

**The War Diaries of Francis James [Whiting](#)**  
**Diary 5**  
**May 19, 1917 to November 20, 1917**

**May 19**

Caught train at Gare du Nord<sup>1</sup> Paris at 11:40. Rode first class as far as Amiens where we arrived at about six in the morning.

**May 20**

Got something to eat at a café and got the train again at seven going to St. Pol. Feeling pretty blue all morning. At St. Pol<sup>2</sup> in time for dinner. Got a good meal very reasonable at a restaurant. Most of the places in this town bear the legend officers only. It makes one feel peeved. Loaded aboard along with Sargt. [F.C.] [Dohaney](#) at 1:30 and arrived Aubigny about three.<sup>3</sup> Got a motor lorry going Arras way and rode five or six miles. Walked most of the way from there. Got into camp at La Targette by 6:30.<sup>4</sup> Just too late to be warned for up the line. Shared the bottle of whiskey Roy got for me among the boys and told them most of my adventures in wonderland. Last night Corp [S.E.] [Webb](#) was killed by a shell and a volunteer party went out tonight to bring him in.

**May 21**

Dropping back into the old routine of horse cleaning, shell dodging etc. Oh it is damnable! On first guard tonight.<sup>5</sup>

**May 22**

Up the line on 116<sup>th</sup> rations. 58<sup>th</sup> rations.<sup>6</sup>

**May 23**

Air fight tonight. Fifty came over and scared all the observers out of the balloons as far as anyone could see. Dropped bombs on camp close to us killing and wounding 30 or 40. Three of our triplanes pursued shooting with a sort of luminous

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<sup>1</sup> Frank had arrived at this same train station on May 9. The Monopole Hotel was within easy walking distance from here.

<sup>2</sup> Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise was 231 km north of Paris and 58 km north of Amiens.

<sup>3</sup> Aubigny-en-Artois was 21 km. east of Saint-Pol.

<sup>4</sup> La Targette was 14 km. east of Aubigny and about 1 km west of Neuville-Saint-Vaast. If Frank got a lift in a lorry for six miles (9.6 km), he would have walked no more than 2.7 miles (4.4 km).

<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, the PPCLI was beginning a rest period at Villers-au-Bois that would last until June 6.

<sup>6</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Pack Animal Company was taking food up to the front lines soldiers of the [116<sup>th</sup> Battalion](#) and the [58<sup>th</sup> Battalion](#).

bullet showing direction of flight.<sup>7</sup> Fritz dodged and got over as far as Lens where later we heard he was brought down.

### **May 24**

This morning after obtaining permission from Lt. [A] Nichols [[Nicholls](#)] I took a horse and went down to Villers au Bois. Interviewed the adjutant [Capt. Leonard [Drummond-Hay](#)] regarding a commission. He informed me that already there was an application of sort in for me. Expect that this is from Major [H.W.] [Niven](#). Lt. Col. [A.S.] [Adamson](#) at present away but am to see him on his return in about a week.<sup>8</sup> Adjutant gave me the tip that if I want a commission I had better add a little hair on my upper lip to my other qualifications.<sup>9</sup> This afternoon the division held sports and a timber competition near here. R.C.R.'s took 1<sup>st</sup> and P.P.'s 2<sup>nd</sup> in timber and team. Lost 10 F in bet.

### **May 25**

This morning we exchanged (compulsorily) a pair of horses for mules. One of them seems to attach himself to me. Call him Beauty because of his handsome (?) appearance. Thinking of naming him Caruso because of the lovely tenor voice he thinks he possesses.

### **May 28**

Today we traded off Caruso for a horse to the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade. We can still hear him singing.

### **May 29**

Up the line again for the 1<sup>st</sup> C.M.R. [Canadian Mounted Rifles] tonight. Very little shelling. Things generally are calm.

### **May 30**

Went to Villers again today but Colonel [Adamson] was not back from leave yet.

### **June 2**

Anniversary of our disastrous affair at Ypres last year. Letters from home, H.C. [Walker](#) and Jean [Irving]. Up the line as usual tonight. 4<sup>th</sup> C.M.R.

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<sup>7</sup> The tri-planes were probably using incendiary bullets containing phosphorus that ignited on contact with air, thereby revealing the direction of the bullet, and ignited anything flammable (i.e. the fuselage of an enemy plane) with which it came into contact.

<sup>8</sup> Lieut. Col Agar Adamson was on leave in England from May 21 to June 5.

<sup>9</sup> Drummond-Hay had learned well from the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Agar Adamson. In a letter to his wife Mabel from Neuville-St. Vaast, France, 22 Dec. 1916, Adamson wrote, "The Army eight months ago issued an order that men might shave the upper lip, but with us, we insist on not shaving, they look more like soldiers and less like low comedians." 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), 248.

### June 3

On cooks fatigue today. Stayed in tonight.<sup>10</sup>

### June 4

4<sup>th</sup> C.M.R. tonight.

### June 5

5<sup>th</sup> C.M.R. tonight at gun pits. Fritz hostile. Jack [Inglee](#) and four others hit on the Lens-Arras road. We ran for it on the way back. By the way, Slim [Allen](#)<sup>11</sup> and Flicker [Havelock](#)<sup>12</sup> have been awarded the M.C. and M.M. respectively. It is an out and out scandal neither of them have even seen a trench. Their little shell dodging adventures on the roads once in a while being nothing to what even the pack corps does every night let alone what the men in the trenches do.

### June 7

On P.P. [Princess Patricia] rations tonight.<sup>13</sup> "Slim" pulled a dirty one over me tonight. I managed to load with 4 Co. rations – top of the Ridge – and he ordered another man to take the load. I then had to take No. 1 rations going to the aeroplane by the Vimy Station about three miles further and through shell fire. Even if he had intended sending me back empty it was a dirty trick anyway as it was not fair on the other lads. There is no excuse for him either way.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> According to the War Diary of the PPCLI, on June 3, "Hostile aircraft made several night raids on camps in vicinity of La Targette dropping numerous bombs." On June 4, "Air raids at La Targette repeated." Oddly, Frank, who was in the La Targette area, made no mention of them, although he noted on June 5 that "Fritz [Germans] hostile."

<sup>11</sup> There is no reference in the war diary to Lt. Melville Allan's receiving the Military Cross. However, a year earlier (15 June 1915) it recorded that he had received the Military Medal.

<sup>12</sup> The War Diary of the PPCLI, 1 June 1917, noted "Military Medal awarded to No. 1056 Corporal F. C. Havelock."

<sup>13</sup> The PPCLI War Diary indicated that the battalion had relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> CMRs in the 3<sup>rd</sup> line (Supports) of the Vimy Defences. According to Lt. Col. [Adamson](#), writing from Berthonval Wood, 15 June 1917, the regiment had gone in on June 6 and were "just out of the line." He added that, "The Division are very pleased at our efforts to hold on, which we did and the cost was not as heavy as it might have been. We got over three hundred unwounded prisoners and accounted for more than that number who will not again worry us ... We were in brand new trenches without any cover and constantly going forward and digging new ones. The weather was, and is, very warm, though it rained on two occasions making conditions very bad. As troops go light, leaving their packs behind them and blankets are all turned in, the condition of the ground is horrible and the flies and rats are having their awful harvest." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 287.

<sup>14</sup> One can understand Frank's upset at having to go three miles further through shell fire with Company 1 rations, especially when he had loaded rations for Company 4, but he did not explain how this was "unfair" to the other men, unless he meant the men who accompanied him. Evidently Frank did not have much use for Allan, an attitude that did not seem to be shared by the officers of the regiment. The entry for May 30 in the PPCLI War Diary included a message from Major General [Lipsett](#) commanding 3 Canadian Division to the O.C. PPCLI stating, "Will you please convey my hearty congratulations to Lieut. M. Allan and NCOs and men of your transport for their success at the army show [see May 24]. The PPCLI have set the high standard for transport in the Division and have kept it up consistently, which is something a Battalion may well be proud of."

## June 8

R.C.A. [Royal Canadian Artillery] rations tonight to mine head. Very quiet trip.

## June 11

Understand the Ypres Salient has been straightened out the last week with five or six thousand prisoners.<sup>15</sup> Snatched a few hours sleep at odd hours during the day. Tonight while going up to O.O. supports I met Vic [Thompson](#). He is in the first C.M.R. and says there are a few of our old pals around his batt. Am going over tomorrow on a visit.

## June 12

This afternoon went over and met Vic [Thompson] again also Ryan, [B.F.] [Houghton](#) (Fuzzy), Reg [Hall](#) and [J.A.] [Mitchell](#) all of the old 18 class. From them I learned that old [Basil] [Worswick](#) was killed in the Irish rebellion, that Jock [Hamilton](#) came out with their draft to 1<sup>st</sup> C.M.R.'s but was gassed by a shell and is now down the line, that Andy [Robertson](#) was wounded, that dear old "Daw-person" is dead and that [Blackhall](#) is out again. Doug [Smith](#) and [R.M.] [Hopper](#) are out here somewhere as officers.

## June 13

Did not go out tonight. Not needed. Wrote Miss Spackman.

## June 14 to June 30

For the past two weeks things have progressed more or less as usual. On this front the Germans have retired a mile or so on a forty mile front, so it is rumoured, though we have had no papers here for days.<sup>16</sup> The weather has been generally wet though an occasional fine day dries the ground up a little. We were supposed to be moving back to Bruay for a divisional rest though the retirement has somewhat changed the plans. I suppose the divisional commanders wanted to hang on and gain all the credit possible.<sup>17</sup> Last night I was on the 58<sup>th</sup> ration party and it seemed that on the whole party there were only two men who did not know where the rations had to be dumped and they were the guide and the officer in charge. We lost about an hour wandering around country that every man knew perfectly well and the going was awfully slippery at that.

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<sup>15</sup> This was the highly successful [Battle of Messines Ridge](#) on 7 June 1917. [Adamson](#) wrote, "The capture of Messines and Wyschaete Ridge was a great feat. I know the ground so well, as when we were in the Kemmel Line, we were just opposite to them and often wondered if they could ever be taken." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 288.

<sup>16</sup> The entry for July 31 in the War Diary of the PPCLI reads as follows: "Memorandum from G.O.C. [General Office Commanding] 3<sup>rd</sup> Can Division published in Battalion orders, referring to successful operations of 3<sup>rd</sup> Can. Div. since March 16 and their advance of approximately 4½ miles since March."

<sup>17</sup> "The order for the move into rest area having been cancelled ... the Divn. has now been ordered to side step to the left & take over the area of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Divn. which will be withdrawn to rest." War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, June 1917, p. [12](#).

### **July 1**

Understand we are moving camp to somewhere near Souchez tomorrow. It is not very far.<sup>18</sup>

### **July 2**

Loaded up and pulled out about 2 this afternoon. Went through Souchez and Ablain St. Nazare and because we were lost and it was getting late camped on hillside.<sup>19</sup> Drew blank ticket and did not go up the line tonight.

### **July 3**

Moved south near to 7<sup>th</sup> Brig. Transports.<sup>20</sup> Am line orderly. Did not go out. Had a good bath down by Souchez River. Canadian mail. Two from home, one each from Mary, Mac[William] and C.D. [Richardson](#)'s sister Mrs. Shearer. Wrote home tonight.

### **July 6**

Moved tents on the other side of road from horses. At last seem to be settled down. The powers that be in this outfit know as much about efficiency and administration as the regimental dog knows about music. Finally camped near Carency and about three miles further from our work than we were before.<sup>21</sup> Are taking rations up to about the same dumps as before.

### **July 8**

Fritz sends us quite a bit of shell gas nowadays. Caught a little of it tonight.

### **July 9**

Feel a little tough but did not go sick. Up to the line on R.E. [Royal Engineers] stuff. Moving oil guns. Wandered up into Avion<sup>22</sup> and the officer stumbled into one of our outposts before learning where he was. Hunted around for a guide. Waited a couple of hours in Avion for guide. No guide. Dumped guns in dugout and got back to camp by 2 A.M.

### **July 10**

Tonight got back by 12. Fritz shelled camp and piece went through tent while I

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<sup>18</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Pack Corp moved to the Souchez area, which was 4.5 km north of La Targette.

<sup>19</sup> Ablain-Saint-Nazaire was 2.7 km west of Souchez.

<sup>20</sup> Frank had gone southwest a little over 2 km to the Souchez River, which was near Carency where the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Transports were stationed. The PPCLI Battalion was at Niagara Camp at Chateau de la Haie, which was about 5.5 km northwest of Carency.

<sup>21</sup> Carency was 4.6 km northwest of La Targette. Transport was carrying supplies up near Vimy, which was between 5 and 6 km east of La Targette, so Frank was accurate in saying the pack corps was further away from the front lines than it had been previously.

<sup>22</sup> Avion was on the southwest edge of Lens about 8.2 km east of Souchez and 12 or 13 km northeast of Carency.

was making my bed. Retreated precipitately to nearest trench. No casualties in pack corps though several killed and wounded in other units.<sup>23</sup>

### **July 11**

This morning met [H.J.] [Tingley](#). He tells me [J.M.] [Brown](#) of the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Amb. says Jock [Hamilton](#) is expected to die. Gave me quite a lot of news of the boys. Won a few francs on crown and anchor tonight.

### **July 12**

An R.E. [Royal Engineers] party tonight again. Oil guns or something of the sort. Back by 1:30 A.M. Tonight won about 15 francs.<sup>24</sup>

### **July 13**

Played the game again tonight. At one time had 130 francs in hand but luck changed and lost 100.

### **July 14**

Played again and lost everything tonight. Am on the 4<sup>th</sup> C.M.R. and am writing the events of the last week while waiting to fall in.

### **July 26**

Moved from the Vimy area back to battalion today on a divisional rest.<sup>25</sup> Regiment at Marle Amiens about 8 kilos away.<sup>26</sup> Strolled around the village [Barlin] tonight and helped an old lady stook some rye. Cutting has started around here.

### **August 2**

Yesterday paid 20 F and received 5 pounds from Aldine St. [H.] [Ellison](#) is working close to our billets on Div. cement works. He and I tonight went around to the mine and looked over the works.<sup>27</sup> Did not go down as it is wet.

### **August 3**

Four letters yesterday. Answered three.

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<sup>23</sup> This incident underscores the fact that a soldier was never really safe, whether he was on the firing line, in support, or further back in transport.

<sup>24</sup> Gambling was a form of entertainment all along the front. Just before the Battle of Amiens, Will Bird wrote, "Poker games were in progress in many glades. Some men were writing letters home. The majority sat together, chatting now and then but mostly busy with their thoughts." Bird, [Ghosts have Warm Hands](#), 96.

<sup>25</sup> Frank was referring here to the pack corps' move from Carency 16 km northwest to Barlin, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division headquarters.

<sup>26</sup> The PPCLI Battalion went another 8 km further northwest to a small town named Lapugnoy, which was 3 km from Marles-les-Mines, where there was a coal mine. The entry for July 26 in the War Diary of the PPCLI reads, "Battalion marches in morning to billets in Lapugnoy via Bois d'Ulhain-Barlin, Bruay." Lapugnoy was roughly 20 km northwest of Carency.

<sup>27</sup> There was a coal mine at Barlin at that time.

#### **August 4**

Sunday. Heard a very interesting address by Dr. John McNeil [[MacNeill](#)] on Fatalism.

#### **August 5**

Heard him again at Ruitz.<sup>28</sup>

#### **August 6**

Applied for pass to visit [P.P.C.L.I.] Regiment.

#### **August 7**

Went down to Lapugnoy today. Major [H.W.] Nevin [[Niven](#)] had gone down to Ferfay about 7 kilos further, so could not see him.<sup>29</sup> Paraded for O.C.'s orders at 12 after waiting three hours. O.C. away so did not see him. However Lt. [G.R.] [Stevens](#) (McG) told me they are closing down on commissions. Had to be back at four. Chipped in 1 pound each with [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#) and ran crown and anchor for a while. Made about 17 F each.

#### **August 8**

Played again tonight – won about the same.

#### **August 10**

Won 25 F. Letters from home, Hilda, H.C. [Walker](#), Ambleside and Miss Wood.

#### **August 11**

Won 50 F. Concert at Y.M.C.A. ce soir.

#### **August 19**

There has been a fearful battle going just north of here for the last four days.<sup>30</sup> One hears from the casualties some horrible tales of atrocities. Fritz is throwing over some new gas. The shell bursts and a fluid evaporates forming a scentless invisible poison vapour. It acts after four or five hours. First symptoms being blindness followed by delirium and death.<sup>31</sup> Our gas is pleasant too. It penetrated

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<sup>28</sup> Ruitz was about 3 km northwest of Barlin.

<sup>29</sup> Ferfay was 8-9 km west of Lapugnoy.

<sup>30</sup> This was the Battle of Hill 70 north of Lens, an Anglo-Canadian offensive which began on August 15. The Canadians achieved their objectives, but at a cost of 9200 casualties. This placed more pressure on German-held Lens. See [Hill 70 and the Lens Offensive](#), August & September of 1917 for more information on this battle.

<sup>31</sup> The Germans used [Mustard Gas](#) during this battle, and its effects were as lethal as Frank described. On 22 August 1917, [Adamson](#) wrote, "In the 6 hours yesterday evening on our Corps front, the Germans put over 6000 gas shells both on front lines and back areas. Papineau had 14 serious cases. They come in flocks of twenty, make very little noise and almost no smell. They employed this method to put Batteries out of business and are quite successful. We do the same and the Boche says our gas is deadly. The gas question is a serious one and the only advice we have as to treatment is to take a hot bath and get into clean pyjamas at once. It affects certain parts not mentioned and gloves must be worn when performing certain functions of nature. These rules might be carried out at the Ritz [a high class hotel], but not on

the German gas helmets causing them to vomit. They take off their mask to throw up and the gas finishes the matter.<sup>32</sup> Was to have tea with Capt. Campbell in Y.M.C.A. tent tonight but battle going on in Lens district necessitated their presence nearer the line. Dr. McNeil [[MacNeill](#)] was also to be there but he had to go up too.<sup>33</sup>

### **August 21**

Received word to visit Capt. McNeil [[MacNeill](#)] at Ruitz this afternoon at two. Went down and found him sick in bed. However we had a very good talk together. Told him of the ghostly compact between [Harry] Beaumont and I. Gave him Beaumont's address so that in case I get snafosed he can obtain from Beau after the war any data B. may have accumulated on this subject. Have made quite a bit of money lately. Have about 500 F in my pocket. On getting back into camp in Barlin found we have been split into brigades – or at least into 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> brigades. About 30 of us remaining in Barlin as reserve.<sup>34</sup> Bought Floss and [Harry] Beau[mont] a couple of wedding presents – 28 F each. A piano cover and a table centre respectively.

### **August 22**

Sent it off by registered mail. [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#) and [H.J.] [Arbuckle](#) have gone up to Sains Gobelle [Sains-en-Gohelle] and took the dice with them. Played a little on someone else's board and won 15 F.

### **August 26**

Sunday. Lost 70 F on someone's board tonight.

### **August 27**

[H.A.] Nesbitt came up today with a tale of woe that he had gone bust along with Buck [H.J. Arbuckle]. Lent him three pounds. Later learnt that Buck [H.J. Arbuckle] had two or three hundred left. This looks queer. Played with Davey Smith tonight and lost 100 F Davey 50 F. Last week some of the Barlin party including myself left Barlin at 2:30 P. M. got to Sains Gobelle [Sains-en-Gohelle]

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service. The gas sticks to the men's clothing who then go into dugouts and gas the men next to them. We are supplied with fans to clear out dugouts but lighting a fire seems so far the best plan, but it must not show, which is difficult." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 303.

<sup>32</sup> The Canadians did not use gas in this battle, but they did drop drums of burning oil into the deep trenches, which had the desired effect on the German defenders.

<sup>33</sup> The Third Division reported considerable movement on August 19-21. War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, August 1917, p. [7](#).

<sup>34</sup> In its August 21 diary entry, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division staff made no mention of this reorganisation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Pack Corps. The War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, August 1917, p. [7](#). Evidently, Frank remained with the remnant that was attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division headquarters. According to the August 21 entry in the PPCLI War Diary, which of course was part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, "Transport lines move to Petit-Sains Fosse 10 on 22.8.17." This was at Sains-en-Gohelle, about 4 km east of Barlin. The Battalion moved into a reserve position behind the front lines at Cité St. Pierre, which was somewhere east of Grenay on the north side of Lens. Grenay was about 6 km east of Sains-en-Gohelle.

by 4. Left for the line at dark 8 o'clock. Went through Marocq and Bally [Bully-les-Mines], Grenay, St. Pierre and finally dumped our load in St. Emilie just north of Lens.<sup>35</sup> We took our loads – gas shells – right up to the front line trench. No casualties although one man was killed and two wounded just ahead of our party.<sup>36</sup> Got back to Barlin by 4 in the morning. Slept most of the following day.

### August 29

Last night about 8 seven of us were rounded up for an Engineer party at Lens. Got back this morning at 4. It is about 25 miles there and back. Was shelled pretty badly for a while.<sup>37</sup> Slept until noon. I understand this work is for the Imperials and is volunteered for by our beloved O.C. [A.] Nichols [[Nicholls](#)].

### September 1

Tonight on Engineers again and [A.J.] [Burt](#) (42<sup>nd</sup>) “Bud” [Wiser](#) (58<sup>th</sup>) and one 116<sup>th</sup> man killed outright. Davey [Smith?,] [John?] Donaldson (43<sup>rd</sup>) wounded [F.R.] [Hasse](#) (49<sup>th</sup>) eardrum burst. 49<sup>th</sup> Transport officer will probably die of wounds.<sup>38</sup>

### September 4

Today moved back to La Targette. The rest of the pack corp. joined us in our new camp south of M. St. Vaast – Mont St. Eloi trenches.

### September 24

Four extra men have joined our section which makes it quite a bit easier. We are going to start a drive early in October.<sup>39</sup> Many air raids on England. Also air fights around here. Fritz brought down three of our observer air balloons the other day.

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<sup>35</sup> The Barlin branch of the divisional transport first travelled 5-6 km east-southeast to Sains-en-Gohelle, which was where the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade transport was located. They travelled about 8-10 km from Sains-en-Gohelle to the front lines on the northern outskirts of Lens.

<sup>36</sup> The PPCLI was on the front lines at this time. On August 26, there was considerable shelling and the battalion had 6 men killed and 7 wounded. On August 27, a day described as “quiet,” the diary reported 1 man killed and 8 wounded.

<sup>37</sup> The shelling may not have killed men, but it did kill some horses. Lt. Col. [Adamson](#) wrote from Lens, 29 August 1917, that, “three of our chargers [cavalry horses] killed last night [Aug. 28] on their way back from carrying rations in the pack train. Our Transport Officer’s horse was killed under him ... He was not hurt which was a great escape.” [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 304-305. The PPCLI, which had been in the front line since August 24, reported considerable activity during that time, including heavy shelling to their right on August 29. Four men were wounded that day, and another died at Barlin of his wounds.

<sup>38</sup> This transport officer of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade has not been identified, but on September 1, the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion recorded “Casualties to date Lt. J. E. Carman seriously wounded. 30 O/R Killed. 11 O.R. wounded. War Diary of the 49<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, September 1917, p. [4](#).”

<sup>39</sup> The rumours were correct, but Frank did not know where the action would take place. The PPCLI was training at Bois-des-Alleux west of Lens-Liévin between September 7 and 16, as well as providing working parties. On September 17, it moved into the support trenches and remained there until September 24, when it moved into the front lines. It was relatively quiet during this time, as Frank reported, but on the night of September 29/30, enemy shells caused an explosion in an ammunition dump that resulted in 35-40 casualties; of those 3 killed and 1 wounded were from 4<sup>th</sup> Company of the PPCLI.

Many planes of both sides brought down. Papers do not mention our losses correctly. Enumerate all Germans brought down against ours missing only. Have not played crown and anchor since coming down here.<sup>40</sup> [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#) has now borrowed in addition to the previous 7 F, 10 F, 5 F and 2 F. Total 99.50 F [?]. Suspect I will never get it. Line very quiet in these parts. We go up only one night in two. Fritz does practically no shelling at all now.

### **October 1**

Went to picture show at Div. cinema tonight with [H.] [Creed](#) and [A.A.] [Bremner](#). Very hot and crowded. Pictures stupid. Went out at half time. My turn up the line tomorrow night.

### **October 3**

Rumor developed today that we are moving out of this part of the line within a few days.<sup>41</sup> Played crown and anchor tonight. Won 70 f.

### **October 4**

Rumor strengthened. Extra men sent back taking with them my blanket I lent one of them off my bed. Stayed in again tonight.

### **October 5**

Cleaning up for this mysterious move. No one knows where we are going or why. On R. C. R. party tonight but it was cancelled.

### **October 6**

Moved today to Béthencourt a very small hamlet west of Aubigny.<sup>42</sup> Rained quite a bit. Hired a bed in an old French ladies house. Horse in stable. Fairly jake. Had to share room with madame.

### **October 7**

Consolidated billets during day. My shocked conventions of last night were absolutely squashed tonight. Madame shared her bed with a youth who comes from Tingues [Tincques] to keep her company. Madame has grandchildren about his age so I guess it is alright.

### **October 8**

Rations today. Had to go to Marigoval [Mingoval] about 5 kilos. Inc. [inclement]

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<sup>40</sup> La Targette was about 20 km south-southeast of Barlin.

<sup>41</sup> The rumours were correct. They were moving back to the Ypres Salient.

<sup>42</sup> Béthencourt was a small village about 5 km west of Aubigny-en-Artois and 19 km west of La Targette, Neuville-Saint-Vaast. Frank remained there until October 13. In the meantime, on October 6, the PPCLI went to a rest camp at Monchy-Breton, which was about 22 km northwest of Neuville-Saint-Vaast and 8-9 km northwest of Béthencourt. The battalion remained at the rest camp until October 16. Third Division Headquarters were about 7 km northeast of Béthencourt at Villers Châtel, where they remained until October 15.

weather. Spent the evening with [H.] [Creed](#) and [A.A.] [Bremner](#) down at Tingués [Tinqués]<sup>43</sup> Drank banjus (?) and Muscat. Punk dope.

### **October 10**

Wrote home and to Ambleside.

### **October 13**

Left Bethencourt this morning. Travelled to about 3 kilos north of Bethune.<sup>44</sup> Very wet all day. Got in about sundown. Yesterday mail from home, Alex MacW[illiam]. Also Dorothea Donnelly.

### **October 14**

Marched about 20 kilos today but went astray. Officers did not know enough to order us to feed and water our horses so they were not attended to from between 5:30 this morning until dark tonight. Carrying about 250 lbs at that. Of course I managed to get my horse feed and water when no one was looking though he had his pack on all day. Stopped at Morbecque west of Hazebrouck.<sup>45</sup> Nearly everybody up here speaks very good English. Lots of New Zealanders here.

### **October 15**

Moved again this time to a farm between Steenvoorde and Godewaersvelde.<sup>46</sup> Lost way again. All day I had my eye on Cassel hill but camp about seven or eight kilos from there.

### **October 16**

Still at farm. Horses no stable us no billets. Have made a small bivouac by the side of a wheat stack with my saddle cover.<sup>47</sup> Tonight immediately after stables I caught a bus for Steenvoorde. Walked from there to Lucie's place. Lucie at Cassel working as cook or something of the sort. The dear old lady made a deuce of a fuss over me. Fixed me up a bed on the floor and in the morning

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<sup>43</sup> Mingoal was about 5 km northeast and Tinqués 1.5 km west of Béthencourt. It was where the Rear 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisional Headquarters were located. War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, October 1917, p. [5](#).

<sup>44</sup> Béthune was about 24 km directly north of Béthencourt. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, including the Pack Mule Company, was moving to Flanders in preparation for a major offensive in the Ypres area.

<sup>45</sup> Morbecque was about 20 km northwest of Béthune and 4 km southwest of Hazebrouck. On October 15, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division reported that "The Divl. Arty. [Artillery] are moving by march route. They are accompanied by the Divl. Pack Mule Co. On 14<sup>th</sup> they marked from Estree Cauchie & Gauchin Legal to Annezin Vendin-Les-Bethune & Gonnehem & today reach the Morbeque Area." War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, October 1917, p. [8](#).

<sup>46</sup> Steenvoorde was about 12 km northeast of Hazebrouck and 4.7 km northwest of Godewaersvelde. On October 16, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Headquarters reported that the "Pack Mule Co. moved to the Eecke area today," which was in the vicinity of Steenvoorde and Godewaersvelde.

<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, the PPCLI moved north on October 16 by train to Caestre, which was 4.7 km south west of Godewaersvelde in the direction of Hazebrouck. Battalion headquarters were at Le Peuplier, which was about 2 km west of Caestre.

made me coffee before I left at 4 o'clock. The old man seems something of a dub. He was not there last year. Seems to regard me with suspicion.

### **October 17**

No rations today. [A.A.] [Bremner](#) and I came down to Steen. [Steenvoorde]. to get something to eat. Birch got very drunk today. In trouble with "four eyes" our Seventh Brigade officer named Anderson.

### **October 18**

No rations today. Heard they have gone up to Vlamertinghe today. On guard tonight. Got some rations but they are for tomorrow. Heard last two days rations were left back at Godewaersvelde.<sup>48</sup>

### **October 20**

Stayed here all day. Lots of bombs dropped by Fritz all around us.

### **October 21 PASSCHENDAELE**

Moved up past Ypres. Camped in a field near St. Jean. Horses standing out in the mud. Pitched a tent in the mud.<sup>49</sup> More bombs.<sup>50</sup>

### **October 22**

Up the line with ammunition. Dead horses, dead men, guns, gun limbers – everything is stuck in the mud. Mud up to the horses backs. Roads torn up something awful.<sup>51</sup> Up the line again twice more today.

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<sup>48</sup> According to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Headquarters, the Divisional Pack Mule Company had moved to the "vicinity of Vlamertinghe." War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, October 1917, p. [9](#). Evidently, Frank's unit was somewhere between Godewaersvelde and Vlamertinghe.

<sup>49</sup> St. Jean, or Sint-Jan, was about 2.6 km northeast of Ypres. Frank's description of conditions at the camp there was confirmed by 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Headquarters, which described its accommodations as "poor and in a bad state" War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, October 1917, p. [10](#). The PPCLI moved up on October 23 to Ypres and remained there in the ruins, because of a lack of room or facilities at St. Jean. [Adamson](#) wrote, "On arrival at the ancient town, for reasons I cannot explain, we were ordered to proceed no further. I shoved the men into what cellars could be found. Each man carried 24 hours' rations and was all right. The officers' food had been put in the Mess cart, which went with the transport another route, so we were a pretty hungry bunch although all wise ones always carry in the haversack chocolate and other emergency foods." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 306-307.

<sup>50</sup> The war diary of the PPCLI reported much aerial bombing between October 23 and 28, when the battalion was in reserve and supplying work parties to the front.

<sup>51</sup> On October 23, Lt. Col. Adamson wrote, "The condition of the ground beggars description. Just one mass of shell holes all full of water. The strongest and youngest men cannot navigate without falling down. The people we relieved tell me in the attack, a great many of their men were drowned in shell holes for want of strength to pull themselves out when dog tired." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 307.

## October 26

Pulled off a show up here this morning.<sup>52</sup> Rumors of varying success. Quite a few prisoners coming down all day. Some helping our wounded others their own. Many without an escort. Raining all day. Things are in a hell of a state. Up twice today.

## October 27

This morning we had several casualties.<sup>53</sup> Young [W.T.] [Tate](#) among them of the 116<sup>th</sup>. New officer. Seems to have a little horse sense. Heard later he used to be a private, which explains it.

## October 30

7<sup>th</sup> Brigade including Pats.<sup>54</sup> Went over this morning. Badly cut up by aeroplane bombs, shells, gas and machine guns.<sup>55</sup> Supposed to have taken their objectives.<sup>56</sup> Heard that among the officers they killed are Capt. Sullivan [H.E. [Sullivan](#)], Hagger [Capt. R.L. [Haggard](#)], Lt. [J. R.] [Riddell](#), [Maj. T. M.] [Papineau](#) [M.C.], Williams [Lieut. M.W. [Williams](#)] also George [Hogg](#). Very few prisoners taken. We were up the line several times today. A few minor casualties. Had a number of narrow escapes personally.

## October 31

Heard that casualties in regiments are about 400. We are moving back soon.

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<sup>52</sup> The war diary of the PPCLI reported on October 26 that "The first portion of the Can Corps Passchendaele offensive was carried out this morning by 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigades." On the same day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Headquarters, stationed in Ypres, reported that the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalions had "suffered severely" and that casualties would likely be "in the neighbourhood of 1000." On October 27, Headquarters reported that "Casualties incomplete as yet for the operation. Killed 9 officers 48 O R – Wounded 33 officers 466 O.R. – Missing 4 O.R." War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, Administrative Branches of the Staff, October 1917, p. [10](#).

<sup>53</sup> There was continual bombing by enemy airplanes. The October 24 entry in the PPCLI War Diary stated, "Enemy aeroplanes coming over Ypres in squadrons of 11 & 13 bombing in day time. Our planes seem unable to cope with these foundations." On October 26, "Much enemy bombing on Ypres & back areas in evening & night," and on October 27, "Ypres was shelled with high velocity shells and the town and surrounding areas heavily bombed in the moonlight." Not much wonder that Frank reported casualties in the pack corps.

<sup>54</sup> The PPCLI had moved from Ypres to the Gravenstafel area 8 km to the east on October 28 in preparation for the second phase of the the Passchendaele offensive. On the morning of October 30, the attack was carried out by the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, with the 72 Battn. (4<sup>th</sup> Can. Div.) on the right, the PPCLI in the centre, and the 49<sup>th</sup> Battn. on the left.

<sup>55</sup> According to the war diary, 600 soldiers, including 28 officers, of the PPCLI went into the battle, and 354 became casualties, included 93 killed outright, 3 who died of their wounds, 38 missing [most of them dead], 199 wounded, and 1 shell shocked.

<sup>56</sup> The offensive was successfully completed with a line established in advance of Meetchele, just outside of Passchendaele. On 2 November 1917, [Adamson](#) wrote, "The ground we gained and held against two counter-attacks and continuing artillery bombardment is of some importance, as the ridge we took is a commanding one and I do not expect the Army (although they ordered us to do so) thought we would be able to hold it, even if able to take it. The higher authorities are themselves out in expressing to us their appreciation of our efforts, but I cannot help wondering if the position gained was worth the awful sacrifice of life." [Letters of Aqar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 309.

## November 1

Two parcels yesterday from Miss Beaumont and Dorothea Donnelly. Two more today from Mrs. N. [S?] Beaumont<sup>57</sup> and Eatons – think it is from home. Gas shells and aeroplane bombs all the time. Few more casualties. Further names I remember as having been killed are Lt. [J.E.] [Pike](#), [J.E.] [Almon](#), [Capt. W.H.] [Morris](#), poor little [A.R.] [Mutton](#), who rose up to the rank of machine gun sergeant also was killed. Among the few remaining that I knew personally only [H.] [Ellison](#), Freddie Hall (who by the way now sports a Military Medal) and Ham Stevens remain. [F.] [Loco](#), Samorson[?] and about everyone else I know were wounded. Twenty-three officers went into the scrap and three came out whole. Ten were killed and ten were wounded.<sup>58</sup>

## November 2

Moved back on Div. Rest to within 3 kilos of Watou,<sup>59</sup> north of Steenvoorde. Camped at a farm. Tented in the mud. Mules without shelter.

## November 5

Straightened things around all day yesterday. Today at noon suddenly warned to move again so came down to Watou. Camped in a grassy field on outskirts of village. Very soggy. Horses on the other side of village in deeper mud than ever.

## November 6

Moved camp this morning but only to a different part of the field. Some rest! Ye Gods. Have had no bath for six weeks. Congratulated this afternoon by Gen. Lippsett [[Lipsett](#)] on work done beyond Ypres lately.<sup>60</sup>

## November 8

Bathed at last but had to get it myself. Creolined what clothes I could not get changed so am a little less lousy.

## November 9

We are still holding Passchendaele Ridge. Germans driving Italians back wholesale. Captured over 250,000 men and 2600 guns in three or four days. Military Revolutionist Party in Russia have overthrown Provisional government and Kerensky has fled. New party demands an immediate peace. Food situation in England very bad. Canadian conscription scheme seems to have fallen

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<sup>57</sup> There was no Mrs. N. Beaumont, but Sarah Beaumont was the mother of Harry and Dick.

<sup>58</sup> Frank was to find out later that Dick [Beaumont](#) was also among the dead.

<sup>59</sup> Watou was 7.5 km west of Poperinghe, Belgium and nearly 8 km north of Steenvoorde, France.

<sup>60</sup> According to Lt.-Col. [Adamson](#), the troops were also addressed by Brig. Gen. Hugh Marshall [Dyer](#), DSO, G.O.C. 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, who prior to the war was a prominent farmer outside of Minnedosa, Manitoba, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Manitoba Agricultural College.

through. The attention of the parties being devoted to an election.<sup>61</sup> Moving this afternoon to Vlamertinghe. Left Watou this afternoon at 2 P.M. Arrived at our old camp at St. Jean about 9:30. Raining and dark as hell. Pitched tent in the mud. [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#) and [H.] [Creed](#) hunted a hole for themselves in some old houses nearby. Dusty [Hoover](#) and I put the tent up between us. Afterwards the 49<sup>th</sup> section came in for the night.<sup>62</sup>

### **November 10**

Shell hit in camp this morning and hit [[J.](#) or [R.G.](#)] **McConnell** (49<sup>th</sup>) in the head. Up the line as far as Passchendaele tonight with 43<sup>rd</sup> rations. Shelled road badly. Johnston of R.C.R.'s hit in the knee. Gas in considerable quantities. Dead men and horses all (over) the road. Some almost buried in the mud.

### **November 11**

Up the line as far as Waterloo Farm this afternoon on 32<sup>nd</sup> water. More shelling. No one hit.

### **November 12**

On rations this morning. 58<sup>th</sup> rations up the line this afternoon.

### **November 13-16**

Working not quite so hard this trip in. Only bothered with rations. No ammunition. Tonight while coming out shelled pretty badly.<sup>63</sup>

### **November 17**

On R.C.R.'s party this afternoon. Went up through hell and deep water including mud to Waterloo Farm. Was not wanted. Came back through ditto. Gas shells on

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<sup>61</sup> Frank's pessimism was well founded. October 24 marked the beginning of the [Battle of Caporetto](#), and initial Austro-German successes suggested an impending German-Austro-Hungarian victory in Italy. On 7 November 1917, the [Russian Revolution](#) took a dangerous turn, when the Bolsheviks under Vladimir Lenin overthrew Alexander Kerensky's provisional government and immediately sought a separate peace with Germany and its allies. Throughout 1917, England suffered from hunger because German U-Boats prevented ships from bringing in food. By November, the situation was extremely serious, and in January 1918 rationing went into force. Finally, debate was raging in Canada over conscription, and Sir Robert Borden had called an election in December to settle the issue. To soldiers like Frank, it didn't look like the war was going to end any time soon.

<sup>62</sup> They were back at the same place they were on October 21, just 2.5 km northeast of Ypres.

<sup>63</sup> Frank was certainly in great danger, but his old company was in a much worse situation. According to the PPCLI War Diary, the battalion arrived at Wietze Camp near St. Jean on Nov 13 and went into supports on Nov. 14 behind the frontlines, which were being subjected to a fierce enemy bombardment that lasted without letup from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup>, except from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m. on Nov. 17. No. 1 and 2 Companies were in "close support" behind the R.C.R.s and the 42<sup>nd</sup> Bn. in the front lines. Besides the bombardment, they were subjected to gas attacks during the night on Nov. 15/16 and 16/17. Enemy airplanes directed the artillery fire and strafed the trenches with machine gun fire as well. There were 59 casualties, mostly in No. 1 and No. 2 Companies, with one officer killed and three wounded. Lt.-Col. [Adamson](#), in temporary command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, wrote, "The fighting for Passchendaele Ridge is continuing most severely and the Germans have brought up a tremendous amount of artillery from somewhere." [Letters of Agar Adamson 1914 to 1919](#), 313.

the way. Seemed like a new gas. It burst in a white cloud on hitting the ground and smelt sweet and pungent, something like sweet nitre or ether. Felt a bit tough tonight.

### **November 18**

Still feeling a bit sick. Travelled through Ypres north of Mont des Cats through Caestre and camp near a straw pile about a kilo or two south of Lucie's place but I did not know it until this morning.<sup>64</sup>

### **November 19**

Passed through Hazebrouck going south and after retracing our steps a few times camped at a farm near St. Venant. Very tired mentally and physically.<sup>65</sup>

### **November 20**

Passed southwest of Lillers and finally camped at what they promise is a rest camp after the usual step retracing while the Q.M. and the officers I suppose have supper. Village is very small – Cuhem.<sup>66</sup> Found me a quiet farm where the people are nice. They let me sleep in the mow. This is great as we have no tent up or anything fixed.<sup>67</sup>

### **November 21**

Pitched tent this morning. Wrote letters in my new "home."

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<sup>64</sup> The PPCLI was relieved and moved back to the Wieltze Camp at 4:00 a.m. on Nov. 18 and remained there all day. Transport, however, left for Hondeghem, which was about 35 km west-southwest of Ypres and 6.4 km west of Caestre.

<sup>65</sup> On Nov. 19, the battalion travelled by bus from Wieltze Camp to Robecq, which was about 16 km south of Hazebrouck. Transport travelled south that day about 19 km from Hondeghem and camped at St. Venant, which was 3.5 km north of Robecq.

<sup>66</sup> Lillers was about 8 km southwest of Robecq.

<sup>67</sup> On Nov. 20, Lt.-Col. [Adamson](#), who was now the acting brigadier, wrote, "We are out of the line for 30 days, the whole Division being scattered in the neighbourhood in small villages with very poor accommodation for officers, although the men have good barns." According to the PPCLI War Diary, both the Battalion and Transport were at Saint-Hilaire-Cottes, which was just over 13 km southwest of Robecq. However, Transport must have been nearer to Cuhem, which was a further 12.5 km west of Saint-Hilaire.