

WAR DIARY

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War Diary of Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis

Private Account of the period spent by me in France from end of January 1940 until the Battalion left Bailleul for the Saar just before active warfare started.

Patrick Munro
Laufen 27.9.40
Captain P G Munro, Rm17
POW No 1196

This diary contains a short account of what happened to my Company, 'C' Company, 4th (Ross-shire) Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders, from the time the Battalion left Bailleul (Pas de Calais) on 24 April 1940 for the Saar, until the final capitulation of the 51st (Highland) Division at St Valery on 12 June 1940. It was originally written in April 1941 at Laufen, West Bavaria, my first (and worst) prison camp in Germany. I decided to write it three years later in my third prison camp at Eichstatt, Bavaria.

Patrick Munro
14 March 1944

Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis as a POW in Laufen Castle (Oflag VIIC) 1941.



*Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis in later years.
[Photo courtesy of Clan Munro website.]*

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Preface

I have decided to write this account of our first few months in France, more with the object of filling in time and to give me some occupation during the long stretches of intense boredom (and very often depression!) thrust upon me by my enforced stay in Germany as a prisoner of war, than with the object of interesting anyone whom may pick it up and read possibly a page or two after I get back to home and peace again.

I would warn anyone before they start that much of it is only of real interest to myself, and as my descriptive powers are very limited, the reader will probably not get a true picture of some of the characters I introduce into the story. I give it the title of "story" in preference to "account" or "diary" because as it all happened between six and eight months ago, and as so much has happened since then, many of the dates I cannot be certain of and many I am afraid will be inaccurate. Again I repeat it is entirely person and is in no way intended to serve as an official record or to assist in the compiling of a Regimental Diary.

Finally, I would say, as an excuse for the many bad spelling and grammatical mistakes that are bound to appear on practically every page, I plead the fact that it is being written in a room approximately 24ft x 40ft x 10ft in which nine other officers eat, sleep and live!

Kriegsgefangenenlager
Offlag VIIC/H
Laufen
Bavaria
September 27th, 1940.

Embarkation

I paraded my Company ('C' Company 4th Seaforth Highlanders) along with the rest of the Battalion on the cold and raw morning of January 25th, 1940.

I don't think many of us were sorry to see the last of Bordon where we had spent a pretty miserable and uncomfortable six weeks trying to complete our training under difficult conditions before receiving orders to embark for France. The Jocks were all in good form as we marched to the station and the entraining arrangements went smoothly enough.

I travelled down to Southampton in a carriage with Brigadier Herbert Stewart, Harry Houldsworth (Commanding the Battalion) and R A A S Macrae (Battalion Adjutant) and Ronnie Haig (our Brigade Major). After travelling at snails pace most of the way we reached Southampton Docks about midday, and managed to get the men on to the boat and settled down without delay. An hour or two later, the rest of the Battalion and some 4th Camerons arrived and embarked on the same boat.

In the early afternoon we were off! But not for France as we thought, as we only went down the coast a few miles and dropped our hook in the mud off Portland.

After seeing the Jocks fed and bedded down I went to bed early. I remember waking up next morning and thinking what a wonderful crossing we had had, only to find we had not moved a yard but had lain off Portland all night. We were lucky in having the boat to ourselves; as each new transport came up alongside and joined the convoy during the day we could see through glasses that they were packed like sardines, while we certainly had enough room for comparative comfort and most of the officers had a cabin to themselves. Our only grouse was that there was no alcohol on board of any sort.

Finally we started, a convoy of about 16 ships with an escort of two destroyers; and I saw the last of England. For longer than I ever dreamt I would at the time, through the mist and rain about midday on 26th January.

The journey was uneventful and except for the occasional dart across our bows by one of the destroyers nothing exciting happened. By the evening the Jocks were all in really good form and the pipe band played for an hour or so on deck for them. Finally they ended up the day by dancing reels and country dances in one of the saloons to the music of two "boxes" and a tenor drum which was tremendously popular! I remember my Sergeant Major (Anderson) was the moving spirit and they were delighted when he and most of the Warrant Officers joined in with them.

I remember thinking at the time, how lucky I was to be privileged to go to war with such a fine Battalion with such fine spirit in it, where everyone was friends with everyone else, from the youngest private soldier to the Colonel himself, and yet where discipline was excellent.

That night I wrote a few letters and postcards before going to bed. After a good night I was woken by my batman Hugh Forsyth at about 4 am who told me we were just getting into Harvre. We tied up and had breakfast on board before disembarking just after it got light. Guides led the Battalion down to a large goods shed about a mile from the quay where, after a considerable wait, a meal of sorts was produced by the cooks for the troops and blankets issued. I had meanwhile sent my two

subalterns, David Murray and Lamond, off to the Gare Maritime where they had a sort of buffet for officers. When they came back I went off and had a meal of sorts myself, posted some letters, changed some money and bought a couple of bottles of brandy and a French conversation book! By this time the Battalion had been marched back to the station again and entrained. We said goodbye to David Fleming who had been left behind with a few men as first line reinforcements, and rattled off very slowly out of the station for Nointot.

First Fortnight in France

The journey was even slower than that from Bordon to Southampton. We were all feeling rather jaded after the boat and I think everyone was feeling a little depressed wondering what was in front of us. I must admit I thought once or twice of our return - when it would be and how, who would come back and who would not.

We reached Nointot Station late in the afternoon in pouring rain, and after a good deal of sorting out I set off at the head of my Company with two guides who had met us at the station for our billets.

We marched out of the station and almost immediately down the drive to the Chateau Beclair which was owned by M. le Baron Etchaygoym.

I can't really remember what my feelings were when we reached the men's billets as I was only too pleased to get out of the soaking rain!

My Company was billeted in the stables of the Chateau. This was much the same as any other stables except that there were no loose boxes, and one would describe it more as a carriage house perhaps. It had a stone flagged floor and just about held the hundred odd men in the Company and no more. My Sergeant Major and most of the senior NCOs slept in the coachman's room above. After a bit some straw arrived and I got the men a meal and settled down fairly happily. I tried out my first French on the Baron's chauffeur-gardener, who appeared from nowhere, with not much success; however he was very helpful in spite of this!

Then David and Lamond and I went in search of our own billet; this we found was a large room in the disused laundry of the Chateau, which was a separate building. It was completely devoid of any furniture except three very derelict beds, being damp, very cold and very musty! However, our batmen got things unpacked and made the best they could of it. The next problem was food as we had not had any for hours. We had no idea where the other Companies were or where Battalion HQ was or if there was any village near, so in the end we gave it up and fed on rations. Hot tea and bully was very acceptable (and I would give anything for it now in this place!!).

Next morning early, Cecil Lake, our Padre, appeared and rescued us as far as food was concerned and took us down and showed us a cafe just outside the gates of the Chateau drive where we had a grand French breakfast of coffee and roll and butter.

After breakfast I motored in my truck to Battalion HQ which was about three miles from my Company billet. Here we found Harry and several of the others. This was also the first occasion I met Andre Jourde (our French Liaison Officer). We became great friends afterwards so I will endeavour to describe him. He was a schoolmaster in civil life and came from Lyons, and had taught French in England for some months, at Bristol I think. He was a most attractive personality, very dark hair (slightly thin on top!), jet black eyes and a row of very white and shining even teeth which were displayed to great advantage as he seldom had anything but a smile for everyone! He was short and thickset and always very well dressed (sensibly but not immaculately like some French officers). He spoke very fluent if not correct English. I took to him, as we all did, straight away, and if you can be bothered to read on you will hear a lot more about Andre later in the story.

Battalion HQ was a fairly new uninhabited cottage in an orchard. It had been pouring solidly since we arrived and the mud round the cottage was indescribable - an idea of how bad it was will be got from an incident I will relate later on. From now onwards dates and days are not going to be accurate, if mentioned at all, and I intend to just give a general account of our doings without mentioning any particular days.

We had not been there long before I met our host, M. Le Baron Etchaygoym. He was a man of about 45 and quite charming. He spoke good and fluent English and amongst other things was a member of the Turf Club which I think is rare for a foreigner. The Baroness was also charming and spoke almost perfect English. She was of French-Irish extraction and as far as I could make out was closely related to the Hennesys (Vi Hennesy being a cousin of hers). They were both very kind to us all during our stay at Nointot and did everything they could to help us make the best of rather uncomfortable billets. They had another estate, I believe, in Normandy, and usually at this time of year lived there, consequently a large part of the Chateau was shut up. It was a large building, built I believe about the middle of the seventeenth century, and stood in a large open park with lawns and flower beds all round it. There were some very fine Spruces and Wellingtonias in the park, many of which were spoilt in the great frost that was to come in a day or two. They only had about five ancient retainers in the house who were very intrigued with the Jocks and were most kind, giving us hot water at the kitchen door and making me an omelette when I stayed in bed with a streaming cold one day! The kitchen was interesting, a huge room with stone flagged floor and all round the walls were hung highly polished brass pots and pans, many of which must have been hundreds of years old. The whole place was spotless, and the Jocks got a fearful telling off if they dared cross the threshold with their dirty boots!

After we had been there a day or two we experienced the most amazing weather conditions I've ever seen. One night it began to freeze and the frost got harder and harder and then on top of this a slow but steady drizzle began. As the rain came down it froze solid on the trees, telephone poles and wires. The branches of the trees carried tremendous weights of ice until the weight became so great that they came crashing down with a noise like thunder all over the place. It was really dangerous to walk about near trees, so much so that Harry gave an order that everyone was to wear their tin hats during the daytime and this actually saved more than one Jock several hours unconsciousness! Meanwhile there was nothing to employ our time with, as of course there were no training facilities and we were only too delighted to help.

Hayward Maclean (both of whom were killed later) lived in a small cafe about four miles away. They all made great friends with the people who kept the cafe and said that they were extraordinarily kind and hospitable - we certainly dined very well that night.

An occasional drive into Bolbec, where Bde. HQ was, to get the men's pay relieved the monotony and always met a lot of Camerons and 6th Seaforth officers there doing the same job, and it was pleasant enough having a drink or two and a crack with them in the hotel where the Pay Office was situated.

Finally we said goodbye to the Chateau Beclair and Baron and Baroness on or about 5th February. I think they were both genuinely sorry to see the last of us. The Baroness spent most of the morning surrounded by a mob of Jocks outside the Chateau talking to them and taking photos! Harry and RAAS and I dined that night in the Chateau and I had a grand bath, my first for about a fortnight! I am sure they would have asked us in for a bath more often but owing to the hard frosts the water supply was very short.

We said goodbye to our hosts with many promises to come back and see them Apres la Guerre, motored to the station and left Nointot by train at midnight.

M. le Maire de Lieres

As far as I can remember the whole Bn. travelled in one train, that is all except one very unfortunate Jock who we had to bury at Nointot, an incident I forgot to relate in the last chapter.

This man, Forsyth by name (and a cousin of the griever at Foulis Mains), went out one night with his pals, and mixed his drinks too much at a local cafe. He managed to get home to Bn. HQ where he was billeted, but just as he arrived at the door of his billet he fell and, being by himself by now, was drowned in the mud which surrounded the building, which gives some idea of how appalling it was. It must have been at least 2-3 feet deep in some places! This was our first casualty.

After a fairly reasonable journey the first (but by no means the last!) for the Jocks in cattle trucks (Cheveux 8 Hommes 40 variety), we got to Lillers Station about 10 am next morning. There we were met by Geordie Ross (Cromarty) who had been sent on to arrange our billets. I put the Company in charge of David and got into a truck with Geordie and Hec and set off for Lieres. The weather was still pretty miserable although a thaw had set in by now and the roads were inches deep in slush. After about 20 minutes drive we reached Lieres and Geordie introduced me to M. and Mme. Laversin who were to be my hosts and in whose house I spent a very happy three weeks. The Company were marching up behind us so I only had time to say how do you do, dump my luggage and dash off to see about our billets. Hec and I set off to do a tour of the village and find out where we could get our two Companies in to.

My French was still very rusty but Hec refused point blank to speak the language at all - so I had to do the arranging for both Companies! We caused intense interest amongst the inhabitants, all of which, almost without exception, were people who owned small farms or small holdings. We did a complete tour of the whole village and most of them were very helpful and offered to house as many men as we wished. I remember the thing that intrigued them most about us was that we both had moustaches! For some unknown reason they had an idea that all the English were clean shaven - they were astonished when later they saw that many of the Jocks had moustaches too!

Finally, after rather an exhausting (both physically and mentally) two hours I managed to find billets for the 200 odd men we had in our Companies. Just as we had finished the Companies marched in.

The rest of the day was spent in feeding the men and sorting them out and putting them into their billets. These ranged from a straw barn to a room with a large double bed in it and some were luckier than others. We decided to split the village into two areas and Hec's company had one end and mine the other. We were lucky being together as they were both West Coast Companies (Ullapool and Lochcarron Districts). Having got them all settled down I returned to my billet and renewed my rather hurried first acquaintance with M. and Mme. Laversin.



l-r: M.Laversin (Mayor of Lieres), Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis, Mme Laversin and their daughter. See "Postscript".

The Mayor was a typical Frenchman. Very small, about 5ft. 3, very round, fat, little man with twinkling black eyes and an enormous fierce looking black moustache; what was left of his hair (which one seldom saw as he nearly always wore his hat both indoors and out!) was black. Madame was large and plump with fair hair and a very kind, good-natured face and must have been very good looking in her youth. The house, of which they were both tremendously proud, was practically brand new, it only having been completed about eighteen months before. I was shown my bedroom which was a nice light room with a large French window overlooking the village green across a small stream on the other side of which was the church. I had a large and very comfortable double bed, and to my joy I found a radiator in the room! To my greater still joy I was shown the bathroom with a real bath with hot and cold water laid on! A most unexpected luxury! After unpacking some things I went off to our Mess which was a few hundred yards down the village street and which we shared with 'B' Company officers. It was a small farmhouse owned by a woman whose name I have forgotten, who lived there with her small son aged 7 and daughter 9, her husband being away on military service. We managed to persuade her to do the cooking for us while we bought the food and drink, assisted by the Mayor who often bought provisions for us whenever he went to Lillers. On the whole this worked very satisfactorily and we fed quite well. Incidentally, I improved my French a lot as I always had to order the meals each morning with Madame as she appeared quite devoid of any ideas of her own - which was odd for a French woman - but she was a good cook. We produced two batmen to help her, one to wash up and wait and the other to peel potatoes and do odd jobs. I was lucky in having Hugh Forsyth as my batman as he learned French in Dingwall Academy and although his Ross-shire French accent was a bit difficult sometimes he invariably made himself understood and in fact very soon could carry on long conversations in French!

After supper that night I went back to the Mayor's house, where we sat down to two bottles of excellent wine - this was later to become a nightly performance - and told each other our life histories! He told me he had been a Prisoner of War during the last war from September 1914 until the end - little did I think then that I should be in his shoes now! Madame had lived all her life in Lieres and curiously enough had looked after Haig's GHQ Mess, which had been in the very house where we had ours, for some weeks in 1917. After the wine we started off on liqueurs of various kinds and sweet cakes, and after a very pleasant evening retired to bed about 11 pm.

Next morning I was woken by a loud tapping on my door about 8 am. This was the Mayor in his pyjamas! After a lot of explanation I gathered he wanted me to go down and have a cup of coffee. I shaved and dressed as quickly as I could and went down to find him sitting in the kitchen (still in his pyjamas!) waiting for me. He seemed rather surprised that I had taken so long. And he eventually explained that it was quite unnecessary to dress. So from then onwards every morning that I was there I always went down to the kitchen in my pyjamas where we each had two huge cups of black coffee laced with brandy (Biscuit Brand) and cigarettes and passed the time of day and talked about what we were going to do that day, Mme. Laversin meanwhile hovering round keeping the coffee pot hot on their kind of French Aga cooker. Then I went upstairs and had my bath and dressed and walked round to the Mess for breakfast. I remember I never left the house before a meal or left it after a meal without the Major saying "Mangez bien" or "Avez-vous bien Mangé?!"

The Battalion were fairly widely scattered in this area, Ronnie Pelham-Burns' Company being at a village called Lespesses about three miles away and Rory Tarbat's at the next village down the road at Fouquenam. Every morning the Company Commanders motored in their 8cwt trucks to Bn. HQ at a village called Equedeque and attended orderly room and passed the time of day and exchanged our news. While on the subject of news I might say we had no letters at all for the first three weeks we were in France, and it was a great day when a large sack of mail arrived outside my office one morning.

Our days we spent chiefly in doing musketry and route marches as the weather at first didn't permit training of any kind outside. I managed to borrow a small field from one of the farmers and the Jocks played football in the afternoons. I also persuaded one of the local cafe proprietors to let me have the use of his cafe at certain hours during the day and this was used as a sort of recreation room where they could play darts, cards etc and have beer and bacon and eggs at night. One the whole they were extraordinarily well behaved and in spite of their being no less than six cafes in this small village, all of which sold every imaginable kind of drink, I didn't have a single drunk case while we were there, in fact I don't think I had one in my Company the whole time we were in France.

To go back to my domestic life with the Mayor and his wife, they were kindness itself and couldn't do enough for me. My French improved daily and we were able to converse more and more easily. Every morning at midday I had to go in and have an aperitif with him, usually Monthazilac, a very pleasant white wine which he had in his cellar, and we talked about all kinds of things over a bottle before lunch. He had a tremendous sense of humour and thoroughly enjoyed pulling my leg at every possible opportunity and loved making jokes. He always spoke slowly for my benefit except when he was excited, then it came out in a positive stream. He was a tremendous help in many ways and bought vegetables for me, for the men and fixed up contracts with the locals for doing their washing and arranged with the schoolmistress for us to have our Church parade services in the school, and many other things. Madame Laversin was also very kind and was always making cakes etc for me. They were both devoted to my batman Hugh Forsyth and took a delight in pulling his

leg too and pretending to tick him off if he didn't clean my room properly or clean the staircase etc. They were very mystified by the name Hugh and always called him "Hoog" (with a hard G)! I was given the best parlour to do all my writing in and as they never used it except when they had friends in on Sundays, I had it entirely to myself. But except when I was working or writing letters I always sat in the kitchen as M. le Maire liked company! The more people who came in to see me the more delighted he was as they were drawn into the kitchen and immediately a bottle was opened!



Lieut. Hector Munro (Foulis),
2nd Seaforth's.

This is "Uncle Hec" mentioned by Captain Munro. The photograph does not feature in Captain Munro's diary but as an entry for Lt. Munro is included in the WW1 records of RCHS, it is felt appropriate to include it.

The day after I arrived I was taken on a conducted tour (by both of them!) round the whole house and everything shown to me from top to bottom. As I said before, they had only built it about two years before and were very proud of it. He had more or less planned it all himself and told me the whole thing plus fittings of all kinds had cost him only £700 which was incredibly cheap for a house that size. It had two bedrooms upstairs and one down, a bathroom, two sitting rooms and kitchen and scullery, and a large boxroom under the roof. Outside there was a good garage which you could get to from a door leading off the kitchen, But the thing he was most proud of was his cellar - especially designed by himself. This contained the hot water boiler, which I remember so well hearing him stoke for my bath every morning at ten to eight, which meant that I had to get up and be downstairs in ten minutes for my coffee and brandy! The cellar was well stocked with

practically every known wine and liqueur and Mme. Laversin kept all kinds of home made pates and jams both of which she was adept at making - especially hare pate which she gave me the recipe for, but alas is now in the hands of a Bosch!

In front and behind the house were flower beds, which were just beginning to show a mass of spring flowers coming up when we left. At the back of the house there was a large orchard of pear, apples and plums in which she kept hens and ducks.

The Mayor was a retired brewer and had apparently made his money in the firm of Cabouch-Laversin beer, which must have been a fairly large firm as their beer is sold over a large area of France. He was obviously very much respected and liked in the village and if there was any trouble over billeting or the Jocks - which very seldom happened - he always managed to smooth it out, and would tell me all about it afterwards and say that those particular people were always being difficult anyway and with a twinkle in his eye tell me that he was glad of an opportunity of putting them in their place! He smoked innumerable cigarettes and had a liking for 'Gold Flake' and was pleased as Punch when I gave him a few hundred now and then! Like me, he was especially fond of a Turkish cigarette with his coffee and brandy in the mornings.

On Sundays I was a sort of showpiece and they always asked friends over for the day to meet me. They usually arrived about midday and sat down to a meal in the parlour immediately they had taken their coats and hats off and never rose from the table or stopped eating and drinking until the guest took their departure about 6pm. I only attended the last lap and used to come in about 5 pm and was introduced all round and we then all sat down again and this was the signal for another burst of eating and drinking!

One days two nieces of his came over to see him for the day, aged about 16 and 18 respectively. One could speak a "vairy leetle" English of which she was very proud but very shy! That evening we all sat down to cards and round games which continued until I retired to bed about 11. To my astonishment I found both girls sitting in their dressing gowns with the Mayor in the kitchen when I came down (in my pyjamas!) for my normal morning coffee! He had persuaded them to stay the night and they had enjoyed their stay so much that they were persuaded to stay the next night too! They had the room next door to me and were delighted when I turned the wireless on to Carol Gibbons' band at the Savoy, as they could hear it through the wall.

After we had been at Lieres some days Simon Fraser turned up from England. He had been on a Senior Officers' course at Sheerness and was in good form when he arrived. I helped him get settled into his billet which was a room at the top of a windey wooden stairs in a large old farmhouse. At one time the building must have been part of a big chateau as it was obviously very old and had amongst other things a big walled garden with some very ancient fruit trees in it and an old fashioned fish pond in the grounds. While the Jocks were digging a rubbish pit there one day they came across all sorts of relics from the last war - old mess tins, waterbottles, bayonets etc, so it must have been used by our predecessors of 1914-18. This reminds me of a curious coincidence that happened in the village one day. Raigie Macleod (from Ullapool), Simon's Sgt. Major, walked into one of the village cafes and saw a woman who he recognised to be someone he had known in a neighbouring village while serving with the 4th Seaforths in 1916 - and the odd thing was she recognised him too!

The days went past pleasantly enough and I was seldome bored during our stay in Lieres. The weather was mostly good and I remember particularly one glorious warm spring day when Harry (C.O.) came over and lunched in our Mess with us and he and I went for a long walk afterwards.

Although very flat it was rather attractive agricultural country with lots to amuse one on a walk in the way of partridges, hares and various different kinds of birds in the woods and fields.

Simon or Hector used to come in and see the Mayor most evenings after supper and he and his wife were very impressed with Simon's height. "O il est gros" they always said whenever he left! I found the one snag about the village was its church bell, which seemed to ring from dawn till dark and as the church was only a stone's throw from my bedroom window it used to nearly drive me mad sometimes.

As the days went by the Jocks became more and more popular in the village and many of them used to share the family meals in their billets while practically all of them were given coffee and rolls in the morning by their temporary hosts for nothing. At the same time a great many of them helped the farmers with their work whenever they got a chance and it was a common sight to see two of them loading turnips or potatoes with the farmer, neither of them being able to speak a word of the other's language! And one often heard remarks such as "Come away in for your coffee Maggie" shouted across the yard to the daughter of the house who appeared to understand perfectly! I remember one Jock used to ride an old mare cart horse across the village green outside my window every evening about 5 o' clock after he had finished work with a small boy sitting in front of him, and it was a comic sight watching him go by sitting bareback and wearing a balmoral bonnet and battledress!

I asked Harry if the pipes and drums could come over to the village and play Retreat one evening. The Mayor was thrilled when they turned up and still more so when he was asked to stand on his front steps and take the salute! He then said a few words to the Pipe Major at the finish - neither understanding the other! However, it was a great success. This was of course an excuse for another party, and Harry and RAAS and Rory and Duncan Macrae and I and various others were all drawn in to the kitchen for drinks and cakes afterwards. They took a tremendous fancy to Harry and were much amused at his French which was a mixture of French and English, and when he was completely stuck he always said "Well, anyway, Vive La France!" which was greeted by peals of mirth!

Soon after our arrival the thaw came, and caused a terrific flood in the village. The small stream running through the middle of the village became a raging torrent in about three-quarters of an hour, about six times its normal size, and the whole village was flooded to the depth of two or three feet everywhere. The Mayor asked me if I would get the Jocks to do rescue work with our Company trucks, and we set about collecting stranded old women and children and carting them back and fore. The Jocks loved it and so did the kids. One Jock drove the truck while another sat in the back and held on to the kids and prevented them falling out!

Philip Mitford and Jack Walford came over from the 2nd Bn. at Roubaix one Sunday and had lunch with us, and another day Duncan Macrae (our MO) and RAAS and I motored over to Lille and dined with Philip there.

Eventually the order came for us to move. We had been expecting it for a long time as we were only held up while the thaw precautions were in operation. These precautions were very necessary as most of the roads were in an appalling state when the frost came out of them and many had to be closed.

I forgot to say earlier that one afternoon Harry turned up with a French Captain who wanted to speak to some of the men. This turned out to be Andre Maurois, the author. He was a dapper little

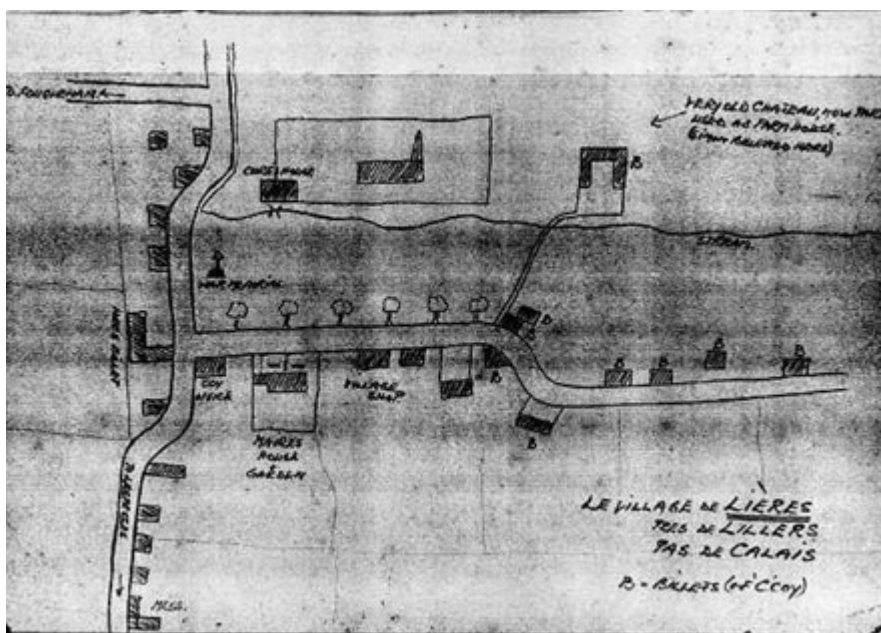
man of about 55, I should say, and interesting to talk to, although his English, though fluent, wasn't as good as one would have expected of a man who had written so many books in English. He spoke to a lot of men and seemed interested in what they told him. Funnily enough, he was accompanied by an English Captain (from GHQ) whose name I can't remember who was at Winchester and Sandhurst with Uncle Hec. (Captain H C S Munro, MC, 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders, killed in action near Cambrai, France, 22nd October 1918, aged 23 years) and who was very astonished at my resemblance of him when I was introduced to him.

Colin McNab turned up one day too in a large staff car to see me from GHQ. We hadn't met for a year or so and it was grand seeing his cheerful face again - he was looking very well and had put on a lot of weight!

There are many other incidents I could write about but most of them are trivial and only of real interest to myself so I won't bore anyone who has managed to wade through as far as this.

Eventually, after various orders and counter-orders and false starts, the final order for the Battalion to move to our next billeting area arrived as I said before. I got all my kit packed up the night before and spent most of our last day at Lieres going round paying for the billets, light, straw etc. It was extraordinary how grateful, yet how ungrasping, all of the villagers were over payment, and although the rates were very small, many of them said they thought it was too much and some didn't expect to be paid at all. They all with one accord said how well the men had behaved and how sorry they were to see us go.

Next morning, about 7 o'clock, I said goodbye to the Mayor and his wife. I was made to promise to come back and see them again soon and to come over and stay "Apres la Guerre" and was given a large packet of hare pate sandwiches and some chocolate for the journey! I was really sorry to say goodbye to them; they had been so extraordinarily kind and I felt quite depressed at leaving. The Company fell in on the village green, and as the Jocks came out of their billets I saw one embrace two old women standing on their doorstep who then threw their aprons over their faces and wept at his departure. We marched a couple of miles to our embussing point and set off on Mechanical Transport for Wingles.



Hand drawn map of Lieres.

Wingles

The journey in MT, as far as I can remember, was uneventful except that we started two hours after our advertised starting time owing to a complete French Division crossing our route at Lillers. So we had to wait until they had all passed which took a considerable time.

It took about two hours to get to Wingles, and on arrival we found that "A", "B" and "C" Companies were billeted in a large, disused cotton factory at one end of the town. There was plenty of room for the 300 men who were put in there, but it wasn't particularly comfortable, being very draughty, as there were at least seven exits none of which had doors on them. However, each man had quite a good ration of straw and they settled down quite happily.

Wingles itself was a dirty little mining town surrounded on all sides by mines, slag heaps and factories. The people were much the same type as one would find in any mining town in England and Scotland and their houses much the same. Headquarters Company and "D" Company were billeted about a mile away from us in the town itself, while the Officers' billets were scattered about in various houses and shops.

Simon and Hec and I all lived in the same house - again I am afraid I have forgotten the owner's name. The inhabitants were an extremely voluble woman (who never stopped talking for one second, except to draw breath!), her husband and son and daughter. The husband had part-time employment in the local ammonia factory and seldom appeared, except at night, and the wife informed me, almost before we got inside the house, that he drank; however we never saw any signs of this vice! The kids were rather a nice pair - Robert aged 9 and Odette aged 14. Robert, we found out, was a very intelligent little boy and was very anxious to know all about everything and to increase his few words of English at every possible opportunity. Odette proved later to be a friend indeed long after when, we prisoners of war, we marched through Wingles on the early part of our journey to this place. This incident might be worth relating now.

We were very short of food on the whole of our march as prisoners of war through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany and depended more or less entirely on what we could buy or were given by the locals; this latter in France only. As we passed through Wingles, Hec and I espied Odette on her bicycle; we managed to catch her eye and gave her a handful of 10 franc notes and told her to go off and buy food of any sort for us. Off she went and came back later with all sorts of cheese, bread and butter, eggs etc. I was carrying a good deal in the way of packs, haversacks, blankets etc and it was a very hot day, so rather than let me carry the food which she had just bought for us, she hung it on her bicycle and walked along beside us the whole way - about 12 miles to our next camp! She indeed proved to be a friend.

We didn't see much of Madame except when we came in after supper at night, as she had a shop in the front of the house which kept her busy. We had quite comfortable bedrooms and the house was very clean. Our two Companies again shared a Mess together in a house quite near the men's billets and only a minute or two from our own. The owners of this house were an ex-service man and his wife, and were most hospitable and kind and allowed us to use their kitchen to cook in. In fact, as Allan Shearer lived in their only spare room, they gave up their whole house for us. We also saw the old Madame on our way through Wingles as prisoners of war, and as Hec and I passed the house (we were marching together) she rushed out into the road and wrung us both by the hand and tearfully wailed "Oh! les deux freres - c'est terrible!"

I knew George (Chamier, brother-in-law, married to PM's eldest sister, Marion) was somewhere near Wingles and was determined to find him. So one Sunday Andre and I set out in my truck after Church parade. We lunched in a place called Phalemphan not far from Wingles and then went on. Without much difficulty we found George's regiment at Camphin, only about eight miles from Wingles. He was in his office but came out and gave us tea in the Mess and was in great form. It was grand seeing him again and having him so near, as we went out together on various occasions after that.

Our first spell at Wingles was taken up with some training and a few route marches and various trips to Lille in the evenings by way of recreation. One day, Harry, Simon, Shaw and I motored down the Somme via Arras and did an extraordinarily interesting tour of the old battlefields and many of the War Cemeteries and War Memorials. It was made all the more interesting by the fact that Harry and Simon both knew the country well from the last war and recognised many of the places where various incidents took place. We saw the Seaforths regimental war memorial first, which was simple but very impressive. It is a plain Celtic Cross about 20ft. high and stands in a small enclosure by itself, right in the middle of a big, flat plain on which I believe more Seaforths fought and died during 1914-18 than any other part of France and Belgium. We stopped every now and then to have a look at some of the cemeteries, all of which were beautifully kept. They all have the same pattern headstone - perfectly plain with just the name, rank, regiment and date on them. There isn't a weed to be seen anywhere and the grass is beautifully kept and the whole thing in perfect order and most impressive. There are some very big ones in that part and in many there must have been tens of thousands of stones. I well remember it was a perfectly glorious Spring day that Sunday, and seeing those thousands and thousands of stones in white rows, it seemed impossible then that the whole thing could ever happen over again. I'm afraid from my description it would sound rather a depressing way of spending a Sunday afternoon, but, on the contrary, one did not get a feeling of depression - the whole effect was extraordinarily peaceful and quiet - and to me intensely interesting. We found Carol Baird's grave and also the Blackwood (Fortrose) sons' grave, both of whom had been 2nd Seaforths during the War, and various others. The 9th Division Memorial in which the 9th Seaforths (which Pa - Lt. Colonel C C H O Gascoigne, DSO, 1877-1929 - was in) were a Battalion. This one was equally impressive, being a huge cairn of stones some 30-40ft. high with the name of each unit in the Division engraved on one of the stones all round. Finally we went on to the Highland Division and Newfoundland Division ones, which are both in the same park. The former is a replica of the Highlander they have on so many of the memorials in the North (as at Bonar Bridge for instance) and the latter a Moose - both about 20 times life size. They stand in a large enclosed piece of land which has been left exactly as it was in 1918. The grass has grown over everything, of course, but you can still see where the trenches were and the ground is littered with relics of all kinds. But it has not been spoilt at all by being commercialised like Vimy, which I am going to write about later. We put our names in the visitors' book in the Newfoundland hut and started on our way home. We stopped in Arras, where GHQ was then, and had an excellent dinner in the hotel. Again, little did I think that I should march through that town only about three months later - a prisoner of war.

Another day Simon and I took some of the men from our Companies over to see the Vimy Memorial. It is simply colossal and stands on the top of the Vimy ridge overlooking a huge flat plain and can be seen from miles away. Here, however, as I said before, it has been rather spoilt. All the original trenches have been built up with bags of cement so as they will last forever, and there are lemonade booths and postcard stands etc dotted about, which spoils it rather. However, Simon and I left these and went further afield and he found various old haunts in the surrounding country where he said he had been with 9th Seaforths in the last War.

The battlefield of Loos was only two or three miles from Wingles and some of us went over and had a look at it one day. Although it all happened more than 24 years ago, and the ground had been ploughed many times since then, there was still quite a lot to be seen and Simon managed to reconstruct quite a lot of what had happened, which was interesting.

The 6th Seaforths and 4th Camerons were at villages quite close to us and we saw quite a lot of them as they came over every now and then. The pipes and drums played Retreat in the town square once or twice which always caused a tremendous stir amongst the local inhabitants.

One day I motored over with David Murray to Lieres to see the Mayor and his wife. As soon as we got near the village some of the kids spotted us and there was a howl of delight, "Les Ecosais - ils retournes!" And almost before we had reached the village news had gone round that we were coming back! It was a Sunday and there was a large party (as usual) in progress in the Mayor's house. They were delighted to see us and we were drawn in and sat down to eat and drink. I had brought a Scotch pearl thistle brooch for Madame Laversin which she was delighted with. They persuaded us to stay to supper and opened a bottle or two of champagne to celebrate the occasion. However, we managed to steer our way home alright!

There is not much else of interest to tell about our first stay at Wingles. After we had been there about a week, orders came for us to move again up to a village called Leers, near Roubaix, to relieve a Brigade on the Belgian frontier. Again we moved by MT.

First Tour on the Belgian Frontier

We had been on one or two preliminary reconnaissance visits to Leers before, so knew more or less what to expect. Our chief duties were to watch the frontier there, mainly with a view to stopping smuggling. My Company took over these duties first, which employed most of the men in my Company, as we had to supply three guards, each of which did 24 hours on. It was much the same sort of place as Wingles, only instead of coal mines there were various kinds of factories and works scattered about. Roubaix, which is the sort of Manchester of France, was only about five miles away.

Again we were fairly well scattered, each Company being given their own area. In my case the men were billeted in some evacuated and very derelict houses which had been left in a pretty bad state by a Bn. of the East Surreys who we took over from. However, we managed to get things sorted out, and in the end I think we were more comfortable than at Wingles. By this time we were getting pretty good at improvising and managed to build quite a good brick oven in the cookhouse in order to get a change of diet from eternal stews which the men had ("SOS" they always called it - "same old stew"). My office was next door to the billets and there was quite a good park for the transport. One great boon, the men had wirelesses but they were never very satisfactory and too weak to get English stations which the Bosch jammed most of the day. The ones they had here were good sets left behind by the East Surreys and were run off the electric light. We paid 60 francs a week for each, which came to very little when split amongst the Company. Again, we shared a Mess with "B" Company officers, and here we were very fortunate in getting hold of a very modern villa, the owners of which had evacuated it. It had all modern conveniences and was extremely well furnished and had a bathroom. However, there was a snag about the bathroom as the water was heated by gas which you bought in cylinders. Try as we might we couldn't get any of these so had to improvise and boil petrol cans and kettles etc up on the kitchen range for baths. The house consisted of three good bedrooms, which Simon, Hec and I had, two small rooms upstairs for the cook and our batmen, a basin with running water on the landing upstairs, kitchenette and scullery and dining room and sitting room in one downstairs. All were extremely well furnished and it was a joy to have really comfortable armchairs to sit in again. We also had an extremely good radio gramophone left by the East Surreys which we hired from a local firm. We had Ralph Campbell, one of my Company cooks (who was later killed), to cook for us, as he did at Wingles, and he cooked extremely well; and three batmen to do the housework and waiting at meals. Davie looked after the feeding and did it very well. So on the whole we were lucky and spent a very comfortable week or so living in our villa. The caretaker lived in a house just across the road and produced everything for us in the way of plate and linen and cooking utensils and also did our washing and sold us eggs and vegetables. We discovered that there was quite a good cellar in the house and managed to purchase wine from the housekeeper as and when we required it, which was useful.

To go back to the Frontier duties. I think the Jocks rather enjoyed it on the whole as they had to prowl about at night and try to catch these smugglers - however they were never successful. Most of it was done with dogs, I believe, and pretty successfully. There were a few Douaniers at various points and they led a patrol of Jocks out each night. Hector Mackenzie (Yon's son), who was now a subaltern in my Company, took a great delight in crawling about in ditches all night trying to catch a smuggler and we used to pull his leg about it. Another thing he was good at was eating! I've never seen anyone with such an appetite! It was quite incredible the amount of food he consumed and it was a source of continual amusement to all of us.

When we had finished our tour of duty on frontier guard, most of the time was spent in finding work parties for the Royal Engineers who were busy digging an anti-tank ditch and building block houses. Little did we realise that all our efforts were wasted as I don't think any of them were ever used. We had to do a certain amount of work on the defences ourselves, on our Company positions which we were to take up in the then unlikely event of a German invasion of Belgium. However, this was most unsatisfactory as it was chiefly loop holing houses etc and the owners naturally objected to having a hole made in the wall of their bedroom and the whole house filled with sandbags and wood! If they objected - as they invariably did, not unnaturally - if the house was to be occupied, all one could do was to put it down on paper that such and such a job would be done in the event of a German invasion of Belgium - and the thing became a farce. We apparently had no powers at all to compel people to clear out of their houses. Thinking back on it now, and many, many other similar cases which we were later to come across, it all goes to make one realise that the French didn't really take the War seriously at all OR had no intention of putting up any kind of fight for it if war did come. However, we played about with the places we were allowed to work on and the men gained a certain amount of experience and learned something about making defences.

There was a Brigade of Guards in the village next door to us and we occasionally saw some of them. I remember seeing the Duke of Gloucester walking about in the streets quite often and I think he must have been living with them. We saw our first Bosch aeroplane while we were at Leers. He came over from the direction of Belgium one bright sunny afternoon, quite low down, but there didn't appear to be any AA guns in our vicinity as no one took much notice of him, although the air raid warning did go. I heard one coming over in the early hours of the morning and the Belgians had several cracks at him on his way back to Germany.

One day, it was announced that we were to take part in an exercise. As the Brigade who we relieved had been in the area since the outbreak of War, it looked to us suspiciously like us having to "hold the baby" for them and that their Divisional Commander whose Division we were temporarily in apparently didn't think they were capable of doing it - if they had they would certainly have carried it out before this! It was the first bit of higher training we had done since Mobilization and so was an experience for the Jocks.

It started about 4pm one day and ended at 8am two days later. For me it meant about 48 hours with little or no sleep. Where it was possible, the platoons occupied the actual positions they would have done in the event of Germany invading Belgium. I say where possible as many of the trenches were 3 or 4ft deep with water owing to the thaw and rain and, as I said before, many of the positions were merely marked on paper and no work had been begun on them. I found a room in a small farmhouse which I used as my headquarters which was fairly comfortable. They were a family of husband and wife, two sons aged 11 and 14, two flapper daughters and a small one of about 4 or 5. The latter had an amazing resemblance fo CGM [Gillian "Gosh" Mitford to whom PGM was engaged for a time and who later married Dick Troughton] so much so that I showed Madame the photograph I had of her at about that age and she was astonished! They were awfully kind and, although we had our own food, insisted on giving us coffee and rum at various hours of the day and night, which was very pleasant as it poured with rain most of the time during the exercise. Harry came round and saw us once or twice, accompanied by various Staff Officers and Generals amongst whom was the Duke of Gloucester, but I was sound asleep when they arrived about 3am so they merely looked in, saw me snoring on the floor and walked out again! The whole thing appeared to go fairly well and apart from what I have related was uneventful.

Once of twice we went into Lille for the evening which was only about 12 miles away. One evening Simon, George Baird, Charles Shand and I hired a taxi and proceeded in the direction of Lille at

breakneck speed. It was a very cold night and I was jammed in on the back seat, and as there was a fearful fog inside you could not see out of any of the windows at all - how the driver saw anything I can't think. We eventually stopped in what we thought was a traffic block in Lille with rows of cars either side. By way of conversation we asked the driver where he was going until we had dined and were ready to go home again and he said "Je reste ici". We thought the remark odd in the middle of a traffic block but sat back and waited for the traffic to move on again. Nothing happened for five minutes and again he said "Je reste ici" - again we waited for the traffic to move on and again we remained stationary. After about 10 minutes of this we got fed up and said we would get out and walk. We got out to find that we had been sitting in a car park the whole time and not a traffic block! It doesn't seem very funny written like this but we nearly burst ourselves laughing about it at the time - I think the driver thought we were quite mad! We always started off our evenings at Lille in the cocktail bar called "The Miami" in the Carlton Hotel. It was rather an amusing place as you saw represented there officers of practically every regiment in the BEF and many French regiments. It was very similar to any London cocktail bar except that you could only drink champagne cocktails or straight champagne. It was decorated with very clever caricatures of Hitler, Goering, Goebbels and the rest of them! One nearly always met someone one knew and usually found some of the 2nd Bn. there, as they were billeted at Halloin just outside Lille. The basement of the hotel was got up as a nightclub and I think it was supposed to be a copy of the Florida in London. It opened about 6pm and there was a bar at one end and a band (who were extraordinarily good) at the other end and dance floor in the middle. One saw some odd sights there in the shape of officers dancing with local Lillian ladies! It would have proved a goldmine for a blackmailer! Drinks on the whole were extraordinarily cheap there, champagne being about the cheapest of them - and some people were quite happy, to say the least of it, by the end of the evening - although I never saw anyone drunk, I'm glad to say, as of course everyone (French and British) were wearing uniform. However, one did get an idea of how very odd some of the Belisha officers were in the BEF!

As far as I can remember this particular night that I am talking about, we went on to dine at a very popular restaurant called "Chez Andre" where one got a most excellent dinner. It was kept by Madame ? and her husband, who was the chef. If you stayed late enough he used to appear out of the back regions in his chef's hat and if you happened to be with a friend of his he always called for a bottle of champagne before you left!

One rather interesting thing about this restaurant was that the walls were completely covered with drawings and sketches of all kinds - some very good, some very bad. I believe that the origin of it was that in the old days it was frequented by French artists a lot, most of whom couldn't pay their bill, so instead they presented the proprietor with one of their works! They had the most superb lobster and langouste there which Simon and I always had, washed down by a very good vintage white wine they gave you with it. It was such a treat being able to have a different wine with each course which one can seldom afford in England!

After dining well (but wisely!) we went on to a nightclub, the name of which I can't remember. This wasn't very amusing as it was packed with officers and you could cut the atmosphere with a knife! The cabaret consisted of three or four rather plump females, wearing little or nothing, disporting themselves on the dance floor - they didn't dance very well at that! I remember I nearly set one of them on fire that night! The bar of the place was at one end in an alcove up some steps and we happened to be propping it up when the girls appeared through a door at the back and stood by us waiting for their turn in the cabaret. About all they were wearing was a transparent filmy gauze veil over their shoulders which hung down to their feet. In the crush my cigarette caught one of these and I thought there was rather an odd smell, when I suddenly saw a smouldering hole

in the veil, just about to burst into flames! However, some humourist standing near me saw it first and proceeded to play a soda syphon on the unfortunate girl and all was well!

We didn't stay long as the heat was appalling, so we collected our taxi. Fortunately the driver appeared sober (which didn't always happen when we hired a taxi!) and we set off home.

Altogether we were at Leers about 10 days; it was a change if nothing else. We returned to Wingles by MT again.

Wingles Again

On arriving back at Wingles again we found that the REs had done a certain amount to make our billets in the factory more comfortable, although we didn't get half what we had asked for but we weren't surprised! They had put in water and built some sheds for the cookhouses which had previously been in the engine room of the factory.

I had a different billet this time in a house just across the road from the factory, which was much the same as the one I had before. The Madame who owned it wasn't so effusive as the first one, which was a blessing. The household consisted of Madame, a daughter of about 18 who worked in a tailor's shop in the next village (conscripted for making uniforms) and Monsieur who I hardly ever saw as he was on a night shift in a local factory and slept most of the day. I also managed to get a new Company office across the road from the factory. Previously I used the sort of pay box of the factory, which was a wooden erection with glass windows all round which stood in the middle of the factory and looked rather like a signal box!

We found on our return that our chief job now was to be digging an anti-tank ditch just outside Lille.

Each Company took it in turns to do three days a week at this job. We started at about 8am every morning in the Battalion transport and had to motor about 12 miles. We took dinners out with us and stopped work about 4pm. Each Company had a length of ditch to dig, and so it became competitive as to who dug the most, which also helped to keep their interest in it. We had two or three REs with us who were supposed to show us what to do, but if anything they knew rather less about it than we did and eventually I got most of it out of the book! The remaining three days of the week we did some mild training but as the countrysides were nothing but a mass of coal mines, this wasn't very easy!

One day I fixed up to have a route march over to George's (Chamier) Bn. at Camphin and George promised to produce dinners for the Jocks and arrange a football match afterwards with his men, but something happened and it fell through in the end.

While we were at Wingles the Divisional concert party came over and gave a show once or twice and were really extraordinarily good and the Jocks always enjoyed them.

Simon and Rory and I motored over to Bethune one evening, which wasn't far from us, and had our hair cut and did some shopping and dined in the hotel there. It was rather an attractive old town but had been rather battered in the last war. (I remember there had been a certain amount of damage done by bombing when we marched through it again as prisoners.)

Another evening I took my truck over and saw George and we went on to Lille in his large and comfortable limousine and dined. We took their doctor and George's friend Paul, their French liaison officer. This time he took me to a new bar, not far from the Carlton, which was pleasanter as it wasn't so noisy and had not so many people in it. We went on and dined at "Chez Andre" again. George took me into the kitchens at the back before dinner and introduced me to various bodies who worked in the back regions who were delighted to see him!

Another place we used to dine at was the Gourmet sans Chiquet (I don't know whether this is spelt right) which was a very nice little place. It apparently wasn't well known by the BEF as it was

always full of French people and very few British officers dined there - which was a pleasant change from the normal crowd of them one met everywhere. Here again one got an excellent dinner. I wish I could remember some of the dishes we had there. Andre Jourde and I used to go there a lot afterwards.

Lille itself was an attractive town with some very good shops in it. La Rue Nationale was the main street and I remember there was a most excellent chocolate shop in it - one of the Despaux Havez shops. Rows and rows and rows of every conceivable kind of chocolate were laid out on glass slabs. You bought your box at whatever price you wished (anything from 50 to 250 or 300 francs) and then chose the chocs you wanted put in it. They had most attractive boxes - hand painted etc - and I sent several home. One afternoon Andre and RAAS and David Murray and I went in to a shop to ask the way. RAAS and David, who were wearing kilts, waited for us outside on the pavement. When we came out about three minutes later, we found a complete blockage outside the shop door and a large crowd of about 40 people, in the centre of which stood RAAS and David looking rather embarrassed - their kilts being the attraction!

The days were by quite uneventfully really at Wingles and there is nothing much to report about our doings here during our second visit.

Here again, as in all the places we went, the Jocks were very popular and got on well with the local inhabitants. Somehow the French and Scots seem to be more akin than the French and English. When we arrived in Wingles we found that British troops had rather a bad name there. A certain English regular battalion had been there before us and I think must have broken the place up, or had made a nuisance of themselves in some way - anyway they had not been popular.

One Saturday, our Battalion football team played a team of local miners, which was a great success. I wasn't present but was told afterwards that a Corporal in my Company, who was captain of the team, was most surprised when at the beginning of the game and at the end he was embraced on both cheeks by the opposing captain!

We had a group photograph taken of all the officers in the Battalion one Sunday after Church parade. It was the only photograph we ever had taken when we were all together and I wish I had a copy of it. I lost both my copies later when I had to abandon my 8 cwt truck to the Bosch when we were retiring after the attack on the Somme.

Finally, after being at Wingles for about three weeks in all, we received orders one day to move to Bailleul on the frontier, about 29 kilometres west of Lille. We left Wingles on a vile, cold morning with sleet coming down and a gale blowing, again in MT.

Bailleul

This journey was one of the coldest and most unpleasant I have ever experienced. The sleet slowly turned to snow and, with the gale that was blowing, it came in through the front of my truck horizontally. "Boots" Macdonald and I were frozen stiff by the time we arrived at Bailleul, as you have practically no protection at all in an 8 cwt - added to which the windscreen wiper wouldn't work. However, it cleared up a bit on arrival.

We had been here before as, when we were at Lieres, we had been all set to relieve a French battalion and had come up and done a reconnaissance in February. So we knew something about the place and what we were coming to.

One again, my Company and Simon's were in billets next door to each other and we also shared an Officers' Mess. I was allotted barns in three farms about a mile or so outside the town, all close to each other. They looked rather dismal at first sight, especially after it had been snowing and sleeting. However, by now we were quite good at making ourselves as comfortable as possible.

We had sent an advance party on ahead from the Battalion to get things ready for us, and it was just as well that we did. The filth and dirt left behind by the French Battalion who we relieved was indescribable, I believe. However, our advance party had done splendid work and managed to clean most if it up by the time we arrived.

[I find it very difficult to write coherently at the moment as there are two Gordon Highlander officers giving each other a lesson in Japanese, sitting by my elbow at the same table!!]

Although we were quite close to Bailleul, which was a fairly big town, we were completely in the country and surrounded by green fields, which was a nice change from Wingles. The owners of the farms were nice people and out to help as much as they could.

I got the men settled into their billets that afternoon as best we could, and decided to wait till tomorrow until we sorted them out into Platoons. The next day I put one Platoon into each farm which gave them all plenty of room. We managed to get lots of straw from the farmers and jammed up all the draughty cracks in the floor with sacks of grain and on the whole most of them were fairly comfortable.

My own billet was about half a mile up the road in a small house belonging to a Douanier and his wife. I had quite a nice room separated from their kitchen by a glass and wood partition. They were a nice pair and very kind. She always made my breakfast for me in the mornings which saved me going about two miles to the Mess. My 8 cwt truck came up from the men's billets each morning at 8.15 and collected me. I didn't see much of the Douanier as he had to go out to his work at strange hours of the day and night. It is odd to think of it now they they were both quite sure that Hitler would never invade Belgium and felt quite secure there! Simon Fraser lived just across the road from me with some very nice people and I used to go in occasionally and see them. Our Mess was about a mile away from the men's billets and was situated in another farm. The owners were half-Flemish and consisted of six old men, each older than the last, and two women. It was rather an attractive farm with big buildings and a sort of moat all around it. They gave us their dining room to feed in and a small room off it where we could cook. David Murray and Hec Mackenzie lived here also. We had the same staff as before - Campbell to cook and Barclay as waiter. On the whole I think we fed fairly well at Bailleul as there were quite good shops in the town and we could get eggs and milk and butter from the farm.

One Company was always on frontier duty, which meant that they lived in billets actually on the frontier which was some two miles from the town. Each Company took it in turns to do this job for eight days and were then relieved by another Company. The remainder worked on the defences which had been started by the French who we had taken over from. They were all very slipshod and most of what they had done in the way of trenches etc had fallen in with the frost and thaw and we had to dig them all out again and re-vent them. However, it was interesting work and we all enjoyed it. My Company's particular job was rebuilding a communication trench which the French

had started and which had fallen in. The mud or, rather, clay was incredible and in some parts it was almost impossible to work. In places you sank up to your knees and it was just like trying to dig a trench in syrup! However, when dry weather came it was a bit easier. We managed to finish the job before we left for the Saar and were very proud of it as it was really well made - so much so that the farmer on whose land it was must have had a devil of a job dismantling it and filling it in again after the war in France was over!

My Company never did a turn of duty on the frontier as we left before our turn came round.

The remainder of the Battalion were billeted in the town of Bailleul. The Battalion orderly room was in the main street (Rue de Lille) and HQ officers' mess quite close.

Soon after we got to Bailleul and 2nd Seaforths arrived and came into 152 Brigade, and the 6th Seaforths left and went to the Brigade that the 2nd Battalion was in. This was done for some reason throughout the whole Division - there was a Regular Battalion put into each Brigade which meant two Territorial and one Regular Battalion in each Brigade. It is interesting to note here that, in the opinion of the Staff and in fact most people, the Territorial Battalions (with one exception!) were considered far better than the Regular Battalions. It was nice having the 2nd Battalion with us as I saw a lot of old friends and Phip (Philip Mitford) and Colin Mackenzie (Farr) were with them. Phip took over Adjutant of the 2nd from Rory Horne soon after they got to Bailleul. We usually had combined Church Services etc with them so as the Jocks got to know each other, and of course we had quite a few ex-Regulars with us.

To go back to our billets in the farms. I got the farmer to let me have one of his fields and we got a football ground going, which the Jocks enjoyed playing on, in the afternoons after work. We built a wonderful range in the cookhouse out of bricks and clay which proved a great success and helped a lot in the feeding. Fortunately the weather was lovely most of the time we were here, with only an occasional wet day here and there. Soldiering in France was still more or less like peacetime soldiering except for odd duties like frontier guards. We had to supply guards for outside the Orderly Room and they had to be just as well turned out as at home.

The town of Bailleul was rather fine in its way. It was knocked about pretty badly during the last War and most of the public buildings were new. It had a very fine Town Hall which I think was built with funds collected in Huddersfield under the scheme started after the War when British towns undertook to help rebuild French towns that had been badly damaged. The Town Hall overlooked a very fine square of an area of about eight acres. I remember one day the Highland Division massed pipes and drums played Retreat in the square. I and some others watched from the tower of the Town Hall and it was a fine sight. The last time the Divisional massed pipes had played was at Aldershot for the Canadians. There were various big noises present when they played at Bailleul, including our Corps Commander, Sir Ronald Adam, Bt., and a French Army Commander. One lovely afternoon, having nothing to do, Hec and John Anderson and I hired a taxi and went over to Dunkirk which was about 30 kilometres drive.

It was a perfectly glorious day with real hot sun. On our way we stopped at Cassel, from where Foch directed one of the major battles (can't remember which) of the last War. Cassel is built on a hill - the only hill for miles - standing in the middle of a vast, flat plain. There is a kind of Barracks built at the very top of the hill with a statue of Foch (same as the one outside Victoria Station) in front of it. You get the most magnificent view from this hill and can see far into Belgium on one side and far across France on the other. We actually saw the Canadian War Memorial at Vimy some 80 kilometres away.

After this we went on to Dunkirk. Little did we think when we were there that, in only about two months' time, most of the BEF would be evacuated from that small port! It was a lovely beach with miles and miles of sand along the top of which runs a boulevard with cafes, shops etc on it. We went for a long walk on the beach for about three hours and then wandered along the front and had one or two 'aperitifs' before dinner. While we were walking along the front (we were wearing kilts), two small boys, aged about 4, rushed out of a house and ran up to us and, after a pause and scratching of heads, said simultaneously, "Can you give me a badge, please" very slowly - they were both wearing glengarry bonnets much too big for them! We looked inside the bonnets and saw that they had been bought at 'Scotch House' in Knightsbridge! We said we were very sorry but we only had one each, and they looked very crestfallen! Their Ma and Pa were looking out of their sitting room window and had obviously instructed them what to say, and were much amused!

We tried to find a decent restaurant where we could have dinner and eventually went into one where we made friends with a Frenchman. He took us along to an English bar run by an ex-British soldier where we found a most peculiar collection of people, amongst whom were four British Merchant Captains, a Lieutenant RN, and some French civilians. We drank champagne cocktails there for a bit and then all went back and had quite a grand dinner at the Hotel du Gare. After a lot of argument, our French friend persuaded us to go back to what he called his 'batchelor flat'! We weren't very keen, however, but eventually said we would go for half an hour. We found that it was his mother's flat which he now inhabited by himself. He made us drink more champagne and we eventually left at about 11 pm and got back to Bailleul at midnight.

Most of our time was quiet and uneventful at Bailleul and there is little of interest to report as we did nothing much other than our daily routine work.

The famous Foret de Nieppe was only about eight kilometres away. One day, Simon Fraser and I went over for a Sunday afternoon walk. It really was the most beautiful wood I've ever seen. I don't know what size it was but it was a pretty big green blob on the map and must have been about 3 miles by 7 long. At that time (in early April) it was one mass of primroses, violets, vetches and a dozen other kinds of wild flowers. They grew so thick (most of the trees being quite young) that it was just like a carpet of flowers. It was another glorious afternoon and, even hot walking with our coats off, I don't think I have enjoyed these few hours so much since we left England. We had seen very few woods since coming to France and it was such a complete change of scenery, the birds singing as hard as they could, and everything so peaceful and quiet. Alas, the next time I heard of the Foret de Nieppe was when I reached here. I was told by an officer who had been there just before the BEF were evacuated that there had been heavy fighting in the woods and that parts of it had been set on fire by incendiary bombs - which seemed so sad. I remember we came back after a most delightful walk and had our whisky and soda before supper, sitting outside the Mess in the evening sun.

Simon and I went into Lille for a bath and dinner several times and always had a very pleasant evening. And Andre Jourde and I went in once or twice on shopping expeditions. He was such a nice companion to have as he loved doing anything and got quite excited about going to Lille and was so enthusiastic about everything! I dined once or twice while with the 2nd Battalion and some of them often came down and dined in our Mess. We found that the longer we stayed at Bailleul the nicer the owners of our billets became, and after we had made friends with them they were always most helpful. One rather formidable old Madame, who owned the farm where I had my Company HQ office and a Platoon, gave a bit of trouble once as she swore she looked out of her bedroom window one night and saw two Jocks cooking one of her chickens over a fire! However, on

investigation, we discovered no traces whatever of feathers and they all swore black and blue that they hadn't eaten her hen! There was, however, a great temptation for them to do so, as she had dozens of chickens which wandered about everywhere and laid their eggs in most strange places. More than once, on getting into my 8cwt truck, there were squawks and two of three old hens leapt out of the back having deposited their eggs there. One day I actually sat on an egg that had been laid on the driving seat! So it was rather much to expect the transport drivers to return eggs that had been laid in the trucks! At the same time, at this particular farm, they did a roaring trade with the Jocks by selling them egg and bacon sandwiches at 9 francs (it certainly didn't cost more than 2 francs to produce!) and a mug of beer.

Looking back over these days, although the memory of them is fading pretty quickly in this place, it all seems years ago. I think we all enjoyed life and really had a very comfortable existence.

Then one day the scare came that Hitler was about to invade Belgium and we were all put on three hours' notice to move. We got packed up and had all the trucks loaded and were prepared to cross the frontier at any moment. We were told that we had to be prepared for at least a 30 kilometre march with little or no chance of food or sleep - which rather shook us! However, after three or four days it all calmed down, and when we left for Metz everything appeared calm.

The Battalion leaves for Metz

The Battalion left Bailleul for Metz on 24 April 1940-. We left by train early on a cold, raw morning. I think we were all glad to be off at last on a definite job, having spent our last few days with everything fully loaded and ready to move at a moment's notice in the event of the Germans invading Belgium.

Some of the 2nd Seaforths who had recently joined the Brigade travelled with us. It was a tiresome journey and we passed through dull country. The time was passed by consuming an odd assortment of food and drink, and a non-stop game of poker was kept going in one carriage by Duncan Macrae (our MO), Murdo MacLennan, Walter Mundell, John Anderson, R A A S Macrae, Phip Mitford and I from the moment we got into the train till the moment we got out!

Eventually, after a thirty hour journey, we arrived in pouring rain at the small station of Meziers the following morning at 11 am. We were met by Alick Cargill on the platform with the unwelcome news that the Battalion had orders to march back to Metz, some eight kilometres away, which we had already passed through in the train. The 2nd Seaforths had orders to remain at Meziers. So back we marched to Metz through pouring rain along the usual poplar lined Route Nationale and arrived at a large Barracks on the outside of Metz which were known as Les Quatiers des Valliers.

These Barracks, which had been built by the Germans prior to 1914, were occupied by a hundred or so British troops of various Regiments, most of them either going or coming from home, under a garrison Adjutant, a Captain in the Ulster Rifles whose name I have forgotten. It was a pleasant surprise to find that they were fairly clean although more or less unfurnished. We had plenty of space, so, having got the Jocks fairly comfortably settled in, I went off in search of my own billet. I had a choice of three and decided on quite a nice little house about five minutes walk from the Barracks. It was in an attractive situation, the back looking out on to a hill covered with vines and gardens, and my bedroom in front, overlooking the town of Metz with the three spires of the Cathedral dominating the whole countryside. Duncan Macrae was living in the house immediately opposite and across the street and we carried on conversations through our respective bedroom windows whilst shaving in the mornings!

All the officers fed in a central Mess in the Barracks which, although it looked like a glorified soda fountain, must have been a French officers' Mess in peacetime. Most of the time here was spent in cleaning up and sorting out equipment and drill parades for the men, while the officers did various reconnaissances of the positions we were to take over from the French in the battle area. One morning some of us drove out to a very anquated range near the town to fire our revolvers - first time I'd let mine off since 1937, I think!

While we were there I went into Metz several times. It was a lovely old town which was approached across several bridges over the Mosel river. Built on a series of hills, it is a network of narrow, winding streets and extremely difficult to find one's way about in. The shops were grand, and at that time life there seemed very gay and normal with all the cafes open and lots of smartly dressed women and French and British officers walking about and having drinks outside the cafes in the warm spring sunshine. We used to take a truck in after tea, do some shopping and went to the main hotel, L'hotel Royal, where we had a bath and spent an hour or so drinking champagne cocktails in the bar. A very aged French general, who was the Commandant of Metz Garrison and who must have been at least 70, was more or less a permanent feature in the bar. He was always

surrounded by his girlfriends of all ages who tweaked his ears and patted him on the head, much to the disapproval of his wife who was usually in the background. There were several excellent restaurants in the town, our favourite being "Les Nous Enfants" where you could order your meal from a menu a yard long and find it waiting for you the following evening. Andre Jourde (our liaison officer) and I spent an hour in the Cathedral one day. It is a magnificent building and, although most of the stained glass had been taken out of the windows, the interior was most impressive and it had wonderful carving inside and out. The morning after our arrival in Metz, I was surprised to find a letter written in familiar handwriting with a local postmark. To my greater surprise and joy, I found it was from Veronica Fraser (Lovat, later married first Phipps, second Fitzroy Maclean) who I thought was still in London. She said she had a job as a nurse in a French hospital at Ay, quite close to Metz. The letter had actually been written a week earlier saying that she had heard that "the Seaforths were coming to Metz". So much for security in France! We ourselves were not supposed to know our destination even twelve hours before leaving Bailleul !

Next day I motored over to see her. Veronica greeted me on arrival and I thought she looked tired and overworked but she was in great form. The hospital, which was in a chateau, was run by a French Countess out of her private income. She took me over the wards and introduced me to some of the patients, two of which were badly wounded Black Watch men. The establishment consisted of French nurses and French army doctors (Veronica was the only English woman in the place) and the ambulance drivers were an amazing collection of American, Peruvian, Chilean etc. They were apparently a collection of adventurer playboys who had bought their own ambulances and were giving their services free. They lived a completely hand-to-mouth existence in some farm buildings near the chateau. Veronica took me down to tea with them and we had a meal (mostly out of Fortnum & Mason and Macey tins) of caviar, fried eggs, pate, tea, champagne, toast etc! They turned out to be a charming collection and were doing a fine job. I left Veronica's hospital with promises to come back and take her out to dinner in Metz one night. But I never saw her again as she moved at short notice. I heard afterwards in captivity from her saying that she had just managed to get out and back to England by a narrow margin when the Blitz came. On my way back, I looked in on 2nd Seaforths at Meziers and found that Phip was ill. I went round to his billet and found him propped up in bed with a streaming cold and being looked after by the faithful Pte. Stows! However, his unfailing charm had done the trick very quickly and the owners of the house, especially the daughter, couldn't do too much for him and he was being plied with hot drinks and food. I sat on his bed and talked to him for an hour and then motored back to Battacks.

I remember an incident which deeply impressed me at the time while on one of our reconnaissances with the CO in the Saar battle area. We were looking at some positions near a deserted village called Chemery. We had walked through the village which was an indescribable mess of filth and dirt, having been recently occupied by French troops since the outbreak of War. It was a tiny village of some 20 cottages but they had managed to collect enough money amongst themselves to put up a plain stone cross in the middle of the village with the inscription "Grace a Dieu, Sept 1938", obviously in thankfulness for Munich and knowing, had war come, their little village would have been obliterated. Actually it was later, when we withdrew behind the Maginot and the village was shelled to bits by the Maginot guns. After we had been at Quartier des Vaillers a week, the order came for us to move forward. That evening, just as it was getting dark, we paraded as a Battalion for the last time under the CO and marched off with the pipes playing.

The Battalion moves forward of the Maginot Line

We left about 7 pm and marched some 16 kilometres in a thunderstorm and blinding rain to a village called Vigy. There the Battalion stopped the night in various barns and houses. The officers all slept in one large room at the back of a cafe. We were very cramped and there was pretty good chaos, as we discovered later that there was a French sergeants' Mess installed in the same building! We were now only allowed to move at night, so the following day the Jocks amused themselves by dancing reels and country dances in the village street, much to the amazement of the inhabitants!

That night we moved again, stopping at a village called Ebbersvillers. The Jocks' billets were much the same here while the officers' ones were a distinct improvement. David Murray (who had been a Subaltern in my Company since we came to France) and I shared a room in quite a good sized house. The owner, a woman of about 60, spoke to us through half-opened doors, so we didn't see much of her. My Company officers (David Murray and Smith) and I shared a Mess with Simon Fraser and his Company in a farmhouse. The owners had evidently had warning of our arrival as, when we knocked on the door about midnight, Madame and daughter were waiting for us. They were both charming. Madame could only speak German but had no love for that race! However, her daughter, Marie Louise, spoke both German and French, so we fixed things up through her. She was about 18, with jet black hair and large, sparkling, brown eyes, attractive and bubbling over with excitement at our arrival. Almost the first thing she asked was whether we had a doctor with us. We produced Duncan Macrae, who happened to be with us, whereupon, without the slightest hesitation or false modesty, she drew upm her skirt and showed him a large mosquito bite above her knee, all the while pouring out a long and more or less unintelligible explanation, half in German and half in French, punctuated by shrieks of laughter. This was a situation Duncan was more than capable of dealing with and he played up well, and from then onwards we more or less had a free run of the house. They gave us their parlour with an excellent cooking stove for our Mess and we were very comfortable. For some unknown reason Marie Louise took a great fancy to me and it wasn't long before she was pouring out her private woes! She told me she was "betrothed" to a sergeant in the Maginot Line who her Pa and Ma wanted her to marry but whom she didn't care for at all, and what was she to do about it? I didn't know what the answer to this one was and managed to sidetrack it! We only saw Monsieur once. He was some sort of railway official and spoke only German. He didn't like us and was at no pains to conceal his dislike. We suspected, perhaps quite wrongly, that he was pro-Bosch.

It was lovely country in this district, big green fields and rolling valleys, and large beech forests. It must have looked its best at this time of year (late April, early May) with all the flowers out in their gardens and fields.

The day after we arrived David Murray left for home with a threatened appendix, which was the luckiest thing that ever happened to him in his life as he never returned to us, and in consequence avoided four or more years as a prisoner of war! When he left I took on his batman, Pte. Barkley, as my own. Pte. Forsyth, who had been with me since coming to France, had gone sick at Vigy and had been sent back to Metz in an ambulance to recover.

Whilst in this village, we got an interesting sideline on the tremendous faith the French had in the Maginot Line. In spite of the village being well within range of German long range artillery (they later even shelled Metz, 25 kilometres further south), and being only about six kilometres behind the Maginot line, none of the inhabitants ever gave a thought to the possibility of evacuation, if you suggested it to them; they merely smiled and said 'but we have the Maginot in front of us'.

We spent two days at Ebbersvillers and while we were there we motored up and made several reconnaissances of the positions we were to take over from the French. The actual battle area consisted of four lines. Firstly, the 'Ligne de Contact' which, as its name implied, was in actual touch with the enemy. Secondly, the 'Ligne de Recoile' some four kilometres behind. Thirdly, the 'Ligne d'Arret' and, finally, the much advertised 'Ligne Maginot'. It was all very impressive and formidable looking - on paper. When referring to these lines, the magic word that was on every French officer's lips was "project". There was a project for everything, all beautifully drawn out on maps and plans, and occasionally even marked out on the actual ground by sticks and tapes. But, except for the Ligne de Contact, which was extremely haphazard and less than half finished, there wasn't so much as a scrap to be seen on the actual positions. The principle the French went on was: let sleeping dogs lie, or if we don't worry the Bosch then they won't worry us, and on the whole it worked. It was all a most false and unnatural state of affairs. To further explain it, the following might be of interest and possibly amusement.

The Major commanding the French Battalion who we were to take over from, told us that one of his Company posts was in a certain village. He said that for the first night or so they had been bothered by an enemy patrol who took the same route and always passed through the same house at the end of the village at the same hour. We actually asked him if he sent out a patrol to shoot them up. He replied in all seriousness, "But no, we simply locked the doors of the house and that stopped them"! We were also amazed to find that the electric light supply to some of the villages on the French side which still worked actually came from an area held by the Germans! The French further told us that, on a certain part of the front that was overlooked by the Germans, only one ration lorry per day was allowed to pass, and that only between 5 and 6 pm, but that if more than one tried to pass, or at a different hour, it would be fired on by the Germans. We tried it on our first day in that particular sector and, sure enough, it was quite true!

Eventually, after two days, we left Ebbersvillers having said goodbye to Madame and Marie Louise, who kept some of my laundry in pawn, so as I should have to go back and collect it! We marched up to the Ligne de Recoile by night. My Company was allotted an area just outside a village called Neudorff. I had gone on ahead and Smith, my only Subaltern, had brought the Company on. It was midnight, one of the blackest nights I've ever experienced, when they arrived. As no lights whatever were allowed, it took over an hour to sort them all out. No positions at all had been dug by the French and, as we were not in actual contact with the enemy, it was unnecessary for the whole Company to man the positions. The only shelter available was in ten wooden army huts in the middle of a large beech wood, and these were full of anti-tank mines! I had been told that these were naturally not primed and were quite safe, but the French had cheerfully told us that the Germans occasionally dropped the odd shell in that area, and that if a stray one did happen to hit one of the huts, the whole lot would probably go up simultaneously. However, I took a chance on that and put the men in them and dossed down for rather an unhappy night on a heap of anti-tank mines! Next morning the Brigadier (Herbert Stewart) came to see me and suggested that we moved back into the village of Neudorff, half a mile or so further back, which we did with a good deal of relief!

The village was occupied by a Bn. of French troops who, to my joy, were packing up to leave. They eventually cleared off in the afternoon, leaving only a battery of Colonial Gunners commanded by a Captain and two Subalterns. They were Algerians and all, except the officers, coal black. Actually, they were very fine looking chaps, all of magnificent physique and very much better dressed than the average French troop - and all with bare feet! The Jocks were very intrigued

by them, but found it rather upsetting when the blacks would lean up against a doorway, motionless, and follow them down the streets with their enormous eyes!

The Company spent the afternoon cleaning up the village, which had been left in an appalling mess by the French, and, having made several houses more or less habitable, I got the men in.

Smith and I had a room each in a house above the French officers' Mess and, although they offered us the use of the Mess, we thought it would be easier if we fed on our own, and found a couple of adequate rooms to cook and feed in in the house next door where we also put our batmen and Campbell, my cook.

The village, which was evacuated of all civilians, was small and attractive. About twenty houses on either side of the village street, one pump being its only water supply. The gardens were full of lilac and spring flowers and the village surrounded by orchards and small fields.

During the day I put the Company on to working on the undug positions we had taken over from the French. By night, half the Company occupied these positions while the other half came back to billets. In the mornings I normally motored round to Bn. HQ, picking up Ronnie Pelham-Burn on my way. He lived in a village called Bibiche with his Company, about three miles from me.

Bn. HQ was situated in an old, disused, powder factory. Across country it was only about two miles; by road about five or six miles. It was an interesting road, parts of which lookeded right over to the Bosch positions some five miles away. The most exposed parts of it were camouflaged with canvas screening, which seemed to be fairly effective. There was one particular corner called 'Windy Corner'. Here the road went almost into the town of Bouzenville and then turned sharp right for the south. Several Bosch shells had landed round about this turning, so one didn't waste much time passing this particular spot.

Bouzenville was an extraordinary place. It was a town of some seven or ten thousand inhabitants which had been evacuated on the outbreak of War. Out of curiosity I went into it once. One had a most curious feeling in this place. It was completely deserted and, in the main street, there was not a sound or a movement, except for an occasional stray and hungry looking cat crossing the street. It must have been evacuated in a hurry as many of the shop windows still had produce and goods of various sorts in them. A main road and railway line ran through it. I didn't stay there long as it had been reported that German patrols visited it and occasionally inhabited it. The whole place was extremely eerie, watching one the whole time!

The powder factory was well sited for a Bn. HQ. It was approached by a narrow road off the main Metz-Bouzenville road and had been built in a clearing of large beech forest between two hills. The office and CO and Adjutants' quarters were in what must have been the manager's house at one time, while the men, transport, QM stores etc were tucked away in kind of casements dug into the sides of banks or covered with earth. One had to cross a small stream to get to the Bn. office. In this stream the French had rigged up rather an amusing figure called "Hitler's punishment". This was a small figure of Hitler cut out of tin and painted. The figure was winding a wheel and was rigged up to work by the flow of the stream and, in consequence, worked non-stop day and night!

While at Bn. HQ we usually discussed various questions and did odd jobs such as collecting the mail etc. One day an incident happened which luckily turned out to be amusing but which might have turned out to be tragic. Andre Jourde, whose bedroom was immediately above the CO's office, was having a look at his revolver and was apparently handling it fully loaded. There was a loud

report and a bullet came through the floor and missed Harry Houldsworth's head by inches and finally lodged in the wall.

Smith and I got on very well with the two French gunner officers who were billeted in Neudorff and often wandered in and had drinks with them in their Mess.

We never quite discovered on what principle, and when, they fired their guns but, several times when we were sitting talking to them in their Mess, one or other of them would suddenly jump to his feet and say, "S'il vous plait, un moment, je vais tirer", whereupon he would dash outside and a moment later there would be a shattering report and he would come back beaming all over, sit down and continue the conversation as if nothing had happened! This performance happened at any hour of the day and not apparently at any specified time!

One day, with tremendous ceremony, they asked us to come and dine with them in their Mess. We turned up at 7 pm and were plied with half a dozen kinds of aperitifs. The meal, which was enormous and extremely well cooked, was served by their black batmen wearing their ordinary uniform and rather grimy white gloves. We were given masses of pink, sweet champagne during the meal and were in pretty good form when we left about midnight, having cemented the Entente very firmly! The Algerians were excellent waiters and they told us that they made extremely good and faithful batmen.

It was in this village that we first experienced the amazing number of bird noises in this part of the world which later were to prove the bane of our existence. The whole countryside was full of nightingales and owls, but in this part especially the former. They made an astonishing noise at night and, having heard them en masse, I consider them to be very over-rated!

After we had been at Neudorff about five days, I was wakened one morning about 5 am by the roar of engines. On looking out of my bedroom window, up to a brilliant cloudless sky, I saw about 150 German bombers flying south-west at about 7000 ft - by this we knew that peace, or comparative peace, had ended. I heard later that morning that Paris had been bombed.

The Blitz begins

At 8 am I got the "Mise en Garde" or French Army signal that the 'balloon had gone up' and that we were to leave billets and man the posts. Later in the morning I heard that Hitler had invaded Holland and Belgium. The same old game as 26 years ago. We all expected it but somehow didn't think it would happen.

All I can remember about the rest of the day was one long rush and one damn thing after another. There were a thousand and one things to think about and be dealt with. Messages came in every five minutes and orders to be given right, left and centre. I only had one Subaltern in my Company, which didn't help. However, the CO sent me up Allan Shearer which relieved things a bit. Harassed gunners, machine gunners, sappers, anti-tank gunners dashed in and out of my office all day, asking innumerable questions. Various troops moved into the village, and with the quickening tempo our French gunner friends fired their guns every ten minutes - apparently into the blue!

I moved the platoons out of the village into their positions, and got the Jocks onto completing the various digging tasks they had been working on during the past few days. They worked magnificently and most of them were dead beat at night. I kept my office in the village but had an advance HQ with the platoons in case of emergency. I made my CSM Anderson (late PSI at Invergordon) sleep in the office by the telephone and I took it in turns with Allan Shearer and Smith at night to do duty in advance HQ.

Actually, while we were in these positions we only had one minor alarm. We heard a considerable amount of firing in front of us on our left, and soon afterwards a message came through to say that enemy tanks had been spotted and that an armoured breakthrough was expected. However, nothing came of it and I heard afterwards that it had been a small attack by the Lothian and Border Horse on the Bosch lines and nowhere near us. It should be remembered that in these positions we were not in contact with the enemy and that the 'Ligne de Contact' was some four kilometres in front of us, so that unless there was a large scale attack, or some very enterprising enemy patrol should come our way, there wasn't much chance of seeing a German. However, at the time we didn't really appreciate this - at least I didn't and we remained ready for action night and day.

After twelve hours the flap died down considerably and things straightened themselves out. A charming Company Commander of the Northumberland Fusiliers, who were anti-MG Battalion, came to see me. His name was Dodge (Dodge Motors and a prospective MP for a constituency in Kent) and he had a DSO and MC from the last War. He asked me if I would house one of his platoon commanders in my office. This turned out to be a very elderly Subaltern called Salmon who, in spite of being about twice my age, would insist on calling me Sir after every other word! He turned out to be the most god awful bore as well ! However, as his platoon was attached to my Company, I had to put up with him. He seemed to know nothing about his job and asked me where he should site all his guns and how and when etc etc. So, although I knew nothing about machine guns, I had to do his job as well as my own!

One day, Ronnie Pelham-Burn and I motored up to the 'Ligne de Contact' to look at the positions our respect Companies were to take over from the 4th Camerons. We motored through the outskirts of Bouzenville and two or three miles further on left our truck in a deserted village and started walking. Eventually we came to the International Post, commanded by a French Captain who had a mixed force of 20-30 French and British troops under his command. He pointed out the next post

and showed us where we had to keep our heads down. Incidentally, we were wearing steel helmets for the first time with a reason. The Major commanding the French Battalion which we took over from, and of whom I have spoken previously, had one great watchword. It was "Toujours portez la casquette" - apparently as long as you did this nothing else mattered. He kept on repeating this at every possible opportunity! But to continue.

We reached the next post. They were all roughly along the line of the road we were walking on, which was commanded by Dubbie Fincastle. He met us, looking extremely tired, worn and worried, as did his subaltern Willie Robertson, who I met for the first time and who I have since got to know well in prison camps.

It turned out that during the past few days they had had a pretty rough time of it. They had been attacked several times at night by Bosch patrols who, owing to the particular position of the post, had had it more or less their own way and had sprayed them with Tommy guns and chucked hand grenades more or less with impunity. Once again, this was a legacy for which we had to thank the French, for never having tried to do anything about it or building suitable posts.

This post, which as far as I can remember was held by about 40 men and two officers, resembled an enlarged rabbit hole. It was on the edge of a sunken road. Dug out of the bank on the enemy side, it was a series of trenches about 6 ft deep, with one covered-in dug out. The trench was far too narrow and it was impossible for two people to pass. The dug out was just large enough to hold ten men, and that very cramped. The remainder stayed out in the trench all night and manned the post. Standing up in the trench the men could just see over the top, and the only fire steps there were for the brens. There was complete chaos, with a shambles of ammunition, grenades, rifles, food, clothing, equipment, cooking utensils etc lying everywhere. This was entirely due to lack of space. At the back of the post was the road, and the ground sloped away to a grass field about 100 yards broad, running along the side of a huge beech forest called the Foret de Bouzenville which must have been about 500 acres or more in size. From this side they had been considerably bothered by snipers, who climbed up trees and took potshots at them both day and night, further adding to their troubles by making it difficult to prepare meals in the open without the risk of casualties.

There was no doubt that the enemy were on top at this particular form of warfare. Again the French were chiefly to blame by letting them get the initiative from the start. Further-more, it was fairly certain that the patrols and snipers they used on this part of the front were local men - even some foresters from Metz who had gone over to the Germans on the outbreak of War - who knew the ground perfectly and were skilled in woodcraft. It was at this post that I got my first experience of bird noises. We were standing on the road, smoking a cigarette, when suddenly there was a very clear owl call from just inside the wood, quite close. Dubbie Fincastle and Willie Robertson both immediately stopped talking and looked a bit worried. We asked them what was up and they explained that the enemy patrols always used various bird calls to communicate with each other and they were so cleverly done that it was impossible to know when it was a patrol and when it was a genuine bird! As these devils were often up trees and on any side of you, a shot in the back from the wood was always on the cards.

They all looked very tired and wanted sleep badly so we moved on to the next post, which was some 500 yds up the road and was in a small wood called the Tiergarten. This was the post I was taking over, and it was at present being commanded by Raymond Burton. Here things seemed to be more peaceful and they had had a quiet night. Usually only one post at a time was attacked by the Germans, and Dubbie had had it the previous night. The rest of the posts spent a fairly peaceful night. The Tiergarten was an isolated beechwood of about two acres, just off the road. Here the

post, although quite inadequate for the number of men that it was supposed to hold, had been constructed in a considerably better way. It was sited in a clearing on the edge of the wood overlooking a small valley on to another hill held by the enemy some 700 yards away. The whole post was some 200 yards in circumference, surrounded by wire. In the middle was the main post, a trench capable of holding 15 men, and there were three other posts round it, about twenty yards away, made of railway sleepers, sandbags, wire and posts. These had only been partially finished but served as cover if nothing else. Raymond told us that two nights before they had had a hell of a pasting for about one and a half hours by German mortars, firing 60 rounds per minute off and on, and had then put in an attack with 40-50 men. The Germans had got inside the wire, and as it was a pitch black night chaos reigned until the raid was over. At the end of it, the Camerons found that they had had fairly heavy casualties, amongst which four men had been taken prisoner. Another four had had a lucky escape, having been blown clean out of their post and knocked unconscious. The Bosch, thinking they were dead, had left them; however they came round alright in the morning! The Camerons thought that they had inflicted casualties on the Germans, but it was usually impossible to tell as they always made very great efforts to take all their dead and wounded back with them on these night raids. This post was by way of being a Company post. However, having had a good look round, I decided that it was suicide to have more than a platoon at the most in it. It appeared to be remarkably peaceful that morning with the warm sun shining through the trees and the birds singing. Raymond Burton said he was sure we were in for a peaceful time, having just had a big raid on the post - however that remained to be seen! Ronnie and I returned to our Companies.

Two days after the 'Mise en Garde', orders came for the Battalion to move up to the 'Ligne de Contact' to relieve the 4th Camerons, we ourselves being relieved by 2nd Seaforths. Godfrey Murray came up to see me and I handed over my Company position to him.

It was arranged that the Company commanders should go up the night before with a small advance guard and take over while the Battalion were to march up the following day. Ronnie P-B and I went over to Battalion HQ for final orders, taking our advance parties (NCO and four men, I think) with us. We found Harry Houldsworth rather harrowed with so many people asking so many questions and he was suffering from lack of sleep. However, he was his usual patient, smiling self and had everything well under control. He gave us orders to meet him and the Battalion at a certain RV at 9 am the following morning. This place was just behind the 'Ligne de Contact'. The object of this assembly point was that the CO was determined that, if it was humanly possible, we were not going to be bothered by German patrols in our rear when we took over from the Camerons. He had, therefore, evolved an excellent scheme whereby the Battalion was to beat out the Forêt de Bouzenville where it was certain these patrols and snipers lived. The method employed was to be exactly the same as that used at a covert shoot using the 800 odd Jocks of the Battalion as beaters, the CO and Company commanders acting as head keeper and under keepers! Having fixed this up, Ronnie and I set off for Dampont Farm, the HQ of 4th Camerons.

Here we found Jack Cawdor (CO) and Derek Lang (Adj.) and various other Cameron and Gunner officers, all looking completely exhausted and thankful to see the first of their relief arriving. We were each given a guide and they led us up about a mile to our Company positions. On my arrival at the Tiergarten post, I thought it rather odd that there should be a lot of men lying down in the open and none having camouflaged themselves with branches etc; some were even outside the perimeter wire. I found Ross had taken over command of Company from Raymond Burton. He apparently had come to the same conclusion as I had, and decided that the post was too small to accommodate a whole Company and that, in the event of a raid, if the men were so concentrated, casualties were bound to be high. His CO had apparently refused to allow him to withdraw any

men out of the post and he had therefore thought it safer to have his Company less concentrated. I suggested that there would be hell to pay if the Bosch started to shell the post with all these men outside with no protection whatsoever. He realised this but said that nothing could be done about it. As it was his Company who were concerned and he was in charge, I said no more!

I got my party into the trench and let Ross put them where he wanted them. It must have been a tight fit before we came, but after I and my men were in we were more or less shoulder to shoulder! There was no possible chance of sleep or rest for anyone as there wasn't even enough room to lie down in the bottom of the trench, so we 'stood to' all night. It was a dead quiet night without a sound except for the usual discomfoting bird noises and an occasional dog barking in the distance. We passed an uneventful night and, as all seemed quiet, some of us got out of the trench and were smoking a cigarette and thinking about preparing the men's breakfast when suddenly there was the most tremendous explosion practically at our feet. We made a dive for the trench and got there just as six similar shattering reports went off all round us. Being my first experience of being under fire, I reckoned it was an enemy mortar that was firing at us, and firing extremely accurately at that, as the stuff was bursting all round the trench. However, it turned out later that I was wrong. The explosions came thick and fast for about a quarter of an hour, and a lot of bits of metal were flying about all over the place and hitting the trees and branches round us, and a certain amount coming into the trench. I remember, for some curious reason, my only reaction was surprise when a lump of jagged metal the size of a golf ball buried itself with a "whump" in the side of the trench neatly between me and the man standing six inches away from me! One of my lance corporals was badly wounded with a hole the size of one's fist in the small of his back. It all stopped as suddenly as it had started. By now I was not only worried about the wounded lance corporal, who was losing a lot of blood, but I had somehow to get back to Bn. RV where I had orders to meet the CO.

I got three volunteers and arranged with Ross that he should give us covering fire while we got the wounded NCO out of the trench on to a stretcher. We managed to get him out alright, but as we set off with the stretcher there was a hail of bullets all round us, apparently from very close range. We made a bolt for it - or as much as it is possible to bolt carrying a man on a stretcher! Bullets ripped all around us, making smacking noises on the trees. How we weren't hit I don't know. After we had gone 30 or 40 yards the trees offered us a certain amount of cover. When we were hidden by trees, the Bosch lobbed over mortar shells and followed us with these bursting about 30 yards behind us for 400 or 500 yards and then stopped. On thinking over it all afterwards, I came to the conclusion that we had been had for suckers and that what had happened was this. Two or three Germans must have crawled up the bank in dead ground to within 15 or 20 yards of the trench and, still under cover from fire and view, had lobbed hand grenades at the trench as, unlike mortar shells, they gave no warning of their arrival. Then, when the stretcher party got out of the trench, all they had to do was to put their heads just above the bank and spray us with impunity as we went, realising that the men in the trench couldn't see them! Quite cunning - but I found it as my baptism of fire most alarming! We had to carry the stretcher two miles to Bn. HQ which, with a heavy Jock on it, I found most exhausting. I found Duncan Macrae (our MO) there on arrival and handed the wounded man over to him. He had a look at him before I left and said that, although he was pretty bad, he thought he would recover. I have since heard that he was home and had completely recovered and had been to Ardullie! (Captain Munro's home)

From Dampont Farm I went straight down to the Bn. RV and found them all having breakfast. While I had some breakfast the CO explained the manoeuvre for driving the wood. It was a heavenly morning and by this time the sun was pretty warm and it was plainly going to be a scorching day. Eventually the Bn. set off. Getting the whole Battalion spread out into a long line in thick wood and undergrowth was a very difficult operation and took some time to complete.

However, this done, word came to move forward and the whole line got on the move. All went well for a bit but the line began to get ragged as different parts of it came to thick or thin parts of the wood. Some parts would have been impenetrable for a keeper, and were almost impossible for a Jock in full marching order with a pack and carrying a rifle or Bren. After we had done half the wood, the line was beginning to get too much out of control, so it was decided to call it off. I think it certainly did some good, if only to scare any Bosch who might have been in the wood. We found one or two hides which they had built, but no signs of the occupants. The Battalion reformed and the Companies marched off to their respective posts.

The Battalion occupies the Ligne de Contact

Having seen the difficulties to be met in the post my Company was to take over, I had decided previously with the CO to put only one platoon in the Tiergarten Wood and keep the remainder of the Company as a mobile reserve in a small village called Coleman which was to be occupied by Simon Fraser's Company ('B' Coy.). I had the Company come up to the Ligne de Contact through the Foret de Bouzenville and took Smith and his platoon to the Tiergarten position and sent the remainder of the Company, under Allan Shearer, to Coleman. On reaching the Tiergarten I found Ross with only three men left, he having sent the remainder back to Bn. HQ in anticipation of our arrival, rather unwisely I thought in the event of an attack before our arrival ! He said that they had been shelled and sniped off and on most of the day. Chaos reigned everywhere and, as all the trench stores seemed to be scattered far and wide over the wood, it was impossible to have any kind of hand-over. Altogether it wasn't a very encouraging start. However, I got the platoon settled in, having collected as much as we could find of the scattered gear, gave Smith his orders and walked on down the road to Coleman.

The village was very like most of the other French villages we had been in and, of course, was uninhabited. Here the French and British had made some effort to fortify it and many of the houses were sandbagged and loopholed. It was built on a flat piece of ground and was surrounded by fields with woods some hundreds of yards away. The road, which could be regarded as the forward defended locality of the whole line, ran through the village. The distance from the Tiergarten post to the village was about half a mile and there was flat, open country between the two. As I arrived the Cameron Company, commanded by Punch Redfell(?) (afterwards killed on the Somme), were just leaving. I found Simon Fraser and arranged with him which buildings my Company were going to occupy and which were his. It was fairly easy to occupy by day as there was a good field of view all round, but by night it was very much more difficult. On our right there was a gap of half a mile to the next post and on our left an indefinite gap, as Rory Tarbat's Company were about two miles away in that direction. However, having decided on our plan, Simon and I got the men in and, having arranged to have a meal sent up to Smith and his platoon after dark, we retired to our HQ in a house on the main village street and had supper. I had Allan Shearer with me and Simon had Hec (Hecctor Gascoigne, brother) and Hayward Maclean, his other subaltern Murdo Maclellan being in another post in the Tiergarten. We settled down for the night taking it in turns to sleep.

That night was quite uneventful and, having ascertained that Smith was OK in the Tiergarten, Simon and I with a runner each - which was later to prove a godsend to me - set off walking to Bn. HQ. It was a heavenly morning and walking through the fields beside a little trout stream made one feel supremely happy somehow. But, having seen so little of war as yet, I kept on thinking of the lines "where every prospect pleases and only man is vile". We attended a conference in Bn. HQ which would be of no particular interest in this account. After I had been there an hour or so, the CO and I and my runner, Pte. Finlay Macrae, set off on foot through the Foret de Bouzenville.

It might be of interest here to anyone who is misguided enough to have continued reading as far as this for me to write something about the brothers Duncan and Finlay Macrae who were my faithful Company runners for so long in England and France. Finlay was about 36 and Duncan 34. They didn't resemble each other in any way except perhaps their speech and physique. They were both magnificently built men not far short of 6 ft. Duncan was fair with blue eyes and Finlay very dark. They were both shepherds from the West Coast and had been employed by Ian Macrae at Druidaig. They were both very solid and after having seen them in one or two unpleasant and, to me, hair-

raising experiences, I came to the conclusion that neither of them knew what fear was! They were devoted to each other and both spoke Gaelic. Their favourite occupation in their leisure hours in the billets was wrestling with one another! A man from their village told me a story about them which he swore was true, which illustrates well the sort of men they were. He said that one day, years ago, when they were lighting their pipes after having had their porridge one morning in their croft, Duncan looked up and said to Finlay, "I'm away to Australia the day", and without another word he went into the next room, picked up his bag and walked out of the cottage. Finlay didn't see or hear from him for seven years and one day in walked Duncan without a word, just as if he had been away for the day! He had apparently had quite a successful time in Australia but after seven years still missed Finlay's company so much that he decided he would come home again. I will write more about them later on. It is sad to think they are separated. Duncan was taken prisoner at St Valery and Finlay, who was badly wounded in France on the Somme, was evacuated home where he recovered and got a Military Medal (I hope, and like to think, on my recommendation). He then went out to North Africa in one of our Battalions where he got a Bar to his MM and was killed. No one could have wished for a finer pair of men than these two brothers I had in my Company.

The CO and I visited various posts that he wanted to see on our way up to mine. We had lunch of a tin of bully and some biscuits with John Anderson, who was one of Ronnie P-B's platoon commanders. We then went to Coleman village and eventually got to the Tiergarten post at 4 pm. We had been looking at the positions here and discussing some improvements and the CO had promised to get the Brigadier up to look at them the next day. Everything seemed very peaceful and quiet and he was just leaving when firing suddenly broke out on our right. Unfortunately, neither of us had glasses with us so we couldn't see much of what was happening. We waited to see if anything would develop. The firing got louder and louder and seemed to be spreading along the line. Then, just as the CO decided he should go back to Bn. HQ, two or three shells landed very close indeed. He remained standing stock still and quite unperturbed and behaved as if a couple of bumble bees had just passed instead of some shells landing within a few yards of us! I found it very hard to stand still and pretend I hadn't noticed anything much! However, he walked off back to Bn. HQ and I returned to my HQ at Coleman.

I had only gone about half way when I met Allan Shearer doubling up the road with the remainder of the Company. He said that Simon had sent him up as the village was being fired on and that, judging by the amount of noise all round, he thought it probable that an attack was coming shortly. I got the men under cover and had to do a hurried reconnaissance and some pretty quick thinking. There were no prepared positions and we had no tools, the transport having failed to turn up from the Ligne de Recoile. Just as I had got the men into position behind trees, banks etc, some mortar shells landed in the middle of us and one man was hit.

Having been away with the CO all day, I had only a hazy idea as to what the situation was and so decided to go down and see Simon in the village. So, taking Duncan Macrae with me, I set off in that direction. As soon as we got out of the wood on to the flat fields between us and the village we were fired on. We lay low and then crawled again, but each time we moved bullets whistled over our heads. Macrae then got one through his pack and as we were completely exposed and had to cross a flat bit of ground in full view of the enemy, I decided it was suicide to go on and the only thing to do was to wait an hour till it got dark. My CSM (Anderson) arrived with a message from Simon saying that orders had come over the phone from HQ that there would be a general withdrawal at 11 pm and that Smith, commanding the Tiergarten post, had received separate orders for withdrawal over his phone.

The first part of that night was pitch black, till the moon came out. Although there was spasmodic firing in the distance, our immediate surroundings seemed very quiet. I sent a runner up to Smith to see if he was alright and got hold of Alan Shearer and gave him orders for withdrawal. I arranged with him that he should start withdrawing at 11 pm with the main body of the Company while I kept two sections behind with me to cover his withdrawal in case of difficulties. I should explain here, perhaps, the rough idea of the French plans for withdrawal. When the Germans attacked in force there was no idea of trying to hold the Ligne de Contact. They considered in their plan that the Battalion holding this line was to be regarded more or less as a write-off! They were to hold on as long as possible and then withdraw as best they could through the 'Ligne de Recoile' and eventually (a forlorn hope according to the French) behind the Maginot.

The orders I had received were to withdraw my Company to Danpont Farm (Bn. HQ) and from there to a given RV. I arranged that Alan Shearer should take Finlay Macrae with him, he being the only person other than myself who knew the way back to Bn. HQ. Meanwhile, the moon had got up and it was very light indeed, and as the Company had to cross over a long stretch of very open country overlooked by the enemy, I was afraid that they might spot our withdrawal. However, at 11 o'clock Alan Shearer set off with his party. I followed with the remainder about a quarter of an hour later. We had to pass within 300 yards of one of Ronnie Pelham-Burns' posts commanded by John Anderson. As we drew level with it a tremendous noise of small arms fire and grenades started. I thought the post was probably being attacked by a German patrol but could only see the flashes. I fully expected we should get the backwash of this and certainly that a few stray bullets would come our way. It was no good trying to help as we couldn't have distinguished friend from foe. Some days previously our battle patrol, having come up to one of the Cameron posts at night, had been mistaken for Germans and fired on, and Hector Mackenzie, who was commanding the patrol, had been hit in the leg. So, remembering that, and all things being considered, I thought it best to steer clear of them and on we went. I had to go pretty fast to catch up with Alan Shearer, which I eventually did by luck, as it turned out, as he was steering a very inaccurate course and heaven knows where he would have got to if I hadn't stopped him in time. On reaching Bn. HQ there wasn't a sound to be heard and no signs of the sentry that was always at the entrance to the farmyard. However, there was one small oil lamp still burning in one of the windows. The whole thing seemed odd to me and I thought at first it might have been a Bosch trap. So, drawing my revolver and taking one man with a rifle with me, we advanced rather gingerly into the courtyard. Still not a sound. I pushed the door open and listened but could neither see nor hear anything. In the room where the lamp was burning there were signs of a hurried departure and I guessed that HQ must have left on the pre-arranged 'withdrawal route'. And so on we went down the road. I was marching at the head of my Company when suddenly I was challenged by an officer in the middle of the road. He was a Scots Fusilier and his Battalion was lining the route and covering our withdrawal. I could just make out the dim outline of the Jocks lying in the ditch on either side of the road which ran through a thick wood, and an occasional glint of their bayonets. I forget which Bn. it was but their CO was Lord Rowallan and his Adjutant a brother of Patrick Agnew of our 5th Bn.

By this time I knew we were a bit behind schedule and, as the withdrawal route only took me to a certain point, it was essential that we pushed on as quickly as possible in case Bn. HQ couldn't wait for us, as the whole plan of withdrawal of the entire force in front of the Maginot was on a timed programme and bridges were scheduled to be blown at a certain hour, regardless of who was still to come. On our way through Bibiche village we passed some Lothian and Borders Horse sitting in their tanks. They were remaining till last and were to blow the bridges.

Eventually we met the CO walking up the road to meet us. He seemed tremendously relieved to see us and find that we had had no difficulty in getting out and had no casualties. However, he was worried about Smith. Meanwhile, Rory Tarbat had arrived with his Company and Ronnie Pelham-Burn arrived later. But there was no sign of Simon Fraser and his Company. We waited for an hour and I had time to talk to John Anderson and asked him what all the fuss was about as we passed his post earlier. He said it was a ruse of Ronnie, who had ordered him to fire off rifles and Brens into the air at a certain time, to cover the noise of his (Ronnie's) withdrawal ! Simon Fraser's Company and Smith and his platoon not having arrived, the CO sent the remainder of the Battalion off on the withdrawal route under the command of Rory Tarbat.

The moon had gone in and it was pitch black again. Most of the route was across country and many of the Jocks were pretty exhausted. But we had at least another 15 kilometres to do that night and if any fell out they were bound sooner or later to be captured by the Bosch who were following up. We stumbled on over barbed wire, through ploughed fields, ditches, hedges and gravel pits. Incidentally, the men were carrying full packs, greatcoats, blankets, Brens and anti-tank rifles and a good many cooking containers etc as we had had no transport in the Ligne de Contact.

Soon we came to the 2nd Seaforths holding the 'Ligne de Recoile' through which we were to withdraw. They were all interested to know what the news was and what the situation in front was, as they seemed to expect an attack pretty soon, thinking then, as we did, that we were being followed up quickly by the Bosch. I met Colin Mackenzie, who was most helpful in piloting my Company through what appeared in the dark to be a series of cuttings and caves, but I suppose they couldn't have been! We passed through the powder factory (now the 2nd Bn. HQ) and, as we went, kept on picking up more and more stragglers from various units. As it got light the column seemed to have assumed enormous proportions and was now about a mile long. It was not a happy or inspiring sight. The officers had to go up and down encouraging the men, many of whom were now dead beat and found great difficulty in keeping going. It must be remembered that all of them had already marched, fully equipped (and more), some 10 kilometres and most of them had had little or no sleep for about four nights, having been digging hard all day. A withdrawal is not calculated to put men's spirits up. At one moment some Bosch planes came over quite low but for some unknown reason made no attempt to attack the column. As we went on we heard the bridges being blown behind us.

Section 9 Behind the Maginot Line Again

The column passed through Chennery and, after taking a very indirect route, eventually passed through the Maginot Line about seven miles further on. This was about 6 am. Although the column must now have been well over a thousand strong, the few Frenchmen who were lolling about or making their breakfast outside their posts in the Maginot seemed to take singularly little interest in us, or indeed what was happening in front of them! Finally, after another three hours' marching we arrived, completely exhausted, at the Brigade RV in Le Foret de Conte Huulostein.

Fortunately there was a meal waiting for the men and, when they had fed, I got them sorted out and they made bivouacs and shelters for themselves out of branches. There was still no sign of Smith and his platoon and I was extremely worried about his non-appearance. The CO was equally worried and very annoyed with me for not having confirmed Smith's original orders personally, and I kicked myself for having been such a fool. I was too exhausted to eat and Simon and I managed to find a bell tent full of stores in which we flung ourselves down, exhausted. Even in this state we found it extremely difficult to sleep as there was a gunner battery of what sounded like very large calibre guns about a hundred yards away from us which was firing continually, almost without pause. Eventually we were wakened by R A A S Macrae (the Adjutant) about an hour later, who told us there was a CO's conference in 10 minutes time and that my Company was being sent out immediately to occupy another position. Soon after this, to my intense relief, Smith and his platoon turned up safe and sound. He said he had no difficulty in getting out of his post and had understood his orders and seemed rather surprised at all the flap that had been going on about him. After a hurried lunch, in the middle of which General Fortune and his ADC, David Lumsden, turned up and presented the CO with a long-promised case of champagne, I set off to reconnoitre my new positions.

My new position was in another wood and had previously been occupied by the French and, as usual, was almost entirely 'projet' and completely undug. It was at present occupied by a Company of 1st Black Watch commanded by Geoff Milne. He gave me a rough idea of the situation and then Smith arrived, having had a rest, bringing the Company with him. The Jocks were in no fit state to work and, as there was no likelihood of immediate attack (we now being behind the Maginot), I only put them on short working shifts and made the remainder rest.

The next day orders came saying that we were to be relieved by a Company of 4th Gordons and that we would return to Bn. HQ. Harry Usher turned up and said that his Company were relieving us, so having taken him round the positions, I marched the Company back to the Foret de Conte Huulostein and rejoined the remainder of the Battalion.

It was still the most glorious weather. In this we were lucky as there were only a few tents of any kind in the forest and most of the men slept out in the open. It was another of the enormous forests of beech which were so common in this part of France. By now they were in full leaf and the ground below was a carpet of wild flowers. Nothing could have been more pleasant sitting out having our meals under these huge trees. But things were rather spoilt by guns firing off all round us, both far and near, and the occasional German aeroplane coming over.

As far as I can remember, we were in this place about three days awaiting orders to move. Besides being a welcome rest for the men, it gave us an opportunity to sort out stores and check up on deficiencies which were pretty big after the sudden night withdrawal from the Ligne de Contact.

Our transport "hide" was in another part of the forest and the 2nd Seaforths' transport was there too. I went over one morning and had a drink with Billy Fox, their MTO, who seemed in great form. The inhabitants of the surrounding villages now began to panic and started evacuating their homes. John Anderson came in one morning and said that he had seen our friends Marie Louise and her Ma and they had sent a personal request to me, asking if I would go and help them move and give them some transport. However, this was impossible as I was far too busy with my own job. I sent a message back to this effect and told them that any transport we had available was being sent up to help them. This was actually done by the Brigade who collected every vehicle they could and started a sort of ferry service between these villages and Metz, the French authorities apparently having made no arrangements of their own!

General Fortune came to lunch with us one day and gave us what news he could of the situation, but it was very scanty and he said he knew little more than us and that the whole situation was very 'obscure'. The evening before we left, the CO took Simon Fraser and I into Metz in his car for a (by now!) much needed bath and dinner. The place hadn't changed much but was quieter. On passing through the main square we saw two or three shell craters made by German long-range guns, but damage appeared to be negligible. We went straight to our old haunt, L'Hotel Royale, where we had our last bath and dinner in peace. We listened to the news over the radio in the manager's office, I remember, before we left, then motored back with no lights on a clear, moonlit night. The next day being Sunday, Cecil Lake (our padre) arranged for an outdoor service. It was a voluntary parade but practically all the Jocks turned up. Standing in a clearing of the wood with a background of green trees and a cloudless blue sky above, a gentle warm breeze blowing just enough to stir the leaves of the trees, it was one of the most impressive services I have ever attended and I shall remember it always.

Next morning, orders came for the Battalion to move and we marched some 15 kilometres south-west to a place called Bois du Rurange. Here again we were in the open and the Battalion bivouaced. The inhabitants of a nearby farm told us that the French police had caught three spies near here recently and that all three had been shot. Whether this was true or not I never discovered. It was another grilling hot day. We spent an uneventful twelve hours at this place. Andre Jourde amused himself by taking photographs of some of us, and I later managed to get mine home. Late in the afternoon Ian Shaw Mackenzie (our 2nd I/C) and Mackintosh (QM) arrived back from leave. They had had a lively time getting to us and had been bombed at various places on the way.

We moved again by night through Ay and Meziers to yet another wood called Silvange Mirange. There were a lot of refugees living in kind of hutments in the wood and we had to keep a pretty strict eye on our belongings while they were about. All this time there were German planes circling overhead most of the day. Many of them must have seen us but made no attempt to bomb or machine gun us. Simon and I went into Metz to collect some of the Battalion laundry that had been left there and to arrange for some surplus kit that had been dumped to be sent home. I expect it is still sitting there, as probably are our drums which were left in store at Quatier Les Valliers.

After 48 hours we moved again, still going south-west some twenty miles to the village of Boncourt. Shaw and the Company Commanders went on ahead in their trucks to arrange billeting. In one village where we stopped on our way, women rushed out into the road and presented us each with a bunch of peonies and tied a bunch on the radiator of each truck, much to our amazement! Boncourt was a small, attractive village with a large, derelict chateau standing in its own grounds in the middle of it. The chateau had been uninhabited since 1915, they told us, and it certainly looked it. There was a French AA battery in the village who had apparently been more or less a permanent fixture since the start. Their CO, a Major, was quite helpful in arranging billets for us. He had a

successful battle with the local schoolmaster whose school we wanted for one Company and who was very averse to giving it! They screamed at each other for about ten minutes, surrounded by dozens of kids who were all delighted at the prospect of not having to go to school the following day! Eventually, having arranged everything to our satisfaction, we were invited to go and have a bottle of wine in the Frenchmen's Mess. They had done themselves pretty well and had an extremely comfortable house and were well dug in. They proudly showed us pieces of German plane they had shot down outside the village the day before. Having once more helped to cement the 'entente' we all moved off to the one and only cafe in the village.

This cafe was run by a nice, good-natured, old woman who produced an enormous meal for seven of us and gave us the keys of her cellar and told us to choose what we wanted! Andre Jourde, who was with us, went into her kitchen and assisted her in the making of some mammoth omelettes, which went down very nicely. Before it got dark I scoured the village and managed to buy a bottle of beer and slab of chocolate for each man in my Company. It was going to be a wet night and they would have a long and tiring march, and beer and chocolate would keep them quiet while their meal was being cooked. Then we all dossed down on benches in the cafe and got what sleep we could till the Battalion arrived, in pouring rain, at 3 am. I got my Company into a large barn full of straw, with two lofts in it. They got a meal and settled down for the night. I eventually got back to my own billet in a cottage on the outskirts of the village just as it was beginning to get light. My batman, John Barkley, woke me next morning at 8 am. It was a wonderful morning with a clear, blue sky and I looked out of a very funny little bedroom window on to the cottage garden and orchard filled with cherry trees in blossom.

The following day was uneventful except that our kit from Metz arrived - at last - all except the Battalion drums. Most of the day was spent in sorting it all out. All the officers fed in a central Mess in the village cafe. We had no idea how long we were likely to stay here, but Brigade had said at least a day or two. The whole situation was still pretty obscure and vague and even the wireless didn't tell us much. We didn't know where our next destination was going to be, but we had heard that the Germans had broken through at Sedan and we thought it more than likely we would be sent there. After supper on our second evening at Boncourt, George Baird, who had recently been on leave, produced a trout rod and he and I walked down to a small river just outside the village and fished for a couple of hours till dark. It was a lovely, still evening - I think 28th May - and it was hard to believe there was a war on and that the BEF were in the opening stages of their evacuation from Dunkirk while we fished away peacefully. We were of course at this time quite ignorant of the world-shattering events going on in Belgium and the coast of France. We caught nothing but spent a delightful two hours and returned to billets comfortably tired. It turned out to be a memorable night, being the last night I slept in a civilized bed between sheets. Nearly four years later I am still a prisoner of war and sleep in a double decker wooden bunk!

The next day started off quietly enough. General Fortune visited us and told the CO we should not have to move for twenty-four hours but gave no indication as to our next destination. All went peacefully until about 3 pm, when Victor Campbell (Brigade Major) suddenly arrived in a car, flat out, and pulled up in a cloud of dust outside the Mess. He said that two Companies were to leave immediately and entrain at a station nine miles away in half an hour! This was clearly impossible. However, 'C' and 'D' Companies (Ronnie Pelham-Burns' and mine) were ordered to leave immediately. Everything was one mad rush from then onwards. Again it was a grilling afternoon. I had just enough time to get the men a cup of tea before we left, and we started off at about 140 to the minute on a forced march against time. On the way, we passed the 2nd Seaforths who were halted by the side of the road. I don't think they knew their destination either, but all seemed to think they were going to stop the gap at Sedan and were in great form. I just caught a glimpse of

Phip, Colin Mackenzie and John de Pree, but I saw many old friends amongst the other ranks, some - I suppose recruits - I even recognised from my early days of soldiering at Dover in the early 1930s with the 1st Battalion. We had one maddening wait, I remember, at a level crossing while a train ambled very slowly along. As we passed a long, French, mechanised column, some Messerschmitts flew over, pretty high up. The Frogs all light-heartedly yelled out, "Attention! Monsieur Schmitt!" and dived into the nearest ditch, while we had to continue marching giving furtive upwards glances and hoping for the best that the pilots hadn't seen us - they apparently hadn't this time! Soon we saw the station and the 4th Camerons with pipers playing approaching it from another direction. On arriving at the station - I forget its name - we found a train waiting for us, two Companies of 4th Seaforths and the whole Battalion of 4th Camerons.

The Battalion moves to the Rouen area

I shan't forget that railway journey for a very long time. It was about the craziest - or appeared to be at the time - I've ever been on! Jack Cawdor (CO of 4th Camerons) was the senior officer on the train but had had no orders as to where we were going; in fact he didn't even know whether we were going north, south, east or west. The engine driver on being questioned was equally ignorant on this subject and merely shrugged his shoulders and said that he had been told that he would get directions at each station we stopped.

The men were in cattle trucks and the officers packed like sardines in second-class carriages. The train had evidently had a bad time somewhere as it was riddled from end to end with machine gun bullet holes, some of which had been rather half-heartedly patched up. As we had no idea where we were going, we fully expected to be visited by Bosch planes. Our only defence was some Brens on AA mountings, perched very precariously on top of the cattle trucks with two Jocks per gun hanging on by their eyebrows! The train went at walking pace more or less for the first part of the journey. In the hurry of getting entrained we officers found that our valises - and in fact everything except what we carried on us - had been separated from us and were on a part of the train which we couldn't get at. Also, in the hurry of leaving Boncourt, we had not been able to make much arrangement about food either for ourselves or the troops. All we had were a few tins that we had stuffed into our valises at the last minute and which were now separated from us. The troops had been given a scratch meal at the station before leaving so were more or less OK. Alan Shearer, who was in my carriage, suddenly produced half a dozen tins and a bottle of whisky and saved the situation for that night anyway. Eventually we settled down and slept fitfully until it became light next morning. We had stopped at various stations during the night but no one appeared to know much about us or really take very much interest in us or our eventual destination. However, about mid-day on our second day in the train, we stopped at a big station where, surprisingly enough, the French had made arrangements for a meal and had got tanks of hot (if not boiling!) water to make tea and produced quite a good meal for the troops of a mixture of British and French Army rations.

This station, like most of the others we had passed through, was crowded with refugees, all trying to go south away from the Germans. I spoke to some of them. I was surprised when one of them, a man of about 45, spoke to me in a broad Irish accent. He told me that he had married a Belgian during the last war and had stayed out there when the war was over. He told me he had come from Ghent, on foot, hitch-hiking where he could and in a train wherever he could find one. He told me he had started with his wife and daughter, aged 12, and that they had been machine gunned by German planes practically the whole way. His daughter had been killed and his wife wounded; she was standing beside him with her arm in a sling while I was talking to him. Poor chap, he was in a terrible state. After the troops had been fed, as we had half an hour to wait, four of us managed

to push and shove our way through the enormous crowds of refugees, out of the station in search of some food. We found a cafe, which was also full of ravenous refugees, near the station and, having waited in the queue, just before we had to make a bolt for the train we managed to get three loaves, a bottle of champagne and some tins of sardines, which was all they had to offer!

During the course of that afternoon the train, which was a very long one, had to go up some not unduly steep gradients and, in spite of having two engines (of rather ancient pattern), couldn't make it. So the only thing to do was for everyone to get out and push. This happened several times and after a bit we got the drill taped! As soon as the train seemed like coming to a standstill and the engines started puffing and snorting, all 1200 men and officers leapt down from the carriages and pushed! There was also a squad of men by the engine with spades to shovel up gravel and throw it on the rails to give the engine wheels a grip and stop them slipping! We pushed until she got under way and then leapt back into the carriages. By the route we were taking, it looked as if we were heading for Paris - actually we skirted the outskirts of Paris - and, after another night and a day in the train, arrived after a 56 hour journey at midnight on 27 May at Rouen.

It was pouring with rain as usual - it always seemed to rain at night and be fine in the daytime during the last few weeks. We were shunted into a siding and couldn't find a sign of anyone who knew anything about us or where we were supposed to go. However, we de-trained and got the baggage and vehicles out and meanwhile someone did turn up who said he was our guide and was taking us to a tented camp which had originally been an Infantry base depot. In spite of a hellish two-day journey in the train with very little sleep, the Jocks were in great form. After a march of five miles or so along an unknown route in pitch dark we eventually arrived at the camp, by which time the officer who was guiding us, thinking, I suppose, he had done his job, had disappeared. There seemed to be hundreds of tents scattered over a wide area, all except a very few being unoccupied. Ronnie and I got tired of asking in the occupied ones, the inmates of which were mostly asleep, where we were supposed to go, and receiving a more or less don't-know-and-don't-care answer. So, after falling over tent pegs, ropes and sleeping bodies, we gave up and just put the men into the nearest tents we could find. It is amazing, looking back on it, how haphazard all these arrangements - or, rather, complete lack of them - were. Most of the occupants of this camp who we spoke to, and who presumably had been sitting back taking it easy since the start of the war, were most indignant that we had arrived to disturb their peace.

There was still no sign of the rest of the Battalion who were supposed to be only an hour behind us. Ronnie and I set off in a truck to try and locate them and so save them all the trouble we had had on arrival. It still being dark, the place seemed to be a network of roads, most of which ended in an abrupt stop at a large anti-tank obstacle. Having gone round in innumerable circles and tied ourselves up in knots trying to find a way out of the place, we gave it up and went back to the camp to wait for them. They turned up at 4 am. The following day was spent in getting things sorted out and resting the men as much as possible. In the daylight the camp was seen to cover a vast area and would have housed a Corps at least! There were several very big NAAFI's which were packing up. However, I heard much later that in a day or two the panic was so great that the NAAFI staff all bolted, leaving nearly a million pounds' worth of whisky, cigarettes etc for the Bosch when they arrived - and, incidentally, the local Frenchmen!

At midday the CO left by car for a conference at IBD headquarters. While he was away a staff officer from Northern Area HQ - a new one to us! - arrived with orders that the Battalion was to move that afternoon at 6 pm and that French civilian buses would be provided to transport us to our destination. This rather smelled as if someone, somewhere was in rather a hurry for us to get somewhere and we drew the obvious conclusions. This officer could give no information as to

where 152 Bde. HQ might be - we had been out of touch with them now for 24 hours - nor did he know anything about our own MT which was coming by road.

The CO came back soon after this chap had left and issued orders for the move that evening. The Battalion was standing by from 4 pm onwards, fully dressed and ready to walk into the buses on their arrival. A curious thing happened that afternoon which led to rather an amusing sequence of events. During the afternoon, some of us, having nothing to do while waiting for the buses, had got hold of an old cricket bat and ball with which we were amusing ourselves. While doing this, John Anderson suddenly missed a very valuable gold cigarette case which he had been carrying on him. A search was started and it was eventually found. He then gave the case to 'Tosh' our QM to look after for him. Later on, John was badly wounded and got home and 'Tosh' was taken prisoner. Again, much later, 'Tosh' as a POW managed to be passed for repatriation. He often said to me how he was looking forward, when and if he ever got home on repatriation party, to being able to hand back John Anderson his cigarette case (which he had probably forgotten all about during the course of three years). It was quite a feat managing to retain the case at all, as he must have gone through many searches at the hands of the Germans, most of which were very thorough, and if they had found it would most certainly have kept it. It was ironical that, when eventually he did get home, he found that the position had been reversed and that John Anderson had been taken prisoner himself in Sicily!

By 9 o'clock that night there was still no sign of French buses and no message had come through as to why they hadn't arrived. They were now three hours overdue and all efforts by DRs sent out to try and locate them had failed. The CO then went off to Northern Area HQ. He came back later, saying that all he could find out was that the Battalion, along with the rest of the 51st Division, was being sent up to the Somme. The buses, they said, might arrive any time. However, the CO with his unfailing good sense and invariably admirable way of dealing quietly and sensibly with annoying situations, said that the whole Battalion was to stand down and go back to their tents and sleep - if the buses did arrive then they would damn well have to wait until we were ready to get into them!

About 10 pm Smith arrived. He had been with the road party driving the Bn. MT from the Saar area and had had a very tiring journey driving half way across France. He said that he had been sent by the Brigade MTO to say that our transport was at Foret d'Eu, which gave us a line on where we were going. All the officers turned in and had rather an uncomfortable night in a large marquee. At 6 am the French transport - about 60 civilian buses of various ages - arrived and we got going.

The Battalion moves up to the Somme

The long column of buses left in a steady drizzle. Travelling very slowly through Rouen we saw the preparations - inadequate as they were - the French were making to try and stop the German advance. The bridges over the river were being sandbagged and hastily prepared for demolition and there were many troops about. But strangely enough there wasn't as yet any signs of panic and very little movement of refugees. Incidentally, the subsequent speed of the German advance was so great that they didn't have time or neglected to blow these bridges and the Germans found them intact on reaching the town. We travelled some 30 miles by way of Neufchatel to a RV called "Starfish Cross Roads" in the Foret d'Eu.

The Battalion debussed and Companies went off to various 'hides' in the forest to which they had been allotted. After the men had been fed, a perimeter was formed with all round defence and all the roads were blocked and covered by anti-tank rifles and guns. In the afternoon the CO took the Company commanders in his car another eight miles further north, through the small town of Biangy to a village called Le Translay which we were to occupy next day. We were each allotted a Company area and spent some time making a reconnaissance of our defensive positions. The inhabitants of the village were just preparing to leave. This was not before it was necessary as Germans were reported to be in a village called Huppy only six miles to the west (actually the east). On returning to our Companies we found that there had been the first of many subsequent (and mostly quite unfounded) scares of enemy parachute landings. Precautions were taken, such as posting watchers at various vantage points but no parachutists were seen.

At 9 pm we marched in darkness and silence to 'Le Translay'. Having given my orders to platoon commanders - I now as well as having Smith and Shearer had a new one whose name was Grieve, just recently come to France - and got them out to their various positions and started digging. I went back to my Company HQ which was an uninhabited cottage. The HQ personnel got down to digging a shell-proof shelter at the back of the cottage. The village by now had been completely evacuated and it must have been in a big hurry from what I found when I went into some of the cottages. Chaos reigned in most. In one I found a half-eaten meal still on the table; in another a kettle boiling on the fire; and in another - most welcome sight of all - great slabs of freshly made butter sitting on the kitchen table, presumably waiting to be taken to market! Many animals had been left behind and birds in cages as well as chickens and hens. All these sights were very pathetic and whenever I got a chance I spent my time letting out caged rabbits and birds, and loosing chained dogs, all of which would otherwise have starved. There were farm animals like cows and pigs and sheep everywhere; no effort seemed to have been made to take them away or even destroy them. This seemed to be the same all over France and must have helped the Germans very considerably in their amazingly rapid advance, when they could live on the country as they went. We, on the other hand, were not used to these conditions. Previously everything had to be paid for, or some long process gone into, and we had no experience or training or knowledge of what living on the country meant, while in the back of our minds (anyway of mine) there was always the nasty word "looting". However, later, as we gained in experience, we learnt perhaps the elements of what living on the country means.

Most of the day was spent digging. One ramshackle old motor car came along the road through my Company position from the direction of our front, during the afternoon. It was filled to bursting point by some elderly French peasants and their belongings. We had orders to stop all cars and examine their passes. This I did. They were all (simultaneously) very voluble indeed and

screaming and weeping and saying "Les salles Bosche" etc etc and appeared to be quite genuine French men and women, and produced what looked like an adequate pass signed by the Mayor of their local town. However, to make sure, I rang up Bn. HQ and asked Andre Jourde to come down and give them a look over and OK them and their passes, and said to him the whole set-up seemed quite genuine, but that he really couldn't tell any more than I could. However, we let things go on. But it was a trouble that was, from now on, to be continually recurring. How could one tell which were genuine Frenchmen and which were Bosch fifth columnists? In ninety-nine cars out of a hundred it was impossible to say. Papers and passports can be easily forged and so can plausible stories. Add to this the fact that a harassed Company Commander has enough of his own business to think about, and hasn't possibly time to question every civilian he comes across, and certainly can't send them all under escort to the Bn. interpreter to be questioned. It can perhaps be seen from the above that the Germans had a very great advantage over the Allies in France and an immensely strong weapon against which we were virtually unable to take any effective measures - admittedly owing mainly to complete neglect by the French.

Soon after this incident a large British tank came rumbling along the road. It was a cheering sight as it was the first we had seen for a very long time, and I was beginning to wonder if we had any in France at all ! I forget what regiment it belonged to. The occupants, two NCOs, seemed very cheerful but were almost as ignorant of the general situation as we were, but assured us that we were holding the Bosch in front and even pushing them back in some places. However, they were completely vague as to place, name and details! Orders came that evening to the effect that the 2nd Seaforths were relieving us the following morning. We spent an uneventful night and the next morning Jack Walford arrived with some of his Company and took over my positions. Having done this, I motored up the road to a place called Grebault-Mesnil where I met the CO and did another reconnaissance of my new Company positions. While walking along the road with the CO a French Army lorry passed us and then stopped. They had four or five German prisoners in the back who they were enormously proud of. They were the first Germans I had seen. They were all wounded and looked very dirty and exhausted and rather frightened. We gave one some cigarettes which he seemed to want badly and he seemed surprisingly grateful !

There were still civilians in this village - although not many - who in spite of the fact that there was a lot of firing going on all round, and what sounded like a major battle on our right front, appeared to have no intention of moving! The Companies filtered up during the course of the afternoon and the same drill was repeated again of giving out my orders and getting the platoons down to digging their positions and building anti-tank obstacles with farm implements, gates, or out of any old junk they could lay their hands on. I got quite a good house for my Company HQ and, having got all the Company transport tucked away under cover from air attack in the orchard, Campbell (my cook), Barkley and Macdonald (my driver) got things going and produced a good meal. On the whole, that night (30/31st May) was fairly quiet. The Company was now "standing to" at dusk and "standing down" at dawn as there appeared to be no enemy activity within three miles and there were French troops in front of us still.

The following morning some of us went to a nearby village called Huppy with the CO for a conference. The French Commander was General de Gaulle who no one then attached much importance to. He was wearing a very tattered uniform and looked extremely tired. He had only recently been promoted and was still wearing Lieut. Colonel's badges of rank on his sleeve. He appeared to us then as a man of outstanding character with a complete grasp of the situation and, although full of confidence, was not too over-confident. He was cheerful and optimistic, which at this time was the exact opposite of the majority of French officers. None of us realised then that this man was suddenly to rise to fame some three weeks later as the leader of the Free French

Forces! All this time we were under command of a French Corps and the Division took its orders from the French. De Gaulle explained at this conference that the French were holding a line roughly between the villages of Moyenneville and Bienfait, a mile or so in front of us. He said that the French were going to attack with tanks, crossing the line at 1800 hours that evening. He gave orders that the 4th Seaforths were to stand by and support the remaining French in repelling a German counter-attack should the tank attack fail. We left de Gaulle's headquarters and went on to the village of Behen which the Battalion was to occupy that afternoon. Just as we were completing our reconnaissances the Germans began shelling the village and outskirts. Some came unpleasantly close and we saw some civilians have a remarkable escape. A man and woman were pushing a pram along the road heading out of the village when the shelling started. They made a dive for a large haystack by the side of the road. Two minutes later a shell landed very close to the stack and set it on fire. Miraculously, out of the flames and smoke the man, woman, and child in the pram emerged unhurt and hurried on down the road! The Companies arrived up and I led mine off to our new positions.

My Company position was in a small wood in the grounds of a large chateau on the edge of the village. The Germans had occupied this village some days before but had been driven out of it by the French. They must have used this chateau as an HQ of sorts as it had been recently occupied and there were signs of a meal lying about in one room and a lot of broken wine glasses. Just outside the front door two Germans had been buried and small wooden crosses put over their graves on which their tin hats were sitting. Because of this I didn't think it was a very healthy place to have my Company HQ, as if the Germans had an HQ in the chateau they would probably think we should do the same and shell it on this supposition. So I decided to steer clear of it and accordingly dug my headquarters position in the wood not far from the platoons.

During these days it was most wonderful weather and the country was looking its very best. We took it all so much for granted, I suppose, because we were so occupied and had so many things to think about. But the few moments I was able to switch my mind off my immediate worries, the loveliness of the surrounding countryside brought it home to me so forcefully how useless and futile war was. I spent the afternoon walking round my platoon positions. The Jocks were all in excellent form and really putting their backs into it and digging their positions well. It was a disheartening task which had been going on for a week or so, digging positions - always in a hurry - and as soon as they had been completed orders would come for us to move again, and the same process would be repeated at the next place. However, at present we were at least going in the right direction - forward - whereas, later, it was the same process only in a different direction - backwards - which was disheartening to say the least of it.

About 4 pm I went over to see Simon Fraser, who was on my right. I had a cup of tea with him with a "cinder" in it, as he always called it, and a hunk of excellent Dundee cake which I thoroughly enjoyed. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion just outside, and we rushed out to find that a shell had landed on, and more or less demolished, the next door house. On reviewing the situation, we decided that it was only an odd one and decided to take a chance and go on living in his house. We proved to be right as no more arrived in that particular area while we were there.

At 1800 hours the French tanks and infantry attack started. We had a pretty good view of it as our positions were roughly along their 'start line'. From the beginning it seemed doomed to failure and appeared very half-hearted. The Germans evidently had a fairly strong tank defence as several French tanks were very soon knocked out and left blazing by their crews. When darkness fell a long, disorganised stream of French soldiers started coming back through our lines, repeating the slogan which from now onwards we were to hear all too often, "Toute est perdu"! The few

surviving tanks limped through every now and then. The only information they could give us was that the attack had been a complete failure, that all their officers had been killed and that the Germans would be arriving any moment now! Not very encouraging news but we knew that most of it was probably untrue. They were an unhappy sight and there was an atmosphere of complete despair amongst them. Many of them obviously had only one intention on their minds and that was to get out of it and away as soon as possible. They certainly appeared to have no officers and any form of discipline had long since disappeared, and it was every man for himself. We expected a counter-attack now. The CO sent Douglas Scott with a patrol to the village of Moyenneville, some two miles up the road, to try and get some information as to what was happening in front. A French officer then appeared at Bn. HQ saying that he had had orders from his Brigadier at Moyenneville to collect as many of these stragglers and bring them back. This he proceeded to do and eventually got a hold of about 100 and took them up to Moyenneville. Our MO by now was having a pretty busy time at Bn. HQ which was becoming more and more full of wounded Frenchmen.

At 2 am the 2nd Seaforths arrived in the village on their way through to Moyenneville. As everyone was expecting a counter-attack they were advancing across country in open formation with fixed bayonets. Their silhouettes were just visible at close range and an occasional glint of a bayonet. All this coming and going, and at the same time expecting a counter-attack at any moment, was most nervewracking as it was impossible, except at very close quarters, to tell friend from foe. There must have been many a finger touching the trigger amongst the Jocks that night, and I think it speaks very highly of them that, in the midst of all this uncertainty and with demoralized Frenchmen streaming back through our positions one way and the 2nd Seaforths going through us forward the other, they were completely under control and their discipline and steadiness was excellent.

The following morning at 10 o'clock, orders came for us to relieve the 2nd Seaforths in Moyenneville. Accordingly, the Company Commanders went straight up to make the usual reconnaissance. The village was being shelled sporadically as we arrived. I was to take over from Ian Fraser and eventually found him and Ian Galloway in a house in the village which he was using as his HQ. While he was explaining the situation to me, a shell landed on a barn about 10 yards away at the back of the house where his cooks were preparing a meal. Fortunately no one was hurt but one cook was rather badly burnt as the explosion set the petrol cooker on fire.

My platoon positions, which were all outside the village, were once again virgin ground and no attempt had been made by the French, who had previously held this village, to dig any kind of defences. 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies then came up from Behen while 'A' Company (Rory Tarbat) and Bn. HQ remained behind there. Once again I issued my orders and got the platoons out to their positions. I had decided that Ian Fraser's Company HQ was too far away from the platoons and so chose a small orchard on the north (enemy) side of the village for mine. There was a fairly good shed nearby where I could put my truck and have it concealed from air observation, and the apple trees afforded the same cover for the actual HQ which we proceeded to dig. We dug two trenches, a 'V' shaped one large enough to hold ten men comfortably, and another smaller one fifteen yards away just off the road, for the cooks to avoid carrying rations further than was necessary when they had been off-loaded.

The Jocks worked well and most of the digging was finished by nightfall (31st May). That night was fairly quiet, on our immediate front anyway, although there was still considerable small arms fire on our right, which at the time I took to be an attack on the 2nd Seaforths who were now holding Bienfait and Boencourt. About 2 am some shells landed a few hundred yards in front of my HQ. I found out later that one had been a direct hit on Ronnie P-B's HQ which was in a large four-

storied house. However, the shell had fortunately only gone through two storeys and so no serious damage was done! About 6 am a truck stopped on the road beside my HQ. An officer got out and walked up through the orchard to speak to me. He was a subaltern who I had never seen before and told me that he was Intelligence Officer of "Vick Force" which I had never heard of at that time. He told me his name and his Regiment - The Prince of Wales Regiment. I had heard of the PWVs but never the PW Regt. He simply said that he had been sent up to look at our positions. I asked him if he had been to our Bn. HQ on his way up and he said no, which I thought was odd. He then began to give me a vivid description of Dunkirk. He told me that the BEF was in the process of leaving France, that the Germans had cut the Belgian Army to pieces and inflicted staggering blows to the French which they could never recover from. The BEF had been cut in half and one half annihilated, and that we had had enormous losses in ships in the Channel. We had seen no papers for days and somehow hadn't managed to hear any news. All this amazed me - so much so that I couldn't and wouldn't believe it and got very angry at the time with this chap as he piled on disaster after disaster and finally said that it was only a matter of days before GB would be invaded. Finally he left. His stories seemed so unbelievable and fantastic, and his own identity rather odd, that I decided to ring up Bn. HQ. R A A S (Macrae) said he had never heard of him or "Vick Force" and that he would try and check up on him immediately. After some considerable time I believe his identity was checked and he was proved to be who he said he was. But it shows how very ignorant of the whole situation we were at the time of Dunkirk.

As I put down the telephone, a mortar shell suddenly landed out of the blue, very close indeed to the trench. Most of us were standing on the parapet, as it was very quiet and the cooks were going to issue breakfasts to the platoons. We made a dive for the trench just as three more came over and one actually landed on the parapet. My servant, Pte. Barkley, put up his hand to protect his face from the blast and got his hand and arm shattered to pulp, poor chap, but it probably saved his life. Then, all hell broke loose. During the course of the next three-quarters of an hour seventy or eighty mortar shells landed all round (and one actually inside) the trench. It was extremely accurate fire and at the time I was certain it must have been observed fire - so accurate was it. But I couldn't understand where they could possibly see the fire from, as the orchard was screened by houses on the enemy side and was not overlooked from anywhere. The telephone line was dead by now so I couldn't inform Bn. HQ. However, unknown to me, my CSM, who was in a different part of the trench to myself, had been wounded in the back and had got out of the trench and run down to Ronnie P-B's HQ where he painted a blacker picture than it really was. He said that casualties were very heavy and that I had been killed. Ronnie rang up for the MO and an ambulance. Meanwhile, the shells were landing so thick and fast that there was nothing to do but remain in the trench and hope for the best. At the same time I anticipated an attack. The trench was over-crowded when the shelling started as two Signallers and the Signal Sergeant happened to be up with me at the time.

It soon turned out that, in my ignorance, I had chosen a most unfortunate spot for my HQ. These mortar shells with their steep trajectory were coming over and bursting on impact with the top branches of the apple trees, the burst coming straight down on top of us into the trench on several occasions. After a quarter of an hour the ambulance arrived and Duncan Macrae and his medical sergeant, choosing their moment, made a dash for the trench. The sergeant was badly hit just as he got to the trench and fell in. Movement in the trench was by now very restricted and Duncan had a terribly difficult task attending to the wounded. My cook, Campbell (from Dingwall), had been mortally wounded and Duncan said that he couldn't possibly last much longer. Murdo Mackenzie (who had been at Foulis as a forester), the signal sergeant, was wounded but insisted on taking a chance and making a bolt for it, so as he could mend the telephone line. In doing so he was slightly wounded again but carried on and did magnificent work. Finlay Macrae, my runner who I have spoken of before, was also wounded in the back of the head. But, in spite of a very nasty wound

(right through his steel helmet) he was a wonderful example and carried on as if nothing had happened, refused to have his wound dressed by Duncan until he had dealt with the other cases and generally was a very great help. Suddenly the shelling stopped as abruptly as it had started.

Out of the 15 in the trench ten had been wounded and one killed. The sides of the trench were riddled with splinters varying from the size of an egg to the size of a halfpenny. My bivouac tent, made out of the covering of my 8 cwt, which was a few yards behind the trench was riddled with holes. It was a miracle that we were not all as dead as mutton.

When the shelling stopped we got the wounded into the ambulance and the remainder I took down to Ronnie Pelham-Burns' HQ for a meal and a rest after the tremendous dusting they had gone through. Soon after this the CO arrived and we went off together to find another site for my Company HQ, and he had a look round my platoon positions. I then went back with him and had lunch at Bn. HQ. After lunch there was a conference attended by Lt Col Peppe commanding the Royal Horse Artillery in our area, during which the Germans started shelling the village, one or two of which came uncomfortably close to Bn. HQ. After this I bicycled back to my new Company HQ. It was in another orchard but at the south end of the village. I went round the platoons and the Jocks all seemed in good form but were anxious to get a wash (which none of them had had for about four days). This was a problem as all three platoons were some considerable way from any water and the only way of getting it to them was in petrol cans, manhandled. This we did just before darkness fell.

The early part of that night (1st/2nd June) was fairly quiet but about 11 pm firing broke out on our right, which proved afterwards to be a local attack on 2nd Seaforths. In the early hours of 2nd June heavy firing broke out on our immediate front. Then our own artillery started behind us and the shells came whining over and landed (what sounded at night) pretty close in front. I sent a runner up to Grieve's platoon, which was about 600 yds in front of HQ, but he reported that all was well there. On my left there was a gap

of at least a mile between us and 1st Black Watch. Thinking the Bosch might have discovered this and make a sudden break through, we manned our positions at Coy. HQ and stood to for the rest of that night. But, except for wandering cows looming up out of the darkness and a few stray enemy shells landing in our area, nothing of importance happened that night. By this time the Jocks had become quite accustomed to shelling and could not only tell which were coming and which were going, so to speak, but also which were likely to land near and which over and which short! Having issued breakfast to the platoons, I went into the village and had mine with Simon and Hec at their HQ. They told me the news that Ronnie P-B's Company had been attacked during the night, seriously enough for him to send up the SOS signal for artillery support - so that accounted for most of the noise we heard that night. The 2nd June was fairly quiet until midday when the Germans began shelling Moyennville village. Their fire was pretty accurate and as my HQ was on the outskirts of the village, it didn't worry us much. But they made a mess of the middle of the village and knocked the church steeple down. There was an excellent view from there. Hec told me he had just been up to the top of it when the shelling started and that they hit the steeple in the first two or three shots, so he made a hurried exit from the church in the midst of a shower of bricks and mortar and dust - just in time!

Bn. HQ rang up in the afternoon to say that we were to withdraw that night and were being relieved by 4th Gordons, and that the Company Commander of my relief was on his way up. He never arrived. They rang up to say that he (Capt. Dick), his batman and a DR of ours (Pte. Sutherland from Dingwall), who was guiding him up, had all been killed by a shell on their way up. This meant considerable delay while another officer was sent for. Eventually, late in the evening, Bill

Morrison arrived and we just had time to make a very quick reconnaissance and plan for the relief before darkness. Morrison then went back to collect his Company saying that he would be back by 11 pm.

The Germans started shelling the village and the road up which the Gordon relief was due to come, as soon as it was dark. They arrived at 11.30 having had four casualties on their way up. The relief was completed, not without a good deal of difficulty as it was a very dark night and a certain amount of confusion ensued as to who was who.

I had sent my HQ, and the platoon I had with me, to the pre-arranged RV where we were to pick up my remaining two platoons, and had gone back to see if Bill Morrison was OK before we left, when some shells landed fairly close. Soon after I had left him on my return to the platoons, I heard a shell coming and knew immediately by the sound of it that it was going to land very close to me. I have explained before that these shells burst on impact with the tops of the trees. After some rapid thinking, therefore (during the course of a split second), I decided that it was useless throwing myself on the ground as I should probably get the contents of the shell in my back from above. I suddenly saw a tree - a pretty substantial oak tree - about five yards from me. I took one leap at it and wrapped myself round it, said a short prayer and hoped for the best! Simultaneously, the shell landed and burst on the top branches of this tree and I felt bits of shell burying themselves with a thud on the other side of the trunk and the remaining bits whizzing past my ears! It all happened in a fraction of a second, and I certainly wouldn't be writing this if I hadn't happened to see that tree!

I collected the platoons and we set off across country, parallel to, but some way away from, the road leading out of the village. The Germans must have known some kind of relief was taking place as they were shelling this road the whole time. Our progress was slow as we had two Gordon stretcher cases to take with us, and we seemed to come across enormous hedges and ditches every ten yards. We eventually reached 4th Gordons HQ in Behen, which they had taken over from our HQ, and handed the two wounded men over to them and continued on our way. About 4 am we arrived at a place called Zalieux, the Bn. RV.

The troops were very tired, dirty and hungry after a not too pleasant four days and wanted rest badly. Having got them into billets (most of the villages were now at least partially evacuated), I went off to find my own billet.

This was in a large chateau very recently evacuated. So recently, in fact, that the bedroom that Simon and I threw ourselves down in to sleep had some pathetic reminders of the hurry in which the owners must have left. It must have been the bedroom of the lady of the chateau. Everything was in confusion - drawers of the dressing table pulled half open where a handful of silk stockings and more intimate female garments had been snatched up and pushed into a suitcase. Dirty water in the wash basin. And, most pathetic of all, lying on the bedside table a most beautiful little miniature of two small children in a lovely frame encrusted with diamonds - which must have been forgotten at the last moment. It was the same all over the house; confusion reigned everywhere. Simon and I were too exhausted to even take off our jackets and flung ourselves down on the four poster bed and slept solidly until we were woken by my batman (now Hugh Forsyth - Barclay having gone home after being wounded) at 11 am. The CO was having a conference in half an hour, so off we went to Bn. HQ which was in another chateau a little way off. We were told that 51st Division, in conjunction with the French, was going to attack with the objective of pushing back the bridgehead the Germans had across the Somme at Abbeville. The attack might take place that afternoon (against which we had apparently vigorously protested to the French) but more probably the following morning (4th June), early. A reconnaissance party, consisting of CO, Adjutant and

Company Commanders, then motored out to look at the ground we were to attack across. After a short distance we came across the 4th Camerons. They were having a fairly hot time and were being worried a great deal by Bosch snipers who fired as soon as there was any movement. It was hopeless trying to do a reconnaissance from here, so we moved on again. We eventually found a spot where we could get a good view of the piece of ground we wanted to look at. This spot, however, was still overlooked by the enemy which didn't make things any easier. The Brigadier (Herbert Stewart, DSO, a 53 year old Lowlander who had served with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the 1914-18 War) arrived and gave us a general idea of the whole attack. Having satisfied ourselves as much as we could about the nature of the ground over which we were to attack, we all motored back to Bn. HQ where there was another short conference. We were given the general orders for the attack by the Division and told that now the attack was taking place definitely the following morning and that there would be another conference at 7 pm when the CO would issue his final orders. We went back to our Companies and gave warning orders for the attack, a meal was issued and everything got on the move.

At 7 pm I again went back to Bn. HQ. I was surprised to find about thirty officers had arrived for the conference, including a lot of Frenchmen. The scene was rather impressive. We all gathered in the drawingroom of the chateau. It was a beautifully proportioned room with a high ceiling. Two large glass doors, through which the sun streamed, opened on to the lawn. When everyone was present, Harry Houldsworth opened the conference by explaining what was going to happen, with the aid of maps and a blackboard. There were present representatives of Division and Brigade as well as the French, and all aspects of the attack were discussed - except what action would be taken should the attack fail. This I discovered afterwards was in everyone's mind but no one liked to bring up the question! Maps were very scarce and all I had was a 1912 Michelin road map which I had to share with Simon Fraser. I have forgotten nearly all the details of the orders for the attack, but the following may possibly interest some reader. It is a copy of the Plan of Attack for 4th Seaforths sector copied out of the Adjutants' War Diary which was compiled in captivity.

Zero 0330 hours 4 June:

1. 2-10 artillery barrage opened on Bois de Villiers (about a mile from our start line) to cover the noise of tanks coming forward, and was gradually lifted to the other side of the Somme (say 4 miles).
2. French heavy tanks to follow the barrage and capture the high ground of Mt. de Caubert and Caesar's Ridge (2½ - 3 miles).
3. 2nd Seaforths to attack Bois de Villers and clear it of enemy, this being their final objective.
4. French light tanks, followed by 4th Seaforths advancing on a two Company front ('B' and 'C' Companies leading) on each side of the Bois de Villers, were to attack the Mt. de Caubert and consolidate this objective.
5. French Dragon Porte (mechanised infantry) were to advance through 4th Seaforths and follow the heavy tanks to Mt. de Caubert and Caesar's Camp and hold this ground until the arrival of the slower moving infantry.

As far as my own Company was concerned, the following is a very rough and simplified version of what was going to happen.

'C' and 'B' Companies (Simon Fraser's and mine) were to lead the attack, 'C' on the left and 'B' on the right. 'A' and 'D' Companies (Ronnie P-B and Rory Tarbat) to advance about 500 yards behind 'C' and 'B'. My layout at the start line (as shown me on a blackboard at the conference) was as under.

X	X	X	X			French medium tank
X	X	X	X	X	X	French light tank
		X				French Commander's tank
X	X	X	X	X	X	French light tank
		X				French Commander's tank

All this looked pretty formidable. I was to give orders to my sections that they were each to follow up as close as possible behind a tank, which would afford them some protection against small arms fire. I was in high hopes until suddenly, towards the end of the conference, Lt. Eitoff, who was the Brigade French liaison officer, said something to the effect that he didn't think some of the tanks (which were coming by rail) would arrive in time for the attack. There was dead silence in the room. Then the CO, who was looking extremely tired and exhausted, asked in a very cold voice what reasons Lt Eitoff had for thinking this? I forget the answer; anyway a heated discussion started between Eitoff and the CO, who got very angry indeed - in fact I have never seen him so angry. Eventually he ordered Eitoff to hold his tongue and said that he was talking nonsense. At the time I was extremely surprised at the CO getting so annoyed. As far back as I remember him I could not recollect an occasion when he had ever raised his voice before, and I could only put it down to the fact that he had had an extremely anxious and worrying time and hadn't slept for days. It was only long afterwards that I tumbled to the obvious reason. He probably had grave doubts himself as to whether our full quota of tanks would turn up, but had had his orders and knew that they had to be complied with. In fact, considerable harm might be done if he passed these doubts to his officers - small wonder that he was annoyed. In his position I should have been furious. He was a magnificent example throughout. Everyone knew, or thought they knew, in their heart of hearts that this attack was a last desperate effort and more than probably doomed to failure from the start. But Harry Houldsworth never gave us a hint of what he thought about the whole thing and always took the optimistic view and encouraged everyone. Finally the conference ended and we left to pass on our orders to our respective Companies - slightly bewildered!

I say we were slightly bewildered because of the suddenness and magnitude of the whole business. It was my first experience of a Divisional attack. Maybe I was wrong, but all my previous military experience had taught me that considerable time and preparation was usually necessary before an attack of this size was launched. And here we were embarking on one at considerably less than twelve hours' notice, and under the severe handicaps of (a) having no accurate maps at all and only one out-of-date road map per two Companies; and (b) only having had the briefest of glances at the ground over which we were to attack - none of the platoon Commanders had seen the ground until the attack had actually started. I must again stress that the Division was under command of a French Corps Commander. I believe that General Fortune had protested vigorously about the ridiculously short preparations and, in fact, about the whole attack.

By now it was quite dark. I collected my platoon Commanders - Grieve, Smith and Alan Shearer - and explained the whole attack to them and passed on all that we had learned at the conference and, finally, issued my orders. The Battalion start line was a road almost at right angles to our objective. We were to advance over fairly open country with small woods here and there. Before reaching our objective, which was a long, sloping ridge (about four miles from the start line) overlooking the

river Somme, it would be necessary to execute a sort of right wheel and, because of this, the danger of losing direction was always present. On reaching the objective we had orders to lie down on the near slope of the hill (so as not to be seen by the enemy) and wait until the pioneer Bn., who were following up behind us, had dug us in. These orders were given out to about twelve people looking over my shoulder at my one solitary map, aided by the light of a rather flickering oil lamp!

About 11.30 pm all the officers who were taking part in the attack assembled in the chateau diningroom for supper. It was a cheerful party and everyone seemed to be in great form. We managed, somehow, to get hold of some champagne. Those officers who were not taking part in the attack were away doing various jobs, in order to let us get a couple of hours' rest before we moved off for the start line. The Colonel had decided that all second-in-command of Companies were to remain at Bn. HQ during the attack - a wise precaution as it turned out. This included Hector, Bim Young and Douglas Scott. It was a definite relief to me that Hector and I were not both taking part in the attack. About 1 am Simon and I motored up to Bn. HQ to see the CO, in case there were any changes in the orders. It was a very dark night indeed and "Boots" Macdonald (chauffeur at Tullich, Kyle), my driver, had great difficulty in finding his way there and back with no lights at all. The Colonel was in good form but terribly tired and obviously very worried. We had a cup of tea with him and motored back. Simon was very cheerful and in good form on the way back. He regarded the whole attack as futile!

It was too late by the time we got back to think of getting any sleep, as there was a tremendous amount to do. Having collected our Companies, we marched off across country to the start line. On reaching it, I got the platoons lined up and made them sit down and wait. It was still dark and only an occasional burst of small arms fire broke the silence. I had a short chat with Colin Mackenzie (2nd Bn. IO) who was passing by on some job. There were no signs of any French tanks and, by 3 am, I was getting rather worried. Shortly after 3 am a medium tank, making an appalling noise and proceeding in a series of jerks, suddenly turned up. It looked far from well and must have had something very far wrong with its works. The driver jumped out and, after having found that he had come to the right place, and on being questioned, said that he knew nothing about the other 17 tanks that I was expecting. He then screamed in my ear, and above the series of explosive noises the tank was making, saying something about "Il ne marche pas tres bien"!

At 3.20 am our barrage started. It was terrific, tremendous - I've never heard such a colossal noise. No word can possibly describe the din it made. I heard afterwards that about 900 guns were employed. While I was sitting with my Company HQ, waiting for zero, there was a whirr and a plop and a shell buried itself in the earth two yards in front of us - it was a dud! The CO came along and said he was sorry but we should just have to start with the one tank instead of 18 and, as the minute hand of my watch passed the half hour, we all stood up and started the advance at a steady pace with bayonets fixed, preceded by a solitary tank!

We advanced in open order. Some German shells were falling by now, but most of them were some way ahead and as it got lighter we could see the earth being thrown up in showers as they landed. We were advancing through open country, covered mostly by corn crops which came up to just below our knees. There was a very heavy dew and our legs were soaking wet in five minutes. The first half hour went entirely according to plan and there seemed to be no opposition for some hundreds of yards. I heard the occasional bullet whistling over our heads but the noise of the barrage was so terrific we could hear little else. As we proceeded, the noise of the guns lessened a bit and light automatic and rifle fire became more apparent, and I began to see men being hit and spinning round like shot rabbits. Meanwhile, my solitary tank was rumbling along in front of us, doing quite good work and knocking out isolated Bosch posts here and there. Lt. Eitoff (Bde.

Liaison Officer), who has been mentioned before, set a fine example by walking alongside the tank and pointing out any strong points which the gunner did not spot. But very soon after this he was killed and the tank was knocked out and set on fire.

Shearer's and Grieve's platoons were still in good order and advancing at a steady rate, but Smith's platoon had gone too much to the left and disappeared from view. Opposition began to get stiffer and stiffer and soon the advance began to slow down, and finally halted. I could see no signs of the Companies on our right or left and so went to investigate. Our right boundary was a small ridge about five feet high and I crawled up to this and had a look over. As soon as I put my head over, a hail of fire came from in front and rear, which puzzled me. The Jocks by now were all lying down in any small fold in the ground they could find, and firing from that position. Casualties were becoming heavier every minute and there seemed to be no hope of advancing further, under what was now very heavy fire. Shelling had now increased considerably. I have forgotten most of the details of what happened before I decided to withdraw the Company, and my powers of description are not nearly adequate enough to give a clear picture. Suffice it to say that I decided to withdraw the Company back to where 2nd Seaforths were in the Bois de Villers.

I therefore collected all the men I could and eventually we arrived back at the Bois de Villers in an exhausted condition. Here I found Paul Nason, Jack Ritchie and Shan Blair. They knew even less of the situation than I did but thought that the whole attack had been a failure. However, they were pleased to see us as they wanted reinforcements badly as they expected a German counter-attack. They had no entrenching tools and nor had we, so I started the men off digging themselves in with bayonets, pocket knives, anything they could get hold of. There was still no sign of Smith or Grieve although I had a lot of men from their platoons with me. I put Alan Shearer in charge and, taking my batman Forsyth with me, walked back through the wood for 400 yards where Nason told me I would find a couple of signallers with a phone. Just as we reached the signallers a German plane, flying very low and making sweeps over the wood, passed over. The pilot must have spotted us as he banked sharply

and came back over us. We just had time to see two bombs falling from the undercarriage and coming straight at us! We flung ourselves into a small scrape in the ground which could hardly be called a trench. There was a tremendous explosion as the bomb landed about ten yards away and trees were knocked down like ninepins all around us - some fell across the scrape that we were in and Forsyth's rifle, which was lying in the open a few feet away from him, was smashed to matchsticks. We were lucky to have got away with it. The plane flew off and I managed to get on to HQ on the phone and reported the situation to Shaw Mackenzie (2nd in command of the Bn.). He ordered me to put the Company in charge of Alan Shearer and said that they were to be attached to 2nd Seaforths commanded by Paul Nason until further orders. He then said I was to come straight back to Bn. HQ. When I had carried out these arrangements I went back and saw Alan Shearer and made sure he understood his job and, taking Forsyth with me, trudged back across the fields to the chateau where Bn. HQ was situated.

I was greeted by 'Shaw' on the doorstep with the news that the whole attack had failed, and that the CO had been wounded and the Adjutant killed. The next person I saw was Hec, who was delighted to see me as he said that I had definitely been reported as killed - I've never discovered by whom! Shaw was just leaving for the Bn. battle HQ to take over from the CO who was being evacuated, wounded, back to the base. I never saw him after he had been wounded but heard that he was very unwilling to be evacuated and only went on a direct order from the Brigadier who himself was wounded later, rather badly, and got home. Shaw told me to remain at Bn. HQ and act for him while he was at battle HQ and deal with any messages that came in.

It was now about midday. I was completely exhausted and, I suppose partly owing to the state I was in and having been slightly concussed by the bomb dropped on us from the plane, I was stone deaf in my right ear for five days! I don't remember much about what happened the rest of that day. Various people drifted in and out and messages kept coming in all day, each one more depressing than the last, and casualties mounted hourly. I was expecting Shaw to return at any time and was anxious to get back to my Company. At 4 pm there was still no sign of him so, putting Hec in charge, I set out again for Bois de Villers. I found Alan Shearer and the Company all in fairly good form having had a comparatively quiet day, and they had managed to get some rest. Soon, after it got dark, orders came through to the effect that the Battalion would withdraw that night to the village of Zailleux. On my return to HQ I found that Alan Shearer had withdrawn the Company successfully and without incident. Whilst waiting for the remaining Companies we made up a list of the officer casualties which was as follows:

Lt. Col. H W Houldsworth, CO, - wounded
Major S K Fraser, OC, 'B' Coy - killed
Captain N MacBeth, Carrier Officer - wounded
Lt. M. Maclennan, 'B' Coy - killed
2/Lt. H C Maclean, 'B' Coy - killed
2/Lt Smith, 'C' Coy - killed
2/Lt Grieve, 'C' Coy - killed
2/Lt F Lindsay, Sig. Officer - severely wounded
2/Lt. J Anderson 'D' Coy - severely wounded
2/Lt W Mundell, 'D' Coy - severely wounded
Lt H Macrae, Intell. Officer - severely wounded

Out of 17 officers who actually took part in this attack 11 were casualties. None of the wounded was slightly wounded and all were evacuated home. Frank Lindsay lost a leg; Walter Mundell was invalided out of the service for good; John Anderson was in hospital for nearly a year and later was captured in Sicily and is a prisoner in Germany now. Of the casualties amongst the men it was impossible to say anything at this time. They appeared to be extremely high in the face of it. 'B' Company (Simon Fraser) seemed to have been almost completely wiped out. He and all his officers who had taken part in the attack had been killed and only about 40 men turned up. Accurate figures will never be known until the war is over - if then - as many must have been taken prisoner. In the casualty list that went into Brigade the majority had to be put down as "missing" only. When questioned, so many of the men had conflicting stories and as we were on the move from now on - retreating - practically the whole time until the end and always in close contact with the enemy, it was impossible to trace these stories and sift which were false and which were true. For example, my two subalterns, Smith and Grieve, I was by no means certain about. One of their platoon would say he saw them dead and another would say that much later he was sure he had seen them wounded. And I am only convinced now - a year later (this was written in 1941) - that they must have been killed as nothing has been heard of them. I write at length on this subject as we have all felt, here in captivity, how hopeless we must seem to so many unhappy relatives of the men who were reported missing and whose fate is still unknown. [The Battalion suffered 223 casualties amongst the other ranks, representing half its effective fighting strength.]

Withdrawal from the Somme

About 2 am on 5th June the remaining Companies had all turned up. As usual, it was pitch dark and a good deal of confusion reigned. Orders had now been changed and we were told to go to a place called Limeaux. Accordingly, Shaw Mackenzie (now in command of the Battalion) took Ronnie Pelham-Burn and I off in his car to reconnoitre Limeaux and told George Baird to march the Battalion out there. Dodging a few stray shells on the way there - I suspect that some of them were French ones falling short as usual - we reached Limeaux just as it was getting light. It was a small, tumbledown village, completely deserted, and for some reason had obviously been rather badly dive-bombed. There were enormous craters all round it and one or two actually in the village. A French battery, situated on a hill just south of the village, was firing full blast as we motored in, and soon was replied to by the Germans and a pretty heavy artillery duel took place. It seemed a very unhealthy spot to put the Bn. in and Shaw was rather worried about the whole thing. However, as we waited and watched the German guns lifted and the shells went screaming well over the village, landing some distance away. The French battery must have been hit, as they ceased firing very suddenly and everything became very quiet. The Battalion was well on its way now, therefore it would have been useless to get in touch with Brigade and report this rather unpleasant situation, as Shaw wanted to do. We made what preparations we could for their arrival and did a recce of our various Company positions and waited for them to arrive.

[Much has happened since I last wrote this account (about two months ago). The 'invasion' has been going eleven days and Hitler has used his much vaunted secret weapon (a rocket pilotless plane) on the South of England. More locally, The Beverage (?) has gone and our garden is growing!]

We had been told that there were French troops holding a line in front of us, therefore there was no immediate danger of being attacked. However, this proved later to be quite inaccurate!

Eventually the Battalion arrived. By this time the majority of them were in a very weary state and many completely all in. However, there was nothing for it but to get the men down again to the unceasing task of digging. So, while the cooks were preparing breakfast, the whole Company dug their positions. Just as I was in the middle of withdrawing the Company in relays from their digging tasks for breakfast, Shaw Mackenzie came running down the road saying that a message had come from Brigade to the effect that the enemy had launched an attack and that the thin line of troops on our front had been driven back and an attack was imminent. He only had time to point in the direction of the wood at the back of the village and say, "Go up there and take up a position immediately; our orders are that we must hold on at all costs!" The position was not cheerful. The men had had no sleep for 48 hours and had little or no rest since the attack the previous morning. Added to this, many of the Jocks had not had a hot meal since the abortive attack on the Abbeville bridgehead. Written down in so many words, it strikes me that this all sounds rather a "moan" but I want to convey a true picture of the conditions at the time.

Incidentally, I never heard so much as a single word of protest from any of the Jocks - ever - however hard the conditions were. We immediately left our positions and went over to the wood pointed out by Shaw and dug furiously, expecting to be attacked at any minute. We were assisted considerably in this work as there were stacks of cut wood lying about and we used them as breastworks for the trenches. Having worked at this for an hour, a message came from Bn. HQ

saying that I was to withdraw my Company back to the village again, where I should receive further orders. So we moved once more.

It now appeared that the situation was not so serious as at first thought, and orders were issued from the Battalion to take up new positions to the south of the village.

Meanwhile, the remnants of 'B' Company (Simon Fraser's), which had been cut up badly in the attack on 4th June, were attached to my Company, also their only surviving officer, Hector. This made a big difference as it brought the strength of my Company up to about 70 or 80 as far as I can remember, but I was still terribly short of NCOs. We moved off to our new positions amid sporadic firing from our front. Once again we dug and this time we were left in our positions long enough to complete our tasks. By 3 pm (this was 5th June) things were comparatively quiet and remained so for some hours.

About 5 pm seven or eight enemy bombers flew low over us and proceeded to divebomb one of our battery positions about two miles to our rear. I had a ringside seat as their target was across some flat, open fields. Except for the droning noise made when they dived, it was exactly like hawks attacking something on the ground! It was alarming to watch but I heard afterwards they did surprisingly little damage.

Later in the evening an enemy reconnaissance plane came over very low indeed and flew leisurely round and round in circles looking at our positions, which annoyed us a lot. A good deal of small arms fire was expended at it as it looked such an easy target, but with no effect whatever, so presumably it was heavily armoured. During all these days I didn't see a sign of a British or French plane of any sort.

It was a glorious evening and all we had to do was sit and wait, keeping an eye open for the Bosch. I saw one lot of about 50 marching over some open ground, in fours, in their greatcoats, about a mile away - a wonderful target for a machine gun but unfortunately none was at hand.

From time to time reports came in from my platoons that they had seen Germans in the immediate vicinity, some as close as 600 yards, but as their movements were extremely cautious and positions well concealed, no good targets were presented. However, it was obvious that they were filtering in preparation to making an attack.

I took a walk down to Bn. HQ with Ronnie Pelham-Burn. It was situated in a large beech wood about half a mile away. They all seemed in good form and I was delighted to see a meal was being prepared and shortly being sent out to the Companies.

On my return journey to my Company I was surprised to see a stretcher being carried through the wood. On it was my driver, "Boots" Macdonald, who I had left half an hour ago sitting in my truck. Apparently, in getting out of the truck, he had caught his leg in the sling of his rifle, presumably loaded with the safety catch forward, and it had gone off and the bullet had passed through his knee joint. Duncan Macrae, our MO, took a serious view of the wound and he proved to be right, as I heard after capture that Macdonald had lost his leg, but had got home. I satisfied myself that it was not a s.i. (self-inflicted) wound but a genuine accident!

As evening wore on things remained uncannily quiet, although we knew the enemy was very close. At 11 pm orders came saying that I was to withdraw my Company to Bn. HQ and thence to a place called Ramburelles.

I had been stupid enough to forget until now that I had no driver for my truck now that Macdonald had gone. I therefore put Hector in charge of it and gave him instructions to drive it round by road (I was taking the Company across country) to Bn. HQ, but not to start the engine until we had left, as I had had orders that as we were in such close contact with the enemy the withdrawal must take place in complete silence.

The withdrawal took place successfully, without incident, and we reached Bn. HQ to find the other Companies just coming in. Finally the Battalion moved off. R A A S Macrae did magnificent work leading us over completely trackless country on one of the blackest nights I've ever experienced. From the little one could see, we appeared to be going across country that had been shelled or bombed, as we were continually crossing large craters and climbing over fallen trees etc. Eventually we reached a road and the going became easier. I was by now exhausted and three-quarters asleep so I don't remember being conscious much of my surroundings! I can only remember that we were joined by a great many other troops - Black Watch, Gordons, Camerons and French gunners, and the column got larger and larger. By now there were looks of utter exhaustion on everyone's faces and, on many, dejection. A squadron of German fighters flew low over the column and fired a few bursts, but I don't think anyone was hit, and they continued on their way. This behaviour of German planes was to be a feature of the days to come. They appeared to take surprisingly little interest in such excellent targets as long columns of troops and vehicles on the march. I suppose by now they knew our inevitable end and that their net was being drawn closer and closer, and preferred to have prisoners rather than corpses!

After a longish march we reached Ramburelles village at about 5 am on 5th June. Here we learned that the Battalion was to be held in Brigade reserve and that the men were to be rested as much as possible. There were still a few inhabitants in the village but I got the men into two or three unoccupied houses and two barns. They needed no encouragement to lie down and sleep!

By this time I was ravenous and wanted food even more than sleep. However, I had not seen any signs of Hector since I left him with my truck and by this time was rather anxious about where he was. Just as Andre Jourde and I were setting off in search of him, he turned up with rather a long face. I wondered what was up and he explained that he had lost my truck and all my personal belongings! Apparently what happened was this. My 8 cwt was always rather a brute to start, and when we had withdrawn from our last position, try as he might he couldn't get a spark out of the engine and, having no one with him, he eventually had to abandon it. He apparently thought of setting it on fire but decided against this as it would give our position away. He had his own equipment etc to carry and therefore could carry no more. Hence I lost everything I had except what I stood up in and my map and a few papers! I was annoyed at the time but during the next week we all lost everything we had so it wasn't a very great hardship. However, things that I valued most like G's letters and photographs (Gillian "Gosh" Mitford, later Troughton, to whom PM was engaged at this time) were gone forever and, by no means least important, a case of sherry and one of whisky! It made me furious to think of the delight of some fat Hun finding all these things intact. Another loss of great value to me was Uncle Hector's badge in my Glengarry which had been all through the last War. I wonder if I shall ever hear of any of them again?

We hadn't far to search for food as, to our astonishment, we found a cafe in the village open and apparently still functioning, in spite of there being firing not a mile away. We had a mammoth omelette of every egg the old woman who owned the place had left (23!), which she seemed delighted to give us. This was washed down with large bowls full of very arabica coffee. Quite a lot of locals were in the cafe and asked us whether they ought to leave. When we said they most

certainly ought to, there were the usual babbling discussions, then a tirade against "les salles Bosches" and the wails and moans while they packed up or went off to their houses.

I had previously noted down a house where I was to have my Company HQ but hadn't been inside it yet, so when we had finished eating, I thought I had better go and inspect it. It was on the side of the main road (Route Nationale) which ran through the south end of the village. As we were approaching the house, a French paila (?) came up to us and asked if he could borrow a bicycle as he had lost his battalion who had gone on ahead and he wanted to catch them up. He was very different to the usual run of French soldiers as he was clean and smartly dressed. He had a fine looking face and wore a very large but well clipped jet black beard and moustache. I then discovered that he was a priest who had been conscripted. I was sorry I couldn't help him as he was obviously quite genuine, and he went on his way.

The house I had chosen for my HQ was quite a large, prosperous-looking house standing back off the road, in its own grounds with a walled garden at the back. I thought at first it was empty. However, I thought I had better ring the bell rather than walk straight in, in case there was someone living there. After a considerable pause, I heard shuffling footsteps and a woman of about 60 came to the door and opened it a couple of inches and said more or less, "The owners are away, I'm the caretaker and what the hell do you want?" - or words to that effect. I was tired and didn't feel like an argument so merely explained that I wanted the house for my HQ and that, in case she didn't know, the Germans weren't more than a mile or so away. This didn't seem to worry her at all and, after a lot of grumbling, she opened the door and let me in. I discovered the house was built in three parts, only the centre part, which contained three bedrooms upstairs and a bare, unfurnished livingroom downstairs, being open. The parts on either side were locked up. Without a single word more, but giving me an old-fashioned and suspicious look, the caretaker retired into what I suppose were the servants' quarters and firmly locked the door behind us. I daresay a few hours later she didn't have such an easy time with the Huns. Everything in the house that could be locked was locked, also the walled garden and garage. I got my HQ staff settled in and got two hours' sleep before orders came saying that 4 Camerons were being heavily engaged on our right and that the enemy had broken through the Gordons on our left. Accordingly, I got the Company out again and sent the platoons off to their positions and put a squad on to blocking all roads into the village. I remember one block we put up consisted of a circular saw, an anvil, an old motor car, four barrels of tar and a plough! How puny our efforts seem now since the tremendous expansion and mechanisation of the army during the past four years!

Periodically during the morning wounded from the Gordons and Camerons came through the village and from their stores these units seemed to be having a fairly rough time.

At 2 pm our carrier platoon and a platoon of MGs were sent to give support to the Camerons and did some very good work.

The village was shelled spasmodically and one landed uncomfortably close to my HQ but no signs of an immediate attack could be seen. All day German planes flew low over us with impunity, which was very demoralising for the troops.

At 9 pm, the Battalion withdrew across the river Bresle, and we left in the dusk. The whole countryside to the north of Ramburelles was lit up by a wood and several farms blazing, which must have been set on fire by bombing or shelling.

Again we had a long march over a road we knew well - the one we had come up from Rouem. On arrival at Blangy about midnight, the chaos was something to be seen or, rather felt as it was pitch dark, to be believed. There must have been thousands of troops going through that small town and hundreds of refugees. As we struggled through we passed, or were passed by, French troops of every description, horsed batteries of gunners, mechanised batteries, tanks, black Moroccan troops, and French infantry, not to mention enormous farm wagons, perambulators etc of the panic-stricken refugees. In fact complete chaos seemed to reign amongst the French.

Fortunately it was a beautiful starry night with no moon and quite cool, which made marching easier. Once again the Jocks were magnificent and, although many had reached a point which was almost beyond human endurance, they kept going and kept together.

The streams of refugees was a most pitiful sight. I felt sorry for them but I felt far more sorry for their wretched horses. Farm carts were piled high with belongings, all carrying loads which were much too heavy for the poor horses. In spite of their own exhaustion the Jocks, whenever we came to a hill, always seemed to be able to summon up sufficient energy to help some old woman push her perambulator full of goods or put their shoulders to the back of a farm cart and give the horses a help.

Eventually we reached Star Fish crossroads where we halted, and the hundreds of refugees streamed on into the night towards Rouen. Here we rested for the night and following day. On our arrival it was found that all our Battalion transport, which we had supposed we should find waiting for us, had disappeared and therefore there was no food to give the men. However, they were located later and it was found that the woods they had been in at Star Fish crossroads had been bombed by German planes and they had had a rough time and so moved.

The following day was uneventful and most of it was spent reorganising the very depleted Companies. Some had the luck to see a British fighter plane shoot down a couple of Bosch. This gave a tremendous uplift to the troops and they felt that perhaps the Germans weren't getting it all their own way after all.

Late in the afternoon orders came from Brigade to the effect that the Battalion would be moved north that night, after dark, by MT, to a place called Le Treport. However, as we half expected, no transport arrived and the Battalion started marching to our next destination - Courville (Ourville?) - some 20 miles away. The carrier platoon was sent on ahead to form road blocks and picquets on the enemy side of our route. We had not been marching for long when a German plane flew over us. Whether they were trying to locate our movements or not, I don't know, but the plane gave off an amazingly bright light which lit up the countryside for miles around and seemed to last for about 10 minutes.

Ronnie P-B went on ahead to make arrangements for the Battalion at Courville.

Just before dawn we appeared to be marching along a road running parallel with a low range of hills, on the other side of which there appeared to be a tremendous battle going on. This surprised us as we had thought the enemy was in quite another direction! But by now we knew practically nothing of the situation and Brigade seemed to know very little more.

As we entered Courville at about 6 am we met the 2nd Battalion which had just arrived from another direction. I saw Phip (Philip Mitford) for a minute or two and he was looking desperately tired and almost completely all in. The responsibility of the position of Adjutant to a Battalion at

the very early age of 22 in peacetime is big enough but how much greater in wartime - and I have heard from all sides how magnificently he did this job. As we passed the 2nd Seaforths we picked up wild rumours about embarking for home, and visions of a meal, bath and a drink in London in the next few days were conjured up! But none of us took the stories too seriously, fortunately.

By now it was quite light and, on reaching the far end of the village of Courville, we found the transport promised for the previous night waiting for us! In spite of our Battalion position being only a short distance down the road, it was a very welcome rest to be ferried in these lorries the remaining distance down the road. The Battalion "hide" was in a large beechwood above Courville. Just as the tail of the column was disappearing into the wood, another German reconnaissance plane appeared out of a cloudless sky and made a few leisurely circles above us and then flew off.

Once in the wood, I immediately made the men take off their equipment and lie down and sleep, which was all most of them were fit for. I then got a few volunteers to start digging slit trenches in case we were bombed. This was a damnable task in a wood, digging amongst enormous roots.

Later, I was sent one officer and 20 men who had recently come out to France as reinforcements. The officer was Willie Moore, son of the minister in Wick, who had been with me in Bodon (Bridge of Don Barracks?) before we came out.

After the Company had had a rest and breakfast had been issued, I left them in charge of Moore, digging as usual, and went off in search of food myself. Hec and I picked up Andre Jourde on our way and eventually found an uninhabited farmhouse just outside the wood. All the CQMS were in the farmyard having their breakfast after preparing the troops' breakfasts. There was great competition in finding eggs amidst squawks and cackles from the indignant hens! Next operation was to find out if they were good or bad. This was done by floating them in a well and watching if they sank or floated! We had an excellent breakfast in the farmhouse kitchen and then wandered about the garden. Again it was a heavenly morning and the garden was filled with flowers and so like farm gardens at home.

Hec and I returned to the Company and later in the morning I was sent for and told to send out a party of men to search for a parachutist who was reported to have been dropped from a German plane over the wood. As usual, after an hour's hunt, they returned not having seen a sign of him.

Later in the afternoon orders came for us to move, again by MT, to a place called Bois Robert, near Dieppe. The name Dieppe made the Jocks boat minded again! We had been so used to promised transport not turning up that we were all very surprised when some civilian buses and vans did arrive about 5 pm. We all got in and the convoy started off. After travelling along secondary roads for some miles, we reached a main road where the convoy was joined by other British and French troops and thousands of refugees in every possible kind of conveyance and many on foot. It was a perfect summer evening with a clear blue sky, and by the grace of God no enemy bombers came over, as we were the easiest possible target and the results of bombing and machine gunning would have been appalling.

We reached our destination safely and Companies were allotted areas, and we were told that we should probably be here for 12 hours - this was at 6 pm. The men had a meal and, having issued orders to the platoon commanders, I went to Battalion HQ to try to "get in the picture" if anyone knew the "picture" by now!

The CO was away at Brigade so I hung about for an hour or so and met Norman Innes (QM 2nd Bn.) on the main road to Dieppe, which ran close by, and had a crack with him. Eventually, Shaw arrived back at 9 pm and said we were to move immediately to Arques la Bataille on the main road and about ten miles east of Dieppe. The CO had a hurried Company Commanders' conference and our positions were pointed out to us by the light of one flickering electric torch on our extremely inaccurate maps. I returned straight away to the Company, put Alan Shearer in charge, gave him his orders and set off in my truck for Arques la Bataille to do a recce. I managed to find the place in the darkness and made my plan and dispositions. As I was walking back along the road down which my Company was coming, Victor Fortune, our Divisional Commander, drove up in his car. He had a word with me and then told his chauffeur to stop the car by the side of the road where I hope he managed to catch a few minutes' sleep as he looked completely exhausted.

I walked on down the road and met the Company. I led them through the village of Arques la Bataille to the area I had been allotted. It was just getting light as we arrived and I was able to explain the situation and issue orders straight away. My HQ was established in a house at the end of the village and the Company was holding a line running parallel with a railway and a river, both running about 300 yards in front of the platoon positions. These afforded good, natural, anti-tank obstacles but that was all one could say for an otherwise absurd position. My Company, of 60 or 70 men, was holding approximately two miles of front. This causes no aspersions on my senior officers as the Division's task was to hold some 24 miles of front!

My first job was to get in touch with a platoon of 4th Camerons on my left, as I was left hand Company of the Battalion. This was accomplished successfully. However, an apparently insoluble problem now arose. The ground we were occupying was low and inclined to be marshy with the river Bethune running along our front. The platoons found that on digging down to a depth of two feet, they struck water. Therefore in most of the posts, when occupied, the men had to stand up to their knees in water!

The village was still occupied but at 11 am (9th June) the Mayor issued a very belated evacuation order. I was immediately besieged by weeping women and children, all saying what were they to do, where were they to go, etc? Two of the more level headed householders gave me all the keys to their houses and said I was to use anything I liked and, if I felt inclined, to destroy everything in the house before I left so as the Bosch wouldn't get it. All the villagers then departed. I immediately moved my HQ into one of the houses at the west end of the village and having stripped the garden of all the vegetables - there were some very young and very delectable green peas amongst them - I set the Jocks on to digging a deep shelter into which I could move my HQ in the event of shelling or air bombing; this was to prove a godsend later in the day.

About 1 o'clock, to my utter astonishment, suddenly Ron Mackintosh Walker came into my HQ. I had no idea he was even in France and hadn't seen him for about four years when he was with 2nd Bn. at Dover for a short spell. He had apparently taken over command of 4th Camerons from Jack Cawdor who, unable to stand the racket and strain, had gone home. He had come to see me about his right hand Company, which was on my left flank, and said that the officer commanding this Company, a Major Murray, would shortly be coming to see me, to 'liaise' with me over a possible withdrawal that night. The name Murray conveyed nothing to me and I thought he would probably be a Territorial I did not know. However, to my further astonishment, about an hour later who should suddenly walk in but Willie Murray. The last Murray I expected to see as I thought he was still living comfortably in his house in Inverness! He was in great form, we exchanged news and I was delighted to see him. Having made arrangements for the withdrawal that night, he left. Little

did I think then that we should live in the same Mess, in the same room, in the same prison camp for over a year!

Later that afternoon some more reinforcements were sent up to me. They consisted of two officers and about 40 ORs, including a new CSM as I had now lost two, Anderson having been wounded and evacuated at Mozenville, and his successor, whose name I can't recollect, who was killed on 4 June. This new one was an Englishman and didn't impress me much. The two officers were Ramsay Bisset, a tall, very fair, well built chap about 6ft 2" or 3", from Edinburgh; and Douglas Young who was small and dark and who, I discovered later, was a varsity cricket blue and quite a celebrity in this line. The ORs were a mixture of old reservists and pretty hard cases at that, and very young militia men; both classes seemed to be more or less untrained. I spent most of the afternoon sorting out the platoons and forming new sections and allotting them to the few NCOs I had left.

Except for one incident which I will deal with later on, the day was fairly quiet. About 3 pm I walked through the village to see Hec. He had established himself in a large house in the middle of Argues la Battaile, the back yard of which was full of livestock of various sorts - hens, pigeons, rabbits etc - and he gave me a present of two dozen eggs! After tea, all being quiet, we went over and explored a house, the owners of which had left their keys with him and told him to take what he wanted. It must have belonged to a very prosperous, retired businessman and was a most lovely house. At the back was a delightful garden with a stream running through it. They had only had time to snatch up a few personal belongings before leaving, otherwise the house was untouched. It was full of beautiful furniture, pictures, miniatures and tapestries. We took the owner at his word and I helped myself to a pair of his wonderful silk pyjamas and some underclothes as I had nothing except what I stood up in, having lost my truck and all my belongings.

I got back to my HQ to find that Forsyth had cooked my supper. Having eaten it, I then went round the posts and returned to my HQ. That night I was thankful to get a few hours' sleep and was woken shortly after midnight by the blowing of the bridges across the Bethune river which ran parallel to our front. It was a tremendous explosion - they can't have made any mistake about destroying the bridges - as it broke several of the windows of my house although the bridges were a mile and more away!

Before dawn I took Ramsay Bisset and his platoon to relieve Willie Murray's Company. It was very dark but we completed the relief without incident. As the daylight grew stronger, I began to see that it was a ridiculous position and, if attacked, quite untenable for a Company let alone a platoon. It was a large area of flat and marshy ground with no cover whatever and well overlooked by wooded slopes from the enemy's direction. There was a gap of at least two miles on the right flank of this platoon whilst their left flank was in the air now that the Camerons had withdrawn! I spoke to Shaw about it as soon as I got back but he said nothing could be done about it.

That day, 10 June, turned out to be a glorious one and the morning seemed to be very quiet, but we knew that the Germans were following up quickly, so fireworks were expected before the day was very old. In the morning I helped Lammond, who had his A/T platoon on the main road to Dieppe which passed outside my HQ. Having sited his guns, we made a road block out of old motor cars which we pinched from a deserted garage.

The remainder of the day was uneventful except for one Company, and I think it best to quote an extract out of the Adjutant's official diary:

"1300 hrs. 'D' Company reported that the enemy were attacking and trying to cross the Bethune river by the destroyed bridge. Captain Pelham-Burn (OC 'D' Company) reported that his forward post at the bridge had been driven back. It was also reported that German lorries were debussing troops the other side of the Bethune at a crossroads. This information was passed back to the Royal Horse Gunners who immediately concentrated fire on the crossroads. However, enemy troops managed to cross the river and establish a post in an old factory near the railway.

"The Germans were making good use of their mortars on 'A' and 'D' Companies.

"It was reported by Captain P-B that the enemy were trying to repair the bridge. One section of carriers was sent forward under Sgt. Ross to 'D' Company. Sgt. Ross attacked the enemy at the bridge with his carrier but was caught at nearly point blank range by an enemy A/T gun which destroyed the carrier. Sgt. Ross was blown clean out. He was brought back, badly wounded by tommygun bullets in the chest. He was still alive when he left the RAP for the ADS. Sgt. Ross did a very gallant and courageous bit of work.

"'D' Coy. was now withdrawn some 70 yards into line with 'B' Coy. in order to allow the artillery to shell the bridge area.

"The RHA shelled the bridge and scored a direct hit on the ruin, which blew it to pieces. They also shelled the wood on 'A' Company's front while the Mortar Pl. shelled the factory post and drove the enemy out of it.

"'A' Coy. was heavily shelled and was engaging the enemy to their front with fire.

"Liaison with 5th Gordons on our right, who were not being directly attacked, gave us MG fire right across our front.

"1400 hrs. Bn. HQ was heavily shelled, causing several casualties. The transport hide also received some of this shelling and three COMS were wounded and one Lance Corporal killed while three other MT staff were badly wounded. The momentum of the attack was wearing off by 1600 hours and all the enemy had been drawn off."

Meanwhile, I was in my HQ from 11 am onwards hearing all this going on on my right and wondering what it was all about and expecting to be attacked at any minute. However, it wasn't until 6 that evening that I even saw any of the enemy. There was a lot of them and all were running as hard as they could out of their positions, back up the hill into the woods. I cannot understand why they only made one attack on our lines and that in not very great numbers. At 6.15 pm I received a message from Bn. HQ to the effect that the Battalion would hold on at all costs till 11 pm and then withdraw to a pre-arranged RV about two miles further back.

Spontaneous firing was still going on, so, still expecting an attack, I sent my new CSM on his first real job and told him to reconnoitre our route back to the RV. He came back later saying he knew it with his eyes shut and I felt satisfied.

At 7 pm we were subjected to a good deal of shelling, several landing all round us and splinters flying about all over the place. I was extremely glad I had dug slit trenches the day before as the house that my HQ had been in was partially demolished by three direct hits.

At 11 pm I withdrew the platoons to my HQ. We set off in pitch darkness up an exceedingly steep hill, though thick fir woods, led by the CSM who was supposed to know the way. After half a mile I could see that he was hopelessly lost and so I took over from him. It was now pouring with rain, pitch dark, and the woods through which we were going were being shelled by the Germans. This was inclined to panic some of the younger men of the draft that had arrived the day before and I had some trouble trying to control them and stop them from wandering. By some miracle no one was hit. The ones who were inclined to panic soon quietened down. It was not surprising that they were "jumpy" as some were straight out from home.

I led the Company on up the hill through the wood which was intersected by paths going in every possible direction which made things even more confusing. It was hard work for the men as they were carrying everything - weapons, ammunition, picks, shovels, cooking stoves, grenade boxes, a large amount of reserve SAA, as well as their packs and greatcoats.

I was now going entirely by compass, by guess and by God! Soon we came to a clearing in the wood and found ourselves in front of an enormous chateau. Here things were further complicated by finding ourselves in a maze of outbuildings, gardens and courtyards. However, we managed to find our way out of this maze and, after a quarter of an hour spent in scrambling across hedges and ditches, we found ourselves on a road and soon met R A A S Macrae who came to meet us in a carrier. Soon we met the Battalion transport which was lined up waiting for us. I got my men on to every available space I could find and still had many left over. They had to get on somewhere, somehow, or be left behind to be picked up by the Germans. Eventually, by some amazing feat they all got on - I shall never understand how - and the convoy started off. Soon we reached a main road and, when first light came about 3.30 am, I saw what was causing us to move only at snail's pace. An enormous column had developed, consisting of hundreds of vehicles of all kinds, moving nose to tail, consisting of the whole Division and masses of panicking French troops.

Soon we reached a small town whose name I have forgotten. No words can describe the traffic chaos here. Each vehicle had to get on as best it could and find its own way out of the town, and the convoy was split up. After backing and turning and manoeuvring, I managed to get my truck clear of the town and found myself immediately behind Duncan Macrae and his ambulance. I signalled for him to stop, which he did, and we consulted our map and checked our route. Just as we started off again we were joined by two more trucks, one of which was an ammunition truck belonging to an A/T battery with an officer driving it, and the other a 15 cwt. with eight of his men on board. Duncan had the only map we owned between us so he led in his truck, followed by me, then the ambulance, then two A/T trucks.

Half an hour's driving brought us to the village which we had been given as an RV. I jumped out of the truck and thought it odd that no one else appeared to be there before us. As I was walking forward to consult with Duncan, I was met by a hail of lead from all directions, at very close range, and simultaneously an anti-tank gun started pumping shells into the vehicles. Something was very wrong here, surely?

All our trucks, nose to tail now and halted, were naturally facing the wrong way for getting back out of the village. There seemed to be no possible turning place in the narrow village street. Somehow the ambulance did manage to turn and went flat out down the road only to find its way partially blocked by the A/T ammunition truck which had been hit and was blazing to the sky and going off like a fireworks display in a most alarming way. However, the ambulance managed to barge its way past and Duncan picked out the driver, who was very severely burnt and wounded, and threw him

into the back of his ambulance. [RCHS note: was it for this action that Duncan Macrae received the Military Cross??]

Meanwhile, the second A/T truck had got hopelessly stuck and was abandoned by its occupants. Whilst changing over from their truck to mine, two of them were killed instantly about a yard from me, and one of the occupants of my truck had been hit, but they got him on board alright. I was, meanwhile, trying to disentangle the congestion and direct turning operations. The ambulance had gone on. The A/T truck was on fire and written off, the A/T officer's truck was hopelessly bogged and stuck. This left only mine and Duncan's truck which in some miraculous way the drivers had managed to get turned. Having done this, they put their feet down on the accelerators as hard as they could, thinking I suppose that I was on board - which I wasn't - and, to my horror, I found myself stranded in the middle of the road with Germans not more than 150 yards away, taking shots at me out of the windows of the houses in the village. It was only a matter of time before I would be hit by something, and I must now catch that rear truck, and the only hope in hell I had of doing this was to run for it - and then only a very faint hope! It was no good shouting to them to slow down as there was a devil of a noise going on, what with the roar of the engines and two trucks blazing, and the Germans firing at us.

So I ran. My God, how I ran up that road! All I could think of at the time was how amazingly lucky we were to have driven into an ambush which was apparently manned by the worst shots in Hitler's army! It seemed that if they could hit a haystack, they should have got us all.

Luck was with me that day alright. As I ran I saw the trucks would have to slow down to get past the blazing ammunition truck. I just made the rear one as he was accelerating after passing the burning truck and was hauled on by the collar of my jacket by the troops sitting on the back, and was held there, more off than on, with my legs trailing along the road!

We stopped as soon as we were out of range to allow Duncan Macrae to dress the burns of the A/T ammunition truck driver who was terribly badly burnt all over and, although conscious then and suffering agonies, I doubt if he lived long.

After some difficulty and asking numerous people, we found Divisional HQ and reported what had happened, and they were more than a little surprised to hear that the enemy were only a mile or so away. There seemed to be tremendous activity going on, people coming and going, and everyone looking very harassed, including three Naval officers who, I suppose, had come up from St Valery.

I left Divisional HQ and went on to Bn. HQ which I found at a place called Yelon. Here they seemed surprised to see us, as they had guessed what had happened and thought they had probably seen the last of us! I felt a little indignant at having followed the route given to me very accurately and arrived at my correct destination only to find it occupied by Germans! However, the explanation was that the RV had suddenly been changed as the situation was changing so rapidly, and the message with the change of RV in it had not reached the part of the column that I was in!

By now it seemed pretty clear that the Germans had almost encircled us and were drawing closer the whole time.

I collected my Company and was allocated a new subaltern, Douglas Young, who had turned up with some reinforcements. We reached our positions which were in an orchard surrounded by large grass fields and small woods. Again we dug. The morning and afternoon were comparatively quiet and there was nothing to report.

However, as evening drew on ends.

Postscript

The Highland Division was blissfully unaware that, by mid-afternoon of that day, General Rommel's Panzers had indeed encircled them and cut off their escape westwards to Le Havre.

Behind the scenes a last ditch attempt to evacuate the Division was being planned around the small channel port of St Valery-en-Caux. Those Battalions (4th Seaforths, 5th Gordons, 1st Black Watch) which had been heavily engaged on the river Bethune had been allocated the nearer, eastern, perimeter to hold, whilst the 2nd Seaforths, 1st Gordons and 4th Camerons were ordered to the west of the town; the remnants of the French Corps to which they were attached held the southern approaches.

The confused convergence on St Valery that morning (11th June) meant that the 4th Seaforths did not actually take up their positions around Yelon until 11.30 am.

By the afternoon, Rommel had covered the remaining six miles to St Valery, punching a hole in the weak western defences. His tanks, sitting on the cliffs, were then able to train their guns on the beaches and harbour of the town and, by evening, they had broken through to the east as well.

Early on 12th June, orders reached Shaw-Mackenzie, CO of 4th Seaforths, to abandon positions and withdraw into St Valery, which the Battalion successfully achieved by 5.00 am.

By now the Division's fate was well and truly sealed, but a few lucky troops (1,300 British and 900 French), by chance in the chaos finding themselves in the right place at the right time, were taken off the beach at Veules les Roses, some five kilometres to the east of the town, despite the presence of the German guns.

Totally surrounded, General Fortune still hoped to hold out until nightfall and for possible evacuation of his Division by the Royal Navy. With this in mind, he ordered his troops to secure the woods on the heights on both sides of St Valery. 4th Seaforths were concentrated to the south-east of the town and Major Shaw-Mackenzie, told to secure the woods on the opposite hillside, had just dispatched the first wave of his men when word reached him that the French Corps Commander, General Ihler, under whose command the 51st Division was, had given the order to surrender at 8.00 am.

General Fortune, however, was determined to fight on, but a heavy German bombardment of the town commenced and, reluctantly, he realised at a few minutes past 10.00 am that he had no alternative other than to obey orders. Thus started virtually five years as Prisoners of War for more than 10,000 men of the 51st Highland Division.



Standing, l-r: Allan Wallace; 'Tosh' Mackintosh QM; ?; Rev Cecil Lake; Ramsay Bisset; ?; George Cameron (Tain); Cargill; Shand; Hector Gascoigne. Seated l-r: Paddy Heffernan; Rory Tarbat (later Lord Cromartie); R A A S Macrae, Adjutant; Patrick Munro of Foulis.

4th Seaforth officers, POW Camp Oflag VII, Laufen, Germany, 1941, sent by PGM via Croix-Rouge and Switzerland, addressed to CQMS Jack Matheson, c/o Dr Duncan Macrae, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ross-shire, Scotland



Back row, l-r: Capt. J. M Bingham, Black Watch; Lord Elphinstone, Black Watch; Major Cluny Macpherson, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; Major Victor Campbell, Cameron Highlanders; Captain Hector Gascoigne, Seaforth Highlanders; Capt. Patrick Munro of Foulis, Seaforth Highlanders. Front row, l-r: Capt. I Campbell (later Duke of Argyll), Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; Major W Murray, Cameron Highlanders; Capt. G Koch de Gorrynde.

Group of POW officers, Oflag VII C Germany, July/August 1941, from a postcard sent by PGM to Lady Munro of Foulis, Foulis Castle, Evanton, Ross-shire, Scotland, dated 13 August 1941.

Biography

On return to civilian life Patrick Munro of Foulis took over control of all the farms on Foulis Estate and died in 1995 at the age of 83.

During captivity, Hugh Forsyth was forced to work in mines in Poland but in post-war years had a successful career as an electrician. He died in August 2007 at the age of 92.

Hector Gascoigne worked for the Forestry Commission in Wales and Aberdeen.

Duncan Macrae became a much-loved and respected GP in Dingwall and died in 2007 at the age of 92. For his war service he was awarded the Military Cross but when asked by the late Dr William Bruce how he had earned it, Dr Macrae replied, with typical modesty, "Och, I could make a better brew (of tea) than the rest of the boys."

The Ross-Shire Journal, April 2018

The account which appears in this section was published in The Ross-shire Journal in April 2018 and is reproduced courtesy of the Editor.

All photographs associated with the article are courtesy of Hector W Munro of Foulis.

The incident, photograph and letter are courtesy of Hector W Munro of Foulis.

Postscript 2018 to War Diary of Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis



Standing, l-r: Allan Wallace; 'Tosh' Mackintosh QM; ?; Rev Cecil Lake; Ramsay Bisset; ?; George Cameron (Tain); Cargill; Shand; Hector Gascoigne. Seated l-r: Paddy Heffernan; Rory Tarbat (later Lord Cromartie); R A A S Macrae, Adjutant; Patrick Munro of Foulis.

4th Seaforth officers, POW Camp Oflag VII, Laufen, Germany, 1941, sent by PGM via Croix-Rouge and Switzerland, addressed to CQMS Jack Matheson, c/o Dr Duncan Macrae, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ross-shire, Scotland

Six cousins with strong Ross-shire connections made an emotional journey to the former prisoner of war camps in which their fathers were held for nearly five years.

The poignant visit to Bavaria took in Laufen, Tittmoning and Eichstatt castles, all used as PoW camps from 1940-45 after around 8000 men of the 51st Highland Division were captured at St Valery-en-Caux prior to the fall of France.

The men were force-marched through France, Belgium and Holland, crowded onto barges going up the Rhine and finally herded onto horse wagons into captivity.

77 Years Later



l-r: Michael Gascoigne, John Munro, Hector Munro, Harry Munro, Charlotte Hunt (nee Munro), Angus Cheape, Alistair Irwin, Laura Mackenzie, Patrick Gascoigne.

Hector Munro of Foulis, who was on the trip said: "Our late fathers rarely spoke about their time as PoWs but it affected them all very deeply and we felt we needed to lay the ghost of that significant part of their younger lives to rest."

He was joined by Harry Munro, QC, of Nova Scotia; John Munro of Lejre in Denmark; their sister, Charlotte Hunt, of Balfron; and first cousins, brothers Michael Gascoigne and Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Gascoigne, MBE (Scots Guards).

All are children of brothers Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis and Captain Hector Gascoigne (Seaforth Highlanders), captured on 12 June 1940.

Hector Munro said on the trip the group were joined by their partners and three other children of PoWs: Laura Mackenzie, whose father Lieutenant Colin Mackenzie, MC (Seaforth Highlanders) was held in Laufen and later the notorious Colditz Castle; Angus Cheape, younger son of Lieutenant H B Cheape (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders), held at Eichstatt; and Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin, KCB, CBE (Black Watch), whose father Lieutenant A D H Irwin (Black Watch) was held at Eichstatt and Tittmoning.

The emotionally-charged visit took in the beautifully maintained Durnbach Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery. The majority of the 2934 young servicemen buried there are airmen shot down over Bavaria, Wurtemberg, Austria, Hessen and Thuringia.

The remainder are men killed while escaping from prisoner of war camps in the same areas, or who died towards the end of the war on forced marches from the camps to more remote areas. Among them lie individuals from all the Highland regiments.

Laufen Castle (Oflag VIIC), an austere and forbidding court-yarded castle described by Hector's father as his first and worst PoW camp, stands much as it was in 1940.

Hector Munro said: "Although now redeveloped into blocks of flats, there was still a disturbing feeling inside the buildings. With the help of contemporary plans and our ability to explore the upper floors, the exact line of the perimeter fence that contained the tiny exercise yard hard up against the fast-flowing Salkzach river, now forming the frontier between Germany and Austria, could clearly be made out."

To relieve overcrowding, some of the officers were transferred in 1942 to Oflag VIID in the almost inaccessible Tittimoning Castle perched high on a crag above the town, which was also visited.

Eichstatt, where most of their fathers were transferred in 1942, was also visited. It is well known that on 14 April 1945 as the US Army approached, the officers were marched out of the camp and that only a short distance from the camp the column was attacked by American aircraft, which mistook it for a formation of German troops.

Hector Munro said: "Fourteen British officers were killed and 46 were wounded but what is less well known is that as the aircraft strafed the column and the British officers dived for cover they swept up a young German boy who happened to be passing them at the time and undoubtedly saved his life. The position of the escape tunnel dug for over a hundred metres from one of the camp latrines to a villager's chicken run outside the wire, through which 65 prisoners escaped in 1943, was pointed out to the group."

Looking back over the visit, he said: "Probably the most poignant moment of the whole trip was when the three pipers, John Munro, Patrick Gascoigne and Angus Cheape, paid tribute to their fathers and all PoWs held at Eichstatt by playing a selection of tunes including The Black Bear, The Green Hills of Tyrol, Scotland the Brave, Amazing Grace and The Rowan Tree alongside the line of the perimeter fence.

"The nearby kindergarten came out to listen, even the police cadets playing on the sports field alongside paused for a moment and there were moist eyes among the group who had met nothing but kindness and courtesy wherever they went in Bavaria, and a genuine desire to help them fulfil their quest."

He added: "World War II had a great impact on all our lives, politically, economically and socially. Wounds have healed and we have had over 70 years of peace in Northern Europe.

Returning to 1940 and the force-marching of troops following their being taken prisoner on 12 June of that year, Captain Munro described an incident, written on an envelope enclosing photographs, as follows:

"My brother Hector (Captain Hector Gascoigne 'B' Company 4th Seaforths) and I were taken prisoner on 12 June 1940 at St Valéry (near Cherbourg) while serving with the 51st Highland Division. I had been billeted with M. Laversin (Mayor of Lieres) and his wife, who had been extremely kind and hospitable, earlier on, during (I think) March/April 1940."

[See "M. le Maire de Lieres" on page 1 of War Diary]

"In some remarkable way they had found out that we were both alive and well and had even located the column of prisoners we were with and sent an 'emissary', their brave and courageous granddaughter, aged 16, on a bicycle with a bag of food and a bottle of water for us. She actually found us in a column of perhaps 500-700 men, on the march under guard, heading North, perhaps 50 miles from her home (!) and safely accomplished her mission, saying 'I will be back with more food tomorrow'.

She did indeed return late the following evening. However, our guards had got wise to what was going on and, after trying several times, with amazing courage for a child, she was caught in the act of handing over the food to us. She was hit with the butt of a rifle by a Kraut guard, knocked off her bicycle into a ditch, where the guard proceeded to crush her machine to twisted iron by jumping up and down on it with his jackboots, and then told her that she 'would be shot if she tried again'."

"In floods of tears she left us, saying: 'Grandpa and Grandma - ET MOI AUSSI - will pray for you'."



l-r: M.Laversin (Mayor of Lieres), Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis, Mme Laversin and their daughter.

And, finally, a letter

The kindness of the Laversin family continued when a French Nun (Sister St Denis), from a Convent in Warwickshire and sibling of Mme Laversin, wrote to Mrs Eva Gascoigne, mother of Patrick and Hector, in early December 1940 as follows:

"A few days ago I received a letter, dated 5th August, in which my dear sister, Madame Laversin, was asking me to inform you that your two sons had let her know they were in good health, but prisoners since 21 June. My sister wrote to you then, but fearing you have not received her letter, she asks me to tell you that she and her husband have been praying for your dear sons, and they hope to see them again after the war."

News was very scarce in wartime and this was probably the first that Mrs Gascoigne had received. Although the letter being relayed had been sent on 5th August it had taken four months to reach the UK.



At Laufen Castle 1941. l-r: Captain Patrick Munro of Foulis, Captain Cluny Macpherson, Captain Koch de Gorynne, Captain The Hon. J Elphinstone, Captain Hector Gascoigne.