

29/12/16. Reveille at 2 A.M. horses fed and fast broken. We, miserable objects in a mass of equipment, were man-handled on to wondering horses, well laden guns and wagons, and before daybreak; isolated stragglers (and they were few) witnessed through the falling snow, a procession of overcoats, "gaspirators," tin hats, haversacks, full bandoliers, leather jackets, etc. etc., the occasional glisten of an eye in the darkness or a muffled growl about confounded gear, being the only indication of human presence. A few remarks (by no means affectionate) about LARKHILL and the Plains were occasionally audible. Cpl. Patrick's (H.Q.) horse was the exception that proved the rule, and showed his regard for the mud hill, by making for his late stables (or elsewhere) at a gallop, taking all equipment except Cpl. Patrick.

31/12/16. Slept during transit across ditch and woke at 6 a.m. to tell French post card sellers to go to Holborn. Disembarking here (LE HAVRE) we collected drivers and horses who had already arrived, got aboard train with all paraphernalia and steamed out at 1 p.m.

1/1/17. Passed through the French towns of ROUEN, BOULOGNE, CALAIS, ST OMER, HAZEBROUCK to BAILLEUL. When trains stopped en route it was invariably lined by French children calling for "biski." Several of our boys attempted conversation with them in French, but the youngsters did not appear to understand their own language. By the aid of acetylene lamps we emptied the train at 10 p.m. and during the 10 kilo ride to STRAZEELE a staff man found that to maintain a centre of gravity while asleep on horseback needs practice. Throughout the ride the roar of the guns was distinctly audible. Arriving at the village of STRAZEELE, horses were picketed, watered and fed, and we retired to the old barn which was to be our habitation. Pigs resented our intrusion, but the application of boot to bacon proved effective. Horse lines were in a cultivation paddock, and armed with shovels, we slily crawled there three times a day to dig the muddies out for their meals. We quickly located egg and chip shops, where the French scholars among us volunteered the information that "Je desire five oofs" meant "I can do five eggs." Happening to be eating eggs after hours one evening long after the "8 o'clock fini" I was saved from the clutches of the M.P.'s by the mediation of Madeline. Fortunately W.O. Macartney and Sgt. Buckle were also there, and even had I been captured I was not on my own.

9/1/17. Signallers and some of the gunners left for ARMENTIERES front to benefit by a few days initiation by the Tommies. The latter told terrible tales of the horrors of war. I thought it as well to write home and to send my money away, but the R.F.A. lads were probably pulling our legs.

18/1/17. The Batteries left in sections for their respective positions at 10 a.m. in a snow storm, which added to other discomforts and continued till late in the afternoon. Guns were installed after dark and the teams arrived at wagon lines at midnight, tired drivers turning into bunk at 1 a.m.

18/1/17. Took over definitely from the Tommy Battery which had been covering our infantry. This day also marked the start of French ice works. It was gratifying, after our long training, to be at last assisting to hold the line.

21/1/17. First casualty in Brigade - a "Blighty" for Bob Fowler (26th) for which "Fritz" will pay.

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#### PERSONAL.

Sgt. Fidler (107) having heard all about Gallipoli trenches while in Egypt, would like to compare them with our French ones. It is quite possible he will be appointed Minister for Duckboards and Dug-outs in the next Cabinet.

Gnrs. Astill and Gunboat Smith (26th) have returned from the trenches and are making a rapid recovery.

Sgt. Weil (26th) will shortly complete his course of salute practice. The Bell Sub. will then have the use of the mirror.

Clog-Dancer Smith of 27th buzzer fame, has secured an engagement with a West End theatre.

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#### ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

(-5th). We do not think the Sgt. Major referred to the nails supporting your "strides" when he said "Henyone hever 'aving a hitch to report at once to the hem ho (M.O.)."

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Dvr. Murphy (25th). Your horse evidently died of rheumatoid arthritis caused by the greasy heal reaching the heart. Corn plaster may have averted the demise.

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As you could not cast your head and eyes to the left with a stiff neck, you were right in saluting with your hat off. (Reply to Linesman Seale (26th).)

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Gnr. Geo. Hewitson (25th). For loss of appetite we suggest taking three tins of bully beef and 3 army biscuits before and after meals.

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