

The War Diaries of Francis James Whiting
Diary 2
September 11, 1915 to June 6, 1916

September 11

Sent away 25 francs to Uncle Ernie for a sleeping bag and a few other minor luxuries. Leslie [Hancock](#) and I went over to Steenwert [Steenwerck] this afternoon for tea; picked up a couple of friends of his. Back to camp by 7:30. Just in time to take in the concert that was planned for this evening. We had a huge bonfire which provided the illumination. The prizes for the sports were also donated. Two letters for me tonight; one from home and the other from H.E. Wood. Lovely weather these days. Harvest time and all, it makes me homesick. The crops at home are fine, so they say. When I get back – if I do – I shall be a well-to-do man.¹

September 12

Church parade. Wrote letters home. Went for a swim in the canal with [M.L.] Hancock this afternoon. Also a walk this evening. Felt very sick tonight after we got back to camp. Feverish, but it abated considerably after an hour or so.

September 13

Reported sick this morning. Very heavy bombardment at dawn this morning. About 6:30 we heard the phut-phut of a machine gun overhead and looking up saw a German plane pursued by a French or a Belgian. Suddenly the friendly plane took a dive downward and I thought he was done for, but after dropping about 50 feet he recovered and as he did so the German started volplaning² down at a very steep angle. He landed near a small grove about a quarter of a mile from here and shortly afterward we heard a maxim open fire upon him. Later we learned that he had attempted to fire his machine and also shot several men who tried to capture him. The German was killed.

September 14

Feeling better today. No parade today. Expecting to leave for somewhere all day. Every little while someone would unspring a new rumour as to where we are going though I doubt the O.C. [Officer Commanding] knows for sure. Our blankets were sent off this morning. Am writing this just

¹ Frank was still in relatively good spirits, in spite of the indicators around him of what was ahead.

² Volplane means to glide down with the engine turned off.

before parading tonight prepara[r]atory to our departure. It is now about 6 o'clock. Wherever we are sent it is almost certain to be the firing line somewhere. Started off about 6:30 going in a north-westerly direction. There seems to be the whole army division on the move. Every hour we stopped for 10 minutes. At first songs and chaff [banter] enlivened the column but gradually that died down and everyone conserved his energy as much as possible. A man just in front of me had his mess tin fastened on behind his pack and I told myself that I would follow that shiny tin as long as I could see it. I verily believe that during the last two hours if I had stumbled and fell or lost sight of that mess tin I would have given up. Men were falling out on all sides. It was a terrible gruelling march but at last after coming about 15 miles we turned down a narrow lane and shortly after found ourselves in a barn well floored with straw. These long marches with that terrible pack on our backs are very trying.³

September 15

Lounged around all day. No parade. Very stiff and sore.

September 16

Pay parade in forenoon. Route march in afternoon. Very stiff and sore yet, but feeling better tonight. Sending Hilda A.R. a service postcard tonight. Will write letters tomorrow all being well. Am swotting on French these days.

September 17

A review in honour of O.C. of A.S.C.⁴ Loafed the rest of the day.

September 18

Mess orderly for me today. Paraded at 2:30 and marched to Hazebrouck – 5 kilometres from here. –Pradelle[s]. Entrained at sundown in horsecars – 40 men to the car. Some crowd. Cars smaller than the smallest Canadian cars. Travelling approx. south-west.⁵

³ The march was designed to “toughen” the soldiers. Maj. Agar [Adamson](#), writing at Flixecourt, 17 Nov 1915, described it as “intimate training,” the idea being “to get this Battn. as hard as training can possibly make it in both wind and limb.” See .N. M. Christie, ed., [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919: Lieutenant Colonel, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry](#), (Nepean, Ontario: CEF Books, 1997), 104. The regiment was now at Pradelles, a small village about five km east of Hazebrouck, France.

⁴ The Officer Commanding the Army Service Corps was Lieutenant-General [Sir William Pulteney](#).

⁵ The Regiment was on its way to the Somme region near Amiens.

September 19

Slept but very little during night. Detrained at sunrise this morning at the railhead [Guillaucourt]. Given a tin of very poor tea and marched to a village about 7 miles northwest [northeast] – Mericourt [Méricourt-sur-Somme]. Billeted temporarily in a deserted house. Orchard at back almost overflowing with fruit. Left this billet at 5:30 PM and moved a few hundred yards where we bivouacked for the night. Camped near a canal where I went fishing for a while in the afternoon. Caught nothing and shortly after I returned to camp I was sent on guard for the night.⁶

September 20

Immediately after being relieved this morning I went for a swim in the canal and shortly after coming out my name and number was taken for breaking a newly fledged rule. Tried to have a little sleep but it was no go – too much going on. Paraded at 2 PM and marched about 3 miles to a camp in the valley. I think the orders are to send us to the trenches tonight. Orders changed. Marched to huts by the River Somme.⁷ Slept fairly well.

September 21

Paraded before Lieut. [C.A.] [Pope](#) this morning. Given 2 extra fatigues⁸ for yesterday's crime. Some place for justice, this army. Letters from home and Alec [McWilliams](#).

September 22

Kit inspection in forenoon. Lecture on first aid and a little extension drill in the afternoon. Plane duel this evening. Went for a swim in the canal at noon. Water rather cold. Received letter from Dick [Beaumont](#).⁹

September 23

In last letter home I asked Dad to enquire about the purchase of a machine

⁶ The PPCLI had travelled south by rail about 136 km from Hazebrouck. They left the train at Guillaucourt, marched northeast about 11 km, and bivouacked in a field just beyond the small village of Méricourt-sur-Somme, which lay about 32 km east of Amiens.

⁷ The huts were located somewhere near Froissy, which was along the Somme about 6 km northeast of Méricourt.

⁸ Fatigues involved labour of a non-military kind, sometimes cleaning or kitchen duty, but more often digging trenches, tasks that soldiers generally wanted to avoid. Therefore, extra fatigues were used as punishment for infractions of the rules.

⁹ Dick Beaumont enlisted at Minnedosa, Manitoba, on 2 August 1915 and left for Montreal on August 4. He arrived in England, September 14, and was in training at Shorncliffe when he wrote Frank.

gun.

September 24

Took a walk down to a village about 2 k. from here – Bray [Bray-sur-Somme], I think the name is.¹⁰ Bought chocolate and a drink of what they call citron. The way led by the canal all the way. The inhabitants of the country seem to have awakened to the value of tree-planting some years ago. Some of the trees planted by the canal are 2 feet through. In fact if it were not for the trees that have been planted in this country it would closely resemble the prairies in the bareness of trees. Tonight at 5:30 a party of us were paraded and marched out to dig trenches about 7 miles from here along the canal. We appeared to be between the two lines as the bullets were flying over our heads from both directions. Later learned German trenches were about 80 yards from where we were digging. It rained considerably, making it rather dirty work. Dug for about 3 hours and marched back to camp. Very tired.

September 25

Loafed all forenoon. Company drill for an hour or two in afternoon. Still very tired. Moved tonight to a village – Cappy.¹¹ In Battalion reserve. Half the battalion went up to the firing trenches.¹² We stay here for three or four days unless needed. Billeted in stable. Stable very lousy.

September 26

Mess orderly today. Digging a shelter trench at back of billet in case of shell fire. Heard today we have broken through the German lines in 2 places. Large number of prisoners taken.¹³

¹⁰ Bray-sur-Somme was about 2.1 km north of Froissy.

¹¹ Cappy was a village 3 km east of Froissy. It was located in “a hilly part of the country” in a section of the front that the Canadians had just taken over from the French. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 75.

¹² According to the PPCLI War Diary, “No 1 Company and half of No 2 Company (under Lt. [Pope](#) and Lt. Irwin) went into Trenches [about 6 km east of Cappy at Frise] and No 4 Company went into support at Eclusiers [3 km east of Cappy].” No. 3 Company and half of No. 2, including Frank’s platoon, remained behind at Cappy in reserve.

¹³ After bombarding the German lines for four days, the British began an offensive, known as the Battle of Loos, on September 25, 1915. That day, they were able to capture Loos and move toward Lens, but on September 26 they faced a German counter-offensive that resulted in heavy British losses and eventual retreat a few days later.

September 27

Digging dugouts on canal bank in forenoon. Loafed in afternoon. Ordered to trenches tonight. Went into dugout about half a mile from German line. On guard during night.¹⁴ Things very quiet, considering but lots of rifle bullets round. Trenches ankle deep in mud owing to heavy rain lately. These trenches we have taken over from the French. They are deep and fairly wide but have no protection from the dirt falling in as have ours further north. Dugouts rather long and very much alive with rats. Slept but little.¹⁵

September 28

Moved to a dugout nearer the lines. On guard all day again. Raining again. Dugout leaks.

September 29

Slept very well last night between guards. Loafed during day and received orders to go back to the village [Eclusier] between here and Cappy tonight. Slept in a big barn tonight. Very comfy bed. Took boots off. Slept well.

September 30 [Oct 1]

Had a good clean-up today and hunted walnuts in the forenoon – very successful. Village [Eclusier] badly smashed up. Only two women left. One received the Legion of Honour for opening sluice gates of canal on Germans, killing about 200 of them.¹⁶ Received orders to move back into

¹⁴ The war diary of the PPCLI recorded that the remainder of the battalion at Cappy (No. 3 Company and No. 2 less 2 platoons) marched up to Eclusier to go into brigade support. That evening Frank was assigned guard duty in the support trenches between Eclusier and the frontline trenches at Frise, which was 3.4 km east of Eclusier along the Somme Canal.

¹⁵ For more information on the conditions that Frank was probably experiencing for the first time, go to [Life in the Trenches](#) at First World War.com. It gives a graphic account of what trench warfare meant to the average soldier. In a letter dated 27 September 1915, Maj. Agar [Adamson](#) described the same trenches as follows:

Pelly and I have visited the trenches which can be done by daylight owing to the French having dug most wonderfully deep trenches and any number of communication trenches. The advance trenches in places are out 30 yards from the Boches who are not very active except at mining ... Our advance trenches are very lightly held but the communication trenches and support trenches about 80 yards behind are well garrisoned and ready to rush up in event of an attack. The half Battn. we have in trenches is very much scattered, those holding the advance trenches extending about 3 miles, in two's. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 76.

¹⁶ The reference here is to Marcelle Semmer, whose remarkable [story](#) became well known during World War I. According to the news report, perhaps embellished for propaganda purposes, she did not actually open the sluice gates of the canal, but raised the drawbridge crossing the canal and prevented the German advance by nearly a day. Agar Adamson's version of events

trenches tonight. Letter from home. Threshing. Wheat down to 75 [cents a bushel]. Answered letter. Also one to Mrs. Pullman and Uncle Ernie. Left village [Eclusier] at 6:30 tonight and went into trenches.¹⁷ The Germans are from 40 to 400 yards away. Five others and an N.C.O.¹⁸ kept a listening post,¹⁹ a little in advance of the main line of trenches. Kept watch in pairs – two hours each. Those off guard sitting down and making themselves as comfortable as possible.

October 1

Came off guard this morning at 6 after “standing to” for an hour about dawn. Told to go to bed for a while. Found an empty dugout containing 2 double beds, a table, 2 chairs and an oil painting. Slept for about an hour, but soon after a bunch of fellows came in and wrangled over rations for a couple of hours effectively stopping me from sleep. On fatigue in afternoon. Hauled water for section from the well down by the old ruined

was closer to Frank's as far as the sluice gates were concerned. In a letter to his wife Mabel, 4 October 1915, Maj. Agar [Adamson](#) wrote:

In the village two miles further back there is a woman of 26, the only woman in the village; when the Germans came through, she opened the lock gates and flooded their position retarding their advance two days. When they got into the village they made her nurse their wounded. She found out their plans to attack the French and gave the warning. The French were ready for the attack and drove the Germans back. She was wounded while attending to the French wounded. The President of France gave her the Legion of Honour and the Bronze Cross. The day I was there she was just leaving her house to walk eight miles to buy stores and half the Regiment was lined up on the road waiting to take up this line. (I had gone ahead and had seen the Medals and heard the story). As she appeared on the road, I called the half Battn. to attention and presented arms to her. She went down the line bowing to the men, very pleased. The General heard of it and instead of being annoyed, quite approved and telegraphed to the French General the incident. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 81.

¹⁷ The regiment had moved east to Frise. According to the PPCLI War Diary, No. 2 Company moved into the trenches “to the right” of the canal on October 1. In a letter to his wife dated 30 September 1915, Maj. Agar Adamson wrote,

If you will look at Cappy on the map and follow up the canal, you will find the second village from Cappy on the right and left bank of the canal begins with F. This is where we are and occupy trenches, half the Battn. on the left of the canal; half on the right. The trenches run through this scattering village built by the French, full of dugouts, furnished from the houses. There are very good cellars and several houses not quite blown to pieces. Regimental H.Q. occupy one, but the snipers are constantly firing and knocking the slates off the roof. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 78.

¹⁸ An N.C.O. or non-commissioned officer in the Canadian Army held the rank of either a sergeant or corporal.

¹⁹ A [listening post](#) or “sap-head” was a camouflaged position usually located in No Man's Land, where soldiers listened for indications of enemy activity.

church.²⁰ There used to be a very classy dwelling down there at one time but chunks are missing out of the walls, leaving the rich furniture all exposed. The houses in this village seem to have provided the dugouts around here with furniture. The trenches at this point are formed in a regular labyrinth.

October 2

On guard again all night. Snatched about an hour and a half sleep during the night. Feeling very rotten this morning. On guard at a sap head in an advanced position until noon. Got dinner and tried to sleep, but couldn't. Went on guard at the listening post again at 6. Slept or rather dozed at intervals but didn't get any more than an hour all told.

October 3

Sent off to bring up rations before breakfast from village [Eclusier] where we were billeted. Distance about 3 miles to where we had to leave them. Rations in heavy cases. Very hard work. Feeling positively rotten. On guard rest of forenoon. Hunted up a more quiet dugout and slept about an hour and a half.

October 4

On guard again all night. Slept 2 hours as I sat waiting my turn. Very cold nights lately. Slept very well in afternoon, also during times at night. Three of us, [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#), [E.W.] Howey [[Howes](#)] and myself seem to have permanently established in a listening post about 25 yards from the Germans.

October 5

Enemy shelled our back yard for a while. No one killed or hurt.²¹ Object seemed to be the bridge over the Somme River. Turning in for a little sleep now – 1 o'clock. Hope they don't start again, some of their shells dropped within a few yards of our dugout this morning. Received a letter from home also the photos I sent from Montreal up home. Returned through dead letter office on account of insufficient postage.

²⁰ Frank was in the village of Frise.

²¹ In fact, according to the PPCLI War Diary, 5 October 1915, "Two men slightly wounded in the Crows Nest by a stray bullet (No. A11098 [Cyril [Harrington](#)] (one from Black Watch)." Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, "We had one man shot by rifle fire through the mouth today." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 82.

October 6

Getting on much better with the sleep question the last day or two. Can cat-nap anywhere now. Wrote Miss Wood.²² Very quiet night last night.

October 7

Quiet day. Went down for rations tonight. Charlie [Little](#) fell in the ditch and wet the tea and sugar. Also himself. Lent him a dry pair of underpants. Quiet night.

October 8

Slight touch of diarrhea this morning. Feeling somewhat sick all day.

October 9 [7]

Bombing affray between a number of our fellows and some of the enemy whom they had waylaid.²³ Conflicting reports as to results obtained.

October 10

Sunday. A party of our fellows went out between the lines on patrol. Not returned yet.²⁴

October 11

Quiet day.²⁵

²² Miss Mary G. Wood was the M.A.C. librarian. The letter, dated October 7, was published in the *M.A.C. Gazette*, with an accompanying photograph of F. J. Whiting ('18) in uniform, McGill 113, 5 Platoon, 2 Company P.P.C.L.I.

²³ This was a reference to an incident on October 7 involving a patrol under Sgt. J.M. [Christie](#) that intercepted a German patrol in No Man's Land. A detailed report was included in the PPCLI War Diary [here](#) and [here](#).

²⁴ These may be the men mentioned by Maj. [Adamson](#) in a letter dated, 11 October 1915. "The three men of No. 2 who hid in a Jack Johnson hole for one night and a day within ten yards of the German trench, returned to safety and report a fair number of Germans in that portion of the trench and a great deal of conversation which they could not understand. They are going out again tonight and taking with them the Brigadier's interpreter to try and find out what he can find." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 85. In a letter dated 17 October 1915, Adamson wrote, "I forgot if I told you, the Brigade Intelligence Officer who stayed out all night with a Dictaphone in front of the German's trenches heard a lot of conversation, but nothing of any importance." Ibid, 90.

²⁵ The PPCLI War Diary, 11 October 1915, reported "Very little activity today. Two men slightly wounded in No 3 & No 4 company Trenches (Nos. A11036 [Willard G. [McLellan](#)] McG 73 [Earle M. [Philips](#)])."

October 12

Position shelled during night, I understand, though personally I slept through it. About 9 A.M. a heavy rifle fire was started by the enemy which was returned by us. No one hurt but a lot of ammunition shot off and sleep disturbed. In No. 4 company one man was killed and four wounded by a trench mortar during the night.²⁶ Brisk bombardment for an hour this morning.

October 13

The man killed, I learned later was G.B. Johnston [[Johnstone](#)] of our University company. I don't remember meeting him. [E.M.] [Phillips](#) who helped cook down at the guard station in Rouen was hit in the shoulder while shooting at a German. [V.S.] [Ferguson](#), of Yorkton and [W. D.] [Moyle](#) also were wounded but I don't know how seriously.

October 15 [14]

Occasionally shelled during last day and night. At present time have not heard of any more casualties. Last night heard rumour that we are moving out today or tomorrow and that the P.Ps are to be converted to a navy [navvy]²⁷ battalion.

October 16 [15]

[G.M.] Hutchison [[Hodgson](#)] killed today. [W. D.] Moyle died of wounds. Very quiet today. Little shelling by either side.²⁸

October 17 [16]

Heard we are leaving tonight for Morcourt or some name like that. Left trenches at 6 o'clock. Had a regular Hell of a march in our soft condition

²⁶ According to the PPCLI War Diary, 12 October 1915, "Every thing quiet today except on the hill where the enemy destroyed the Crows Nest with Trench mortars. (Casualties 1 killed (McG[ill] 44 [George Blanchard Johnstone]) 2 wounded (McG[ill] 58 [William Davies Moyle], McG[ill] 181 [Vernon Stewart Ferguson]). The three men, all from the 2nd University Company, were in the Crow's Nest, the same place where Pte. Cyril [Harrington](#) was slightly wounded on October 5.

²⁷ If the PPCLI had been transformed into a "navvy" battalion, its main role would have been construction or excavation work rather than frontline fighting. It is easy to understand why a rumour like this would circulate among battle-weary soldiers.

²⁸ Frank was mistaken. Hodgson died on October 14. There were no casualties mentioned by the PPCLI War Diary on October 16, except a drowning that had occurred ten days earlier, but on October 14, "Casualties 1 killed (no. A10993 [Geoffrey M. Hodgson]) and 1 wounded (no. 825 [Gerald H. [Brown](#)])." Frank was probably mistaken about Moyle, too, as there is no evidence that he died.

Town proved to be about 15 miles from the trenches. Billeted in fairly comfortable stable.²⁹

October 18 [17]

Sunday. Rested luxuriously.³⁰

October 19

Went road making in afternoon. Wish we could make roads for the rest of the winter. Road construction appeals to me more than man destruction.

October 20

Had a little drill in forenoon. Ordered to stand to arms this afternoon. Something seems to be doing somewhere. Rumour has it that the Cambridgeshires who relieved us in the trenches have lost them to the Germans.

October 21

Ordered up very early this morning. Standing to still at 10 A.M. Handed in our blankets. Expect to be moved somewhere. Rumour says Servia.³¹ Received a parcel from Uncle Ernie day before yesterday. Sleeping bag rather large. Making it smaller.

October 22

Loafed around. Light drill in afternoon.

October 23

Up at six. Paraded at seven. Marched to huts by canal – about 6 miles – for fatigue duty.

²⁹ The PPCLI War Diary recorded that the move to Morcourt, 17 km southwest of Eclusier, occurred on Oct 16.

³⁰ Frank was mistaken. Sunday fell on October 17; however, his entry for Oct 19 corresponded with the War Diary of the PPCLI for that date.

³¹ Rumours abounded on the front, and this one had some substance. On 25 October 1915, Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, "The 28th and 26th Divisions, which beyond a doubt went to Serbia last week, were pulled back the same as were we and by Brigades entrained for Marseilles where they embarked. No letters mentioning their destination were allowed to be written. There seems to be a fair likelihood of our following them ..." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 93-94. On 27 October 1915, he wrote, "... the Army Corps interpreter ... assured me that he knew for certain our Division was going very shortly to follow the other two and that he himself, not being required there, was going to another Army Corps." Ibid, 95. World War I began, when Austria-Hungary attacked the small Eastern European country of Servia or Serbia in retaliation for the assassination of Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 at Sarajevo in Bosnia.

October 24

Sunday. Whole battalion moved today to Boves, a small village 6 miles from Amiens.³² Terrible march – 14 miles between meals. Feet very sore. Had to pitch tents for the night.³³

October 25

Monday. Moved to another village 6 miles beyond Amiens. Circumvented Amiens. Village named Ferriere.³⁴ Most of our fellows got very drunk tonight. Raised much Cain. Billeted in very comfortable barn adjoining orchard.

October 26

Tuesday. Route march in forenoon. [M.L.] [Hancock](#) and I looked over a very interesting chateau near here this evening. The gardener and his daughter showed us around.

October 27

Wed. route march in forenoon. Got a pass into Amiens from noon until midnight. Took train leaving 12:45. Fare 4 cents. Got into Amiens. Hooked up with [H.] [Howard](#) and [J.B.] [Mawdsley](#), went for a bath first go. Had a good dinner about 3 o'clock which cost the three of us 10 francs. Went to the [cathedral](#). Wonderful place. Marvellous paintings. Priceless stained glass windows. Bought a bunch of postcards from the old lady outside and later met a French lady who took great pride in speaking English. She addressed postcards for me in French and kindly offered to mail anything else we wished to send out. Stood and talked in the little stationers store until suppertime. Bought a French dictionary. Hunted up another restaurant where they skinned us to our last cent for supper. Had to walk back to billets, about 6 miles. Very enjoyable day. Got to billet about 11 o'clock. Stole some apples from orchard. Ate them. Good night.

October 28

Opening of College. Wonder if anybody misses me. Wish I was there. Must write to Miss Wood today. Signed on for machine gun training in case of

³² Boves was about 10 km southeast of Amiens.

³³ Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, "A great many of the new men fell out from fatigue or sore feet yesterday, and today I fear they won't last long. They have been too much nursed. We, while here, are ordered by hard work and long marches to get every man available fit or weeded out." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 94.

³⁴ The 4¼ hr. march to Ferrières took them about 3 km northwest to Cagny, then west about 9 km to Saleux, and northwest again about 4 km to Ferrières, which was about 6 km west of Amiens.

emergency. Small draft came over from England, bringing quite a few of our fellows who were left behind for various reasons. Wet day.

October 31

Sunday. Rainy. No church parade. Went for a walk in forest this evening.

November 4

Our company was taken down to Amiens by train and all well bathed. Marched round and looked at cathedral for 25 minutes. Turned loose up town upon 100 yards of street for 15 minutes. Treated to a drink by Major [A.S. [Adamson](#)]. Marched back to billets.³⁵

November 6

Been practising attack during forenoon for the last week or two. Did it again today. Gymcana (however they spell it) this afternoon. Otherwise sports. The V.C. [Veterinary Corps] race was strange to me and very good. The idea was to gallop a 100 yards to where a man with one arm strapped to his side and lying. The rider dismounted and picked up the wounded man, laying him over the horse and climbing up behind, and galloping back. On the way back I discovered a bush loaded with ripe blackberries. Some country. Two letters tonight. One from home and one from Alex McWilliams. Answered both.

November 7

Sunday. Church parade this morning. No preacher. Dismissed. Expect to leave soon.

November 8 [and 9]

Paraded at 8 this morning. Speech by Brig. Gen. [W.E.B.] Smith bidding us farewell to his brigade.³⁶ Reply by Maj. Hamilton [Gault](#). Three hearty British cheers, band playing and goodbye to Ferriere, the K.R.R.'s [Kings Royal Rifles] and the Shrop [Kings Shropshire Light Infantry]. Marched through Picquigny and several small villages. Arrived at Flixecourt at 1

³⁵ On 5 November 1915, Maj. Adamson wrote, "The Company went into Amiens yesterday morning at 8:45 and marched to the public baths which were most excellent, hot shower baths, each man had a complete change, 15 minutes to wash and 10 minutes to get dressed in. I had received strict orders that no man was to leave the ranks. I, after the baths, marched them to the Cathedral and gave them an hour inside, we then marched to a café and each man had a glass of beer. I then picked out 300 yards of the street fullest of shops and placing a guard at each end, gave the men 20 minutes to shop and then marched them back here [Ferrieres]. They all enjoyed it and no man was missing." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 98.

³⁶ Brig. Gen. W.E.B. Smith was the commanding officer of the 80th Brigade, British 27th Division, with which the PPCLI had been associated since November 1914.

A.M.³⁷ On mess orderly duty. Rotten job when moving. Well, I should worry, I've dodged it for 6 weeks. The wisest old owls get caught sometimes. Billeted in a play house with billiard room, card tables and café adjoining. Quite a good little town this. A very flourishing business appears to be done by the co-operative stores they have here. Would like to speak to the manager if he talks English. Quite a bunch got very drunk again tonight. Paraded this morning for an hour or two of drill. Lecture by M.O. [Medical Officer]. Announcement by Maj. [A.S.] [Adamson](#) to the effect that we are here for two or three weeks as a model Battalion for the 36th Div., 3rd Army Corps. Also as a kind of training Batt. for some fledgling N.C.O.s and officers.

November 9

Bath parade this afternoon down at the factory, P.P.s parade behind chateau. Concert tonight in our billets. Went off very well. Officers attended.

November 10

Rained intermittently during day. Parade cancelled. Went and visited [chateau](#). Fine old place. Best stable I ever saw. "Patron" owns the factory, also a number of others scattered through France.³⁸ Appears to be one of the richest men in northern France. Dined at café all day today. Nearly broke again tonight. Am going to write to Harry [Beaumont] (didn't).

November 11

Bath parade this morning. Paraded for an hour's drill but rained. Dined downtown at café for supper with [W.L.] [Francey](#) and [H.R.] [Johnson](#). [A.G.S.] [Fleming](#) showed me a letter he had written to a friend telling his doings from the time of his leaving home until that never to be forgotten "eighth of May".³⁹ By the way, he received the D.C.M. for his work that day.⁴⁰

³⁷ After the farewell speeches, the PPCLI left the 8th Brigade on November 8 via Picquigny for Flixecourt, which was about 23 km north-west of Amiens. By November 30, the PPCLI had joined the 3rd Division of the newly created Canadian Corps.

³⁸ This was a reference to Chateau Folly owned by Monsieur Saint, whose family had established a weaving factory at Flixecourt in 1840. Just prior to World War, it employed several thousand people.

³⁹ The reference here is to the Battle of Frezenberg in the Ypres Salient on 8 May 1915. See the PPCLI War Diary, May 1915, [pp. 5-10](#), for an account of the events of that day. From [PPCLI & the Great War](#) comes the following quotation, "The historic battle of FREZENBERG was fought on 8 May, 1915 at Bellewaerde Lake. The enemy attacked behind clouds of poison gas, however the Regiment held the front even though they were fighting from ditches and shell holes and were under fire from three sides. The Regiment came out of action commanded by Lt. H.W. [Niven](#) with

November 12

Feel sick this morning. Rained this morning. Parade cancelled.

November 14

Pay parade up at the Factory this morning at 10 A.M. Church parade up to chateau at 12:30 [p.m.].⁴¹ Unholy hour for church parade. Wrote letter home. Rec'd one from Aunt Jennie.

November 15

Snow this morning. On guard with [Turner](#), [Ward](#) and Corp. [C.] [Spurgeon](#) at chateau.

November 16

Snowed hard again during night. Relieved at 10 A.M. O.C. parade this afternoon but was excused on account of my boots being in such bad shape. Bunch of the old Pats went to Blighty [Britain] on pass tonight!!! Very cold. Someone swiped my gloves as they were drying on the mantelpiece in the bar-room. Lent Dave [Boyer](#) 2 francs to buy more booze. Foolish practise. Mustn't do it again. Give him a lecture instead, drier than booze perhaps, but money is scarce in France.

November 17

No parades for me today. Held very good concert tonight. Other fellows had good practical training in attacks this morning. The fort and ammunition being of snow. Battalion being used for non-coms and officers of 3rd Army Corps to train upon.

November 20

Got some better boots today. Paper chase in afternoon.

154 effectives. The anniversary of this famous battle is commemorated annually by the Regiment."

⁴⁰ On 30 November 1915, Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, "One of my men named [Fleming](#) who got the Distinguished Conduct Medal on the 8th and whom I wanted to make a Sergeant has been sent for by a certain General to be appointed an officer at once, in another Regiment." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 110. The Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) was awarded in recognition of gallantry in the other ranks of the British and Canadian Armies. Fleming was also "Mentioned in Despatches" for his conduct at the Battle of Frezenburg.

⁴¹ Maj. Adamson was staying at the chateau as a guest of M. Saint. On 15 November 1915, he wrote, "Yesterday I took church parade in the grounds of the big chateau and the big iron gates ...were opened for the occasion. As a rule they are only opened for weddings, funerals and baptisms, so the English Governess told me." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 103.

November 21

Church and pay parade in forenoon. During week wrote home, to Miss Cottier, to Hilda and to Uncle Ernie. Last night received parcel from home – cake, socks and things, very acceptable. Also rec'd papers from home. Today a letter from home, Harry [Beaumont], Libby [Beaumont] and Halright [Hallwright].⁴²

November 22

Practising artillery fire formation with students from chateau.⁴³ Wrote home.

November 23

Same as yesterday with the exception that students ran the thing. Short route march this afternoon under Capt. [S.L.] [Jones](#). Our N.C.O.s being given drill. Some of them need it, too.

November 24

Practising the attack this morning. Afternoon off. Packed up my old uniform and will try to send it home. 7 P.M. Telegram has come into headquarters to move us off in the morning. Very unexpected. Hope it is only a rumour. Wrote to Harry [Beaumont] last night and to Halright [Hallwright] tonight.⁴⁴

November 25

Reveille at 3:45 this morning. Rolled up blankets and fell in by 5 o'clock. Marched to Pont-Remy – about 10 miles. Took train at 12 o'clock, travelled up the coast. Arrived at destination – Caestre [Caëstre]. Marched 1½ miles and billeted in a barn near Fletre [Flêtre].⁴⁵ Got to bed about 12 o'clock.

⁴² Families and friends at home did what they could to support their loved ones, who were often cold and hungry in the trenches. A letter or parcel from home helped to alleviate the discomfort of the front and connect soldiers to normal life. Harry and his youngest sister Libby wrote often. H.E. Hallwright, another university friend, was from Brunetta, Alberta, and a 3rd year student at M.A.C. in the winter of 1914-1915.

⁴³ The students were from the 3rd Army School of Instruction, which was located at Flixecourt.

⁴⁴ In his letter to H.E. Hallwright, Class of '17, Frank wrote, "Well! As to news, just at the present time we are having a spell off work. We have been at the front quite a while and may be sent back any time. In fact since I started on this page someone has just come in and announced that we are to move 'somewhere' tomorrow. It may be only a rumour, of course.

"I looked rather dubiously at what you said about wishing me all kinds of luck. To tell the truth, old man, I must confess to a sneaking partiality for the good kind. Yours as ever, Frank Whiting. P.S. – That report did come true. We are moving." *M.A.C. Gazette*, v. IX, no. 4 (Feb 1916), p. 43.

⁴⁵ Caëstre was about 205 km to the northeast of Flixicourt via the coastal route. Flêtre was about 3 km east of Caestre and about 25 km southwest of Ypres.

November 26

Very cold weather. Freezing hard. Guns going all the time. No parade today.

November 27

Inspection parade today for smoke helmets, emergency rations, rifles and ammunition.

November 28

Pay parade in forenoon -20 fr. Walking out parade in afternoon. Time altered, missed parade, on the mat for tomorrow. Wrote letters to home, Mr. Coffin, Uncle Will, Hilda and Libbie Beaumont. Sent Xmas cards to Hilda, Libbie and Harry and Uncle Will's folks. Billeted [at [Flêtre](#)] near Ypres – about 10 miles.

November 30

Inspection by General [Alderson](#) of Canadian Div. We are part of the Canadian Corps now.⁴⁶

December [3 & 4]

Rained occasionally the last two days. No parades. Wrote Mother yesterday. Letter from Dad tonight. Answering it.

December 5

Payday – 10 Fr. Went down to 8th Battalion at Metteren [Méteren] to look for [R.J.] Rusty Rodgers [[Rogers](#)] and [T.W.] [Cogland](#). Both as near as I could find out, never left England. In orderly office at Shorncliffe. Two parcels from Ramsgate. Acknowledged both.

December 6

Short route march this afternoon. Wrote to [R.J.] Rodgers [Rogers]. New draft came up from Shorncliffe, part of 3rd University company.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Major [Adamson](#) accepted, but had been opposed to the transfer of the regiment from British to Canadian control, in part because of his misgivings about the competence of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In a letter to his wife, 20 December 1915, he wrote, "General Mercer is at present in command of the Corps Troops of which we are a part. He has been made a Major General and is slated to command the 3rd Division. We are in the 2nd Army which is commanded by General Plumer and Alderson is our Corps Commander." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 96,109, 114.

⁴⁷ The War Diary for the PPCLI noted on December 5 that 138 men arrived from the base camp and were posted to companies, bringing the strength of the regiment up to 31 officers and 1008 other ranks.

December 7

Ceremonial parade in forenoon to welcome the draft. Met many of our fellows left behind at Shorncliffe. Met a man named [Boddy](#) who came from Wilkie.⁴⁸ Did not know him up there. Received letter from Alma Algre. Answered same.

December 10

Bath parade to Bailleul this afternoon. Hard march down there. Dismissed for a couple of hours. Got back just in time to have a splash or two. Bathed in the swimming pool at the Lunatic Asylum. Fine set of buildings. Got clean underwear in exchange for dirty. Got back to billets at Fletre by 6:30.

December 11

Fancy parade this morning before colours. Cinematograph in attendance.⁴⁹ Also took us dismissing outside the billets, getting the Canadian mail and receiving our mulligan. Football matches this afternoon between our fellows and the N.F.s [?]. Received a letter from home last night, also a joint one from [H.E.] Wood and [John A.] [Gibson](#).⁵⁰

December 12

Answered Wood and Gibson's letter also one from home and one from Harry [Beaumont]. Parcel from Mr. Coffin. Payday – 10 Fr. Am writing for money from Mr. Coffin.

December 13

Route march this morning. Goat-skin coats issued today. Awful looking things.⁵¹ Wrote to Aunt Yeo, London. Received parcel from them today.

December 19

Sunday. Moved east today via Bailleul and Locre about 10 miles. Billeted in a barn a few minutes walk from Dickebusch [Dikkebus].⁵² Two batteries

⁴⁸ Wilkie, Saskatchewan was about twenty km northwest of Wolfe, where Frank's family had settled.

⁴⁹ Much to his surprise, Frank saw the pictures of the Princess Pats at the "Bric-a-Brac" Cinema in London on 3 April 1916, while he was on leave there.

⁵⁰ H.E. Wood and John A. Gibson were 2nd year classmates of Frank's at M.A.C. in the winter of 1914-1915.

⁵¹ One soldier described the coat as "naked as it came off the goat." A [picture](#) certainly suggests that they were rather rustic looking creations.

⁵² Dikkebus was 6 km southwest of Ypres. According to the War Diary of the PPCLI, the 2nd Company was billeted at two farms at Helleblast.

of artillery within 500 yards. Hell popping this afternoon. Wrote a few lines to mother. In Belge [Belgium] now. Land of mud. Something expected to happen around here shortly. We are in a "Flying Column" now in conjunction with 49th, 42nd and the R.C.Rs.⁵³ About 4 or 5 miles from line now. Can see enemy observation balloons. Gas attack this morning. Results unconfirmed. 5,000 casualties.⁵⁴

December 20

Letter from Jack [Hamilton](#). On digging fatigue tonight within 100 yards of Germans.⁵⁵ Building breastwork. [H.] [Ellison](#) dug up a dead soldier. Stench frightful. Remains in bags. Likely shelled. Considerable bombardment continually. No casualties among our crowd. One killed and one wounded in B.E.s [British Expeditionary] within a few yards. Counting within 3 miles of line, a desert, shell holes everywhere, houses and barns levelled. Back to billets by 1 A.M.

December 22

Out again tonight. About 300 Germans are lying between the lines. Gas attack of Sunday morning failed. Men are lying in heaps and sprawled over the wires.⁵⁶

December 23

Out again. Raining almost all the time. Mud fearful.

⁵³ That "flying column" was the Seventh Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division, which was officially organised on 22 December 1915 under Brig.-Gen. A.C. [Macdonell](#). A "flying column" was a mobile corps of troops, composed of all arms, which usually had a particular task to do.

⁵⁴ Concerning the gas attack, [Adamson](#) wrote, "The Boches did not leave their trenches as our artillery shelled them during the gassing. The wind changed and the gas was driven back on them, so the biter was bitten." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 116.

⁵⁵ Adamson wrote, 20 December 1915, "I am all alone tonight, all 3 Subalterns having gone off on digging parties lasting from 5 p.m. till 3 a.m. ... I got the C.O. to so arrange it that each Company worked on the same piece of trench....and it consists of digging a second line of trenches about 400 yards behind the firing line, also communication trenches and putting up wire in front. It is naturally slow work as all movement on the part of the men nearest must cease whenever a German flare goes up or they are spotted and fired on by machine guns." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 115.

⁵⁶ The sight must have been so fearful that it blocked out the other misery of the night. On December 23, Adamson wrote, "Last night men were working in running water up to their waist and marched back to the barn and had to turn in as they were and are still wet this afternoon. The organization is bad as no troops, with any idea of keeping them fit more than a few weeks, should be asked to work under the present conditions, unless it is of the utmost moment." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 117.

December 24

Mess orderly today. Pay parade – 10 Fr. Missed digging parade tonight. Christmas Eve! Had no mail for 2 days. Channel ports closed for some reason. Rumored that Greece and Rumania is in on our side. Bombardment ceased. All very quiet tonight. Rest of company out digging. Went to midnight mass at Catholic church near here. Only soldiers there. Many fresh from the trenches. One tried to play the organ. He made a dismal mess of it. All bombardment ceased.

December 25

Christmas Day. No parades. Pudding in addition to our mulligan today.⁵⁷ No mail yet. Major [Gault](#)'s mother sent each man a small Christmas pudding, a packet of tobacco and a writing tablet.⁵⁸ Our artillery sent a few shells over this afternoon. Most of the crowd were very drunk tonight.

December 27

Very bad cough. Went sick. Walked 2 miles through the mud before breakfast to the medical officer. Gave me medicine and light duty. No digging parade for me tonight.

December 28

Feeling worse. Sick again. Letters from [[C.R.](#) or [R.M.](#)] [Hopper](#),⁵⁹ Miss Spackman, Mrs. Pulman, home. Wrote home and to Harry B[eaumont].

December 29

Little better today. Steady bombardment all afternoon from both sides. They found our battery and killed several. A few civilians were also caught

⁵⁷ The officers did much better. In a letter to his wife on Christmas day, [Adamson](#) reported that "Stewart managed to borrow a car on the 24th and went to General Headquarters and brought back 4 chickens and two ducks with Sardines, soup, your plum pudding, some cheese, we fed 17 officers in Molson's billet." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 118.

⁵⁸ Like many British women of that time, Major Gault's mother did what she could to support the troops in the trenches. Letters of encouragement and parcels containing food, socks, and other necessities were deeply appreciated by the soldiers, who were often cold and hungry. Frank did not mention that the wife of Stanley [Jones](#), Company Captain, sent "crackers and sweets to every man of No. 2 Company." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 116.

⁵⁹ This may have been R.M. Hopper, of Newdale, Manitoba, who was a 3rd year student at M.A.C. in the winter of 1914-1915. On the other hand, it could also have been his brother, Clark Reid Hopper, B.A., Lecturer in English and Agricultural Economics, 400 Administration Building, M.A.C. during that same winter. Lt. Clark Reid Hopper, Reg. No. 910011, enlisted in February 1916 at Winnipeg in the Manitoba Company, 196th Overseas Battalion and became a lieutenant in May 1916. He was just 25 years of age.

in the village [La Clyte] near here. Some of our men killed and wounded.⁶⁰ Capt. [Stewart](#) caught 4 spies signalling from the windmill up on the hill.⁶¹ When out digging tonight, 3 machine guns opened up. Jim [Mawdsley](#) caught in the mouth. He was the only casualty as they opened fire. I dropped like a shot into the mud.⁶²

December 31

Moved back to Fletre. Took a short cut. Billeted in our old barn.⁶³

1916

[January 1]

[The War Diary of the PPCLI, 1 January 1916, reads, "The Battalion now forms part of the 7th Canadian Brigade commanded by Brigadier General A.C. [Macdonell](#) D.S.O. The following units form the 7th C.I.B. Royal Canadian Regiment, 42nd Battalion, 49th Battalion, & P.P.C.L.I. The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade forms part of the 3rd Canadian Division commanded by Major General M.S. [Mercer](#) O.C.B."⁶⁴].

January 2

Sunday. No pay today. Wrote to [[C.R.](#) or [R.M.](#)] **Hopper**, Miss Spackman, Hilda A.R., Frank Bingham and Mrs. Pulman. Also home.

January 3

Letter from home. Devil of a route march today. Cough bad, roads bad, all bad!

January 4

Pack drill in forenoon. Wrote home in afternoon.

⁶⁰ According to the PPCLI's War Diary, only three of the battalion's men were wounded in the attack on the village of La Clyte. [Adamson](#) reported 30 men wounded and 2 killed in the attack on the village. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 120.

⁶¹ Adamson wrote that it was Major Gray of No. 4 Company who caught the spies. "Gray and his Company had arrested two women and two men the day before who were acting in a peculiar way near a windmill. When they were spoken to, they said they did not care for the English and hoped they would soon be under the Germans. They fought very hard when arrested and a shot was fired at a distance of 50 yards, but they were unable to find out where the shot came from." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 120.

⁶² There is no reference in the PPCLI's War Diary to this incident involving Pte. J.B. Mawdsley.

⁶³ This was the same barn in which the company was billeted on November 25.

⁶⁴ See Frank's reference on 19 December 1915.

January 5

Mess orderly today. The rest went to Bailleul for a concert. Going into trenches end of week.

January 7

Parcels from Frank Bingham and Mr. Coffin.

January 9

Reveille at 4:30. Paraded on the road 5:50. Marched through Materen and Bailleul to billets about 5 k. further on.⁶⁵ Very muddy. Now live in low huts. Paraded at 5 minutes notice for fatigue near line. Constructing more entanglements about 150 yards from line. Dan [McLean](#) hit in the stomach.

January 10

Dan McLean died this morning, buried in the afternoon.⁶⁶ No coffin – just wrapped in a blanket. Seems to be the custom. No parades today.

January 11

Heard that the 42nd have suffered pretty heavy casualties up in the trenches near here. Eight platoons who were out digging this morning saw quite a number of casualties. The howitzer behind the hut raised Cain this morning. Wrote to Harry B[eaumont]. Out digging tonight. Country half a mile back from line is in awful shape. Mine craters, shell holes, fire-trenches, dugouts all blown into one.

January 12

Fell in on the road tonight at 5:30. Walked up to trenches – about 3 miles. Relieved 42nd. Spent very bad night. Shelter very poor. Wind and rain blew in. Quiet night.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ The battalion moved east from Flêtre via Méteren and Bailleul into reserve across the border at Wood Farm, Dranoutre [Dranouter] in Belgium. Dranoutre was about 7 km southwest of Dikkibus, where the battalion had been billeted on December 19, and about 15 km southwest of Ypres.

⁶⁶ Although there was no mention of Dan McLean's death in the war diary of the PPCLI for 10 January 1916, he was well known and well liked in the regiment in spite of his wild ways. [Adamson](#) wrote, "I had one of my old original men shot in the stomach in a digging party last night and he died this morning. He was always badly behaved when in billets, but an excellent fellow in the trenches and I was rather counting on him being of use to the Company now that we are going in." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 126.

⁶⁷ Adamson wrote about this section [Kemmel] of the frontlines. "I ... went thoroughly over the part of the trench my Company [No. 2] has to hold for four days. It has a communication trench, but has no connection on either side, owing to the trench on the right having gone to pieces, but we have a small post behind it, with a few men and a Maxim gun. The next trench on our left is 300 yds. away. At night a patrol of two men from each trench crawl out and meet half way. We are within 40 yards of the Boche. Our trench is just on top of a hill and the Germans just on the

January 13

Fixed up shelter during day. Slept a little during forenoon.⁶⁸ [R.] McCullach [[McCullough](#)] went on pass. [A.H.] [Penny](#) sent in his place. [G.] Neil [[Neale](#)] and I slept together in dugout. Rats and mice very plentiful.⁶⁹

January 14

Heavy bombardment during afternoon. Lieut. [E.F.] [Newcombe](#) struck in the jaw with rifle grenade. Expected to live.⁷⁰

January 15

Heavy bombardment at noon again today. Shrapnel coming back from shells that land in the German trenches 100 yards away. No casualties.

January 16

Normal afternoon strafe. Came out of trenches tonight. Relieved by 42nd. Marched through Neuve Eglise on way back to Dranoutre. N.E. very badly shelled. Nothing there at all. Very pretty village once. Billeted in barn near Dranoutre. Slept gloriously.⁷¹

other top and slopes down ... There is not a loop-hole in the entire parapet, there are hardly any paradoss and I doubt if any of the so called dugouts are even shrapnel proof. The men must never be without their equipment and we do not even take a blanket, or a waterproof sheet in with us, so we can look forward to an uncomfortable four days." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 127.

⁶⁸ When on the frontlines, [Adamson](#) insisted upon "the men taking every moment of rest coming to them." Even at that, some broke under the strain. On January 14, he wrote, "Last night had two men doing their tour in a listening post, one very young lad, name Hale fainted ... Two men have gone to hospital suffering from what is now called 'system breakdown.'" *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 129.

⁶⁹ Maj. Adamson noted this and worse. "The trenches are full of mice and rats, the stench in places is awful, and even chloride of lime won't keep it down. The back of the trench is a mass of marked and unmarked graves. We have in 2 days, by the help of digging parties day and night from the two companies in support, filled and put in place, 4,000 sandbags and are constantly coming on dead bodies in all stages of decomposition." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 128.

⁷⁰ According to the War Diary of the PPCLI, Lieutenant Newcombe's injury occurred on 16 January 1916.

⁷¹ Frank's four days in the trenches had ended, but not for long. On January 12, Adamson described the routine as follows: "After 4 days [in the frontlines] we go back into Divisional Reserve and rest, no digging. 5 miles back into tents for 4 days. We then hold the same line again, but on that occasion Companies 3 and 4 are in the firing line. 1 and 2 are in fairly close support and supply working parties, all day and night. After 4 days we go back to Brigade Reserve (where we are now) and supply digging parties all day and night, after 4 days we begin the tour again and 1 and 2 again go into the firing line. Thus the tour for a Company will be: 4 days in firing line, 4 days Divisional Reserve in tents resting, 4 days in supporting trenches supplying working parties, 4 days in Brigade Reserve supplying working parties. The complete

January 17

Dined downtown with [H.] [Ellison](#). Bath parade this afternoon.⁷² Visit from Jack [Barker](#) tonight. His gang is in the huts at Wood Farm.⁷³

January 18

Pay parade this morning. Dined again with [H.] Ellison. Met man named [Wm. E.] [Howe](#) from 30.40.18.⁷⁴ Didn't know him.

January 19

Concert in YMCA tent tonight⁷⁵. Very well rendered indeed. Wrote to Bill and Miss Wood. Received parcel from M.A.C.

January 20

Walked up to the T Farm tonight. In support this time.⁷⁶ Out on fatigue – carrying party.

January 21

On guard all day. Ten casualties.⁷⁷ [F.C.] [Ramsden](#) wounded.

tour should last 3 months, then the Brigade is due 14 days rest." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 127.

⁷² The baths had an interesting history. In November 1915, Maj. [Adamson](#), who was always mindful of the soldiers under his command, noticed that another battalion had acquired "eight tin baths all fitting into each other and a boiler for heating water" for the use of its men. Impressed, Adamson arranged to have his wife purchase similar baths in London with regimental funds. In a letter from Flêtre, 2 January 1916, he informed her that "The baths are up and working in a barn, they are a great success and everybody is very pleased with them, the water in one bath does for two men." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 97, 110, 123.

⁷³ The same huts at Dranoutre [Dranouter] where Frank had been billeted on January 9.

⁷⁴ "30.40.18" refers to the section, township, and range of the farm in Saskatchewan where Howe worked as an agricultural labourer.

⁷⁵ To better understand the role of the Y.M.C.A. on the front during World War I, see [A YMCA Hut - Camp Devens](#).

⁷⁶ According to the PPCLI War Diary, the 3rd and 4th Companies were on the front lines, the 1st at "R E Farm" and the 2nd at "Tea Farm" in support.

⁷⁷ According to the PPCLI War Diary, "McG142 Pte Ramsden F. C. wounded by Rifle Grenade." On the same date, the diary stated that "A bomb accidentally exploded in the bomb waistcoat of 51289 Pte. [Kelly](#), J.K., killing the bearer and severely wounding 23561 Pte [O'Keefe](#), A. and 22572 Pte. [Hanlon](#) W [sic – should be H.], & slightly wounding 1716 L/C [Poppey](#), W.J., and 22897 Pte. [McCormack](#) A.C. [sic – should be J.J.] who remained on duty; all these men belonged to the Grenade Section. 23 January '16, "23561 Pte. O'Keefe, A. died of wounds in Bailleul Hospital." On January 25, Adamson wrote, "One very unfortunate accident occurred during the night that Gray reported a German patrol having crawled in between the gap in our line of trenches. The bombers were ordered to advance up the slope and if they saw the patrol to bomb them. All the

January 22

Wrote to Harry [Beaumont]. Fatigue filling sandbags up in 15 trench. Lively bombardment most of the time. Letter from Cousin Fred. New draft came up tonight – only 38 of them. Dick [Beaumont](#) not among them. Parcel from Harry's aunt.⁷⁸ Very good one too.

January 23

Fatigue again this afternoon. Quieter.

January 24

Relieved by 42nd tonight. Moved on down to Wood Farm in huts.⁷⁹

January 25

Pain in back this morning. Feels like lumbago. Light duty.

January 26

Better today. Digging fatigue tonight. Very tired.⁸⁰

January 27

Ditto.

January 28

No digging.

January 29

Moved off from huts at 11 AM. Marched by very circuitous route to a farm some 4 k. from Fletre.⁸¹ [H.] [Ellison](#) and I walked in to Fletre tonight. Had supper in our old restaurant.

men wear the aprons with pockets holding the Mills hand bombs, they have a pin in them and will not go off until the pin is pulled out. One of these pins must have worked loose in the apron pocket while the man was crawling up the slope as one exploded killing 2 men and wounding four." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 133.

⁷⁸ This was probably Ruth Beaumont of Ambleside in the Lake District of England. Five of her Beaumont nephews served in World War I, and three of them were killed before the war was over.

⁷⁹ Probably the same huts mentioned on January 9 and 17.

⁸⁰ Frank's tiredness was readily explained. [Adamson](#) wrote, "The weather has not been so kind of late to us and the digging parties are suffering a good deal working in water up to their middles, long gum boots are not available except in trenches." *Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919*, 135.

January 30

Walked in to Fletre again. Lost our way and had to come in by way of Meteran. Ride from there to Fletre.

February 2

Wrote to Harry [Beaumont] and [F.] [Daw](#). Wrote home.

February 3

Started bomb course. Battalion sports this afternoon. A comp' won second on tug-o-war. Won a franc on it.

February 4

Brigade route march – 10 miles. Parade in afternoon to football match. Pay parade postponed. Deep disgust among troops.

February 6

Moved up to Locre [Loker].⁸² Billeted in huts in the town.

February 7

Left Locre in PM. Moved into trenches, found them very good.⁸³ Sandbags on both sides. Dugouts good. Am with [A.] [Giles](#) and [H.] Ellison. Quiet night.

February 8

Quiet day and night.

February 9

New draft from Havre came up. Met Mr. [R.H.] [Bernard](#) who used to preach at Wolfe. Letters from Gwen and Elsie tonight. Expect to go on pass soon.

February 11

Relieved by 49th at sunset.⁸⁴ In support billets about 2 miles back from trenches. Near Kemmel Hill.⁸⁵

⁸¹ According to the PPCLI Diary, that circuitous route went through "Dranoutre, Croix de Poperinghe, St. Jans Capel and Schaexken and Le Quatre." Evidently, the farm was near Quatre-Fils d'Aymon just north of Méteren and east of Flêtre. See also Frank's diary entry for March 10.

⁸² Locre, or Loker, was 10-12 km northeast of Flêtre, and Flêtre was 12 km southwest of Ypres.

⁸³ The 1st and 2nd Companies were on the front line in the Kemmel sector.

February 12

Out wiring tonight near lines. [L.H.] [Duggleby](#), 2 paces behind me, shot in stomach. Expected to live.⁸⁶

February 13-14

Wiring again both nights.

February 15

Went back to line. In supports – S.P. 10. In with [A.] [Giles](#) and [H.] [Ellison](#) again. Guarding gate at night leading on to Suicide Road. Rained considerably.

February 16

Bailed out dugout in forenoon. No fatigue during day.

February 17

Bob [Bernard](#) is my watch partner. We have to have two on that post in case of accidents.

February 18

Wrote home and to Frank [Daw](#).

February 19

Relieved by 49th at dusk. Met [Frank W.] [Hasse](#) who is in 49th signallers. He used to stay at Bells. Met Dick [Beaumont](#).⁸⁷ Moved out to Locre.

⁸⁴ [Adamson](#) was not at all pleased with the relief. The following day, he wrote, "We got out last night after a very unsatisfactory relief by the 49th Battn. who lack any kind of system and the men straggle up as if they were going to a baseball match." What made matters worse, "My orderly got hold of some rum last night from the 49th and when I moved out he was very drunk. We sent him up today for a Court Martial. Also the night before I found one of the McGill Gentlemen students who was on sentry was not at his post, but having tea in his dugout. He also goes for his Court Martial." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 142.

⁸⁵ Adamson wrote "We are in huts behind a big hill which drains into us, the mud conditions are very bad." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 142. For a view of Kemmel Hill, go to [World War 1 Battlefields](#).

⁸⁶ The entry on February 10 in the PPCLI War Diary mentioned "Only one casualty & that on a working party behind the line at night," It is probably the incident involving Duggleby that Frank described on February 12.

⁸⁷ Dick arrived at the front line on February 18. On 17 February 1916, Maj. Adamson wrote, "50 reinforcements are arriving tomorrow from England and will be pushed right into the trenches tomorrow night. No. 2 Company gets 14 of them." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 147.

February 20 [19?]

Was to go on pass tonight but delayed a week. Taking [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#) in town to keep him out of mischief.

February 21 [20]

Inoculated today.⁸⁸ Spoke to Lieut. [P.] [Molson](#) re commission. Passed very sore night.

February 22 [21]

Stayed in bed all day. Very sore.

February 23 [22]

Wrote letters home and to Doris. Bought souvenirs. Payed today. Snowed.

February 24 [23]

Left Locre 5 PM. Relieved 49th from G.3.⁸⁹ In supports. No guard tonight. In dugout with [G.] Neil [Neale](#), [J.] [Davey](#), [R.H.] [Bernard](#). Snowed today and froze. Very cold all night.⁹⁰

February 25

On fatigue in forenoon cleanout out support trench. Wrote home.

February 25-26-27

Fatigues morning, noon and night. This afternoon they decided to have a bombardment so we in the support were withdrawn half a mile or so. Didn't do much damage.⁹¹

February 28

Fatigue in forenoon. Relieved in afternoon by 49th. On a carrying party going out of the trenches. Had to pack officers stuff. Learned that passes are cancelled indefinitely. Moved back to Kemmel huts.

⁸⁸ The PPCLI War Diary records that the inoculations occurred on February 20.

⁸⁹ According to the PPCLI War Diary, relief occurred on February 23 and had been completed by 7:55 P.M.

⁹⁰ Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, "The weather continues very cold and the men are suffering a good deal from the cold. And the ration of coke and coal, which is a little over half a pound a man, soon runs out." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 151.

⁹¹ Adamson wrote, "Our strafe is on today and is due to commence at 4 o'clock, we are sure to get severe retaliation and are withdrawing all but a few sentries from the front lines, for two hours afterwards." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 154.

February 29

Wrote home. Lovely day. Lots of aeroplanes around. Lively shelling.

March 1

Fatigue down to Regent Street dugout last night. Tonight all stand-to. Lively bombardment during night to divert attention from an attack to be made up Ypres way. No fatigue tonight. Walked down, but officer (R.E.) was away.⁹²

March 4 [3]⁹³

Marched down to [Kemmel] Chateau tonight. [Kemmel] Huts shelled shortly after we left. Learned later there was several casualties. Chateau badly looted. Some men of 52nd Batt. along with us for the night.⁹⁴

March 5 [4]

Moved into F4 trenches south of our old G. trenches. Everything in rotten shape. Snowed the last day or two. Dugouts tumble down. Trenches in bad shape.⁹⁵

⁹² The PPCLI War Diary, March 1, stated, "Work parties cancelled because of strafe up North." On March 2, there were "Work parties P.M. only."

⁹³ Frank Whiting's dates were out by one day. In fact it was the 3rd. Considering the cold and snow, the terrible conditions of the trenches, the bombardment, and the stress of manning a listening post in No Man's land [March 5], it is little wonder that Frank could be out a day in his diary!

⁹⁴ The War Diary, March 3, noted that "one Platoon of B. Coy 52nd Bn. with each Coy for instruction." [Adamson](#) wrote, "We received orders this morning [Mar 3] to occupy our trenches tonight instead of tomorrow night. A company of the 52nd Battalion is to be attached to us for instruction. We have also been given a longer piece of front line. Our formation will now be 3 companies in the fire line and one in immediate support. The new piece of trench has not a good reputation and a lot of work will have to be done on it." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 156.

⁹⁵ According to the PPCLI War Diary, March 4, "No 2 Coy took over F4 and F5, and half Regent St Dugouts from 29th Bn." Adamson wrote, "We got in last night and are taking over the new piece of line tonight. The C.O. and I went over it today, it is in a very bad state and the Regiments in it before ought to be ashamed of themselves for neglecting it. When a piece of parapet was blown in, they built a traverse in rear of it and when it was blown down, one in rear of it and so on, until there is no line and no connection. The Battn. H.Q. is a mile and a half back and none have any parados or wire in front. The Boche could have easily broken through and if in any strength make it very uncomfortable for the Regiments on each flank who would have to counter attack from a flank. All the officers in the trench were lurching in one dugout, no officer on duty in the trench or no Sergeant, the sentries relieved themselves, few of them had smoke helmets on and most of the Ross Rifles were so dirty and rusty that I doubt if they would shoot. Everybody seemed very pleased with themselves and interlarded their remarks with the usual western blasphemy. The British had a very bad time in these trenches and are accordingly named the Glory Hole, Suicide Corner, Dead Man's Corner, Mount Pleasant, etc., etc." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 157.

March 6 [March 5]

Sunday. Hogging it in a hell of a dugout with four others. Water and mud in all directions – fore and aft.⁹⁶ Lively shelling about sundown. Many sausages and whiz-bangs from Fritz.⁹⁷ Makes one wonder what kind of a bringing up the people had who are running this war. On listening post duty 70 yards in advance. No shelter. Have to lay down on a bank with feet in a ditch of water. Two hour shifts.

March 6-7

Same duty. Free in daytime. Have been expecting to go out for the last 2 days. At the last minute warned we had to put in another day. Snowing.

March 8

On officer's fatigue. Left trenches at 2:30. Walked out to Loche ahead of platoon. Learn that big battle has been raging around Verdun with little success on either side.⁹⁸ Germans have made a slight advance at terrific cost. Zeppelin raids galore England. No mail for me from anyone for over a week. Billeted in draughty barn. Given an issue of rum and a blanket and slept like a log in spite of bitter cold.⁹⁹

March 9

Hard frost this morning. Rifle inspection at 10:30 AM. Passes rumoured to start again tonight.

March 10

Moved back to billet near Quatre Fils Aymon.¹⁰⁰ Same old place.

⁹⁶ It only got worse. Maj. [Adamson](#) wrote, " ... I was in the fire trenches from early morning [Mar 6] till eight in the evening. One part of a trench having been blown to pieces. Besides cutting off half the garrison, all the drains had been blocked, and most of the dugouts in the undestroyed part of the trench flooded out, in places the water was five feet deep. The snow continues and the wind fortunately in the safe direction, is blowing a gale. We were due to be relieved tonight [Mar 7] but a new order has just arrived for us to remain in another day, making five." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 158.

⁹⁷ It was a wild day. Maj. Adamson wrote, "One of our M.G. men was killed this afternoon. Jones' old trench now held by No. 3 Company was smashed to pieces a few hours ago with trench mortars, a good many men were buried, but none killed which is perfectly wonderful." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 157.

⁹⁸ Frank was well-informed. [The Battle of Verdun](#) (February-December 1916) cost the lives of nearly a million German and French soldiers with no appreciable gains on either side.

⁹⁹ Maj. Adamson wrote, "48 hours continuous snow storm and still going strong, makes the Country beautiful and war a crime." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 159.

¹⁰⁰ Quatre Fils Aymon was about a km north of Méteren. The billets were probably at the "farm some 4 k. from Fletre" mentioned on January 29. In the PPCLI War Diary, March 10, it states that

March 12

Pay parade – 15 Fr. No word from home yet. This is Sunday. Never given up hope of getting pass to England.

March 13

Physical jerks before breakfast. Inspection of iron rations and platoon drill after. Football match after dinner.

March 14

Football match between P.P.s and 49th over near Dranoutre 3-2 favour of 49th. Met Wilf [Barker](#). He is leaving signallers and returning to his platoon. Lovely weather.

March 15

Guard.

March 16

Inspection by Corps Commander [E.A.H.] [Alderson](#). We leave for somewhere near Hooge shortly. Pretty hot place. Have written Harry B[eaumont]. making a ghostly compact with him in case I get done in during this war.¹⁰¹ No Canadian mail yet. We spend considerable time these days playing footer and baseball. Good weather continues. Enemy activity still continues at Verdun. Backbone of attack believed to be broken. Lots of aeroplanes about these days.

March 17

Although Frank did not make a diary entry on this date, the entry in the PPCLI War Diary noted that the “C.O. and Adj. Went to Ypres to inspect trenches in Sanctuary Wood to be taken over by Bde.” It would be a place that Frank would soon know and forever remember because of the events that took place there at the beginning of June 1915.

the battalion “marched to Roukloshille by Mont Noir & Schaexken.” Le Roukloshille, a hamlet between Méteren and Godewaersvelde to the north, was nearby.

¹⁰¹ Hooge was on the east side of the Ypres Salient and a very dangerous place, so Frank was anxious about his future. See [Sanctuary Wood, Mount Sorrel & Hill 62](#). [Adamson](#) learned about this move in the Ypres salient on March 11 in a secret memo from General Alderson’s Chief of Staff, Charles Beatty, who wrote, “I am also to be the bearer of unpleasant tidings, for I do not imagine any of us who have lived in the salient for long want to go back there.” On March 14, Adamson wrote, “The new line has been settled upon, our Division hold Hooge and behind the Bellewaerde lake upon which we fell back on the 8th of May, the 1st Division on our right at Hill 60 and the 2nd Division on our left.” [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 161, 162.

March 19

Sunday. Went to Fletre with Black MacDonald. He is getting a commission with 49th.

March 20

Moved from Mont de Cats to within 2 miles of Ypres – a little northeast of Dickebusch.¹⁰² Met a man named Murray well acquainted with the Manatoulin [?] part of the population around home.

March 21

Met [F.W.] [Crawford](#) who used to lecture at the M.A.C. Came up in the last draft from Shorncliffe last night. Also [R.C.] [Trimble](#) of third degree year.¹⁰³ He came over on a visit. Joined the 12th C.M.R. No. 5 Platoon on carrying fatigues all day. Rest of Batt. moved into reserve trenches tonight. Had to walk about 9 miles. This is reckoned a hot corner up in front here and we are regarded as lucky that we are not going in with the rest. Our bunch moved camp back near Q.M.'s stores. Good weather has changed.

March 22

Raining nearly all day. Passes started again last Sunday, but only 3 were taken from our Company. I came about fourth. No mail from Canada yet.

March 23

Sent with rations down to [Maj. S.L.] [Jones](#)'s party at strong point near Vlamertinghe, about 5 miles from here. Nearest town to our camp is Ouderdom.¹⁰⁴ Coming back took in picture show in YMCA tent. Got to camp 5:30. Went down to our own Y and took in more pictures.

March 24

Parcel and reg. letter from Coffin. On mess orderly duty today. Dick

¹⁰² According to the PPCLI Diary Entry, March 20, the battalion "marched to camp at Ouderdam left Roukloshille at 9:30 a.m." Since Le Roukloshille was in the vicinity of Mont des Cats, Frank's diary reference was accurate.

¹⁰³ This may have been the draft Maj. [Adamson](#) mentioned on March 14. He wrote, "We are getting a new draft of men tomorrow to fill up the gaps in our ranks. The New University men do not last long, there is nothing really the matter with them, they simply break down, mostly with rheumatism and the Medical Officer has to send them down as unfit to stand the strain. The medical examinations in Canada are a bit of a farce." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 162.

¹⁰⁴ Ouderdom was about 4 km west of Dickebus and 6-7 km southwest of Vlamertinghe. Dickebus and Vlamertinghe were between 5-6 km west of Ypres.

[Beaumont](#) and 3 others wounded by shrapnel.¹⁰⁵ Wrote to his people relieving anxiety. Wrote home.

March 25

Wrote a farewell letter home as we are going into some particularly bad trenches tonight behind Ypres. Hardly expect to come out. Left camp at 6 PM. Stopped before going very far, told to report at once to paymaster before going on pass. [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#), [F.T.] [Mabson](#), [D.E.] [Donnelly](#) and myself. Got to Poperinghe by 1 AM. Only got 5 Fr. From paymaster.

March 26

Boarded train at 4 AM. Got to Boulogne about 12 noon. Am writing this on the quay waiting for the boat to take us. Loaded onto boat but was taken off shortly and marched to top of hill above Boulogne to a rest camp. Had quite a job getting supper. [F.J.] [Crofts](#) and I went downtown – broke bounds – and succeeded in getting some fried eggs but on the way back Crofts was pinched by 2 police. I ran for it and got away. Cost Crofts 2 Fr. to get loose again. Embarked and started off, passed by the boat Sussex, sunk yesterday by the Germans. Saw her masts sticking up. Got to Folkstone by dusk. London 9:30. Home by 11 PM. Folks all in bed. Left [T.G.G.] Ellis at Peel House.

March 28

Said “Howdy” to all the folks. Hunted up [T.G.G.] Ellis. Went with him to get some new uniforms. Went round to Gamages.¹⁰⁶ Got polished up in great style.

March 29

[T.G.G.] Ellis and I visited Westminster in the morning and the Victoria and Albert Museum in the afternoon.

March 30

Went down to Ramsgate. Met an old pal named [S.] Needs [\[Needs\]](#). He tried hard to arrange a meeting with Maj [J.H.] [Lindsay](#), who is here wounded. If I could have seen him, think I could have worked an extension of leave. All the folks and I went to a revue “A Devonshire Girl”. Very good show.

¹⁰⁵ Dick was one of “2 O.R. [other ranks] wounded” on March 22.

¹⁰⁶ [Gamages](#) was a department store in London. See photograph [here](#).

March 31

Visited the folks around town. Took Dolly Fowler to a picture show. Deuced nice girl, Dolly.

April 1

Came back to London. [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#) beat it off with [D.E.] [Donnelly](#). Took Floss to "Joyland". Lovely affair.

April 2

Sunday. Zepp raids almost every night in some part of England. Uncle took me around to the Tower this morning. Had a walk down Piccadilly and Petticoat Lane. Some crush.¹⁰⁷ Took Flossie and Eddie out for a walk in the park. Lovely day. Uncle took me up to see Uncle Jack and Ethel and Will Nokes. Jack is getting pretty sick. Don't think he will last long. Arranged to take Ethel and a lady friend of hers to "Peg O' My Heart" tomorrow.

April 3

Went to see Peggy. She was great. Will met us at the entrance as we were coming out and took us to tea in Lyons. Got back home in time to take Edie to "Bric-a Brac". Flossie was to have come too, but she was ill today. Pictures shown at Bric-a-Brac were of the P.P.s when we were at Fletre before Xmas. Never expected to see them. The rest of the show was simply great. Tonight is the end of the world. I feel satisfied now that this old world has paid off a little of her debt of joy to me. They can bring on their Legion of Honour Roll now and I won't complain.

April 4

Bade everyone goodbye and appeared at Victoria by 7:50 AM – the time set for us to be there. Only saw [F.J.] [Crofts](#). [F.T.] [Mabson](#), [D.E.] [Donnelly](#) and [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#) have not yet appeared. Took boat at Folkstone and had a good passage over. Arrived in Boulogne about noon. Sitting in train waiting to move off while writing this. Bought the boys a bottle of Scotch and got to Poperinghe about 2 in the morning. Slept a little while on the floor of the YMCA hut there. Found the Battalion near the place where we left from. A Russian prince inspected the bunch this morning but as I did not report until fall-in I was excused. Rumour to the effect that we are going to Calais on garrison duty shortly. I am possessed with an almost overpowering nausea towards all things military.

¹⁰⁷ "Crush" in this instance may mean "crowd."

April 6

Moved last night to road between Ouderdom and Vlamertinghe.¹⁰⁸ Reported to orderly room this morning. Camp shelled.¹⁰⁹ Fatigue party tonight building parapets near Ypres. Rained. Got back 2:30 AM.

April 7

Stayed in bed till 10 this morning. Loafed all day. Went to picture show down the road tonight.

April 8

Route march this morning. Fatigue tonight. Good weather. Not too muddy.

April 9

Sunday. Wrote to McWilliams this morning. This afternoon went down to Vlamertinghe with [A.] [Giles](#) and wandered round the ruins. Found an old convent where a few nuns made lace. Bought some to the value of 23 shillings. Went to a concert in the Y tonight. Fritz sent over a few shells but it didn't make much difference. We enjoyed the music and the address.

April 10

Threw a few live bombs this morning by way of keeping in practise.

April 11 [12]

Met Allan [Bell](#) today.¹¹⁰ Went into the trenches tonight.¹¹¹ Up to eastern front of the salient. [H.J.] [Warin](#) shot through the head before being there 10 minutes. Bad place. Trenches blown up. No dugouts. [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#), [H.]

¹⁰⁸ The battalion had moved on March 28 to Camp B and on April 5 to Camp C, somewhere along the 6 km distance between Ouderdom and Vlamertinghe to the northeast.

¹⁰⁹ According to [Adamson](#), the enemy "shelled the Princess Pats so badly last night [April 6] that the Regiment had to take to the open, some huts were smashed but no one was hit." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 165.

¹¹⁰ Allan Bell was a farmer from back home in Saskatchewan, where Frank and his family had homesteaded.

¹¹¹ The PPCLI War Diary, April 12, recorded that the battalion "Relieved the 49th Bn. in the Hooge trenches [near Sanctuary Wood] relief compete 1:15 a.m." Adamson wrote from divisional headquarters, April 9, that "The Regiment goes into trenches on the 12th for 8 days in 48 hour reliefs as the trenches are very uncomfortable – no dugouts, simply disconnected ditches." On April 12, he wrote, "The Regiment goes into the trenches tonight. I sent [Buller](#) up a note saying I hated to be here [Divisional H.Q.] in comparative comfort when they were going into nasty trenches, but that if anything serious happened I would insist upon the General finding somebody to take my place." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 165.

[Ellison](#), [D.E.] [Donnelly](#) and I all sleep together in a drain. Horrid stench. Can't move in daytime at all. Snipers too active.

April 14

Came out to Zellebeke Lake dugouts.¹¹² Quite a few casualties.¹¹³

April 15

Letter from [[C.R.](#) or [R.M.](#)] **Hopper**. Wrote an answer. Sent letter home. Fatigue caring rations to the front line at night. Back by 9 AM.

April 16

Back in trenches tonight. Out on pumping fatigue with [T.G. G.] Ellis, [H.] Ellison and [F.] [Loco](#). Fair dugout.

April 17

Very little work necessary to keep front hole empty of water.

April 18

Came out tonight.¹¹⁴ On way out put on fatigue cleaning out R.S.M.'s dugout. A shell hit it today killing R.S.M. [Regimental Sergeant-Major Stuart [Godfrey](#)], his batman [Pte. Robert [Boulter](#)] and badly wounding S.M.[E.] [Pritchard](#).¹¹⁵ Back to dugout by 1 AM.

¹¹² The front was so dangerous that "Company reliefs have to take place two men at a time during the night." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 167.

¹¹³ According to the war diary, the PPCLI was in the trenches between April 12 and 20. Concerning the arrangements for No. 2 Company, [Adamson](#) wrote on April 12. "My company is divided into eight lots, each in a separate trench all without connection with each other. At one place we are only 12 yards from the Germans, they are on the upper slope of the hill. There are no dugouts, no fires can be lighted. We can be shot at from three sides, no movement of any kind is possible during daylight. Each Company does 48 hours in and 48 hours out, hiding in dugouts built in a Railway Culvert 150 yards behind. No wire exists in front of the trenches, it having been blown away when the original trench was mined. 'No Man's Land' consists of shell holes and old craters. Patrolling is very difficult from each of the 8 posts. We put out listening posts of two men each who hide in shell holes. Our tour is 8 days, 4 days in and 4 days in the culvert in 48 hour shifts. It has been continually raining and blowing a gale for two days and is bitterly cold." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 166.

¹¹⁴ The reference "Came out tonight" means Frank was moving from the front to the Zellebeke Dugouts behind the front lines. On the way back from the front, Frank was assigned the job of cleaning RSM Godfrey's dugout, which was located at "Half Way House," the battalion headquarters. After that job was completed, Frank returned to the Zellebeke Dugouts.

¹¹⁵ Maj. Adamson wrote of this incident on 21 April 1916. "The evening I reported at the trenches, the Regimental Sergeant-Major and his Servant, both originals, had just been killed, a shell coming through the dugout, also wounding my Sergeant-Major so badly that he is not expected to live ... He was in the same dugout and only two away from the one the C.O., [Gault](#) and the

April 19 [20]¹¹⁶

Rose at 12 noon, washed, had breakfast, cleaned rifle and wrote diary. Last time we were down here McDonald told me that he had written to his brother, a captain in the 103rd Batt., re a commission for me.¹¹⁷ His brother answered in effect that he had spoken to O.C. who thinks favourably of proposition. Met Dick [Beaumont](#). His wound has healed and he rejoined the regiment.

April 27

Got pass to Poperinghe. Met Allan [Bell](#) and C.C. [Lamb](#). The 5th struck it pretty hard the last spell in the trenches. Rumour of our trip to Calais dying out. Going to trenches on Saturday [April 29].¹¹⁸

April 28

Heard last night that Sam [Read](#) had died in hospital from wound received at Zillebeke dugout. Wrote to his mother. Also to [H.J.] [Warin](#)'s father.

April 29

Left camp and marched to Railway dugouts. Fair dugout. Holds 13.¹¹⁹

April 30

Sunday. Layed around all day. Fatigue up to the front line tonight building

Adjutant were in at the time. [Martin](#) had only left this unfortunate dugout two minutes before. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 168.

¹¹⁶ Frank's date covered events on April 19 and 20. The relief of the PPCLI occurred in two phases. At about 8.15 p.m. on April 19, the R.C.R Machine Guns and a few of the PPCLI were led out by guides from Hell Fire Corner and marched to Rest Camp "D" via the Menin Gate. The remainder of the PPCLI was relieved by the 60th Bn. on April 20, with relief completed by 2:15 a.m. on April 21. The PPCLI then took a train "from the Asylum to Brandhoek and occupied camp D," arriving there at 7:00 a.m. on April 21. Frank was already there, having arrived sometime in the early hours of April 20. Dick Beaumont arrived at Rest Camp D on April 20, and Frank would have met him sometime after 12:00 noon that day. War Diary of the 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion, April 1916, Appendix B, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ A commission was an official document that would have given Frank officer rank in the armed forces.

¹¹⁸ The PPCLI was at Rest Camp D from April 21 to April 29. This camp was near Brandhoek, which was about 8 or 9 km from Ypres and 5 km from Poperinghe.

¹¹⁹ The 49th Bn. was on the frontlines. The PPCLI was in support on a line "a little to the right" of where they were previously with 'quite good' dugouts "built behind a natural embankment" that was likely to "stand anything but a direct hit." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 171.

machine gun emplacement. Coming back heard a nightingale sing.¹²⁰

May 1

On same fatigue as yesterday. Fishing today. Caught one small pike and found two carp killed by bomb last night. Met Victor [Lapp](#) this afternoon. He was at Montreal when I was there, also at St. Martin's Plain.¹²¹

May 2

Vic [Lapp] came over today. He is dispensing pills to a battery in the 1st Brigade.

May 3

Great weather. Fishing, swimming, and boating on the lake. Went over to Vic [Lapp]'s place. He expects to go on pass soon. Invited him to go and visit Aunt and Uncle in London.

May 4

Taken from regiment today and transferred to Brigade wirers. In dugouts on south side of Zillebeke Lake. Moved back to company for rations and sleeping accommodation. Did nothing but carry wire, etc. up to front line tonight. Go and erect it in front tomorrow night.

May 5

Failed to make connection with rest of wiring party at rendezvous at Brig. Hdqts. Reported to Lt. [P.] [Molson](#). Stayed in tonight.

May 6

Went out with wirers tonight. Pretty quiet.

¹²⁰ In an article written for *The Grain Growers' Guide*, 15 June 1926, about his recent trip to the battlefields of Europe, Frank again mentioned nightingales. After describing the communication system connecting Zillebeke to Sanctuary Wood, Frank wrote, "During the spring of 1916, nightingales used to sing in the woods by the side of that trench when there were not too many shells dropping near. The sweet notes would echo and re-echo up and down the hillsides and the air was fragrant with wet, earthy smells and young leaves. Oh well, the second of June [Battle of Sanctuary Wood and Mont Sorrel] changed all that. I hope the nightingales made a successful retirement!" *The Grain Growers' Guide*, 15 June 1926, 4-5.

¹²¹ Nature also provided [Adamson](#) with an unexpected meal that day. He wrote, "On the way home we shot a pheasant which is contrary to army regulations, but will make the eating of him, more pleasant." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 172.

May 7

Battalion moved from lakeside to trenches.¹²² [J.R.] Riddel [[Riddell](#)] and I, receiving no orders to proceed with company stayed in dugout until morning. Came up and joined by 9 AM [May 8]. Fred [Dobie](#) and Lt. [C. A.] [Pope](#) killed last night. Eddie Howse [[Howes](#)] and [E. L.] [Hanson](#) wounded. Several other casualties. No sentry go for me. Found a dugout big enough for a small dog and crawled in.¹²³

May 8

Very quiet all day. Anniversary of famous battle the P.P.s put up last year here at Ypres.¹²⁴

May 9

Bombardment this morning. No sentry go except during afternoon.

May 10

Brisk bombardment this morning. Out wiring for 3 hours tonight. They spotted us and turned a machine gun on us. Nobody hurt. Pulled out about 2:15 AM. Bill [W.] [Milne](#) and Les [Hancock](#) came back off pass. Reported a whale of a time.

May 11

Brisk bombardment this morning for an hour and a half during and after stand-to. Very heavy stuff sent over by both sides this afternoon. This morning was the first time I ever saw shells landing. Lots of times noticed a bunch of 3 or 4 from a height of 20 feet dive into the earth and explode. Saw lots of trench mortars, both mannewerfers [minenwerfers] and ours go

¹²² As mentioned by [Adamson](#) on April 21, they were just beginning "eight [days] in the firing line, although in another part of the line called Sanctuary Wood, for rather gruesome reasons." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 168.

¹²³ 1st and 2nd Companies were on the front lines in Sanctuary Wood. 3rd and 4th Companies were in Supports.

¹²⁴ Frank was referring to the historic Battle of Frezenberg, "The Patricias served one year with 80th Brigade (named the "Stonewall Brigade" after its defence of the Ypres Salient in May, 1915). The historic battle of FREZENBERG was fought on 8 May, 1915 at Bellewaerde Lake. The enemy attacked behind clouds of poison gas; however, the Regiment held the front even though they were fighting from ditches and shell holes and were under fire from three sides. The Regiment came out of action commanded by Lt H.W. [Niven](#) with 154 effectives. The anniversary of this famous battle is commemorated annually by the Regiment. " See [The PPCLI & the Great War](#).

over this morning.¹²⁵ Two men in 6 platoon wounded. Relieved tonight by 3 & 4 Comp. Came a hundred yards or so further back into Sanctuary Wood into Warrington Avenue dugouts. [[A.D.](#) or [H.M.](#)] **Murray** and I in one small dugout. On fatigue every night up to the front line. [R.W.] Dick [Ellis](#) shot through chest by sniper while out with us building parapet. Expected to live.

May 15

Relieved by 42nd [sic] tonight midnight. Caught train by 7:30. Came to present billets (Vlamertinghe).¹²⁶

May 23

Spent the first part of 8 days resting.¹²⁷ Latter part drilling under sergeant of Gren. Guards.¹²⁸ On fatigue last night. Moved to camp on Ypres Road.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ For information on trench mortars, see [First World War.Com. Adamson](#) wrote, "We have had a most alarming day [May 11] and the greatest shelling the Brigade has had since it came in ... Niven's trench suffered 200 2.9 shells knocking a great part of the trench to pieces, ... at 3 p.m. Stewart and his Company who were in close support trenches with raid-proof dugouts only, were shelled badly ... I was in the trench most of the day, by 7 p.m. all was quiet ... Casualties, considering the shelling, amounted to nothing." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 176.

¹²⁶ In fact, the PPCLI was relieved by the 43rd Bn. and went back of the lines to a rest camp, where it remained from May 16 to 23.

¹²⁷ Frank's brief summary implied a rather peaceful time, but there was much going on. Maj. Adamson noted that they arrived at their camp at 3 a.m. [May 17] and "were eating some bread and cheese when the whole camp was badly bombed by aeroplanes, and was also fired on by a long range Naval gun being directed by the aeroplane. Our machines went up after them and one of them (OURS) was brought down a few yards from us." Both the pilot and his observer died. On May 18, at 2 a.m. "the gas alarm was sounded and all the troops piled out waiting for the order to put their helmets on," but the wind was so light that the gas never reached them, and after waiting for two hours, they all turned in again. In addition to these diversions, the soldiers entertained themselves by digging trenches "10-feet deep and two ft. wide" as places of refuge, just in case their huts were bombed again. If that wasn't enough, they also went up to the front line trenches at night on "digging and carrying parties." Some rest! [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 178-9.

¹²⁸ According to the War Diary of the PPCLI, 16-23 May 1916, "Sergt. Carter 1st Bn Grenadier Guards carrying out instructions for Officers and NCOs & where possible with Companies."

¹²⁹ On May 23 the PPCLI went into reserve at Camp F. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Companies were there, and 1st Company was at the Belgium Chateau. Each company was to be at the chateau for two days in turn for a period of eight days, after which they would go into the trenches on their left for another eight days. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 180.

May 26 (24)

Anniversary of day I left home. Up to orderly room this morning. Received one extra guard for losing cap and appearing on parade before breakfast without it. Fatigue tonight.

May 25

Moved to Belgian chateau. On fatigue digging ditch for cables.

May 26

Got wet last night. Rheumatism today but went out tonight notwithstanding.

May 27

Moved back to F. Camp. On guard tomorrow. Extra fatigue tonight.

May 28

Sunday. On gas guard today. Wrote a number of letters. Frequent aeroplane fights.

May 29

Wrote letters. No fatigue for me tonight.

May 30

Met Harry [Hudson](#) the other day. He and [J.C.] [Dryden](#) are over in the next field. They are attached to the 9th Field Engineers. [G.L.] [Malcolm](#) is in their bunch but is at present in Shorncliffe, quarantined for measles.

May 31

Left camp for trenches.¹³⁰ No 5 platoon is in the Appendix, 6, 7, 8 behind in trench 63. No. 1 Co. on our right up to the Loop. No. 2 Section, with me in charge as senior on the extreme left of our line.¹³¹ Between our post and

¹³⁰ The PPCLI trenches were in Sanctuary Wood. On the front line, to the right, was No. 1 Company, to the left, No 2 Company, to which Frank belonged. Right behind them in Support were No. 3 on the right and No. 4 on the left. To the right of the PPCLI companies on the south, were the 1st CMR (Canadian Mounted Rifles) of the 8th Brigade, holding the frontlines southwest from Sanctuary Wood to Tor Top (Hill 62) and Observatory Ridge. To the right of 1st CMR, the 4th CMR occupied the frontline trenches on the flat knoll of Mount Sorrel in front of Armagh Wood. The 5th CMR were in Support behind 1st and 4th CMR at Maple Copse, which was below Observatory Ridge. To the left of the PPCLI trenches on the north, an open space separated Sanctuary Wood from the Hooge sector, where the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) held the front lines. "The Gap" was a section of that open space closest to Sanctuary Wood.

¹³¹ Frank was in the 5th Platoon, which was in the Appendix, an outpost position attached to Trench 66 on the front line. Evidently the platoon had been divided into sections, and No. 2 section with Frank in charge was on the extreme left of the line. The other three platoons were in Trench 63 behind them with Capt. H.W. [Niven](#), commanding officer, in the centre position.

the R.C.R.s is a “gap” through some low ground of about 400 yards. The Germans have a bombing post [Bird Cage] about 40 yards away. Slept but little during the night, but quite a bit during the following day.

June 1

Very quiet all day. Last night A.H. [Penny](#) was shot through the head. He and I were on guard together just before leaving camp. Slept none at all during night. Very quiet, but young [C.L.] [Anderson](#) was shot through the head.

June 2 ****Sanctuary Wood****

Sanctuary Wood.¹³² Stand down at 3:30 AM. Had breakfast and turned in to sleep on the fire step. Dozed for half an hour or so when the Germans started to bombard Sanctuary Wood, a hundred yards or so in our rear.¹³³ As the shelling grew in intensity, I took out my writing pad and started to write to Harry [Beaumont] describing events as they occurred. Later broke off to write a farewell letter home. Continued Harry’s letter for a while longer to keep my nerve steady, but several big ones fell so close that I was nearly buried in debris. Laid writing pad aside and awaited end. Battle dust and smoke so thick that cannot see the Wood only at times. Whole range of vision is a leaping mass of flame. Roar continuous.¹³⁴

10 AM

Learn that communication lines have been cut. Cannot get word out to

¹³² For a map showing the position of Sanctuary Wood within the Ypres Salient and a brief account of the battle that began on June 2, see [Sanctuary Wood, Mount Sorrel & Hill 62](#). There is also a good map at [The Battle of Mount Sorrel 2 June 1916](#) and a more comprehensive history at [The St. Eloi Craters and Mount Sorrel, 1916](#). A recent analysis of this battle, including a map, can be found in Tim Cook, [At the Sharp End](#) (Toronto: Viking Canada for Penguin Group, 2007), 343-354.

¹³³ This section of the line was dominated by German fire power, particularly from its strong point, the Bird Cage, a German strafing post in No Man’s Land about “40 yards” opposite the 2nd Co. position. Fortunately for Frank and his platoon, most of the German shells went over their heads and struck deeper into the Canadian lines. However, No. 8 Platoon on the right near the Loop was not so fortunate. Its officer, Lt. [Hagarty](#) and most of his men were killed, and the remainder eventually evacuated Trench 63 under the direction of a wounded Lt. [Molson](#). No. 7 Platoon to its left was similarly hard hit.

¹³⁴ The PPCLI War Diary recorded, “At 8:30 a.m. the enemy began shelling our front lines and supports. This gradually increased to an intense bombardment from H.E. shells and trench mortars,” lasting for five hours. Military historian Tim Cook wrote, “This was one of the most staggering bombardments of the war to date, and it continued to rupture the Canadian trench system for nearly four and a half hours.” See Cook, [At the Sharp Edge](#), 350.

support. Capt. [H.W.] Nevin [[Niven](#)]¹³⁵ and [G.] [Trigg\[s\]](#) wounded. Dave [Boyer](#) wounded in the head. Our post being tried for. Ordered to move out to the right. I took wrong turning and got down the communication trench; went along that until I came to a machine gun crew who told me no one else had come back there. Sheltered under flying traverse for a few moments when man came staggering down, naked from the waist up. "Look out, boys," he said. "The Germans are coming!" He was covered with blood from a wound in the side.¹³⁶ I grabbed my gun and dashed back. Heavy rifle fire started. Took up my position facing gap. Loaded 10 shots in the magazine, got a box of bombs and waited for them.¹³⁷ About 3 in the afternoon the shelling died down considerably.¹³⁸ Learned that Angus [Alexander] McDonald [[MacDonald](#)] was killed along with Lieut. [D.G.] Haggerty [[Hagarty](#)]. Huns have penetrated into Maple Copse and the Woods. They now hold Warrington, Hill St., Gource [Gourock] Rd.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Captain H. W. Niven, the company commander, was wounded in the side, but retained command until the evening of June 2, when he was relieved by Lt. [Glassco](#) (No. 4 Co.). Niven and his orderly made the dangerous trip down to headquarters at midnight and were returning at dawn with stretcher bearers when he was hit in the chest and had to return to the Dressing Station. He eventually recovered from his wounds and returned to the regiment in charge of Co. 2 on 7 August 1916. The War Diary of the PPCLI, 22 July 1916 announced that he had received the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.).

¹³⁶ This must have been after the bombardment ended at 1:30-2:00 p.m. and the German troops began to advance on the right through the section that had been occupied by the now annihilated No. 1 Company. The wounded man may have been one of the few survivors of that company.

¹³⁷ When Frank realised the Germans were advancing, he returned to the Appendix to defend the line from a possible enemy advance through the Gap on his left.

¹³⁸ According to the PPCLI War Diary, "The bombardment lasted for five hours when it was lifted and an infantry attack occurred." Since it had commenced at 8:30 a.m., the shelling must have ended around 1:30 p.m. By 3:00 p.m. the German infantry had advanced on the right of No 2 Company through the section of the frontline that had been held by No 1 Company. In so doing, it had blocked that route as a means of escape for the now isolated No. 2 Company.

¹³⁹ However, they did not hold all. No. 1 Company had been annihilated on the front lines near "Warrington Avenue," but as reported in the PPCLI War Diary, June 2, the supports [3rd and 4th Companies] had "held, on the right, the greater part of Warrington Avenue and Lovers Lane to Border Lane, and on the left, the "R" series of trenches." To their right, the 1st and 4th CMR were similarly decimated by the bombardment, and remnants could not hold back the German advance, but the 5th CMR at Maple Copse resisted fiercely and held its ground. Frank had only a glimmer of how dire the Canadian situation was. General [Mercer](#), Commanding Officer of the 3rd Division, and Brig.-Gen. Williams, Commander of the 8th Brigade, had been inspecting the frontlines [Mount Sorrel] held by the 4th CMR when the barrage had begun in the morning. Mercer was killed and a wounded Williams captured by the enemy. Later in the day, Lieutenant-Colonel [Buller](#), Commanding Officer of the PPCLI, was killed while rallying his troops, and Major Hamilton [Gault](#) was severely wounded. For a number of hours, all was confusion, and the Canadians were in disarray, but fortunately, the Germans did not press their advantage, which gave the defenders a little time to retrench. Maj. [Adamson](#), who had just returned from leave, joined Colonel Griesbach of the 49th in a three battalion counter-attack in the late evening,

We are cut off entirely and our only chance of succour is by way of the open fields behind the gap. This, however, is swept by machine gun fire and the German curtain fire. No. 7 and 8 Platoons are practically wiped out. The reason we have not been punished more severely than we have is because we were so close to the enemy they could not drop their shells quite short enough by several yards. The boys on the right end of the Appendix are doing great work sniping the Germans as they come over by the Birdcage,¹⁴⁰ through the line once held by One Co. (but now blown level to the ground) down the hill towards the marsh at the foot of the Woods.¹⁴¹

6 PM

Shell fire decreased considerably. Expecting either a counter attack on our part or an attempt by the Germans to connect their lines behind us up through the gap to the line in front of us. In that case we are all as good as dead or prisoners.¹⁴²

7 PM

A number of flares started up in Sanctuary Woods just on our right. Red, blue and white signals used. Immediately the machine guns opened up with every rifle firing rapid. Then the artillery started and the Hell of the morning was repeated with the added rifle and machine gun fire from both

“driving the Germans out of the Right Sector and straightening out the line,” but failing to dislodge the Germans from their new positions. [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 182. Further counter-attacks were postponed until the following day.

¹⁴⁰ Frank described the “Bird-Cage” as a German pill-box. In an article he wrote for *the Grain Growers’ Guide* in June 1926 after visiting the battlefields in Flanders, he made the following observation, “I searched in vain for the ‘Bird-cage’ where Fritz kept deadly watch for sign of movement down in the hollow. Several pill-boxes are still to be seen on the ridge, but none that I could be sure was our old friend of 1916” *The Grain Growers’ Guide*, 15 June 1926, 4.

¹⁴¹ This sniping, which went on for hours, helped to slow the German advance on the right. The PPCLI War Diary recorded that “Company No. 2 succeeded in holding their trench and stopped an enemy bombing attack.” Concerning that attack, Sgt. Louis [Robertson](#), wrote, “I looked over to the right where No. 1 Company had been and there they were coming across in droves. They did not come across directly to my front but started to work in from my right flank in the open space between me and the bunch behind [No. 4 in Support]. As they were coming down a slope, however, and we were like in a valley, we began to pick them off and they soon quit.” Robertson also described the sniping of the German troops as they went back and forth from their new lines for wire, lumber, etc., along the ridge of the hill about three hundred yards to his right. No. 2 Company sniped many of them, but didn’t fire on stretcher bearers.

¹⁴² An attack by the enemy from the left through the Gap would have forced the 4th Company to fight on both its right and left flanks. If successful, such an attack would have completely isolated No. 2 Company on the frontline with surrender or death the only alternatives. Fortunately, the attack never came.

sides. The air seemed full of lead. [A.H.] [Buckland](#) and I took up our posts overlooking the gap. Had to keep one eye on No Man's Land as we were expecting them over any minute. After an hour or so the fire gradually died down and the survivors discussed the retirement. On guard all night waiting for them.¹⁴³

June 3

1 AM

Figure if we are not out of here by daybreak we will be blown to bits as soon as they can see where they are shelling, or else we will be cut off. Curtain fire slackened over field. [T.G.G.] [Ellis](#), [H.] [Ellison](#), ... [Bill] [Milne](#) and Dunc [Gay](#) wounded. Only about 30 left in the Appendix.

1:30 AM

Peep of dawn. Expect the end any time now. This place is mined and I expect them to touch it off any time as the present would be the most effective against us.¹⁴⁴ Crouch down in the trench and wait, occasionally running down the deserted trench in the gap to fire off a round or two to make out someone is occupying it. While watching at the corner where the parado [back wall of the trench] was low, a sausage fell on the bank beside me, rolled onto my shoulder and fell into the water. It did not explode.

2 AM

The flares went up and the attack started. Stood it for a while, when Glasgow [Glassco](#),¹⁴⁵ our remaining officer gave the word to retire.¹⁴⁶ We

¹⁴³ The PPCLI War Diary recorded "In the evening the enemy suspected a counter attack as they opened up rapid machine gun and rifle fire and an intense barrage in our rear." The Canadians retaliated in kind and attempted a counter attack that evening, but it failed to dislodge the enemy from its new position.

¹⁴⁴ Frank later learned that it had been mined, and they were wise to leave it.

¹⁴⁵ Lieut. G. B. Glassco, who had just joined the regiment in the field from the Second University Company was sent to the front to lead No 2 Company after it was learned that all of its officers had become casualties. Unfamiliar with the terrain, he nevertheless went forward all the way "on hands and knees," reached the Appendix, and assumed command. R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, McGill University at War, 1914-1918, 1939-1945 (Montreal: McGill University, 1947), 20.

¹⁴⁶ Sgt. Louis [Robertson](#) wrote that Capt. [Niven](#) and all the wounded officers had moved back at about midnight, leaving Glassco in charge. With no contact with headquarters, no evidence of reinforcements, no food, and little ammunition, he made the decision to retire. They set out at dawn with about forty-five able-bodied men left to carry out the wounded. Concerning the withdrawal, the 7th Brigade reported "Between 1 and 2 a.m., June 3rd, the remains of A [Sic] Company 60 strong under Lieut. Glasgow P.P.C.L.I., (all other officers had been wounded) withdrew from the Appendix and 65, bringing everything with them, including the machine gun. They had done all that mortal man could do, and decided to withdraw before being surrounded and captured." War Diary of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, June 1916, Appendix A, p. 8.

all left our kits and only carrying our rifles and equipment, scrambled over the trench and ran in the direction of our second line. We had not gone any more than a few yards when four big shells were dropped in our few remaining bays. The open field we had to traverse in order to get to the shelter of our second line was swept by the fire of the machine guns of both sides. Shells were bursting around on all sides of us. A bullet struck the ground just under the edge of my boot. [G.] Neil [\[Neale\]](#) had his arm “slapped” by a passing shell. Resolved that if I were wounded so I could not run, would shoot myself as it was getting light fast and delay would mean the death of all. Found an old trench that gave us partial shelter the latter part of the way,¹⁴⁷ and just as the sun was rising we got to the comparative safety of our second line – held by R.C.R.s.¹⁴⁸ Hadn’t been there very long before they opened fire with artillery. Bombardment of our trench continued steady all day. We were moved up and down continually to avoid as much as possible the shells which were dropped in patches.¹⁴⁹ Partially buried once and once a large fragment of shell made a dint in my helmet. Ate nothing but a small piece of bread all day. Brought out of the Appendix about half a bottle of water. Carefully husbanded it all day only giving to wounded men who were in need of it. Everyone suffered considerably from thirst.

About 7 PM detailed with a number of others as stretcher bearers. Told to leave all our equipment and get our cases out as quickly as possible. [W.G.] [\[Elder\]](#), [R.] [\[Oldford\]](#), [W.] [\[Lovegrove\]](#) and myself detailed on one

¹⁴⁷ Sgt. Louis [\[Robertson\]](#) wrote that they went back from behind the gap and faced curtain fire about 300 yards to their rear, but they somehow got through and continued to “an old trench running parallel to the fire trench about 500 yards back.”

¹⁴⁸ Robertson wrote that they followed this trench till they came across the 42nd and 49th who were coming up to reinforce their front lines. However, Frank and his companions must have entered the old trench to the right of Robertson and came upon that part of the second line occupied by two companies of the Royal Canadian Rifles. This event was described by military historian Jeffery Williams as follows, “Shortly before daybreak, with a new attack developing, the company withdrew over the open fields, bringing with it all its ammunition, stores, machine guns and wounded, crossed 500 yards of open country, passed through an enemy barrage and reached the support line without the loss of a man.” Jeffery Williams, *Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, 1914-1984 Seventy Years Service* (London, England: Leo Cooper, 1972, Reprint, Leo Cooper in association with Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1985), 19.

¹⁴⁹ As reported in the PPCLI War Diary, the enemy barrage began at daybreak and continued for about eighty-five minutes. At around 9:00 a.m., the 49th Battalion initiated a counter attack that lasted until the early afternoon before it petered out with few gains. The enemy responded with heavy shelling of the Canadian lines, and Maj. [\[Adamson\]](#) recorded that “At 3, for 80 minutes, the Germans bombarded our lines with the most intense bombardment I have ever heard, even greater than the 8th of May [1915] ... at 9 p.m. and 1 a.m. they repeated the bombardment, lasting each time for 50 minutes.” [\[Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919\]](#), 182.

stretcher. First part of the way trench was badly filled in with the shelling and we had a terrible time getting along. Hadn't gone 50 yards when the fearful exertion made us gasp with thirst. Wounded man named [C.G.] [Butchart](#), of 4 Co. The trench was very crooked and quite new. In fact was only about 3 feet deep with no sand bags along the side. The A-frame made it doubly hard to get around the corners as we had to lift the man over the top. Only room enough for 2 men on the stretcher at a time. Poor [W.G.] [Elder](#) had worked like a Trojan the day before digging out men buried by shells. He dug out Mac once and was nearly exhausted. The other two were little better. We came up with some 60th who were lying in the trench and who at first refused to get out of the way, but I cursed my way up and down a few times until even the sergeants called me "Sir", thinking that a man who spoke with such decision must be a major at least.¹⁵⁰ They eventually crawled up and cowered on the top until we had struggled by when they could drop back into the trench again. The bullets were flying over occasionally but most of the shelling had ceased and it was now comparatively quiet. My slender stock of water which I had thoughtfully brought along was soon exhausted, but I found another hole which contained some pretty good stuff. Scrambled over quite a few corpses along this trench, although nothing to what we saw later.

June 4

When about 300 yards from the China Wall as it was first breaking day another counter attack was started and the enemy started to shell our trench.¹⁵¹ Sheets of bullets went overhead. [W.G.] Elder, who was with me at the head of the stretcher said, "I guess this is the end. We can never get out of here. Let's shake hands." I laughed, but shook hands and remarked that I thought the end had arrived for 2 days and that we would not give up trying until the end did come. A percussion shrapnel¹⁵² exploded about 2 feet from me soon after blowing to pieces a 60th man and badly wounding another. Although we were untouched, I found later that I was suffering from shock and over-strain. Presently the fire slackened about daybreak and we struggled on a little further. Once a 60th man who was up on top got into such a hurry to get back again that he stepped on our man. We

¹⁵⁰ The 60th Bn. on the left and the 43rd Bn. on the right would relieve the PPCLI and the 49th Bn. on June 4.

¹⁵¹ Frank and the others had been slowly moved back all night under fire. The China Wall was a communication trench banked high with sandbags that ran from the Menin Road to Zillebeke and was about 2 km west of Sanctuary Wood.

¹⁵² A "percussion shrapnel" is a grenade that detonates on impact and scatters shrapnel over a wide range when it explodes.

nearly killed him. Coming along the China Wall the dead were piled up pretty thick. Wall nearly all smashed down. Had to get up on top and the other fellows were so weak that I put the 3 of them on one end while I handled the other. In this way we managed to get to the dressing station where no sooner did we get there than I promptly collapsed. Later staggered down to the Ypres campgrounds where the battalion was assembling. Drank half a pint of rum but could not sleep. When roll was called, 450 were either killed, wounded or missing. Dunc [Gay](#) dead, Walker Walter dead. [A.] [Giles](#) missing, Mc...dead, Tom Flintoff [[Flintoff](#)] dead, [W.H.] [Hoey](#) badly wounded, the Colonel [H.C. [Buller](#)] dead, [A.H.] [Gault](#) wounded,¹⁵³ all 2 Company officers dead or wounded, dozens of my chums and acquaintances gone. This is a regiment of mourning. Found later the 2 Co. saved the day by our murderous crossfire on the Germans when they had broken through No. 1 company and the C.M.R.s on our right.¹⁵⁴ Learned later the Appendix was mined and we did well to retire from it. Wilf Barker wounded in the eyes. Gone to Blighty. Whole brigade moved back to Oudendom.

June 5

Resting up. Shaking hands with old friends who have got through. Find nerves have gone. Jump like a rabbit at every little thing.

¹⁵³ Major Andrew Hamilton Gault, the founder of the PPCLI and second-in-command, received a leg wound that later required amputation.

¹⁵⁴ "Despite having its right forward company virtually annihilated in the bombardment and suffering through the nearly twenty-four hours of continuous fighting that followed, the PPCLI refused to break, eventually funnelling the enemy into a narrow salient that left them dangerously exposed ... The PPCLI lost more than 400 men in their desperate stand. 'Hardly a man survived to tell the story of this defence,' noted Lieutenant Ralph [Hodder-Williams](#). 'In the Battalion papers there is little beyond an eloquent list of killed and missing.'" Cook, [At the Sharp End](#), 354.