

**The War Diaries of Francis James [Whiting](#)
Diary 6
December 11, 1917 to October 28, 1918**

There is a gap in the diaries at this point. The entries between Nov 20 and December 11, 1917, have been cut from this book.

Remnants read:

*"Heard from Jean Irving that Dick [Beaumont](#) has been missing since...."
"...ordered to report to regiment for leave warrant..."
"...such amazing good luck too in getting..."
"...was splendid. Fay Compton played the part of Peter..."
"...falling in love. If not then there is going to be hell to pay..."
"...Dorothy and Hugh very much in the way. Have to leave tomorrow..."
"...concert....also again at night. Do not like London. Want Jean..."
"...March of this year. My conversation with Dick Beaumont is given in the rear of..."*

December 11

Caught train at 5:30 A.M. and were dumped out 6 kilos west of Bruay. Caught lorries and landed in Bally Grenay [Bully Grenay]¹ 3:30. Big mail. Four of five from home, one Jean, one Weir, one Lucie, one Ethel, one from [Cpt. E.H] [Oliver](#) re the instructors job. Wants to see me. Parcels from home. Red X [Cross] Traynor, Alma Algee, papers from Mom, London and Missisaga. Wrote two letters tonight. Found a cot in a cellar. Seems dry with a fireplace. All alone down here. Very comfy.

December 12

Wrote five letters in afternoon. Up the line tonight on C.M.R. rations. Met Eric [McCullagh](#). Had not seen him for 13 [sic 3] years. Shell landed in front of me and behind Jack [Hylands](#) blowing up track. Had to wait to fix track. Back by 9:00.

The PPCLI was at Saint-Hilaire-Cottes until December 21, when it set out for the frontline. On December 23, it was on the outskirts of Liévin, with the No. 3 and No. 4 Companies in the front line and No. 1 and No. 2 in Support.

1918

January 15

Wrote three letters in afternoon. Up the line to Loos [Loos-en-Gohelle]² tonight with 116th rations. A little overhead shrapnel. Letters from Harry B[eaumont], Jean, book from Miss L. G. Wood.

¹ Apparently, Frank was returning from leave in England. He joined the [7th Brigade] Pack Corps at Bully-Grenay, which was near the railway station between Bully-les-Mines and Grenay on the northwest outskirts of Liévin-Lens. The station was also about 20 km north of Arras on the main Hazebrouck-Arras line.

² Loos-en-Gohelle was about 3.4 km east of Grenay on the north side of Lens.

January 18

Tonight I heard of a concert given by P.P. party at Les Brebis³ and bribed Dusty [Hoover](#) to take my horse back and put him in. So after delivering the rations at the “opera house” [Rue] St. Pierre [Pierre,⁴] I skipped off and arrived in time to see most of the concert. Was talking to a Y.M.C.A. captain who told me Capt. [E.H.] [Oliver](#) is in Les Brebis. Will try to get to see him within the next two or three days. Heard Charlie [Little](#) is an instructor in agriculture with this new college movement.

January 19

Letter from Jean last night. Day guard today. Up the line as usual tonight, as we are very shorthanded. Wash out! Looked up Capt. [E.H.] Oliver re instructorship. He has only just started the scheme and so far has not the authority to demand my transfer. Will wait until he sees how scheme is turning out before applying for me.

January 21

Up the line on 116th rations. Talked to a man just back off leave and asked him what he thought of the duration after having seen England lately. He put the finish within three months. My opinion exactly. Also enquired of several others just back off leave. They all think war will end within six months. Great labor and socialist strikes in Austria. Strikes in Spain. Threatened strikes in England. Russia, of course, even worse.

January 22

Left Bally-Grenay this morning at ten and landed in rambling village – Dieval⁵ –by 4:30 this afternoon. Horses in a barn, men also. Hunted a bed immediately after putting up the horse. Persuaded a French woman to hire me her bed “reserved for officers.” Pay her one franc per night. Not very good place. Kids rather dirty.

January 23

Started in “resting” this morning by washing the limbers⁶ before they are sent back to Noeux Les Mines – about 20 miles through the mud. This afternoon I am supposed to be cleaning my saddle but have side stepped and am sitting in my room writing this. Later, was unkindly criticized by S.M. for not sticking around.

January 24-25

Feeling very blue. Do not like sticking around with nothing to do but to polish

³ Les Brebis was a street/neighbourhood in Grenay.

⁴ There is a Rue St. Pierre in Grenay, where the opera house may have been located.

⁵ Dieval was a village 28.5 km west of Grenay. On the same day, the PPCLI, including its transport unit, moved from Souchez 11.4 km northwest to Bois de Froissart near Hersin-Coupigny.

⁶ The limbers were two-wheeled horse-drawn carts used to transport field guns.

rusty buckles. Have stopped writing letters as I cannot get them through.

January 26-28

Have written to Jean a couple of times but have held one letter back. The other, the mildest stopped by O.C. He wanted to see me the following morning, and I told him that if I did not get harder and more sensible work to do I would go crazy on his hands. Following morning on rations. At noon when I came back was told I was on ration party of two going to St. Pol [Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise] – 12 kilos every day.⁷ Tickled to death. Played crown and anchor several evenings and won altogether about 75 francs.

February 5

Have been on St. Pol rations every day for over a week now but was told am on a garden digging job for a while now. The old lady has no one to do it for her as her son has lost the use of his arm in the war.

February 6

(I think this is the date) Anyway it rained pretty much all day, and though I made a bit of a start on the garden, things are too wet and muggy to make a good job.

February 7-11

Working on the garden. Had a good time as I was my own boss. Started writing letters again, also eating and sleeping normally. The old lady gives me some awful tuck outs. Stuffs me all the time with chips, boullion [bouillon], salad, beer, coffee and everything she has in the house.

February 14

Had to quit the garden as all work done by us for civilians is stopped for some reason.

February 21

Worked at saddles and time-killing generally all last week. Interested myself in making small love to Leonie Blondell also Marguerite and Blanche. Other times played crown and anchor. Have now about five hundred francs. This morning after bidding farewell to all the girls we left Dieval for La Targette, arriving there about sundown.⁸ Horses out-side. Found a dugout with [A.A.] [Bremner](#) and Dusty [Hoover](#). Afraid of lice from Dusty so the following day –

February 22

Started digging another dugout for myself. Worked on it all day and then learned that Dusty [Hoover] was moving into the feed tent. Decided to stay along with [A.A.] Bremner.

⁷ Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise was about 11 km southwest of Diéval.

⁸ The Pack Corps were now 32 km southeast of Diéval near Neuville-Saint-Vaast, which was just southwest of Liévin and the front lines. This was the main camp of the pack corps for the 7th, 8th, and 9th Brigades.

February 23

Worked at the big dugout all day – in the spare time from our saddles. Took part of roof off and put in supports also built in our open fireplace that proves to be a terror for smoke. Up the line tonight for 58th to Avion.⁹ Line very quiet.

February 24

Worked again at fireplace but with indifferent success. Drove in angle irons and wove a wire bedstead across them. Result highly satisfactory. Bought 20 francs of grub at Y.M.C.A. and backed someone's board for the price. Made it. Lots of letters from everyone these days, but very little time for answering them.

February 25

Think we have fixed fireplace to work at last. The wood is the next problem. All we can find around here is wet and soggy. Up the line again tonight on 58th.

February 27-28 and March 1

Not having to work in afternoon now, so after fixing up fireplace and table and gathering a good lot of wood for the fire, we are very comfortable. One night [Bert] [Eastman](#) of the R.C.R.'s and I made a raid on a canteen where crown and anchor was allowed. I decoyed [meaning?]. Between us we cleaned up about 500 francs in about an hour and a half. Sent 20 pounds to London. Weather warm and fine in the second week of March.

March 12

Warned for a party going to Vimy¹⁰ on salvage work. Two officers Lindsay and Patterson in charge. About 20 men in party. L. Corp. Vyce [Weiss?] as N.C.O. Found a good bomb proof dugout in an old German gun emplacement near the brick fields just north of Vimy. We are all in the one dugout. Do not like it as there is no privacy for reading or writing.

March 13

Rumors of a great attack here shortly now. Imperial Chancellor of German has announced that the Allies must either come to some agreement with Germany, with Wilson's speech as a foundation, or else face the drive he intends putting on. It looks like a crisis to me. Worked around all day salvaging whizz-bangs and angle iron and a lot of junk. Eastman is carrying on while I am away. Saw him tonight. He broke Murray for about 200 he says. Murray has made money from me for a long time now.

March 17

Came back down to main camp at La Targette tonight. Got a ride down on light railway.

⁹ Avion was located on the southern outskirts of Lens about 8 km northeast of Neuville-Saint-Vaast.

¹⁰ Vimy just south of Avion and 5.7 km northeast of Neuville-Saint-Vaast.

March 18

Day off.

March 19

On railway work at Leeds Dump.

March 20

Up the line again on salvage. Camped in old place by water tower.

March 21

This morning [A.I.] [Abbott](#) and I went fishing for frogs, also rabbit hunting. Caught half a dozen frogs and one rabbit. Scared several others. Worked loading trucks of salvaged shell cases at night. Shelling quite a bit.

March 22

Papers have stopped coming and rumors are beginning to come through of a German offensive to the south.

March 23

Had to go back to main camp [La Targette] again tonight. Press of work I suppose. All the Batts. need mules nowadays.

March 24-30

Fritz has broken through our lines on the Somme on a front of fifty miles. He has penetrated to within eight or nine miles of Amiens. Captured 70,000 prisoners and hundreds of guns. He seems to be working around Arras in the hope of turning Vimy Ridge into a salient. In fact we are in a big salient now and guns that used to point east now point south and west of south. We have been standing for days now all packed up ready to retire at an hours notice. Canteens are closed and most construction work is suspended in anticipation of retirement.¹¹

April 1

Have been up to the line every night lately. Tonight on 116th rations. Shells coming very close.

April 7

8th and 9th Brig. Packs went up to Bally-Grenay today.¹²

¹¹ Frank was referring to the German [Spring Offensive](#) of 1918, which gained the enemy a great deal of territory, but did not achieve the breakthrough it needed to win the war.

¹² Bully-Grenay was a little over 13 km north of La Targette.

April 8

We – 7th Brig. Moved north to Carency.¹³ Good stables and billets. [A.A.] [Brem\[ner\]](#). and I are in a hut all to ourselves. Open fire-place. Have made an armchair with a wheelbarrow. Very comfy.

April 10

Shell-hole¹⁴ got his wind up tonight about 2 A.M. and made us all stand to. No one else in division knew anything about it. For two days mules have been without oats or hay. We missed one day's rations. Blame Shell-hole for neglect of duty. Fritz is making a big drive up north around Bailleul and west of Armentieres. His offensive south has quietened down.

April 14

Rumor that French and Americans have counter-attacked down around Noyon and captured between 60,000 and 80,000 prisoners. No papers.

April 20

Rumor of 14th unconfirmed. Played several times lately. Sent away 4 pounds for Pitman course.

April 29

Sent away to London 10 pounds. Still have about 800 francs. Moving tomorrow.

April 30

Moved to Nouvelin [Houvelin],¹⁵ a small village 4 miles east of Dieval.

May 1

Remainder of company – 8th and 9th Brigades joined us today. Went to Dieval for rations. Saw Blanche Boithe as we passed. Promised to come up and visit on Sunday.

May 2

Chored round all day.

May 5

Visited Dieval today. Saw all my lady-friends. They made as much fuss over me as if I were a native of the place.

¹³ Carency was about 5 km northwest of La Targette.

¹⁴ This was probably the nickname of one of the officers of the 7th Brigade Pack Corps.

¹⁵ Houvelin was 7.4 km southeast of Diéval.

May 7

Moved from Nouvelin [Houvelin] to St. Hilaire today – 26 kilos.¹⁶ Lines in a fine shady grove. Billed in a barn.

May 11

Tonight was rudely called a bastard by Teddy Ran [Rawe]. Teddy refused to take it back so smashed him one and asked him to go outside. T. refused and I struck him twice more. While I was waiting for him to rise, [H.A.] Nesbitt jumped in and I was going to handle him right there, but a French girl got in the way and held my two hands. Agreed to go outside and settle in quiet spot. Went and fought for about five minutes, during which time [H.A.] Nesbitt displayed the best guard and I the best leading. He was evidently waiting for me to play myself out, but police came along and stopped it. Net results were Teddy Ran [Rawe], black eye and badly swollen lip. Nesbitt, swollen lip and a lame nose. Slightly swollen lip. Apology from T.R. and a drink to “better understanding.” Declaration to [H.A.] Nesbitt to stay out of the way. Very satisfied as fight was clean and in a good cause. Congrats from several quarters.

May 15

Weather beautiful but hot. Hawthorne, lilac, chestnut and all fruit trees in blossom. Received first three lessons of Pitman course. They are very good.

May and June until 23rd

Have had a glorious time here. Horses camped in splendid place right in amongst tall trees. Manoeuvres every Monday. Last Sunday got permission to go down to Cuhem to see the folks – Davonts.¹⁷ The government has taken their only horse. The old folks felt loss keenly. Eastman and I have tonight a roulette wheel for 110 francs. Worked it out for several evenings but had only very small bets. However, we have paid for it by its winnings and about 100 francs besides. The German attacks have been attended by fair success though they have practically died down now. The Austrians attacked Italians but had to retire further than they came.

June 23

Moved south to a small village 3 kilos east of St. Pol.

June 24

Moved to Starbourg.

June 25

Sick with influenza. Travelled down by ambulance and lorry to Monchiet.¹⁸ Grave

¹⁶ Saint-Hilaire-Cottes was 26.5 km north of Houvelin.

¹⁷ Cuhem was about ten km west of Saint-Hilaire-Cottes.

¹⁸ Monchiet, which appeared to be the new location of the 7th Brigade Pack Corps, was 34 km southeast of Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise and about 15 km south west of Arras.

epidemic of influenza.¹⁹

June 26

Sick again. No dugout or billet of any kind.

June 27

Fixed a place today. Feeling better.

July 1

Moved camp to Grossville [Grosville] a few kilos north [sic - southwest] of Arras.²⁰ Poor place for camp. No material for dugouts. Will probably work from here.

July 2

Up the line tonight with ammo for trench mortars. Back by three o'clock. Very long way.

July 3

Played indoor baseball in camp tonight. Confined to camp awaiting orders.

July 10

7th Brigade pack mules sent back to Regiment.²¹

July 15

Having a rotten time polishing steel and being dogged around by Slim [Allan](#).

July 20

Moved from Monchiet to Beaucourt [Simencourt?] and from there to Agnez le Dousais [Agnes-lès-Duisans].²²

July 24

From Agnez moved north [sic- southwest] to Montrelet and from there following

¹⁹ The PPCLI moved over fifty km on June 25 from Saint-Hilaire-Cottes to Hauteville on the east side of Arras and about 8 km northwest of Monchiet. The trip, especially the march from Aubigny-en-Artois to Hauteville was long, the men "arriving at destination after midnight. Owing to the number of men suffering from this epidemic of influenza and other conditions this & subsequent move was not very satisfactory."

²⁰ Grosville was 3.3 km east of Monchiet and about 12 km southwest of Arras.

²¹ According to his "Casualty Form-Active Service" in his personnel records, Frank "rejoined Unit from Div Pack Train" on 14 July 1919. Evidently, pack mules were being sent back to the various regiments that had contributed them to the 7th Brigade Pack Corps, which was a section of the 3rd Canadian Division Pack Corps. In this instance, Frank must have joined the mules returning to PPCLI Transport at Moncheit, only a short distance from Grosville, where the Pack Corps was located. The PPCLI Transport had moved from Saint-Hilaire-Cottes to Hauteville on June 25, but had moved again in July to Monchiet. It was commanded by Frank's old nemesis, Slim Allan.

²² PPCLI Transport moved northeast about 10 km to Agnes-lès-Duisans, which was about 11 km west of Arras, where the PPCLI was in Support trenches.

day to Picquigny [Picquigny]. That night moved to St. Fascian [Saint-Fuscien] south of Amiens where we joined regiment.²³

August 4

Sunday. Today I was returned for duty to my company for an unknown reason. T.O. [transport officer] refused to say why.²⁴

August 5

Gas helmet parade in forenoon. Moved about five miles nearer line. Army getting ready for attack on grand scale. Utmost secrecy enforced. Nearly all moves at night and well camouflaged by day.

August 6

Moved up to Bois de Boves tonight past heavy traffic on road. Bivouacked in wood with only coat for covering.²⁵

August 7 [and 8]

Loafed all day. Slept a little. Read a little. Wrote to Piza [Isabella Beaumont] and one or two others. We are to attack in morning. Received instructions as to what Brigade is to do. It looks like a good show to me. Idea is to free Amiens and Paris railway but objective is unlimited. Tonight moved up two or three kilos nearer and rested in trench for three or four hours.²⁶ Pretty cold and did not sleep at all. At peep of dawn barrage opened and we (7th Brig.) advanced. R.C.R.'s, 42nd and 49th in second wave. 9th Brigade in first wave. P.P.C.L.I.'s in support of 7th. Final objective today is tramway line beyond Hill 102. Thousands of tanks are along with us. Major [William Avery] [Bishop](#) and his circus is also along to look after the air service. Proceeded in single file down the hill toward the village of Domart which seems to have been just within our lines. From there on over a river by pontoon bridge when we came under fire. Noticed very few casualties considering. Passed a number of pack mules lying dead. Thought I recognized Bill. Later learned that [Bert] [Eastman](#) has been killed, also [J.N.] [Johnston\[e\]](#) of the R.C.R. Tubby Shaw, [J.L.] [McEwan](#), Badger, [H.] [Creed](#), [A.] [Monty](#) (42nd)

²³ Although the PPCLI remained in the Arras sector until July 30, Transport was on the move, going southwest 43 km from Agnes-lès-Duisans to Montrelet on July 24, and continued a further 18 km in roughly the same direction the following day to Picquigny, which was about 12 km northwest of Amiens. During the night of July 25/26, it moved to Saint-Fuscian on the south side of Amiens, where it was joined by the rest of the battalion on August 2.

²⁴ Evidently, Frank was transferred from PPCLI Transport to the battalion's No. 2 Company. The Battle of Amiens, which would achieve a major breakthrough in enemy lines, was scheduled to begin on August 8. Undoubtedly, a soldier, who was as good a shot as Frank, was more useful on the frontlines than in transport.

²⁵ According to the PPCLI War Diary, the battalion moved around 9 p.m., August 6, from Saint-Fuscien about 6-7 km east to Bois de Boves and Gentelles Wood.

²⁶ The battalion moved up "at 10 p.m. to Meknes Alley in readiness to jump off on 8th the day fixed for surprise attack by Canadians in conjunction with Australians on left & French on right to clear Amiens Paris railway." PPCLI War Diary, 7 Aug. 1918.

wounded. [J.L.] [Davidson](#) who took my place was wounded.²⁷ Here the roads lay alongside a swamp where lay two tanks mired. Very deadly place to stay. From here we filed on over a long gentle slope to the right of which the wood of Nadon held up the 43rd for quite a while and gave them a lot of trouble. At the top of the hill saw [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#), [A.A.] [Bremner](#) and Red [R.W.] [Wilson](#) who gave me the news. In the valley beyond and at the western base of Hill 102 we halted for the day.

Nearby a tank had been in an awful battle with a battery of 4.5's. The Germans had evidently seen the tank come round the hill and had wheeled two of their guns round to the attack. At a distance of only one hundred yards, the duel had been waged, while the tank attempted to turn and get out of sight beyond the swell of the hill. Too late however. The enemy scored four direct hits, the last bursting in through the gun chamber walls and blowing the entire crew to atoms. The crew of the German battery put up a very gallant fight before being finally overcome. I gathered up a few picture postcards lying around the dug outs for souvenirs. Many of the men held up out-going prisoners for souvenirs, but I did not fancy this method. Tonight we bivied in a wood a little to the right. Had no covering but a German great coat.

August 9

Moved up and camped near Beaucourt for the night.²⁸ Great enthusiasm. Rumors of all sorts including capture of Douai and Lille. Am chumming with three very decent fellows. [A.E.] [Elliott](#) is an ordained minister and used to preach out west. [Heath](#) is a very nice little fellow²⁹ as is also [M.W.F.] [Lewis](#) a merry eyed lad of about twenty-three. [A.E.] Elliott has been put on stretcher bearing as young [James] [Hill](#) the previous S.B. has been wounded. Rumors that we were going over in the morning. Slept out on the grass. Very cold.

August 10

Did not go over but saw the French attack on the south side of Noyons-Amiens road. We are on the north. Fritz was in the field about two hundred yards on our right all night and we did not know it.

August 11

Dug in today. Sent a couple of German field post cards.

August 12 [11]

Tonight [Aug. 11] moved up about 6 kilos. We are now at the old trench line and

²⁷ Perhaps Frank's luck was still with him. Had he remained with the Pack Corps he could have met the same fate as these men.

²⁸ "The Battalion ... rendezvoused at just outside Beaucourt waiting there until the evening at 9 p.m. when they moved E ... to a field ... near Folies the P.P.C.L. I. leading the main body followed by R.C.R. 42nd and 49th in the order named." PPCLI War Diary, 9 Aug. 1918.

²⁹ At 5 feet 3 inches in height, Pte. Eddie Heath was indeed a "little fellow." By coincidence, his 26th birthday fell on August 9, the day he and Frank met.

we hear the defence has stiffened up considerably. Relieved Lancs. Fusiliers who have attempted to storm trenches opposite.³⁰ They were held up by the wire and only about ten percent got out alive.

August 13 [12]

Today we were moved around all over. First from one trench to another. While in one place [near Parvillers] we were shelled by whizz-bangs during which poor [M.W.F.] [Lewis](#) was killed and [R.H.] [Hess](#) seriously wounded. Moved back again. Many dead lying in trench. Four tanks just on our right dead too. One has been burning all day.³¹

August 14 [13]

More casualties. No. 3 Co. suffered last night in attack and defence of village and wood to our front.³² L.C. Babbie [Baptie](#) seems to have dysentery. Has gone down to dressing station. [A.E.] [Elliott](#) has been wounded in hand. Gone down the line. I have a bad attack of diarrhea. Tonight [Aug. 13] on ration party until ten o'clock. Stood to for a couple of hours then moved out and overland to a trench that adjoins German front line. On communication party until dawn [Aug. 14].³³ Warned for a bombing party to take German trenches. Am bayonet man. At 6:30 A.M. advanced down trench but Germans had retired into next line. Followed down communication trench into village. Heavy German bombardment of their vacated trenches.³⁴ In the fight for the village and wood of Parvillers, Major

³⁰ The Battalion moved forward on August 11 beyond Folies into the frontlines just before Parvillers-le-Quenoy. According to the PPCLI War Diary, 11 Aug. 1918, "The 32nd being still unable to advance the 7th Brigade were ordered up to relieve them, and take over from Royal Scots, Argyll & Sutherland & Lancashire Fusiliers and moved out after dark leaving behind at Folies the Transport & rear details."

³¹ The PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, recorded that there was a certain amount of German shelling of their trenches throughout August 12.

³² According to the PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, the attack commenced at 8:00 p.m. on August 12 and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy during the advance, which had to be halted when they "exhausted all their supplies of bombs."

³³ "In the evening the Battalion received orders from Brigade to make a joint attack with the 49th Cdn. Battalion, with the purpose of capturing Parvillers. The necessary arrangements were made and the Battalion, standing to, awaited instructions from Brigade, which arrived at 12.35 a.m.. A limited objective of the old German Front Line system west of Parvillers was given to Battalions. The Battalion moved across into Assembly Position in trenches L.27.d – establishing Battalion Headquarters at L.27.d.40.70 – All in position by 3.00 a.m." PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, 13/14 Aug. 1918.

³⁴ "The Battalion jumped off at 6.30 and had gained all objectives by 6.50, joining up with the 49th Cdn. Battalion. Company Commanders immediately sent out Patrols into Parvillers and proceeded to follow up the success, and received orders from the C.O. to push forward. They succeeded in getting right through the Village of Parvillers, to the orchard in L.29.a with very few casualties." PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, 14 Aug. 1918.

[Drummond-Hay](#) was killed. A number of six platoon was taken prisoner.³⁵ We only captured half a dozen Germans. All morning ran up and down trenches following Lt. [Benson](#), who worked very hard but without thought for exhausted men. Retired from village and wood into old German front line captured first thing in the morning. Found German dugout and there tried to sleep during afternoon. Too excited and tried to rest, but during night got in several good hours.

August 16 [15]

Slept until nearly noon. Diarrhea seems better. This morning R.C.R.s retook village and wood and consolidated position.³⁶ This afternoon did a little roaming around over ground Lancs. Fusiliers and Royal Scots attempted two or three days ago. Shocking sights. From the former regiment only one officer and 17 men returned, the rest are out there yet. Very few German dead, as they were in positions behind well wired trenches. Buried [M.W.F.] [Lewis](#) this afternoon. Also found paper of man named [McCutcheon](#). Will send on to his mother. Relieved tonight by Division. Came back to Sugar factory.³⁷

August 17 [19-20]

Moved [Aug 19] from this camp [Valley Wood] a distance of 10 kilos [Boves] where we entrained [at 2:00 a.m., Aug 20] and travelled north. Lucky enough to get a 2nd class carriage with cushion.

August 18 [20]

Detained this morning 8 A.M. [at Boquemaison] Marched 5 kilos. Billeted in shed [at Ivergny].³⁸

August 22

Squad drill this morning. Wrote letters to Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. McCutcheon, home and Ambleside. Moved about 13 kilos tonight and billeted in chateau.³⁹

³⁵ "It was then reported that the Battalion co-operating on the left, which had advanced with us had received orders to retire to their first objective. The Germans, seeing this retirement, immediately took advantage of it and came into Parvillers in considerable force on the left, behind our left advanced Company. As this left both flanks in the air, it compelled a retirement which was carried out successfully, but regret to say with considerable casualties, including Major Drummond-Hay, killed, and three Officers wounded. The Battalion then took up position in its first objective. During this operation we took eight unwounded and one wounded prisoner." PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, 14 August 1918.

³⁶ "At 11.00 p.m. [Aug 14], the Royal Canadian Regiment on their most successful operation, passed through the Battalion, which stood to in support during the night, until report was received [Aug. 15] that the operation had been successful and the line in front of Parvillers consolidated." PPCLI War Diary, 14/15 Aug. 1918.

³⁷ The battalion was relieved by the 15th Canadian Battalion and moved to the neighbourhood of Folies Wood. PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 1, 15 Aug 1918. On August 16, it marched to Valley Wood, where it remained until August 19. On August 18, the 7th Brigade was inspected by Prime Minister Clemenceau of France, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, and Sir Henry Rawlinson commanding 4th Army. PPCLI War Diary, 16-19 Aug 1918.

³⁸ Boquemaison was 41 km north of Amiens and Ivergny was 5.8 km northeast of Boquemaison.

³⁹ The march took them about 13 km northeast to billets in Givenchy-le-Noble.

August 23

Tonight moved from chateau to near Agnez Le Dousais [Agnes-lès-Duisans].⁴⁰

August 24

This evening volunteered for advance party but after travelling 3 kilos was cancelled and returned.

August 25

On advance party again tonight. Came up as far as two kilos east of Arras.⁴¹ Stayed all night in old trench no covering but our old sheets. Rained heavily. No sleep.

August 26

This morning our troops attacked and at 6 A.M. our battalion was moved up in support.⁴² About now we left shelter of hill and in extended order advanced over about two kilos of old trench country. Eddie [Heath](#), my pal, very nervous.⁴³ Machine gun fire troublesome in earlier part of advance, but we were not held up by it until nearly noon. Sergt. [F.W.] [Turner](#) was hit in the neck and later I heard he died, Corp. [A.W.] [Stevens](#) in the stomach. Later platoon officer in the hand.⁴⁴ About noon line held up and we took cover in shell holes. I tried to dislodge machine gun post in valley but could not shoot straight enough. Gave it up at last.⁴⁵ Tanks, three, then advanced, but after getting a few hundred yards past where we were, they [got] stuck, and the crews took to the trenches. After

⁴⁰ The battalion marched east about 15 km to “Y huts on Aubigny Arras road junction with road from Agnez-le-Duisans,” on the west side of Arras. PPCLI War Diary, 23 Aug 1918.

⁴¹ According to the PPCLI War Diary, the battalion moved into “the neighbourhood of Blangy” on the east side of Arras in preparation for an attack the following morning.

⁴² The 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade attacked at 3:00 a.m. on August 25. The PPCLI moved forward at 9.30 a.m., Frank’s No. 2 Company with Captain Tenbroeke in command on the front left. They were somewhere near Monchy-le-Preux, which was located about 8 or 9 km southeast of Arras.

⁴³ In [Getaway](#), Frank’s partly fact, partly fictional account of his war experiences, he wrote, “A serious sort was Heath – I believe he told me once that he had been a theological student – at any rate, I often saw him reading his Testament, and I must frequently have hurt him with some careless or cynical remark on religion; yet in spite of that he gave me his friendship. In age and appearance he was about the same as myself – twenty-three and a rusty blonde.” F. J. Whiting, *Getaway* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2000), 19.

⁴⁴ Casualties increased on the front during the day from “Machine Gun enfilade fire and snipers” and all four platoons of No. 3 Company were sent up as reinforcements. By this time, No. 1 Company had lost all of its officers. PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 2, August 1918.

⁴⁵ Frank wrote, “A machine-gun a couple of hundred yards ahead was sweeping our immediate area every few minutes. It was some little time before we spotted the place where it was located. Our shell-hole was too exposed to do any sniping with even a measure of security, so I wriggled back quite a distance and approached the quarry from a different direction.

“My new position was farther away than before, but a low bank surmounted by tall grass gave me fair cover, and I managed to get away a few shots before being discovered. I rather doubt that I did them much damage as the distance was too great. Besides, my only target was an occasional glimpse of a grey shoulder or helmet. Our spasmodic duel lasted an hour” *Getaway*, 22.

sundown Fritz was seen to be massing on our left front and we hastily tried to straighten our line in shell holes.⁴⁶

Ed [Heath](#) while running into another hole just ahead of me was hit in the neck and dropped. I scrambled over to him, but after a glance at the course the bullet had taken, [I] saw there was no hope for him. Bullet had entered base of neck on left side and come out at point of shoulder on right. However I congratulated him on the nice Blighty he had stopped, but he said, "Ah Frank this is no Blighty." In fact he seemed to know from the first that he was dying, although he was quite strong in the arms and neck, even though he was paralyzed from the shoulder down.

Fritz advanced until he came to a trench just opposite us where he stopped and consolidated. Ed getting gradually worse as it grew dark. Asking whether he had any message to send to his wife, he said, "Tell her to suit herself as to whether she marries again or not." I also suggested that he write a farewell note – or dictate one. He said, "Yes, but be quick." It was only a short note written hastily upon the back of a Y.M.C.A. envelope in which he told them not to worry for him as he was going home to his Heavenly Father.⁴⁷ After he was through I tried to read it through for him but half was all I could manage. My voice broke then.

I finally located a trench nearby where he could lay in comparative shelter and with the aid of three others and a rubber sheet we carried him to it and laid him in a shallow dugout. He begged me to stay with him to the end. "It will not be long now" he kept saying. The last hour or two he was conscious he suffered considerable pain, but I managed to get him a couple of morphine tablets, which saved him quite a lot and under whose gentle influence he passed out about midnight I should judge. He died quietly with his head and shoulders resting against my thighs.

He had not been dead only a few minutes when I was warned for a ration party, so I asked the Captain, [M.] [Tenbroke](#) – not to have him buried until I came back. This he promised. It was breaking day when we got back to the trench with rations. On the way heard of quite a few casualties among the officers and men I knew. After getting back, I buried Ed behind the parade with my entrenching tool. I could only find one piece of wood so I could not make him a cross. However I wrote his name on an envelope and put it in a tin upside down on the grave.

August 27

This morning Mr. [Lt. Ian Laughlin] McKinnon [[MacKinnon](#)] was killed by a

⁴⁶ During the night of Aug 26-27, "the enemy made at least five unsuccessful bombing attacks, in force, on our left Company [No. 2] ... These attacks were all successfully repulsed with large casualties to the Boche." PPCLI War Diary, Appendix 2, August 1918.

⁴⁷ Frank wrote, "Upon the back of an old YMCA envelope I scribbled hastily at his dictation a few lines of farewell to his wife and two little daughters, in which he said he was going home to his Heavenly Father, and that his prayer was that they would all meet again in a better world. [Getaway](#), 24.

sniper, also a man named [A.] Howey [[Howie](#)]. During the middle of the day I managed to get about two hours of sleep upon the fire step using poor Ed's blood stained sheet for a cover. The 58th went over and took some territory on our right but the barrage did not trouble me. About four Col. [Stewart](#) came along, and shortly after I heard rumors of a raid to be put on at 6 P.M. after a barrage had done its work. The idea was, as near as I could make out, that the Germans occupied the same trench as we did only a little on our left. It was our job to bomb him out and form posts along it. 6 P.M. No barrage, so advanced up the trench without it, an officer named [Lt. A.J.] [Robins](#) [Lt. M.J. [Robb](#)] in charge.⁴⁸ As fast as we advanced up trench Germans withdrew leaving all equipment and rifles, also machine guns.

I was about tenth when we started but by the time we had travelled three hundred yards I was only second. One bayonet man preceding. We had very few bombs, so had to use German stick-bombs. Only saw one Fritz, and he surrendered and was passed to rear. When we were about half a mile from where we started, the lookout called, "Run like hell, he's coming!"⁴⁹ The bayonet man in front promptly squeezed past me and did so. I stopped to throw another bomb at where I judged the enemy would be, but as I was down in the deep trench I could see no one. However I ran as hard as I could after my brave comrades, who, I think could have held the trench if they had stuck, but just as I turned a corner leading into a piece with a low parapet, I saw our men bunching into the next turning trying to scramble through, and out of the tail of my eye I could see a line of Germans within 15 yards rushing right upon us.

I had no rifle and only one bomb left that was ready. This I threw at a man that was only about a rod distant. He fired at the same time, but missed. The bomb hit him in the middle, but as they are timed for 7 seconds, he was quite safe. Then I

⁴⁸ Frank was mistaken, probably because of the similarity between the two surnames. Lt. A. J. Robins had been wounded at Passchendaele on 30 October 1917 and did not return to the PPCLI until 13 September 1918. He was killed at Tilloy 28 September 1918.

⁴⁹ The report on this action in the [War Diary of the PPCLI](#) reads as follows: "At about 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon the Battalion received orders to Bomb their way to Pelves, along Faction, Friction and Cartridge Trenches. Two parties of fourteen men each, one under Lieuts. Barclay and Ogilvie and one under Lieut Robb bombed along these Trenches. Lieut. Robb's party succeeded in advancing along the trench for a distance of 900 yards, meeting with considerable opposition for the greater part of the way. As large numbers of the enemy were met with and as the supply of bombs was very short and machine guns from both flanks were firing on his party, Lieut. Robb was forced to withdraw, which he did with very few casualties. In the meantime, the Party bombing along Cartridge Trench under Lieuts. Barclay and Ogilvie, who did not advance quite so far, withdrew in order to conform with the other party's withdrawal. Snipers were posted to cut off any Germans [sic] who might be retreating overland. So many targets presented themselves, that a Lewis Gun garrisoning the Trench was brought up and put into action, and very severe casualties were inflicted upon the enemy in this way. During the withdrawal one of the Lewis Guns brought out by the bombing party, was employed to cover their withdrawal.

The party had nine casualties. One prisoner was captured, who stated that there was an inter-machine Gun Company relief at the time of the attack. This accounted for the large number of men who were found to occupy the trench. By this time, No. 1 Company had all its Officers killed and a large number of other rank casualties had occurred in both front line Companies.

turned to run again, but as I did so I stumbled and fell. Then they were on me. I realized in a flash that I had one chance yet. If I rose to continue fighting I should certainly be shot before I had got to my knees. Or even if I tried to follow the others, my back would only stop the bullets they were firing into the disappearing figures of my little party. By lying still and feigning dead there was just a chance they would pass me. This I did, and though one did kick me as he passed, the ruse worked and the whole bunch hurried on down the trench after the others.

As soon as they had gone, I rose and crawled out of the back of the trench and through some shell holes intending to lay there until dark when I would try to rejoin the company. As my evil luck would have it though, a German came looking for his own casualties and soon discovered me, and as I had discarded my equipment in order to move less noisily I shammed dead again, but this time it did not work, and as there was a dozen others right there, I “came to” and consented to follow the gentleman.⁵⁰

To my surprise, I was well treated from the first. They gave me my rations and water bottle, though pinched my cigarettes. Now a sergeant and the one who had found me started to escort me back over-land to the rear. We had not gone far when we met a major who asked in good English how many men we had in the trench. I told him that it was with regret that I couldn't do so, as I was still a Canadian, even if I was captured. I rather expected that he would have shot me, but he only smiled and passed on.

We had not gone much further, when one of our machine guns opened up on us, and the sergeant dropped, shot through the knee. I helped to dress him when we proceeded.⁵¹ Soon after, we came to a dugout where I was questioned by a captain. He got no information, however. One of his men gave me two very good cigars. Still later, I was taken to another dugout and told to make myself as comfortable as I could for the night on the stairs. As the German soldiers were

⁵⁰ Frank was captured somewhere between Monchy-le-Preux and Pelves, which were about 2 km apart. In his account of his capture, Frank wrote, “I knew from long experience that the greatest danger to a captured enemy is during the split second while the capturer debates whether to kill or to give the poor beggar his life. Once safely past this instant of indecision, one's chance of being murdered in cold blood later is not so great ... I may or may not have been pale with fright, but evidently there was something about my appearance that was unconvincing even to a cursory glance, and so it was that this chap started to investigate my ‘corpse.’ I did not know whether he would test me by sticking a bayonet through my ribs or what, so, to take his mind off any unpleasantness he might be planning, I flickered my eyelids, gave a groan and muttered, ‘Wasser.’”

“This was certainly a bright idea, and while he was trying to figure out what a man who spoke German was doing in an enemy uniform, I was slowly coming back to life ... When I had sufficiently regained my senses I opened my eyes, and when they met those of the big German who stood over me, I gave him one of my friendliest smiles and said ‘Wasser’ again.

“He smiled in return and answered apologetically, ‘Nicht Wasser.’ Safe! I had won the trick. I smiled again, a real one this time.” [Getaway](#), 32-33.

⁵¹ Frank wrote, “Several British machine-guns joined the chorus and the sergeant dropped with a bullet through the knee ... ‘Come on!’ I yelled, grabbing him by the shoulder. With the help of my arm he staggered up, and we ran a three-legged twenty yard dash to the nearest shell-hole. Into this we tumbled together ... I hastily bound up his wound with his field dressing ...” [Getaway](#), 34.

doing the same, I could hardly complain at the discomfort. During the night, one of them gave me a handful of their sweet little biscuits that are, however, not as nutritious as ours.

August 28

Shortly after dawn everyone evacuated [the] dugout as our men are advancing again. I was led a couple of kilos to rear when I was taken over by a cavalry man – probably an Uhlan.⁵² He escorted me to a place where I judged corps headquarters was held and there handed me over to another cavalryman who conducted me to a village between Vitry (Vitry-en-Artois)⁵³ and a large canal that we crossed later in the day. This cavalryman was a strong socialist and in a mongrel sort of French agreed marvellously well upon many things. He left me in a chateau where it seemed as if there was some sort of artillery headquarters. I stayed here about four hours during which time I was excellently treated by my captors, also the generals moved out to take up new positions further east.

About four taken in charge by another Uhlan and conducted to a mining village [Sin-le-Noble]⁵⁴ some 6 kilos distant.⁵⁵ Fritz bringing back guns and mounting them on banks of canal. In this mining village the civilians crowded about in great numbers asking for news and when I considered the war would be over⁵⁶ they pressed food upon me, which I held in my hand intending to eat it later. One of them – a boy – gave me his cap and would accept no payment. Taken into a private house and there had to stand and wait for over an hour while various dignitaries finished their game of cards and held a conference upon my fate.

Meanwhile, I had put [the] accumulated bread down upon the table and which the good French woman had wrapped in a cloth for me. She had prepared a great plateful of food, too, but the gentle guard refused her to give it to me. One young woman was so glad to see me that she gave me a whopping big kiss right on the lips. She was very good looking too.⁵⁷

⁵² An Uhlan was member of the horse cavalry of the German army. Frank described him as “A mounted escort armed with a lance.” [Getaway](#), 42.

⁵³ Vitry-en-Artois was 10 km. northeast of Monchy-le-Preux and 7 km. from Pelves.

⁵⁴ Frank identified this mining village as Sin-le-Noble. *Getaway*, 44. It was about 2.8 km east of Douay.

⁵⁵ Frank described what he saw behind the German lines. “The roads and towns teemed with the field-grey legions. Every estaminet and shop was crowded with soldiery. Nearly every house bore a notice in German telling the number of men that could be billeted there. Hardly a wall which did not bear large sign-boards indicating the direction to dressing stations, motor parks, farriers, supply dumps and a thousand other such places. The few small signs in French seemed swamped.” *Getaway*, 43.

⁵⁶ Frank wrote, “The Germans had that day been moving back some of their long-range guns and were mounting them beneath the trees that bordered a neighbouring canal. The Germans denied that they were retiring even a little, but the French thought it a hopeful sign and were checking up their own observations with my recent firing-line knowledge.” *Getaway*, 44.

⁵⁷ In his book, Frank described this incident in some detail. *Getaway*, 46-47.

Soon after, my guard took me away and as I was going refused to let me take the bread. It was a very black night and we were quite alone for two or three kilometres. He came very near to being strangled to death for his over attention to business, but on considering that I have had no sleep for three whole nights, this being the fourth, I doubted I had the strength. Finally he handed me over to the Intelligence Officer [at Lewarde]⁵⁸ who gave me a little of their sour black bread but I could not eat much of it though he gave me some honey to spread upon it. He tried for information but didn't get any. Was finally taken to the guardroom for the night where I fought the remainder of the night with about a million fleas that attacked me from my bedding. During the night three others, Imperials, were brought in.

August 29

This morning asked our guard for a wash and he conducted us to a pump in a nearby street. As my socks had not been changed or taken off since before the battle, my feet were in bad shape and I limped as I walked. So I asked a French lady if she had an old pair of socks she could sell, and she brought me out a good pair, but would take no payment. Another woman, unasked, brought us a bowl so we could wash with more convenience; another gave us a towel each. And all gave us sympathetic looks and smiles. After a breakfast of coffee(?) and black bread we were taken back to the Intelligence place and there lodged in the yard. Here we stayed until about three or four in the afternoon. During that time I washed and dried my dirty socks and partook of an excellent dinner of biscuits and soup and mashed vegetables and beef.

We were then moved to Douai⁵⁹ and lodged in the Bank of France transformed into a prison. For supper we had more black bread and a vile lump of sausage that is made of anything but beef. There are quite a few British prisoners here.⁶⁰

August 29

Slept like a log all night and most of the day.⁶¹ Interrogated afresh for information. Both at the last place and here I sent away a postcard to England and Canada saying I am a prisoner and well.

August 30

Slept most of the day again. Moved out at 6 tonight and took train for about 30

⁵⁸ Lewarde, which Frank also identified in his book, was 5.5 km. southeast of Sin-le-Noble. See Whiting, [Getaway](#), 46.

⁵⁹ The city of Douai was 7.4 km northwest of Lewarde.

⁶⁰ Frank wrote, "Two or three hundred newly-captured prisoners were held there continually. More arrived every few hours by day and night, and every two or three days drafts of a hundred or so were sent from this place to working camps of different sorts all over this part of France." *Getaway*, 48.

⁶¹ Frank wrote, "There were no fatigue parties or work of any sort to do in this camp, and by the judicious use of a couple of francs I bribed my way to an upstairs room containing only seven other occupants. Here, upon a vacant spring bed with mattress and a blanket, I held my headquarters for the three subsequent days, emerging only for roll-call and meals and sleeping a full eighteen hours a day." *Getaway*, 48.

kilos in direction of Valenciennes. Detrained and marched to village named Conde [Conde-sur-l'Escaut]⁶² and lodged in old cavalry barracks. No blankets, no coat of course and no bed of any sort. Curled up on the bare stone floor. Did not sleep.

August 31

At 7 this morning all were paraded for breakfast. Instead of a roll being called, a count is made, and it takes a deuce of a time. There is a roll-call twice daily, and it takes from anywhere up to two hours each time as there is almost always some beggar sleeping off in some out of the way corner.⁶³

For breakfast, we had a seventh of a German loaf – about one slice and coffee. Dinner, a soup of dried vegetables, plenty of it but not very nourishing as it is made up chiefly of turnip. Tea, a seventh of a loaf and tea(?).⁶⁴ Afterwards about 7 we were paraded again for roll call and then given each a piece of bread sent in by the French civilians. Those good people send us in bread nearly every night.

In this camp there is an inner colony of prisoners taken last November. They get enough parcels sent in to them to more than keep them in addition to the regular German ration.⁶⁵ Those men give us their surplus and there is always a crowd of hungry ones waiting about the gate where the extra food is given out. One of them, Robertson of the Fort Garry Horse has taken my name to include in his next letter to his mother. She will write to my mother as may be months before I can get mail out or back. Today was Sunday [Sept. 1] and tonight I feel very blue.

September 1

This morning I volunteered for a working party and all day worked on a new prisoner's compound in the village of Fresnes [Fresnes-sur-Escaut] three kilos

⁶² Valenciennes was about 30 km by rail from Douai, and Conde-sur-l'Escaut was about 13 km north of it.

⁶³ Frank wrote, "... we were all paraded in two long lines and counted. No small chore that, as the cavalry barracks in which we were lodged now held between six and seven hundred men. Every few minutes a late comer or two would sneak in from behind and upset the formation. After horrible cursing on the part of the German sergeant in charge, he took himself off apparently more or less satisfied with the tally ..." [Getaway](#), 49.

⁶⁴ Of the tea, Frank wrote, "There was a mess-tin half filled with what was called tea. Someone later told me the tea was made from an infusion of beech leaves. Leaves of some sort they certainly were, but not tea leaves." [Getaway](#), 49.

⁶⁵ Frank wrote of these prisoners, "One corner of these old barracks were fenced off and guarded separately from the rest, the inmates being a score or so of men who had been captured the previous November. These men wore black uniforms with brown bands around their arms. Their clothes were supplied from England, and everything else they required such as food, soap, books, cigarettes, etc. was sent from the Red Cross." [Getaway](#), 50. Evidently, they had been prisoners long enough to be identified and assisted by the Red Cross and relief agencies.

from here.⁶⁶

September 6

For the last five days have been working on the new compound. During this time have been fairly content but today felt so weak that I had to fall out and rest.⁶⁷ This camp is an assembly camp where prisoners are collected and sent out on to working battalions and jobs in Germany and all over the place. No applications coming in for farmers.

September 7

Did not go to work today. Plenty of volunteers to take my place. Very little work to be done here. Am keeping this diary very quiet as it would instantly [be] commandeered if they knew I had it. At the Intelligence Office I was searched but I hid this in my money belt under my shirt.⁶⁸

September 8

Sunday. Last night it stormed and while it was on I remarked to one of my fellows that it was an ideal night to escape. This morning six of our officers were missing. This is a very easy place to get out of, but between here and our line is a canal that might prove awkward as sentries are posted on all the bridges.⁶⁹ Tonight the camp commandant stopped the French issue of bread as punishment. Though, of course, we had nothing to do with our officers escaping.

⁶⁶ Fresnes-sur-l'Escaut was about 2 km southwest of Conde-sur-l'Escaut on the route to Valenciennes. Frank volunteered for the working party because "there was always the chance of getting a turnip or perhaps a few raw potatoes smuggled to one by some kindly French woman." [Getaway](#), 51.

⁶⁷ Frank was weak with hunger. At the end of the five days, Frank wrote, "I felt so weak from hunger I paraded sick. The only chance of getting any hand-outs was when we were either going to work or coming back at night. The gang got so they would break ranks and almost mob any person they thought looked promising. Of course this would not do. So the guards kept a tight hand on us, and the odd scraps were few and far between." *Getaway*, 51.

⁶⁸ Frank had taken precautions on August 27, when he and the German sergeant were sharing a trench together shortly after Frank's capture. He wrote, "Now, as I have already mentioned, I had won some two hundred francs in a Crown and Anchor game the day before we went into action, so that I was pretty well heeled for cash. This money I had been carrying in a lined money-belt around my waist. In my left-hand breast pocket, together with my pay-book, a few photographs and a letter or two, was my diary of our operations for the past year ... While the sergeant and I talked together in the darkness of the dug-out, I pondered what to do with all this desirable loot ... After some little thought I put all the money and my diary in one pouch, chattering the while to disguise the slight rattle of paper as I made the change. I then worked the money belt under my shirt and shifted it around until the pouch hung well down over my stomach. By doing so I figured that unless I was actually stripped I could pass any ordinary search where one's pockets were completely emptied and the usual patting and feeling down the body was done. I did not anticipate a search that would discover a hiding place so low down in the centre." *Getaway*, 35-36.

⁶⁹ Frank wrote, "High bulwarks circled the town. All entrances were guarded. A canal running by the western outskirts increased the hazards, and sentries were posted on every bridge. Moreover, the town swarmed with German soldiery, so that after sizing up the situation I did not feel in any particular hurry to try the stunt myself, especially as there were rumours that most of us were soon to be moved to the lager [brewery] at Fresnes." *Getaway*, 53.

September 9

This afternoon we were all moved to the new compound in the old maltery in Fresnes. We number at present about 600. Out of this bunch there is about ten Canadians.

September 10

Slept all day between meals. At the other place we had been getting a few handouts from the older prisoners who received parcels but here we have nothing of that sort, nor French bread issue either, so will likely go pretty hungry from now on.

September 11

Slept again nearly all day. This evening volunteers were called for various tradesmen; among others they wanted someone to run a threshing mill. I do not know much about it, but I put my name down for it. I was sorry a moment later as they called for lumbermen, and nearly all the Canadians went in for that. However, I can probably work the exchange if I want to. Last night I went out about 3 o'clock to see how chances were for beating it. There was a high wind blowing, but it was too clear and the sentry too wide awake.

September 12

Slept again. Do not feel so keen about getting away, now there is a chance to get a fairly decent job. The sentries have been instructed to shoot indiscriminately, if anyone is seen sneaking around after dark. The risk does not seem worthwhile, especially as the end of the war is practically in sight. No one expects it to last beyond Christmas.

September 13

At night am bothered greatly with dreams of home and England and glorious great feeds of everything. Of course, they are lovely while they last, but the awakening is awful. We are all beginning to feel the pinch.

This afternoon occurred one of the most disgraceful exhibitions I have ever witnessed. Some extra soup and jam was sent up from the men at the Conde camp for us. At first we lined up in fours to receive our share, but when the man dishing it called for working parties to the front all those at the rear rushed up and surrounded the tub and the man, so that he could do nothing at all. In vain he called to them to line up quietly and all would get some, but after a time he gave it up and struggled out leaving the tub.⁷⁰ In an instant the mob were on it like a bunch of ravenous hogs, upsetting the barrel of good rich soup and fighting to dig their mess tins into the mixture of mud and food that instantly formed beneath their feet.

⁷⁰ In his book, Frank described the man in charge of dishing out the food as the interpreter, who obtained his job because he "spoke German like a native." Frank wrote that he was a Jew named Cohen, and he "wore the uniform of a private in a London Scottish battalion." [Getaway](#), 56, 59.

Tonight we received an extra large issue of jam that had been sent in from somewhere for us. We also received a bowl of vegetable soup in lieu of tea(?), but it was very watery, and though I ate it many of the men could not. It is very tasteless being made of turnips dried and ground.⁷¹ This evening I did not go to bed with the others, as I was expecting one of our guards to come in who was going to bring me some bread. It was just getting nicely dark when a shot rang out. On going out to see what was the matter, two imperial sergeants and myself found that the sentry had shot a man trying to escape. It appeared he was climbing over the gate, when the sentry saw him and shouted. On being discovered, he started to climb back when the guard, holding his rifle close to the poor fellow's thigh, fired.

The explosion tore a huge hole through, shattering the bones and making a fearful mess. When we got to him he was lying in the mud and groaning and begged us to get him out of it. Bending over, I recognized him as Sergeant [Strate](#) (925626) of the 5th Batt. Canadians. With some difficulty the three of us managed to carry him into the Stretcher Bearer's billet where we laid him on the stone floor. The S.B. [stretcher-bearer] bound him up after a fashion, while I had gone for proper field dressings. The boys eagerly offered as soon as I called for them.

On my pointing out that he was bleeding badly from a hole underneath, the S.B. [stretcher-bearer] then put on a tourniquet which only partially checked the flow. As I pillowed his head, he told me he was done for. I cheered him up as best I could, but as I thought the same as he, it wasn't very convincing. Soon after the German doctor came, and with his orderly, bound him up a bit better. They also gave him a couple of morphine tablets as he was in great pain. Later I learned he was carried out and taken away in an open cart, while it poured with rain. He died about three o'clock in the morning. In my opinion, with proper treatment, he could have been saved, but lying on that stone floor all that time and later in the open cart brought on death by exposure more than anything else.

September 14

This afternoon more soup came up for us from the other camp, but I did not get any. Some of those who got theirs first suddenly made a rush upon the line-up, causing everyone but a few of us to vacate their places and rush the tub as it was getting low, and those at the rear of the line did not expect to get any. I turned away in disgust and sorrow that British soldiers should act in such a way before their German captors. Without prejudice, I can add, however, that I did not see any of the Canadians join in the rush. Am pretty hungry tonight. The only thing I have to eat is a spoonful or two of cocoa. I will keep this until nearly bed-time, when I will eat it. I think perhaps I can buy some bread from one or two of the guards. They have promised to bring some tomorrow morning.

⁷¹ Frank described them as a "mess of boiled turnip leaves. These were fearfully salt[y] and many of the men could not eat them, though I managed to get mine down." [Getaway](#), 59-60

September 15

Sunday. No bread this morning, but the cook sold me an extra loaf for five marks. This afternoon two others and myself made a breach in the partition at the head of my bed.⁷² As far as I know, at least eight men figure on getting out of it tonight.⁷³ Last night the one and only Yankee the camp boasted escaped through the roof. Today the commandant and general were pretty sore and lined up all our guards and gave them the devil. I hear they are all to be sent back to the trenches. This afternoon a notice appeared on the door to the effect that guards have orders to shoot down on sight anyone attempting an escape without being obliged to challenge.

Our plan is a good one, though as we leave the building in daylight it is very risky and under observation of the sentry when he is at the northern end of his beat. About half past eight tonight, we pulled the boards down, and I led the way through the hole. As soon as my feet touched the stonework, some gravel grated underneath, so I stopped long enough to take off my boots. I then made a dash through the unused portion of the building my hole led into, through the open window-hole and across the piece under observation. My luck was in and no one noticed. Four others followed, the rest deciding it was too light for the attempt. We five then put on our boots, scaled a board fence and hid down among some turnips for about an hour and a half. We then decided it would get no darker, until the moon set, so we made off. The moon is just about ten days old and is really too far gone, but we were to be moved out of this camp tomorrow, so have to take a chance on it being too light.⁷⁴

We had not gone three hundred yards before we almost ran into three Germans. I saw them in time, however, and turned off walking at a tangent. They passed

⁷² This partition separated prison sleeping quarters from an unused portion of the building. Frank's plan, which he carried out, was to crawl through the breach he had made in the partition into the empty portion, then go through an open window space at the other end, and at the appropriate moment race about fifty yards and over a wall to the other side. [Getaway](#), 69-74.

⁷³ Although Frank had been sobered by [Strate](#)'s fatal attempt to escape, he had at least two reasons to make his own attempt. He feared that the prisoners could be sent to "some working camp in Germany" far away from the frontlines among a hostile population where escape would be extremely difficult. He also had dysentery that was getting worse, and a "particularly virulent type of influenza was raging in the camp" as well, so he felt if he was going to make an attempt, it had to be soon. *Getaway*, 66, 68.

⁷⁴ Frank's book described their first close call after leaving their hiding place among the turnips. He wrote, "At the lower end of the garden we came to a thick-set hedge at the top of a railway embankment. Down below and immediately in front of us we could hear voices and the noise of men walking about on the railway. To our left a signal cabin threw a strong light almost up to the prison camp, and on the right a short distance lay the straggling village of Fresnes. We seemed to be stuck already. After a little cautious craning about in order to size up the situation I turned to the right, following the hedge along for a hundred yards or so which took us as close to the village as I deemed advisable. No one was on the railway just here, but we could see those we had recently avoided. I paused at a gap until the others had crept up to me. 'Keep close up,' I muttered and wiggled through the gap and slid down the bank. The four others followed making what seemed like a tremendous row. At the bottom I led the way, walking boldly across the scrunching cinders followed closely by the others. The bluff worked. The Germans to the left paid no attention as the light was not strong enough for them to see our uniforms. They probably took us for a small working party on legitimate business." *Getaway*, 77.

without comment.⁷⁵ Soon after, we struck a forest where we made good speed for about two hours.⁷⁶ Then we had a stroke of bad luck. We ran into a sentry guarding an engine on a railway we had to cross. He was about seventy-five yards off when I noticed him. I stopped, and he challenged, but I made no answer and after a moment told the boys to follow on across the track. We had just got across and were taking to the woods again when he opened fire. He fired two shots, but I do not think he hit anyone. We broke and ran, scattering through the brush in all directions and kicking up an awful row. A few men came out of a nearby camp and followed a little way, but they soon gave up.

By this time, of course, I was quite alone. I waited, listening half an hour for the others to (come) along, but I heard no more of them, so came on alone. After another hour's walking, the forest ended and I came out onto some flats adjoining what appeared to be a very large town [St. Amand].⁷⁷ There I had a lot of trouble crossing a lot of dykes and ditches filled with water, and after these, I struck a canal.⁷⁸ I had heard there is a canal to cross between here and Douai and at first thought this was it, but after skirting the town to the south, I struck another forest where I continued until daybreak. I then found a good thicket and am now writing this in its shelter. There is a light railway within a few yards of here where Germans have been working all day.⁷⁹

There has been a pretty steady bombardment on for the greater part of the day. By the sound of the guns, I have at least twenty kilos to travel yet, not saying of the canal to cross which I fear will be the toughest proposition of the whole undertaking. If I do it tonight, I will do remarkably well, what with the moon as bright as it probably will be.

Ten Days Later

Well, I did not make it and am once more back in the prison at Fresnes though as yet nothing has been said or done to me as punishment. It happened this way: I

⁷⁵ "We had been following a faint path which led due west when I suddenly noticed three Germans coming along another path at an angle which would cut ours ... Without a word I started off again at an angle to the left of our previous course and walking as quickly as possible without actually drawing attention to ourselves by an unwonted speed ... For a few moments the situation looked bad as the Germans drew closer. Then as they passed behind us about fifteen yards distant, we all breathed a lot easier." [Getaway](#), 77-78.

⁷⁶ "These woods, known as the Forest de Raimes, covered a large area. In pre-war days there must have been some valuable timber here but the Germans had worked the forest until there was nothing left but vast expanses of slashings and bracken with only odd patches of inferior stuff left standing." [Getaway](#), 79.

⁷⁷ In his book, Frank identified this town as St. Amand [Saint-Amand-les-Eaux], which was about 12 km west of Fresnes-sur-l'Escaut.

⁷⁸ In fact, Frank had probably reached the Scarpe River, which connected St. Amand with Douai and Arras to the southwest. He had first assumed it was the Canal de la Sensée, which connected the Scarpe and Escaut Rivers, and was, according to an air force prisoner he had interviewed back at the prison, the only canal he would cross before reaching the Canadian lines.

⁷⁹ Frank had omitted to "circle" his retreat before taking cover. As a result, he discovered that "there was a light railway track immediately beyond the "thick clump of bushes" where he lay. He had to lie perfectly still all day lest his slightest movement gave him away to a passerby. [Getaway](#), 83-84.

left the shelter of the wood at dusk of the second night [September 16] and striking a south-westerly direction had good luck in that it was deserted open country for about 8 kilos. I then skirted the town of Somain⁸⁰ and still keeping the same direction got down into a mining district. About three o'clock in the morning [September 17], it began to rain, and for an hour and a half, it stormed with thunder and lightening. During most of the storm, I crept into a shed at the back of someone's house and as I was very tired slept until the rain had passed over.⁸¹

While traversing the open country in the earlier part of the night I had a very narrow escape. I had just crossed the Douai-Valenciennes railway and following a path through a gap in a hedge came suddenly into the moonlight.⁸² To my dismay as I emerged, I observed two Germans coming down the same path toward me. If I went back, they would see me again in the gap. If I went forward,

⁸⁰ Somain was about 16 km directly east of Sin-le-Noble, which was just a couple of kilometres outside of Douai.

⁸¹ Frank said much more about the storm and the shed incident in [Getaway](#). Indeed, it was at this time that he claimed to have experienced "one of the strangest incidents of the whole adventure." He also claimed that he wrote about it in his diary, "as it seemed to have happened," but in fact there is no such reference, possibly because some of the diary pages were removed at a later date. He himself may have removed them, "as years of solid, everyday security have passed since that night, and I am now more or less pleased to think that it was only a sort of waking dream, brought on by utter weariness and a little delirium most likely." Nevertheless, he included a detailed description of the incident in his book. Whether it was a fictional embellishment reflective of the increased interest in spiritual forces both during and immediately following the Great War, or a retrospective attempt to make sense of an experience that actually occurred, we can never be sure, but there are hints in his references elsewhere to the "ghostly pact" he had with Harry Beaumont and his conversations with Captain John MacNeill that suggest he was interested in the supernatural. See his description of the incident below.

"Soon it began to rain, quietly at first and then gradually increasing in vigour. For the previous hour or more I had been walking more slowly, stopping frequently for short rests. About this time the rain commenced to fall in real earnest, I stumbled over a lump of dirt and fell prone, and so utterly fagged out was I that I just stretched out with my head resting on my arm. Every over-wrought nerve and muscle in my body prayed for sleep, though the thunder crashed, and the rain teemed down upon me ... While I lay there I must have dozed for presently I fancied I heard music ... and singing ... and among other strains a thread of an old favourite that went, 'The way is dark, and I am far from home.' The music and the singing seemed to fade away, and I became conscious of an odour of wet khaki. Khaki that reeked of pain-wrenched sweat and warm blood that penetrated steadily through the fabric. I was brought fully awake by a hand that gripped and lifted my shoulder. I wearily raised my head, too numb with fatigue to care who or what I should see, but no one was there. I did not feel in the least afraid, although the pressure of the hand remained and with little or no effort on my part, helped me to my feet and led me along, taking a course a little to the south of that which I had been following.

Soon I came to a small cluster of houses which I approached from the rear. Although I had up to this time avoided any building that might conceivably harbour a number of Germans, I felt not the slightest fear or hesitation in this case. At the door of one of the houses was a small shed with a door standing ajar. As I peered inside, the lightning flashed, showing me a small cart loaded with straw. The fodder hung down over the whiffle-tree, so that anyone lying beneath the cart would be quite hidden from view. With a little effort, I crawled under and sank down with a sigh of relief upon a little bed a dog had evidently used ... The storm was just clearing off when I awoke, and the last few raindrops were spotting as I emerged from my shelter. Feeling greatly refreshed and deeply grateful to whatever agency or state of mind had led me to that sanctuary, I continued my journey." *Getaway*, 87-89.

⁸² As Frank was travelling in a south-westerly direction from somewhere near St-Amand-les-Eaux, he must have crossed the Douai-Valenciennes Railway to the northeast of Somain.

they would see me again and plainer in the open. So I did the only thing to save the situation. Standing back as far as possible in the shadow of the hedge, I waited until they were almost up to me when I made a noise that I hoped sounded like a German challenge. They said nothing but came right on. Then I saw they were both carrying a bag of potatoes. As they passed me, I peered forward as if to see who they were and though they eyed me pretty close, they went on without stopping or speaking. As soon as they had turned the corner, I took to my heels and ran across the fields for a quarter of a mile without stopping.⁸³

About dawn [September 17], I began to look for a place to lie up in during the day, but as there were no bushes I had quite a job. Many German were about, and at last I had to take to some long weeds to avoid discovery. When daylight came, I found my place of refuge was only a few yards from a road over which Germans passed all day. However, I camouflaged myself well with leaves and weeds, and lying flat on my back upon the wet ground, I managed to escape detection though the day seemed terribly long. At last the sun set and with the dark I left my hiding place. I was then I judged only about three or four miles from our line.

With the greatest care I advanced until climbing a low bank found myself on the brink of the Canal de la Sensee. This canal runs roughly north and south and at present forms the No Man's Land between the two armies.⁸⁴ There was one German machine gun post, however, on the other side that occasionally turned loose a few rounds, otherwise, once across the canal I was practically home. But how to cross the water was the big question. It looked awful wide and deep, besides very cold, and I finally decided to look for some wood to help me across before tackling it.

While I was cautiously scouting about back from the canal a few hundred yards, I had the ill luck to be seen by a sentry who was sitting under a bank guarding a row of their little machine gun go-carts. He waited until I was only a few yards away, when he held me up with his revolver. For two hours he kept me there. Then when help did not come to take back his go-carts, we each took three apiece and lugged them back to his billets – some five or six kilos. He then

⁸³ This incident is described in detail in [Getaway](#), 86-87.

⁸⁴ The Canal de la Sensée was located just south of Douai and ran in a northwest-southeast direction. Frank was now more than forty km southwest of the prison at Fresnes-sur-Escaut.

showed where I could sleep the remainder of the night which I certainly did.⁸⁵

The next morning [September 18] I was taken before his officer, who told me he liked me as he thought I was a brave man. I did pretty well for bread here, and after breakfast the German who took me escorted me as far as Lewarde where the Intelligence Bureau is.⁸⁶ On the way, I was given some bread and cigarettes by a French woman. I also stopped at a German canteen and bought a tooth brush and some more cigars. Arriving at Lewarde, I was recognized by the men there, and though I did not deserve it, they treated me well and fed me all and more than I could eat. I was careful enough to save some of the generous bread issue for the lean days I knew were to follow.

I stayed here until the afternoon of the following day [September 19], when two undersized Germans escorted me to Denain.⁸⁷ Here I was booked into a room by myself, and though I had a fairly good bed they gave me no supper nor breakfast the following morning [September 20]. [At] Noon I received the usual issue of boiled veg. they give and shortly after was taken into the train along with a number of C.M.R.'s to be shipped to Fresnes.

Here we arrived about 7 in the evening [September 20] when to my surprise I found the rest of our little party, also the Yankee who escaped a few nights before I did. They had been retaken the following morning after the escape. Yank had got down to Denain and was having a good time with the French being dressed in civilian when caught. The last few days I have done nothing but sleep and play cards, I bought a loaf of bread for five marks, but it has gone now and hunger stares me in the face. However, we hope to be moved out of here within a few days.

October

For three or four days after making the last entry, I stayed pretty hungry. The weather was very cold, too, so after getting my seventh of a loaf in the morning, I would turn in to bed again and sleep until noon. After soup, I would do the same again until tea – in fact I slept or tried to sleep nearly all the time.

⁸⁵ In [Getaway](#), Frank mixed fact and fiction freely. However, up until he reached the Canal de la Sensée, the text of the diary and the book parallel each other closely. After that point, they begin to diverge significantly. For instance, in *Getaway*, Frank made a difficult and hair-raising crossing of the canal, only to be caught later on the other side. This never happened. Concerning his return to Fresnes, the diary traces his journey from his captor's billets to the Intelligence Bureau at Lewarde, then to Denain, and finally to Fresnes by train. In *Getaway*, Frank travelled to his captor's billet, then to Denain (although there is a confusing reference to his already having been to the Intelligence Office at Lewarde), then he went to the Intelligence Office in Lewarde, evidently for a second time, after which he returned to Denain, from which he was taken by train to Fresnes. The sequence does not make sense and may have resulted in part through an editorial error. See *Getaway*, 102-110. Whatever the case, Frank did add two exciting escape attempts from Fresnes that were completely fictional (*Getaway*, 114-165) before returning to a text that followed the diary, more or less, from October 1918, when the prisoners were moved from Fresnes, until the end of the war.

⁸⁶ Lewarde was five or six km east of the Canal de la Sensée and 8 or 9 km west of Somain.

⁸⁷ Denain was about 17 km east of Lewarde and 14 km from Valenciennes. Frank was on his way back to the prison camp in Fresnes-sur-l'Escaut.

Then I got in with a young corporal of the R.B.'s named Walter Turner. He had worked in the cook house so had a little pull there which helped a bit. Also, he was the best grub rustler I have yet met. He used to go out into the town on working parties and nearly always brought back food, which he insisted on dividing with me. In fact, for a few days, he filled me until I actually wasn't hungry between meals.

We thought out several good schemes for escaping. Among others was one to cut the wire behind the latrine immediately after roll call at night, and while the crowd was still dense, climb out and over the wall. The only thing that deterred us was the uncertainty as to whether there was a patrol or sentry on the other side of the wall. Another was to get into the loft over the Kammer and get out through the roof like the Yankee did.

In the midst of our plans came the order for all N.C.O.'s to depart. It hit me pretty hard as I had grown to like the generous hearted little fellow. He had been a seaman and burglar and goodness knows what not and was a real good pal besides. So I divided some bread with him that I had bought for four marks a loaf, and he gave me a bit of precious soap and some cheese, also an old shirt or two and then he went. For two days I missed him terribly, not only because of the soap and bread he could rustle but for his companionship.

Then one night came the order to move out the whole camp in the morning. Our men are advancing so fast that there is danger of us being recaptured by the British, so we are to be sent further east and north towards Brussels. This night, with two days rations in my picket I tried to get out via the latrine. I pried off the wire with my knife and had everything ready, but the sentry simply would not go away and gradually the crowd melted away to bed to where I had to follow.

The next morning I watched my chance, and just as soon as the order came to fall in, I nipped into the Kammer and hid in a pile of old rags and clothes lying behind the door. The plan was that I assumed the whole camp, sentries and all, were being moved. This being so, all I had to do was to lay hidden until dark, when I would have no difficulty in getting out and escaping to the forest of Raismes, about a kilometre to the west, where I would await our advancing army. The plan was excellent, reducing to the minimum the chances of being shot while getting away but my luck ran out. After I was hidden, I heard someone come in but he did not discover me. A few minutes later, everyone moved off, and I felt fairly safe.

I had then a good mind to creep out and hide under one of the bunks in the deserted quarters. If I had done so, all would perhaps have been well, but I was afraid that while I was uncovered someone would come, so I decided to take a chance and stay where I was. After I had been hidden for perhaps two hours, someone else came in and as bad luck would have it about the first thing he laid hands on was the old coat that covered my head. He did not pull it quite off, and

as part of my face was still hidden and I lay still, I hoped he had not seen me, especially when he presently dropped the coat and walked out. However, he soon came back with two others, and they immediately set to work uncovering me.

Realizing the game was up, I crawled out and [was] met by a vigorous storm of German. One, a corporal, made to draw his bayonet and use it on me, but someone held him back. Another grabbed a walking stick and was going to knock my brains out, but someone held him back. The other contented himself with giving me a shove over a pile of blankets, but five minutes later they had cooled off and led me to the house by the main gateway where they had a room.

Here they gave me a huge mess tin of the cabbage left in the cook house from last night. At noon, they again gave me a good fill of their own stew containing lots of meat and potatoes. At tea time another good fill, and at dark, I was taken down into the cellar and there locked in feeling pretty comfortable. They had given me a palliasse⁸⁸ and a blanket besides my overcoat, so that I slept well.

It appeared that these three had been left to look after the extra baggage in the Kammer, until the carts were sent back from the new camp to fetch it. We waited here for five or six days, during which time I was fed on the fat of the land. I asked for a little work and they set me to emptying the palliasses of their straw in main sleeping hall. While on this job, I found a good cap, a haversack, a pair of puttees, and old pair of socks and packet containing a couple of handfuls of beans, which I will keep for the lean days ahead. Of course, there was no arrangement made for my rations, so they took [me] around to the French Comite who supplied me with ample bread.

Then came the order to evacuate the town. Every wheel barrow and old pair of wheels of any and every sort were at once in the keenest demand. For the next three days, I was the witness of some of the maddest scenes I have ever seen. Old men and women, infants in arms, the lame all had to get out immediately and go to Nivalle – about 40 kilos. It was terrible. They had to leave their little all, and with only what they could carry or push, get out and away.⁸⁹ Our shells are following fast behind and the bombs from our aeroplanes do an awful lot of damage, not only to the Germans, but in a greater degree to the civilians. In Valenciennes, I hear, there are hundreds of civilian funerals every day.

⁸⁸ The palliasse was a thin mattress filled with straw, sawdust, etc.

⁸⁹ Frank elaborated on this point in his book. He wrote, "It is hard for Westerners to understand the bitter tragedy of an evacuation of that sort. To us it is our heritage that we pull stakes and move on after we have been in one place a few years for a generation or so. To European peasant standards, any people of less than twenty years' standing in a community are foreigners and outsiders. Certainly anyone who changes his place of residence every five or ten years is considered a fly-by-night and anything but a respectable citizen." [Getaway](#), 170-171.

The first day out from Fresnes we travelled 18 kilos to Boussu, where we stopped for the night.⁹⁰ These fellows are taking along a deuce of a lot of stuff – chiefly food which they put on a Russian prisoners wagon.⁹¹ At Boussu, however,

we took the train and travelled to Mons.⁹² We changed here and for three hours waited on the square, until our next train came along. During this time, many people gave me bread and tobacco, so that when we moved off – about three in the afternoon – I was well supplied. The crowds of refugees in Mons are in a pitiful plight waiting to be moved to – no one knows where.

About dark we arrived in Soignies, where our camp is situated.⁹³ We are billeted in a glove factory. There are no latrines, no conveniences for washing and you sleep where you can.⁹⁴ On the other hand, the civilians here are doing all they can for our relief. Every day we receive each 200 grams of biscuits, also extra potatoes, beans, and a little meat once a week. Yesterday they issued each man a complete clean outfit of underwear, a packet of cigarettes, and a small tin of meat between two men.⁹⁵

Last week we came very near to having peace. President Wilson sent a note with 14 points outlining terms. The Germans agreed to all of them, but W. sent

⁹⁰ Boussu was in Belgium directly east of Fresnes-sur-Escault perhaps 15 km overland. Of this journey, Frank wrote, "I will never forget the sights and sounds I heard that day. Nothing I had previously experienced touched me as did the sight of those people we passed. Chiefly women and children – the able-bodied men had long since been sent off to work in the mines. Only the feeble and sick and old were left of the men." [Getaway](#), 173.

⁹¹ The Russian prisoners were "also moving out, lock, stock and barrel. All the impedimenta of the Russian camp was loaded upon two huge French farm wagons – and such wagons! We never see their like back home. Wheels five feet high; hubs as big as a small man's body; tires six inches wide and an inch thick; weight, around a ton and a half; not a small nail in the whole edifice; built before the Revolution; still sound and good for another century or two of use ... The Russians were moving back into Germany taking the two wagons with their piled-up loads along. And by that I do not mean they were driving horses which would take the loads to Germany. Ten men to a side on two ropes tied to the end of the short stub tongue furnished the motive power ... There were not enough Russians to spell one another off, and their escort allowed them five minutes rest every hour." *Getaway*, 171-172.

⁹² Mons was about 14 km east of Boussu.

⁹³ Soignies was about 18 km northeast of Mons.

⁹⁴ Frank wrote, "Living conditions in the glove factory were the worst I had ever experienced. Less than half of us had mattresses. Only a few had a blanket or overcoat and no one had both. Water was strictly limited. Once a day a water cart came into the camp and each man could get a small tinful – if he had a tin, and until the cart was empty ... Practically all of us were suffering from hunger and dysentery and there were no lavatories or latrines. In our part of the prison there were no proper rooms or sections for sleeping ... Day and night were hideous with the groans and stench from tortured bodies ... I find it difficult at this time to lash my mind into a reconstruction of the unspeakable sights and impressions carved into my soul during the fived horrible days we passed in the glove factory." *Getaway*, 175-176.

⁹⁵ "The civilians at this town were very generous. For food they sent in two American Relief biscuits per man nearly every day. The owner of the glove factory presented each man a new suit of flannel underwear for winter use, and very grateful we were to get it. The fact that many of the poor beggars were so hungry that they traded their garments to the Germans for bread did not in the least detract from the munificent gift." *Getaway*, 176.

another note demanding, as near as I could make out, the abdication of the Kaiser. This seems hard to believe, but at any rate they are still carrying on the war and rumor has it that our boys have Valenciennes and are within five miles of Mons. We can hear the guns as plain or plain as we could when we were in Fresnes.

October 28

The last few days have been spent as usual with the exception that the peace rumors are still strong. We are supposed to be having an armistice now, but some say now that Foch has the chief say about peace terms, and he of course wants to keep at the Germans until they are completely finished. The corporal that brought me back has been giving me extra soup nearly every day, since I have been back.⁹⁶ Our biscuit issue ceased yesterday owing to lack of transport. The Germans are using every effort to get their stuff back. I heard the other day that our men have all the north coast ports, including Antwerp, and are advancing south. But this does not agree with the armistice rumor, so do not put much reliance on either. Today we are on half rations of bread. Saur kraut for dinner and barley for tea. I bought two mess tins of potatoes from a Fritz for one mark.

⁹⁶ Frank mentioned "George, the corporal," who "often smuggled me a little stew from his own mess." George was one of the three guards who had discovered Frank hiding in the storehouse at Fresnes. In spite of their initial roughness, all three of them treated him so well during the week he was in their charge, that Frank "grew to be almost one of the family." [Getaway](#), 170, 176.