. I get to 500x of it when our guns open into my back.

I jink into a hollow, then Tiger gets a place where he can see a X road, all sorts of Germans on bikes and in cars. We don't attack, as its my job to get information.

Brook goes off alone and never returns. Cpl. Kelly gets the information from the French which saves me.

Get into billets very tired in dark, thought we had lost the way. Sergeant Christian is guide.

Report to Briggs, sleep in hay and cold.

#### Thurs 10 Sep. 1914

A. squadron leading squadron over difficult county. Yellow Sally broke her neck over a bridge.

Found a battle going on near a village, can't make out Germans from English.

Fired at from a bush and 2 German prisoners hunted out of it by French Lancers.

A great muddle.

Watson a gunner comes to reconnoitre with A. squadron which is sent to get close to our Infantry.

Come into very heavy shell fire at close range, Watson severely wounded.  
Squadron gallops back on Brigade, 2 men wounded, 8 horses, some killed.  
After to take a hill, X while going to find Winwood passed 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars by a tree. A shell fell within 5 yards of me on the pony, wounding Lockett amongst others.  
Good billet in a valley, sleep in a bed.  
X Saw a German cavalry Division going slowly across plain 2 miles off.  
2 Battery could not get up in time.  
We were shelled heavily and our gunners had to leave guns.

#### Friday 11 Sep. 1914

Marched by Oulchy, turned N.E.  
8 German corps and 1 Division are operating here.  
French have a reported success.  
English army reported to have captured 7 guns, many machine guns and 1000 prisoners. Sat about under a culvert wet through, back to a village, dirty dishevelled and wet.  
We fix up a fire and liberate a white goat.  
Pankhurst goes sick with Pneumonia, am not surprised.

#### Sat 12 Sep. 1914

Advance, soon in contact with enemy.  
Braine village is held. A. squadron into a wood on right of road and we eventually get into a castle and good long distance shooting from there into the backs of German infantry, they also get heavily shelled whenever they appear, dropping into turnips on all sides.  
A. Squadron get to a farm "La Saulx Sadree", by a covered way, thought all Germans had gone, when suddenly firing broke out and shortly after a party of 45 and 1 officer in close order appear on road.  
Get Squadron from behind gate way on road, rapid fire, down they went, only a few shots back, which got Sergeant Christian.  
Then closed into chateau again, get into cellars while our artillery fired over us.  
Get Madeira, and after went forward for white flag, only 5 of us, which was rash. We found 20 unwounded men, 12 killed and wounded and the officer dying.  
Fortunately the unwounded behind the rick were very frightened, I threatened them with sword and we fired revolvers, then formed them up and handed them to the Infantry, took their arms and broke them.  
A good success for A. squadron. Saw Allenby just after it was over.  
We went on a fools errand after some machine guns in wet. In evening in mud and rain, told there was a charge coming off, it did not.  
All this was battle of Marne, from 6 Sept.  
Billeted at Dhuisel, left helmet there. Pouring rain, rotten billet, uncivil inhabitant, have to threaten them.  
Helmet left with: Mons Mathieux de Guart, Dhuisel, Aisne.

#### Sunday 13 Sep. 1914

Went up to where the Worcestershire Regiment was, then behind them. Then guns came into action by us, so we moved. Crossed the Aisne for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. See the Zouaves.  
A great battle in full swing, hundreds of guns firing.

The Brigade twice ambles out into the middle of it, in apex of guns, and has to retire, shelled and useless.

I am responsible for the connection with French attacks, ride down to them in the village of V. close to Craonne, where Nap fought in 1814.

Find Brigade has suddenly shifted and that we have been beaten back, through Bourges many wounded coming in, including young Loyd of 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles who says Nat (my brother) with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion got 12 German guns, and that Nat is unhurt.

I go on quietly after the Brigade, they have been thrown into a hole at Chavonne, where a counter attack was expected.

Our billets already full.

#### Mon 14 Sep. 1914

Action begun for heights on N. bank of Aisne. Fought all day, we finish by having gained some 2 miles of ground.

Get to Pagnan, saw French troops Zouaves.

We were brigaded all day, and occasionally, did a little ceremonial in the face of the enemy up by Tourde Paissy farm, right in the middle of crowds of guns.

I and Tiger were sent to keep communications with French, in a little village Varogne.

While watching French rather vacillating attack, the Germans attacked all along the line, the Brigade is hurled to Chavonne to a critical point. I pursue and see big shell hitting gunners, also many stragglers get rather cold feet.

We awaited the counter attack which did not meet us, as we are in support. Then under covered line to Soupir Chateau.

Get in late, I am ordered to be the Squadron for night battle position. A very long night in open behind guards.

Fall down a bank.

Luckily we are not attacked we have no bayonets etc.

#### Tues 15 Sep. 1914

Germans reported retiring behind gun fire, this proves un-true. We are really hanging on to the ground taken, by our eyelids. Artillery duel till dusk.

Regiment above Chavonne, B and C Squadron in front line, A. Squadron in reserve. After we had breakfasted in the chateau gardens, shave, to a salvo of shells in the chateau.

Shells come over all day but, concealed under steep slopes of hill, we don't get casualties.

Return to Soupir and dine in rain, however sleep on the billiard room table cloth, in the big room.

#### Wed 16 Sep. 1914

Again at Chavonne. I was late, owing to an argument with the 11th, so have to relieve C. Squadron.

We await the attack by an old waggon, I can see the Germans in their trenches from my advanced post. Continual sniping and gunning after a time relieved by 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoons, and very glad of it.

Go to Soupir, it was a horrid position, no field of fire, and in a wood.

Found the whole Brigade with their lines down in a most exposed position, where I saw 4 gunners and 8 horses killed a few days ago.

Was at once sat on for expostulating, I felt it was but a question of time, so sat in ditch reading a paper.



A few shells, and are fortunately allowed to saddle up.

Ten minutes after, plump into the middle of us, just by Mic, shell comes, kills a horse and men, then battery fire and confusion.

11<sup>th</sup> Hussars come through my tail 1<sup>st</sup> troop goes spare, all the others lead round well. 2 men killed, hettlefold wounded, close to me by the card players all the dust down my back. There shell were coal-box. 250 lb siege gun shells. Billet at O. Collier Johnson and reinforcements join.

#### Thurs 17 Sep. 1914

We hear of many casualties, Hogg of 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars and many others.

We hear 10,000 British casualties alone, up to date.

We sleep in our billets on the straw as much as possible. The RE repair the bridges.

They say 600 German and 200 English dead at the Chimney.

#### Fri 18 Sep. 1914

A rest day. See the shells bursting on the ridge a mile away from us and that is all.

We are glad to be quit of them for the time.

Robinson and I go round on a foraging expedition and to call on the Bays in Chateau.

The Germans have turned it inside out, smashing what they could.

#### Sat 19 Sep. 1914

March from Ouilly before dawn in torrents of rain at ½ hours' notice, all sorts of things doubtless left behind.

Sneak round by bed of river at Soupir, by as usual, in the end found by coal box.

To Chavonne, late over front line of defences from 4<sup>th</sup> D.Gs they look worried and are obviously thankful to be out of it.

We are in a sunk round, rough steps up to permit a field of fire, right resting on a wood, in which is B. squadron. They lose 2 men and shoot 3 Germans at 10 yards.

We dig in, are shelled all day and the centre of an artillery duel. Bullets in road and a corpl. touched. The German attack in evening on Wiltshires glances off us, 60 men came right to us, then swing away, very heavy firing, the attack repulsed.

#### Sunday 20 Sep. 1914

We are relieved by 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars early, and are thankful to go from our position, which was a bad one and worse for B. squadron who had 1 killed and 1 wounded.

A squadron had little shooting tho a very comfortable night in a wet hole which the officers constructed. Improving the inner defences in village all morning. Heavy shell fire and a general attack in the evening on outer defences. Only a few bullets come our way, I was near my cellar.

Sleep in an old cottage occupied by a 70 year war veteran, who told us of the chicken blood, firing on wounded, etc.

Heard a German charge on the hill and their cheers against the Wilts.

The artillery would not fire because of prisoners.

#### Mon 21 Sep. 1914

Our deferred week end. Go back 6 miles to rest and really get there without being recalled.

Sneak back the new river way past coal box corner, up to our hocks in mud, but leave the shells behind and are thankful.

In time come to a peaceful village, unspoilt by Germans. Food, papers and hear Owen has gone to the front, according to his prophecy. Sort my kit, wash all over and thoroughly enjoy the rest.

#### Tues 22 Sep. 1914

Rain as usual, but some sun. I go with Peckham to Fismes in the mess cart, commandeered, to try and get wine.

Track an old workman down in the end, and get 1 bottle. Get fresh meat and bread. The whole place crammed with French, transport, etc.

Find various officers working their way up to the front to fill gaps.

The Germans are reported to be giving ground, some trenches have been taken in which they were starving, probably too advanced.

2 Regiments W. Yorks and Devons get ambushed by White Flag, their first action and lost heavily, Germans came forward with their rifles up, machine guns hidden. Sleep in afternoon.

#### 23 Sep. 1914

Wake up at 6.30 and feel energetic and fit once more instead of leaden footed and blear eyed.

Bright sun at last and the sound of guns further off. Robbie and I ride to Fismes. Enjoy the rest, after lunch to valise again.

The Germans have enteric we are to take precautions against it, thinking about being inoculated, its probably as well.

At dinner got an order to be, possibly, ready to march at 3am

See an aeroplane shelled in evening, hear how Yorks and Devons new regts got ambushed under white flag.

Germans advanced in sections, rifles over heads and machine guns hidden.

Broel brings in a bad Dum Dum bullet 600 were taken off a German generals motor car

#### 24. Sep 1914

Still here and sitting in the sun writing after breakfast feeling well for once and rested. The booming of guns same as ever.

Winnie has been made Col, and that is about all.

Enjoy the quiet life, much debate as to whether I will be inoculated, decide to wait till enteric actually breaks out

#### 25. Sep 1914

Our day out. Reveille at 1.

Fortunately Tiger returns safely and does guide, or else would probably have led into the German lines in the dark.

After a winding journey thro Villiers-Moulins, to Paissy, without being shelled, tho' we passed over area which got it badly by day.

Kept up communication with Turcos and hid the whole squadron in caves, including myself.

Very heavy shelling, but can't quite get at us.

A shrapnel on our breakfast table thro' the window.

The school mistress a most devoted lady, cooks our lunch.

A very pretty old world village in happier times.

Get out at night un-shelled and get in all safe late, no one hit

#### 26. Sep 1914

Thought we really were going to get a rest.

Not so, ordered to saddle up after breakfast.

Hang about all day rather at a loose end with all ones kit packed.

Germans made a big attack on Troyon in the night, repulsed.

Much gunning

Boxer arrives and takes squadron

#### 27. Sep 1914

Thought we were going to have a rest, mistaken.

Saddled up after breakfast and to Soupir once more, past coal box corner safely.

Hear that the retrograde movement of the Germans is rather a myth.

Shells about but not close except one

Saw Winston Churchill in a motor

My writing stopped by a coal box and order to go to billets.

We file away and immediately the leading regiment gets in open it is shelled.

2 telephones of enemy have been discovered in Chavonne today and the man captured, an Alsatian spy, who will be shot, says there are more.

We go to St.Maud, but can't fit in.

Trail off to a farm on a hill by some gunners, wait for food.

Officers to sleep in a loft, I fall off the first story in the dark, luckily managed to scabble the wall as I went, and only landed on wood not stone.

Badly bruise my thigh only, but it hurts a lot.

The gunners give me a bed. A poor way to be outed but lucky not to be worse.

#### 28. Sep 1914

Have another taste of the ambulance, 7 miles on my back, after 13 years.

A painful ride over a rough road behind regiment to Blangy once more.

I am deposited in the mess on a stretcher and eventually given a bed, am quite helpless.

Yesterday we expected a forward movement, a myth

#### 29. Sep 1914

I manage to crawl down 11 o'clock. Apparently the situation the same, tho' Germans made some tentative attacks yesterday easily repelled.

This should suit us, as we lose practically no one.

Hear that the Cameron Highlanders have been wiped out at breakfast by a coal box.

The French turning movement has been met by 4 corps Germans from Malines.

Apparently their best troops have gone to the East, our theatre is for the moment a secondary one. Germans said to be heavily entrenching. Don't think we will move, so will get well before the Regiment moves, a bit of luck.

#### 30. Sep 1914

The 11th Hussars move in here, because the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers have been badly shelled at Longuecoal and had 40 odd casualties.

De Lisle kept them there all day, refusing to let them move. Things are rather crowded here. Read the papers and try to see the end and don't look very near, but they say the Stock Exchange are laying 4-1 on peace by November 1<sup>st</sup>. Afraid this is only one of the usual canards.

Much the same here, a French success reported against flank of 2 German corps, its possible. Our Aisne casualties in paper.

## **October 1914**

### 1 Oct 1914

Leg better, I cannot go far yet, read papers and write letters

### 3 Oct 1914

Expect to move, but don't. I fill the day as best I can reading discussing possibilities and hearing rumours, such as General v. Kluck surrounded with 40,000 men

### 4. Oct 1914

We move in morning, White and myself in the ambulance. Get taken to the wrong place, then to a dirty billet, vacated by gunners, near a church.

The supply man comes in, and as I can't walk, suddenly head for Paris. Motor to Fere by the Flying Head quarters, all lit up, rockets in air.

Get bagged by Hospital people, get on train heading for the base.

Hear of Tetanus.

### 5. Oct 1914

Kavanagh and I go straight to the Ritz, where we are taken in free, it has just re-opened.

A suite of luxurious rooms, an enormous bath and every modern luxury.

Get masseur, in particular to hotel, and barber.

Come out another being.

Round Paris, to Chatham Champs Elysée and tea at Café de la Paix, meet American and French officers, after go on to Maxims, Harvey of the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers joins up, we go to Moulin Rouge

### 6. Oct 1914

Furious shopping, fitting out after Néry, getting teeth stopped. Tea at Cafe de la Paix, a large dinner at Maxims with various officers, Entente Cordiale and frog's legs

### 7.Oct 1914

Early out shopping, ready to move at 11.

No sign of a car or a message from Foster, the ASC man. Hear of the Regiment moving and can't think how we are to rejoin.

Lunch at the Abbé. At 2pm to our surprise, he appears, go to police for a pass and round Paris for petrol.

A furious night drive thro Subies etc, and arrive at Rocroy.

A man, Dickie, most kind, he will send us on tomorrow.

A comfortable billet

### 8. Oct 1914

The motor car pursuit all up behind the great battle line for miles, bump into a fight and a bulge in the line at Lassigny, and out again.

Tea at Compiègne, gunners entraining. Cross river and eventually hit Brigade near Courmelle.

They got sucked into a French bulge, delayed hours on their march, but no fight. I motor on to the billet with Osborne, everyone surprised to see me back so soon, and sound

#### 9. Oct 1914

A sharp frost, everyone's teeth chatter. Don't know what it will be like later on in Belge.

Turns into bright sun, we march all day, 1 hours halt at Oube Villiers. Hear guns far away towards Arras, a smiling country untouched by Germans.

I go round village putting out out-posts, arrange billets etc

Am in a ghostly old wing of the house, place my valise on the bed

#### 10. Oct 1914

Onward, a cold morning and a fine day. A long march descend into a quiet and secluded valley and billet in the farm of the wife of a chasseur a cheval.

Heavy firing not far off, our infantry are near about. Patteson sees his brother.

Head at Cormelles that Herbert Gilmour has been killed

#### 11. Oct 1914

Called at 4. Cold march to right of army, we are roped in for divisional cavalry, to our disgust.

I am sent to Verguisinal to find French, don't find any, but a firing line in front and a hang up and gunning, only a few R. E. digging trenches.

Sit about on a coal tip all watching, for a change.

Infantry appear later, and after a little hunt in closing dark, find regiment.

We go eventually to a chateau in a field, full of French, who have to quit in night.

I lost my bed and had to sleep in bathroom.

#### 12. Oct 1914

Start off in a thick fog thro' Bethune, to a place called Vieille Chapelle.

The French have held it, cavalry and infantry and have evidently had a bad time.

We cross the rubicon i.e. the bridge mounted in ½ sections, soon reach the X roads, and almost at once Patteson is brought back to me with his brains out, his death a lesson in tactics.

We performed with the chasseurs à pied. Infantry come up and we hang on to the city of the dead all day. As I expected get heavily shelled, in evening leave village like a Drury Lane Pantomime, with walls falling and the church spire crashing down on to poor Patteson's grave.

Leave several wounded.

Eventually get to billets near Bethune.

Found my entrenching tool most useful to make up place under logs, it probably saved us.

#### 13. Oct 1914

We are rejoiced to finish with Division Cavalry.

Pursued after the brigade a quick and rather arduous march, but found our supplies behind the French fighting line, to which we got quite near, including shells.

Get champagne by the road side. A battle in progress, we are reserve cavalry on a flank, infantry Division deploying when we arrived.

Mont Noir taken with 1000 German casualties, 200 of ours.

We billeted on farm near Rochonville and dry after the downpour, which we sat in. Tiger and I sleep behind the firing line, close by enemy. We get beds and are shown the lie of the land by the daughter of the house. The Brigade has had casualties but a better day than yesterday.

#### 14. Oct 1914

Drenching rain, the forward movement proceeds. Don't like papers, it looks like a huge siege boiling up.

Hear 6000 marines in Antwerp, 2000 into Holland

A squadron advance to Brigade.

Our operation the taking of Dranouches from Uhlans, who luckily run, as we entered village frontally.

Flemish here can't speak much French over frontier, a different country.

#### 15. Oct 1914

Get up early after a very good night in an empty house and it resolved itself into a rest day, only we did not know it.

Met 2 marines who gave the naval situation, chain of mines and submarines across channel.

2000 marines lost at Antwerp, had to go to Holland.

The new aeroplane motor guns to go back to Plymouth, everything points to a winter campaign, only one can't tell.

The Kaiser should die today by prophecy

#### 16. Oct 1914

Reserve brigade. We have off at 7.

I am with echelon A, tomorrow will be advance squadron of the Division if we go on. Go to Leuve Eglise in a thick fog, pack and await events in a small cottage. Next door home is shut, the owner a workman shot against a wall by Germans last Sunday.

Two German army corps reported advancing from Bruges and by coast. We are as far forward as required, perhaps further.

#### 17. Oct 1914

Start off as advance Brigade at 6 with orders this time to take the river line, to Ploughshot into a large wood. An extraordinary manoeuvre in middle of same, sit down later to firing and guns all round.

Machine guns ordered up, as Cousal sick, I take over and am amused therewith, tho' get gunned and get no shooting.

A new haystack position, the Bays gun knocked out, the 11<sup>th</sup> in a beastly position right up by railway line behind a hedge opposite infantry entrenched, who had done it in night.

Lumly killed, various wounded. Our battery busy, some casualties.

See one of our aeroplanes working well, with lights etc.

Thought we were for very unpleasant job facing Germans.

All night we were spared, Lord knows what, by arrival of a lot of infantry and back under cover of darkness, followed by a parting salvo, to Drasoutre

#### 18. Oct 1914

Reserve Brigade wander out at Dawn, and still do machine guns.

To a large wood and sit there all day, very little fighting but 60lb guns close to us make the day hideous.

A few shells fall, coal boxes ½ size but not close. After dark a trying march to a farm near Romeraines. There get champagne which was hidden from Germans

#### 19. Oct 1914

In a new flea bag and very comfortable on a mattress.

Pulled out at 3 with an order to make a night march to St Yves arrive at dawn and report to O.C.4th D.Gs.

Succeed in finding my way there, farms are burning most of the day and coal boxes, but they don't quite come our way.

A scare when I first arrived it looked like an attack, but was the Tins.

Rumour says things are not very bright. I guessed as much.

Expect we will dig in here.

5th DG m guns with Holland occupy the old advanced position which I considered a bad and untenable one.

Sleep in the Inn, shells all round and in the wood but not into us. Go round posts at night on a cycle.

#### 20. Oct 1914

We were to be relieved at dawn, but 2 squadrons of the 18<sup>th</sup>, owing to a mistake, come late, they pay the penalty of casualties at once. A squadron has trumpeter Lines hit and cannot leave the trenches till quite late in the day, being pinned in by machine guns etc.

We eventually get back to the "B" of Bois de Ploegstrut.

Nearly get hit by a shell which pitches into the middle of some led-horses of Division Headquarters. A scurry like a wasps nest ensues inside. Shells on the lawn and into house etc all day.

Listen to the din of a brigade RFA and 60lb Battery. Suddenly saddled up in evening to rush off to support 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade and Goffy, although we were reserve Regiment of Division.

Came on hill 63, saw in looming mists of evening cavalry down road shells bursting behind them and in them.

We are hurried to Messines to put it in a state of defence and hold it till the last.

Hunt m[achine] gun positions at dark and behind barricades the squadrons try and dig themselves in during night.

I dine with B in a very nice house we consider the local situation for us, a very trying one, indeed liked the prospect of the morrow almost less than any I have known.

The 18<sup>th</sup> lost heavily where they relieved us at Le Ghies, 80 men.

The Tins badly hit, lost man of theirs came to me in Messimes, unarmed.

Sleep in a very comfortable bed in the doomed city.

#### 21. Oct 1914

Out 1 hour before dawn, hide machine guns horses in a brewery, the others of regiment go a long way back to comparative safety, site trenches at dawn.

A squadron moves 4 times before the beat is found.

Uhlans come early, but don't give much of a target in fog.

Luckily we were able to entrench a bit before the real shelling started. Then they started on the city, hundreds came in the day, bursting everywhere smashing everything.

The worst of it came in the hour before dark we found a cellar, our house hit. Collier Johnson's house wiped out, only he was below ground.

I had a near one going from gun to gun.

Only 6 wounded at end of day in regiment but it was distinctly trying.

Got a good dinner and at night ½ Brigade of infantry come to reinforce us.

A very bad day over and I thought it would be much worse.

We hear the Germans and rushed Le Ghies. We retook it, captured our own prisoners back again, who had been rushed asleep and exhausted and get 300 Germans!

Relieved by infantry late at night, then bed. Guns had to go on again at 2 am

#### 22. Oct 1914

A great deal of firing before dawn, the real attack was further South no doubt.

I dressed hastily and went to machine guns. Unfortunately LC Spendly hit in mouth, a pure bit of bad luck.

The moment he moved across the window he got it, the only one thro' the window.

At first little shelling, Kavanagh and I explore the now empty convent I walk in the garden, nearly catch a shell.

Go with a map, large scale, I found to the Battery commander and nearly get another, then to lunch and are hunted to cellar by howitzer.

Am now writing in cellar, waiting for better times!

I warned Black re position of A Squadron he refused to move and a shrapnel burst in them, killed Rich, wounded Black and 15 others.

So I am now to command the Squadron again, in a way I'm sorry, Archie and Bouverie gone sick. The Tins have lost heavily.

#### 24. Oct 1914

Lindenhoch

Our rest day spoilt by an airman reporting a cavalry corps marching on us.

All saddled up ready, then off.

All sorts of rumours going, big Russian victory, Italy at war, etc, etc, Haighs, big success in North

#### 25. Oct 1914

March out in usual pitch dark back to Messines. We are in reserve by a windmill, dig ourselves into the ground. I collect tools from all sides, am sure this is one of the big lessons of the war.

Billet in town at dark, only a few shells, in big house opposite convent.

#### 26. Oct 1914

A Squadron for duty and relieve 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars before dawn. They must have had a very bad night in pouring rain, in a miserable trench half full of water.

My particular place is a sort of little cave.

Shot at various Uhlans then the situation alters with its usual lightning rapidity, a big forward movement is to come off, all infantry withdrawn, cavalry take over a very extensive line, which brings me in support by convent, in dug outs.

The convent and church burn, so I am warm in night, almost too much so. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade gone. Hear big battle.

#### 27. Oct 1914



A Squadron is in supporting trenches. I go round before dawn, find Spurrier., see Blackburn and just get back before the shooting begins, there is little of it. In dug outs in rain part of time, relieved by Connaughts in evening. The usual furious muddle about it.

#### 28. Oct 1914

A very comfortable night get my boots off, in the house where I found the signalling going on, and after breakfast we actually go back and see our long lost horses, groom, clean and ride them. Gallop round a field enclosed by trees, all the time keeping a sharp lookout for aeroplanes, such is our present life. Change my Squadron to a little farm near by as this place is over-crowded and a sea of mud.

Then up to our old pitch by windmill, see various aeroplanes being shot at. Not very encouraging news today, there is very hard fighting on the left and we are hanging on, get quietly back into Messines and take over the outer line, formerly held by C squadron, from Connaughts.

A very cold night, frost.

I am on left of line with 11 troop.

Turned out twice by firing to meet the attack only a few shots however.

Our orders remain the same, to hang on to the last here, so its simple

#### 29. Oct 1914

A big battle going on on our left. At first only cannon can be heard, but by 12 can hear musketry and machine guns. It seems to be coming this way. Lie in the cold trench, read papers, think of other times, one might almost be buried and done with, hour after hour, hear we may not be relieved even tonight.

The day is wintry, and one's feet wet.

War from the cavalry soldiers point of view as he expected and as it is, are two quite different things.

Am relieved by Wild's Rifles in evening after a lot of palaver; Pathans and Sikhs.

The getting in and out of trenches was rather a comedy in rain and dark, it might have been otherwise Currans cough for instance.

The Afrides are going German hunting in the wood.

I get a comfortable billet and sleep and a letter from Vide and good news re Haigh having