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of the
Green Howards

Kenneth Taylor's War Diary, 1944

Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment (19th Foot) The North York Militia, The North York Local Militia & North York Rifle Volunteers

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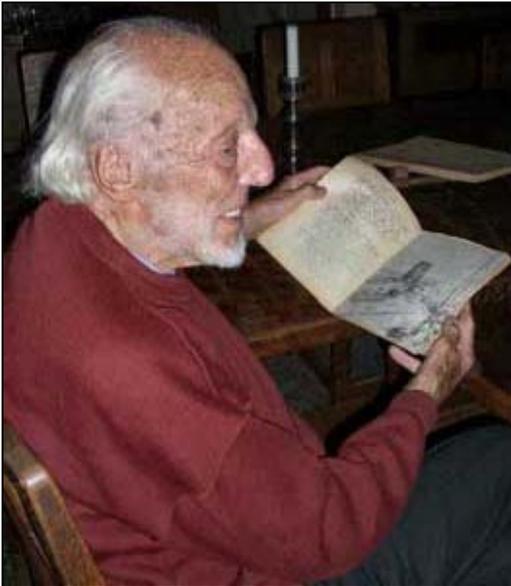
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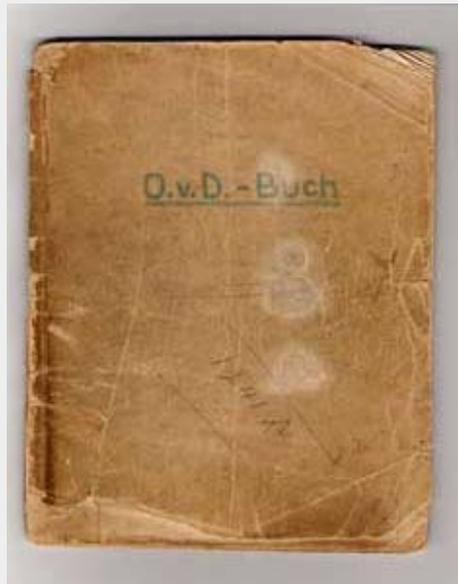
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INTRODUCTION



Kenneth Taylor, photographed on the occasion of his visit to the Green Howards Regimental Museum in September 2005. He was then aged 87.



The book used by Kenneth Taylor for his diary.



Click above image for a 1024 x 604px image. Click anywhere in the window that opens to close it.



Click above image for a 640 x 378px image. Click anywhere in the window that opens to close it.

A group of Officers of the Green Howards (6th Battalion?) taken sometime in 1944. Kenneth Taylor is 3rd from right, centre row.

In 1944, Lieutenant Kenneth Taylor of the Green Howards recorded his experiences in an 'illegal' wartime diary.

Mr Taylor presented a transcript of his diary to the Green Howards Regimental Museum. Serving soldiers were forbidden from keeping diaries, so he wrote his entries secretly every evening in a 'liberated' German exercise book. In it he details his experiences in 1944 from D-Day in June through to the end of the year.

With the 6th Battalion The Green Howards he moved through France and Belgium into Holland, arriving at the Nijmegen Bridge across the River Waal just a few days after its capture by the Allied troops. The bridge was a vital objective on the advance of Allies into Germany.

Kenneth Taylor, who was promoted Captain at the end of October 1944, spent several weeks in the Nijmegen area, with some time of rest in Brussels. In late November 50th Division, of which the 6th Battalion The Green Howards was part, was broken up, and Ken returned to England, and there his diary ended.

A fluent French speaker, he was sent soon afterwards as Liaison Officer with the Belgian Army as the 21st Army Group advanced through Belgium. In Brussels, recently liberated, he met Françoise, a young artist, whom he married.

We are delighted to be able to present his diary on this website. Kenneth Taylor's diary can also be read on his son's website, <http://www.patricktaylor.com/war-diary-1>.

The diary is presented in "Chapters" on this website, each of which can be accessed from the Index below. At the end of the diary, we have compiled a list of the names that have been mentioned in the diary, and the Chapters in which these names can be found.

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1. 6 JUNE - 12 JUNE 1944

Tuesday 6 June, 44

Awakened early in the darkness. Ship rolling considerably but not feeling sick yet. Went on deck into the cold air to watch the glow over the French coast where the RAF is busy. Over on the right the sky is alight with flares, probably on the American sector. Wondering when I will first hear the enemy shells coming over. Had a very good breakfast despite the rough sea - probably the last for a long time. Got dressed up and went to action deck about 0430hrs. Everyone in high spirits and singing to the mouth organ. Whisky and rum being passed round freely. After a long time went up and embarked into LCM about 0530.

Quite light now and French coast can be seen dimly. Surrounded by ships but everything going on without interference. Had great difficulty in casting off owing to rough sea. Circled round for about half an hour and then made for coast about 7 miles away. Aircraft could be heard roaring overhead. Sea very unpleasant but most people too excited to be seasick. Had to tow one LCA some of the way but the rope kept snapping so left it. RAF and Navy making enormous noise and SP artillery putting over terrific barrage.

Eventually approached beach and found things difficult. Kept grounding and hitting obstacles with shells falling in water. Made a few attempts to get close in but failed. Eventually decided to climb out but the ramp refused to go down at first. Shrapnel hitting craft so we jumped for it at 0800hrs and water only up to waist. 27 set got wet thro' and would not work. Cairns hit in leg. Stopped a few minutes at edge of beach. Woods hit in eye. Got on to coast road where things were unpleasant owing to mortars and shells flying around and minefield on both sides. Some logs on the side of the road provided welcome protection.

Glad to find myself not unduly worried and able to walk around and see how people were getting on. Most of them OK but a few rather shaken. Quite a number of prisoners coming in looking completely dazed. "Achtung Minen" notices on roadside stick in my mind. Very glad to move up road away from the beach where things a little quieter. Grass on fire provided a useful smoke screen. Moved thro' Ver sur Mer and was "Spandau'ed" a little. Talked to a few prisoners including Russians. Held up at Crepon by 88s and Spandaus but by-passed them and stopped for a brew-up. On moving forward shelled and mortared and made one hasty exit from M14. Rainford killed. Dug in then moved fwd to overlook St Gabriel and dug in again. Drinking Champagne when disturbed again by Jerry. At about 2000hrs saw 4 of our tanks blazing. Put in final attack S of St Gabriel and stopped in wood at dark. Gibson wounded. We are the furthest forward troops of the whole invasion and fairly near our objective. The morale was very high and we have moved very quickly, by-passing any opposition where possible.

Wednesday 7 June, 44

Stand to 0415. Moved off early towards St Leger, had a little fighting. Shot up once by Thunderbolts and 2 of our carriers knocked out. Went right past objective to Ducy - St Marguerite, but had to withdraw into line between St Leger and Cancaguy. Set up Bn HQ in pleasant orchard. First chance for a proper wash and sleep. No one eager to dig at first but some Spandau and mortar fire soon encouraged them. Terrific FLAK from beach at night. Wright wounded. We cannot move forward as there is nothing behind us to support. All the landings have been held up owing to filthy weather, so it is a case of hanging on. God knows what would have happened if there had been a heavy counter-attack last night.

Thursday 8 June, 44

Everyone well dug in now and beginning to feel tired. Not much sleep last night. Waiting for 7[th] Arm'd Div to land and come thro' us. Spent pleasant evening in Cancaguy talking to the inhabitants. Obtained good number of eggs and some chocolate. These French people very glad to see us. Dislike Jerries very much.

Friday 9 June, 44

Nothing very fresh. Little sight of enemy except for a few snipers in front. Visited fwd joint post near Conde where they are bothered with Jerry fighting patrols at night. Marauder came down in next field. Saw about 6 Jerry planes making for beach. Eggs plentiful and food good. Pleasant people near Conde - house full of refugees - everyone well fed although short of sugar, soap, bread, etc. Went to Carrier fwd patrol and received a spot of shelling. Raining.

Saturday 10 June, 44

Feeling very tired, so had morning sleep. Visited Chateau which had been Jerry HQ. Found a few bottles of wine and some eggs. The sight of two charred German bodies on the roadside makes a very unpleasant impression.

Sunday 11 June, 44

Lovely day. Decided at midday to put in attack on Christot. Rather hurriedly arranged. Moved forward about 2 miles without opposition. Leading Coys then pinned down by Spandau. Reserve Coys likewise unable to advance. Went forward to try and get communications working. Very unpleasant. Heavy mortaring, shelling, and Spandau fire. Went in a Jeep to look for some casualties. Found none but got lost and was pinned by Spandau behind low bank. Spent about 20 minutes looking in hedges and buildings and expected to stumble on to a nest of Jerries at any moment. These Germans do not seem to take much notice of Red Cross and they Spandau'ed my Jeep the whole way back, but fortunately we moved too quickly to be hit.

All the Companies badly hit and many said it was the bloodiest battle they ever remembered. I soon got used to Spandau bullets flying overhead. Bn decided to withdraw as our flanks were unsecure and we were still suffering heavy casualties. Withdrew in good order to the accompaniment of renewed enemy machine gunning. 4 officers killed, 2 wounded, and about 60 men lost. Reorganised at last light but could not get any food up. Counter-attack expected. Tried to sleep in a ditch but too cold. I don't think any action will upset me after this one.

Monday 12 June, 44

C.O. sent out a special message of praise for the way the battalion had fought. Withdrew to better positions at first light. Moved back across railway to Ducy. Saw a number of Shermans knocked out and on seeing a number of charred bodies beside them I wondered if perhaps the Infantry was not a worse life than the RAC after all. Back in a wood all very serene and peaceful. Enemy quite near but no sign of him. They had even worse casualties yesterday than we did.

Asked C.O. for transfer to Rifle Company but he refused. Feeling rather fed up with my job when the fighting is going on. Saw 3 French girls who gave information of 25 Canadian prisoners being shot at Audrieu. They are SS troops in front of us and are quite fanatical and very young. The prisoners are very haughty, although some of them had been told that we would shoot them when they were taken prisoner. Very tired and not much sleep at night owing to false alarm being given and most of the night stand-to.

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2. 13 JUNE - 26 JUNE 1944

Tuesday 13 June, 44

Feeling extremely well. There seems to be plenty of buckshee Compo at present and with enormous numbers of eggs produced by Robertson we feed very well indeed. 49 Div arrived to relieve us in the afternoon, fresh from England and first time in action. All wearing steel helmets, with faces blackened, they amused us rather, and were treated with superior grins.

Moved out in the evening to a Manoir near Conde sur Seulles. Told at least 24 hrs rest, Bn HQ in the Manoir. Slept in a room, ate at a table, sat on a chair, talked to a pretty French girl, who however chewed gum and much preferred to sleep with the SS.

Everyone feeling very happy to be out of the line - not to have to stand-to and lay lines. Unfortunately a Medium Regt had set up shop in a neighbouring field and fired regularly during the night. Slept well though. Had sundry conversation with Monsieur le Marquis and also a bath in his establishment - cost 10 cigarettes. These people very polite and hospitable but obviously not glad to see us.

Wednesday 14 June, 44

They were treated well by the Germans and regard us as a nuisance. Advocation of Anglo-Franco-Spanish bloc. Never heard of de Gaulle. Violent hatred of Russians and Americans (toujours le Dollar). Professed admiration of the English who are "vielle", unlike Americans. Told me about Russian agents being dropped in France to sabotage railways. Petain their hero. Many French near here killed by British aircraft and greatly resented.

Standing by to move all day, but nothing came of it, except spoiled our rest somewhat. Had a chance to change clothes and refit. Received good supply of newspapers and found 50 Div in headlines. People went to Bayeux for baths.

Thursday 15 June, 44

Morning's rest. Stacked up to move in afternoon. Went as far as Folliot without incident. This village bombed and shelled to hell. Spent evening talking to 2 men and a woman of the Resistance. Grand people, who have no resentment of their village being destroyed. Watched Thunderbolts divebombing. People said all France behind us - slight exaggeration. Went to bed early.

Friday 16 June, 44

Set off early. No trouble to La Belle Epine. Resistance on way to Les Orailles held us up. Went thro' Les Orailles and had to stop. Tanks and 88s shelling our positions. 88 thro' window five feet above my head. Dug in rather quickly near farm buildings. Shelled steadily all afternoon and evening. A few casualties. Pte Bready became very drunk on local brew and had to be evacuated under close arrest. Shelling struck me as most unpleasant so far as we had to sit and do nothing. Could not attempt our objective - Le Lion Vert.

Saturday 17 June, 44

Pulled out fairly early and 5EY came into our positions. Went back through La Belle Epine and La Senandiere with further slight shelling. Planned to attack La Taille and Longraye with tank support. Started OK but leadings Coys soon pinned. Very thick close country made advance almost impossible. B Coy lost a platoon temporarily. All Coys rather knocked about. Withdrew slightly and reorganised between Lingevres and Longraye 796677. No-one very happy. Enemy likely to infiltrate in close country and our flanks uncertain. Dug in.

Sunday 18 June, 44

Mortared, shelled, and Spandau'ed - not excessively. Windy dry weather. Stay here a few days until supplies landed.

Mon and Tues 19 and 20 June, 44

Dorsets came up on our left but unable to advance far. Right flank still open. Shelled sporadically. Periodic stand-tos. Our Arty very active. C Coy brought down ME109 with Bren gun.

Wednesday 21 June, 44

In pouring rain made another attempt to reach La Taille. Coys mortared heavily and A Coy mixed up in our own Arty fire. Had to withdraw to original positions. Everyone very miserable.

Thursday 22 June, 44

More digging, shelling, and mortaring. Change of clothing and improvement in weather. Food still good. Wireless sets in a dreadful mess - waterlogged. Had great trouble with lines due to tanks and water. Saw Marauders bombing Orbois, a marvellous sight which brightens a very monotonous, deadly depressing existence. Very accurate and concentrated flak, but they kept formation. Saw one down in flames.

Friday 23 June, 44

We did a lot of patrolling. Elusive enemy in woods in front. Very tired and fed up. Managed to overhaul wireless sets and get lines working. A few casualties from mortaring - especially D Coy. Read a little for the first time. "New Writing and Daylight" - wrote a few letters. Radio fixed up. Shelling and mortaring not having a good effect on morale.

Saturday 24 June, 44

Still in same position N of Longraye. We have been here too long and Jerry has got our range. We are putting over terrific Arty barrage but enemy is increasing too. Saw my mug smashed to hell by shrapnel on my bed. Not much sleep at night owing to noise and alarms. Stand-to 0430 every morning is a nuisance. Weather is perfect now and it certainly helps to revive spirits, although quite a few people becoming bomb-happy. SWBs on our right eases things a little.

Sunday 25 June, 44

Tremendous Arty barrage at 0500hrs to prelude 49 Div attack. We are shelled and mortared rather heavily now. Nebelwerfers too now - rather terrifying. Listened to Symphony Concert from Cambridge theatre. 2 hours of heaven punctuated by wild dives for slit trench as shells come over. Haydn's Symphony 101 and Mozart Piano Concerto in A have done me a great deal of good, but they only emphasise this grotesque environment.

Shelling by 105s in the evening worst up to now. They hit the trees and burst in the air. I don't worry much but it has a withering effect on the nerves. Two nice holes in the windscreen of my truck this afternoon. I am quite decided that the most unpleasant thing from the Jerries is mortaring - especially Nebelwerfers.

Receiving lots of letters now and also my 3rd 100 cigarettes. Everyone rather short of cigs but I have been able to help a few people as I have plenty. I am rather worried that none of my letters have reached home yet, although some people's have. Have written quite a few letters today. Everyone keeps asking when we are going to be relieved. People have to be evacuated quite often with shattered nerves and quite a few have deserted. Have had some good reinforcements for my platoon, but the Rifle Coys are getting very indifferent ones. I saw 400 Fortresses on their way to stonk someone this morning.

Monday 26 June, 44

Filthy wet day - very demoralising when you have no shelter. We decided to try to push on a bit as the enemy is thought to have withdrawn from our heavy shelling. Strong patrols sent forward with a view to being reinforced, but enemy still there. Forward troops badly mortared and had to withdraw. We are still in the same spot and all this seems interminable. It is like being in prison - living all the time in the same field, being unable to see more than a few hundred yards in the close country. My mind is absolutely deadened at present. A lot more shelling and mortaring. Dorsets truck blown up in my field today. A steady trickle of killed and wounded whilst in a static position is very demoralising.

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3. 27 JUNE - 7 JULY 1944

Tuesday 27 June, 44

Went to bed in truck immediately after breakfast and had a good sleep. Push forward decided for 1630 today. Coys moved forward 1645 under heavy barrage with tanks in support. Communications badly jammed but managed to function. C.O wounded. My best signaller (Cpl McKenna) badly wounded. Given 3 pints of blood plasma at RAP but very doubtful condition. Coys gaining objectives about 2100hrs. 11 of our tanks knocked out but our casualties not as heavy as they might have been. C Coy reached La Taille X-rds at 2130hrs. Bn HQ moved forward about 1000 yds and arrived in new location in semi-darkness. Immediate dig-in. Track blocked by tank and carrier so could not get truck up.

Wednesday 28 June, 44

Everyone very hungry but no sign of food at 0100hr. Found a way to bring up truck but whilst doing so landed it on its side in a ditch. Had to get whole platoon to carry cable 'phones and exchange to new area. Began laying lines just before dawn, having had a meagre supper. Lines through 0700hrs and breakfast extremely welcome. Shortly after breakfast first shell landed and right in our field. I suspect they DF our wireless sets. Fairly heavy shelling continued. This place does not seem very healthy! Weather lovely today. Managed to retrieve truck about 1000hrs and then a couple of hours sleep.

Shelling and mortaring all day, just about 1 degree worse than anything before. However one becomes used to it, but very nerve racking. Cpl Hall wounded and evacuated - not serious. Birtley wounded seriously from mortars. Went to bed about midnight.

Thursday 29 June, 44

Received 2 letters yesterday and two more today - very welcome. Shelling started bright and early this morning and heavier than before. Our Arty replies with gusto but not much consolation. Continual rain does not make us any happier. Had a good wash and shave which I missed yesterday. Life is a horrible dull routine at present.

Cpl McKenna and Birtley both died of wounds. Davies evacuated bomb-happy. Received 4 new signallers. Everyone's nerves on edge with bombardment. Set up lines and exchange in new position. New C.O. seems very efficient but I wish Robin was still with us. Had another C.O. for about 4 hours yesterday. Glad he did not stay. He was in a slit trench before anyone else heard a shell coming.

Thunderstorm in the evening. The sight and smell of dead cows is very depressing. They have the most gruesome expression. Terrific Blitz on A Coy at 1100hrs. My batman went out to repair the line which he did very well.

Friday 30 June, 44

Went to bed 0200hrs and got up 0300hrs to relieve Adj. Managed a few shell-interrupted hours of sleep in the morning. In the afternoon went to Bayeux. Quite the most amazing contrast of environment I have ever experienced in so short a time. Had a lovely bath and walked round the town. No sign of any war damage but packed with British soldiers. Only thing to buy in the shops is butter and cheese. Couldn't believe I wasn't dreaming, to be walking about in a town and seeing civilians. Didn't feel much like going back.

Returned to find another signaller, Leek, had been wounded. Moved to new position at 1700hrs and soon had lines working. Quite a number broken by shells during evening and I got to bed late as usual.

Saturday 1 July, 44

Bn HQ has the most amazing dug-out I have seen in the front line. It looks as though we are here for months instead of a few days (I hope). The C.O. is driving people scatty with his elaborate schemes and pamphlet doctrines. Laying lines all over the place. Despite new position, still being shelled but not too heavily except for one big one 10yds from exchange. No-one hurt but I made the quickest descent ever to earth.

Saw a marvellous sight in the evening when hundreds of Halifaxes came over in open formation at low altitude to drop 1000 tons on 2 Pz Divs at Villers Bocage. Could see the bombs dropping. Fighters swarming about like flies 1000s of feet above. Saw none shot down despite usual terrific FLAK. Weather still very wet and spirits rather damp. Lovett and Jardine both wounded but not very seriously. Very short of signallers now and no time to get reinforcements used to things. Sgt Smith still unfit, but comes up in a day's time.

Sunday 2 July, 44

Went out at 0015hrs to lay line to A Coy forward platoon in pouring rain. Platoon only 200 yds from daytime Spandau positions. Layed line and spoke on phone without being challenged once. Had to waken someone to tell them phone was there. Most extraordinary! I think I could bring a whole German battalion thro' our lines at night without being stopped. Went to bed at 0230hrs and slept thro' stand-to until midday for which I felt much better.

Still pouring with rain and lines being broken all over the place thro' mortaring. Signallers absolutely dead beat and fed up although no-one seems to realize it. 2 I/C wanted lines to A Echelon but I refused. Talk of changing position with 7GH tomorrow as they are in a quieter spot than we are. Looking forward to a rest but shouldn't be surprised if C.O. has us doing drill parades. We have been nearly a month in the line now and still no sign of relief. Went to bed early and had undisturbed sleep. Received cigarettes from U.H.

Monday 3 July, 44

Woke up in pouring rain again. Moving today. Went over to 7GH to look at new position. Seems much better than ours. After Tiffin weather cleared up and we had a fine afternoon and evening. The sun put some new life into me and enabled me to acquire a reflective mood for the first time for days. Thought mainly about Anglezarke and meeting Pat there. Just going to move when Carrier went up on a mine and caused some delay.

Tuesday 4 July, 44

At 0100hrs arrived in new position and went straight to bed in a nicely prepared trench covered by two old doors. These unfortunately leaked and contrary to my expectations I woke up wet in the morning as usual. It rained as usual. This part of the world is very peaceful compared with the one I have just left. We have even got a Mess which I am reluctant to use at first but soon corrupted. Compo supplemented by fresh butter and vegetables is excellent.

The nearby buildings all destroyed except for a farm which is still occupied. Farmer gets very excited because people have been taking his potatoes and planks. He says that dead cows, ruined buildings, and civilians shelled cannot be helped. C'est la guerre - but taking his potatoes, his living, is unnecessary and will make the British very unpopular in France. Unfortunately it is difficult to prevent and to tell him that he can claim damages from civil court in Bayeux causes a certain amount of scepticism.

De Gaulle might be a good thing, but he has bandits and scoundrels in his Govt - i.e. anyone with leftward tendencies. Strong pacifism in French peasants, and fatalism about war.

Wednesday 5 July, 44

Not much work to do. Lines behaving. All Coys having fairly peaceful time except A Coy slight disturbance. Managed a spot of sunbathing. Weather still showery. Read NS and N. Had to stay up all night - quite interesting as there were plenty of Patrol reports. Having a fairly lazy time letting Sgt Smith do the work. I wouldn't mind a change of job. Battalion HQ is a dreadful place.

Thursday 6 July, 44

Received more cigarettes. Rien a faire. Hot sunny day for a change. Slept. Thunderstorm at night but kept dry. It was true - I actually saw C Coy doing drill this morning.

Friday 7 July, 44

Woke up feeling lousy - bad stomach and sick. Survived morning and went to see M.O. Did a bit of vomiting and was sent to ADS and from there to FDS, who decided they had no accommodation for officers with gastritis. I would have liked to stay there as it was a lovely old monastery. Another uncomfortable journey to 10 CCS just near Bayeux. After a great deal of fussing and talking I was allowed to go to bed in the officers' ward/tent. Sheets, a spring bed, and a roof that doesn't leak.

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4. 8 JULY - 9 AUGUST 1944

Saturday 8 July, 44

Had a perfect sleep and woke up feeling completely well. Rather shaken to find I was on a fluid diet. Feeling very hungry but Sister would give me nothing to eat. Anyway the rest is very welcome and I can write a few letters. Saw M.O. and persuaded him there was nothing the matter with me. Said I could have some food and return to duty tomorrow.

Most people here seem to think that 50 Div is having a rest. I enlightened them that we have been in the line for 32 days and still there. Had some cheese, marmalade, cocoa, and BREAD. The first bread since leaving the ship on D-Day. I had almost begun to wish I had asked to stay here a little longer as the food seems grand. The best feature is that there is no wireless here, although I expect soon the patients will have to contend with this added discomfort.

Various sorts of Padres arrive periodically with chocolates, cigarettes, and communion. I accept all but the latter, which is not required to secure the former. I must also add, to the credit of 10 CCS, that they don't come round every few minutes to straighten the bedclothes. The idea of having a Sister to attend to one was rather cheerful but this particular one does not stir my fancy very much. Received news yesterday that Margaret has heard from Ronnie at last. I am thrilled at the thought of her joy and relief. Slept and wrote letters.

Sunday 9 July, 44

Left CCS at 1400hrs. Arrived at 205 CRC hoping to be sent straight to the Battalion. Found myself a prisoner for the night with the possibility of remaining here indefinitely and then being sent to God knows where. There are about 20 officers here, most of whom depress one immeasurably. They are mainly people who have been found unsuitable by their units or who have failed at the critical moment. Their presence is most demoralizing. Their object seems to be to get cushy jobs somewhere out of the line and their behaviour either hysterical or decrepit.

Went out after dark and sent a message to the Adjutant asking him to retrieve me. I hear 50 Div is putting in an attack tonight and feel rather low about it. Went to the cinema and saw Song of Russia. Met Frenchman whom I met 3 weeks ago at Folliot.

Monday 10 July, 44

Woke up about half an hour after breakfast finished but managed to scrounge some. I suppose they thought I was one of the irresponsible inmates. Made further enquiries about getting out but replies rather vague. Went to see my friends at the farm who gave me cider and Calvados. They are strongly pro-British and accept even our pillaging as inevitable. De Gaulle the only possible govt for France. The Normans are conservative about the Russians and the Communists.

There is one officer here who had breakfast in his steel helmet this morning owing to our barrage about 5 miles away!

Staff Captain picked me up at midday and took me back to Bn in time for lunch and to find we were moving in to a position further West to relieve the Essex. Moved 1500 to NW of Bois de St Germain. Essex counter-attacked here this morning. A moderate amount of shelling as we arrived and only one line laid. Did the remainder before going to bed in the rain - not much sleep.

Tuesday 11 July, 44

Bn HQ moving in afternoon. Glad, as the area is filthy and depressing. Installed new exchange in the morning - in a nice circular mortar pit. Moved in fine weather and had a very pleasant hole to sleep in. Nearly big enough for a four-poster bed.

Wed 12 - Wed 19 July, 44

Static for one week. Fine weather mostly, with occasional showers. A little shelling. Heard a rocket gun once and a Flying Bomb one night. A Spandau fired on a fixed line over Bn HQ Latrines. Spent a pleasant afternoon, July 14, in Bayeux. Had a bath and half an

hour in the Cathedral. It was still familiar after 10 years.

Went down nearly to beach one evening and had a look at places captured on D-Day. Masses of troops everywhere who seem to be having a picnic. We have given up all hope of being relieved. Pleased to see Brian on 18 July.

Read a few French books found in a farm. Fair amount of rest but morale of Battalion fairly low.

Wednesday 19 July, 44

Enemy thought to have withdrawn so moved forward. Enemy still there. Cpl Murray and Priestley wounded in carrier hitting a mine. D Coy lost Sgt Major, 21/C, PI Comd and a signaller with one shell. C.O. took it into his head to speak on the wireless - his procedure and security agonizing.

Reached objective but had to withdraw a bit owing to 56 Bde on right not reaching objective. Had great trouble from Spandaus, shells, and mortars. Lost 3 killed and 16 wounded by dark. Positions shelled rather accurately from time to time. Up nearly all night laying lines.

Thursday 20 July, 44

Had a couple of hours sleep but too busy to sleep in daytime. Rained most of day. Decided to sleep above ground in bivvy and be comfortable if less safe.

Friday 21 July, 44

Rained nearly all day. No time to shave. Heavy shelling all round Bn area during evening. A fed-up-making day.

Saturday 22 July, 44

Still raining but longer fine periods than yesterday. No cigarettes received for weeks - since tax-free began. Good job I brought plenty, but nearly all gone. Life will be desperate if there are no cigarettes. I have a good tea system laid on, having bartered my whisky for 2 extra pints per day. After many rumours of further probing forward we seem to be here for some time.

The Bn is sadly different from the D-Day one. I don't think it is capable of doing much now, nor has anyone much confidence in C.O. Hear that Col. Hastings wants to come back. I hope so.

Sunday 23 July, 44

Weather a bit better today. Listened to afternoon concert - Dvorak - and wrote letters. Spent evening at C Coy talking to Major Morton - mainly about the non-decadence of the French. Spandaus still active and shelling. 200 cigarettes arrived.

Monday 24 July, 44

Great improvement in weather. Looks like keeping fine too. Spent a busy morning and went to Bde in afternoon.

A lovely mellow evening which seems to have thawed everyone. The air is balmy - everywhere people are sitting about in groups talking spiritedly or in a contemplative mood. The sunshine has broken the tension and there is less an appearance of strain. They sit and talk about their holidays and past experiences. All this serves to reawaken one's senses and feelings and brings a consequent feeling of unrest to the mind as the perspective of the environment adjusts itself. When one is wet, shelled, and worked incessantly, the intense desire to live does not make itself apparent, but once one can begin to appreciate the high moments of life, one shrinks anew from the thought of death and maiming. This becomes worse the longer one is in action and the desire to find some escape becomes more insistent. There is scarcely a man in the Battalion who does not shrink from the thought of further heavy fighting. Seven weeks ago everyone was keen to get into action. There is talk of a few days rest in the near future. No-one is very enthusiastic as it will only be in preparation for something else. C and D Coys have only 2 officers each and very few NCOs. All we can do at present is to hold a firm line.

Tues and Weds 25 and 26 July, 44

Still holding same position. Bn HQ shelled on Tuesday and I had a piece of shrapnel thro' my tunic which just grazed my chest. I felt a little shaken after this.

Shelled heavily on Weds night. Had to go and mend a line in the middle of it which was very unpleasant as the line ran along the road which was receiving Jerry's attention. Potter lost 2 fingers.

Thursday 27 July, 44

Prepared all day for relief by 231 Bde. Relief began at 2100hrs and enemy left us alone fortunately. Left with signal truck at 2230 and

received a send-off by 105mm shells. No-one hurt.

I don't remember ever having had such a feeling of relief and exhilaration as that experienced as we drove away from the line in the moonlight. As the weight and worry of the battle seemed to slip away, one's senses gradually thawed and perceived the beauty of the night, the scent of the hedgerows, the shades and colours of the sky. Arriving in the rest area I found a tent awaiting me, put my pyjamas on for the first time for weeks and went to sleep.

Friday 28 July, 44

The rest is going to involve a great deal of work, checking kit and stores and carrying out maintenance, but no shelling. Anyway it is my turn to go to 30 Corps Rest Camp for 3 days. I was a little annoyed at first at going there whilst the Battalion was already resting, but on second thoughts it may be worth getting out of a lot of niggling work.

Arrived at Rest Camp at a place called Longues sur Mer near Arramanches. A lovely cove almost like some of those in the less rugged parts of Cornwall. The camp is very pleasant - everything free and easy - food excellent. Went to Cinema. Kept awake at night by small Air Raid with heavy FLAK.

Saturday 29 July, 44

Got up for breakfast at 1000hrs. Wrote some letters and sunbathed. Had a swim after lunch and then went out on a bicycle in early evening. At Reyes met Kenny and Peters and had dinner with them. This would be a lovely place to cycle in if every village were not full of soldiers.

Sunday 30 July, 44

Spent practically the whole day swimming and sunbathing. Saw an airman parachute down in to sea and drown. Cycled to Bayeux in the evening, returned and found a truck waiting to take me back to Battalion for a conference. Very annoyed as it was a useless conference.

Monday 31 July, 44

Went to Bayeux for lunch. Met Jack Ormrod in Lion d'Or from 24 Lancers. Had a party in mess at night with 6 Sisters from 9th General Hospital. Had a lot of fun and went to bed at 0400hrs.

Tuesday 1 August, 44

Went off at 0800 with C.O. on a recce to relieve 130 Bde of 43 Div. Position just East of Caumont - filthy sort of place. Spent day motorcycling backwards and forwards to Granville and was nearly blinded with dust. Bn came up 2000hrs, but relief very confused. Took over line from Dorsets but had to lay our own during the night. Got caught out on road one and a half miles from Bn when Jerry aircraft dropped flares. Road verges mined so could not leave road. Thought the end had come when bombs came whistling down. Went to bed at 0530hrs.

Wednesday 2 August, 44

Woke up at 1000hrs. 5EY and 7GH made successful attack and we moved up behind them near Aunay sur Seulles.

Thursday 3 August, 44

Quiet day in lovely weather. 7th and Gds Armd Divs doing well to South and beginning to open up the front. Americans halfway across Brittany. Most of German armour is in front of us.

Friday 4 August, 44

Another lovely day - nothing to do until afternoon when we reced 7GH position. Took over from them during evening whilst they took next feature.

Sat 5 - Mon 7 August, 44

Resting. Bn concentrated and Mess set up. Corp Comd spoke to us. No letters lately. Jim Rimmer came to see me.

Tuesday 8 August, 44

Moved forward to assembly area SW of Ondfontaine. Went thro' Villers Bocage absolutely razed to the ground - worse than anything I have ever seen. Arrived midday in pleasant orchard quite a distance from enemy - 10 SS Div. Slept all afternoon. Saw 100s of Fortresses bombing. Guns making too much noise to sleep well at night. Received letters.

Wednesday 9 August, 44

Reveille 0430. Moved at 0730 to concentration area of North slope of Mt Pincon. A little shelling but not very close. 'O' Gp for attack on feature South of Le Plessis Grimault - supported by tanks and Arty. I am writing this in the half track M14 as we move up to Start line waiting for 151 Bde to take intermediate objective. 7 Arm'd Division on our left and 43 Div on our right. First big battle we have had for some time. Glorious day but everyone feeling apprehensive about enemy Arty and tanks. We should make it but perhaps dearly. I had a fateful feeling this morning which is wearing off a bit now. Brian has a sticky job today.

1345hrs Held up by traffic. 1430hrs We pass over Mt Pincon and smashed tanks litter the road. Shells dropping round about as this is a very exposed forward slope. Can see our barrage landing in front. 151 Bde have gained objective. Many prisoners walking back up the road. 1500hrs Just had an unpleasant half hour's shelling on the road but it is not so close now. 1515hrs More shelling - I am fed up with this bloody war. We are waiting to start advance now. I won't see a lot of these people again. Jerry seems to save all his Arty and mortar ammunition until we are on the move away from our slit trenches. It is fairly whizzing down everywhere now.

1615hrs Have just during the last half hour had the most horrible barrage on top of us. I have been crouching in the M14 working on the wireless set - shells landing within 20 yards. I have been sweating and waiting to stop a packet. I am very thirsty. It is not too bad now but may start again any minute. Our boys have started their advance. Fortunately the barrage is not on them now although fairly near. No doubt we shall all get it tonight when we have pushed the enemy out of his positions. I wish I was swanning thro' Brittany with the Yanks.

2100hrs We have been shelled all day steadily. M14 has moved forward a short distance. Coys have dug in about two thirds of the way to their objective and we are awaiting orders to move up. No-one has had a meal since 1200hrs. It looks like being a rough night with shelling and possibly a counter attack. L.Cpl Macmillan has been wounded. The M14 seems to have borne a charmed life up to now but I don't relish the next move forward.

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5. 10 AUGUST - 26 AUGUST 1944

Thursday 10 August, 44

Arrived in position just as it was going dark and spent whole night digging in under shell-fire. Had some sleep during the morning. A lovely hot day. Did not do very much. Not a pleasant position.

Friday 11 August, 44

On duty all last night. Slept all morning thro' terrific barrage of our guns supporting 151 Bde. We are moving up tonight nearer to Conde sur Noireau in support of 231 Bde.

Saturday 12 August, 44

Moved at 0030hrs. As we arrived in position at 0330hrs road shelled. A few casualties. Spent rest of night digging in. Moved forward 0830hrs over a ridge to position near Devons. Dug in and were then shelled by SP gun and mortared all afternoon. Every one landing right in our orchard. Cpl Gunnell and Callaghan wounded. I was scared stiff. Spandau sniping at us too.

1730 withdrew again and as we were going back over the ridge in view of the enemy gunners I mentally said "Goodbye" to everyone. Got through and dug in again for the 3rd time in one day at about 11.30pm. The last three days have been infinitely worse than D-Day and we have lost about 150 men. I am short of 9 signallers and feeling almost bomb happy.

I am absolutely filthy with diving into trenches and utterly tired out. Apparently we were being shelled thro' open sights by heavy calibre SP guns. The RAP had a ghastly time this afternoon and the doctor was absolutely magnificent. A shell hit the next room to the one in which he was working and he still carried on unperturbed.

Sunday 13 August, 44

Our 25 pounders made such a noise last night that it got on my nerves and I could hardly sleep. The enemy seems to be pulling out today as he is not worrying us much. It is a good job as we could not have stood much more of that. Men are being evacuated in considerable numbers in a state of nervous exhaustion. I went to sleep in the afternoon in the lovely hot sunshine and woke up to find that we were being taken into reserve for 3 days rest. As the evening mellowed this realization and the cessation of the enemy shelling gradually allowed the spirit to unclamp itself and feelings other than fear and horror to return. Almost at last light I enjoyed hearing some hymns sung on the wireless, and then unexpectedly the most marvellous thing happened.

My incredulous ears perceived the slow movement of the Eroica just beginning. Nothing else could have satisfied me quite so much at that moment and my reaction to it dwarfed any other musical experience I have ever had. Surrendering oneself to the Eroica at such a moment was to experience the limit of human feeling. My soul had been torn to shreds during the last few days by all that was grotesque and horrible and here its elements were being washed, soothed, reawakened, and integrated again by the work of someone whose perceptions and sympathies were deeper than those of any other human being. Had a letter from Norma.

Monday 14 August, 44

Went back to North of Mt Pincon and arrived in rest area in time for lunch. The usual type of rest with kit checks, parades, and not much rest - but oh! no shelling! After hearing a talk by Bde I.O. it appears that the Jerries are completely encircled. Our work of the past week has not shown much result but there is no doubt that we have been instrumental in cracking the hardcore of resistance in everything we have done. We have lost 36 officers and over 800 men, 600 of them Battle Casualties.

Tues 15 - Thurs 17 August, 44

Resting - some of the time - plenty of work. Made a trip to Aunay sur Odon. This town is about twice as devastated as Villers Bocage. All one sees is a road cut through heaps of rubble piled on both sides, and no building stands except for the church steeple.

We are busy making ourselves into a mobile column to pursue the Jerries (we hope!). South France has been invaded and we have completed the encirclement in the North. I wish the BFs would pack-in. It seems silly to risk death a few more times when the result of the war is now so certain. During a rest like this our sensibilities and appreciation of life return and the sweetness of it makes the thought of death more difficult to tolerate than when one's senses are numbed by the battle.

Friday 18 August, 44

Our mobile column sets out and we swan off thro' Vassy to a place near Flers. A lovely day's motoring, but I was nearly blinded by dust at the end of it. Many civilians about, who give a good welcome. We feel more like liberators especially as the towns are not badly damaged.

Saturday 19 August, 44

Made further short journey thro' Athis to La Corneille where we spent a pleasant night. Nowhere near enemy but P.B.I. made to dig-in - for exercise.

Sunday 20 August, 44

Advanced through pleasant country NE for a few miles and stopped about lunch time in pleasant spot near St Honorine. Moved on in the dark thro' Putanges. Rained all night and everyone got very wet.

Mon and Tues 21 and 22 Aug, 44

Rained. Felt sick and vomited. Spent night and next day in ambulance thro' Argentan and Gace feeling rather ill. Greeted everywhere with flowers, fruit, and wild acclaim. Owing to quick retreat not much sign of damage. Spent another night in ambulance.

Wednesday 23 Aug, 44

Started early and had terrific welcome especially at Rugles. Hear that FFI have taken Paris. More rain. Rejoined Battalion. Stopped at Ambenay near Rugles and had a drenching night in a field.

Thursday 24 Aug, 44

Still pouring. Moved into an orchard with plenty of barns and the hospitality of a lovely house. Had the mess in a magnificent parlour. People here rather "collaborateurs" but this seems due to a sentimental religious pacifism and a dislike of La Canaille and Communism. The Resistance keep appearing with collaborateurs whose heads they shave. Probably a great many petty vendettas are settled in the name of La Resistance.

Friday 25 Aug, 44

Should have moved early this morning but postponed. Glorious hot day spent in mainly sitting on a telephone. Went to Rugles with Brian and saw Jim Rimmer. Went out in the evening and had the odd drink with the odd family. One merely walks up to a door and says Bonsoir and is then invited to partake of whatever is going. Learnt how to make Omelettes.

Saturday 26 Aug, 44

Reveille 0315 for early move to the Seine. Did not move until 0900. Then had the most glorious drive thro' Evreux, down the lovely valley of the Eure to Pacy and thence Eastwards to a small village South East of Vernon. Lived in a barren field. Today was the best we have had with wild welcomes from the lovely smiling villages. The country is glorious and the people beautiful. It is heart breaking to have to waste all this enthusiasm by passing quickly thro' it. However we obtained an enormous stock of eggs, tomatoes, apples, pears, plums, walnuts. The shower of fruit becomes extremely dangerous when one is moving quickly.

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6. 27 AUGUST - 10 SEPTEMBER 1944

Sunday 27 August, 44

Spent an idle day in a not interesting place. Walked in the evening to the Seine and had a magnificent view from near Notre Dame de la Mer. A few Jerries could be seen in a wood on the other side. At night we had the most violent storm I have known, accompanied by a cyclone. Everyone absolutely drenched.

Tuesday 29 Aug, 44

Poured with rain all day. Prepared to cross Seine in evening and moved at 2330hrs.

Wednesday 30 Aug, 44

Crossed river at Vernon at 0100hrs in the rain. Slept in a wood. Moved at lunch time thro' Gasny and NE to Beaugrenier and spent a pleasant night in a farm. Spent evening talking to inhabitants. Captured our first V1 site. We are now moving fast again behind the Arm'd Divs.

Thursday 31 Aug, 44

Set off 0800hrs and moved thro' Chaumont en Vexin to Auneuil. Pleasant night in a Chateau.

Friday 1 September, 44

Moved at 0600hrs thro' Beauvais, Breteuil, and nearly to Amiens, then East near to Villers Bretonneux. Held 2 bridgeheads over Somme at Corbie and ---? People here are wildly hysterical and mostly rather drunk. There is nothing for us to do as the FFI round up all the Jerries whom the Arm'd Divs have by-passed. I don't like the hair-shaving of collaborators.

Saturday 2 September, 44

Got up 0330 for an early move which did not materialize. Rained. Moved at midday thro' Amiens and across the Somme nearly to Arras. The Somme country is very bleak and desolate.

Sunday 3 September, 44

Moved thro' Arras to defensive position North of the town in a wilderness.

Monday 4 September, 44

Left Arras and travelled 100 miles to Alost in Belgium, via Vimy, Lens, and Tournai. The North of France near Lens and Lille is horribly depressing and the people all look pinched and unhealthy. Things are a little better in Tournai. In moving thro' Belgium to Alost the welcome we received outdid anything seen before. In Alost itself was the most incredible sight. The people went absolutely crazy. It is practically impossible to travel thro' the town as they pull you out of your Jeep and climb all over it. The sight of one motor cycle causes a whole street to turn out and cheer wildly. At the same time parties of Maquis with various weapons go tearing off into the nearby woods to produce prisoners. They are constantly asking for petrol and arms. Everything in the town is offered to us including the full use of a glorious swimming pool 200 yds from Bn HQ.

Tues and Weds 5 and 6 September, 44

Swimming and drinking and conversation most of the day and night.

Thursday 7 September, 44

After a marvellous few days ordered to move again at midday. Set off thro' Malines towards Albert Canal and had further wild demonstrations. No trouble en route except tomato juice obscuring windscreens of vehicles. Stopped near canal South of Gheel. Told to make an opposed crossing in boats at night. Enemy not thought to be strong.

Friday 8 September, 44

Moved up nearly to canal at midnight on a dark night. Whilst waiting to cross, a chap in D Coy set off a 75 Grenade which blew his head off. I was talking to him 2 minutes earlier and had just walked away. The sight of this brought one back to reality after the last few weeks and did not induce a very happy frame of mind for the operation. We made crossing in two places with two assault boats and a few Recce boats. It was rather eerie and tense gliding silently across the water with an occasional burst of machine gun fire down the canal, but we had negligible casualties, apart from a few chaps falling in and getting wet.

Our object was to secure ground where bridge had been blown in order that it could be rebuilt before morning. D Coy reached objective but C and A Coys held up and still short of objective by daylight. Bn HQ moved up behind A Coy and we dug-in at dawn. The enemy counter-attacked heavily with machine guns and armoured cars and C Coy came streaming back thro' Bn HQ. 7[th] Green Howards landed behind us and sent two Coys to get the necessary X rds. They also failed, with casualties. A Coy had two platoons surrounded and taken prisoner. D Coy reported over wireless that they were surrounded and scarcely any ammunition left. The C.O. was wounded and the position began to look serious - enemy counter-attacking heavily all afternoon with only B Coy and 1 PI of A Coy keeping them back. It was very disquieting with enemy on 3 sides and only the water behind. I thought we would have to swim or be taken prisoner. However we held all counter-attacks and by darkness the situation was more in hand.

Saturday 9 September, 44

S East Yorks made a night crossing the other side of the X rds which enabled us to advance and secure our objectives, D Coy having managed to rejoin us with not many losses. Bn HQ moved up to a position where we were machine gunned all day long. Enemy now using guns and mortars also. I.O. wounded by Spandau bullets, leaving myself and the 2nd in command at Bn HQ - the Adjutant not having crossed over. In the evening the enemy withdrew a little, 151 Bde having made another bridgehead further East. Slight shelling at night.

Sunday 10 September, 44

Relieved of our positions and prepared to take over from 8DLI, which did in the evening. A very unpleasant spot - Bn HQ is near to a pontoon bridge which is shelled all day long and treated with airbursts. We have already lost about 180 killed, wounded, and missing in this party.

The whole bridgehead is now being very heavily counter-attacked by infantry, tanks, SP guns, and mortar fire. Our own part of it seems to receive particular attention. New C.O. arrived.

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7. 11 SEPTEMBER - 30 SEPTEMBER 1944

Monday 11 September, 44

In early morning mist enemy made terrific counter-attack and he evidently intends to destroy this bridgehead. The tanks infiltrate and turn up in the most unexpected places. Two Panthers concealed in houses destroyed 8 Shermans in quick succession. One Bn of DLI's near Gheel surrounded. The Jerries can be heard yelling and shouting as they attack.

Tuesday 12 September, 44

During the night a good deal of shelling. I counted 60 in 10 minutes which fell in our immediate vicinity. More counter-attacks. Moved Battalion HQ early in the morning, just in time to avoid further shelling. 15 Scottish Div began to take over. During afternoon I undressed and swam across the canal for exercise and not for the reason I originally feared. Just as we were going back over Ferry 7GH counter-attacked so we had to leave our Carriers and A.TK. guns behind. A tremendous relief to leave this bridgehead for a rest.

Wednesday 13 September, 44

Rest cancelled during the night and we had to move early to protect the Guards Arm'd Div bridgehead at Beeringen. However on arrival there things were fairly peaceful. Enemy aircraft came over at night dropping flares but no bombs. Our tracer AA is an amazing sight.

Thursday 14 September, 44

Resting! i.e. a lot of work to do.

Friday 15 September, 44

Went over to bridgehead at Gheel again to bury some bodies and then had 2 hours in Diest. Did some shopping in quite well-stocked shops.

Sat 16 - Mon 18 September, 44

Still resting. Played a game of Rigger. Took HQ Coy for a Route March (Pub Crawl). The new C.O. is quite charming and amusing so far - but rather keen on various bits of nonsense. The Battalion is now made to Blanco. A bugler has been produced. The talk is all concerned with what we are going to do when we get to Germany - which some people imagine will be soon. I seem to have caused some alarm by saying that I only joined the army in order to be able to fraternize with the Germans.

Moved off to Escaut canal at Neerpelt. SS thought to be in vicinity. Occasional Spandau. We were subjected to a prolonged air raid at night which caused us no casualties. We are in the middle of all the AA fire again. Spent all night laying lines.

Tuesday 19 September, 44

Spent the day digging-in vehicles until 1730 when we decided to move Bn HQ - thus causing considerable annoyance to all concerned. However we went to a lovely park. Up all night again laying further lines.

Wednesday 20 September, 44

Moved into a lovely big house with electricity and hot water. Went for a short pub-crawl in the afternoon and also had some sleep. The airborne operation in Holland seems to be progressing well and we are waiting to follow the armour to connect up with it.

Thursday 21 September, 44

Prepared to move at midday but then postponed. Waiting all day for the road into Holland to become clear.

Friday 22 September, 44

Moved at 0035hrs in pitch darkness over the Escaut canal and up the main road to Eindhoven. Frequent delays and by daylight we had moved 6 miles. Had breakfast by the roadside. A great number of knocked out Shermans of Gds Arm'd Div. Our column on this road is nose to tail and sometimes 2 deep. Our object is to reach Nijmegen as soon as possible. Passed thro' Eindhoven about midday and to Son where we were held up many hours. Found out that road had been cut a few miles in front at Veghel by enemy tanks and infantry. Half the Bde including C.O. had got there but we have to stop here in defensive positions.

U.S. airborne troops protecting the corridor here, which is a few miles wide.

Saturday 23 September, 44

Road still closed. Heavy fighting in Veghel. Moved into better defensive positions. Eindhoven behind us has been attacked and enemy got to within sight of bridge but then pushed back. During afternoon saw hundreds of American gliders landing in fields all around us with supplies. Some of them crashed. They are the most amazing sight as they approach across the sky. C.O. arrived back in evening having managed to get thro' from Nijmegen. Arranged to move early in morning if road is still open.

Sunday 24 September, 44

Stayed up all night. Ready on the road at 0400 and although it is still under shell fire in front we moved off at 0430. Our column travelled at a very considerable sort of velocity and as we passed thro' the deserted streets of Veghel and Juden in the early morning light life held a certain amount of interest. However all was quiet and as we sped Northwards towards Grave the tension diminished and one could begin to enjoy the thrill of the journey. The big bridge over the Maas is undamaged and it is a great achievement to have captured it intact.

Nijmegen Arrived in Nijmegen about 0700hrs with great feeling of relief. The first thing to happen was a series of sudden screaming roars as the German aircraft came swooping over the town to drop their bombs. This is something new to us in daylight. Our AA fire is deafening. We are supposed to be defending Nijmegen for a few days but at midday we are told to cross the Waal and put an attack in Eastwards towards Bommel. The airborne Div at Arnhem is still fighting and has not been fully relieved.

Crossed the Nijmegen Bridge over the Waal at about 1600hrs with some apprehension on foot. It is a magnificent bridge and its capture a marvellous achievement. As you walk across with the Luftwaffe in the offing and shells imminent you feel just about the biggest target in Western Europe. In fact that is exactly what you are, as the enemy will now do everything to wipe out this bridge. So far he has not succeeded in doing it any damage and a few hundred yards to the West the railway bridge is still intact and being used for transport.

As it goes dark we move into defensive positions at Ressen and apart from a certain amount of shelling things are reasonably quiet. At night the Luftwaffe renews its activity over the bridge and the AA fire is a beautiful sight. The sky becomes absolutely dense with lines of slowly ascending red balls which appear to creep upwards interminably until they eventually burst.

Monday 25 September, 44

The news that road behind us has been cut again raises our spirits considerably! Also the fact that the Nijmegen bridge may disappear into the water at any moment leaving us marooned on the Island is most comforting. This stretch of land between the Waal and the Neder Rijn is known as the Island and it is just about the most depressing piece of country imaginable, being absolutely flat and netted with deep ditches, usually half full of water. Stayed put all day whilst Bommel mopped up by 5EY.

Tuesday 26 September, 44

Moved forward in the afternoon to attack Haalderen and were met by heavy shelling and mortaring. Almost immediately I saw Capt Dimmer and Capt Semple killed in Bommel by a shell about 50 yds from me. Also Cpl Moralee badly wounded. As I bandaged up his neck I did not think he had much chance but was later told he would probably be O.K. Lt Hammer also killed. Slight advance made but very difficult going.

Wednesday 27 September, 44

A and D Coys cut off. Maj Maxwell and Capt Franklyn killed! Lt Peters and Lt Jamieson missing. B and C relieved pressure on A who did not suffer very heavy casualties. A filthy wet day. Attack on Haalderen abandoned. A few of our tanks knocked out. Germans using a lot of Tigers here. Many cases of exhaustion amongst our chaps. Brian fainted but was soon OK again. A lot of shelling. Hear that Brit airborne at Arnhem cannot be relieved and has had to withdraw with heavy losses from North of Rijn after a marvellous stand. The enemy is very strong in these parts.

Thursday 28 September, 44

Hung on to our positions all day, but Bn was in a bad state and had to be relieved at night. Went back to Ressen in reserve during night.

Friday 29 September, 44

Woke up to find no sign of breakfast arriving. The reason for this soon became apparent when we found that both the bridges had been blown behind us. Fortunately we received 4 days reserve ration on the Island that night and there is plenty of food on the land, so we soon managed to cook some breakfast. A certain air of depression prevails at the moment, what with bridges being blown, the road from Eindhoven cut, and Arnhem abandoned. The railway bridge is completely finished but late in the day the road bridge became usable again after good work by the REs under heavy fire. The Adjutant had to be evacuated with nervous exhaustion in the afternoon, so as the I.O. has been killed I am quite busy - also Sgt Smith is in bed with Malaria.

Saturday 30 September, 44

Moved to defensive position near river bank just East of bridge, as enemy counter-attacks are very strong. He is trying to eliminate the bridgehead. A small amount of shelling. Saw Typhoons rocketing Haalderen - which is a good thing. Lovely day for a change.

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8. 1 OCTOBER - 22 OCTOBER 1944

Sunday 1 October, 44

7[th] Green Howards and our B Coy withstood terrific counter-attack North of Bommel for which they received high congratulation by Corps Commander. We are waiting to be attacked hourly and to have to defend the bridge to the last man, but the 7th's resistance seems to have checked them for the time being.

Monday 2 October, 44

Relieved during the day by 6DL1 and whole Bde returned to Nijmegen for a rest. Glad to leave the Island for a bit. One leaves the Island by a long pontoon bridge. There is terrific congestion of traffic and as we waited about 50 yds from the river a Jeep got stuck halfway across. The enemy chose this moment to do a little shelling and bombing of the bridge, but we suffered no casualties. Once one is over the bridge it is amazing to see the speed with which people move off into the town. The whole of the area just South of the bridge is a veritable no-man's land of ruined buildings swept with shell fire, but it is good to see the main bridge still standing though a little battered. Occupied buildings to the South East of the town and began our rest very pleasantly by being bombed and then shelled during the night.

Tues 3 - Sun 8 October, 44

Having survived this the work started, but fortunately Sgt Smith has recovered now and can do a great deal of it. Everything is well organized and there are innumerable arrangements for baths, cinemas, theatres, EnSA etc. Also there is a soldiers club and an officers club in the town.

Nijmegen is a beautiful town with wide spacious streets and beautiful houses. Even the poorer parts of the town are very clean and the houses pleasant. There are a great many shattered roofs and a fair number of destroyed houses but life goes on.

On some days there is a general atmosphere of haste and uneasiness about the place and all one sees is a few scurrying pedestrians, some wild figures on bicycles, and the Jeeps tearing down the streets. On other days the sun shines and the people come out and through the streets with the soldiers. It all seems to depend partly on the weather and partly on the amount of shelling the previous night. Our own guns of all sizes are sited all over the town and they make an enormous noise when they start firing, which rather frightens people. The enemy is only about 4 miles away to the East in the Reichswald and sometimes during the night the Spandau sound to be coming from the next street. It is unpleasant being shelled during a night in a town as it is impossible to tell how near they are landing - and also one feels rather exposed in an upstairs bedroom. The civilians all sleep in cellars and if they have none often spend the night in someone else's or else in an air-raid shelter.

People are very pleased to offer the hospitality of their houses and even to try to provide meals on occasions. They are not starving but there is not a great deal of food to be had. This is a pity because on the Island there is a lot of livestock and vegetables being wasted, especially in the forward areas.

I spent many an afternoon walking thro' the suburbs and out towards the East of the town - and sometimes went further afield in a Jeep where the country is delightful. One does not choose, however, to spend much time in the neighbourhood of the BRIDGE.

There is a piano in the house where we have our mess, which I played sometimes, but about a quarter of the notes don't work. I slept next door with the Plantenga family in a most comfortable bed.

On some evenings I visited another family called Vekemans who have a gramophone and some good records. It is strange listening to Beethoven with the guns firing and shells falling outside.

The people don't really like the shelling but they pay little regard to it and one tells them that it is only our guns firing, which they seldom believe.

I visited another very large family called Stoopman with an enormous number of children who talk incessantly and provide a great deal of amusement. They are marvellous children and are gradually teaching me to speak Dutch. They all speak English and German but will not converse in the latter language.

Sunday 8 October, 44

I felt very sad to have to return to the Island again. The position has altered very little and all we have to do is occupy defensive positions. The traffic situation on the bridge seems to be a little more organised now and the vehicles are filtered up to its approaches in small numbers. From here there is a succession of large notices saying "GET MOBILE", "THERE IS NO SPEED LIMIT", "YOU ARE OVER THE BRIDGE NOW - GET CRACKING" etc. No-one is slow to act upon these injunctions and once one is over the awkward part of the bridge where it has been repaired the average speed of Jeeps is about 50 miles per hour for about the next half mile. Having got away from the immediate precincts of the bridge one heaves a sigh of relief and assumes a normal speed again. There is a smoke screen round the bridge now and a screen of canvas along the East side of it which prevents direct observation but not random shelling, which continues all day long. The REs working there and the AA gunners have a most unenviable job and I would hate to be one of the MPs who stand immaculate in their Red Hats and white gloves at both ends directing the traffic.

We relieve a Battalion of the 101st American Airborne Div and as most of the positions were under enemy observation this had to be carried out in the dark.

Mon 9 - Tues 17 October, 44

The main enemy in these positions is the mud. It rained all day and everything is a sea of mud. Fortunately we have Bn HQ in a house which stands at a road junction and from the map would appear to be about the most obvious place to shell. However we are perfectly happy because all the shells land either about a quarter of a mile to the North or 200 yds to the South where there is nobody. The only unpleasant activity is from a Spandau which although it is some distance away fires on a fixed line right thro' the shed which contains the Signal Office. A little digging soon overcomes this worry.

Life is rather monotonous but the time soon passes as there is plenty to do. I seem to be on duty nearly every night and manage to have a fair amount of sleep in the day time after the first few days. Although I have some spare time I am unable to settle down to read or write.

We have built a very fine shower bath in a barn. A copper boiler is kept hot all day and the operator carries buckets of water up a ladder and pours them on to a perforated trough under which the ablutionists stand. By means of this the whole Battalion has had a good bath in a few days.

The whole of the Island is absolutely flat and as there are very few trees in some parts it makes movement in daylight very difficult. This means that the forward companies have to have their dinner taken up after dark and their breakfast before daylight. The same applies to lines which are broken by shell fire - which is fairly often.

There is ample food to supplement one's rations. The potatoes, tomatoes, and fruit are rotting and the cows and pigs starving. We have offered to send them to Nijmegen but nothing is done about it so we help ourselves.

Weds 18 - Sun 22 October, 44

We came back to Nijmegen for a few days rest. The town is still being shelled regularly but the air raids are not so frequent now. I did not bother to do so much work this time but spent more time visiting people. I feel very much at home now and would find this town perfect if only the war would move a little further away. Unfortunately if it did we should move with it. The Dutch people are rather impatient that we should move on and liberate the rest of Holland, but this is impossible until Antwerp can be used.

Heard a marvellous lecture on the war by the Corps Commander - Gen Horrocks.

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9. 22 OCTOBER - 11 DECEMBER 1944

Sunday 22 October - 4 November approx

Returned to the Island again. Getting to know the place now. I do not mind so much having to go back, especially in view of the fact that a few days rest comes fairly regularly. We took over from 6DLI this time in a position just North of Elst. One Company is in a position which is mortared rather a lot and where grenade throwing exchanges are fairly frequent but otherwise it is not too bad. Bn HQ is in the most marvellous little group of houses where everyone is rather comfortable with stoves and beds etc. Again we seem to avoid the shelling areas nicely.

Became a Capt and spent two days in Brussels. It was interesting to return down the former corridor to Eindhoven. The sight of large numbers of burnt out British vehicles near Veghel recalled the massacre which we just escaped.

In present position there are masses of vegetables, tomatoes, and grapes which we consume and also send to our friends in Nijmegen.

4 Nov approx - 7 Nov approx

Went into reserve position in Elst. C.O. went to Brussels so we had a real rest, the first good rest since D-Day even though we are in a tactical position. No shelling here, no parades nor admin. It is very seldom in the army that one avoids both shelling and parades - as soon as one ends, the other starts.

Had one riotous party in the mess one night in which some people got rather drunk on some horrible apple wine mixed with gin.

7 Nov - 9 Nov, 44

Went into Nijmegen for four days rest. Did very little work and lived with the Stoopmans. We had a Bn dance in a gymnasium which was a terrific success. The town is getting a good deal of shelling again and occasional bombing. It must be seething with spies.

Called back to the Island again two days early at half an hour's notice. We now belong to the 2nd Canadian Corps, 30 Corps having gone South.

9 Nov, 44 -----

Took over positions from American Airborne Regt in and East of Bemmel - horrible place with unpleasant associations. Greeted by heavy shelling from 150 mm guns. Bn HQ living in a number of fairly dry cellars. The forward Coys are occupying trenches mostly containing 3 or 4 feet of water. Most of our energies in this position are devoted to making these places habitable, which we succeed in doing to some extent, by the ingenious use of oil barrels and corrugated iron sheets. The weather is foul and this atmosphere damps one's spirits - with the monotonous flat countryside, the perpetual grey sky, and the thick mud and brimming dykes. However when the big offensive started further South we felt glad that we were here and not in Geilenbirchen - at last we very rarely suffer any casualties. Nijmegen and its bridge still receive a large amount of shelling and bombing with consequent civilian casualties. Unfortunately it is impossible to do anything about this as the Island is so waterlogged that no push is possible now. One feels that the whole operation which brought us here has become to some extent a white elephant.

We learn about 20 Nov that soon we are going to Roulers near Bruges to do a month or so of training. This is in the main welcome although the amount of bull is bound to be terrific and I anticipate becoming very fed up. The C.O. is difficult enough to tolerate in the line. I cannot conceive what he will be like when we are out of it. At least it will be a few weeks when no-one will be getting killed or wounded.

I often wonder now whether I shall ever settle down again to an uneventful civilian life and ever be able to read or think seriously again.

Twat oozesome and th' adrysmal blokes

Did Sleuyder in a Zee of slutch
All gurgly were the brimming dokes
And the glub gobs sprake Dutch

Beware the Spandau cove my son

Beware the Prushyvolk and shun
She wooshing 88

He took his drusty Sten in hand
Long time the lurksome cove he chased
Then stopped to dig by a marleesh pig
With water to his waist

And as in squelging trench he stood
The Spandau cove with eyes aflame
Came sploshing thro' the swirling flood
A-brrrrping as he came

One two, one two, then quite a few
His drusty Sten went clangle-clack
He left him dead and full of dread
He came a-bellying back

Ah! hast thou slain the Spandau cove
Come to my arms my lovesome swod
My worthy chum let's ope' the rum
And warm thy drench-ed bod

Twas ooesome etc.

26 Nov - 28 Nov, 44

Relieved by 231 Bde and left the Island again for Nijmegen. Stayed with Stoopmans but only for short time as we left on the night of the 28th for Roulers by road.

29 Nov, 44

Travelled all night in pouring rain and at a snail-like speed. Thro' Holland the roads run between submerged fields and in the moonlight only water can be seen on all sides, with occasional trees and houses sticking up from it. I had to lead the convoy and only lost the way once! Had breakfast near Alost, but not quite near enough! Arrived in Roulers about 1400hrs and everyone repaired to civilian billets.

30 Nov, 44

Did nothing. I am living in a magnificent house belonging to a very wealthy barrister and the family is very kind. They agree to speak French for my benefit instead of practising their English on me.

1 - 8 Dec, 44

It soon becomes known that we are not here to be trained but for the Division to be broken up. This news causes great depression at first but this is drowned by prolonged and energetic "celebration". There is no shortage of wine or beer in Roulers and everywhere the people are tremendously generous and hospitable. I accepted one invitation to lunch with my family and a meal which began at 1300 was still continuing at 1530 when I had to give in. I had only to mention any wine or liqueur any time and it was immediately produced.

Another memory of Roulers is the smuggling of four Polish girls over the border from Lille for the officers dance. By about 6 Dec everyone was in a fair state of exhaustion and on learning that I was to have leave in England fairly soon I began to lead a quiet life.

Left Roulers at midday on the 8th for Ostende whence we set sail on a horrible little ship for England - en route for Northern Ireland with a training draft. I am no longer a Green Howard, but a Gloster. In itself this means nothing but the idea of having to start all over again to get to know everyone in a Battalion is depressing.

9 Dec - 10 Dec, 44

Arrived in Folkestone and disembarked in England at daylight - incidentally the first people to disembark at Folkestone for over four years. By train to a Transit camp near Southampton. Escaped from camp at night to spend weekend in London.

11 Dec, 44

Embarked at Southampton in the Sobieski and proceeded to live in a certain amount of luxury - all reminding me rather of D-Day.

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NAMES MENTIONED IN THE DIARY

[Chapter 1](#)

Cairns (wounded)
Woods (wounded)
Rainford (killed)
Gibson (wounded)
Wright (wounded)

[Chapter 3](#)

Cpl McKenna (killed)
Cpl Hall (wounded)
Birtley (killed)
Davies
Leek (wounded)
Lovett (wounded)
Jardine (wounded)
Sgt Smith

[Chapter 5](#)

Cpl Gunnell (wounded)
Callaghan
Jim Rimmer

[Chapter 7](#)

Capt Dimmer (killed)
Capt Semple (killed)
Cpl Moralee (wounded)
Lt Hammer (killed)
Major Maxwell (killed)
Capt Franklyn (killed)
Sgt Smith (ill)

[Chapter 2](#)

Pte Bready

[Chapter 4](#)

Cpl Murray (wounded)
Cpl Priestley (wounded)
Lt. Col Hastings (wounded)
Major Morton
Potter (wounded)
Kenny
Peters
Jack Ormrod (24th Lancers)
Jim Rimmer
L/Cpl McMillan (wounded)

Chapter 6

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