

and now I was back again in the line with that rotten crashing noise at intervals in front of me, and all of us looking fed up and miserable. We received a rum ration in the morning and were then posted to our companies. I found that I was among an entirely strange section and this did not help to make me feel at home, and the next few days passed very slowly.

The trenches about here were all very shallow as they were fresh ones that had been dug in consolidation of the freshly won ground, so that shelling was rendered much more effective, there being such little cover. There were no dugouts, although back in the old German front lines there were some splendid deep ones.

From now on for a month we were constantly in the trenches without a break; either front, support or reserve lines, or prowling at night about Loos fetching rations or drawing spades for working parties. This was a far longer time in the line without a break than was ever done later in the war. The only good purpose it served was to get us thoroughly used to trench life and to take everything as a matter of course, but the health of the battalion was not improved and mine in particular was getting rather bad.

One position among many others that we had during this period was in the trenches ^{in front of} ~~of~~ the famous Loos chalk pits. Our lines could be enfiladed here, so that when shelling commenced we all had to clear out of one piece of trench and crowd into another at right angles to it. This was all very well during day time but during the night this could not be done so easily.

At another position by a double gap(an old communication trench leading from our line to his and consequently blocked by both parties - hence 'double block' or 'gap') a German trench mortar killed seven of our men, the whole of the occupants of one traverse, and that same night I, with G.New, helped to dig for the bodies. Not a very comfortable job as it was very easy for another trench mortar to follow on and do some more good work. We found most of the bodies, two or three of which had been killed by concussion only and were not scratched, but of course buried in the earth.

In the trenches about here, as there were practically no dugouts, holes were scooped out in the side of the trench near the floor (they resembled nothing so much as a shallow grave in the side of the trench), and these were used to sleep in by one and sometimes two men. In wet weather, however, many of these collapsed and buried the occupants, and orders were eventually given to stop these being dug.

At last we left the line for a rest at Lillers, and the march from Mazingarbe to the station at Noeux les Mines was a very painful one for me. I got a sharp pain in my left shoulder as soon as I lifted on my pack, and as well as this I was feeling all out. On reaching Lillers I also contracted a mild form of dysentery which was very bad, although not bad enough to send me to hospital by army standards.

We were about four weeks at Lillers 'resting' and one of the chief things I remember was the awful job I had getting the mud off my clothes, especially my great-

coat. The mud seemed a specially adhesive kind that buried itself right in the cloth itself and was an awful job to remove. I felt groggy for the greater part of the time here but very gradually got better.

There was plenty of spit and polish of course while we were here, and also inspections and guards; but after all we were behind the line and there were shops and estaminets.

The month soon went by and from Lillers we moved to Philosophe (a small woebegone looking village with only one street just past Mazingarbe on the way to Loos), and after a couple of days here in the ruined houses, we moved up to the front line by the Hohenzollern Redoubt. This was a filthy part of the line; the trenches were in an awful state, full of mud and water (duckboards were greatly lacking at this time) and in one part of the trench we were in the water was well past the knees, and there were no dugouts or shelters of any kind. Rifle grenades and trench mortars were frequent. It was here that I went on my first covering party. We moved over the front line late one night and spread out to about two yards apart and then laid down in the open for a couple of hours. There was practically no shelling but plenty of rifle fire and inches of mud and slush. On the whole I did not find it too uncomfortable. This was about Christmas 1915 and Christmas Day was spent in the front line here. A mine was exploded on our front on Christmas morning and the shelling was very brisk for a time; I remember that as the trench could be enfiladed three of us took shelter round a corner of the trench and

spent a hectic twenty minutes until the shelling began to slacken off. The battalion had several casualties.

About this time steel helmets were given out - one between ten men or thereabouts; also trench waders - long rubber boots that reached right up the leg; they kept the water out quite well but if worn for any length of time caused the feet to become swollen and very painful.

New Year's Day 1916 saw me with three or four others in a small system of trenches well behind the reserve line, called Lone Keep (near Philosophie). Now that a couple of months had passed since the attack at Loos and we had been all over the ground, there was no shadow of doubt that the small piece of ground gained was captured at an enormous price in casualties, and the attack, I think, could be written down as a complete failure. We had certainly taken Loos and pushed our trenches a little way beyond, but the salient so caused rendered the line difficult to hold and casualties continued to be heavy. The ground itself was dismal looking. The famous Loos 'towers' (great iron erections over a mine shaft) could be seen from most parts of the line and the big mounds of slack called 'crassiers' dominated most of the trenches. The ground for miles surrounding Loos was crossed and criss-crossed with trenches and saps, and at night time, slithering and feeling one's way in the darkness and mud, it was most difficult ground to cross. Of Loos itself a few walls still remained and quite a lot of cellars, but even in peacetime it must have been a miserable little place.

However, I opened the New Year behind the line, so started well. With me were three others I find by looking in the only diary I have managed to retain. We had simply to mind the place and feed ourselves (the latter being more difficult), so that it was a welcome change from the actual trenches although we slept in a dugout which was simply running alive with vermin. I have a note in my diary of our New Year's breakfast which consisted of two eggs each, Quaker Oats, bacon and bread and jam. But after about ten days in this place we moved up to the line once more, and spent a lot of time around Loos and the Double Crassier, Maroc, etc.

On one occasion I acted as guide for an incoming battalion. I met them at Maroc; it was a black night but there was no trouble at all until we got to Loos, and then I must have taken a wrong trench as I found myself more or less lost and was forced to get out on top occasionally to get my bearings. But the mutterings and cursings behind me when it was found out that I was lost were most ghastly to a poor guide who was only too damned anxious to deliver the battalion to the line safely and then get out to Les Breb̄is himself for a rest.

There were many carrying and working parties in this sector, and one night in particular we worked all night carrying up boxes of bombs to the front line by Loos.

During our second rest at Lillers I was sent for a course of instructions on the Maxim gun and short-

ly afterwards received orders to report to the machine gun section for duty. My particular gun section proved to be in the cellars at Maroc, and here I joined them, and from that time on remained with machine guns until the war ended. In the end a machine gun was as familiar to me as a rifle was to an infantryman. It proved to be heavy work coming and going from the line as all the guns and apparatus connected with them have to be manhandled in the trenches and sometimes carried for very long distances, but the work was far more interesting than with the poor old infantry, especially out of the line.

We shifted from the cellars in Maroc on the eve of the Kaisers birthday 27th January 1916, and I had the doubtful honour of carrying the Maxim gun for the first time. The way led through and over various trenches with the weight of the gun dragging me down at every step. This gun was one of the old Maxims, in a heavy gun metal case and weighed much more than the Vickers which ultimately replaced them; the Vickers guns when filled with water ready for action weigh about 48 lbs, and this was quite enough weight to carry any distance in addition to ordinary equipment, but the old Maxim weighed another 10 lbs above this.

The Germans attacked along the Loos Hulluch road on the Kaiser's birthday but we were not affected in our positions, although there was some general shelling. For the following day I quote from my diary:

28th January 1916. A party of five of us had to go to our cellar in Maroc this afternoon to fetch more ammunition. We arrived there all right in spite of some shelling but found our house had been nearly blown up by a shell. We carried three boxes of ammunition each and went into

another cellar for a rest. We had no sooner settled down than heavy shelling commenced and we stayed there for about three hours but then decided to risk it. We dashed about 200 yards in the open to a trench, and after about a 200 yards journey in this (rather smashed in) our eyes commenced to smart badly and we put on our gas helmets. It proved to be tear shell gas only. Artillery wires were cut and the trench badly damaged and we were glad to get back to our dugouts. The gas helmets made us pour with perspiration.

The gas helmets mentioned above were the old flannel kind which had to be tucked in the collar of the tunic.

This same night we moved to the front line by the double crassier and found ourselves subject to very heavy trench mortars which on exploding made a noise like a small mine and shook the trench even 300 yards away. I hated these things, possibly because there is a chance of evading them if you see them coming, but as this means constantly keeping your neck craned back looking skywards, it is difficult to be always on the lookout. But trench mortars were undoubtedly murderous things with an explosion that shook everything for a long way round.

Up to February 1st 1916 we remained in the front line, and here I finished "Moonbeams from the larger Lunacy" which I think Ess sent me. We arrived back in Les Brebis about 3.30 a.m. Later in the morning a bomb was dropped in the town and a couple of ~~several~~ civilians killed.

On the 6th we returned to Loos village itself and we had two teams placed in a cellar with gun positions nearby. Two of 'A' Company were killed in the line by a trench mortar. The weather at this time was very cold and our positions were in a trench which was half full of icy cold slushy water, but things were fairly quiet.

On the 10th Feb. we moved to the front line and luckily had a dugout to sleep in and I managed to get a water bottle full of rum which was very useful. Some very good soup came up the line here in large vacuum containers for the infantry, and we obtained some. A German mine was exploded in front of us but one of our machine guns caught the raiding party and the sergeant concerned duly received the D.C.M.

From these trenches we moved to others near Loos and were relieved here by the Munsters, while we returned to Noeux les Mines (a place to which I returned for a few weeks after the armistice had been signed), and entrained to Lillers for a rest. Lillers is a fair sized town and had quite a lot of civilians still remaining in it at this time and many estaminets and confectioners' shops. We were billeted in a barn just outside the town. The weather was bitterly cold and much snow fell. While we were here the attack at Verdun commenced and the German bombardment in the distance sounded very ominous.

From Lillers we trekked through various little villages behind the line and at one of these I received by post a pair of red carpet slippers! from a woman who visited me at Oxford hospital and gave me one or two good motor drives there.

Towards the middle of March (1916), we ended our trek at Gouy, behind the Souchez - Vimy front. Gouy was a putrid little village consisting of a few scattered houses surrounding a cesspool full of green slimy water, and we spent most of our time down from the line in this village in huts left behind by the French, and which had

wire beds in tiers all round the sides One tier above the other. I enjoyed myself here however; I was settled down with the section and beginning ~~to~~ thoroughly ^{to} enjoy machine gun work and also the life in this part of the line.

Next evening we left Gouy for the line and passed through the ruins of Ablain St. Nazaire and Souchez to the line beyond. We were shelled on the way up and in the darkness I fell in a deep shell hole full of mud, but managed to retain unbroken a bottle of vin rouge which I was taking in the line with me. The ruins of Souchez looked very weird in the darkness and seemed quite surrounded with pools of water and trickling streams. Duckboards had to be followed from here to the quarries, where we shared a tremendous dugout and spent the greater part of the time playing cards and going on ration parties. After a few days here in reserve we passed along a communication trench cut downwards in the hillside, and quite exposed to view in daylight, to the front line. The trench was in a shocking state and very muddy but things were fairly quiet while we were here. The weather was cold and snow fell heavily, making the trenches look quite nice and the surrounding country, but after thawing it was damned uncomfortable, and two dugouts that we had, oozed water from the floor, walls and roof and also trickled from the floor of the trench into the dugout and it was hellish trying to keep warm feet; we wrapped dry sandbags round them after removing our boots but these soon got wet. We heard the famous blue light rumour here - that two blue Verrey lights meant that peace had been declared, but they did not appear here and never did.

From here we dragged our way back through the mud of the communication trench and returned to Gouy about 2.30 a.m. Trench waders in mud were awful things; on this occasion one stuck so firmly in the mud of the trench that I had to withdraw my foot and then pull the wader out with my hands.

A few days later we went to fresh positions on the Lorette heights from which we had a splendid view of the country behind us and could see the ruins of Notre Dame de Lorette. The French must have had an awful job taking these positions and the dugouts round about contained many skeletons and other ugly souvenirs. The weather had become warmer and we had a fine time in these positions, spending the days lounging about in the trench in the sun, and the nights in playing cards as we had a very comfortable dugout. It was now April 1916, and from Lorette we moved to Carency (another village the French had taken in 1915 after heavy fighting but now well behind the line - at least about the reserve line), and here we did a lot of work on fresh gun emplacements near Cabaret Rouge and in the valley below Vimy which could be seen just above us. The valley was an awful place to work in. All work had to be done at night of course and the ground was sloppy and slushy although on the side of the valley and it was practically impossible to make any progress with digging in spite of hand pumps being obtained. The valley had received some very heavy shelling a short time previously to judge by the shell holes of various sizes.

One night when it was simply pouring with rain,

after we had had various other moves, we were met by a guide and taken across the valley and up the opposite slope to the front line on the left of Vimy. It rained all the way and the communication trenches, were like small swimming baths full of liquid mud; we arrived at our positions soaked to the skin. We soon found that we had arrived at the nesting place of trench mortars and mines: the trench mortars came over regularly all day long and now and a gain a mine would be exploded. We had two go up during the four days we were in this position; one of these seemed to go up right behind our trench, it was a most weird thing, I happened to be looking that way at the time and saw a pillar of flame shoot about forty feet in the air and then head^r the usual heavy rumbling noise, and yet our trench did not suffer in the least except from the usual bombardment afterwards. Even when we were back at Carency or Cabaret Rouge, mines seemed to be always going up at the rate of almost one a day and as the lines were on the crest of the ridge the explosions could be seen splendidly from a distance - it is as well to view these from a distance too.

One evening in the middle of May, Dunkerley was killed at a position near the ridge, being hit by a whizz bang which damaged my equipment and broke my rifle, and we carried him across the valley to Cabaret Rouge where he was buried.

A day or so later when we were back in reserve we had orders to take our guns to positions so that we could give overhead fire across the valley as we were exploding a few mines. Duly to time (in the late evening)

our five mines were exploded practically simultaneously and we opened fire. We had a splendid view of the explosions and also the bombardment afterwards although it must have been pretty hellish up there. First the dull red glare of the mines going up and then for a few seconds not a sound; then Verey lights of different colours scampering skywards in the darkness, a little rifle firing and then the artillery on both sides crashed in. Overhead shrapnel bursting (in the distance just like furnace doors being rapidly opened and shut) and the heavy red glow of high explosives bursting. As I looked on I certainly did not think I should be in one of these craters within 48 hours.

However, I went there and arrived at the lip of the crater about midnight. There were only three of us left with the gun and a small party of Lancashire Fusilier bombers holding the crater which was about 30 yards or more in front of our front line. We got to the crater quietly enough but the 24 hours we spent here were pretty bad ones. We were on one edge of the crater while Jerry was on the other and the sap which led to the crater from our front line was very shallow and the last few yards contained several limbs and bodies of men who had been buried by the blow back from the mine; the position itself consisted of a very narrow, shallow piece of trench, one end of which led into the open and revealed nothing but chunks of white chalky ground, blown up by the mine, giving the place a most desolate appearance even in daylight. Trench

mortars came over unceasingly all day and although all these passed over as we were so close, they fell near enough to send showers of earth over us and the explosions themselves were deafening. Rifle grenades were also thrown over plentifully and these dropped all over the place; these we had to listen for, they fall with a peculiar swish, swishing sound. In the afternoon our own artillery joined in by dropping some shells short; the first one that came over sounded like an express train coming for our backs - it seemed certain to come right into the trench and we all crouched down flat while we waited, but it skimmed the trench and fell just outside and a big lump of chalk thrown up by it hit me in the back and for the moment I thought I was hit badly. Night eventually fell and a few hand bombs were thrown on either side during stand to but nothing else occurred until our relief arrived about midnight and on our way out I was astounded at the damage that had been done during the day by the trench mortars - the front line was simply one mass of huge holes and the trench practically obliterated.

Of our relief, ~~was~~ one was wounded early the next morning and another came down with shell shock, so that they were not so fortunate as our little party.

The next night I acted as guide for the relief to the crater and was glad to get back to the valley afterwards. This valley was generally known as Zouave Valley or Death Valley, ^{as} so the French suffered heavy losses in taking it about the same time that Loos was captured in September 1915.

From the ridge we went to a peculiar secret position in the valley below which was made very well. A

long narrow passage underground led to the emplacement which was quite covered in except for a small hole to fire through. And orders were that in the event of a German attack succeeding, we were to hold our fire until the first waves were past us and then to open fire on their backs. What would happen to us afterwards when the position was discovered was not quite clear; however, we had no occasion to do this death or glory stunt, but it was certainly a very cleverly made position.

From here we went right back for a couple of days and had not been back twenty four hours when the Germans attacked, and we were rushed back to Cabaret Rouge, being met by a few shells and plenty of tear shell gas. We then found that Jerry had taken all five of our craters including the one I was in a day or so previously and had captured practically the whole of "D" Company of the 7th and caused the 140th Brigade very heavy casualties. The 2nd Division arrived to retake the lost trenches but I believe the counter attack was postponed. We stood by in case we were wanted.

Vimy Ridge was a rotten place at this time - the home of trench mortars and mines, but in the various positions in reserve just behind the lines we had a most comfortable time, namely at Carency, Lorette and Cabaret Rouge, which was simply a very deep trench full of fine dugouts, and apparently got its name from the ruins of an estaminet through which the trench cut and which I slept in one night, but it was full of large rats and not a very pleasant place.

The ridge itself was notorious for the number of trench mortars used there, and also the number of mines that

were being dug and exploded. But this proved to my last time in this sector with the exception of a short return about June 1916 when we found that the Germans had consolidated their gains during May, and that their trenches now looked right across the valley, so that the valley could not be used during the daytime as it could formerly.

I had now been with the machine guns for nearly six months and was beginning to become quite an expert with the gun. It was heavy work carrying them in and out of the line together with all the ammunition to be used, but it was far more interesting work than in the infantry and gave one much more independence in the line itself. The guns would be placed in their selected positions in the trenches and rarely fired except by order, and then simply for a given time at a given objective, so that when, in 1918, machine guns should have been fired whenever there was a visible target I found that fire was often delayed under the old, but mistaken idea in open warfare, that the position would be given away too soon.

At the same time we did a lot of night firing round and about the ridge and were lucky in having few casualties. Our post arrived regularly; we had regular spells back at rest; rations were good; and on the whole we had nothing to grumble at.

From Vimy we went back to Bruay for a rest. Bruay was a nice little town well behind the line, with a civilian population and many estaminets - one in particular which sold ice cold French beer which was great

after a long route march on a hot day. The Divisional Follies also performed here. We had a good billet, the whole of the section being billeted in one large attic, and, it being June, the weather was fine and very hot. Our clothing was a little mouldy and rather lively at this time but we were ~~about~~^{able} during the rest to reduce the population, which was getting rather thick.

We fell in for many inspections with the consequent washing of equipment and polishing; physical jerks in the early morning; guards and so, but on the whole we had a good time. Everybody knew everybody else very well in the section and got on well together; we had remained the same section, with but few casualties, for some months, through Loos, Vimy, Souchez, etc., and it was not really until September 1916 at High Wood on the Somme that the section was smashed up, and then the job was done pretty thoroughly. However, for the time being we were content and passed our rest well. We heard here of Kitchener's death, it being read out to us on parade.

Our rest at last came to an end (it lasted about a fortnight), and I saw Bruay no more until after the armistice, two and half years later, when I walked through the town after being ⁱⁿ hospital with influenza, and thought then of our old section as it was in 1916, and it was a very fine section then. Our old billet seemed lifeless and the very town seemed different.

We left Bruay for Aix Noulette, passing through Hersin en the way. Aix Noulette was a smashed up village in the reserve lines and was shelled occasionally. We were thrust into a large brewery cellar, and with ^{them} as our

base, did a lot of work on gun positions in the line at night. We first received our box respirators here. We were between Souchez and Vimy and one of our positions was in a rather old mine crater in which we found that our gun was mounted practically on top of a dead German who was only thinly covered with soil. I took his bayonet but lost it later.

We did a lot of night firing here as about this time we were making raids along the whole front in preparation for the big Somme offensive; at Vimy we noticed that mines were still being exploded.

In one position in the front line a bombing raid suddenly broke out on our right and our trenches were heavily shelled; unfortunately at the time the infantry were being relieved so that the trenches were crammed and there were many casualties.

We had many different positions in the line always using Aix Noulette as our base, with an occasional bath at Hersin, but finally after one more visit to the Vimy sector we dropped out of the line and commenced our trek towards the Somme. It was now about the end of July 1916 and the weather was glorious and remained so during the whole of our trek which was a long one.

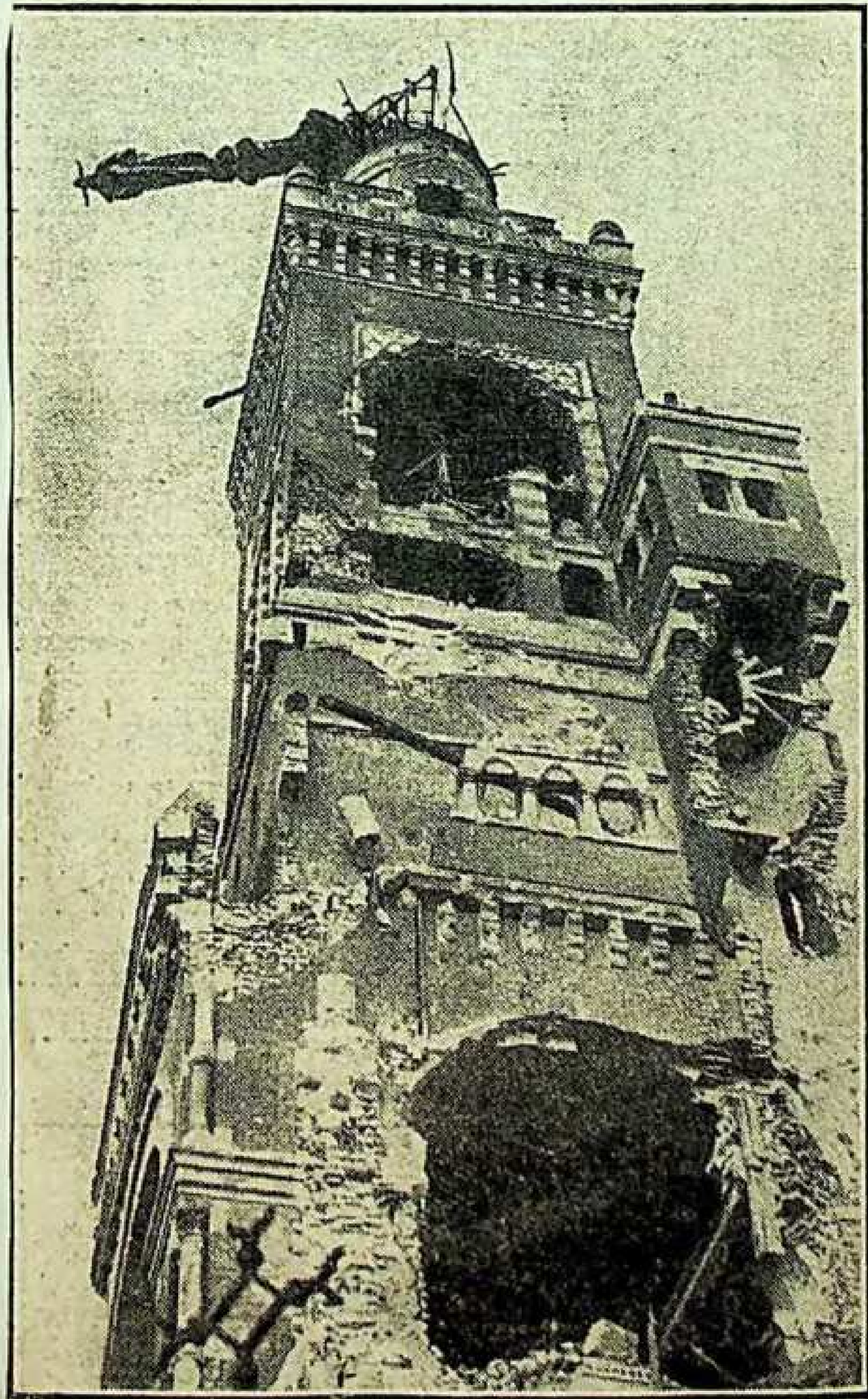
My 21st birthday was spent at a place called Lathieu near Ourton on the trek. We were billeted at the time in an old farmyard among piles and piles of straw. The weather was very hot and because of this we often commenced our march very wearily in the morning so that we had finished before noon; the nights were spent ~~sleep~~ sleeping in the open on our waterproof sheets, or if we

had time we built a slight shelter out of two or three waterproof sheets and a few sticks. Some of our halting places were in fine places; several times in or near orchards and quite often near a river where we could bathe. Particularly was this the case at Neuf Moulins where we were dumped, after a long march, in the middle of a small field full of apple trees and a river flowing nearby; there was a splendid place for swimming near a mill and we also had some good cricket here; our section remained unbeaten at this throughout the trek.

Of course, the whole of the 47th Division was gradually working its way towards the Somme and we had several practise attacks in combination with the infantry, and some of these were pretty hot work.

Towards the end of August we reached Franvillers, almost the last stage of our trek, and which was in fact our last village containing civilians. From here we could see the shelling at night in the far distance at Thiepval, and the bright twinkling shell bursts and Verey lights did not look at all appetising.

We stayed in Franvillers, completing our training until the 12th September, and did much gun practice, including a lot of actual firing at various targets (often tin cans on sticks), and on the 12th September 1916 we paraded at dawn and marched through Albert and halted in a barren plain cut up by trenches near Fricourt. We stayed the night in some old dugouts and next morning at 4.30 a.m. fell in once more, knowing that this march would take us to our jumping off place for High Wood. We fell in in battle order and marched through the captured



Albert Cathedral tower with its figure of the Virgin.