

**My Impressions & Experiences  
4 August 1916 – 18 April 1919**

**Written in December 1921 by [Jack Beaumont](#)  
to his future wife, Florence Henderson**

To begin at the beginning, I, in common with many thousands of others, was leading a humdrum life at the time the Great War broke out. I was tired of farming, and could see nothing ahead of me except work, and no man had less ambition, or initiative, than yours truly. Then, along came the greatest crisis that has ever disturbed either individuals, or possibly nations. We English have been raised in an atmosphere of martial lore, and as a consequence, are naturally inclined to prick up our ears at the first hint of war. But, right here I wish to state that no patriotism, or thoughts of duty, led me to enlist. It was the desire for a change, and a sop to my natural egoism, that put me into the ranks. However, almost two years of war had gone by, before I gained my desire, and in the meantime, my eldest brother had gone to France.<sup>1</sup>



**Pte. Jack Beaumont,**  
Reg. No. 922495, 200th (Winnipeg) Battalion

<sup>1</sup> Jack was the youngest of three brothers, all English immigrants, farming southeast of Minnedosa in the Cordova District. His eldest brother Pte. [Richard "Dick" Beaumont](#), had enlisted in 1915.

On June 3rd, 1916, I finally enlisted in Winnipeg, and joined the cosmopolitan ranks of the noble 200th Batt. I soon settled down to the routine; in fact, I was very fond of drill, and except for the Physical drill, rather enjoyed myself. We marched around the city, did some company drill up near the C.P.R. depot, and then in July, we moved to [Camp Hughes](#).<sup>2</sup>



**200th Battalion at Camp Hughes, 1916**

*A copy of this image is available at the Manitoba Archives*

Soon after we reached there, I went to the hospital for an operation, and spent several weeks there.<sup>3</sup> Then I had sick leave home, & returned to the Camp only to qualify for a few inoculations. After this we had harvest leave. Back to Camp again, and soon we had real cold weather, snow & slush, and wet feet. We did a little of real soldiering there, for a time.

Finally, late in October, we moved to Winnipeg.<sup>4</sup> We were quartered in the Galt Building, back of the City Hall. A chum and I preferred to sleep out, so we rented a room on William Ave. We had a swell winter, I joined the Signal Section of the Batt[alion], so was relieved of foolish drill, and all we did was to study the Morse Code, flag drill, and route marches.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jack arrived at Camp Hughes (formerly Camp Sewell) on 23 June 1916. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.

<sup>3</sup> It may have felt like “several weeks,” but Jack was in hospital at Camp Hughes from 26 June to 7 August 1916 – just eleven days. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.

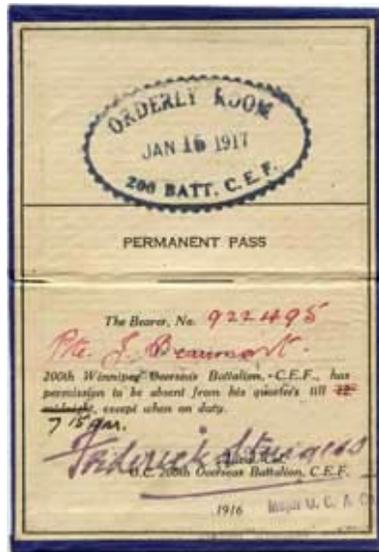
<sup>4</sup> Jack returned to Winnipeg on 23 October 1917. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.

<sup>5</sup> Jack joined the Signal Section on 6 November 1916. Diary 5: Grain Growers’ Note Pad (Black Cover), 1916-1917, p. 26.



The Galt Building, Winnipeg

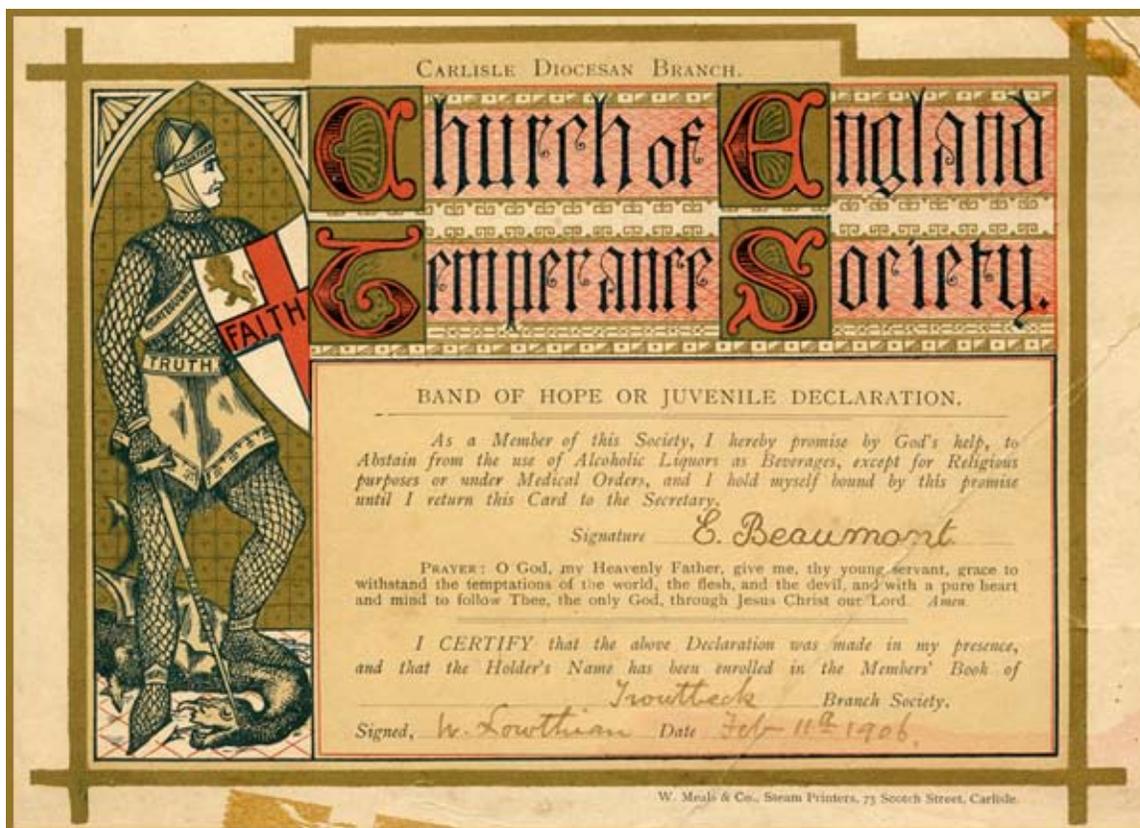
Courtesy [http://westenddumplings.blogspot.com/2008\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://westenddumplings.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html)



Jack's Permanent Passes, evidently to allow him to "sleep out," one dated 7 June 1916, and the other dated 16 January 1917.

I can see those route [page 2] marches yet; all the people lined up along the streets, our band playing, etc etc. There is certainly a thrill in wearing a uniform, sometimes!!! At times we had ceremonial parades, military funerals; these were cold affairs, and we had to walk a long way, at times. In the army, a private soldier always gets more honor at his death, than during his life.

It was in Winnipeg that I first began to see a few of the many pitfalls that beset the life of a soldier. Women, drink, and gambling, etc etc.<sup>6</sup> I had a sister in the city, I knew several people, too, so I kept clear of the streets.<sup>7</sup> But I always felt sorry for boys who have neither sisters nor good friends, at times like these. We must never blame the ones who fall, too harshly.



**Jack’s sister Elizabeth “Betty” Beaumont’s Temperance Declaration, 1906**

*Temperance was a strong influence in Jack’s family in part because of alcohol problems in the previous generation.*

Like all barracks, ours was productive of lots of colds, sore throats, etc. In early March, I contracted first a severe cold, then measles, and finally, a touch of Dip[h]theria. I had an operation for tonsils, and finally was able to leave the hospital in time to join my battalion, ready to move overseas.<sup>8</sup> I was not feeling very well, that April day when we left Winnipeg, a cold, bleak morning, on April 9th. We had a six days train journey, and I was very glad to leave.

<sup>6</sup> Jack’s family, who were active members of the Church of England, disapproved of alcohol consumption and gambling.

<sup>7</sup> Jack’s older sisters Alice and Sara went to Winnipeg from the farm in the fall of 1909. However, Alice went back to the farm for extended periods, so Sara was the sister mentioned here. Sara remained in Winnipeg until her marriage in 1922 to Alex MacWilliam, a graduate of the Manitoba Agricultural College and a friend of her brother Harry, who met Alex when they were both attending the college between 1913 and 1915. Elizabeth Beaumont Reminiscence, circa 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Jack’s personnel records contain two entries describing his hospital stay, one between 9 and 31 March 1917, or 22 days, for “tonsillitis” and the other between 28 and 31 March 1917 for “measles & Tonsillitis.” There was no mention of “diphtheria.”

There was lots of whisky on that train, and between drunks & fights, and various forms of rowdyism, we had a rough passage. On our arrival in Halifax, we were turned back to Aldershot Camp, 70 miles from Halifax, and spent three weeks there.



**Military Camp at Aldershot, Nova Scotia**

Courtesy <http://images.oakville.halinet.on.ca/63461/data>

Finally, we went to Halifax again, and spent three days waiting to embark. I saw more of the seamy side of life there, too, but I guess my guardian angle [angel] must have been pretty close, for I managed to keep straight. And then came the great moment, when we embarked, and my first step was taken, to get to the front.<sup>9</sup>

I was put on guard, the first thing, and that was an awful night, a dark, evil-smelling hole of a guard-room, and the motion of the ship. Ugh. I tramped the deck most of the night, trailing my rifle behind me, in a very unsoldierlike way. We had many of these duties, look-outs, etc, and then we had Physical Drill, and last of all, boat-drill. I detested the latter, our salvation(?) was a raft, away up on the very top deck; I used to pray that I would never be reduced to using it. When we were two or three days out from Port, two British destroyers came to meet us. I realized then [page 3] that we were in the submarine zone.

<sup>9</sup> Jack embarked from Halifax for England on H.M.S. [Megantic](#) on 30 April 1917. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.



**Jack went overseas on R.M.S. Megantic**

Courtesy [http://www.immigrantships.net/newcompass/ships/ship\\_files/pix\\_m.html](http://www.immigrantships.net/newcompass/ships/ship_files/pix_m.html)

The last day was a rush. We had each to take our own chances, (the ship I mean), and we all had to keep a sharp look out for submarines. I was on guard, one day, and the fog-horn sounded. Owing to a mistake, the signal for an enemy sub. was given. Up came a man, lugging all his equipment, and scared stiff. "Where is it", he said to me. "Where what?" says I. "The submarine." I ordered him below, and wondered how many more would pester me.



**Canadian Troops camped out on St. Martin's Plain, Shorncliffe.**

Courtesy <http://bbhilda.topcities.com> - *Folkstone Then and Now (Military/Wartime)*

We reached Liverpool safely, and on a lovely morning.<sup>10</sup> I have told you of the apple blossoms I saw, and the train ride to Shorncliffe. We were put into a camp for 3 weeks,

<sup>10</sup> The Megantic arrived at Liverpool on 14 May 1917. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.

in a place called Lower Dibgate.<sup>11</sup> What with short rations, (12 to 14 to 1 loop) etc, and a monotonous wait, I was glad when we moved out. Previous to this, however, I had a little scare, one evening. Just picture, a dark, wet night, and me shivering in bed. Suddenly, a warning is given, Zeppelin overhead, and out I ran, but there was nothing doing. Then came our move to St. Martin's Plain, and that same day, our first taste of war. You see, until this, I had hardly seen an aeroplane, and on that memorable day, the Huns made their first daylight raid on England. Shorncliffe is close to Folkstone, and the planes came over that town, bombing all the way. The camp we had just left was blown to atoms, and we suffered in the new one, too. We could see nothing, only hear a faint hum, and I saw huts, men, etc., etc., all blown up. We lost a lot of men in that do, and I got a fear of an aeroplane that will never leave me.<sup>12</sup>

Then we had a week of leave, and [I] headed for my old home, glad to leave for a few days.<sup>13</sup>



**Troutbeck's Jesus Church and churchyard, where Jack's brother Thomas, sister Maggie, and father John Beaumont were buried.**

*"Lakeland" Postcards:*

*Grace Castree, Troutbeck, Windermere.*

<sup>11</sup> On their arrival at Shorncliffe on 15 May 1917, the members of the 200th Bn. were transferred to the 11th Canadian Reserve Battalion Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records. Lower Dibgate was about a mile west of the Shorncliffe camp outside of Folkstone.

<sup>12</sup> Enemy planes attacked from the west at about 6:00 p.m. on Friday, 25 May 1917. Bombs were dropped at Hythe, the military camps at Dibgate, St. Martin's Plain, Shorncliffe, and the west end of Folkestone, where 71 civilians, including 28 women and 27 children were killed, and more than 96 others were injured. Among the soldiers, there were 18 (including 16 Canadians) killed and 90 (including 86 Canadians) wounded. For details, see [The Great Folkestone Air Raid Friday 25th May 1917](#).

<sup>13</sup> Jack's old home was Troutbeck in the shire of Westmorland, a beautifully scenic part of the English Lake District. Evidently, he visited there for a week at the end of May 1917.



**Near Glencoin Bridge.**  
*"Lakeland" Postcards:*  
*Grace Castree, Troutbeck, Windermere.*



**Pte. Jack Beaumont, probably at the entrance to his late grandfather's house at The Crag in Troutbeck.**  
The photograph was "taken by Miss Castree on the 30th of May," evidently while Jack was on leave there.

On our return, we started to drill in real earnest, no C.E.F. [Canadian Expeditionary Force] man will ever forget the ceremony carried on at Shorncliffe. We did a little of everything, learned to throw bombs, (I hated them), to use gas-helmets, did a lot of shooting, bayonet fighting, etc., etc. [page 4] We were all as keen as mustard, and did more work than we ever did later on. I had not reached my objective, then; therefore, I was a dutiful man. Then came the final medical exam for France, and we were really ready for the front (Or so we fondly imagined).<sup>14</sup>

The English Channel is notorious the world over, as being a rough bit of water. I heartily endorse that. We had to wear life-belts, in case of a submarine attack, and we had weak cocoa given as a stimulus.



**Jack probably crossed the English Channel on a similar troop ship**

*The Ballarat, above, was photographed alongside the escorting destroyer HMS Phoenix on 25 April 1917, shortly after the troopship had been torpedoed. (Australian War Memorial)*

*Courtesy:*

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS\\_Phoenix\\_&\\_troopship\\_Ballarar\\_1917\\_AWM\\_H13735.jpeg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Phoenix_&_troopship_Ballarar_1917_AWM_H13735.jpeg)

<sup>14</sup> Jack was transferred to the 107th Pioneer Bn. on 21 June 1917 and crossed over to Boulogne the following day. Pte. Jack Beaumont Personnel Records.

Then came Boulogne, an evil-smelling seaport town, built on a hill-side. We stayed in a camp one night, and then came the test march to Etaples, a distance of 18 or 20 miles, in full marching order. (Our equipment, rifle, & ammunition weighed about 70 lbs.)<sup>15</sup>

I was all in when we reached Etaples, but oh, what a lovely road, roses all the way; truly France is a lovely country. We went into tents at this place, and then commenced a terror of a time. Drill, marches, and every form of entertainment known to the mind of a military genius, or ass. This camp was called the Bull Ring, all over France & Belgium. We had sham fights, these were not too bad, we dug holes in the sand to shelter in, we fired dummy ammunition, we sweated in the hot sun, we swore at conditions, and heartily wished to get up the line (Up the line, always means, into the trenches). We unlearned all we had laboriously learned in England, we promptly forgot all we learned in Etaples at our next port of call.



**Bayonet Practice at Bull Ring, Etaples**  
Courtesy <http://smythe.id.au/lestweforget/ch6.htm>

Finally, we packed up and moved closer to the line.<sup>16</sup> I ought to have mentioned that I was now on draft for the 107th Batt[alion], a Pioneer Batt, of the 1st Can. Div. Each Division had a complete Batt, for digging trenches, putting up wire entanglements, building roads etc., etc. We moved to a place called \_\_\_\_\_ ( need my diary to supply name. I think though our first stop was Cologne-Richart [Calonne Ricouart]). We were attached to the 1st Entrenching Coy, and had the usual formula of drill etc.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Jack was among forty-three men who marched to Étaples, the Canadian Base Depot on 23 June 1917. Including the arrivals, there were twelve hundred and fourteen men in the camp that day. War Diary of the Canadian General Base Depot, Étaples, June 1917, [p.6](#). Jack made many friends and acquaintances among the soldiers who served with him during WWI. For brief biographies of some of them, go [here](#).

<sup>16</sup> Jack left Étaples on 9 July 1917 along with nine other men. See his Personnel Record and the War Diary of the Canadian General Base Depot, July 1917, [p.3](#).

<sup>17</sup> On July 12, after two days (July 10 and 11) at Calonne-Ricouart, he and one hundred and twenty-five other draftees for the 107th Pioneers moved to the 1st Canadian Entrenching Battalion at Villers-au-Bois. War Diary of the 1st Canadian Entrenching Battalion, July 1917, [p.19](#). They remained with the 1st Canadian Entrenching Battalion digging reserve trenches on Vimy Ridge until 23 August 1917.

[page 5] Then we moved to Blanchy [Neuville-Saint-Vaast?], and I realized what war was.<sup>18</sup> All that remained of this, a town larger than Rathwell, a little, was a heap of white chalk stones – no walls, not a roof in the whole place.<sup>19</sup> Desolate, well, it had to be seen to be understood. It is at night that these places looked so forlorn, no lights, only the moon shining on the ruins, ah, I shall never forget that scene of complete ruin.



**The Ruins of Neuville-Saint-Vaast**

Courtesy [http://www.stahlgewitter.com/16\\_03\\_02.htm](http://www.stahlgewitter.com/16_03_02.htm)

From here, we did our first real work, digging a reserve line of trenches, on [Vimy Ridge](#). This hill was the scene of a terrible battle on April 9th, 1917, and we saw evidence of it. It is a long low hill, and every inch of ground was torn over & over again by shells. We dug up shells, wire, and scores of dead bodies, it was an awful job, I had a row with a chap, one day, he used to rob these dead bodies, take money, and once I saw him taking a ring off a finger. I simply hated that man, he was as close to being an animal as I ever saw anyone.

We had about 4 miles to walk to our work every day, and say, we used to be tired of it. One day I said to [Charles] [Harris](#), "Let's take a holiday, today." So I feigned sickness, and he had to help me home. Ha, Ha. How we did lark around that sunny afternoon, and watched a big 15 in. gun firing, etc.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, the first move was to Neuville-Saint-Vaast. It occurred on 17 July 1917. According to the battalion war diary, Jack and the other Pioneers joined a "working party of 8 officers and 780 O.R. [other ranks]" that was "dispatched to Canadian Entrenching Comp. Neuville St. Vaast to relieve 2nd Canadian Entrenching Battn." War Diary of 1st Canadian Entrenching Battalion, July 1917, [p.12](#). Jack may have confused the names here. "Blanchy" was probably Saint-Laurent-Blangy, about 6 km south of Neuville-Saint-Vaast, on the northeast side of Arras. This was most certainly the "Blanchy" Jack mentioned in his war diary on 8 April 1918.

<sup>19</sup> If Jack erred in the name, this may have been a description of Neuville-Saint-Vaast. The village of Rathwell, Manitoba, to which Jack compared "Blanchy," was the home of Jack's future wife, Florence Henderson, to whom he was writing his reminiscence of the war.

I had funny impressions in those days, used to argue with my chums on all sorts of subjects, I remember a half-breed, he must have been a Catholick.<sup>20</sup> I had an argument with him about Sir Wilfred Laurier. I believe he could have killed me. I also had strong views on the subject of the English Monarchy. Previous to my period in France, I would argue in favour of Kings, but now I am rather inclined the other way.

In August we joined our Batt., the 107th, and after a short rest, we moved up close to the line.<sup>21</sup> Now my experience so far, had not brought me into contact with much of actual warfare, we had a pretty fair time at Blanchy, could move around in daylight, and ever hardly heard a shell explode.

[page 6] Our first move was to Bully-Grenay, a town near the lines, but in a fair state of preservation.<sup>22</sup> Lots of shops, there, estamets, etc. When moving up, I saw my first shell explode, about 300 yards away. One of the men near me fell flat on his face, but in those days a shell never worried me. From here on, I was to realize just how rotten a pioneer's life could be. We always worked at night, many a glorious moonlight night I have swung a pick, and handled a shovel, and called down wrath on the heads of all & sundry for starting a war.

We were soon moved to Lievin, a town near to Lens, at that time a hot corner for Canadians.<sup>23</sup> This part of France used to produce large quantities of coal. Hence the German anxiety to secure Lens and surrounding towns. We lived in cellars in Lievin, dark, unwholesome places. It always seemed so natural, to me, sleeping until noon, and stealing out at night, working until early morning, and then home again.

The first night that we were heavily shelled, I can see and feel, yet. We were making a narrow trench deeper. It was a warm night, and suddenly, without any warning, the shells began to come over. They were well aimed, too, we all laid down in the trench, and for 3½ hours, never lifted a hand. Shells burst on our trench, above in [it], and in it, and when it was all over, we were half buried with dirt & stones. None of my chums were hit, but one of our Corporals [Corp. A. L. [Green](#)] was buried. We dug him out, and he soon recovered. I could hear some praying, and one young fellow was so scared, he jumped up and ran along the trench over us. I can feel his feet on my head, yet, and I

<sup>20</sup> The term "half-breed" was commonly used at the time to refer to English-speaking Protestants of mixed European/Aboriginal background. Metis described people of mixed French/Aboriginal descent, who were Catholics and generally French-speaking. Since the soldier mentioned by Jack was Roman Catholic, he was probably of mixed French/Aboriginal descent, thus, more properly described as Metis.

<sup>21</sup> According to the War Diary of the 1st Canadian Entrenching Battalion, [p.7](#), "Working Parties from Neuville St. Vaast and Ablain St. Nazaire [were] brought in for reinforcement purposes" on August 21. Three officers left the following day for the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, and on August 23 the remaining 128 other ranks, including Jack, followed them. That draft of 3 officers and 128 other ranks joined the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion at the divisional rest station at Lapugnoy on 24 August 1917. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, August 1917, [p.6](#).

<sup>22</sup> They moved to Bully-Grenay on 6 September 1917.

<sup>23</sup> According to the war diary, the move to Liévin occurred on 13 September 1917. See War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, September 1917, [p.3](#).

guess I cussed him not a little.<sup>24</sup>

I remember another awful night in Lievin, when we had a gas attack. We were just starting out to work when the gas shells began to come over, hundreds of them, they made a peculiar noise of their own, and when they landed, all you could hear was a soft, Put. I never saw so much gas before or after that, we sat in the dug-out, and played cards with our masks on. I can see [Harris](#), yet, in the dim candle-light, we could not speak with these things on, but sometimes we took them off, to argue a point of play, only to put them on again.<sup>25</sup>

[page 7] Sometimes in my dreams, I can picture these endless nights, walking through miles of trenches, machine guns barking away, shells going over our heads, and bursting away back, and smell the various gases, filthy trenches, dug-outs, and bodies. One night we were halted in a tunnel, shells were falling near the mouth of it. The Officer was too scared to lead us out; we always waited for orders, like good soldiers. Along came our Major, a proper dare-devil of a man. "What are you all doing here," he said. "Waiting for orders, sir," we said. He swore, hunted up the Officer, & led the way out. All my chums were behind me, and when I reached the mouth of the tunnel, I yelled, "About turn," and away we went back in. It was great sport, we missed a night's work, and no-one knew who had given the order. Another night we went to work, and on the way, passed a lot of tools all piled in a bay, near the trench. On our arrival at the place where we had to labour & earn our \$1.10, we found that our tools were missing. Never a man opened his mouth about the tools we had passed, but some fool of a Lance-Corporal, evidently anxious for a raise, told our Officer about them. My, didn't we bless him; we nearly had a rest. Another time we made three attempts to dig a trench, and were shelled out each time. Then we moved off.

When under shell-fire, a person's mind becomes a confused & conflicting blur of ideas and thoughts. You wonder if you will get hit, speculate just where you would like to be hit, and finally say, "Oh well, if it comes, it comes." What a life, though, when you look back on it, working from 7 pm to 2 am, home & a drink of rum, and a breakfast, sleeping until noon, writing letters, or shaving, or something, supper at 5.30 pm and then etc. Hardly daring to show yourself in daylight, and then sneaking around like a thief.

This place, Lievin, always had a bad name, there were lots of batteries around there, and the town was a regular trap for idle soldiers. I remember we took a walk around the place, one day, and came to a cross-roads, it was called Hell Fire Corner, and it lived up to its name.<sup>26</sup> We crossed there mighty fast, but not any too soon. Whiz Bangs were rather the rule there, instead of the exception.

<sup>24</sup> This incident occurred some time during the night of 19/20 September 1917. The war diary entry for September 20 stated that "One party at work in Congress trench driven home by shell fire." War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, September 1917, [p.4](#).

<sup>25</sup> This incident was described in Jack's diary on September 21. The war diary recorded on September 22 that "Heavy shell fire interfered with work on trenches."

<sup>26</sup> In fact, it was Whiz Bang Corner. Hell Fire Corner was in the Ypres Salient.



**Whiz-Bang Corner in Liévin, France**

*Courtesy*

<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=40146>

I will explain here the different types of guns & shells we heard and saw. All quick firing guns, using a small shell, were called Whiz-Bangs, for a very simple [page 8] reason, they fired almost on a level, and when in line with them, all you heard was, Bang, Zip, Bang, if you were good & lively, you dodged, and if not, you, well, didn't. Large naval guns also fire with the gun in a horizontal position, but all howitzers have the barrel of the gun in almost a perpendicular position. Now these different guns all have their own particular use, & range. A small field gun will send a small shell up to a mile or so. Then we have the up to 20 miles. The howitzers shells could be heard seconds before they ever passed over us, the big shells sounded like a train, moving through the air. By this rule, if you could hear a shell coming, you were generally safe, for it would be almost over you when you actually heard it. Gas shells, being filled with liquid, made a soft, souging kind of sound.<sup>27</sup>

There are many noises to contend with, take over-head shrapnel for instance, they made a terrific noise, and were very dangerous at certain angles. I have often had them burst directly over me, and seen men hit, a considerable distance away. Then we had trench mortars; they came over with a fiery tail behind them, described a perfect arc, and landed with a soul-inspiring bang. Machine gun bullets have a wicked sound, too, zip-zip, and then it was time to keep your head low.

We were working at one place, and they took us up the line in a light railway. Well, we had to wait for the train to take us home, and as we sat around, suddenly Fritz began

<sup>27</sup> "Souging [suffing] kind of sound" is a soft, continuous, or murmuring sound like the wind through the trees.

to pepper us with machine guns. I heard them hitting the flanks, and humming around like bees, so a bunch of us started off down the track. Presently along came the train, we climbed on, and then old Heinie [the enemy] decided to heave a shell or two. Gee, that old train did hum along. We kept clear of light railways after that, they were a regular drawing card for casualties.

I remember one other interesting evening, a small party of us had a special job, fixing up a fire-bay [see diagram], in an advanced trench. On the way in, a bullet by some peculiar chance, struck an iron post at the top of the trench, and ricocheted [ricocheted] down the trench. It passed over my head (fortunately I was short) and hit a big chap behind me, in the shoulder. We had to carry him about two miles, (and we did not half bless him) and all the time He said, "I'm dying." But he only got a nice trip to Blighty [England] for several months.<sup>28</sup> He gave me a cigarette case he had with him, I have it yet.<sup>29</sup>



**Match case Front**



**Back**



**Striker**

The above match case with the inscription "J.G." was among Jack Beaumont's memorabilia. This may be the "cigarette" case he received from the wounded soldier. The identity of "J.G." is unknown.



**Match case Front**



**Back**



**Striker**

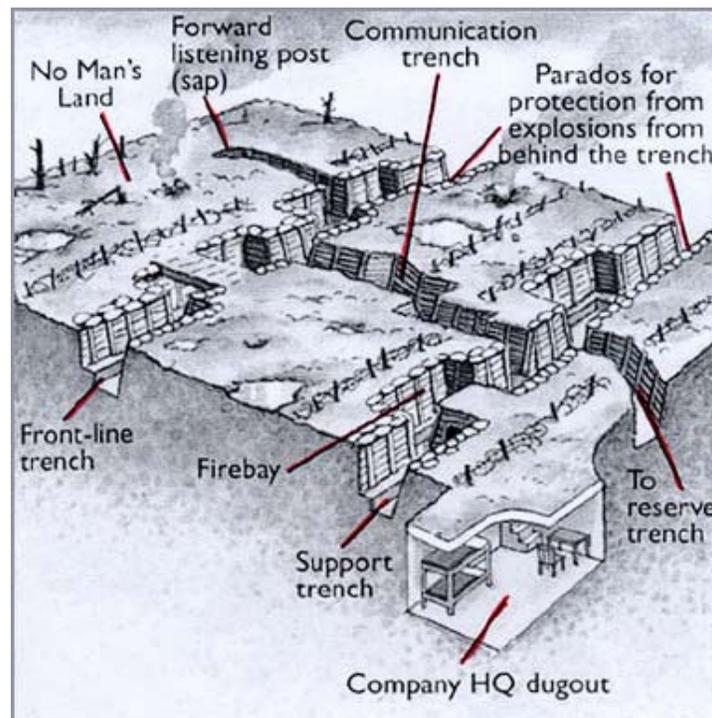
Jack Beaumont's own match case inscribed with his initials "J.B." on the front and "June 1919" on the back.

<sup>28</sup> This may have been Jack Hobson, who was 5 feet 10 ¾ inches tall, certainly a tall man compared to Jack Beaumont, who was only 5 feet 4 inches in height. Jack's war diary mentioned that Hobson was wounded and had to be carried out on 5 February 1918.

<sup>29</sup> Among Jack's memorabilia was a match case with striker inscribed with the initials "J. G." This may have been the "cigarette" case mentioned here. "J. G." has not been identified.

This same man, previous to this nearly caused my finish. He was new to the line, and was very nervous. Well, one night, this same little party of ours, were working in an extremely narrow trench, and suddenly, our men, just in front of us, started a raid on the German sector. These raids, I may say, were the invention of the Canadians, and were used to capture a few prisoners, get some information, and keep the wily Hun on the alert.<sup>30</sup> Just when they [page 9] started, I was enjoying seeing the shells go over, and then the counter attack took place. We were in a good spot for collecting stray bullets, and shells, so we decided to hunt cover. Now this big chap was at the far end of a dug-out. However, he was scared stiff, and refused to move. I was at the other end, anxious to move, too. Finally he did move, and his native jack rabbit had nothing on him for speed. He passed the dug-out at 40 miles per hour, & we saw him no more for several hours. By the time my turn came, the shells were like autumn leaves, falling fast. Just as I passed under a little bridge, I heard a crump, and a fair-sized shell landed two feet above my head. Did I linger to gather roses?!! No.

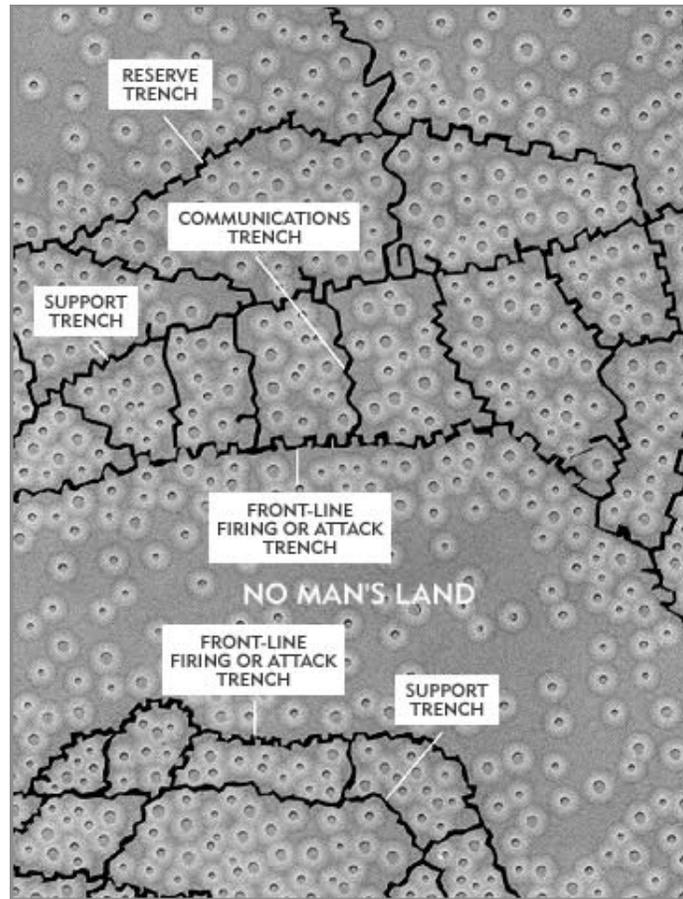
It is perhaps better to just describe how our trenches and the enemy's were laid out. First we have the front line trenches, parallel to each other. Then, close behind, were close supports, another line of trenches, also parallel to the first ones. And also the reserve line some little distance back. The communication trenches were always more dangerous, as they were at right angles to the front line trenches, and shells & bullets



**Diagram showing how the trenches were constructed**  
Courtesy <https://sites.google.com/site/ww1sodeep/trenches-1>

<sup>30</sup> The term 'Hun' was first used by Kaiser Wilhelm II, during a speech in 1900 to German troops about to leave to help put down the Boxer Rebellion in China. He encouraged them to behave like the Huns of old so that "no Chinaman will ever again dare so much as to pull a face at a German." The comparison came back to haunt Germany because it was used in British war propaganda to emphasize the barbarity of the German war effort.

could come right into them. Ahead of the front lines, and between these two places was No-Mans Land, a wierd [sic] & awful place, torn by shells of both sides, covered with wire entanglements, and a right unwholesome place to be found in. Flare lights were used, a small shell like a large shot-gun shell, when fired, they described a high arc, and burst like a star. Then, when they struck the ground, they had an after-glow, which showed up every single thing for hundreds of yards around.



Another diagram showing how the trenches were constructed  
Courtesy <https://sites.google.com/site/ww1sodeep/trenches-1>

I can picture one night, we were putting up a wire entanglement, and just as we would begin to work, up would go a star-shell, and we dare not move a muscle. Then it would be as dark as pitch, and when we carried the rolls of wire, we would fall head-long into a shell hole. These little holes, (sometimes 7 or 10 feet deep,) were usually half full of mud and water, a nice cool bath for the unlucky chap who slipped in. If our mutual and vigilant enemy spied us, over came a few mortars, or a stream of bullets, I can hear them ticking on that wire now. What a life, working in rain and mud, snow and ice, sometimes too tired to care about being hit, and again, taking great precautions to escape.

Then we moved to Petit Vimy, and were billeted in real dug-outs.<sup>31</sup> Awful-smelling, deep, damp holes, full of rats and filthy with vermin. We were so used to the latter, by

<sup>31</sup> This move occurred on 25 September 1917. In one of his war diaries, Jack said they moved to "Colonne two miles away," a small place just north of Bully-les-Mines.

this time that they had ceased to trouble us, but we kept up a continual war-fare on them. We had a man with us, named **Jelly**, a terror to smoke cigarettes, he was death on rats. [page 10] One night he decided to slay a particularly friendly old rat, for the sole reason that it ate his bread and cheese. He armed himself with a long and wicked looking bayonet, got in a good supply of smokes, and waited. In the dark watches of the night, I heard a mighty yell, and a smothered imprecation on all and sundry rats. Poor old Jelly, making a mighty slash at the rat, hit his own toe, and away went the rat. My, we did laugh.



**Petit Vimy and Vimy from the Lens-Arras Road, 1919**

*by Mary Riter Hamilton (1873 - 1954)*

Courtesy <http://peinturesetpoesies.blog50.com/>

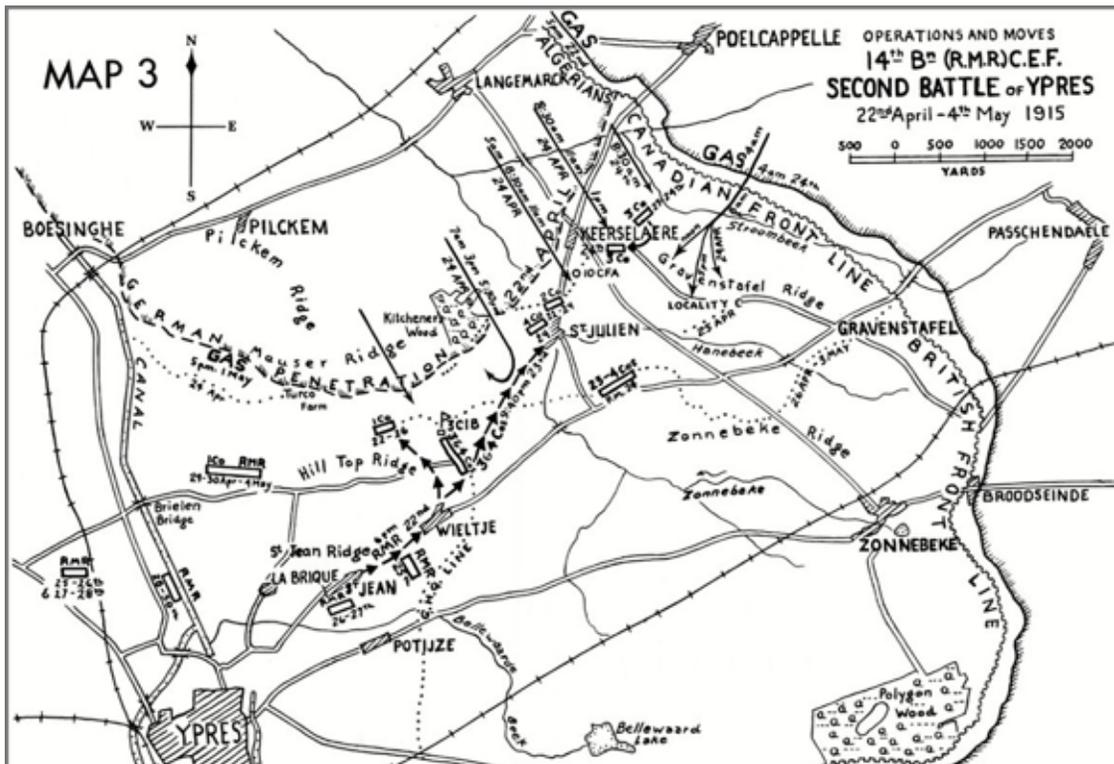
We had a tough time at that place. It rained every day for weeks, and at night, we had to dig cable trenches, each man had a piece to do, a yard long, and 7 feet deep.<sup>32</sup> Here I was to get in a little underhand work. Our spades were about 3' 6" long, and in checking over the work, we put two spades on top of each other, to show the Officer that we had dug 7 feet. I used to lean the lower spade away from the side, and many a time I got away with 5 feet or less. One night, dark as pitch I was working next to T. H. [Morden], and he was standing with his hand on the top of his spade. Down came my pick, square on his hand; my, I did feel mean.

I secured a few pair of boots then, they must have weighed 20 lbs a piece. In two days I did a little wrecking [wrecking] on them, and secured a lighter pair. Another time my

<sup>32</sup> B, C, and D Companies were involved in digging cable trenches and laying cable for the 4th Division from September 25 to October 11, when B Company moved to Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, followed by C and D Companies on October 13. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, September 1917, p.5, and October 1917, p.3.

clothes were a little frayed, but our Quarter Master refused to give me a new pair. So with a brick and an old army razor, I put two years on those clothes, and he said, "My, you wore them out quick." We had lots of little ways of cheating the higher powers, sometimes.

By this time I was fairly well used to the life, shells & bullets did not bother me much, only bones. We had little of these, that fall & winter until we moved to Ypres. We moved to the latter place in mid-October.<sup>33</sup> We marched up, stopping at different towns enroute. Whenever we stopped, we used to rob orchards, to the great disgust of our worthy allies – the French. I used to sample the native wine, too, Vin Blanc and Vin Rouge. It was bitter stuff, but the champagne was good. (You see I am telling everything, good, bad & indifferent). I never drank a great deal, only now and then when I wished to forget what war was, and how miserable I was. I cannot find any excuse for a man drinking now, but when a man is seeing too much of trouble, and has a bad taste in his mouth, it is good to forget, in any way at all. Then we reached Ypres, and a more desolate and dreary country, I have never seen. Mud, mud, and then some, we lived in it, worked in it, and sometimes, slept in it. For three weeks I never had my clothes off, dirty, whew. We could not sleep for shells & bombs; my, I was scared there. We had a pleasant little stroll of about 5 miles to work, sometimes day work, and mostly nights.



Jack's Battalion worked on the Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road  
Courtesy <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/writing/maps.asp>

<sup>33</sup> The battalion arrived at Ypres on 20 October 1917.

[page 11] Our chief task was building a plank road, on which to move up the guns.<sup>34</sup> For a week, all was well, then our road was spotted, and we were potted, to use a common phrase. Each night, at a certain hour, over would come a salvo of shells, and the same in the morning. There was a dump, there, called Spree Farm Dump. (A Dump is a place where supplies for the various branches of warfare are stored, planks, wire, trench mats, shells, etc etc). We carried wet soggy planks from there, at times two miles, on our shoulders, two men to each plank, and when the overhead shrapnel burst over us, we would put the old plank on our heads, to insure greater protection. (Or so we thought, anyway.) There was a dressing station there, a favourite loafing place for tired soldiers, & hot cocoa was served out to all & Sundry. One night a Hun Plane tried to drop a bomb on it. He missed, however, and they dropped in the mud, 50 feet from the nose of your humble servant. I decided to move, in a slight hurry, but I surely blessed the mud, for once. Three real, honest to goodness, bombs, that close, sending up a geyser of mud, are a great incentive to a move of some kind, with or without orders from the Officer in charge.



**British Pioneers repairing the Ypres-Poelcappelle Road in August 1917  
in conditions similar to that of the Wieltze-Gravenstafel Road**  
Courtesy <http://www.freewebs.com/denbob/ulsterdivlangemarck.htm>

We had a chum there, named **English** from Newdale [sic - Cardale]. He was very young, and very nervous. When we were all in bed, and a plane would come over, away he would run. I never knew where, and returned when it was all over. It is funny he was never hit, I used to pull my tin hat over my head, and wonder if this one had my name & number on it. One clear moonlight night, a plane came over, and dropped three bombs, one on each side of our tent. I saw two streaks of fire, and my heart was in my mouth,

<sup>34</sup> The battalion worked on the Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road east of Ypres from October 21 until November 12.

believe me. Another day I was talking to a chum on the road, and suddenly over came a plane, heading right for us. We hurriedly dived into a cellar, and crump, crump, and up went a bunch of mules.

This plank road was a regular man-trap, we were working on there one fine morning, and over came a squadron of German planes, 13 all told. They flew pretty low, and we sure kept mum, but I was good and scared and waited for a bomb, but none came, that trip. We saw lots of queer sights, there, mules and horses buried in mud, and left there, and every day or night, dozens of casualties. I remember one in particular, 4 German prisoners were carrying a wounded man down the line, and over came a shell, they laid down the stretcher, waited for the explosion, and then on they went again, through mud & water. These same Huns were good at that task on our side, but rather rough on their own side.

View "[Images from the Battle of Menin Road](#)," September 1917  
*For a visual impression of the conditions faced by the 107th  
Canadian Pioneer Battalion on the Weiltje-Gravenstafel Road*

Another night I had a proper tough time. We had made one trip up the road with planks, and as we waited to return, the next party were caught by a regular storm of shells. It was pure luck that we were not in the same place. It was a dark, damp night, and of course several men were killed & some [page 12] badly wounded.<sup>35</sup> Four of our party were detailed to carry a man to the rear. Away we went with this chap, and we had to pass in front of a battery of big guns, all firing to beat the ears. The concussion was so great that every time one fired, my old tin hat jumped off my head. Just picture, walking in front of a gun, firing a shell weighing about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a ton, and you can see that it was some noise. We carried that man about 3 miles. To crown all, the Corporal & one of the men on the party were awarded the M.M., for volunteering to carry out wounded. What a farce.

T. H. [\[Morden\]](#) & I had one real narrow shave, though. We were hiking along one dark night, and suddenly I saw a light, and pulled Harry back. A small gun fired across the road so close that the flame scorched our faces. Another step, and we would have been ?..?. [blown to hell?].

I described the town of Ypres to you, its remnant of a once wonderful cathedral, Cloth Hall, etc. Also the swans, the mystery of the age. It was in the old market square that I said goodbye to Dick [\[Beaumont\]](#), I will see that spot as long as I have memory.<sup>36</sup> This square was shelled at regular intervals, and many a poor soldier was caught there. Dick got his first wound near Ypres, in the winter of 15 & 16. A small piece of shell hit him over one eye. Every morning that we ever went up that road, there were a row of bodies laid out, men caught at work the previous night. That is the terrible side of war, one minute a man is well, joking with his pals, the next, he may be hurled into eternity.

<sup>35</sup> This incident probably occurred on 25 October 1917.

<sup>36</sup> Jack met his brother Dick in that square on 24 October 1917. Dick was killed six days later on 30 October 1917 at the Battle of Passchendaele.



Ypres in the Autumn of 1917

Courtesy <http://www.firstworldwar.com/photos/battlegrounds.htm>

And then came our return to France, we were as happy as larks, marching down from there, and then we were taken in lorries, or to be exact, old discarded London busses. I forget where we landed up, but shortly after that we moved to Souchez.<sup>37</sup> We lived in old cellars, then, and had a great time for a month. It was a quiet front, the weather was dry and frosty, and we often had day work. I laughed one night, we were taking up a light railway, loading the ties in a hand-car, and taking them up the line. There was a branch line or junction, and as luck would have it, the switch was locked. Down we went, as hard as possible, sitting on this load of ties, and hit this switch. Bump went the load, all over the landscape, a great mess on a quiet, peac[e]able war-time evening.

Another time, we were building a new branch railway and the Huns decided to liven things up a bit. We laid down the rails, and bingo, up they went again. Finally we made a rush for it, laying rails, pushing ties under, and spiking them. It was ticklish work, and a day or so later, you could not find a trace of that line with a microscope. We could build fire in our cellars, had pretty good food, and got well rested up after the Ypres affair. I looked 10 years older for that month in Belgium.<sup>38</sup> We larked around there, swung the lead a little, dodged a few parades, and work parties, and played the old soldier, in every particular. Have you any idea what “swinging the lead” is? It means, literally, making believe you are sick, when you are really as fit as a fiddle.!!

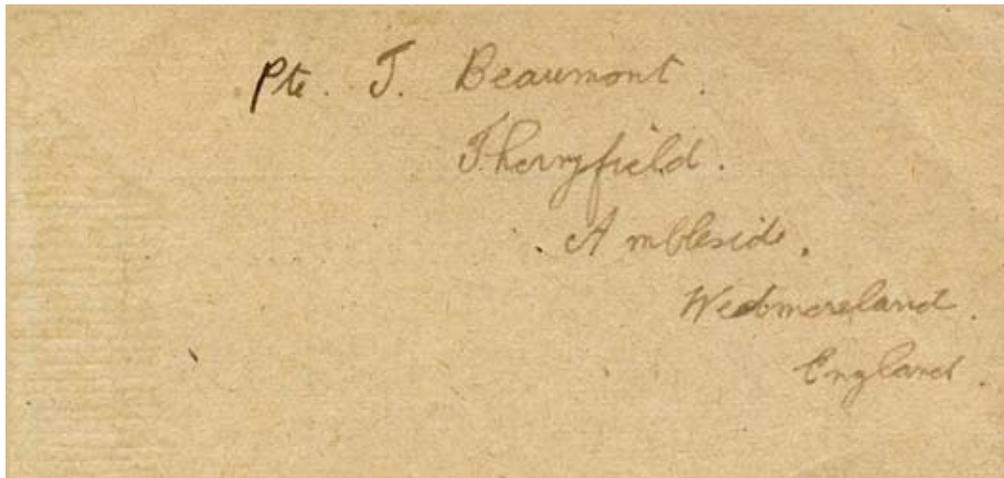
<sup>37</sup> The battalion left Ypres on November 14 and arrived at Fosse 10 on November 16. From there on November 18, A Company moved into Liévin, while C and D Companies moved to Givenchy. Two days later, on November 20, B Company moved to “Columbia Huts” at Souchez just outside of Liévin, where they remained until Nov 27, when they replaced Company D at Givenchy. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, November 1917, [p.3](#) and [p.4](#).

<sup>38</sup> The strain was certainly evident in the picture he had taken of himself on 26 November 1917.

[page 13] From Souchez, we moved to Auchel, and spent Xmas there.<sup>39</sup> We were out of the line for a good spell, here, resting up for a new drive. We slept in a house, here, on a tiled floor, it was rather a pleasant change from the barns and pig-sty. You see, most of the French farmsteads are built in the form of a square, with house on one side, and various stables on the other three sides. The refuse heap was often in the centre, isn't it a splendid way to manage things?

Soon after the New Year we moved to Maroc, a much battered up village.<sup>40</sup> We slept in cellars there, had coal fires when we managed to steal it, or wood if it was more convenient. One morning I was just up, and lighting the fire, when a barrage opened up on the place. I was in front of the fire, blowing at it, when crump, a shell came through the upstairs wall, and a blast of air came down the chimney. A young corporal [Davies] was just at the upstairs door, and he was killed instantly.<sup>41</sup> We never heard him at all, until our major came down and ordered us to warn all the men to leave the cellars. It was a warm job, dodging shells, diving into cellars, and tearing around. We had just got three chaps out of one cellar, when a shell went right into it, and made a little havoc of the, er, furniture.

Then I had a leave to England, and surely did enjoy it; Westmoreland looked nice & peaceable after France.<sup>42</sup>



**A slip of paper with Jack's address in Westmoreland,  
found among his papers after his death**

*Proof that he stayed with his Aunts' Ruth, Clara, and Isa Beaumont at Ambleside.*

<sup>39</sup> Jack was mistaken. His Company moved to Bouvigny-Boyeffles, eight to ten km west of Liévin, on 19 December 1917 and spent Christmas there. The move to Raimbert [Rimbert] near Auchel, about 28 km northwest of Bouvigny-Boyeffles, occurred on December 31. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, December 1917, [p.3](#) and [p.4](#).

<sup>40</sup> They arrived at Maroc on the northern outskirts of Liévin-Lens on 23 January 1918.

<sup>41</sup> Young Corporal Davies was killed on 4 March 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Jack crossed to England on March 16 and returned to France on 31 March 1918.



Thorneyfield in Ambleside, home of Jack's Aunts Ruth, Clara, and Isa.

Going back, I met Charlie [Harris](#) in Boulogne, and we hung around there for a few days, evading the Military Police, and spending the balance of our money. After a few narrow escapes at capture, we decided to return to the Batt. A good bombing raid on the camp helped us to decide, so off we went. We had quite a hunt for them [page 14] and when we finally did, the O.C. fined us both for being a day over leave.<sup>43</sup> We both told a pathetic tale of a mad rush for the boat train in London, but he was adamant, and soaked us 14 days pay.<sup>44</sup> Its of no avail to argue with a Colonel, I soon discerned that.

922495 Beaumont. J.

Report		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, commutations, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B 213, Army Form A. 30, or to other official documents. The authority to be cited in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B 213, Army Form A. 30, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received				
22.6.17	C. B. D.	ARRIVED C. B. D.	FRANCE	22.6.17	N. R. D. PART II ORDERS No. 41 D 27.6.17
9/7/17	C. B. D.	LEFT C. B. D. FOR	1st Bn	9/7/17	N. R. B. B 213 B 6/596
12/7/17	C. B. D.	ARRIVED 1st Bn	FIELD	12/7/17	R & R 29
22.8.17		LEFT FOR LEAVE		22.8.17	B 213 B 6/596
19/17	OC 107	JOINED UNIT			
16.3.18	do	Granted 14 days leave to U.K.		16.3.18	B 213 B 6/25-d/26-18
6-4-18	do	Rejoined from leave		5-6-18	B 213
11-4-18	do	Sentenced to forfeit 10 days pay for w.o.a.s overstaying leave from 1/11 30.3.18 to 24/11 30.3.18		10-4-18	B 2069 P 12 D 29 1/24-4-18
4 6 18	OC 107			29 5/18	D. O. 66

Evidence from Jack's personnel records of the penalty for overstaying his leave to England

<sup>43</sup> Jack and Charlie did not get back to the battalion until 5 April 1918. It had relocated on March 31 to Achicourt, which was a town located on the south side of Arras, about 8 km from the city centre. B Company was at Agny, a village just to the southwest of Achicourt. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, March 1918, [p.6](#).

<sup>44</sup> Jack's personnel record states that he was "Sentenced to forfeit 10 days pay for w.o.a.s overstaying Leave from M/N [midnight] 30-3-18 to M/N 31-3-18." That would be equivalent to two weeks' pay or 14 days, from Jack's point of view.

The first night up the line, we had a warm time. We were marching up a road in two lines, and a big shell landed in the road ahead of us. The nose-cap, flew straight down the line, and I can see it yet, humming along. It was a damp night and we were showered with gas shells, so I was glad when time came to return home.<sup>45</sup> Charles [Harris] and I had an iron bedstead, there, and of course white sheets and pillow cases. The bed had lost a leg in the war, and sagged a trifle, the paint was scratched, and the mattress had inhabitants, but it beat the cold floor all hollow.

Then we had a spell in dugouts near Arras.<sup>46</sup> One day a couple of men were having a bath in a shell hole, when all at once, a couple of shells came over. I saw two figures doing a fair sprint for a dugout, very lightly clad, indeed. Also the ration party was there, with a team, and away went team and wagon in a general direction of the base. We had some nasty roads to travel around there, shelled all the time, and we surely did make time along them.

Soon after this, we moved out for a long rest, ready for the big July offensive.<sup>47</sup> We had a dandy time. I was taking up stretcher-bearing, and of course friend Harris was, too.<sup>48</sup> We had a short lecture from the M.O. in the morning, then we played cards, and in the afternoon, played baseball. I tried to find out the difference between treating a man for a real pain, or imaginary one. Oh those army sick parades, the soldiers limping along, groaning, and looking almost pitiful, really as well as they could be. Many a thousand pills were administered, (the patients usually threw them away) and of all the dodges. If a man ate a little bit of soap, or smoked a cigarette dipped in iodine, his heart would pound something frightfully, and a wet towel bound around a persons knee, and the member pounded, made it swell up to an alarming extent. Sickness was hard to discover, also internal troubles. Having tried a few little dodges myself, I got the habit of looking for symptoms. The only thing was, if the temperature was normal, the man was well, so there you are. Then we practised bandaging, and various other things, but to be candid, we mostly laid on our backs and slept peacefully. The weather was ideal, warm and bright, and thus the days of waiting passed by. We attended the Divisional Sports, and saw Borden, Haig, etc etc.<sup>49</sup>

[page 15] To continue my narrative, I must confess that the time spent in studying the art of first-aid, and the rudiments of 500, (the latter was more attended to) was a good

<sup>45</sup> This incident probably occurred on 6 April 1918. The war diary recorded "considerable hostile shelling of areas" on April 7. War Diary of the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion, April 1918, [p.3](#).

<sup>46</sup> Those dugouts were in Plymouth Camp at Sainte-Catharine on the northern outskirts of Arras. B Company arrived there on 16 April 1916. Previously, they had been in huts at Saint-Laurent-Blangy on April 8 and in cellars in Arras from April 9-15.

<sup>47</sup> The battalion left the war zone on 6 May 1918 and remained at rest and in training until 28 May 1918, when the 107th Canadian Pioneer Battalion was disbanded and the men absorbed into the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Engineer Battalions. "The big July Offensive" may refer to the counter-offensive that marked the beginning of the end for the German army, after its defeat at the 2nd Battle of the Marne in July 1918.

<sup>48</sup> Jack and his friends took up stretcher bearing on 6 June 1918 after they had joined the 1st Battalion, Canadian Engineers.

<sup>49</sup> The divisional sports were held on 1 July 1918 at Tincques.

rest for yours truly, & in fact I nearly blushed on Pay-Day, nearly!! Then after a little training, up the line we toddled, your humble servant, bearing a stretcher, and devoutly hoping that it would never be filled. Many a time I swore softly at that contraption of wood & canvas. We located in Arras, again, in cellars, lovely cool places, and oh what a warm corner that was.<sup>50</sup> Across the square, the wall of a huge hotel was blown way, and one could see bedrooms, with bed still in them, exposed. I slept up there one night, and a shell passed through the floor below, after which I lit out for the cellar, with one eye on the sewer, below that again. I did little here, for a week or so, except let out blisters on the heels of the men who were working up the line. I always put iodine on those places, and oh, the lurid comments of the victims.



**La Grande Place, Arras**

*Courtesy*

<http://vieux-papiers.over-blog.com/article-cartes-postales---14-18---destructions-37407599.html>

I remember one house in Arras, it had never been hit, and the furniture was lovely – A huge billiard table stood in one room, so **Harris** and I decided to have a game. Now this house was “Verboten” to us chaps, and suddenly an M P put his face in at the window. We retired into the dark recesses of the inevitable cellar, and escaped him.<sup>51</sup> Then someone discovered that John Beaumont, S. B. [stretcher bearer] was idle, so next day up the line I went, carrying my little stretcher, & a gallon of iodine, plus some miles of lint.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Jack moved to Arras on 12 July 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Jack and his friend Harris were lucky. Battalion Orders on 12 July 1918 noted that “Special attention is drawn to Standing Orders regarding Looting and trespassing on property, other than that allotted by the military authorities to this Battlefield. Any infringement of this order, i.e., any looking or trespassing will be severely dealt with. This order applies to all ranks. War Diary of the 1st Battalion, Canadian Engineers, July 1918, Appendix 13, [p.31](#).

<sup>52</sup> He went out on 16 July 1918 with his first working party.

My party was engaged in digging a tunnel, & I, of course did not have to labour, I simply waited for some-one to get hit, or, like Micawber, for something to turn up.<sup>53</sup> At noon, I made tea, divided up the rations, taking the lions share, of course, & then called up the weary ones. They told me what poor tea it was, threatened to 'snafoo' me, unless I produced ham & eggs, & then descended into the depths again, to loaf away the afternoon.<sup>54</sup> I sat on top, (in a trench of course) smoked my pipe, and listened for a chance shell, on which I used to yearn for company & sought out the boys.

[page 16] Just a word about tunnels. Each side did this business, and the object was two-fold, as living quarters in winter, and then the rest deep ones, extending under no-mans land & under the enemy's trenches. When the tunnel was completed, a huge stack of explosives was placed there, touched off with electricity, & up went a bunch of the wily enemy. Horrible, of course, but legitimate war-fare. Whenever the Germans suspected us of digging a tunnel, they would also commence one, and as the ground is a good conductor of sound, it became a race, as to who would touch off first. These long passages were all shored up with heavy timber, and had air pipes into them. Some were fitted out in great style, proper rooms, and even pianos & carpets. The earth was put into small jute bags, left in the tunnel during the day, and the night shift had to empty them. I was on both day & night parties, but give me the day work. It's a ticklish job, prowling around on top [at night], and emptying little sacks of clay with an orchestra of bullets & "May-Anns," flying the Dead March.<sup>55</sup>

You see, on many of our jobs, previous to this, we had so much work to do, before we could go out [of the line], and if any of the men were scared, and stopped every time a shell came over, we would be held up. One night we had to shovel the soil back from the top of a newly dug trench, and every time a machine-gun would rattle, down would flop three or four of the gallant men. Well, we had done our share, (for once,) and along came our Officer. We were sitting down, and he said, "Are you done." We said, "Yes sir," so he said, "Come along with me," and here we had to find the part where these timid ones were playing around. The next night, we worked so slow, that it was a wonder we ever did finish, but it never was a policy of mine to help out the war, by doing a scrap more work than necessary. Lazy.?!

One calm, and peaceful night, we were suddenly and severely awakened by a regular salvo. We retired, and our spades and picks were smashed to kindling wood. Blessed relief, we had to go home. Our party was split up, all the N.G.O.s had gone, and the senior man had to lead us out. Now I was all for speed, because if we stayed in one place [page 17] too long, a shell was sure to hunt us up. So when the Verey [Very] lights flared up, away we tore, falling over wire, and digging our noses into the lovely soft

<sup>53</sup> "Micawber," a fictional character in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, idled away his time and optimistically trusted his fate to fortune.

<sup>54</sup> Jack had a keen sense of humour and a quick wit that could easily match anything dished out to him. Typically, he made light of the difficult circumstances he and the other men were in. It was a survival mechanism.

<sup>55</sup> "Prowling around" in *No Man's land* was an invitation to death. The noise of bombs exploding and bullets whizzing by was like the "orchestra" playing the *Dead March*, a solemn piece of music especially associated with military funerals.

mud.<sup>56</sup> We had to cross a road from the end of one trench into another, and every minute a shell hit it. How we ever escaped that night, I don't know, the shells landed between us, (duds, fortunately) and we had all crossed into the trench except [English](#). Just as he crossed, bang went a shell right behind him, and he landed in the middle of us, head first. Of course I had to laugh, he looked so funny, scuttling across the road, but I was ready to cash in my check, just the same.<sup>57</sup>

When I look back, now, it seems to be all part of a nasty dream, and yet, much as I hated it, I would not have missed it for worlds. I had to play a prank once in a while, to keep from going crazy; for instance, one wet night, when gas shells were going a mile or so behind us, I told a new man that there was gas. Magic word, after a thorough training in England. He kept his mask on for 15 mins, and being a dark night, the corporal never saw him, and I had a cat-fit, every time I looked at him. Then we moved to Agny, and there I ended my career in the front line.<sup>58</sup>

The first night, all was well, beyond a little gas coming over. A battery of field guns was in position about 200 yards from our bivouac, and the gas was really intended for them. The second night, however, we were given a proper clean-up.<sup>59</sup> We had just settled down for the evening. I was reading the "Daily Report," and thinking what a soft job it was, being a stretcher-bearer, when, swish –thud, etc., etc., etc. Over came gas shells, nicely mixed up with H.E. [High Explosive] shells, and for an hour or so, you would have supposed the world had come to an end. We had a sheet of ½ inch iron between us & the sky, and the shells were mighty close, so I just waited for the end. Just when it seemed that not one more shell could miss our roof, I heard a cry of "Stretcher-Bearer." I grabbed my kit, gas-helmet, and inwardly blessed the man who would ask me to wander round looking for a "case" in such a night, but the runner led me [page 18] right to the cook-house.

There was our gallant hash-slinger groaning something awful. I had an awful time trying to find out where he was hit. In the excitement, I pulled off my mask, and here he had a tiny little scratch on the leg. To be honest, I gave him a proper army lecture, but by this time, I had swallowed some gallons of gas. When the excitement died down, I returned for my mess-tin, and made a hearty breakfast of gassed porridge, coffee?, (save the mash[?]) and bacon.

<sup>56</sup> A Verrey Light was a coloured flare fired from a pistol, as a signal or to illuminate an area.

<sup>57</sup> This incident probably occurred while Bill English and Jack Beaumont were in Company B of the 107th Pioneer Battalion. Bill went to hospital in January 1918 and may not have returned to the field prior to the amalgamation of the 107th Pioneers with the Canadian Engineers on 28 May 1918. Jack received a letter from him on June 21, which indicates he was elsewhere, and his name did not appear in June 1918 on the nominal roll of the 1st Battalion, Canadian Engineer. See War Diary of the 1st Battalion, Canadian Engineer, June 1918, pp.12-23. To complicate matters further, there was another soldier named "W. English" listed in the 1st Battalion, Canadian Engineer. Walter English, Reg. No. 500522, was in Company A, while Jack was in Company C; therefore, it is unlikely that they would have been together at any time on the front lines.

<sup>58</sup> The battalion moved to the Agny region, about 5 km southwest of Arras, on 23 July 1918.

<sup>59</sup> If Jack's war diary is accurate, it was the third night of July 25/26 when the "proper clean-up" occurred.

But what a morning that was, two thirds of the company were gassed. I took a bunch on stretchers to the first aid station, and felt pretty good. Then my eyes gave out, & my last trip, I escorted two fellows who were totally blind, and I could only open my eyes for a minute to get my bearings; then I had to shut them again. They felt as though there were a few grains of wheat in them, and I wept copiously, all the time. We were driven in cars from the station, finally arriving at Fresnicourt.<sup>60</sup> I was blind for several days, when I did get one eye open, and saw my face, I was glad to shut it, again. I shall never forget my first shave when I did get up. One eye open, a good healthy growth of black stubble, and a very dull razor. Wow.



**British Soldiers Blinded by Gas<sup>61</sup>**

Courtesy <http://www.greatwar.nl/>

From here I was taken to Boulogne, nice military hospital, yum – Afternoon tea of 30 year old hard boiled eggs, and stale bread & sweet smelling margarine.<sup>62</sup> And a severe looking old nurse who said “Open your mouth,” and rammed a thermometer half way

<sup>60</sup> On July 26, Jack was admitted to the 14 Field Ambulance, which had arrived at the Corps Rest Station at “Fresnicourt on 11 July 1918 (War Diary of the 14th Field Ambulance, 11 July 1918, [p.4](#)). On July 22, the Ambulance “received a number of Gas Cases, most of whose eyes were seriously affected,” but made no mention of a large influx of patients on July 26. However, on July 30, it had “over 500 patients at the C.C.R.C. [Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp]” and had “put up many extra tents” (Ibid., 22-30 July 1918, [p.5 - 6](#)). On August 1, when Jack was transferred to No 7 Canadian Casualty Station, the war diarist recorded “Field Ambulance of the Corps have been sending their slight cases of illness here, and we now have over 700 cases” (Ibid., 1 August 1918, [p.3](#)).

<sup>61</sup> This picture is of soldiers from the British 55th (West Lancashire) Division, who had been gassed on 10 April 1918 in the Battle of Estaires, during the German spring offensive. They were waiting for treatment at an Advanced Dressing Station near Bethune, France.

<sup>62</sup> Jack was sent on 2 August 1918 to the British No. 8 Stationary Hospital at Wimereux, about 6 km north of Boulogne.

She also washed my ears out, at 4 am. just when I had managed to fall asleep. Gentle nurses, watched as they flitted around the wards. Perhaps. The matron was a bear, though. She tried to make all the well patients stand at attention when she came in. The first day I was up, she marched in, and up sprang the lads to attention, but as luck would have it, I fell sound asleep, just before she reached my bed, and I snored right lustily, until she went out. After that, I got into the habit of going out, whenever she came in, the old cat.

LIST No.	HOSPITAL	DATE OF ADMISSION	REMARKS
A279 <sup>2</sup>	14 Can. F. & A. Amb.	26-7-18.	Shell Gas
A284-2.	7. C. B. S.	1-8-18.	" "
A286-2.	No 8 Stab. Wimereux	2-8-18.	" "
A313-2	1 Corv. 14 <sup>th</sup> Boulogne	3-9-18	" "
A317-3.	12 .. " Aubengue,	5-9-18.	" "
A328-3.	" " Dis. to 5 R. C. B.		
	St. Martin's	20-9-18	" "
A361-1.	7 C. G. Étaples.	29-10-18	Influenza
B371-2	1st W. G. Liverpool	7-11-18	"
B432	Mil. Camp Epsom	24-1-19	"
B455	Disc.	17-2-19	"

The record of Jack's medical transfers after he was gassed

[page 19] When I left the Hospital I was sent to a convalescent camp.<sup>63</sup> Here we did a few parades, shirked a whole lot more, and made ourselves a general nuisance. I was crimed here, and was awarded 3 days C.B. [Confined to Barracks] The first evening I scrubbed out the guard room, but the next two nights, I managed to evade such menial work. Then I was deemed fit to move towards the line again, so was sent to a camp at Aubin-St-Vaast.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> According to his Personnel Records, Jack was sent to the 1st Convalescent Depot at Boulogne on 3 September 1918 and from there on 5 September 1918 to the No 12 Convalescent camp at Aubengue, not far from Wimereux. It was here that he got into trouble with the sergeant-major.

<sup>64</sup> Actually, on 20 September 1918 Jack went to the 5th Rest Camp at St. Martin's, which was on the eastern outskirts of Boulogne. On September 22, he moved to the Canadian Engineer Base Depot (C.E.B.D.) at Étaples, where he remained until 1 October 1918, when he was sent to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp (C.C.R.C.) at Aubin St. Vaast. See Jack's War Diary, entry for 1 October 1918, Footnote 174.

Form R. 149. *Jack*

Name BEAUMONT Rank Spr Reg. No. 922495

Unit 1<sup>st</sup> Br. C. E.

Next of Kin Canada *Jay*

Date	Movement	Place	Casualty	List No.	Notified N/K O.	W.O. List
1918						
26 7	14 <sup>th</sup> Co. F. A.	Shell gas	do	H 279	H 232	33918
1 8	4 <sup>th</sup> Co. C. S.	do	do	H 255		34222
2-8	8 <sup>th</sup> H. Wimmering	do	do	H 286		29682
3 9	1 Cond. Dep. Boulogne	do	do	H 313		3804/2
5 9	12 <sup>th</sup> Co. Aulnoye	do	do	H 311		3882/22
20 9	Dis to 5 R. C. St. Martin's	do	do	H 328		4276/11
1918						
2 <sup>nd</sup> 10	4 <sup>th</sup> Co. D. Etelles	Influenza	do	H 361		5219/8
11-10	4 <sup>th</sup> Co. D. Liverpool	do	do	H 371		484
24-1-19	1 <sup>st</sup> Co. D. Epstun	do	do	H 437		5634
	R. 2 14/2/19 S.F. to 27/2/19 Rpt					
14 2	1 <sup>st</sup> Co. D. Seaford	do	do	H 455		1802

Jack's medical transfer to the 5th Rest Camp at St. Martins, 20 September 1918

This camp was situated on the edge of a large beech forest. Of all the lovely trees, a beech is hard to beat. (I often beat it in there to escape work.) For a time all was well, we drilled & learned to put gas-masks on, found out which end of the rifle to put the shells in, and oh boy, I was sick of it. Then we had a little riot, to stir things up. There were about 1500 or 2000 conscripts in the camp, and their N.G.O.s were giving us fellows this drill. So one fine day, our company were doing rifle drill, and we all stopped, laid down the arms, and refused to budge an inch. The sergeant raved and swore, and we stood unmoved. The sergeant-major came; he tore his hair, and talked of mutiny, arrest and so forth, and we still remained impassive. Then the R.S.M., a mighty man of valour, and an old soldier to boot, came along. "Why and wherefore," quoth [sic] he, in a voice of thunder, and fixing his soul-inspiring eye on me (being the smallest). I explained that we were averse to being drilled by the conscripts. Then he called for volunteers among the casualties [sic], to take stripes, and I got one.<sup>65</sup> Me, a Lance-Jack. Ha. Ha.

I was given charge of a hut, containing some 30 or 40 men. I was made marker for parades. I shall never forget one misty morning, we were to go on a route march, and I was sent to the field to represent my company. The S.M. [sergeant-major] placed us in position, and when the fog lifted, there were two males grazing along side of me. So, counting myself, there were three of us, and I felt the saying, "When shall we three meet again."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> According to his war diary, Jack got his one stripe on 11 October 1918.

<sup>66</sup> The circumstances of this incident are unclear. It may be that everyone else left under cover of the fog, and when it lifted Jack found himself in company with two grazing animals, type unspecified.

[Page 20] Had a good time here, until one fatal day, I took the “flu.” Down the line again, to some hospital or other.<sup>67</sup> The first night I arrived there I wandered around the hut, and in came a “Supt of mercy,” found my bed empty, and hunted me up “What do you mean by running around with that temperature?” she said. “What is it,” I asked with a sinking heart. “Well,” she said, “It was 104° and by this time will likely be higher.” I hopped into bed and then for 10 days I was a wee bit queer. Sometimes I felt as though I was too tired to live, and then, out would go a bed and patient to the “Death Ward,” and I would hang on a bit longer. I think of all those beds, only 4 of us refused to die, and we had one awful time.



**Canadian General Hospital No. 7, Étaples, France, ca. 1917-1918**

*The hospital to which Jack was sent after he contracted influenza.*

*Courtesy Library and Archives Canada, C-080026*

Then my bed was moved into the open air, and at once I felt better. Soon I could eat the Pre-Historic eggs, and the tea ceased to taste like poison. When I was almost better, the order came to clear all patients to England.<sup>68</sup> We never slept that night, and finally we were moved on stretchers to the ambulances, and thence over rocky roads to Boulogne. There was a lot of stretcher cases, and many of them got up and danced a hornpipe, when the boat pulled out from harbour. On the way over I slept in a comfortable bunk, only when the boat would dip, away went my pillow, and on the return trip, it hit me under the ear. We were carried from the boat to the train, and I was glad when we reached it, being lightly clad, and there was a frosty air.

<sup>67</sup> He was sent to No. 7 Convalescent General Hospital at Étaples on 27 October 1918.

<sup>68</sup> He learned of the move on 4 November 1918. According to his Personnel Records, Jack was sent to England on 6 November 1918.





Jack's Special Pass while at St. John Hospital, Southport

We had a great time in [page 21] this hospital, and larked around to our hearts content. We had concerts, an occasional dance, whist drives, etc. One fancy dress ball, I dressed up as a nigger, blackened my face & hands, and wore a yellow suit with a tall hat.<sup>71</sup> All next day I tried to remove the black, oh boy, wasn't I a mess. And of course, during the evening, the cold cream under the coat of black melted, and ran down, until I looked like a zebra. We did some awful jobs on each other, too, made French beds, put holly, coal etc in the beds, and many a smothered anathema was heard in the dark night, when some poor beggar would come in late, and discovered that his bed required overhauling.

<sup>71</sup> The term "nigger" was widely used at the time, often innocently, to describe someone of African descent. Indeed, "nigger" was a neutral term for black African people as late as the early 1900s in many parts of the world. However, its increased use as a pejorative, particularly in the United States, led to its gradual abandonment in the English-speaking world. It was replaced initially in North America by the word "Coloured" during the first half of the twentieth century, then by "Black" during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) in the United States, and later by "African American" or "Afro-American" in that country. Media coverage of the American Civil Rights Movement probably did more to raise awareness among ordinary non-African people in the United States and elsewhere of the hurtful effects of racial/ethnic slurs. For more information on the history of the word "nigger," particularly in the United States, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigger>. Additional information on the African-American Civil Rights Movement can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American\\_Civil\\_Rights\\_Movement\\_\(1955-1968\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_(1955-1968)). Another excellent source is the 1987 television series "[Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985](#)."



**Christmas 1918. The Card Jack received from the British Red Cross while he was at St. John's Hospital**

The text reads: This year I've guns and carriages; And military marriages; Plum Puddings, lots of baccy; For warriors clad in Khaki; Some push for the boys that are brave; And some ships for the ocean wave; I've lots of Camaraderie; And the certain hope of VICTORY! I'm sad for the boys that are gone; But I say, none the less, "Carry On!"; Carry on against the odds that are mighty; For the sake of dear old BLIGHTY; Brave hearts, I cry, Better Cheer, Please God, I'll bring PEACE NEXT YEAR.

I left the hospital in Jan of 1919, and was sent to Epsom.<sup>72</sup> My I did hate Epsom. This is where one of the famous English races is held, every year. We had a race of our own, there, had 2 hours of P.T. every day. Our usual plan was, to fall in and answer our names, then, when the bunch moved off, to sneak away, and go into a hut or reading room. Also, one fine day, the viligent [sic] N. C. O. called the roll, after reaching the recreation room,

<sup>72</sup> His Personnel Records indicate that Jack went to a military convalescent hospital at Epsom on 23 January 1919.

and found 30 good men & true, missing. We had to make our beds every morning, fold all the clothes, and roll up the mattress, also, sweep under the beds. After the inspection we could unroll it, and sleep again, but until then, we led a dog's life. We wore blue uniforms there, of course, & were a lovely looking crew, some with trousers a mile too long, and small tight coats, another, with short trousers, & huge, flapping coats.

Did very little of anything here, and finally moved to Seaford.<sup>73</sup> Here I donned my military clothes again, and of course my little "dog's" leg, came into action again. We had an awful time, here. Every morning they would fall us in, and detail us to different tasks, and several times I had 10 or 12 men handed over to me, to do something or other, and arrived with 5 or 6. We were all anxious to get home, and the period of waiting seemed endless.

Before I close, let me take you back to France, and try to describe the beauties of the much talked of Poppy. To be exact, it is a bad weed over there, and although, like many another weed, it looked very pretty in the fields. [page 22] In many of these shattered villages, and in the old trenches that had been abandoned, you would see these flowers growing. It would seem to me that Nature was covering up the destruction wrought by the hand of man. In such a way, and given a little time, all these ruins would be covered, and in a century, there would be nothing to show that man had ever lived there.



**Poppies near the Bunker at Essex Farm Cemetery north of Ypres, where John McCrae composed "In Flanders Field" in honour of a fallen comrade.**

*Photo by Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont [14 July 2010](#)*

I also have seen those rows and countless hundreds of little crosses, and it is a sad thing to think of, all those young men & women left there, in a foreign country. War is inevitable, so long as this old world exists. There is no use in trying to make a lasting peace in any way except \_\_\_\_\_? Every individual nation has its own ideals and

<sup>73</sup> Jack was transferred on 17 February 1918 from the convalescent hospital at Epsom [Canadian Engineer Reinforcement Depot or C.E.R.D.] to the 3rd Canadian Engineer Railway Battalion [C.E.R.B.] at Seaford. He remained there until 29 March 1918.

methods; the Latin races are of a violent and extremely passionate nature, quick to anger, & to forgive. Look at the vast difference between an Italian & an Englishman! How could one law appeal to both, and so we may expect these eternal wars until, and again I prefer to pause.



**The Crosses, Row on Row**

Courtesy <http://www.flandersfieldsmusic.com/first-worldwar.html>

Finally we moved to Rhyll, a town in North Wales, and so home, an uneventful trip, albeit, a large number of meals were taken and released, with more speed than relish!! There is absolutely nothing on earth to compare with sea-sickness for pure unadulterated misery.<sup>74</sup> And on to Winnipeg, discharge, civilian suits, and peace?<sup>75</sup>

This is not all, my dear, but it will give you some idea of what it was, and although one has to see to appreciate, it is something that I never wish to see again. I knew what fear

<sup>74</sup> Jack was transferred from the 3rd Canadian Engineer Railway Battalion on March 29 to Kinmel Park Military District, Wing No. 10, in the Canadian Concentration Camp at Rhyll. He remained there until 3 April 1919, when he left from Liverpool on the [SS Lapland](#) for Canada.

<sup>75</sup> Jack left the S. S. Lapland at Halifax on 10 April 1919 and travelled by train to Winnipeg, where he was formally discharged from the army at Military District No. 10 on 14 April 1919. According to the War Diary of No. 10 C.A.S.C. Service Co., 14 April 1919, "CNR Special 1378 arrived 11.15 a.m. with Troops for this District." War Diaries – Military District No. 10: Winnipeg, Manitoba, April 1919, [p.21](#). Undoubtedly, Jack was on that train, as The War Diary of Headquarters No. 10 District Depot, Minto Street Barracks, 14 April 1919, states that "7 officers, 130 other Ranks ex Lapland arrived 12 noon, rationed and dispersed 1 p.m. No complaints." War Diaries – Military District No. 10: Winnipeg, Manitoba, April 1919, [p.34](#). Jack was finally home.

was, many & many a time, have felt that old man time was whittling up his scythe for me, and yet I was spared. And to be honest, fear is a terrible thing to see, in a full grown man; perhaps that is why I tried to hide mine under a jest or two. Life is very good, we abuse it, take foolish risks with it, and when we feel it is going, we sit up and fight to retain it. Now I will close and being close to Christmas, I can heartily endorse that old saying, "Peace on Earth, Goodwill, between All Men."

Pte. J. Beaumont. 922475 C.E.F

Veni Vidi Vici.  
Finis.



**Florence Henderson of Rathwell, Manitoba, Wife of Jack Beaumont**  
*Photographer: Gauvin Geutzel & Co., Winnipeg, Manitoba, circa 1922*