

This article contains extracts from the war diary of my Grandfather, Major Swindell. He was a Pioneer in the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment. Having joined the colours in 1906, he served right through the war, from being one of the Old Contemptibles, all the way to the armistice. He ended the war as Battalion Pioneer Sgt.

The diary was written in two separate volumes - one is a Letts diary for 1915, covering the period 5th August 1914 to 31st December 1916 and the other is a notebook which covers the period 1st January 1916 to 3rd September 1918. The diary ends two months before the armistice. I don't know whether he ended there or if he started a missing third volume. The diary covers most of the major battles of WW1 - starting with the Retreat from Mons (including Le Cateau), the Marne/Aisne, First Ypres, Second Ypres, The Somme/Ancrre, Messines and the 1918 offensives.

The reader may be puzzled about my grandfather's name, Major. The story goes that this unusual name came about from a short-lived tradition in his family of naming the boys after army ranks. Major was the last one, as after he was born, all the women in the family got together and put a stop to it.

My father read parts of the diary over the years, but he was put off reading the whole thing, as the handwriting can be quite difficult to decipher. I decided to attempt to transcribe the diary for the benefit of both my father (who died shortly after I finished) and future generations. It's been a great experience for me also, as my knowledge of WW1 history has increased enormously since I started the process.

Vol 1. – 5th Aug 1914 to 31st Dec 1915

Notice

In the event of my death, please forward this diary to.

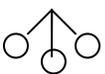
Miss V. Walton.
No. 2 Hyndman Grove,
Hyndman St.
Peckham.
S.E.

(Signed)

M Swindell
Pioneer 2nd Manchester Regt.
B.E.F.

3-2-15

Personal Memoranda

Watch No..... 
 Season Ticket No.....for soup.....
 Stores Ticket No.....Will think about it.....
 Bicycle No.....303 s.a.a.
 Bank Pass Book No.....Also Ran.....
 Telephone No.....To Come.....
 Telegraphic Address....Ditto.....
 Size in Gloves.....Try Bleaching powder.....
 Size in Collars.....No Dog.....
 Size in Hats.....6, 5/8 without lining.....
 Size in Boots.....7, 32/16.....
 Weight.....11st 6lbs Date...Pudding.....
 Height.....5ft 12ins...Date....."
 Insurance falls due.....In the field.....
 Name and Address.....Billy Upton, Somewhere.....

Train Service

To	From
Trench	Trench
3.am	3.am

Diary
Of
M Swindell, Pioneer
2nd Battalion The Manchester Regt.
14th Brigade, 5th Division, France.

Aug 5th 1914.

[Curragh] Recalled from Donard Field Firing Camp to Regiment on mobilisation. Arrived at 6-30pm at Curragh where Batt was stationed.

Aug 6th to Aug 12th 1914.

[Curragh] Going through the hundred and one things that is necessary when a Regiment has orders to mobilise. Some seven hundred reservists arrived from the depot at Ashton-u-Lyne.

Aug 13th 1914.

[Curragh] Left Keane Bks at 9.30am for Curragh siding, entrained for (Destination not Known). 11.30am arrived at North Wall Dublin. Troops slept in Royal Bks. Good reception from town people as we marched through.

Aug 14th 1914 .

[Dublin] Left North Wall at 8-30pm on the Buteshire, heavy thunderstorm while embarking. Splendid send off from people of Dublin. (Destination not Known)

Aug 16th 1914.

[The Buteshire] Weather broke with dawn, rain etc. Shoals of porpoise kept us company. 4pm French torpedo destroyer stopped us, we exchanged greetings. 5pm sighted land. 6pm took aboard pilot & arrived at [Le] Harve (France) 7pm. Disembarked at 11-30pm & slept in dock shed.

Aug 18th 1914 .

Arrived at (Le-Cateau) 1.00pm. Rather glad, stiff from all night ride. Stopped for dinner in field, and at 4pm marched off, arrived & billeted at Landrecies 8pm.

Aug 21st 1914.

Left Landrecies 7am, arrived at St Waast-les-Bavay at 2-30pm, a distance of 16 miles. Went into billets.

Aug 22nd 1914.

Left les Bavay at 6-45am. Crossed the Belgium frontier at 8-30am. Very hot and thirsty. Arrived at Hainin 2-0pm. People very good, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, food etc, in galore, thrown at one as one marched along, billeted in a ballroom of an Estaminet at Thulin.

Aug 23rd 1914.

[Thulin] Inspection of billets by the CO at 9.30am. Heard big guns fire at 11-00am. Watched shells burst over Mons. Battalion fell in 11-30am and took up position along side canal.

Engagement started 12-30pm. Heavy firing (both artillery and rifle) between 2pm and 7-30pm. A few casualties.

Aug 25th 1914.

[Bavey] Moved off at 4-45am distance 25 miles. Retiring. Very hot, arriving at Le Cateau 1-30pm Took up position.

Aug 26th 1914.

[Le-Cateau] Big Battle of Le-Cateau. Battle started with the break of dawn, the firing was terrible. Large number of casualties killed and wounded. Ordered to retire at 3-30pm. Arrived at about 8-0pm. Raining very hard. Snatched a couple of hours sleep & woke up wet through, & found we were on the move, still retiring. (Batt 400 strong, out of 1200)

Aug 28th 1914.

[Pontoise] Retirement continued. General French compliments troops on their behaviour at Le-Cateau. Battalion reorganised.

Aug 30th 1914.

Marching all day. A few minutes halt each hour. Everybody tired and sleepy, job to wake troops to move on again.

Sept 1st 1914.

[Attachy] 3rd & 4th Divisions in action. Battalion acted as general reserve, marched all day, arrived and bivvied at St Quentin about 10-30pm.

Sept 6th 1914.

[Favieres] Marched off at 6-30am & arrived at Coutry 6-0pm. We advancing, enemy retiring.

Sept 9th 1914.

[Rougeville] Marched off at 4-30am. Battalion acting as advance guard. Got into heavy artillery from the enemy at Saasy, about 9-0am. Our guns got into action & things were a bit more even. One battery of the enemy were doing considerable damage. Our artillery could not locate it. Battalion received orders in conjunction with the DCLI to take the guns. Casualties very heavy in the advance - mostly by shrapnel. About 4pm our heavy guns found the enemy battery & put paid to them. We advanced and took the hill, the battle being over about 6pm. Captured the artillery of 6 guns. Enemy retiring, leaving hundreds of dead, 70 was counted in one trench alone, alongside the battery of guns. Our casualties very severe. Bivouac on side of hill Montreine-n-Lyom.

Sept 10th 1914.

[Montepeine] Marched off at daybreak. Passed a lot of bodies of English & German troops, probably crawled out of the woods onto the road to die. DCLI got severely cut up in last nights battle, there were also 700 Germans captured. A draft of 190 reinforcements joined us about 3pm.

Sept 13th 1914.

Marched off at 5pm. Enemy driven back over river by our artillery. We advanced & crossed river (Aisne) by pontoon bridge. Got shelled in crossing, no casualties. Then opened out in skirmishing order & advanced to attack the hill about a mile away on which the Germans were strongly entrenched. Heavily shelled by shrapnel in advancing, few casualties. Captured hill.

Sept 14th 1914.

Advanced & took up position on edge of wood [west side of wood at Chivres]. Very heavy firing on both sides. The village of St Marguerette was practically blown to pieces. A few wounded. Weather rotten.

Sept 26th 1914.

(Jury). Decent billet – very comfortable. Germans fired on our aeroplanes all morning. General Smith-Doran came through the village in his car, & seeing a few of us standing about, pulled up & had quite an interesting chat to us. The following are some of his remarks. That the health of the Batt considering the trying times we had had under fire, & the wet weather was remarkable. That our trenches was far the worst along the whole line. That the behaviour of the troops throughout had been splendid. That the Manchesters had had a very severe and trying time, but had borne it well, & that the retirement from Mons would be known in history as one of the greatest & most successful retreats accomplished.

Editors Note: After a period of rest, the Battalion moved north to Flanders.

Oct 8th 1914.

[Vauchelles] Stayed in this billet all day. The people of the house laid out the table in the best room, used their best crockery & invited us to test their cider, which, needless to say we did, & pronounced it splendid. We got our rum issue just before we moved off, about 5.30pm. Offered it to the landlord to smell, sorry to relate he swiped the lot off neat (about three quarters of a pint) (I wish I could drink it like him). We couldn't say anything after his kindness. We fell in shortly after, & he (the landlord) came to shake hands with us, he hadn't a leg to stand on. Don't know whether

he thought he was young again but, he rolled his sleeves up & wanted to fight the village. His wife said something to him, he turned & struck at her which, fortunately for her did not land, but the striker himself landed in the gutter. It was amusing, we marched off amid laughter, at 6.30pm.

Editors Note: From 12th October to 14th November, the Battalion were in and out of the line in the La Bassee sector, east of Bethune.

Oct15th 1914.

[Richebourg] German infantry attack lasted till midnight (14th). D Coy got it in the neck, 70 killed, wounded & missing, of same Coy in this attack.

Oct 20th 1914.

[Lorgies] Sharp fighting A & B Coys made bayonet charge. Later in the day D Coy charged & lost 93 killed & wounded, but it brought the pains on with the Germans, some of them broke the record at running.

Nov 12th 1914.

[La Gorgue] Germans still shelling billets but hitting nothing so far. The Batt took up their position in the firing line, I moved back with 1st line of transport to La Gorgue. Germans put half a day shells over without however doing any damage. Rain all night so dug in under bank for shells.

Nov 13th 1914.

Still at La Gorgue. Went up to the firing line with ammunition & tool limber. Wet all day, managed to find an old barn for shelter.

Nov 15th 1914.

[Estaires] Marched off at 8am, through Doulieu into Meteren. Rain, hail & snow all the way. The billet that was allotted to us was awful, so after things had quietened down a little we scouted & found a nice little place in a convent where I had the pleasure of a bath. There was also a good fire so dried our clothes etc. Still raining.

Editors Note: From 16th November 1914 to 2nd April 1915, the Battalion operated in the Messines sector, north east of Bailleul.

Nov 16th 1914.

[Meteren] Sorry to leave, but marched off at 3.15pm passing through Bailleul into Neuve-Eglise. The Batt going into position at Wulverghem. Went up with ammunition & tool limber. Afterwards returning to Neuve-Eglise.

Nov 17th 1914.

[Neuve-Eglise] Still at same place. Batt got shelled by Germans with J Johnsons first day. Lost both of our machine guns, the foresight of one being blown off, a shell dropped on the other burying the gun and gun team. Guns officer and one man killed. Gun Sergt mind unhinged & four wounded. The head of the man killed could not be found. Killed are buried at dressing station.

Nov 19th 1914.

[Neuve-Eglise] Received orders to move to dressing station [1km NE of Wulvergem], we (4 pioneers) now stop at dressing station with the doctor. Much easier for us.

Nov 22nd 1914.

D. Station, heavy artillery fire all day. Two German airmen brought down by our artillery. Buried one of ours who died from exposure.

Nov 28th 1914.

['Aunties'] We are back for a rest, Half way between Bailleul & Dranouter. It's a large barn holding A Coy and Headquarters. The owners still occupy it. We have named the Lady (Auntie). She wanted 1 penny per bucket for water. We had no money so she took away the handle of the pump. That meant a walk of half a mile through the muck for water. P.S. The troops when speaking of (Auntie) used the most affectionate terms.

Nov 30th 1914.

Still in same billets. What with Auntie, the mud & the boys on the lice, I shan't be sorry when we shift. Was issued out with the fur coats this day.

Dec 2nd 1914.

Aunties'. Had a generals's inspection by General Count von Gleeson. This made the boys moan a little, having to turn out for a German. Auntie went strong today. She put a chalk mark on her wood, & of course marks and all went. She got wound up & then the music started. She only stopped for breath. The only thing I can compare her voice with is a steam hooter.

Dec 4th 1914.

Still at Aunties'. Boys tickled her up this morning. Milked the cows before she was up. It brought the pains when she found the cows dry, then she counted her hens. She had all the officers up and down through the mud, searching here and there. We had a chicken for dinner that day. I think it is a pity we shift tomorrow for I fancy the rabbits wouldn't be so bad.

Dec 5th 1914.

Moved off at 3.15pm. The parting with Auntie was rather painful, the boys threw her kisses & one threw a handful of feathers over her then we enjoyed the funniest five minutes of our lives. Auntie can dance too. Took up the same trenches at Wulverghem relieving the West Ridings. We went to the same dressing station which was still standing all right.

Dec 8th 1914.

D. Station. One man who was on listening patrol got lost & laid for 36 hours between the firing lines. He got hit by snipers, but afterwards found his bearings & got safely back our own lines. Casualties 1 killed & 3 wounded.

Dec 9th 1914.

D. Station. 40 men & 1 officer of "B" Coy volunteered to make a charge on the advance trench of the Germans. The night was favourable being foggy, they advanced close enough to charge, but

when charging, they came into contact with barbed wire entanglements erected just in front of the German trenches. Germans opened a rapid fire & our fellows had to retire & was very fortunate in getting back with 3 slightly wounded & 1 missing. During the day we had two killed with the one bullet in the trenches.

Dec 19th 1914.

Saint-Jans-Cappel. Up to the tops of our boots in mud. Rain continuous. (Red letter day) Got paid out 5 francs - first since I left The Curragh. It was like giving a donkey strawberries. What is 4/- to a fighting soldier.

Dec 24th 1914.

D. Station. We hoped there would be no casualties during the holidays. But our hopes were soon dashed to the ground. 1 lieut (Mr Yarrow) killed, 1 sergt & 1 pte wounded, but both died afterwards. It almost made one think that the Germans had singled out 1 officer, 1 sergt & 1 pte.

Xmas Day 1914.

D. Station. A little firing by artillery at dawn, but died away as if by mutual consent towards breakfast time. Our chaps went and met the Germans half way between the trenches & exchanged cigarettes, cigars etc. We thought we might get a little larger rum issue, instead we only got half issue. So none of us were interested. Received Kings & Queens post card.

Dec 26th 1914.

D. Station. One or two shells were fired on both sides early morn but soon stopped. Our lads went and met the Germans again. They are Bavarians opposite us, & say that they are fed up, & that the Prussians have left them in the lurch.

Dec 29th 1914.

D. Station. Slight artillery fire all day. Got relieved by the DCLI's & the Dorsets at dusk and move back taking up the old billets between Dranouter and Bailleul. But we did not get into "Aunties" this time. B Coy have that place & I hope they enjoy it. We are further up the road in a decent little

barn, about 6 yards over the frontier line in France. There is only one fault about this billet. A cow starts lowing about 3am, but as we are bed-mates I suppose one mustn't say anything.

Dec 30th 1914.

The shed with the cow. Received Princess Mary's gift.

1915

Jan 1st 1915.

The shed with the cow. Heavy artillery fire from the French on our left front. The Colonel inspected billets, B Coy went out trench digging at Wulverghem. We are in reserve while here.

Jan 11th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Went up to the dressing station & buried one of ours. After leaving the dressing station, it is up to ones knees in mud all the way up to the firing line, & one has a job to dodge "johnsons" holes in the dark. We went through this lot up to a place called Shelled Farm, which is so called on account of some terriers lighting a fire there on New Years Eve. (A bit cheeky considering it is only a matter of 200 yds from our frontline) The Germans got onto it & shelled them out, knocking down half the farm in the process. Returned to the dressing station, and then onto Neuve-Eglise, where we arrived at 3.30am. We had a thunderstorm on our way to the dressing station. Very severe lightning.

Jan 15th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Went up to D. Station. Two wounded no one killed so had no occasion to go to shelled out farm. 30 of A Coy reported sick, 18 had to be carried from the trenches with frost bitten feet. Captured two more snipers (civilians).

Jan 20th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Have 17 soup carriers to make out of biscuit boxes for the Batt use while in trenches. (ie) carry hot soup from Headquarters to the trenches.

Feb 23rd 1915.

Neuve-Eglise.

Bat went into the trenches at dusk. Went up to dressing station and took over Brigade stores, comprising of bombs, flares, hand & rifle grenades, picks, shovels, buckets, sandbags, corrugated iron, detonators etc. Stopped here for the time the Batt was in the trenches to issue out and take in tools, stores etc. Sharp rifle fire all night. The place where these stores are kept has been christened Firework Hut. A fine name as there is about two ton of explosives stored & I have to stop there night & day.

Feb 24th 1915.

Firework Hut. Am not allowed to show my head outside the door during the daytime, as we are in full view of number 8 trench. The snipers there are pretty clever. The immediate district is called La-Plas-de-ferme. The enemy shelled our trenches during the day, result 1 wounded. Heavy rifle fire started at dusk. Weather fine.

Feb 25th 1915.

Firework Hut. Heavy gun fire started just after dawn, shells flying over this place from both sides. Germans shelled Neuve-Eglise. First shell "a Johnson" dropped in the square & some of the 5th Cheshire Territorials ran out of their billets to see the effects of the shell, when shrapnel followed up the Johnson, wounding 5 of them.

The 6th Cheshire Territorials on our left had 7 killed & several wounded, we had 1 killed & 1 wounded. We buried the former alongside the others at the side of the farm. No rest for the wicked, am up all night handing out tools & fireworks. I am thinking it will be a quick go out if a shell catches firework hut?

Mar 8th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Went down to Mud Town, as the huts are called, & had to canvass up the inside of the officers quarters.

Mar 10th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Went down to Mud Town. Had to make two tables & two stools for the C.O. & Adj. There was an accident at the battery of 4.7" guns. A shell exploded as it was being loaded, killing 1 & wounding 4. One not expected to live. If he does he will be blinded for life. Our artillery started bombarding this morning, we had some more shells over in Neuve-Eglise. The batt got up a boxing tournament, a pretty decent show considering.

Mar 16th 1915.

They started off again at about four in the afternoon, with a heavy concussion shell followed up by shrapnel. 40 shells all told they sent over today, dropping five clean in the middle of the yard, knocked half the farm down but didn't touch Firework Hut. Batt relieved by the East Surreys at about 10.30. Casualties 2 wounded. Casualties at Firework Hut during shelling - Broke the cat's leg.

The fun started about 10.30 with a six inch shell dropping clean into the middle of the dung heap in the centre of the yard. I was a case of get out and get under. I got across to the other side where they dress the wounded before the next one came. We could just here the report of the gun & hear the shell coming, just like a motor car going at full speed. We could hear whether they were short or going over the top. They had sent over fourteen & the betting was 2:1 on hitting the farm. Bill Hodge stood at the doorway, "hear it comes" he said, "and it's a short 'un". Sure enough it was for it knocked parts of the farm down. I thought it time to have the cellar for it & I made tracks. They sent 5 more over then stopped for dinner.

Mar 20th 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Finished off soup boxes. Got word from orderly room that Capt Parker was killed at 12 noon. He was known the father of the company. He was also a millionaire. One private was also killed. They were brought down to Neuve-Eglise and buried there. There were also 7 wounded.

Mar 21st 1915.

Neuve-Eglise. Batt was relieved by the Yorkshires of the 63 Brigade. We are to take up a fresh position. Proceed to Bailleul tonight. Went up to the dressing station as usual, I killed. Had to wait

until the parson came before we could bury him. This is a new order out that the parson has to be present at each burial, or else. Before, the doctor done the service. It was 11 o'clock before he arrived & 12 before we got away from the dressing station. The Batt had gone on. We had 13 kilometres to walk. Arrived at Bailleul at 3.30am. Casualties in 2 days 3 killed & 9 wounded. Weather fine.

Mar 22nd 1915.

Bailleul. Went into the R.C. church which dates back to 1609, some splendid carving inside. Strolled round the town Germans did not do too much damage while in occupation.

Mar 29th 1915.

Locre. Had to report to staff Captain at Kemmel at 8am. Arrived there & found we had to stop (attached to Brigade staff) to make wire entanglements frames covered with wire & sacking, for the roofs of dugouts, answering the same purpose as corrugated iron. Casualties 2 killed 10 wounded. Still had to go from Kemmel to the dressing station to bury the dead.

Apr 1st 1915.

Locre. Made crosses for the 3 we buried last night. Nothing doing.

Editors Note: Between 2nd and 7th April 1915 the Battalion moved to Ypres.

Apr 8th 1915.

Ypres. Have to meet the ration carts at about 1000 yards across country to the road. Huns have been shelling Ypres today, the shells passing clean over us. We have made a good start in this district - 5 killed & 21 wounded, mostly caused by French mortars. One of the killed had his face blown away.

Apr 10th 1915.

Ypres. The name of the one barn that is left standing, all that is left of the farm buildings is called Chester Farm. It is possible for the stretcher bearers to fetch the wounded out from 29 trench in the daytime, being protected by a high ridge. Casualties 1 killed, 15 wounded.

Apr 13th 1915.

Ypres. Had a Zeppelin over in the night, dropped two bombs into Reninghelst, Damage put a few of last years turnips out of step. One of ours & a Belgian aeroplane went up & dropped bombs on to it, bringing it down at Popperinge, taking 30 prisoners. 1 Company for the trenches as working party. 1 wounded. Weather continues fine.

Apr 17th 1915.

Ypres. Aeroplanes were hovering over us all day. At 7pm the Batt started with the blowing up of hill 60. I had the pleasure of seeing it go up. The bombardment started. Shells flew in all directions. I was not allowed to go up to the dressing station on account of Germans shelling all roads. Bombardment continued throughout the night.

Apr 18th 1915.

Ypres. Germans counter attacked at dawn but was repulsed. We took 88 rank & file & two officers prisoners, some of which were left in the blowing up of their trenches yesterday, the remainder during the counter attack. The Batt's casualties were 2 killed & 41 wounded. Went up to dressing station at dusk. 2 shells exploded amongst us as we were unloading the rations, luckily hitting no one. We got the rations of the other two pioneers who's turn it was to stop at the dressing station. Just as we turned off the road to cut across the field we got another shell bursting just in front of us & wounding a chap just behind us. Reckon our luck was in.

Apr 24th 1915.

Ypres. Bombardment & battle still continues. The French were blind & panic stricken with vitriol shells and gases but the Canadians stuck it. A lot of the French & Canadians are blind. Went up to dressing station at dusk, have to skirmish for it owing to shelling. Casualties 5 wounded.

Apr 27th 1915.

Ypres. Made some forms for the officers mess. Two companies go up to the firing line to night & come away in the morning. Battle still continues on our left. Our 1st Batt passed us this morning to take up some trenches & missed a lot of old faces.

Apr 30th 1915.

Ypres. The Batt went into the trenches, relieved the East Surreys. My turn up at dressing station. Had 1 wounded in taking over we nearly stopped a 13 pounder on our way up, coming up by the ragtime battery as we call it, owing to it dropping shells 1,000 yds behind our firing line into our reserve dugouts, causing several casualties.

May 6th 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Germans used gas on Hill 60 last night (It is a gas-ly war). The ration party had a hard job to bring rations up last night owing to the amount of shells they put on the roads. Firing was pretty heavy on both sides all day, especially with trench mortars from the enemy, killing in the process 1, & wounding 15 of ours. Weather moderate.

May 26th 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Very restless all along the line during night, on account of the presence of gas. I suppose about 12 noon the Germans shelled with heavy shrapnel (Canal Post) causing several casualties of ours. It's a bit awkward in moving about now as the Germans have rigged up 3 observation balloons, result, Canal Post being shelled. Had a very narrow escape myself. While digging a grave for one chap who was practically blown to pieces, the Germans started shelling again, only putting them further over this time. The first shell gave us warning to dive for cover, the second dropped 4 yards in front of the grave we were digging a minute before. Talk about digging ones own grave. Casualties 2 killed & 5 wounded.

May 29th 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Night & day quiet. Think the Germans are retiring from this position. No sign of a relief yet. The material that we are using against the gas is a mixture of Hypo-sulphate-

soda 10lbs, common soda 2lbs, 1 half pint glycerine, to two galls of water. The Germans are still shelling Ypres. Casualties 7 wounded. Cannot find out the result of the bombardment, which started on our left yesterday.

May 31st 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Today seem to have been held in reserve for aeroplanes of which there were plenty. Hundreds of shells were fired at them. The blue sky was dotted with the white puffs of smoke, which look like balls of cotton wool. Still sending them into Ypres. I don't know whether the Germans are retiring or not but it has gone very quiet all along this front since the Italians have joined in the scrap. The 14th Division of Kitcheners have arrived in this section. Casualties 5 wounded, one an officer. Weather splendid.

Jun 1st 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). They have started breaking Kitcheners Div. In by putting a platoon in with a company of each Regiment what holds the trenches. It's time we were relieved, been in now 32 days without a break. Hardly any fighting here during the daytime - as soon as it is beginning to go dark the battle starts & stops at daybreak. A Zep [zeppelin airship] passed over this evening for the coast & England. Hope he bumps something before he arrives. Casualties 1 died of wounds.

Jun 2nd 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). At one-thirty this morning we had a visit from a German aeroplane who stayed with us for a couple of hours, flying very low. Don't know if he found any secrets but he moved off before it got properly daylight. The part of Kitcheners's 14th Div. who are in with us are the K.R.R. One of them was killed last night and we buried him today. Heard today that the Zep that went over last evening did bump & was brought down near the coast. Casualties 1 wounded.

Jun 3rd 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Had orders to bury a horse behind Hill 60. Made an attempt to go up late last night taking quick lime etc, but was too hot and had to come back. So went up early this morning about 3.30. After wondering about a bit found the carcass, which must have been there for

months. The stench from it was awful. We buried it. Vomited and was very quiet all day. A bombardment started on our right about 1pm round Armentieres way. The Germans shoved a board up above their trench with these words on it. We have captured Pryermyst & 260,000 prisoners. A Belgian battery opened out behind & knocked the board up a fire. Casualties 4 wounded. Weather splendid.

Jun 22nd 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Very quiet all the morning. A desultory artillery fire carried on all day. Spent best part of the day making a new latrine for the officers. Casualties 1 killed 6 wounded. Killed - Lt Vanderspal. Weather inclined to rain.

Jul 23rd 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Artillery active all day. There was a loud explosion which shook this place about 3.30pm. Heard later that it was one of our mines which blew up the German trench in front of our 26 & 27 trenches. Casualties 1 wounded.

Jul 24th 1915.

Ypres (Chester Farm). Paved the pathway leading into the graveyard with bricks. Heavy artillery fire during the morning. We were relieved at night by the 1st Gordens, making in all 86 days in without relief. We moved back to Reninghelst, arriving there about 3.30am. Casualties 1 killed & 6 wounded.

Editors Note: On the 24th July 1915, 2/Manchesters left the front line for a rest, following which there came a move to the Somme (Suzanne/Maricourt), which in turn was followed by a period of leave.

Jul 27th 1915.

Eecke. Battalion inspected by General Plummer. Weather continues fine.

Jul 28th 1915.

Eecke. Having parades just as if it were peacetime.

Jul 30th 1915.

Eecke. Brigade on route march. Weather splendid.

Jul 31st 1915.

Eecke. Transport moved off at 9pm, Batt at 12mn & marched →

Aug 1st 1915.

[to] Godewaarsvelde where we entrained. We arrived at Corbie 3.20pm & at Daours 6.10pm, when we billeted in out houses, farms etc. One man fell out of the train whilst asleep at Calais. Only scratched his hand. We travelled in cattle trucks - 40 per truck.

Aug 2nd 1915.

Daours. Roll call at 7am. Breakfast. Bathing parade afternoon. One of the Surreys was drowned while bathing.

Aug 3rd 1915.

Daours. Made some eye protectors for the gas helmets. Weather fine.

Aug 4th 1915.

Daours. Batt paraded & moved off at 8am. marching to Morlancourt where we billeted. Taking over the billets of the French 403 Regiment. Arriving at 1.30pm.

Aug 5th 1915.

Morlancourt. The billets here are in a filthy state, the French have no idea of sanitation whatever. Shit paper & tins all over the shop. Result - we have to clean it all up.

Aug 9th 1915.

Suzanne. The cooks, kitchens, etc. go right into the trenches at this place. No casualties.

Aug 11th 1915.

Suzanne. Received permit, warrant, cash, etc. to proceed on leave tomorrow. Weather fair.

Aug 14th 1915.

Leave. A dream.

Aug 16th 1915.

Leave. Dream continues.

From trenches. The listening patrol last night bumped an advanced party of the enemy (ie. bombing party). The patrol was surprised, one being captured, remainder retired back to our foretrench, two of them being seriously wounded. They all receive a Field General Courts Martial. Casualties 2 wounded, 1 captured.

Aug 18th 1915.

Leave. Find dream a damn good one.

Aug 19th 1915.

Leave. Finish of dream. Left Victoria 5.40pm to return. Didn't want to but had to.

Aug 20th 1915.

Suzanne. Arrived at Suzanne 12 noon. Sampled whisky & wine with the boys. No casualties.

Weather fine.

Sep 2nd 1915.

Sailly-Laurette. Made tables for officer's mess. Also some notice boards.

Sep 5th 1915.

Sailly-Laurette. Officers of the Brigade held a race meeting at 4pm. Had some very fine sport.

Sep 6th 1915.

Sailly-Laurette. Made table for C.O. Football match between our machine gunners and the Devons. Devons won by 4 to 1. Weather fine.

Sep 8th 1915.

Sailly-Laurette. Football match between our stretcher bearers and the Devons. Devons won by 1 to 0. Weather grand.

Sep 12th 1915.

Suzanne. Pretty sharp action on the right, presumably by the French, lasting about two hours until 6.30pm. The result of those four men who were courts martialed for leaving the listening post on Aug 16th, was sentenced to death, but were commuted to 10 years penal servitude. Weather very hot. Enemy fired at one of our aeroplanes this morning, one of the shells did not burst at the proper time, but came down amongst the transport stampeding some mules but without hurting any.

Sep 14th 1915.

Suzanne. Quiet. Heavy firing still going on on our left. Have orders to make dugouts. Expecting trouble here shortly.

Sep 19th 1915.

Suzanne. Plenty of duels with aeroplanes of both sides. One thing it affords amusement for the troops. Weather fine.

Sep 22nd 1915.

Suzanne & Maricourt. Had orders to shift up to Maricourt this evening. Batt goes into trenches. Had four wounded just as they took over, by trench mortar. Casualties 4 wounded. Have a carpenters shop here - fireplace, bench etc. On the whole it is a very decent dugout. Weather fine.

Sep 24th 1915.

Maricourt. Busy making trench gratings etc. Enemy shelling village just after dusk. Fighting mostly by trench mortar, bombs and hand grenades. Weather changeable.

Sep 29th 1915.

Maricourt. Had one of our signallers hit in the calf. C Coy captured a prisoner today, fine big young fellow, about 19 years old, stood 6ft high, gave himself up. It appears that about 12 came out to give themselves up, but our fellows opened up a fire on them, 11 went back & this fellow dropped into a hole & waited until the firing died down & then came in. Weather cold. 1 wounded.

Oct 6th 1915.

Maricourt. Quiet all day, the usual give & take game at night time. We had one fellow wounded during the night. An officer got onto the parapet & shouted some rather endearing names regarding the Huns, & of course they (the huns) didn't like it & sent over quite an appreciable amount of presents in reply. Result, one of ours hit. Casualties 1 wounded.

Oct 8th 1915.

Maricourt. Still hear the banging of heavy guns on our left & right. Our front quiet, mostly all bog & marshy land. Fighting done by bombing parties at night.

Oct 10th 1915.

Maricourt. A most beautiful day Plenty of aeroplanes of both sides were in evidence. It is always interesting to watch the shells burst all around the planes. Not quite so interesting for the chaps above. Weather uncertain.

Oct 11th 1915.

Maricourt. Terrific bombardment started with the coming of the dawn on our left & still continues. On our front quiet by day, by night sniping & interludes of hand grenades & bombing.

Dec 10th 1915.

Maricourt. Had to put up some beds in the dugouts in 26 trench this afternoon. Trenches half full of mud & water. Weather wet.

Dec 11th 1915.

Maricourt. Wet. Troops up to their necks in mud. Pretty cheerful however.

Dec 13th 1915.

Suzanne. Put up a drying shed for troops to dry clothing etc. German plane bombed Maricourt today.

Dec 25th 1915.

Suzanne. Rained all night & stopped about 8am. Nothing doing, just cleaned up a bit & waited for dinner, which wasn't so bad, taking things all round. Quiet all day.

Vol 2 – 30th Dec 1915 to 3rd Sep 1918

Editors Note: On 30th December 1915, 2/Manchesters were transferred from the 5th to the 32nd Division with the rest of 14 Brigade.

Dec 31st 1915.

Sailly Laurette, about 12 miles from Suzanne. Erected goal posts for company match for 200 francs for winning company. C company winner. Weather very gusty.

1916

Editors Note: Over the next few days, 2 Manchesters marched north towards Albert and Major Swindells was involved in work near the village of Anthuille, on the river Ancre – an area which was then, before the heavy fighting which would begin 6 months later, a relatively quiet sector.

Jan 4th 1916.

Henencourt. In billets, distance from trenches about 9 miles. One can see the ruins of Albert in the distance. During the afternoon there was a heavy bombardment on the left, could hear the roll of cannon quite distinctly. Weather wet.

Jan 5th 1916.

Henencourt. Nothing much doing. Erected some water troughs for the horses. Very quiet on the whole front.

Jan 13th 1916.

Authuille. Terrific bombardment started away on the left early this morning. Big guns, rifles & machine guns all continued, sounded very much like an attack. Been fairly quiet in front all day, the usual artillery duel taking place. But the enemy seemed to be very wary of using his shells. In digging a pit today came across a body wrapped up in a blanket about 18" under the ground, no cross or anything to mark who or what he was. So it is simply put down as an unknown soldier lies here, hard luck. Weather still persists in keeping wet.

Jan 15th 1916.

Authuille. Dawn broke fine and clear, fairly quiet forenoon but towards evening the music started. The enemy wizz banged the trenches and roads leading to them. Our artillery replied, so there was a considerable amount of strafing going on. This happened several times during the night. One of our officers had a very lucky escape, bullet striking his forehead and glancing upwards came out at a point just beyond the top of his forehead. We have a new machine gun "Lewis", which fires 47 rounds in 5 seconds. These are worrying the Phils a little and so they show us that they cannot receive without returning, they repay with the dear old "wizz bang". About 4pm weather turned to rain.

Fri. Jan 21st 1916.

Henencourt. Pioneer Sgt proceeded on leave this morning - handed duties over to me.

Sat. Jan 22nd 1916.

Henencourt. Made tables & forms for officer's mess. Weather wet.

Sun. Jan 23rd 1916.

Henencourt. Made & fixed shelves in Q.M. Stores.

Wed. Jan 26th 1916.

Henencourt. Batt leave here this afternoon for Martinsart where we do 4 days in reserve before going into trenches. Qr Master has kept me behind on account of Pioneer Sgt's absence. During our turn out, Authuille was severely shelled, so 1 company went to that place in reserve.

Fri. Feb 4th 1916.

Henencourt. Quiet. Shifted Q.M. stores today. Plenty of work, but didn't mind as there was a tot of rum at the finish. 18 months of war today.

Wed. Mar 1st 1916.

Henencourt. Left Henencourt for Albert, passing through the village of Millencourt. Arrived Albert passing under the leaning statue of Madonna & Child on top of the Cathedral. Strange sight. We relieved the Norfolks in trenches at dusk. I stop with Q.M. stores in Chateau.

Thu. Mar 2nd 1916.

Albert. Pretty quiet day. Jeff had a tidy old parcel sent him, so we helped him out with it.

Sat. Mar 4th 1916.

Albert. Still snowing. Busy making boxes for Q.M. stores. Enemy shell town nearly every day. So you have to keep your heads down & eyes open.

Tue. Mar 7th 1916.

Albert. Pancake Tuesday, "so they say"? A few shells arrived today so had the cellar for it. Buried one of ours today. Made a cross for him.

Wed. Mar 15th 1916.

Millencourt. Batt relieved 1st Dorsets in trenches at Dusk. La-Marsel. Arrived Albert about 5pm, under enemy observation balloon all the way. First party on arriving at communication trench were shelled. Fortunately no-one was hurt. I am still with the stores at Fletchers Post.

Thu. Mar 16th 1916.

Albert. Woke up this morning & found the sun shining through the roof & the front wall, The result of shells. Apparently this is a windy corner. Had to fly to cellar this evening. Enemy shelled the town for an hour.

Sat. Mar 18th 1916.

Albert. Did not hear of much damage by the shelling yesterday. Had one or two overtures today & just dodged 'em twice by a bit of luck. One bursted next door to the [officer's] mess in the main street. I was fixing up the fireplace in the dining room. In came all the glass on top of me. I found the cellar in a very few moments. Practically the same thing happened in the evening.

Apr 9th 1916.

Authuille. Take over "G" sector tonight. I proceed to Bouzincourt with Q.M.R. stores.

Apr 23rd 1916.

Bouzincourt. Our artillery opened out with a heavy bombardment on the German first line trenches. 75 members of the 17th H.L.I. were to go over on a bombing raid. When they were ready to go over the top, the artillery lengthened the range & so formed a curtain. The raid was successful, 18 prisoners being captured. The Batt was stood to, but were not called upon. Service was held in Billets - E. Sunday.

Editors Note: 2nd Manchesters spent the next two months mainly resting, working or training in the run up to the Battle of the Somme.

May 25th 26th 27th 1916.

Bouzincourt. Had bad weather most of the time. Regiment getting worked hard with digging etc. Each day. Intermittent artillery fire, at times very heavy.

May 30th 1916.

Contay. Rained all night, everywhere & everything in a muddy state. Heavy bombardment going on.

May 31st 1916.

Contay. Here we have a long program of training to do whilst resting.

Jun 5th to 12th 1916.

Contay Wood. Finishing up the longest spell from firing line we have ever had. But it's been hard work. Training of every known kind & we have spent a rotten time in a swampy wood, raining every day. Haven't had a dry foot since we arrived. Left for Senlis, wretched weather, & billeted there.

Jun 14,15,16,17, 1916.

Authuille. Intermittent shelling & usual rifle fire. Oil cans still being thrown around. We are now in reserve to the 19th L.F. & stay in dugouts at Crucifix Corner (termed London Flats). Had an accident with rifle grenade - 1 killed & 1 wounded.

Jun 18th 1916.

C. Corner. Every spare man digging or carrying ammunition, stores etc.

Jun 25th 1916.

Bouzincourt. Bombardment going pretty strong and was returned to duty from Head Quarters for the push.

Jun 26th 1916.

Bouzincourt. Heavy rain, flooded out. Bombardment still continues. Rejoined the company this afternoon.

Jun 28th 1916.

Averluy Woods. Rained all night, no cover, wet through. Operation cancelled owing to extremely bad weather. Batt falls back to Senlis.

Jun 30th 1916.

Senlis. Hear we move off tonight. 19 of our balloons up. Left Senlis 9pm.

Jul 1, 2, 3, 4th 1916.

Blighty Wood [Authuille Wood]. Arrived Blighty Wood, 10.30pm. Went into fire trench. Batt order A, B Coys follow bombers over the top at daybreak between Authuille & Aveluy. C Coy follows midday, D Coy in reserve. At daybreak D Coy went over & reinforced the Batt. Enemy counter attacked, but were bombed out of the redoubt. We consolidated the rear part of this redoubt during the day. Germans only 30 yds away. At 1am [on the] 3rd we were to be relieved by the H.L.I. who were to take the next line. But they were late & only D Coy could get out. Hell of a bombardment - don't know how we got out. We had a matter of two hours sleep in a barn at Authuille, when a 5.9" shell dropped clean on the top of us, causing several casualties. D Coy spent the remainder of the day carrying up bombs & water to the other three companies in the front line. We had over 300 casualties. Batt was relieved at dusk & fell back on Senlis (dugouts & German food).

Jul 5th & 6th 1916.

Senlis. Arrived here about 6am & rest. We move further back tonight. Heavy bombardment continues at La Boisselle & Thiepval.

Jul 7th 1916.

Senlis. On night of 6th, left Senlis for Forceville, billeted in barn, usual thing. Stood to all night. A big attack on. Got sudden orders this morning to pack up. Left for Senlis, as reserve to Corps. Saw a large batch of prisoners come down from the line, so think the game is going well. Pouring with rain. Ordered up to Bouzincourt this evening. Shelled when we got there. Went into huts. Batt ordered up the line & we leave for Crucifix Corner, Aveluy, about midnight.

Jul 8th 1916.

Crucifix Corner. Raining until midday, Batt acting as carrying parties from Crucifix Corner to trenches. Our old trenches in awful state. Mud up to ones knees. Towards nightfall we relieve the Mids [Middlesex Regt.] in the trenches at Ovillers.

Jul 9th & 10th 1916.

Ovillers. Consolidate trenches all night. 11am orders came for the Batt to go over the top. Batt done good work bombing etc. We lost three pioneers here killed. Was relieved by the jocks [H.L.I.] at nightfall. Batt fell back in reserve, to the old German first line trench.

Jul 11th 1916.

Ovillers. D Coy, being the weakest, acted as carrying party to rest of Batt. Manchesters & Inniskillings go over again & take trenches right & left of village. Batt was relieved tonight & went back to Bouzincourt. My Platoon was 7 strong.

Jul 14th 1916.

Bouzincourt. Sudden orders to pack up again for trenches. Regt went in tonight, 250 strong & took up line at Ovillers. I leave the Coy & go back to Head Quarters, from there to Q.M. Stores - Senlis.

Jul 15th 1916.

Senlis. Batt lost 27 men and 1 officer in bombing raid last night. Am 29 today.

Editors Note: From 17th July to 29th July, the Battalion rested then were moved north to the La Basse Sector (east of Bethune), where they stayed until mid October.

Aug 22nd 1916.

Beuvry. Decent day. Batt had an open air concert. After tea, about 7pm, one of our aeroplanes was hit by an enemy anti-aircraft shell, which exploded the petrol tank & the plane fell to the ground in flames. I think it was impossible for the pilot & observer to have escaped but rumour states otherwise.

Sep 8th to 16th 1916.

Annezin. Batt stayed here in this place in reserve. The pioneers built latrines, cookhouses & meat safes. Weather very inclement. Batt proceeds to the trenches tomorrow.

Sep 26th 1916.

Cambrin. Batt came back into front line. 80 men left behind to practice for a bombing raid.

Sep 27th 1916.

Cambrin. Heard today that Thiepval & Combles had fallen with 5000 prisoners. So I had to make a large board & wrote the following on in paint,

Thiepval - und - Combles

Haben - Geffallen

5000 Gefangenen.

This board was put out at dusk in front of the enemy barbed wire.

Oct 1st 1916.

[Cambrin/Annezin] Fairly quiet. Dick & Jim returned off leave. Escaped zepp raid, but not matrimony.

Oct 5th 1916.

[Bethune] Making beds on bunk fashion for troops.

Oct 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th 1916.

[Cambrin/Annezin] Still making beds. Found a shop where blighty beer is sold, so sampled it some.

Editors Note: On 15th October 2nd Manchesters started the march south to Albert. Major's younger brother Ned had emigrated to Australia with his half brother Viner before the war and was in France with the ANZAC forces.

Oct 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 1916.

[Contay] Still held up by bad weather. During this period I met an Australian who was stationed near Ned. Asked him to deliver a letter for me. He agreed.

Nov 1, & 2 1916.

[Contay] Leather Jerkins & winter clothing arrive. Still very wet.

Nov 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11 1916

[Contay] Still at Contay. Batt finding working parties each day for Aveloy. Met the Australian again. He said that he delivered the letter. I thanked him. Weather rotten.

Nov 16th 1916.

[Serre/Mailly-Maillet] Heavy artillery fire both sides. Weather frosty. Batt went over. Heavy machine gun fire.

Nov 18 - 19 & 20 1916.

[Serre] Very rough days. Impossible to move for mud, no wounded able to get out. No water or rations. Plenty of prisoners. Hear we go out tonight if possible.

Nov 21st 1916.

[Mailly-Maillet] Got out early this morning to Mailly. Stragglers arriving in all day done up. We have had heavy casualties both officers & men.

Nov 22nd 1916.

[Mailly-Maillet] Good rest last night in billets but hear we go up again tonight in reserve [for] 48 hours. Heavy artillery fire on both sides. The troops are in a very bad state through mud, wet & frost.

Nov 26th 1916.

[Doullens] Left Doullens for Pernois Halloy [Halloy-les-Pernois] via Canaples. Dirty village & we hear we are here for a long rest from the line. Battalion strength 140.

Nov 27th 1916.

[Halloy-les-Pernois] We are here for rest & training, with plenty of the latter, reinforced up to full strength. Making football fields, latrines, bunks, repair billets etc.

Nov 27th 1916 to Dec 22nd 1916

[Halloy-les-Pernois] Carried on the good work of billet repairing etc. On the 15th Dec I was made full corporal, acting pioneer sergeant.

Dec 23rd 1916.

Leave. & got engaged to the dearest little girl in the world

1917

Jan 1st 1917.

Returned off leave.

Jan 9th 1917.

[Courcelles] Billeted in Courcelles. I have a decent shop here bench vice complete. In reserve ici 4 days.

Jan 10-11-12 1917.

[Courcelles] General repair of billets. Awful conditions, up to the a--- in mud.

Jan 13th 1917.

[Courcelles] Two companies went into the front line tonight. Front line consists of shell holes, mud waist deep. Weather chronic.

Jan 22nd 1917.

[Bus-les-Artois] Batt goes to Maily-Maillet tonight & tomorrow night [goes to] the trenches. 1 Coy in front line, one in support & two in Beaumont-Hamel. I must say that the front line consists of shell holes only. Half full of water & mud, & it is impossible to move out in daytime.

Jan 23rd 1917.

[Bertrancourt] I am in Bertrancourt. Weather has completely changed to frost & the cold is awful. My billet is after Capt Bairnfathers more holy than righteous & can hardly move. Batt goes into the trenches tonight. Everything is frozen. I don't envy the boys in the line tonight.

Jan 31st 1917.

[Bertrancourt] Had a fall of snow during the night. Woke up early this morning & found that we were practically covered with snow, which had blown through the air holes. At 5am our artillery opened a terrific bombardment for a couple of hours. One of the Brigade signallers cut his throat this morning. Also, one of the H.L.I. was shot this morning for murder. Rumour has it that he & a comrade quarrelled over a tin of jam a little while back & one shot the other. Batt returned to the trenches tonight.

Feb 5th 1917.

[Bertrancourt] America has declared war on Germany this day. Intermittent artillery fire all day. Rumour has it that we shift from this quarter in a day or two.

Feb 6th 1917.

[Bertrancourt] Weather still very severe. There are some tidy nuts that came up with the last barrow load who call themselves soldiers. For instance, I have one on my staff, who this evening put the Taylors machine oil, which happened to be in a milk (ideal) tin, on the fire, for shaving water. Imagine what happened. No casualties. Intermittent artillery bombardment all day. Batt went into the line tonight.

Feb 7th 1917.

[Bertrancourt] Same old weather. Artillery slackened off during the day but livened up towards nightfall. Rather an amusing incident happened this evening. Dick volunteered to go to the YMCA to buy Quakers. He was gone a considerable time. When he came back with nothing, we naturally asked him where he had been. He said that when he got inside the door, somebody shut the door & another somebody bunged him a hymnbook. There was a meeting on & Dick was the only one there. Naturally in his eagerness to escape, he forgot about Quakers Oats.

Feb 10th 1917.

[Bertrancourt] Big strafe started at 8pm & at half past the boys went over at various parts of the line from Armentiers to Beaumont Hammel. As far as can hear, it was very successful everywhere. Batt stood to all night.

Mar 17th 1917.

[Beaufort] There is a strong rumour that the enemy has flitted. Trench patrols find this to be true. Batt advanced at 8am & established themselves in German third line, finding all dugouts destroyed.

Mar 25th 1917.

[Voyennes] On all sides the enemy has destroyed everything. Burnt all villages & isolated farms, ripped up railway lines, mined all bridges & also canals, cross roads etc.

Apr 1st 1917.

[Beauvois] Batt moved to Germaine. Remained until dusk, then moved off across country to position near Savy. Lay along railway embankment all night.

Apr 2nd 1917.

[Savy] The Batt opened [fire] just before dawn. Batt attacked & captured 6 field guns & a heap of prisoners. Our casualties were severe. The attack took us through two villages which the lads also captured. Weather awful cold.

Apr 3rd 1917.

[Savy] Enemy made strong counter attack which failed. A terrific barrage was kept up all the time.

Apr 8th 1917.

[Beauvois] C.O. gave the Batt a lecture & read the congratulations from the heads. Everybody pleased with the good work done.

Apr 14th 1917.

[Savy] Batt moved out of Savy & dug in on railway bank. About 11.30 advanced on Sappy Farm, 500 yds from St Quentin via Fayet. Going up, enemy shelled us heavily but discipline of Batt was grand. Batt took German trench about 3.30. 40 casualties. Batt moved back to Savy 7pm.

Editors Note: After this period of action the Battalion was built up to strength and trained at Quivers and Marcelcave. On June 1st 1917 2 Manchesters were placed in the Corps reserve for the Battle of Messines.

Jun 3rd 1917.

La Becque Batt in Corps reserve. Enemy shelled Baileul in evening.

Jun 5th 1917.

[La Becque] Alarm went at 4am. Batt on the road inside half hour & marched to assembly trenches in front of Messines. Battle order. Returned to billets. This was a test to see how quick it could be done.

Jun 7th 1917.

[La Becque] Bombardment still heavy & increased toward midnight. It stopped at 3am & we knew that the boys had gone over.

Jun 8th 1917.

[La Becque] Heard Messines was taken. Many prisoners passing through Bailleul. Enemy shelled later place heavily.

Editors Note: The Battalion now moved north to the Nieuport sector on the North Sea Coast, and stayed in the area for the next four months.

Jun 16th 1917.

[Teteghem] Had a trip to Malo-les-Baines & dipped in briny. Promenade full of shell holes. Nice town.

Jun 17th 1917.

[Teteghem] Marched to Dunkerque early morning & entrained for Coxyde. Rested until evening in Jean Bart Camp. Went into line at Nieuport, relieving the French 76th Regt.

Jun 18th 1917.

[Nieuport] Rather an awkward part of the line. Several canals to cross & the enemy can shell them when & how he likes. Flat country & always under observation. Enemy worked a few shells of all sizes into the town from about 10 different ways, back front & sides. Can't get bearings yet.

Jun 20th 1917.

[Neiuport] Just after m.n. enemy shelled our front line, blowing it completely in. Several casualties. Trenches very poor, no parados – built up off the ground, on account of nature of ground.

Jun 30th 1917.

[Neiuport] Rain & misty all day. Owing to it being such flat country, the enemy have a habit of sending up vast clouds of smoke to hide his guns from observation when firing. A good plan.

Jul 11th 1917.

[Neiuport] A violent bombardment all night. All bridges were shelled & it was most difficult to get over. Many casualties. German planes in abundance. All our trenches are smashed up & it seems as if they are having it all their own way up to now.

Jul 12th 1917.

[Neiuport] Bombardment still strong. Plenty of cases of gas.

Jul 14th 1917.

[Neiuport] No abatement of straff at all. Anything from wizz bangs to 10" naval shells. A cheerful soldier is a good soldier.

Jul 16th 1917.

[Neiuport] The only bridge standing is badly knocked about so can't get across until mended. Bridge was mended about midnight, so we cleared [out] for Coxyde. One days rest & then move to Zuydcoote for coast defence training. Rained all the way.

Jul 24th 1917.

Zuydcoote. The Brigade paraded on the sands in front of sanatorium for Army Corps Commander's inspection. Complimented on saving Corps during last action when in a critical condition. A few awards were presented.

Aug 3rd 1917.

[Oostdunkerke] Sudden orders to pack up & leave Oostdunkerke for La-Panne [Belg. - De Panne] (temp Belgium capital), billeted in boarding house. Very nice place here. Still very wet.

Aug 4th 1917.

[La-Panne] Saw King Albert today. Weather seems to be clearing up a bit now. Shouldn't mind stopping here till appre la guerre. Can get here a decent glass of beer, fresh fish and shrimps.

Aug 5th to 11th 1917.

[La-Panne] Still vegetating in La-Panne. Fish & chips shops here, only drawback is no money.

Sep 2nd 1917.

[Neiuport] Enemy smashes both bridges up early this morning. Weather nice & sunny, might dry some of this mud up.

Sept 21st 1917.

[Sint-Joris] Much the usual thing. Padre stopped one in the arm.

Sept 28th 1917.

[Coxyde] Aeroplanes & artiliery very active today. Village was shelled & our Adjutant Lt Giebolas was killed. Made a coffin for him, the first I have made out here.

Sept 29th 1917.

[Coxyde] The Adjutant was buried today in Coxyde Cemetary. A very nice fellow, most sorry to lose him (a gentleman).

Oct 7th 1917.

[Coxyde] Cleared out today for Petite Synthe, via Dunkerque. Went down in barges, rained all the time. Got in about 2am, feeling very cheerful.

Editors Note: After a short period of rest at Petite Synthe, the Battalion went into training at Tunneling Camp, west of Popperinge. Then, on November 30th it went back into the line at Ypres.

Dec 3rd to 8th 1917.

[Irish Farm/Belle Vue] Batt made a local attack & took a pill box or two, Had few casualties.

Dec 9th 1917.

[Irish Farm/Belle Vue] Hear we get relieved tonight by 96th Bde. It is pitch dark & there is about 8 miles of duckwalk to come over. Pretty rotten road.

1918

Editors Note: The new-year saw the Battalion moving back for rest just a few kilometres southeast of Calais for training and leave, then back into the line in the Houthulst Forest Sector North of Ypres.

Jan 22nd 1918.

[Audruicq/Listerguax] Batt leaves here for Dirty Bucket Camp, Ypres Sector.

Jan 24th - 26th 1918.

[Dirty Bucket Camp] Same place. Am sweating on leave.

Jan 27th 1918.

Leave.

Feb 11th 1918.

[Abri Wood - Brigade Reserve] Arrived back to this hell again from leave. The landscape is rather awe-inspiring. Mud & then again, mud.

Feb 19th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Health no better. The boys went over on a raid tonight, was successful. 17 prisoners & 2 guns, m. A few casualties on our part.

Feb 20th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Batt went into the line & I proceeded to the transport about 12 kilo's behind. Was glad to arrive as I was dead beat.

Feb 24th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Went sick this morning at 91st Field Ambulance. Received medicine & attend. I went back to bed.

Mar 2nd 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector (hospital)] Much improved. Had a bottle of stout at dinner, five minutes after - up it came. Hallo, I thought, the old trouble (inde) again.

Mar 3rd 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector (hospital)] Breakfast, dinner & tea rounded on me.

Mar 6th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector (hospital)] Got fed up with myself & everybody else, so asked the doc to mark me out to duty.

Mar 8, 9, 10, 11th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Laid up at the stores & fed on Bismuth.

Mar 12th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Received Phosferine. So started to use them.

Mar 13th 1918.

[Bergerie Camp - Houthulst Forest Sector] Feeling a lot better, went up to the camp where Batt is resting.

Mar 14, 15th 1918.

[Bergerie Camp - Houthulst Forest Sector] La Bergerie. There is an observation balloon here & this morning a German plane came over & set it alight with his machine gun. The two occupants jumped out & came safely to the ground in their parachutes. The balloon was totally destroyed.

Mar 16th 1918.

[Bergerie Camp - Houthulst Forest Sector] Batt moved into the line about 8 days before it's time. I went back to the stores. Am able to keep a bit of food down now.

Mar 22nd 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Batt moved into front line tonight. I proceed back to the stores as there is plenty of work to do there. Just before leaving B.H.Q. the enemy opened out with his heavies on to B.H.Q., scoring several direct hits. After half an hour he eased up. So I judged it time to move off. I fell the party in, & got about 200 yds from B.H.Q. when he started again & lobbed them unpleasantly close to us. It was a case of get down & get under every time she came. Each one seemed to say I'm yours, I'm yours.

Mar 23, 24, 25th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Busy at the stores. At present we are in the Ypres sector. Had rumours to the effect that we move south where the Germans are advancing. Heard today that we are bound for Arras.

Mar 26th 1918.

[Houthulst Forest Sector] Orders today to pack up.

Editors Note: Due to the German Spring Offensive, on 27th March 1918 the Battalion was moved to the south of Arras.

Mar 28th 1918.

Detained at Savy-B- about 30 Kilos from Arras & marched to Bienvillers. Batt went straight into the line [at Alette].

Apr 2nd 1918.

[Bienvillers] A Coy made a raid & bumped into a crowd of Germans half way, on the same game. Bit of a scrap & a few wounded.

Apr 11th 1918.

[Bienvillers] Early this morning the enemy shelled this village. No damage. Hear from good authority that the gas shells (mustard) the enemy is using are our own shells which he has captured. Bread rations have been a bit rough lately. At intervals during the day, enemy has shelled this place. Sixty five tanks are in readiness behind, for something or other & I don't suppose it's to play kiss in the ring.

May 1st to 14th 1918.

[Barly] Div rest at Barly. Usual Bairnsfather billets. Am kept busy with badges on all the Batts helmets, range & targets etc. Move up into line tomorrow.

May 15th 1918.

[Blairville] Div moved in & relieved the Guards.

May 16th to Jul 5th 1918.

[Blairville] A tidy spell in this time. Batt is doing 8 days in & 4 days in reserve. Sector got more active every day. Plenty of gas, aeroplane fights, bombing & stunts. Casualties severe. Weather fairly decent.

Editors Note: Rest and training in the Ypres area followed this period of action.

Jul 7th to 19th 1918.

[La Brazegue Farm] At La Brazegue Farm. During this period I erected ovens, cookhouses, sports field, bombing ground & bayonet fighting course. Had Fritz over several times bombing. Had a tank exhibition in conjunction with the infantry. Moved in the evening of the 19th by busses to Doullens. There entrained for Proven [Ypres Sector], 40 in a wagon (including horse shit). Very hot day, so it was pleasant. Arrived about 3pm. We are G.H.Q. reserve.

Jul 20th 1918.

[Proven] Have got a fairly decent shop. It has been an old R.E.'s work shop until they got bombed out. Of course it's plenty good enough for us. Had a walk round village tonight. Not a bad place as they go, out here. Had some weak beer, which was no bon. Couldn't get vin blanc, so had to fall back on Malagal. One could just manage to raise a sleeping draught off that. Plenty of Doughboys here.

Jul 24th 1918.

[Proven] Regimental sports, fairly decent turnout. We had a sideshow consisting of the Kaiser & a couple of Aunt Sallies. It was a success. The boys cleared about 50 Francs. German plane was brought down by machine gun fire about midnight.

Jul 25th 1918.

[Proven] D Coy wins Inter Company Football Cup.

Editors Note: On 6th August 1918, 2 Manchesters moved south once more, to take part in the great Amiens Offensive.

Aug 5th & 6th 1918.

[Proven] Today there is an inspection by the King & we are stood to. We leave Proven at 3am for Hangest-Sur-Somme, via Dunkerque, Calais, Boulogne, Abbeville, then 14 kilos to Briquemessnil for the night. Done up, so slept well.

Aug 7th 1918.

[Briquemesnil] Transport move off at 7am. We leave at noon by motors for Boves via Amiens. The whole town was empty of civilians. A big difference to when we were there last. Town knocked about by shellfire. Met about 1000 prisoners passing through the town. At Boves everywhere was crowded with transport. British, American, French, Belgique & Canadian, all moving or waiting for the chance. Plenty of prisoners keep passing down, carrying their own wounded. Twelve miles advance & 30000 prisoners & 200 guns is not a bad days work. We stopped in a field, very tired & soon fell asleep, not troubled by the racket going on. Also grub, water & cigarettes less.

Aug 8th 1918.

[Boves/Beaufort] Woke up perished, but hopped about a bit jildy & soon got warm. Spent another night in the open. Was bombed continuously by enemy planes. Pushed on to Beaufort.

Aug 10th 1918.

[Parvillers] Moved off in rear of Canadians this morning. A nice job, I don't think. A fair amount of German dead lying about & we have a few casualties too. Our brigade moved on but was held up by machine gun fire in a wood. Three tanks came up to shift them, but got knocked out before they reached the wood. One tank was set on fire, a bit warm for the occupants as they got roasted to death. We fetch a bosche plane down & took pilot prisoner. No water & no smokes.

Aug 11th 1918.

[Damery Woods] Made another dash for a fresh position this morning. Heavy machine gun barrage on but got there & held an OP. Some more tanks came up to have another go for this wood but got knocked out, two more set on fire. Crews were got out badly burnt. 14th Brigade have to go through us if possible. They managed it after a rough time & a lot of casualties.

Aug 12th 1918.

[Damery Woods] We hold on allright but hot fighting everywhere. Two Canadian divisions come up & relieve us.

Aug 13th 1918.

[Le Quesnel] We arrive first out side of Le Quesnel. After a rest we fell in & got highly complimented by the Brigadier General & it appears we have advanced & pushed Jerry back 4000yds & we go back in Corps reserve for a rest. We marched about 14 Kilos & slept in a field.

Aug 16th 1918.

[Fourncourt/Harbonniere] Nice quiet day. Had a draft of 350 arrive.

Aug 19th 1918.

[Guillaucourt] Germans made a big raid on our trenches in daylight this morning after a heavy barrage. D Coy got it in the neck rather warm while it lasted. Hand to Hand. Our casualties amount to 85 all told. The Germans got a caning just the same. Remainder of day quiet. Artillery & planes were busy during night. Water scarce.

Aug 25th 1918.

[Guillaucourt] The Germans heavily gassed our front line held by the 15 & 16 L.F.s [Lancashire Fusiliers], causing about 75% of both casualties. We go up help them out. A & B Coys to the 16th LF, C & D to the 15th LF. So now our Batt is holding the whole of the Brigade front. Some achievement after our last hard spell in the line. Jerry seems to be ready to clear out judging by the heavy & scattered shelling just lately.

Aug 30th 1918.

(Chateau Misery) All last night he kept dropping 5.9 in the Chateau & grounds. This morning about 10am he dropped one right into the hut where the shoemakers, taylers & postmen stopped, blowing all who were in there to bits. Three men who were just receiving their warrants for leave next door were also killed. The orderly room Sgt wounded, Regimental QMS W [wounded]. Two of the stores staff W. Interpreter killed. ASC driver killed. Orderly room clerks K. Canteen Cpl K. AJ Pay Cpl K. Altogether 11 killed & 4 wounded with the same shell. I was standing at the back of the hut & it knocked me up against the wall, the pioneers being two huts away. Just escaped it. Needless to say we cleared out.

Aug 31st 1918.

[Chateau Misery] Went back in reserve.

Sep 3rd 1918.

[Berny] Fairly quiet day. Was bombed & gassed at night. Getting cheerful.

Title of various brands of cigarettes it has been my lot to smoke out ici (issued as part rations).

Woodbines	Country Side	Hentsease
Kitcheners	All Arms	Classic
"Alf a mo"	Waverleys	Gold Crest
Trumplers	Drumhead	Pinnacle
Bees Wing	Three Castle	Red Hussars
O.R.D.	United Services	Rocket
Gold Flake (various)	Flag	
Ogdens. S. Gold	Pinhead	
Sival Caporel	Black Cat	
Richmond Honey Dew	Cinderella	
Park Drive	Hellbarm	
Old Gold	Fanlight	
Players Weights etc.	Glory Boys	
B.O.V.	Straight Cut	
Scissors	Silk Cut	
Campaigners	Chairman	
Ruby Queen	Courage	
C.W.S.	Major Arapkin	
Honey Dew	British Standard	
Sweet Caroline	Britannia	

Editors Note: And strangely it is at this point that the diary ends – two months before the Armistice – but a resume of the battalion’s service until the signing of the armistice is provided here.

On 6 September, 1918, 2 Manchester moved to La Neuville and on the 28th to Vendelles, crossing the St. Quentin Canal on the 29th. On 30 September it moved to Magny-la-Fosse, incurring twenty casualties.

On 1 October 1918 2/Manchester attacked the Hindenberg Line with ‘complete success’ at 4pm with four tanks and broke through the Bearevoir-Fonsomme line after hand-to-hand fighting, capturing 210 prisoners. The battalion was then subjected to repeated counter attacks during the night but 2/Manchester’s successfully maintained their position. On the 3rd the Battalion was withdrawn to Lehaucourt with nearly 100 casualties. On 5 October it moved to Brandcourt, later to Bohain. On the 30th it moved towards the Sambre-Oise Canal in readiness for the assault to cross this obstacle to the Allied advance.

On 4 November 1918, the battalion were involved in the crossing of the Sambre-Oise canal, attacking on the left flank of 14 Brigade, meeting intense shell and machine gun fire north of Ors. The poet Wilfred Owen was killed in the attack and is buried in Ors Communal Cemetery. It then attacked the Germans at La Motte Farm. On the 6th the Battalion were relieved and went into billets at Sambreton where it learned about the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

Sambreton – only six miles east of Le Cateau – is where the battalion had detrained at the start of the war on 18 August 1914.

After the war, Sergeant Major Swindell transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Manchester Regiment in 1920 and served in Ireland, Guernsey (1922) and in the Army of Occupation in Germany, returning to the UK in 1927. He left the service in 1929.