# Cecil Frederick George HUMPHRIES

Diary as printed in the *Otago Daily Times*, May-June 1915.

*Otago Daily Times.* 8 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

## SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

### NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

### LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

### A VALUABLE RECORD.

We have been supplied with a copy of the diary of Sergeant Humphries, D.C.M., from the date of his enlistment at Whitehall on August 7, 1914, till December 31. The story, which is an intensely interesting one, will be published from day to day.

Sergeant Humphries was born at Mataura, and subsequently attended the Otago Boys' High School. He is particularly well-known in Christchurch, and left with his mother, (Mrs A. R. Rowse) for England on a holiday trip shortly before the outbreak of the war. Sergeant Humphries represented Canterbury on the football field, and played against Otago a couple of years ago. He also attained some fame as a swimmer and golfer. He has had a wonderful experience at the front in Europe, and starting his diary in a small way his love for it grew daily, and as a result he has penned a splendid record, written under fire and all sorts of conditions.

It will be noticed that there is an entire absence of any grumbling with his lot, however hard at times the life certainly was. Relatives of any other New Zealanders at the front will also note with what keen delight he received any letters sent to him, and see to it that they do not fail in consistently writing to all our other soldiers who are away from home. Of course, some portions of the narrative have had to be censored.

Sergeant Humphries was wounded by a piece of shrapnel in the recent big fight at Neuve Chapelle, and is now in the hospital at Sevenoaks.

### ENLISTED.

The diary opens :— "August 7th, 1914. Enlisted at Whitehall, after great excitement and struggle." Corporal Humphries, as he became on August 20 — attached to the Army Service Corps — arrived in Havre on August 27, and was promoted sergeant on August 29. After detailing his life in the Army Service Corps, and incidentally remarking that he had applied to join a regiment for the front, Sergeant Humphries records the welcome news to him that he had been accepted as a private in the .Manchester Regiment, first Expeditionary Indian Force—this on October 14.

### WITH THE MANCHESTERS.

The diary continues: —

Thursday, October 15th, 1914.—Rose 7 a.m. No breakfast. Wire came was to join the regiment as soon as possible. The colonel ordered a mail cart to be sent down to 6 Rue de la Bouvrie Range for my kit, so here I am as a private in the Manchesters, next door to the Indians, but with it all I am pleased I am here. After being introduced to the Section Commander and put to my tent, the chaps in my tent did all they could to make me at home, so I am quite happy. Drilling at 3 p.m., just for rifle inspection, then tea at 5 p.m. After a yarn to some of the boys we got our bunks ready for the night — in the words of the boys, "got our

keep down," and got down to it. After about 8 p.m., in a very nice warm bunk, I went to sleep.

Friday, October 16th, 1914.—Rose 6 a.m. Weather very foggy. Had to walk about two miles for a wash. 7.30 breakfast, bacon and bread. At 8.30 we fell in with full kit up (60lb in weight), and had a route march to a large field where we had manoeuvres in connection with an aeroplane drill. Landed back at camp in time for dinner (12.45 p.m.) — stew. My new mate is Jim Harding (a very decent chap). The afternoon had come on very cold, so we stayed in our tent for tea, 5 o'clock— routie and muckin (bread and butter), and jam (possie). These are the boys' mess names for the different "tucker." How different this life is, but I am pleased to think I have been given such good health and strength. After a walk and a yarn around the cook's fire, we made our "chapoidown" '— this means bed, and about 8 p.m. we got down to it (this means turned in for the night).

Saturday, October 17th, 1914.—Rose at 6 a.m.— cold and miserable. After breakfast got our blankets folded up ready for the move, so everybody is now anxious to get on, but this was just a trial hurdle. The rain is now coming down in torrents and things look very miserable. We have just been told we leave early in the morning, so we have to get to bed now so as to get a little sleep.

Sunday, October 18, 1914.—Rose 2.30 a.m. (Gun fire) — this means hot tea! — at 2.45 a.m., then a general pack up in the rain. This is my first experience of anything of this sort. At 4 a.m. we moved off (the whole company), a thousand strong, with mule ammunition column and full equipment for a seven mile march in the rain. We plodded along in the slush and arrived in the town of Orleans, and then entrained in trucks (about 50 men to a truck), so you can imagine me now sitting in the corner of an old waggon, in wet clothes, the carriage (?) smelling of horses, and incidentally, men — and here we will be for the next three days, while on our way to the much-looked-for end, the front. With all these ups and downs everybody is in good spirits, and I think it is this that wins our battles, as we never seem to think that we can be beaten. It is just 7 a.m., so will write a little more later.

## A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.

Rather a strange thing happened. This company has attached to it, as an Honorary Corps, the Southland Regiment in New Zealand. We tried to get some of our blankets down as we were sleeping all over one another, and personally I had wet feet, wet clothes, and a rifle for a pillow, and as this old truck of ours is devoid of springs you can well imagine that sleep and comfort were out of the question. The principal thing on this train journey is the kindness of the people, and we were well treated at every place. The women looked very sad, also the elderly men, but the youths and kiddies yelled with excitement as our train-loads passed through.

Monday, October 19th, 1914.— Same truck. I have been cold and miserable all night. Breakfast, a tiny piece of cheese and biscuits. No wash, but have been sticking in this truck since 7 a.m. yesterday, and have another day to go yet. You can imagine me sitting in the corner of this place writing this diary. It is bitterly told. We have just learned of a slight Victory with the Navy, who have sunk four German cruisers. We have passed through Versailles, and now I believe we are on the way to Calais to turn the Germans' left flank. Towards evening we passed a big train smash — I believe there were four killed and 14 injured. The scene of the accident was very touching — women's shoes and clothing of every description lying about. We were coming along very slowly on this line as we were near the danger zone. Crowds of people came out and cheered as we came along, an[d] as usual, gave us coffee, tea, and eatables. The line is simply crowded with troop trains, and trains follow one another in endless succession. We hear all sorts of things about the war, but cannot get any definite information. No letters or postcards! I would give a good deal for a letter now.

After a very hard biscuit and some jam (possie), I crawled myself into the figure eight and tried to get some sleep.

Tuesday, October 20th, 1914.—Near Lille. Same truck (delayed). We are at some unknown place, but getting nearer the enemy, as we can hear the big guns booming out their welcome message. We are to detrain here, so here I am sitting on a bundle of straw, and the camp cooks are getting their fire crackling, and after a cup of tea we are to march five miles to a rest camp for 12 hours — then I believe we are to be "up and at it."

10 a.m. — Arrived at the so-called "rest camp," and my section are billeted in a cowshed! You know what a cowshed usually smells like? Well, this one is no exception. On the march here we passed a graveyard where there were long rows of trenches, and on top entwined were the Union Jack and the French flag, a silent mark which looked very sad. The people do not cheer, and everybody looks sad and miserable. We have just learned that the Germans have been driven back about 20 miles — a few days ago they were within 10 miles of here. Even now when the wind is blowing across, you can hear the boom of the big guns. We passed our headquarters (General) and on the route was a travelling motor car fitted in the most complete style as a wireless station. This is a farmhouse where we are now, and about the place they are putting up 460 men. So far I have lasted out well and only hope my feet will not give way on the march.

Noon.—Lunch, "bully" beef and biscuits and tea. Rain just starting, making things look very miserable. We can hear the booming of the guns quite plainly now, and the aeroplane circling around makes you think that we are not far off. As a matter of fact the Germans were within 10 miles of this place a day or so ago, but have been driven back about 20 miles since then. After a walk around the small village, came back and turned in at 7 p.m. in the cowshed—the smell is very "cowy."

## MARCHING ON.

Wednesday, October 21st, 1914. — Been awake half the night and listening to the solemn boom of the guns. The air inside the cowshed is not too healthy, but it is marvellous what one can put up with. Rose 6 a.m. and after a wash had breakfast at 7 a.m., was handed a pack belonging to a chap who has died, and I can tell you it is some weight (60 odd lb), and I have got to carry this for the honour of my country!

9 a.m.—We all marched out and did some "diamond" drill for aeroplanes. When we returned we were informed that we were to advance, and I was issued another 100 rounds of ammunition, and after a piece of bread and cheese we fell in and started off. On our march we passed Prince Arthur of Connaught. Our party is some 30,000 strong, and General French is riding on in front of us. I am writing this on the side of the road during a 10 minutes halt. We intend doing 15 miles to-day, and tomorrow night to advance into the firing line Another stop at a village called St. Onmer. This is where a great division of artillery joined us. What a sight it is now! miles of troops marching along. Hindoos of every caste and every different dialect — all in one long great line.

We are now at Beneseure, where we arrived at 5 p.m., and were billeted in a barn for the night. After a cup of tea and a piece of .bread, we turned into bunk, and all night long the tramp of feet and rumbling of big carts and waggons kept me awake for a long time, then I slept well until daybreak.

Thursday, October 22nd.—Beneseure. Rose 6 a.m., and had a wash, then we were told to do another day's march. Started off after tea (two mouthfuls and a slice of bread and cheese). The booming is getting nearer every halt now, and the road all along is full of poor people with their little bundles trying to get away from the danger-zone. It is now 10 a.m., and we have halted. While I am writing this a train-load of women and children have just passed, looking the picture of misery. The township we are expected to reach I believe is called Hazilbrock.

(To be continued.)

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## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

Bailleul ( ?) — Have arrived here about 5 p.m. This is the longest march I have ever done (some 20 miles), with a pack weighing 70lb, and march, march —Will I ever forget the sound of the thud of feet and the rattling of tins and mugs attached to the soldier's kit? We passed through several villages, and they showed signs more or less of German rifle fire. The refugees we passed in little groups all along, and they looked awful.

The booming of the guns is getting very close now. We are within 12 miles of the firing line. To-morrow 1 believe we form No. 2 reserve, next day No. 1—and then in the trenches. To-day has been a very impressionable one for me, marching with a great army, guns, horses, transport – Oh! what a sight—as far as you could see, that line of horses, guns, etc., and a great mass of khaki. The Red Cross trains are running in and out, and the wounded fresh from the fields of battle, with blood oozing out of their bandages—it is dreadful! But with it all, as we passed you could see a hand at a window, and the manner it waved would tell in some way the great pain they were in. My feet through to-day's march were all blistered. In pushing along it was only pure patriotism that kept me going. To-night we are billeted in the top storey of a brewery—a very hard floor, but a good roof overhead, so we should be thankful. I have just heard that Lille is in flames and the Germans are playing havoc with everything. The very place where we are sleeping was filled with Germans, so we are right here! Down the road they are digging up graves, or rather just trenches, of the dead, and giving them a decent burial. I have been having a yarn to some of the people here, and they have shown me some awful things that the enemy have done.

Friday, October 23rd. —3 a.m. Just got orders to be on the march at 4.30 a.m. right up to the firing line, to be reserve. It is not a very long march, so my poor blistered feet will not get much agony to-day. Yesterday we did the march on biscuits, and it looks as if we will have biscuits to-day. There is one thing—since hearing of these awful things we are all going on the battlefield with the "'do or die" feeling.

No. 13.

11 a.m.—A halt, 10 minutes. It would make your heart bleed to see all the little villages in ruins. The Germans have surely gone back to the dark ages here. We have heard several tales about their doings. On the 13th (10 days ago), some 60,000 German troops marched through the very village I am in now. The churches around here seem to have been quite a mark for the German gunners, and everything has been more or less horribly knocked about. If there is anything in the luck of 13, I have had my share of that number. I left Wellington on my trip home on the 13th of the month, I got my transfer to the Manchester Regiment on the 13th, and having no rig-out I had to wait until some one went ill or died. Well, one of the boys got run over and I got his kit, which was No. 1313 (double). Then my old rifle was taken away, and bless my luck if it is not No. 13! so if my luck is out I will blame No. 13—or rather you can.

We are within seven miles of the firing line now, and had our first shot at a German airman this morning. I believe we march into the trenches to-night, so to-morrow (if I am spared), I will have some exciting news to write about. On our march this morning we passed miles of

French with transport and ammunition wagons—wagon upon wagon of big shells and small arms—there seems really no end of these motors.
Well, here we are, right in the middle of it —a forced march all day, and the row and crackle of guns, with aeroplanes dropping smoke bombs on our track. The position we are in now is as near Lille as possible. I believe that the Germans have burnt the town. My feet have got a little better since I have seen the poor people with their little bundles jogging along, the picture of misery. I feel 1 am doing my little bit.
Well, as soon as it became dark, the whole regiment set to work to dig trenches. We had not been digging many minutes before an awful tornado of guns (quick-firers), started to open fire. Will I ever forget this night, my first experience of battle! Flash upon flash—houses burning all around—the booming of the guns, which shook you all round—and here we are in the trenches, awaiting our turn!
My first night in the trenches was not of the best. Trying to keep awake, even with the battle raging, was very hard. I was on the watch at one part of the time. The hop vines are done up in smail stacks and look something like men. Well, in the dull of night I watched these, and bless you if I could not imagine them moving into different positions, but it was only fancy, brought on by the want of sleep. About 2 a.m. the noise of battle was awful. The quick-firers seemed to fascinate me as "pom-pom-pom" went out their messages of death. On our right is a lot of the Native Regiment—they are great fellows, and so eager to get right in grips with the enemy. At one part of the night they let the enemy advance to within 100 yards and then opened rapid fire on their quick-firers and silenced their guns (the Germans') within five minutes—it was the 59th Sikh Regiment I believe. They had some 40 wounded— we did not hear how many of the enemy went under. Just before daybreak we were relieved from the trenches and fell in on a vacant section to receive orders.
Saturday, October 24th,—Just before daylight we were on the inarch—no breakfast and no tea, and away we started—a really fagged out little army but with a good spirit we struggled along, as we were to do a big flanking movement. At about noon we halted for about a couple of hours, and had a drink of tea and some "bully" beef and biscuits, then started off on that march again. Will I ever forget the tramp of feet as we struggled along, the rattle of loose equipment, the General and officers with serious faces scanning their maps, and on either side of us our scouts, the Native Cavalry (a fine Lancer Regiment), on the look-out for the enemy. We struggled along until 5 o'clock and were billeted in a barn, but as it was crowded I got some straw and with my pal "Sizzy" (Jim Harding), we got snugly curled up and off to sleep in less time than it takes to write, and although the big guns were sending kindly messages to the Germans not a mile away, we slept the sleep of a real hard-worked soldier.
At about 4 a.m. it started to rain, so that ended our sleep. We have heard great tales of the Germans' losses, such as "a German General gave in with 70,000 troops to the Russians," and also that the Russians have captured 70 miles of transport. We have also heard that America has declared war. I am just taking a note of these things to see (if I am spared), how much is true. My thoughts are with my dear mother very, very much, but when I think of the misery in every conceivable way that these people here have had, why, my mother's thoughts for me are but a mere trifle.
Sunday, October 25th.—Near Lille. The rain came down at about 4 this morning, so sleep was out of the question as I was in the open. The rage of the battle was not nearly so great as last night. It seems as if our enemy have got a set-back. We got orders at 6.30 a.m. to fall in fully dressed ready for a march, (without breakfast), but pleased to say it was cancelled, and we had a delightful "canteen" of tea and some biscuits, and "bully." To-day being Sunday, we were given five tablespoonfuls of rum. Well, I do not drink much myself, but that rum had "some" taste and warmed me up ready for anything. It is a beautiful morning, and I am sitting on a milestone writing up my diary. We are just outside shell-fire, but the big guns arc

booming and our patrol of airships keeping the enemy from finding out our position. Last night (I forgot to mention), I had the privilege of seeing a German aeroplane brought down by one of our guns, it is really exciting to watch the aeroplane sailing along and the shells bursting around. Our airmen are displaying great courage and chasing the German planes back across their own lines whenever they show up. We hear the good news that we are forcing the enemy back all along. All the fighting is done at night now, and half the time you cannot see anything or anybody. I have just been viewing a battle-royal in mid-air between a German aeroplane and an English. After a long chase it ended uneventfully. We are now resting on the edge of the wood (6 p.m.), until dusk, when we take up the trenches that have been dug by the Belgian refugees. They are all guarded in front by barbed wire, and our instructions are to hold them at all costs. I would give anything to get a letter from home, but under these conditions I cannot expect anything. Our big guns have been sending messages of sympathy all day, and I believe have managed to put out of action the enemy's big gun (commonly known by the English "Tommy" as "Jack Johnson").

Monday, October 26th. — After dark last night we seemed to march for hours, through villages that had been shelled. What an awful sight—buildings (some really beautiful), still in flames, and we march along—every 50 yards or so a stop—it was uncanny in the dark. At 10 p.m. the rain came down in torrents, and we got soaked, still we plodded along in the slush and heavily shelled road until midnight. We were hustled into a big farm and told to sit down fully dressed, to be ready at any moment's notice. Just before dawn we marched out and escorted our guns advancing. I understand that Lille has not fallen and that we have practically surrounded the enemy. This is the weakest point and it is our duty to hold it at all costs, but we are getting reinforcements every hour and think we can hold out. We lost two men last night and several wounded. At about daybreak we inarched to a small village and rested all day. Had a glorious cup (or rather "canteen") of tea—how I do long for a good drink of tea.

4 p.m. — We fell in in full marching order, and were on the march again at dusk. What a march! Will I ever forget—shells to the right and shells to the left of us. We were to relieve at 10 the Munsters, who had been in the trenches for 14 days. Going all along we were being sniped at. Several villages were in flames to light up any movements of troops of ours. Things were very, very exciting, with plenty of hard work—it is the hardest I have ever done—crawling along with a big pack, and stopping to have a shot occasionally. We managed to get the trenches about 11.30 p.m.

IN THE TRENCHES.

Tuesday, October 27th. — In the trenches outside Lille. My birthday—did you say "many happy returns!" At two minutes past 12 I picked up my rifle and had a shot at the trenches of the enemy. Jim shouted out "Give them a birthday present!" A little after midnight the Germans threw out lighted bombs to show up our position, it is very uncanny to see everybody in the strange light lying flat down (this is to avoid showing themselves). Then hell commenced—rapid fire until your very arms ached with the holding of the rifle and pulling of the bolts. This battle lasted until 3 a.m., and then silence—and what a silence! — only to be broken by the annoying sniper, who keeps at you from all angles. If you could only picture a midnight attack! I do wish I could pen-picture it to you. Well, you can imagine me sitting in a huge ditch about 8ft deep and about 6ft wide, the side nearest the enemy raised about a foot. Into the bank are dug small holes about big enough to get your head and shoulders in, and it is in this kind of place I have to spend the next 14 days (if the fates are kind enough to allow me to go on with the game). Our greatest trouble is to keep the men awake. Sleepiness is awful, and if the battle lulls down at all you get half asleep beside your rifle. The rifle fire of the Germans is nothing to be afraid of, but it is the shells that one does not like. You have all read about "Jack Johnsons," "Coal Boxes," and such names. Yes, it is

all true. You dodge death every few minutes, and laugh and joke as if nothing were happening. You will be standing by when suddenly you will hear a sound very much similar to the hissing of an old gander; then it is get into your little "burrow" as soon as possible and wait till something happens. It may be you, or it may be 100 yards away. This is what is done a hundred times a day. The "Coal Boxes" are awful —shells blowing great holes in the earth that would bury a London 'bus. Last night two of our boys dug a nice big burrow, but a "Coal Box" struck the ground above, and they were buried beneath and smothered before we could get them out. These things are treated quite casually and you will hear a Tommy say "Two of 'A' company 'went West' last night!" During the night we lost two smothered and four killed — I could not say how many injured. It is awful if you get wounded. You have to do the best you can until it gets dark, as the enemy shoot on all Red Cross, so the suffering that is produced is beyond all imagination. While I am writing this part, two Germans and one of our men are lying a few yards away, dead, and have been there for several days, but no one will risk to go out and bring them in as our trenches are only 300 yards away from the enemy. Everybody thinks that it will be all over before Christmas. I can only hope and trust so. We hear no news, so cannot say anything only what happens immediately on our ground. To-day has been beautifully fine, and it seems a shame to see such beautiful surroundings going to reckless waste like this. I am sorry to say that for the first time in my life I have what the Tommies call "got hitchy-koo"—in plain unvarnished English this means lousy! but it cannot be helped. You cannot get any water to wash here and water to drink is none too plentiful. The way we sleep every second man lies in a trench with his coat for an hour, then on and off until things get really "lively," when everyone "stands to !"

Wednesday, October 28th. — In the same trench. This morning broke fine but cold. We had a good night's fighting but the enemy would not get right to grips with us. We tried to draw them on, but as we are here to hold on they suit our purpose very well going on the way they are going. To-day we are going to sleep, thank God—the next trench does all our watches, and here I am going to try and sleep in the middle of this great battlefield, with the booming of guns and all the several strange noises that go to make up the necessary picture of modern warfare. Breakfast, "bully" beef and white bread, and very nice too, after those biscuits.

1.30 p.m. — Just turned out. Had seven lovely hours sleep in my little rabbit burrow.

3 p.m. — Shells still screaming overhead. The enemy seem to have left us alone and trying to shell a village over our heads. A Zeppelin has just come into sight eight miles away.

"DANTE'S INFERNO."

5 p.m. — It is absolutely hell — Dante's Inferno! To think I should live to see all this. The shrapnel is just bursting over our trenches, and in "H" company's it is hell. They have lost seven and about 15 wounded. The moans and groans— will I ever forget! To be here and sec it—it is marvellous that anyone should live through all this great hail of lead. The curse of all this is, if a man is wounded in the morning he has to lie in the trench until dark before we can get him cut, as the Germans fire on all Red Cross. Towards evening, or rather just after dark, we were taking our dead and wounded out of the trenches when the enemy opened out with the machine gun on us. We had to drop flat on the ground with our wounded and wait until we could steal away. The stretcher-bearers would not go back to the trenches, so "Sizzie" (Jim Harding—my mate), and myself, volunteered to take a man out, which we did safely enough. This was about 11 p.m., and we had to seek cover until 1 a.m. in an old blown-down house.

Thursday, October 29th.—At 1 a.m. the regiment was relieved from the trenches. Our casualties were nine killed and 25 wounded. We were more or less done out with fighting and no sleep, so we all marched to a small village and were given a barn to sleep in.

4.30 a.m. — The big Naval Brigade have arrived by armoured train, and have just opened fire on Lille. Sleep now is out of the question. The building and grounds shake with this awful

noise of death-dealing guns going off. Surely this war cannot last long now. We seem to be giving the Germans "socks," and judging by the dead we see, they surely cannot last long. The noise of the guns' was something I shall never, never forget. I only hope it will be my luck to come through this all right, as the experiences I have gone through I would love to tell you all about.

10 a.m. — All called up again in full marching order, and under orders to join the Meerut Division who are on the march to meet us, when we hope to do a move that will be a big feature in the deciding of this awful war.

4 p.m. — Been marching all day. The pack seems very heavy to-day, but on the move, and without good sleep, I am naturally a little weaker. We are billeted in a great factory — I think it is a big dye works, so I am expecting a good sleep to-night, no fighting. All along our route march yesterday the devastated buildings and the scene of battle were everywhere, and here and there you would come across a piece of crossed sticks, which tells a solemn tale of the result of this seemingly slaughter of good lives. "Estaires" — I think this is the name.

## AT ESTAIRES.

Friday, October 30th, — 5 a.m. Just called out. Weather fine now, but what an awful night! Rain and the thunder of guns kept on incessantly all night. We were lucky not to be in the trenches, as fighting in these pits dodging death is bad enough without the added misery of rain and cold. Breakfast, jam and bread. We are well looked after as regards food now, and have rum issued to us at night. It is all necessary, as to keep us going at this pace we want something, I can tell you. This is a morning I shall never forget. I got a letter from my mother, the first for six weeks! I could not put on paper the pleasure it gives me to receive word — when the mail comes out and the other boys read letters, it makes one very down-hearted. At 12 noon we were marched off to occupy the trenches, and after a seven-mile walk we arrived at the firing line. The night was cold but the moon shone brightly, and we had to be careful not to show ourselves. 'Very little fighting all night, mostly on our right.

## PROMOTED.

To-day I received my first promotion — I was made lance-corporal in the Regular British Army ! This to me is a fine honour, as sergeant in the Army Service Corps is so easily obtained, but to be given an office in the Army generally takes years.

Saturday, October 31st.— In the trenches outside Lille. We finished up quite an uneventful night, but I was lucky. Since my promotion I have been transferred to No. 1 Company. Well, my mate, Jim Harding, (in No. 3), got covered in by a shell from a "Jack Johnson," and had his collarbone broken. If I had not been transferred I should surely have been buried with him. All the fighting is done during the night and it is very hard to even see a German during the day. We seem to be doing well here and playing "the waiting game." To-night we are to be relieved, and going to the reserve trenches for a good night's sleep. This means we get into a trench about 20 yards behind the firing line, and sleep until you are called. It is wonderful how you can sleep with this awful din going on. We have been very lucky—had no casualties last night except poor Jim.

## ACCIDENT TO COLONEL STRICKLAND.

Sunday, November 1st.— ln the trenches. Had a good sleep, but the battle was very quiet. There seems something in the wind, and a move likely to be on at any moment. I had quite a novelty to-day. Got my mail. Getting letters out here is quite the most pleasant thing one could wish to get. The way we are "living" in the firing line is great! We draw rations of bread, bacon, cheese, "bully" beef, and rum, so you see they look after us all right. The weather is beautifully fine and I am sitting down near my little shrapnel-hole ready to dive in when I hear the "hissing sound" of the shell. First thing this morning we were under very heavy gunfire, but the enemy seemed to be "well out" with their range, thank God. Our colonel (Colonel Strickland), had the misfortune of having a brick fall on his head — the

enemy shelled the house he and other officers were in, but beyond burning it down very little damage was done to human life.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

3 p.m.— We are "in hell" at present. The shrapnel is bursting all round and things are not at all pleasant. We keep diving in our little havens of rest, but they are mostly out of range. Mr Davidson, our lieutenant, got a graze on the stomach, and our colour-sergeant, Nicholson, got taken to the hospital with several shrapnel wounds. I was very lucky,— got out of my trench to get some cabbages in a garden, and a "Jack Johnson" burst nearby and knocked them out of my hand!

7 p.m.— The battle on our right and left is raging with great fury, and the noise and hissing of the shells, with the rapid fire of our rifles (which has done so much to upset the enemy), and every now and then the pom, pom, pom of our machine guns. All this fire lights up the two firing lines, and then you can see a picture which could never be described by any human pen.

9 p.m.— Just got our call to get dressed. This does not mean we are undressed. Oh, dear no! It only means get your equipment on and extra rounds of ammunition. Then we get the order to move to our posts, and this is done in a zig-zag fashion along the trenches. Well, once into position, you take off your pack, sort out say 50 rounds, and stand by your little pot-hole ready for business. Every second man lies down for half an hour if nothing doing, and this is how the night passes — with the alarm "stand by" and a rapid fire at the enemy — then all silence again. Surely it is a wonderful life. We are to man this trench at all costs for at least 14 days, but as long as the weather is fine I don't mind, as you have a quiet time in the day — these brutes only come out to fight at night.

(To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 12 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

A VALUABLE RECORD.

Monday, November 2nd. — Same trench. Outside Lille. The morning broke fine. I always see daybreak, as everybody has to stand by half an hour before daybreak, since this is the favourite time for the enemy to make an attack. We are to be relieved from the firing line again to-day, and going into reserve for a night's rest. The shrapnel has been giving us real pepper to-day, and we are having a rotten time in this trench, but got through all right save that we got plenty of dirt shaken down on our rations —talk about eating your peck of dirt, I have eaten all my share if I live to be a thousand years. I do not know our losses to-day, but do not expect many as we have worked hard and made some really good trenches. On our right and left battle has been raging all afternoon. The Kaiser is supposed to be visiting his troops to-day in Lille, so we expect "something doing" in a day or so now, which you will be reading with great interest in London. It has been beautifully fine all day and it seems a shame to have all this turmoil, going on over such beautiful country. Every night you see houses and even mansions (called here "chateaux") burning—set recklessly on fire by the enemy usually to light up our position. Everybody here expects this war to be over before Christmas. This afternoon we were digging our trenches to make our position more secure from the dreaded shrapnel, and not long after we had finished the shells fell hot and fast, and

it is marvellous that more were not injured. To-night, when it got dark, another chap and I went out scouting, and brought in two fowls that would not answer the challenge! The Germans have been shelling the town of Laventie, which is now well in flames, and people are flying for dear life. We are living fine —the people of England sent boxes of cigarettes and matches, also dried fruits. We are in reserve again to-night, but have to go on digging until 10 p.m. before "getting down to it."

Tuesday, November 3rd.—Same trench. Firstly, I have not had a wash, shave, or had my clothes off since October 25th. Can you imagine what I feel like? But it is all in the game, and it is marvellous what one puts up with without a grumble. Last night there was a great battle raging on our right between the 7th Brigade, who made great havoc amongst the Germans. The position remains unaltered, and not much fighting in out quarter. There was supposed to be a general attack, and by the amount of noise from the big guns there must have been a tremendous struggle. I had a great lunch to-day. We commandeered two fowls and boiled them with potatoes, cabbage, and carrots in a big stack set fire to by the Germans. Their trenches were some 800 yards in front of us, and all the while we were being sniped at, but you seem to get used to all this and take everything as a matter of course. We lost a sergeant and a lance-corporal this afternoon. They were out scouting, but they were sniped off by a German sharpshooter.

8 p.m.—Beautiful night, can read a paper. We are expecting something doing to-night, as we have information that they are forming up in the woods opposite. We are in the "supports" to-night, so have to lie down fully laden with ammunition, and next to us we always have our trusty friend, our rifle, which is our best pal now. I would like to mention something of the wounded, but this will act as a reminder if it is my luck to get through all right.

SOLDIERS GO MAD.

About midnight a fog came over, and no sooner had it made its appearance than all hands were called to "stand to," then from the silence of the night thousands of rifles crackling and the big guns booming and throwing shells which lit up the enemy's position, and the rattle and pom, pom of our machine guns. With a yell of "Hoch" the Germans made a cliarge, but oh! - what slaughter! — they charge in mass formation, so it is almost impossible to miss them. This din kept up for well on two hours, and then died down to the usual quietness. The enemy again charged well into the morning, but our troops are well dug in and will take some shifting. Two of our men, when the battle started, went clean off their heads—the excitement drives many mad (the Tommies' word for this is "puddled").

Wednesday, November 4th.—Same trench, near Lille. Have had very little sleep—too much fighting throughout the morning, but am looking forward to some sleep during the day. Our work through the night was highly successful—I believe this applies right along the line. We are on short rations, as something has happened to our supplies. To-day is still foggy; there is no sun, so everything looks miserable. This is quite an uneventful day. The enemy have thought fit to give us a rest, so we are lying down to it and taking advantage of the quietness to have some sleep. The big guns in the distance keep making a terrible din all day long.

Thursday, November 5th, Guy Fawke's day.—ln the same trench. During the night we had a downpour of rain, and everything and everybody is muddy in the extreme. I never felt so dirty in all my life—no wash or shave yet. While I am writing the enemy have just opened fire on our trenches with shrapnel, so we lie in hell again until they take it into their heads to cry off. Got another letter from mother. I would rather get short rations than not get letters, but now I have got an address proper, hope to get in touch nearly every other day. After the rain, the morning broke clear and at last the sun shone through. We were able to put our wet clothes out to dry. The weather is more of a dread to us than the actual enemy in these dug-outs. I have just been warned for "advance" trench work tonight, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.—l2 hours on the look-out, and if we see the enemy we give the alarm and then run for dear life into the

firing line. A small hole is left in the entanglements for us to get back—so this will be a new experience for me to-night.
The big guns are "letting it rip" and pouring out messages of death every few minutes. A house right at the back took 10 shells from the enemy before they could make any impression. It was fire sport. First you would hear the distant bang or thud of the despatch of the heavy gun, then that fascinating few seconds "what will happen when it bursts?" Well, I must get down to my dug-out and have a sleep, as I have to be up on the alert all night.

IN THE ADVANCE TRENCHES.

Friday, November 6th — Same trench. Up all night in the "advance" trench look-out duty for 12 hours—the hardest work I have ever done. The peering into the night suspecting any object to be a German. The fight against sleep is awful. I was never so thankful for 6 a. m. to come in all my life. The only consolation was that the enemy were very quiet, and seemed to be reserving their energies for the right and left flanks. Had a slice of bread and jam, then went into my hole and slept all through this din until 2 p.m. I must look up this date when I get back because there has been a most determined battle raging all day. The weather today is foggy and miserable, no sun, and gives you a depressing sort of feeling. Hear good news of Major-general Gough — "splendid work amongst the Germans." This afternoon the old saying "it's a strange, wind that blows nobody any good" applied to me. Under cover of the mist I went out and finding a bucket in a burning building, had a glorious wash— it was the first for 10 days. I feel "one of the bhoys [boys?] to-night! I parted my hair and felt all right until somebody lent me his glass to see myself, and I had to laugh with those whiskers of mine on—and J looked a real beauty.
In the firing line again, but very little doing. Fired only a few shots. A right royal battle seems to be going on a little to our right. My watch is one hour down and one hour on sentry, working until daylight.

FINE CONTROL FIRE.

Saturday, November 7th. — 12 noon. A good old big gun duel has been on all morning and houses are being knocked down like packs of cards. We had three injured with shrapnel this morning, but I cannot say what our casualties are - only in our own section.
5 p.m.—Things are very quiet now, the fog having come over again, and this makes artillery fire very difficult as positions are hard to determine. On our left a great battle again raged, and the row of hissing shells, the crackling of rifles, and the pom, pom of the machine guns lasted for quite an hour and a half, when the dulling fire of our men told us of the retreat of the enemy. The rapid fire of the British Infantry and the control fire, is the great secret of success of our movement here. After dusk the usual sentries were posted, one out of every three, and several times during the night the whisper would go round "Stand by at once" — then all would be ready, but save a few stray shots we were not called upon to do much. The rest of the night was spent in watching our barbed-wire entanglements, but some of the more daring did come up during the mist, and cut the wires ready for an attack. Towards morning my watch started from 1 to 2. The moon shone out and all was still. You hardly imagine that guns 600 yards apart were pointed at one another ready to deal out death at any moment. The occasional crowing of a lonely rooster—I say "lonely" as most of his mates have found the pot ere this —the "mooing" of a cow, and the crack of the sentry's rifle, are all that break the peace of the night.
Sunday, November 8th. — Same trench. Sundays are just the same as an ordinary day in the trenches, and in fact the Germans seem to prefer this day to make the most of their attacks. Well, this Sunday broke cold, misty, and miserable. Our "Jock" is hero of this section. He goes away to the rear of the firing line and makes a boiler full of tea before daylight. We do his sentries night and day, but it is well worth it, as hot tea at daybreak only needs one to be here to appreciate it. On our left as usual the thunder of great guns tells of the awful fight for

supremacy. The right is somewhat quiet, but will liven up again before long. The enemy have made a new trench some 150 yards nearer to ours, so we are expecting a livelier time than usual tonight. The shrapnel still keeps up—it is a deadly bombardment, — and we have three injured in one of the trenches. Our artillery has been giving their new trench a little shrapnel, and, looking through the glasses, our gunners seem to have found the exact range, so our poor German friends will not be envying their new position. The aeroplanes are doing a lot of scouting, and the amount of ammunition wasted by the Germans in trying to bring down our airmen does not justify the rumour of "the shells of the enemy running out."

5 p.m.—This is our 10th day in the trenches—no shave or boots off yet. The rest of the chaps have not had a wash, but to use the military phrase "I raised my 'mit'" —in other words. I chanced getting a stray shell, and went in the mist to a farmhouse and had a glorious wash. While I am writing this I can hear the bells of a village church ringing. It seems so strange, all these sounds of peace mixed up with the awful noise of war. Just while I am writing these lines the message has been passed down the lines, "Captain Dunlop of our company has been hit on the back of the head, and is fast dying."

(To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 13 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALAND ER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD. .

## GERMANS ADVANCE THEIR TRENCHES.

Monday, November 9th.—Same trench, near Lille. All through the long night there were occasional attacks, but we were able to retain our position right along the line. The morning broke cold and sunless, and when daylight appeared properly we were surprised to see the Germans had advanced to within 300 yards of our trenches and quite close to us—so close that we can hear one another speak, and woe betide anyone who dares show himself—he is promptly "sniped" by the sharpshooter of either side. Personally, I was lucky this morning. I was moving my position along the "communication" trench, when directly in front of me a private named Butterworth was shot dead through the heart, and our colour-sergeant, Johnson, who was on my left, got shot right through the wrist. I had to take my field bandage and with the aid of a little pair of scissors split up his coat and did the necessary ambulance work. I think this is the greatest curse of the war—no doctor or Red Cross men in the trenches, and it only remains for one comrade to do the best he can for another. The other poor chap is lying face down in the field not 10 yards away from me—dead, and we will not be able to bury him until dark as anyone going near would be smartly sniped off by the enemy.

### "SHIFTING" A HOUSE.

4 p.m.—To-day has been quiet save for the incessant pounding of the guns, and the noise of the snap, snap of the sniper's rifle. I have had a good sleep all afternoon, and well I want it, as the enemy, being so close, will make our vigil all the more keen and trying. Just reading a paper of the 31st October lent me by Lieut. Davidson, but when you don't get the daily papers things seem to be so mixed up one really does not know where one is. The scheme of attack here seems to be as successful as we could wish, but as I said before, we only know what

goes on in our quarter. Our artillery officer came in the trenches to take the distance of a house in a field in front of us, and when he was going away he remarked “I’ll shift that in a few minutes.” It was hardly a matter of minutes when one, two, three, and the flames issuing from the house told of the gunnery of our men.

5 p.m.—Just going to take colour-sergeant to the dressing station, which is about a mile distant. It is quite dark now, and I am writing this by the glitter of a home that was once, but now is a smouldering mass of cinders. Well, after leaving my comrade with the doctor I joined a scouting party and came back to the trenches just before the enemy started shelling the road, which seems to be their usual pastime about 6 o'clock every night. As I was coming past a trench a little in the rear of mine, some four of the boys were digging the grave of their old mate Butterworth. All you do is to take their personal belongings and Identification Disc, and bury them in a 4ft hole fully dressed then get two crow sticks, and with an ink-pencil write “Died in action” —this is a soldier's grave, which we have passed by the score ever since we have been in this neighbourhood. Well, to-night we are to be in “supports” and only called up in the case of a charge.

Tuesday, November 10th.—Same place, same trench. Dull and miserable. In the distance is the place called Levantie in flames. On our right the big guns are booming out. Our left is quiet, while where we are the enemy seem to be quite happy to snip, snip all day long. How I do long for daybreak—it is the best part of the day. To-day I am orderly man for the section and my duty is to draw rations from a cart about a mile down the road as soon as darkness appears. It is rather a risky game, as the enemy, knowing we do this, try their best by medium of their artillery to “find the spot.” We change nearly every night so as to fool them. The places around here are full of spies, and several innocent looking people have been canght giving away positions— they are tried and generally shot.

## A REAL SOUTHLAND DRIZZLE.

1 p.m. —Since about 11 the roar of guns on our left has been deafening, and by the noise a tremendous battle must be in progress. Started to rain a little, but have hopes of it clearing again before long. In fine weather life in these dugouts is not so bad, but in the wet it is hell.

3 p.m.—The rain is now coming on in a real “Southland” drizzle, and, things are beginning to look sloppy and miserable, I, personally, with the aid of two oil sheets and some string and bags, managed to make a kind of “Robinson Crusoe” hut, and am laughing at the rain, but think a little “Invercargill” wind would turn the laugh on me.

5 p.m.—Just getting dusk. The snipers are again getting busy, and the crack, crack of their rifles is very annoying, to say the least of it. The battle on our right (as usual at this time of day), is dying down as if they were engaged in a sort of “eight hour a day, and not a minute longer” kind of job.

## DEAD MAN IN THE RATIONS CART.

6 p.m.—At this time we all (the ration party), reported to our quartermaster-sergeant, and marched off to the ration station some mile or so away. We were met by the mule carts which bring the rations, and in a field all our goods were quietly given out. The men bring their blankets, and into these are dumped bread, cheese, biscuits, bacon, and any other ration that is to be drawn. The blankets, I may mention, are not of the cleanest, but in this state the “peck” of dirt we are supposed to consume in our lifetime is enlarged on somewhat. When I arrived at one of the carts (I always like to know what's what), I saw something strange-looking on the cart, —amongst the rations I might mention —and pulling off a piece of sacking was horrified to be brought face to face with a dead man! I was told it was a civilian who tried to run away when called upon to halt by one of the sentries —in fact the very sentry was by the cart ready to explain his deed, which he did with an “alone I did it” sort of air. We got loaded up with our blankets and the rum (which I may mention some clumsy fellow spilt half of). The language from the fellows! Well, you have an idea of the wonderful vocabulary of a

bullock-driver—I am sure if there had been a bullock-driver present he must have looked on with envy. The march back to the trench we did without incident, and landed our goods safe and sound.

8 p.m.—Am for the firing line again to-night, and everything seems quiet and restful —I wonder for how long.

## FIX BAYONETS!

Midnight.—Just before midnight notes in quick succession were handed to the C.O. and O.C. As I was on sentry I thought there was a move on, and right it was! At the strike of 12 big guns on our right boomed out the order "Fix bayonets! Stand to! Extra ammunition out! All keep well awake and expect enemy from our left, who are forming up in big masses!" Well, in ordinary life these words to read in print do not mean much, but in the trenches all is astir, and that excitement that one gets just before the word to fire goes, is a feeling I shall never forget. The battle—the most severe I have listened to or it has been my luck to see—the flash of the big guns lighting up the sky in the distance—the town of Levantie in flames—the crackling of thousands of rifles and the screech of shells overhead from our long-range guns—the rapid fire of our machine guns—that is the noise we create; add to this the enemy's portion and I think you have as near hell as any person could wish to be in. Our part of this huge drama was what they call a "covering fire," which means to keep the enemy engaged so as they will not be able to reinforce the position we are taking. This big "to-do" was carried out by our second division and included in it Sikhs, Ghurkas, and several well-known Native Regiments. This terrible bombardment lasted until 2 p.m., when the rifle fire told its tale that success had been achieved, and all was still again save the occasional crack of a sentry's rifle and the usual sounds heard in everyday life. At half-past 2 we were given orders to "get down to it" again. I may mention that during the "scrap" I put my rifle out of action —something going wrong— so had to borrow one from the reserves to carry on with.

Wednesday, November 11th.—Same trench, near Lille. After our excitement we were "stood to" as usual at 4 a.m. but nothing doing. The air is very cold, although the rain has held off, but the daybreak was dull and cheerless. Our "Jock" went off and returned just before daylight with some tea, (well stewed), and this hot made us buck up somewhat. After breakfast, between 4 and 5, I cleaned my "bondhook" (rifle), and tried to find out the cause of its jamming, but I am afraid it is for more expert hands than mine.

9 a.m.—Turned into my "house" and had a right royal two hours sleep, then got up and made a little fire in the trench, and cooked a slice of bacon with some cheese. I tell you it took some cooking, and my eyes were sore from the smoke caused by blowing to try and aid the fire to go, the wood being damp after the wet night. The final result was good, and —at last! A slice of bread, and bacon, with some Welsh rarebit, which I enjoyed very, verv much. I put on a canteen of water (dirty water), and made a good cup of tea—so I am writing this diary feeling quite contented with myself, and the world in general. As regards war, there is nothing doing. Still the annoying old sniper, sniping away, but after our long and exciting time last night, I think both parties are "well down to it," and will be ready again for fresh "business" to-night.

2 p.m.—I am on sentry for an hour (day sentry). The day is cold, dull and miserable. It is what you would call "sleeping camp." Everybody has to sleep curled up in his half-wet blanket trying to keep as much warmth as possible. I have suffered a good deal with cold feet lately, but last night I hit on a plan that, to use "Doan's Backache Pills" advertisement, "gave me instant relief!" I got two bags, (supposed to be used to fill with dirt for head cover) —but I reversed this and made it a foot cover by putting a good handful of straw and then my feet inside, and the result was marvellous!

*Otago Daily Times.* 14 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALAND ER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

### A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

Trenches near Lille,

Wednesday, November 11.

6 p.m. — The night is very cold, and all appearances of a storm brewing. Things are very quiet. I am on duty. The evening sentry is posted to-night at 5 p.m., and at 6 p.m. I had to do an hour's sentry on the "wire"—there are two of us who have to go out in front of the barbed-wire entanglements and lie down so as to watch if any dare-devil German comes up and cuts it before making a charge. Well, my hour passed off without any undue excitement, but it was a long, long hour, and one has to keep one's eyes and ears open as it is a matter of life or death—who sees one another first! The rain started to come down in torrents and I was not long before I could feel the cold water trickling down my legs. I had no sooner regained the trenches than an urgent message came along the lines, "Stand by everybody! The enemy advancing in a stooping position and our advance guard cut off!"' All was excitement, and with fixed bayonets (as we were expecting to be ordered to charge to regain the outposts), extra ammunition out—and we were ready for anything, but after standing to until midnight, nothing came of it. Then the message came along that the outposts were safe. As a matter of fact, the Germans tried to cut our men off, but our party on the right could see their movements, and after several volleys scattered the Germans. At midnight —the rain and wind—in this sloppy condition the trenches were like a mis-cared for pig-stye. Then the alarm went again, and all had to stand to in the storm, wet through and cold—it was one of the most trying experiences I have had so far. My little "hut" I spend so much time in stood the elements well, but one of my section who was on "outpost," came in shivering with cold and ague, so I did his extra hour duty and gave him my rum and "house" to try and get warm. Next relief I crept in beside him, but slept wet through—my blanket dry when I left, but ringing wet now with my sick friend curled up in it, and you can imagine me, lying down beside him and me shivering with cold while my friend shook all over with ague. I stood it for a while, but had to give in, and got up and walked up and down in the slush and mud of the trench trying to keep myself warm.

I forgot to mention that at 8 last night my friend "Jock" was well to the fore and landed hot tea and a "bully" stew as we stood to. I had one eye on the enemy's trench, and did my best with a knife with the stew. As it was hot it warmed us up well and in fact was very tasty.

Thursday, November 12th.—Up all night, wet through, and miserable. The morning is clear, and we have every hope of a fine day. "Jock" again made tea but the breakfast was a little upset—our rations were put into a spare hole out of the rain, but we had the misfortune of having the earth fall in, and with the bacon, bread, etc., mixed with a fine sprinkling of mud and clay, you can imagine what our breakfast looked like. As soon as it became daybreak we unearthed the "tucker,"' and although it was a bit gritty, it went down all right. All morning we have been digging the mud and slush out of the trenches, and I have made a really good "house" for myself before daylight. I went over to a farmhouse and got as much straw as I could carry, and now I am writing this tucked snugly in a good bed of straw.

"WHAT WAS WHAT."

At 6 a.m. the outposts came in, and we all were anxious to hear “what was what” during the night. The corporal in charge is well-known in the regiment to “get wind up”—this means rather funky, and it was he who imagined he could see Germans to the left, Germans to the right, and in fact Germans all around him. He fixed the alarm and returned to the trenches, but the officer sent out a reconnoitring party who could find nothing, so the corporal had to join the trench again. It is really quite a joke of the regiment to-day.

SNIPING.

12 noon. — The weather is fine but a cold wind blowing, and we have started a little fire, and are trying to make a cup of tea and fry a slice of bacon for lunch. All our things are out drying and we hope to have a little warmth tonight. We have heard the good news that we get relieved to-morrow night, so everybody is looking forward to a good wash and shave and a little rest. I have just had a change—taken off my puttees, boots and socks, turned my socks inside out and dressed up again—fine change, but it really does relieve one. The Germans have dug a new trench some 75 yards in front of our advance party's trench, and we can hear each other cough quite plainly. Some of our “crack”' shots were having a go through their potholes, and I believe we accounted for four; anyway, a fist was shot up over the enemy's trenches and shook at us! They also put up a white flag, which we kept shooting at for sport. They do all sorts of tricks and use dummies in the trenches to draw our fire. Although we are dodging death every few minutes it has its amusing side also. Perhaps we will be trying to cook a bit of bacon in the “canteen,” but then a shot would strike a clay bank and knock some earth into the food, for which the Tommy would relieve himself with a string of oaths. One of our lads, Berend by name, got shot right through the brain. He was a kind-hearted sort, and just before he met his death had volunteered to go along a ditch in front to get some food for some of his mates in the “advance” trench. As he passed me with a tin of jam in one hand, and some bread in the other, I said “keep low, and good luck old boy.” We watched him as hegot successfully to his trench, but within an hour he looked out of a loophole, and a sniper picked him off. I will not put down what happened then, but will leave that for personal explanation.

LA BASSEE CANAL.

Later. — We lost two of our company this afternoon. I cannot tell you the regimental losses. As I said before, we only know our own little crowd, and that the big battle I mentioned the other day was highly successful and a great feature in the turning of the enemy's flanks. They made repeated attempts to regain their lost ground, but without result! This position we now hold is the key to La Bassee Canal, and in the very ground in front a battle lasting 37 hours was fought before we took the position, with enormous losses to the enemy. Human life to the Kaiser counts for nothing—quite different with us, as the officers preserve life as much as it is in their power.

Friday, November 13th. — Same trench. My duty last night was one hour on and one hour off, but we all stood to nearly the whole time—sleep was out of all question. For the first time searchlights have lighted up the scene of war—one German and one English,—and it is uncanny to see things silhouetted against the sky, with all this thunder and noise of battle going on. The weather broke fine but cold. Had a welcome sleep until about 6 a.m. daybreak.

12 noon.--My shelter comes in handy now. The rain is coming down with a steady patter, but I am nice and cosy in my straw and waterproof “hut”.

2 p.m.—Greatly to our surprise, the enemy has opened rapid fire on our trenches in broad daylight mind—I wonder what is the matter with him! We kept down and treated them with contempt, while our artillery showed them there was some shrapnel left. I think it was a ruse to try and draw us out and see the strength of our rapid fire, but nothing came through you see! They will find all too well the effect our rapid fire has on them when they do make an attack. The enemy, however, are quiet again, and rave for this little incident I have

mentioned, and a few guns booming in the distance, things are slow in extreme. I believe we get relieved this afternoon for 48 hours, thank God! Looking forward to a good wash and shave and a nice quiet sleep.

Saturday, November 14th.—Same half-blown farmhouse near Levantie—Late last night the 47th Sikhs relieved us, and tired and weary we struggled along to this farmhouse, where our section was billeted in a loose box. I "fossicked" about and got a good armful of straw, then undid my wet blanket, and with a tired and weary feeling slept the sleep of the just until 5 o'clock. At 5 o'clock when I awoke my clothes were dry, having dried on me, so we had to fall in fully dressed and await orders, and at 5 past 6 we were given the glad news that we were to rest here until 5 o'clock to-night. All hands set to, to make little fires and cook bacon or anything else capable of being eaten. In the rations for breakfast we had bacon so with my little canteen lid I set to and had a very nice breakfast—rasher of bacon and a few chips of potatoes, bread, and what I appreciated more than anything else, a cup of tea with a good sprinkling of sugar. After breakfast I got a good old house boiler, and setting a fire, did my washing, which consisted of a shirt, towel, couple of socks, and a couple of handkerchiefs. What a day we are having! One of the boys found some flour and made a real good dough, this with stew, potatoes, cabbage, carrots and turnips.

A WASH AND A SHAVE.

I was nearly forgetting one of the most interesting things in my life. Had a wash and a shave—the first after 15 days. I had a bath I may mention—in an old wash tub and water that was the colour of my khaki, but it was lovely, so to-day, the 14th November, will long be remembered by me. In looking at the glass this morning it was really laughable—I would have given a sovereign if I could have had a photo of myself!

5 p.m.—Just learned, we are to be here for the night. While sitting round a few embers, I caught sight of what looked like a signal lamp. I reported it to our lieutenant, Mr Davidson, and he, with a party of two others and myself, set out to investigate. We dodged round, and performed a flanking movement on the supposed "spy," but when we arrived we found to our disappointment the remains of a house just burning its last. Anyway it was worth the excitement, as one cannot be too careful with these artful Germans. Got down to rest about 8 p.m. Weather cold but fine. (To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 15 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## FALLING SNOW.

Farmhouse near Levantie.

Sunday, November 15th.—Stood to at 5 a.m. Weather very, very cold, and first time we have seen ice on the water. At 6 a.m. we were told we did not move off until 10 a. m., so everybody went out on scout. The rations consisted of a pot of cheese (between four men), jam and bread. The scouting party arrived back about 8 a.m.—and what a party! One carrying a goose, others fowls, carrots, and all kinds of vegetables—so everybody is now hard at work plucking, etc., ready for a good feed.

We were ready to move off at 10, but the order came to stay here, so we were standing by in the same farmhouse as last night. The weather is very "Southlandy" —plenty of ice, and while I am writing this the snow is falling fast and it looks like a general fall. I only hope the weather clears, as this game is bad enough in fine, but in wet and cold weather it is a devil. No letters again to-day—it does seem too bad, as 1 know right well that they are about somewhere; but the reason they do not reach me I do not understand. I had a walk round the village this morning, and what a sight! Houses smashed to ruins, what were not smashed by shell were upheaved in such a state—crockery, clothes, foodstuffs and all household furniture in endless confusion. In one house I visited, a cat cried alone with such a pitiful cry, and I thought that if a dumb animal felt it, what must be the feelings of the owners, when all this terrible time is over. In another place a poor little fox terrier was tied up in a kennel. The few bones that lay around, licked white, told its own tale, and when I let it go, it ran around ready to eat anything and everything. These are just two little instances of cruelties that I saw to dumb animals, but the terrible things the enemy do to the poor unfortunate people around here, especially women! I will not try and tell in this little book, but would rather tell personally when it is all over. I visited another house occupied by three women and a little girl. I knocked, and the door was opened by an old granny, and she and the rest looked scared and frightened to death. In each of their hands they held Rosary beads. They took me in and gave me a delightful cup of coffee, and tried to tell me in excited French what the dreaded "Allemando" have done.

4 p.m.—We were ordered to pack up ready for moving. The rain came on, but not very hard, so our march to Estaus was not a difficult task.

Monday, November 16th.—Estaus. We arrived here at 6 p.m., and were quartered in a room at the Convent. I am orderly corporal and "platoon" orderly to-night (or rather this was last night), and you would laugh to see me at my new duty. It is to issue all rations to the four sections of my "platoon"'—bread, bacon, cheese, jam, etc.— all had to be divided into three separate numbers, and I can tell you it looks easier than it really is. At 6 a.m. we rose, the morning breaking dull and drizzling.

NEAR BETHUNE.

3 p.m.—Just arrived. On the march from 9 a.m., to a place called La Continas —anyway it is some 8 miles from Bethune. We were billeted again in a cowshed, awaiting the next move. I would not be surprised to see us go into the trenches to-night, although I may say I hope not, as it is cold, wet and cheerless. On our march we passed numerous motor wagons, carrying big guns and all the other things that go to keep an army in the field. I am getting quite used to seeing these sights now and burning villages and people in flight are a common every-day sight. Just heard of the death of poor old Lord Roberts. At times like these death counts for little, and it is only a matter of an hour or so and one is entirely forgotten. On our way here we passed numerous graves with their little wooden crosses and a few flowers, which told the silent tale of the battle—by the newness of the ground it was not many hours ago since they were put to their last resting place. Perhaps you have all read of the French town called Lavcatie. We passed through this one day on our march, and saw it again the other day. What havoc! If I were to try and picture the awfulness of the place, but it is impossible for me to draw any picture that would do it justice. How this country has suffered—my earnest hope is that not long ere this we will be able to pay the enemy back in their own coin. At present I am writing this diary in the sun (which I may say does not come out too often now), at the back of our billet—in other words, our cowshed.

5 p.m.—Went and drew the rations for my "platoon." They had a very nice hot stew (thanks to Jock), and after a read of a 14-day old paper, spread out my little pack of straw and then got down, and amid the booming of the guns and sharp rifle fire, went sound asleep until near daylight, but the cold awoke me, and I lay cold and thought. My thoughts were all with my

New Zealand people and my mother in. London, all snugly tucked away in their nice warm beds. Tuesday, November 17th.—Same farmhouse, La Contrue. Rose 6 a.m. Drizzling rain—I blame all these big guns for the amount of rain we are having. Just before daylight the sound of battle was very great on our left, and sounded as if we had made a charge. I drew some extra rations for to-day's meals, and cut up some Australian frozen beef, which when cooked I may mention was as fine as ever I tasted.

9.30 a.m.—We have rifle inspection for the G. O., after which we have orders to stand by for immediate move. We are in general reserve to-day, while the brigade is being relieved, and then we will have another move on somewhere. Late in the afternoon I drew the letters, and was welcomed by getting two. It is fine to get letters only five days old. I am corporal of the guard to-night, which necessitates my sleeping in the open, and, as we have no light, will have to turn in as soon as it gets dark.

Wednesday, November 18th.—The same little dirty farmhouse. I have been up and down all night. The cold has been very severe, and the white frost puts me in mind of the old "Southland" days. During the night there was plenty of rifle and big gun firing, and this morning the big guns had moved up, and by the sounds we hear they seem to have gained some ground. At about midnight the old dame here (something after the old granny type) gave me a nice bowl of coffee, and in the night it was most acceptable. The sights now are getting familiar, such as mail transport, the gabbling of European tongues, road "doss" wagons, and all the hundreds and thousands of different gear necessary for this huge army.

Noon.—A beautifully fine day. We had rifle inspection this morning, and then dismissed. I fillcd in the time doing several odd jobs, such as sewing buttons on, clearing out my kit, reading over old letters, and tearing them up. The aeroplanes still hover around and the big guns thud, thud away. If it were not for these noises, we would not know we were actually on the battlefield.

5 p.m.—-Went up for rations, and also for the mail, and was rewarded by getting a parcel of cigarettes and a letter from Jim Harding, last but not least—a New Zealand weekly. The sight of the paper gave me quite a sensation, and I eagerly scanned the news with a candle that kept blowing out every few minutes.

Thursday, November 19th.—Same farmhouse. In reserve. The morning is bleak and cold. The ground is frozen, and the ice seems to get thicker every day. Still no orders. Rifle inspection ordered for 10 a.m. The weather is very cold, and inclined to be snowing. Things very quiet all day. Had a good basin of hot "bully" stew - Jock again was the hero.

3 p.m.—The weather is cold and cheerless, and the snow is starting to fall very heavily. We are all confined to the cowshed, trying to keep warm. Quite a lot of boots and clothing have arrived, and everybody is now busy drawing the necessary they are put down for. The battle sounds very quiet and the big guns seem more silent than I have ever heard them. I think the Germans must be preparing for a great retreat. Turned into bunk at 7 p.m. Snowing very heavily.

## HEAVY SNOW.

Friday, November 20th.—Still in reserve —the snow is lying very thick—about 2ft I should say. The frost during the night has made it hard, and the scene is entirely changed. It looks pretty although black, but it is not nearly so cold as the frosty mornings we have been having. At 10 this morning we had a mile walk, and then loaded up some heavy timber for the trenches—it evidently looks as if we were preparing for winter quarters here. The name of this village is La Contica, and our 161b guns are giving a small village about 4 miles away a shelling, which should do a great deal of harm to the enemy.

Noon.—lt is a glorious day—sun shining on the snow, and the work we have done has just got us into a fine glow. I have been issued with a fine pair of new boots, so although the surroundings look cold I personally am as warm as toast.

5 p.m.—Through the frozen state of the roads, our rations will not be up until midnight, so to-night's supper will be a scanty one. Just before dark I got some fresh straw, and prepared my bed as best I could. The temperature is very keen and am expecting a very heavy frost.
6.30 p.m. —The sound of the rapid fire of the rifles and the booming of the big guns is tremendous at present, and it looks as if the enemy are making a charge on our line, but we are well dug in here, with some good barbed-wire entanglements, and have plenty of reserves, so I think we can take all the hammering the Germans can give us. After some "bully" broth went to bed. (To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 17 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

Farmhouse near Levantie.

Saturday, November 21st.—Still in reserve. Had to get out and issue rations at 6 a.m.—and very, very cold too! The ice was thick on the water, but our early rising for rations was rewarded well, as we had an extra included—butter (very nice here, but in civilian life I would call it bad cooking butter!), and also some South American mutton—it was nice for a change but was a very lean-looking kind of sheep. The snow is lying thick, but the day although cold out of the sun, is fine and bracing. I am sitting at the corner of the cowshed, writing up my diary. The rest of the regiment, barring myself and the orderly man, are away trench digging. A German airman has just come down some hundred yards away. His petrol tank frozen when he was observing our big gun fire from overhead, so he had to alight and give himself and his machine up—quite a good capture, besides the machine, all in good order. His papers and documents were handed over. Just before we finished our trench digging, by some unknown reason the German gunners found out where we were, and gave us a taste of several of their "Jack Johnsons," but we were lucky, as they all went wide.

### ACCIDENT TO A BIG GUN.

I witnessed a very sad thing just a little while ago. A sergeant of the artillery, who was fixing the big gun, forgot to close his breech properly, and when the charge went off, the breech blew out, and drove part of it through his shoulder. They carried him away, but I have just learned that he did not live for an hour afterwards.
6 p.m.—Mail just arrived, and I feel about 10 years old. I think I got no less than 17 letters—what a mail!
Sunday, November 22nd.—Still in reserve—eight kilos from Levantie. This is one of the coldest mornings I have ever experienced. I rinsed my canteen out with hot water, and left it with a spoon in it on the ground for a few minutes, and in that time it was frozen hard. We have just been warned for church parade at 9 a.m.—rifle and ammunition to be worn.

### GRAVE OF GENERAL HAMILTON.

11 a. m.—Just returned from church. The sun is shining brilliantly, but in the cowshed it is piercingly cold. I took a walk over to the haystack, and here I am sitting on the sunny side, with the glare of the sun on the snow—still I write my (what has become quite a friend now) diary. My first experience of a military church parade will, I think, always be vivid in my memory. We fell in sharply at 9 a.m. in front of our cowshed, and after a few words of advice from our captain, we marched off to the village church. The church is one of the old Gothic style, with a yard surrounding it, and in one corner just, as I was going in I noticed the grave

of General Hamilton, who fell on October 14th. Once inside, the place was filled with emblems and symbols which go to mark the Roman Catholic Church. The Germans, as in everywhere else, have found their mark with several shells, and the altar and beautiful stained-glass window at the back is broken and shattered in ruins. The windows facing the North were all more or less damaged, but not beyond repair. The organ seemed to have escaped, but several notes this morning seemed a bit out of tune, but I don't know whether to blame perhaps the English organist (with a French organ), or the result of the shaking of a "Coal Box" or "Jack Johnson." This is the picture—a quiet village church with about a thousand British Tommies, from general down to private, with full equipment on, and extra cartridge-bandolier—the white sur plice of the English parson standing beneath the shattered altar, conducting a service well within the reach of shells, and in fact we could hear plainly the rapid fire of the rifles, the booming of big guns, and the noise of the aeroplane overhead. This is my first service on the battlefield, and under these conditions and surroundings, the words of our parson seem doubly impressive. After service we marched down and drew an extra 50 rounds each, as I believe we are off to the trenches to-night.

4 p. m.—Just ordered to get dressed. We are to relieve the Leicesters in the trenches.

## TRENCH LIKE A FORT.

Monday, November 23rd.—In a trench like a fort—some 5 miles from Levantie. After a four-mile march along frozen road, we arrived after dark at the above address, and with the usual precautions in changing over, and although the ground is heavily coated with snow and the air piercingly cold, it does not seem to affect the order of these annoying snipers. Once in the trench and after a grope around to see where we were, on looking out we were amazed to see the German trenches only 40 yards off. Our orders were to keep well down, but to see all you could without being seen. The trenches are so close that the opposing artillery cannot open fire, and here we are rising hand grenades in' modern warfare in 1914—who would have ever dreamt of this! All through the long, long night it froze and froze, and not content with freezing, seemed to rub it in by freezing again. As you will imagine, sleep under such conditions as these was absolutely out of all question. So, when not on the look-out, I walked about in the spare trench trying to keep the blood circulating. When daylight appeared, all were anxious to have a look around, and take our bearings, which were not of a welcome description. Forty yards in front are the Germans with their snipers, sniping away. A little in advance is a sort of sandbox, with a machine gun mounted. Just In front of our trench are the usual barbed-wire entanglements, and in the rear, a small village. All this covered with a thick coating of snow, and looking bleak in the extreme, with not a living object moving about. That is what is in front. At the back of our trenches is the continuation of the cabbage field, with a big farmhouse (that was) blown to pieces, an old farm dray looking solitary and lonely in the middle of this bleak looking field, the whiteness only relieved here and there by the big black patches where shells from "Jack Johnsons" and bombs have fallen and blown the earth skywards. This is to be our home for at least 7 days—who would care to change places with me?

## LIEUTENANT DAVIDSON FATALLY WOUNDED.

Noon.—Been trying to improve my dug-out in case of rain or snow, but the cold makes the ground so hard that it is a labour to try and do anything with it. Our lieutenant, Mr Davidson, while I am writing this is lying (I believe dying), on a stretcher, having been shot through the head while observing the enemy's rifle fire. It seems strange officers such as he are always the first to go, and the best compliment I can pay him with my short acquaintance, is that he was a soldier, and a gentleman.

## A DARING TOMMY.

4 p.m.—Our Mr Davidson is still lingering on. I can only hope he will be able to pull through, as officers like him are few and far between. My feet have been like ice all day, and

my friend Jock has been doing his best (per medium of a bucket with holes in, a few coke lumps, and some bacon fat), to produce something cheerful to try and thaw our frozen limbs. I have warmed my hands—hence the writing of my diary. Jock has a happy knack of producing, almost fairy-like, something out of nothing—sounds vague, but he has stopped my writing to give me a piece of toasted bread cooked in fat—and very nice too! He has also made a cup of tea —I thought it had milk in, but he informed me it was only the colour of it! —but being warm, that is the principal thing, and these days one does not have to enquire too much into things. I must record a little excitement we had just now. An old kettle was about 10 yards at the rear of the trench, and several were "marking time" on it, when Corporal Whitehead "chanced his mit" by crawling out on his hands and knees, and landing safely the kettle, but in doing so he could have easily have been sniped off—but the boys chance strange things for strange objects sometimes.

A HORRIBLE DEATH.

A little to our right, is a sight which I will not soon forget. A lieutenant and two privates dressed themselves up in white and crawled out and cut the barbed-wire in front of the Germans' trenches, which they accomplished all right but were observed coming in, and two were wounded (including the lieutenant), and caught in our very own entanglements, where it was impossible to save them, and they met a terrible death by wounds, cold and barbed-wire, and as I write the two ghostly figures hang on the wires as a monument to their bravery. What is done that is never heard of, for our King and country!

BOMBED BY BRITISH GUNS.

5 p.m.—We were sitting round our little bit of glowing charcoal, when our own artillery opened fire on the German trenches in front, but our boys had the wrong range and dropped two very fine bombs in amongst us! I left to report to our captain, and when I came back, I was dumfounded to see Lance-Corporal Whitehead lying in the trench with a dreadful wound in the neck, and several wounds in the body. I rendered first aid and bandaged him up, but our men kept banging away and it is nothing short of marvellous that the rest of us were not caught, but it is fate, and here I am still writing up my diary, as fit as ever, and merry and bright—long may it continue! After nearly three-quarters of an hour of this "hell" the news went down to our boys, and they lengthened, and our "hrll" was transferred to our friends in front, but with what result, of course, I do not know. The word came along that the Indians were to make a charge, but for some unknown reason this did not come to anything. The night was very quiet, and most of our time was taken up in repairing our trenches where they had suffered from our artillery fire.

Tuesday, November 24th.—Still in the ground. I think I shall start to "sprout"' if I am to be kept half buried like this much longer. We stood to at 4 a.m., but the morning was, strange to say, warm and the ground started to thaw, but we spent most of our time improving our trenches, and made a bit of a "Colonial" oven, and from it produced a very nice "bully" stew including some potatoes a "nigger" gave me in the next trench. Things have been very, very quiet all day long, and our boys while on sentry have passed the hour away by sniping at the trenches in front, which I am pleased to say has had the desired effect, as they have been very well behind, and in fact, quite good to-day.

Noon.—The ground is thawing very quickly, and everyone is in .a state of muck, and most disagreeable. Got down to it, and had a few hours well-earned rest. Just learnt Mr Davidson died from his wounds at 12.30 a.m. This is one of the quietest days we have had, and absolutely nothing for my diary. (To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 18 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## A DUG-OUT FALLS IN.

Trench near Levantie.

Wednesday, November 25th.—Same trench. Early this morning, (I think between 2 and 3), I was on duty, and my friend, Jock, was snoring so contentedly that I thought I would stay on and do his hour of sentry, but I had only done about half an hour, when the wall of our "dug-out" came in on top of Jock— will I ever forget the sequel as Jock got from under the earth! As luck would have it, we had it well propped up, otherwise things might have been a good deal worse, and Jock (beyond a tremendous shaking, or I should say fright), came out without a scratch. The whole thing in the dull light of morning, although serious, was most laughable, and it perhaps seems heartless, but I stood and had a good laugh at my poor friend's antics in his abruptly broken sleep. Well, this little event cost us a good day's work, as we had to set to and get a fresh home together. We were lucky in finding a good cross-beam as a support, so after working until nearly 1 o'clock, we put together a very nice comfortable "home" and quite ready for snow, rain, or hail.

### UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE.

4 p.m.—Have been trying the new dugout, and as it was made so that two can lie in the opposite directions, full out, our rest was greatly appreciated, and I have had a good two hours sleep, which I think was rightly due to me. Jock's boots are right at my head, and have a decided smell of age — if they get much stronger they will be "putting me to sleep" I think. Our aeroplane has been flying about overhead, and someone said it was a German, and opened fire. Our captain, who came along greatly excited, told the boys in language quite unfit for my diary, that it was an Englishman they were firing at. I did an hour's sniping, and this and the aeroplane incident is all I have got to report up to dark. The night is getting very chilly. 1 only hope it freezes, as we will be assured of a fine day to-morrow, if nothing else.

### DISTRESSED ANIMALS.

Thursday, November 26th.—Still here in the same quarters. Last night it was about a three-quarter moon, and nice and light, clear and frosty, just a perfect night for doing sentry. Things have been very quiet, just the odd crack of the rifles, and the now familiar booming of the guns. These cold nights have told very heavily on the live stock, which at this time of the year has to be housed and taken great care of, but now is left to go when and where it likes. All night long you can hear the pitiful mooing of the poor distressed creatures, and this morning after a hard frost, the unfortunates that had escaped the enemy's shrapnel only had to die a more distressing death by cold, and their carcasses now lie white with frost. This is another part of what happens in modern warfare.

I had the best sleep that I have had between 12 and 4 this morning. Our house' is most comfortable, and an extra bundle of clean straw gives it a touch of luxury. The time for turning to has been changed to 5 a.m.—a very welcome change, as the hour before daylight is one of almost piercingly cold, and also seems longest. To-day we were issued with short rations, and as I was sitting down to a breakfast of bread and jam, I was presented with a beautiful big parcel, and also the much-looked-for letter from the mater. On opening the parcel I found it was full of luxuries that only people placed in the same position as myself

can appreciate, so words cannot convey my inward thanks. It seemed to come almost like fate, on the very day that we were rationed short. The muffler and mits I put on straight away, and gave Jock and "Ginger" Douthwaite a muffler. I can feel the great comfort of these little extras—it is gifts such as these that go a long way to minimising the great discomfort of the trenches. I have been all the morning writing Christmas Greeting cards to several of my pals and friends in New Zealand.

## A DEADLY SHELL.

On our left one of our machine guns was silenced by a well-directed shell from the enemy, it blew off the head of a gunner, took off the two legs of the corporal, who was standing alongside, and wounded several others, including the officer (Lieutenant Shipster). Along our front things have been almost too quiet; save for the sniper and a few hand bombs, they have kept well to themselves. It has been a cheerless sort of winter's day, no sun, and a cold bleak wind that seems to go right through our clothes and reach to the very bones.

## PICKED FOR A BAYONET CHARGE.

4 p.m.—Just been warned that I am picked for a bayonet charge to take place at 10.30 p.m. The enemy has got to be pushed back, as they are getting all too cheeky, so if this is the last entry I make, 1 would like this diary with the one in my right pocket to be given to Captain Craig, who I hope will forward it to my mother, whose address will be found in my pay book. I only hope I shall be writing this up again to-morrow, but God only knows, and if the fates are against me I will, I hope, die an honourable death, with my heart full of love for my mother, and some of my dear pals, who, thank God, I have posted Christmas Greetings to to-night, so come what may, I am ready to do or die, so good-night and good luck.

10.30 p.m.—After all our excitement, there is nothing doing. My "tuck box" has been like a child's Christmas stocking. We have just made a cup of cocoa, and I have made a fine lot of tomato soup, and with my neck wrapped up in this warm muffler, and my mits on, I am as warm and as happy as these circumstances will allow. Jock stitched two small blankets together, and in the flicker of the candle, our little "dug-out" looks quite home-like—so a cigarette, and I will try and have some sleep. You see, I have a cigarette occasionally—yes, it gives one something to do, and I believe has a soothing effect on the nerves, in this nerve-racking job.

## "JOCK."

Friday, November 27th.—Still in the same trench. The dirt on my hands! Well, to tell you the truth, you couldn't see the hands, and I have been doing my best to try and reach the skin with a knife. The morning is something similar to yesterday, cold and cheerless" and if one is inclined to be "blue-y," well you could get all you want here to-day. We started our little fire at 7, and Jock had some cheese and bacon and bread for me. You will be thinking Jock is something of a servant, but these little favours are done for me because he is unable to read and write, and I conduct all his correspondence, including letter-writing to his girl (just another experience!) Then again the rum issued—well, it is all if it is very cold on night sentry, but I was never very fond of it, so Jock gets that, and the tobacco. Why, he is a human chimney, with his own and my tobacco, and, to use his own words— "Gawd lummy, if I aint in bleeding heaven, ,if it were not for these b-- Germans messing up our bleeding stew." But the roughest are often the best soldiers, as they care not what happens, and old Jock, who has done 10 years' service, would follow "Charley" (that's me —Cecil, they say, is too d—d swanky for a Tommy) anywhere. After breakfast, I was put in charge of a digging party. and had to make some fresh trenches. It is wonderful what one really does get up to. All these chaps have been trained in this work, but although, as you know, I have never done a day's soldiering in my life before, it is like everything else, it only needs common-sense. Just a little to the right of where we are working, a private was looking out on sentry, when a

sharpshooter got him, and blew the right side of his face clean away. Needless to mention. he "went West" in a few minutes.
"A" company lost about 7 all told. One shot dead, the rest wounded. I think mostly through shrapnel and these hand-bombs they are using.
Lunch to-day consisted of cold "bully," and bread, with some mustard (tuck box again), and after that I turned into bunk and had three hours sleep. The sun, strange to say, has peeped out, and we put our damp blankets to the stranger and pleased to say they got a good airing, if nothing else.

PICKED FOR ANOTHER BAYONET CHARGE.

5 p.m.—Just been picked again for a bayonet charge, which is down to take place at 10.30 p.m. I may say this is considered an honour, as there are only 50 picked out of a battalion of a thousand strong; so hope I will be able to record my impressions of a bayonet charge to you later.
6.30 p.m.—Captain Creagh has just been along and told me to arrange with the officer in charge of the Bombay Rifles (natives), to have our men placed in their trenches while our artillery bombard the enemy—a very wise precaution as the enemy and ourselves are only 40 yards apart, and a shell would play havoc with us. Got no candle and no lights allowed, so will have to stop, and only hope I will be alive and well to write again my experience during the night. If it is my last, I can only reiterate my feelings of yesterday.

(To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 19 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## BULLET-PROOF PLATES.

Trench near Laventie.

Friday, November 27.—This morning we have had issued iron plates (bullet proof), some 2ft 6in by 2ft, with a little loophole for firing, so with this protection we can fix our rifles and bang away with almost certain safety; but it is the shrapnel I do not like, as it seems to give some horrible wounds, or rather, tears the flesh to pieces.
2 p.m.—The happy thought has struck me to tear the leaves out of my diary and give them to Chester to post to you in England, when you will know some of the little things that go to show what a man does for his King and Country. I will ask yon not to be too critical, as I have not read it over, and I really do not know what is in it. The spelling naturally may be a little "off," but there are several thoughts that occurred to me on duty, and I have just jotted them down regardless of the usual writer's art of putting together. As you will notice, I only started to write in real earnest when I commenced to work in real earnest.
Just getting dark. I have just turned my comrade over on his stretcher, as he was in pain, and putting on a body-belt you sent me. It is keeping his wounds from getting too stiff and cold, and he is appreciating the benefit of its warmth. Sunday, November 29th.—Same trench. After dark last night I was detailed with 16 men to bring armoured plates for loopholes from the ration stand, but when we arrived, owing to some unknown cause, they were not there, so we had to gracefully retire "hurt." After all this snow and frost, and the sudden change—mild and everything thawing, you can imagine the state of these trenches. Everything and

everybody is in a constant state of muck, and in some places it is up to one's knees, and you must go all through this on account of the enemy's snipers, who are very wide awake, and very, very seldom miss their mark.

*Otago Daily Times.* 20 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

Trench near Leventie.

Monday, November 30th.—Same address. Late into the night Captain Creagh sent for me, and I was ordered to go to the Sheikh's headquarters and await orders or instructions for an attack, which I believe takes place between 4 and 5 a. m. The captain (Captain Collins), told me to take a seat, and spoke to me very nicely, and his little fire gave me a very cheerful warm up. The bombs to be used were got ready with their time-fuses, and men detailed for the advance. 1 reported all this to our captain, and we were stood to to await the moon going down, but our enemy must have anticipated the move, as they kept continually sending us star-lights. These lights are shot out of a specially-constructed pistol, and light up the ground for about 200 yards around. I think the material used is platinum. After it bursts into flame small parachute arrangement keeps it in mid-air for a few seconds, lighting up the position beautifully. As you can well imagine, they are very weird in the middle of a dark night. The men did not go down until after 4 a.m., but the sky was clear, and all too light for our raid to come off, so we are just keeping this up our sleeve for a nice dark night in the near future. The morning broke with a cold wind blowing, but the air is dry and looks like keeping so all day. The wet weather is too awful to picture in these conditions.

12 noon.—As a weather prophet I am no good, as the rain now has started, and by its steady drizzle looks to have set in for the night. This is something to dread, as mud and wet, as I have said several times before, make these trenches beyond the most vivid imagination.

### SOLDIERS GROWING CROTCHETY.

2 p.m. —I am awake, having had a most glorious sleep, so am fit for an all night's vigil, if necessary. The rain is still coming down, and the grey skies do not improve one's spirits. Our section seems all out of sorts, all the boys pulling against one another. I think it is this continuous duty that has told on their tempers, and you have three eating together, while one will be "on his own"; eating, and so on. Personally, I hate this, as continual nagging plays with anyone's nerves, and should be the last thing where life and death are being dealt out every hour; comradeship should be even more firmly cemented together, but to my great surprise, it is not so. Surely the British Tommy is a most strange piece of manhood—he is beyond me, and I cannot fathom him.

### DEATH OF COLOUR-SERGEANT WILSON.

11.30 p.m. —I cannot sleep, so thought I would light my wee bit of candle, and record what happened. Firstly, Colour-sergeant Wilson, was wounded in the charge the other night, died of his wounds this evening—another fine soldier passed away. I have been put in charge of a section (section 4), for which I am truly thankful, as try as I could with those last lot, I could not get them to pull together, but this section I am going to I will try and get together, and hope I will succeed. I feel proud of this last promotion, as I have been given it above the heads of at least a dozen or more. My duties now consist of posting night sentries, and walking down my portion of the trench to see that all is well, and the men doing their duty by

keeping a proper lookout, and not going to sleep. The night is, strange to say, warm, and the enemy have been doing a lot of firing, but we are well dug in, and with the new iron loophole protection, we have only to fear their bombs and that old dreaded shrapnel of theirs. I must be off again, as I can hear the whisper coming along the line "relieve sentries," and, as I am next to relieve, I must be off to duty.

Tuesday, December 1st. —Same street, but a little farther up, and to use our way of describing wherewre are —"second turning to the right of Coal Box road!" We "stood to" at 4 a. m., but after a few minutes' rapid fire we must have "put wind up" our friends in front, as they were silenced. The daybreak was as usual, cold but fine, and after having a slice of bread and jam, and a cup of tea—or rather a canteen of tea—I got down to it and had a right royal sleep.

## THE SLEEPING CAMP.

Wednesday, December 2nd.—Last night was my first night of N.C.O. on relief picket. The night was a perfect one, the moon at its full, and almost as bright as day. As one walks along through these trenches strange thoughts come to one. The sight of the trenches when nearly everybody is the positions of the men,—some curled up with, their knees under their chin, and others trying to do a figure 8 with themselves, and here and there the loud snore of several can be heard I am sure, by the enemy just across the road; then standing on a little parapet the motionless body of the sentry, one about every 8 yards, with his eye glued to the little loophole, and his mind on nothing else but Germans. All is quiet and still, and it seems so strange to think that this sort of thing must go on. My duty, as I mentioned before, is to keep walking around and seeing all is well and the sentries keeping a sharp lookout and not going to sleep. Everything was so bright and in the moonlight that an attack was out of all question, so there was no "standing to" before dawn, and the boys not on duty had a good lie down.

8 a.m.—Just had some fried cheese and bread, and a canteen of tea, and while I was melting the cheese a dirty little sniper kept hitting the top of the parapet and knocking down the earth into my breakfast, but I was not as unlucky as Corporal Jamieson and Lance-corporal "Shag" (Cooper)—well-known and noted for his powers with the Ghurka's knife. They were sitting around their welcome glare of charcoal with the tea and cheese on the fire, when over came a bomb and blew up everything, but luckily never injured the men. The language of "Shag" was far too severe for my little diary.

After I have finished breakfast, and likewise these few sentries, I am going to amuse myself in trying to upset our friends' breakfasts, and as it is 9 o'clock they are generally at breakfast. Even in the trenches the Germans try and keep up their mode of living—plenty of beer, German sausage, and sauerkraut—so I hope to flavour this little dish with a fair sprinkling of mother earth, just to get even.

12 noon.—Have filled up most of the morning sniping, and of course we hardly ever know with what result, but my friend has not replied, so I presume my shooting is too accurate for him.

This afternoon was very quiet. I wrote several letters, also letters for two comrades who cannot read or write. The enemy have evidently got a new bomb, but thank goodness they are very fond of going wide, otherwise our little sleep to-day would have been greatly disturbed.

## ANNOYING VERMIN.

Thursday, December 3rd.—Same trench. Commonly known among the boys as "Clapham Corner." The direction I may mention, is "turn to the left off Coal Box road." The night again was beautifully moonlight, and although cold, was just a glorious one for the trenches. We were "stood to" at 4 a.m., and about half an hour later the rifle fire and cannonading on our right told of a very determined attack, but at present I don't know whether it was our side or not. The noise kept up until about 5 a.m., when it died away again, and all was still and quiet,

and the order “night sentries”— so the rest of the boys got down to it. The daylight appeared cold and bleak, but I was warmed up by being presented with two lovely parcels of underclothing, and am now longing and waiting to get these “ticky” things off and my lovely set of new things on. They say anticipation is better than realisation, but under these conditions I am afraid I must reverse this idea! My friends have become exceedingly “active” these last two or three nights, so I am now longing to “fix bayonets and charge!” To-day has been something of a “field day.” Firstly, the parcel, then we had a tin of tomatoes (kindly sent by some big-wig of Manchester), given out with our rations. This was our menu in the trench this morning.

6.30—a cup of real turtle soup, then at 8 some bacon and tomatoes, tea and dry bread—or rather toast; could you imagine how I did enjoy all this? No you cannot, as it takes only people placed like we are now to realise what luxuries really are.

Noon.—Have received orders to be all ready packed, to leave at 4 p.m. This is glad news as we are to have 7 days rest, that is if we are not called upon as reserve to reinforce some part of the line that has fallen. Our Natives, The Blucher Rifles, were relieved by the Ghurkas last night, so on my right areo the little fellows that all the eyes of the world are on. They are, to look at, closely allied to the Japanese, and are indeed fine fellows as well as soldiers. While I am writing, the sappers and miners are hard at work laying cables for a searchlight— this will be used on the dark night that follow this full moon.

4 p.m.—All packed up and awaiting darkness so as we can move off, so I have visions of a beautiful restful sleep in the old cowshed! Jock is now making the last cup of cocoa in the trenches for a while— how that cocoa warms one up, and seems to reach even to our icy-cold feet. I had a very pleasant surprise today—a small parcel of cigarettes and tobacco has been sent to me from the son of a private soldier I met while in Colonel Jack's office.

A SPELL FROM THE TRENCHES.

At 5 p.m. our relief came (the Leicesters), and glad we were to hear the order whispered along the trench “File on, quietly.” I really cannot picture to you what all this means, but you can imagine the relief party all clean and shaven, fresh and erect, standing at our loopholes, and ourselves—heavy beards, dirty and worn out, ready to leave. The thought struck me very much as we filed on—the young replacing the old, for this is how it seemed. As we passed the different ones the Tommies would whisper warnings, or joke, such as “Keep nitchy,” which means keep low down, or “Good luck boys, may you all come out again.” But who knows! The party who goes in sometimes never, never comes out the sane, but it is war, and there vou are.

This snow and frost has made everything so sloppy and mucky that every step had to be done with great exactness, and with our heavy pack on, and weary legs it was awful. Our clothes were in an awful mess, and the pulling out of each foot produced the same sound as a cow pulling its feet out of a bog. After about two miles of this, down drains, through tunnels, arches, and in fact, we seemed to go through everything, we arrived by the roadside leading to our billets, and a weary band we were as we dragged one foot after the other on our 4-mile march to our quarters, where we arrived at about 9.30 p.m., and pleased to see the old cowshed. On our way we passed a soldiers’ cemetery, where about 50 of the Leicesters were buried in neat little graves with their simple box-wood crosses, which told the tale of their deaths. After arriving at the cowshed dead beat and tired, and promising myself a good sleep and rest, to my disgust, I was warned for corporal of the guard, so sleep was out of the question. (To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 21 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

# NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## DEAR OLD COWSHED.

Shed near Laventie.

Friday, December 4th.—ln the dear old cowshed, or rather an old shed half blown down, but now doing good service as a jolly good home. After being up half the night posting sentries, and the other half being nearly frozen, at daylight I put on a bucket of water, and after warming it up stripped to the waist, and oh! what joy!—a wash after a fortnight! Then 1 had the second joy—a nice shave, and then another wash. Anybody who has not experienced this will never realise what a comfort and pleasure it is.

10 a.m. —Rifle and ammunition inspection, and a lecture, and incidentally an apology by our captain, and a few words of advice. The shed we are in we have made comfortable under the circumstances. Of course, half we filled with straw, and the other half is the kitchen. The big fireplace takes the old fashioned logs, and with a big fire blazing, well, I only hope I never have any worse! I may mention I am sitting alongside the fire at 2.30 a.m.—l cannot sleep for some unknown reason. Have made some delicious coffee and milk, and some toast, and leaning over the fire my thoughts are pictured in the flickering light, but I am perfectly warm inwardly and outwardly, and as we are not reserve, and a good way from the firing line, we are at peace with the world, while Jock and Sammy are giving it nothing with a good old snore. I forgot to mention that the roof is nearly all off our "home"—I think it had a little encouragement from a "Jack Johnson."

5 p.m.—A friend of mine (Bombay Motor Cycles), came along to see me— it is fine to see a kindly face you know. He has a fine billet to himself, and has invited me round to have dinner—seems quite on earth again! After a good old yarn we bedded down, and getting some really heavy logs on the fire, "got down to it," but for some unknown reason I cannot stay "in the land of Nod" very long.

## ROUTE MARCHING.

Saturday, December 5th. —In the little farmhouse at La Contica. Reveille at 6.30 a.m., and after breakfast had another inspection—kit this time, and put down for any articles short. After a good deal of "red tape"" and messing about, we were dismissed again at 11.30 a.m., and I found a barber and had a hair-cut. Had a bit of lunch, and then fell in again for a route march which took us near to Estaire. The sky got very dark and we had to stride it out, but unfortunately we were overtaken by the storm, and most of us got wet through. On getting back to the little "home" we put on a good fire and stood and dried ourselves in front of it.

4 p.m.—Orders have just been read out: "No one to leave—all to be ready to leave in 15 minutes' notice, as the Manchester is first reserve for the firing line." Hope and trust these rotten Germans do not attempt any of their funny business, and we will be able to have a good rest. After a "chin up" (Tommy's expression for having a chat), I rolled into bunk like a trooper's horse. Before turning in I may mention I have just been along to the aerial section and cadged a tin of petrol, so I am looking forward to tomorrow (Sunday), when I have made up my mind to "do for" lots of things! The fire is getting dull and I can hardly see to write more, so good-night all.

## AN EVENTFUL DAY.

Sunday, December 6th.—At the old farmhouse, or rather the annexe—a cross between a pigstye and a hencoop. Today has been the day of all days. I have left writing my diary till now, 11 p.m. Very late for me now, and how am I to start to tell you all about myself! I arose

at daylight, put two buckets of water on a fire I had made, and borrowed the old woman's tub, or rather "pinched" it, and after a good deal of preparation arranged everything, and had a beautiful bath!

There was a voluntary church parade. Putting on my equipment, I went to the same little village church, which was exactly as I described before save for here and there a fresh mound of graves, and the heavily creped women about told of "something doing" in or around here. Well, here I am talking to you feeling lovely, at peace with everybody, perfectly clean in body, limb and soul. It is really only one who has had to go through this experience that can fully realise the whole benefit of this complete change of body, soul and limb. For dinner we had a real good "Maconochie"' —they are very fine. We also fried a few potatoes, and with a canteen of tea with real milk and plenty of sugar, we were "living." After I finished dinner a friend (Webster of the Bombay Light Horse—mentioned him before I think) came along to see if I could go to their billet and have dinner. All this in one day seems almost too much—I seem to be getting killed with, kindness. I went to the sergeant to get off, but with a loud voice I was told "absolutely impossible," but later he came to me and said it was all right. Mind you, I knew all the time that it was all right, but that was said for the others to hear, and quietly, he (the sergeant) owes me 3 francs, so no wonder I could go! It is wonderful what language this money talks. So I set off for my dinner party. Please do not laugh, but it makes me feel so child-like to get out of the rattle and thunder of the trenches. On arriving at the first farmhouse on the left of brigade headquarters, I found Corporal Aylward (Webster's friend), comfortably sitting down inside a heated room in a typical French farm, with the farmer's wife and daughters, the husband and sons being at "La Guerre" (the war), sitting around a table and jabbering and looking shyly up at the English at the other corner.

After a talk for about an hour the hoot of a motor was heard, and my friend Corporal Webster arrived wet through, Burberry leather coat and all. After the usual hand-shaking and greetings, he stripped off his things and had a complete change, during which time Aylward got together the dinner. Here it is—chicken roasted, with bread sauce mind you, baked onions and baked potatoes, cigar and liqueur, not to forget the delicious French "café" (coffee). Around that table we sat, and with tongues going—first of snipers on the road and then immediately experiences of the trenches—it truly was a happy party. After the eating business was over they piled me up with several chocolates, candles, Bovril and several other articles, including numerous mufflers, which I duly made myself "a good fellow" with by presenting them to the boys. With this load we went down to the village pub and had several "spots" together, after which they walked with me along towards my hencoop, and with a very grateful heart I said good-night. It is little kindnesses such as these that make up for all the other discomforts of the trenches. So to-night I am happy, comfortable and warm, and when I close this book will sit in front of this flickering blaze and have my meal in the light, and then off to my bunk of straw, with a heart full of thanks to those who have given me these untold kindnesses to-day, so good-night all.

Monday, December 7th.—La Contica. After a beautiful sleep I awakened at 6 a.m. and lay awake and thought the sound of war was very quiet, and an occasional round from the sentry and a big gun was the only thing that told us we were near the scene of action. I put a bucket of water on the fire and had another good scrub with the brush. My hands are beginning to get back to their normal again, but the knuckles still retain the mud from the trenches. Breakfast this morning consisted of bacon, and I fried a few potatoes, of which I am very fond.

BATHING PARADE.

9.30 a.m.—We were all ordered up for a bathing parade, rifle and ammunition, and towel. You notice we take our old trusty friend, the rifle, and a few "pulls" always with us. As we marched along the road, on either side at the farmhouses here and there were crowds of

troops of every colour, size and shape. The Hindoos everywhere, and hare brought with all their native equipment, and it must be a sight to French people to watch the strange customs of these people. On the march, we passed a batch of water carriers (beastes), with their pigskin water-bags. It put me in mind of Cairo, and. the scenes from "Kismet." All this in France seems so strange. The bath we were heading to was in the jail at Bethune, but when we had got about 4 miles on our road, we were met by a motor despatch rider, who gave us the unwelcome news of "water off."' I was happily well bathed and changed the day before, but naturally felt a little disappointed at not having a swim, as my fondness for the water is well-known. The weather being winter, I suppose I must not grumble, but it is decidedly "Southlandyfied," and blows with the keenness of a "Crescent Corner" wind. We retraced our steps to our billets, where we arrived at about midday, and making a "bully" stew, ate heartily after our appetising little walk. After lunch I wandered down to a half-blown down house and collected a bundle of tiles to patch up the roof of my "home," with very good results—as you may notice, this page is written on with very few spots on it.

3 p.m.—l was warned for orderly man, to draw rations for No. 3 company. This is always a long job, and it took me right up to dusk. We were sitting beside our little fire when one of the boys came in having a good scratch. I looked on, and how lovely I felt. I knew only too well his feelings, but one of the others said to him, "don't wake them up Charlie, leave them alone." After a canteen of tea and a grilled kipper and some bread, (we are doing ourselves well!), I took off my boots and puttees and got down to my little bit of straw and a blanket. I was not asleep very long before I was awakened by a rapid fire and cannonading, and the machine guns going at top. I hopped out of bunk, and put on my boots and puttees (we are in first reserve, and supposed to sleep —if you can call it sleep —with full equipment on). The battle raged with great fury, and the continual rattle of the machine gun told of a big attack or advance, but luckily we missed being called, so we got down to it again and had a lovely rest until 4 a.m. (To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 22 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

At La Contica.

Monday, December 7.

Still at the same old place. I lit my candle and sat up in bunk and wrote a few post-cards to New Zealand, and some friends in England. This took me until daylight. The morning, as usual now, broke wet and grey—I don't know if it is a London grey, but it does not do to get fits of blues on this job, and personally, I always try and appear happy and contented; and make the best of things. Breakfast consisted of sausages and bacon - just read that again—and all this on active service – with a good canteen of coffee, and I was feeling as fit as a fiddle. Breakfast over, we got our equipment ready for parade at 9.30. The method of paying on the field is as follows: You are warned to be at a certain farmhouse, and all stand around peering into the little door like so many half-starved people waiting around the door of a soup kitchen. When your name is called you hand in your small book to the officer, who inserts the amount and signs, then you sign a paper made out by the colour-sergeant, and with a good salute file out to face the world again! This business kept up most of the morning, and after

having a small piece of bread and cheese, I lay .down on my straw for a rest, but had no sooner got my head down when the word came to dress in light order and oil sheets. We all wondered what move was on.

## PICKS AND SHOVELS.

About 2.30 p.m. we lined up with the old friend the rifle and 250 rounds of ammunition pulling us down, but a little march along the road and we were handed out a pick and shovel just to increase the weight a bit. All the boys tried to guess what was the game. We were about 2000 all told—Manchester Regiment, Connaught Rangers, 4th Suffolk and Black Watch, and with the'captains riding along in front we all set off. The rain just about this time came down in torrents, so we looked a strange little army in the dull light (it gets dark so early here), with the shining waterproofs dripping with the almost torrential, rain, the picks and shovels on our shoulders. We marched along, passing as we went hundreds of troops, or I should say thousands and thousands, the gear necessary for all this lying about, and out of an innocent-looking field as if coming out of the bowels of the earth, you would see men appear almost phantom-like from well-dug-out and concealed winter quarters. Along we dragged with these pick and shovels, not so heavy as they are awkward, but now beginning to get that extra weight that tells as the march goes on. In the distance we could see the lights of a village (I believe La Bassee); but instead of making for for the lights, we skirted around the town and after a very circuitous route, we arrived, much to our surprise, on a road where we took the trenches on first arriving here (Beuvry I think the name is), but all was changed now, not a whole house left. All this I have pictured to you before, so will not describe this scene of desolation again. We must be about 8 miles away and the march is getting tedious.

## THE OLD ROAD.

Once through this little, dark and deserted village, the only things living being the soldiers on sentry at the corner, we were given the order “File on in single file each side of the road.” We know only too well what this means—the danger zone. The precaution is in case a shell lands amongst us, it will only grip a few, whereas if we were in mass formation, or in fours, as usual, you can imagine what the loss of life would be. The old road was quite familiar to all of us. As we passed you would hear someone say “that’s where we used to draw rations, then a little farther up “that's where we gripped a spy.” We had the order “no cigarettes, and absolute quietness,” so we filed along picking our way, as “Jack Johnson” had made great holes in the earth, and the water filling them up made it very hard to see them. Every here and there you would hear a splash and then a long list of words, some of which in fact I have not heard before, and by the sound of the voices they seem really to mean it! The starlights of the Germans could be plainly seen now, and the crack of the rifles was so clear, we knew how far we were off the old firing line. Single file, and into a communication trench full of mud and water, and every step reminding one of the old cow with its feet in the bog, but we were all too wet to mind what happened, so we went through everything with as quiet a splash as possible. Into a half-dug trench we passed, then we were all aware of what we had come for—“Extend four yards apart, every fourth man sentry and hold rifles (which must be charged), and start digging quietly. The digging I may tell you, was hardest I have ever done. The soft mud sticking to the shovels, made things awkward and heavy, and with all this gear on, the task was of hard labour. We finished our allotted task about 9. Nothing' exciting happened. A few stray shots came across, and the flare-lights of the Germans. Our heavy battery kept booming loudly in our rear as if intent on keeping our friends awake in the neighbouring village some 7 miles away. After wading through the slush and the mud we fell in and marched back, tired, to our billets. The march was a trying one; tired, wet and weary, we arrived at midnight—no fire, nothing to eat since midday, but we soon set to work and had a big blaze going and a cup of tea, then scraping ourselves, took off the wet things and got down to it.

Tuesday, December 8th.—ln our little “home” at La Contrue. Did not wake until 6.30 this morning—had a good rest after our exercise of yesterday. Jock made some “gun-fire,” and here I am sitting Maori fashion with a blanket over my shoulders, writing up this little diary. I have just stopped a minute. I have received my first Christmas Greetings by card: “A blot from mother.” After reading the welcome little note, I tried to dig out my rifle—what a mess with mud. I take a pride in keeping my rifle clean, and it hurt me to see it, a faithful friend now, in such a mess, but an hour’s good hard cleaning and it is well fit for anything I may ask of it. Rifle inspection for mid-day, and then some lunch. Our Creagh has gone on 10 days leave to England, and we have a young officer, by the name of Lieutenant Norman, in command. As the day was dull and miserable, he allowed the afternoon free. As soon as we had had a snack of “'bully” and bread, Jock and Sammy left me alone to do my writing, while they went off together to the nearest pub and store, which was some 2 miles off. During the afternoon I stood all alone in my little shed, with thoughts of home and friends. After doing some writing and making up the fire I fell asleep and was awakened by my two pals, who appeared arm-in-arm. Well, it wasno use being annoyed. When I was just about getting “fed up” my friend came along with a bundle containing a pair of boots and socks, etc.—what a relief! I put on my coat and strolled up to his billet and had some delicious stew. I left their little crib just on 11 o’clock, and had to do a little “flanking movement” to get into my' “home” without the guard seeing me, which I successfully did. On my arrival home—what a sight! - The log fire blazing cheerfully, but in front, Sammy in my bunk with feet on my nice clean gear, boots inches with mud, loudly snoring. After rousing them the best way I could and turning them over, I turned in to sleep.

Wednesday, December 9th.—Still near the cowshed, in reserve —La Contrue. The morning still dull, grey, miserable, wet and sloppy, the “home” all upside down and dirty after the night before. A little lecture to my two pals, who promised, after calling themselves all the names possible, not to do it again. Breakfast consisted of a ration of bacon, some cheese, and some tea.

9.45 a.m.—Full pack up, and fell in, but the rain was now coming down very steadily, and our new commander said to us very nicely, “Yon can dismiss, but do not leave your billets until after midday, asyou will get me into trouble if you are seen in the village in the morning. The boys would follow Lieutenant Norman to the end of the earth these times. This is the fine spirit an officer should be held in.

VISIT OF THE KING.

There is one thing I had missed the other day from my diary. That was the visit of the King to his troops.. He came right up near the trenches, and spoke cheering words to men that looked not a little bit dressed for an inspection by the Crowned Head. He asked several men if they could suggest anything for the trenches, and gave orders to several to have fresh boots, and in every way made himself appear as one of ourselves and not the high personage he really is. He travelled along quite a lot of the battlefield and at one part where the big guns were he, I am told, fired one of the guns, so you see even our King has done his little bit to upset these Germans.

The day is miserable, sloppy and raining, so I have put on a nice fire and will sit and write all afternoon, which I did until 4 p.m., when Sammy came home with three very nice pork chops, so I set to work and peeled some potatoes and by means of two buckets, one with pork and potatoes in and the other set inside, with the hot embers of a nice fire underneath, the result was very good, and Jock and Sammy pronounced me a real good cook. After we washed up and had a smoke Jock and Sammy left me alone, and went out to seek comfort at the village pub.

I trust they have not had so much rum and coffee, or I am afraid they will be getting pushed out of house and home. The night is wet and misty, and the rapid fire from the trenches tells

of an expected attack. It is such nights as these that most of the attacks are done, but we are not first reserve to-night, so unless they get very hard pushed we will not be leaving the old cowshed.
The boys arrived home about 7.30 p.m. quite sober to my surprise, but Jock had a bottle of "short tack"' (rum), called the nickname because it is short to get drunk on—short and good.

(To be continued).

*Otago Daily Times.* 24 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

### HIGH LIVING.

Shed at La Contrue.

Thursday, December 10th.—At the old cowshed, still in reserve. The night was miserable in the extreme. I awoke several times and thought of the poor devils in the trenches. Being misty, rapid fire was to be heard every now and again, so small attacks must have been in progress. Rose at 6 a.m. dark, and putting on a canteen made some "gun-fire." We have dined well the last few days, and for breakfast we had each a couple of pork sausages and bacon, bread and coffee. I was cook, and with a little shake of pepper and a pinch of salt and mustard, we are doing things quite "a la."
Parade at 9.45 a.m.—full marching order but after inspecting our rifles, we were told off to stand to, to be ready at 5 minutes' notice. This is only a precautionary measure. The "flash" is we are for the trenches to-night, but no official news so far. By the papers we received last night things seem to be going along —victory after victory for the Allies. I sincerely hope so, but I am afraid there is a lot of newspaper talk over these so-called victories.

### HEAVY LOADING.

Just in the middle of our little lunch we got the order "Pack up immediately." All was bustle, and you would laugh if you could only see me now—Balaclava cap, Guthrie coat, cycle leggings, and this great pack, 250 rounds of ammunition, together with all the other equipment including a water bottle full, and here I am just waiting to go on. It is wonderful what weight one can get along with, and oh! don't I thank myself for being so healthy and strong. After all, that is the best wish anyone can give you—good health. Included in my lot I have yesterday's mail, heavy too, but I want to read them over in the trenches to-morrow. I must be off to "fall in," so hope tomorrow at daylight to be again chatting with you all! I have no idea what trenches we go to, but hope and pray they will not be too far, with this "mule pack" up. Good-night all—it is election day in New Zealand. How I do remember 3 years ago, awaiting the results in Cathedral Square (Christchurch).

### AT GIVENCHY.

Friday, December 11th.—In an old brick kiln, near a place called Givenchy. At 2 p.m. we moved off from the cowshed, well packed up and destination unknown. The rain came down fairly heavily, and the sloppy state of the roads and all wet, made the march very hard. We struggled along, passing through several small villages that I do not catch the names of, until we arrived at a town called Gorre, where we were branched off to the right and made for another small village called Beuvry. On arriving there the rain came down in torrents. I had my pair of leggings given me by my friend Aylward, and they were a treat—kept me warm

and dry. Coming across the Canal (La Bassee Canal), we followed it along until we got to the above address. We must have done about 9 miles, and it was very near dark, so we were put into a cellar of a brewery to await darkness. One or two of the boys got some old rum and drank well but not wisely. As soon as darkness set in, we fell in in single rank and followed the leader into a ditch or trench at the rear of the brewery, and along through orchards, past mansions, graveyards, and in fact all sorts of places.

A LITTLE ADVENTURE.

I noticed as we went along an old blown down house, and as we were halted for a few minutes curiosity got the better of me, and creeping over, I lifted up the sacking on the window, and there I could see the serious faces of French and English officers scanning maps and drawing lines, etc.—it truly was a strange picture.

ASSAULTED BY A BRITISH SOLDIER.

"Advance," and away we sloped through these awful trenches. Rifle fire was going on all around, but we did not even know where the enemy's trenches were, but we struggled on silently. The rum I mentioned before began to tell on one of the boys, and he became very nasty and started shouting, so was placed under arrest, and I was the poor unfortunate who, with a private, had to stay and bring him along. He was a real rotter of the worst type, and gave us a lot of trouble. I tried every way to bring him along quietly, but it was no good—he wanted to fight, so started on me. I gave him a bit of a screw of the arm, but the rotter took out his clasp knife, and in the little "scramble" that we had he took off the top of my third right finger—hence the blood on this page. You will have to excuse the writing, as I am under very difficult circumstances to write this up to-day.

COMRADES IN ARMS.

What a night we had! The French whom we relieved, filed out of their places and as they went would grip you by the hand and say "Bon soir, comrade." We had all our section huddled together (about 50 of us), in a long trench, and half sitting and half lying tried to rest and wait until daylight. No wonder I pray for daylight! As soon as it became light enough to look around I, in a crouching position, tried to find out where we were. What a scene of complete desolation— half-blown-down houses, stray farm gear and stacks of bricks blown about, and lines and lines of trenches in a ruddy-coloured soil, and everywhere the little wooden crosses right beside your own quarters, with the strange words that told of the result of these battles of late for the protection of La Bassee Canal.

DEAD GERMANS.

A little to the left of my loophole I strolled, and risking my head (again curious), I peered over the parapet and there lay, face downwards, crowds of bluey-grey coated Germans, and quite near, the well-cut uniform of an officer. I could not say how long they have been there, but judging by the way they are lying and the smell I should say they have been there a week or more. The enemy's trench is just about 20 yards in front, and a lot of railway trucks in front give them good head cover, which they make ample use of. While I am sitting in this bit of a hole writing up this the word has just come along, "Jolly Thompson has bowled one of them over." Everybody was laughing at the Germans risking themselves, but they are unaware the English have relieved the French yet. When they do they will keep well in hand. It is bitterly cold and foggy. I don't feel in the mood for writing, and this finger makes it very uncomfortable, so will try and get a new bandage put on and have another chat to you later.

2 p.m. — Have been away since 11 a.m. in charge of a party to take a comrade (Edmondson), out of action. The one who was shot in the eye, the bullet going right through, and he presents a horrible sight. I bandaged him up as best I could, and after a great struggle in the trench, we got as far as the church, 2 miles, when the poor chap breathed his last. We took the body to the Red Cross hospital, where we left him laid out ready to be given a soldier's burial. While

there, I got my finger tied up. It is a lot easier, and as you can see, there is not so much blood about.

## THE DEAD AND DYING.

Our trenches have not presented the most pleasant sight—wounded and dying men all over the place. When I was coming along, a reserve man (married, with three children) fell, and it was only a matter of minutes before he "went West." The firing line is right through the Canal and railway line, and to give you an idea of how close we are, one half of the train is behind our trenches, while the other half belongs to the Germans. Things have been very lively with snipers, but the artillery is well away in the distance, and the distant booming of big guns can be heard. When I was taking our comrade to the hospital we had to go through what was once a village—Oh what a sight!—dead pigs, horses, cows, rotting away in the streets. The houses (or what used to be), blown to atoms, and in one big house I went in all the dinner has gone blue-moulded, telling of the hasty retreat by the occupants.

## TRAGIC SIGHTS.

To-day has been a grey day in the trenches, but I am still merry and bright, and hope to carry all this experience right through. One of our boys crawled out to a German officer's body and went through his pockets and got English, French and German gold, a. beautiful gold watch, and several letters. All these things have to be handed over to the officer in charge, as looting in the Army is punished very severely.

The scene right in front to-day is not at all appetising—dead, dead everywhere —the green coats of the Germans mixed up with the red trousers of the French, making a real picture battlefield. The ground immediately behind is all mounds with little wooden crosses which tell their silent tales. With all this around one, it is wonderful how a person can keep up his spirits, but you never think it may be your chance next, and thank the Lord you don't. These trenches have been kept by the French for the past three weeks, so you can perhaps imagine the state of them with no sanitary arrangements, etc.!

## THE AWFUL TRENCHES.

Saturday, December 12th.—At the .station—or rather what used to be the railway station of Givenchy. Yesterday we finished up very disastrously for our company. We lost something like 15 killed and wounded. The night was cold and raining, and pitch dark. I had four sentries to keep. We could only see about a yard in front, so kept an occasional shot going to let them know we were not asleep. At 5 a.m. we were stood to and got ready for leaving, as we are to take up quarters in "support," which happens to be a brewery about two miles from the firing line. At daylight we were ordered "File on," and if 1 kept writing for hours I could not picture to you the awfulness of those terrible trenches —mud and water up to our boot tops, and slipping and sliding with this heavy pack, and bad hand, it was no easy job. At last, after coming through fields, houses and even churchyards (where they have had to remove bodies to allow these trenches to be dug), we arrived at the brewery, the owner of which was evidently (by the correspondence I could see lying about), a member of the French Parliament. His house was beautifully furnished even to luxuriousness, but we trampled in over beautiful carpets with all this mud and slush—it was too dreadful. As l am writing these lines the enemy have started shelling the village and the whistle of shells overhead tells I must find safer quarters in the cellar or something. Half rations yesterday, and to-day nothing— only a little bit of chocolate from the tuck box. The shells are moving towards here, so will be off to the shelter of the brewery cellars.

## ORDERED BACK TO THE TRENCHES.

8 p.m.—We were getting things ready for a good rest in 'the brewery, but were ordered back to the trenches urgently, where we were placed in the "support " trench some 10 or 15 yards behind the firing line. We had just taken off our packs when they started off at top—rifles, rapid firing, bombs going, artillery booming, and now all the all-too-familiar sound of battle,

but evidently we sounded too strong, as the French with their crack artillery had delivered some well-directed shells into their trenches.
I have had no sleep for over two nights so will spread my oil sheet on dear old mother earth, and roll over and try and have 40 winks; good-night.

(To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 25 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

### LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

Near Givenchy.

Sunday, December 13th.—2 a.m. In "support" trendies. I had just put my oil sheet down and had intended having 40 winks, when the enemy suddenly opened full blaze on us, so off went all the noise again, the flash of the rifles lighting up the sky, and the artillery doing their bit. "Stand to" — so I jumped up and put an extra hundred rounds on, and "Fix bayonets and await orders!" During the waits I always oil up the bolt and get ready for action in case of a "jamb." After a good set-to, all got quiet again, and the order "Stand down, and carry on as usual." but I could not sleep so read over my letters again, and had just started by the aid of a candle the mater sent me, to write a letter, when I was ordered to take four men down to the brewery and get kit and rifles belonging to the boys who had "gone West," and hand them over to the ration party's cart. What an awful tramp through this mud and slush, fully two miles, wet through and feet feeling as if they did not belong to me. Anyway, to cut matters short, we duly executed our commission and arrived back at my dug-out well played out, so 1 lighted a candle and here I am now half-past two on Sunday morning, talking to you all, who I hope and trust will be snugly tucked away between two white sheets, having a glorious sleep. Good luck to you!
My mail included two pair of beautiful socks, and I may say 1 am wearing a pair now. I have "quietly," against regulations, got my boots off and a nice thick, new, warm pair of socks on, so my feet have begun to feel as if they have not left me altogether.

DOWN THE "DRAIN."

9 p.m.—Just returned from drawing rations. The "drain" was not nearly so bad to-night, the boys have been at work and have been placing bricks and straw, etc., and have greatly improved on it. On arriving back, played out I might mention, I had the startling news "The Germans intend making a big attack" We are well prepared for them, heaps of troops in "support" and reserve. The firing line has been strengthened both in head cover and men, and here we are to sleep with bayonets fixed beside us tonight, with 300 rounds each, so I wonder what move this night will bring forth.
Midnight.—.Just come off sentry—cannot sleep. The enemy have been very quiet, so this great attack they are leaving rather late unless they are awaiting their favourite time, just before dawn. The night is very dark and drizzling with rain—one of those cheerless kind of nights that gives you the "'blues," but when I cannot sleep 1 always light a candle in my dug-out, and put the oil sheet well around to exclude the light from the enemy, and either write some letters or have a chat in this old diary of mine. After I have finished this I mean to try and patch a few holes in my dug-out.

ACCURATE BRITISH GUNNERY.

Monday, December 14th.—Same trench. —in the old brickyard—daylight. We "stood to" at 5 a.m., but the daybreak appeared, and nothing to report. I had very little sleep—spent most of the morning clearing mud out of the trench and putting bricks down to make walking

easier. From 10 till 11 this morning our artillery were very active. About a mile away along the railway line you could see about 30 Germans drawing coal from a railway truck. This was reported to the artillery officer in the trench, and he said "1 will just stop that relief party." After taking the range and a little tale on the 'phone, a loud bang, and oh, what a sight! Poor wretches, the shell must have landed right in the truck. There were legs and arms, coal and wood all mixed up in the air—truly an awful sight.

USE OF DUM-DUMS.

The airmen reported big massing of troops at La Bassee. We either expect them to make an attack on us here, or a big retirement, to a strong fortified position. We know they have been hard at work. I personally think they will choose the latter course. We had two very strange casualties to-day. A young chap named Gregory has been missing for about three days, and one of the boys having wandered around the old trench, found the poor devil with the top of his head and his face blown clean off, showing clearly the work of these rotten Germans in using those awful bullets called "dum-dums." We put his body on a stretcher, and after taking his valuables (if any), and his personal belongings, also his "dead meat ticket" (the number disc around his neck), he was given a soldier's burial, Captain Fisher reading a few lines, and he is now at rest just at the back of the trench with a long line of French to keep him company.

The other casualty was a reserve man, called up and only joined a couple of days. The relief man called him for sentry, but got no answer, and rolled him over, grumbling at him not waking at once, and was astonished to find him dead shot through the head. How he came to be shot in his dug-out we are at a loss to know.

DRAFT OF SPECIAL RESERVE.

5 p.m. — This afternoon has been very quiet. After a "bully" stew, with several onions and some rice from a deserted house, I had a right royal sleep of about two hours, and felt much better after the rest. We had a draft of special reserve join us, some 110 men, to replace our casualties, and also some 200 Territorials (4th Suffolk Regiment I believe). This is their first time under fire, and one is put between every three of us, so as to give them any little hint, etc. Just warned to take charge of the ration party, so have to do those two miles along the slush and mud again. I can assure you I am dreading the next few hours to come, but needs must and orders are orders, so that is the way I look at it and try and keep smiling.

ANOTHER TRAMP THROUGH THE "DRAIN."

11.30 p.m.—Have not long returned. The rain we had last night has not improved the state of that horrible two miles—we simply dragged one leg after the other through the slush. At several places along the route you have to dash for it as the enemy have, as we call it, "got them set." Our feet about ten times the size of normal owing to this mud sticking on, you can imagine us trying to run! Well, we arrived (33 strong, never lost anyone) at the church, where I was to meet the mule cart by arrangement and draw the rations. Then after a brief spell we started to do that dreaded two miles again, so you can well imagine I arrived feeling fagged out, and after handing over, got back to my hole in the earth, and threw myself down, but although tired out I could not sleep, so lighted my candle, and putting the blanket around my shoulders and pegging down the oil sheet on account of the light, here I am writing up the old diary! It is now half-past 12, things very quiet—the usual crackle of the sentry's rifle, and the glare from the enemy's flare-lights every now and again, is all that tells of warfare.

SPREADING QUICKLIME ON THE DEAD BODIES.

One of the boys has an interesting job on to-night. He has to go out in front and spread quicklime and some disinfectant powder over the German bodies, which I may say, are beginning to "talk" fairly loudly. The French do not take the same pains over sanitary conditions as we do, and ever since taking over these trenches we have been hard at work to try and bring them into a more pleasant smelling state, and have used huge quantities of lime

and disinfectant. As you can imagine, this step is one of grave importance, and it is only these strict measures that keep all these pestilences away from the British Army— at any rate they have done so up to the present.

I think this is the news of the day, so will get down to it and have 40 winks. Good-night all.

Tuesday, December 15th.—Same old place. "Stood to" at 4 a.m. The morning cold, drizzling and miserable. I had a good rest last night, and in fact had

a sleep. For breakfast we had some bacon and cheese, and then I went round and helped sort out the mail bag, and received a parcel of tobacco and cigarette papers, some chocolate, and a pair of mittens. The tobacco and papers I gave to the boys, who greatly appreciated them, and needless to say, the mittens and chocolate were greatly appreciated by "yours truly." Afterwards I went down this rotten drain about a mile for "pawny" (water). I was lucky, as I had just returned when one of the boys was wounded, shot through the leg and shoulder by a German sniper. After great exertion I got back with a candle and a jug of water. I cleaned out my dug-out, shook out the blanket and made things a bit ship-shape.

DEATH OF CAPTAIN FISHER, D.S.O.

At about 11 a.m.—Our Captain Fisher, in charge of our second half of the company, was caught on the top of the head by a sniper, and died almost immediately, This is our ninth officer. He was greatly liked by the members of his company, and his death has caused quite a gloom amongst the boys. After taking his personal belongings off and wrapping him in his blanket, he was buried just behind the firing line, and on the grave was placed a French wreath and a big wooden cross with the words "Captain H. Fisher, 1st Manchester Regiment. Killed in action, December 15th, 1914." Here is another to the long list.

SNIPERS BUSY.

Two or three have had very narrow escapes to-day. One I may mention passed along our trench and, a little excited, said to me. "Nearly had blighty tea" (meaning English tea). This is a favourite expression amongst the lads, and means getting wounded and sent to England. While he was going for water a sniper caught him just above the shoulder, and ripped his coat and jacket but never cut the flesh, and to use his own words "Gawd blimey, another 'arf inch and I would be well away for 'Blighty England.'" Quite a lot have been sniped at to-day, and the above is quite common talk amongst the boys. I only wish I could write the different ways they have of talking, as we have representatives of every district in Britain, and you can imagine we hear some funny talk at times. Our sappers and miners have been hard at work all day making wooden loopholes and filling sandbags to improve our firing line. The artillery has been less active to-day, and the sniper, in fact, seems to be having a day off. Our menu for lunch was "bully" stew with some potatoes and onions, and after having a wander around the firing line and writing a couple of post-cards, I burrowed myself down and had a good couple of hours in dreamland. The weather has been showery on and off all day—just enough to keep the trenches in a state of muckiness.

8 p.m.—Sitting by the light of my candle. It got dark to-day about 3.30 p.m. I am corporal of the guard, so have the watch placed on the side of my dugout, and underneath it the list of names and times of the men on relief, and a candle in an old basin reflecting the light on the watch and names. The relief is every hour, and the sentry has to report before he goes on duty. The rain is just coming on a little harder. "Shag" Cooper has put the coke into the glow and is going to make a canteen of clean tea. The night so far is dark, very dark, and the usual sentry's crack, crack is all that can be heard.

BIG MOVEMENT PROJECTED.

9.30 p.m.—Just had a chat to the "platoon" commander. This is the scheme for to-morrow—will give it to you as it is on orders. To-morrow morning at 7 a.m., the Allies will heavily bombard the enemy's trenches, when the French and No. 2 company of the Manchesters, at a given signal of their rockets, will charge down and occupy the trenches on the right. All this

will be observed by the colonel, who will be on top of a brick stack, and if he thinks fit, will be putting up three red and one green rockets, and order a general advance of the trenches for a half-mile front.
These are the orders, so will not comment on the scheme now, but, hope tomorrow (God willing), to write you all about it. We are in constant state of readiness, and have to turn in with full equipment on and rifle with bayonet fixed. Well, this is all my doings of to-day, so will turn in for a little rest. Goodnight all. (To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 26 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## DESPERATE FIGHTING.

Wednesday, December 16th.—At 5 a.m. we got the order "stand to." "Breakfast, and rifles cleaned and bayonets fixed before 8 o'clock!". We made some tea and had some bread and jam, and then got going at our rifles. At 7.45 a.m. we reported "All well," and stood to awaiting the allotted hour, 8 a.m. The morning was dull but fine, yet inclined to be misty.
How am I to start and write you up tonight, my dear little diary, after all that has happened. Well, here goes. I will do my best to picture to you the events of the day up to now, 5 p.m. On the tick of 8, three big guns boomed out, and then what noise! Pom, pom, pom, one after the other, the screech of the shells overhead, the white smoke across the enemy's lines, then another boom of the loudest, and here and there where the shells had hit the earth, they would blow pieces of wood, earth, etc., skywards. Well, this bombardment, with the accompaniment of rapid firing from this long line and the crack, crack of the machine guns, made a noise that one would never forget. As I was in "support" (the first time since we have taken the trenches), I was partly free to have a look around, and will endeavour to tell you what I saw from an elevated position (but well covered). With the aid of a pair of field glasses it was my luck to witness a modern battle in progress. When the bombardment was at its height, on my right I could plainly see the French, like flies, climbing over the parapet of the railway line, and then rushing towards the enemy's lines—what a charge! the steel bayonets glittering as they charged on, and here and there a dark form would drop from the line. Will they do it? I felt myself all excitement. Then the Germans (as usual), clambering out of their trenches, used their legs to good advantage, but in ones, twos and threes they dropped, and the ones who did escape must consider themselves extremely lucky. In the rear of the firing party little groups of men (there appeared to me about 25), would clamber over that railway line in extended order, run about 15 to 20 yards and then drop down for a few seconds. Altogether there were 5 lines I could see, and during their short rest on the ground they would work like madmen and make what we call "head cover."
While this party were there under heavy rifle fire, their ranks being cut shorter every few minutes, the German gunners found the exact spot, and the white smoke over the heads of those brave French told the too dreadful tale of what was happening. When these little parties moved on to the main trench, the dark forms lying there, and numerous too, told only too well how deadly those few yards had been won for France. I must tell you before I forget, that the French have a new uniform made of a bluish-grey cloth closely resembling the Germans' in

colour, but the coat is the same as with the picturesque and historical red pants and blue coat that has many times made the nations of the world quiver.

## "A HUGE PICTURE SHOW."

While standing watching these operations the thought struck me of something being arranged for some huge picture show, but then again my surroundings made me realise the grim earnestness of it all. I will try and picture to you the scene from where I stood. In front and behind, railway line with rails turned skywards; the brick stacks red but "redder" in places where shells had made themselves felt, and a little road of leafless trees, and every second one most humanlike with broken limbs, from the brow of a hill green as if it had had its crop taken off; to the left, amidst a mangel field and on the skyline, the railway, and beyond, in relief again, the dark sky and the half-blown-down houses, while here and there the smoke from the burning homes, and still further back the tall chimneys of factories issuing their big columns of smoke as if regardless of all this noise and turmoil.

This is the picture that had met my eyes a few minutes ago, now in that quiet mangel field that was, were numerous French working like madmen deepening every moment their trench to give security to those brave ones who came through that awful storm of lead. The green patch on the hill now besprinkled with black ferns, told all too well that somebody's darlings had paid their soldier's honour. That green patch I could not help thinking, seemed to me like a hill that had been cleared of all timber and fired, and the blackened logs remaining, with the green spring grass, made a picture so familiar to any New Zealander. But those blackened logs were not of trees, but all trunks of men who but a few hours ago were living!

## FRENCH SUCCESS.

The order came along the line "French advanced, captured three trenches with complete success." We were all to charge this morning, but owing to the great success of the French it has altered the plan somewhat, but we were all ready, and I personally was stripped of such things as overcoat, muffler, mittens, etc.—they are not wanted to keep one warm when things like this are going on. On our left the native regiment (Blucher Rifles), made an attack and captured two sapheads from the Germans. Their casualties I believe were one officer killed, one wounded, and several natives.

I think the natives behave most gallantly, and the enemy are growing to fear these little "black devils." The line of trenches we hold are very strong. By the French completing the line this morning I think we will be able to stand any onslaught that may be brought against us. What I have written took only until about midday to get through, and at that hour the cannonading ceased and got down to normal again. The boys got to work getting their onions and potatoes ready for their good old "bully" stew. These trenches are funny places, and although playing with death every few seconds, one cannot help laughing.

## DEVIL-MAY-CARE TOMMIES.

While l am writing this up three of the lads in the next dug-out are singing "Get out and get under," and several rag-time melodies, while further down a real comedian is making the boys laugh heartily with his acting and singing "Take me back to Yorkshire." Truly 1 am having a wonderful experience, and if the Fates are only kind, what I have gone through could not be bought for bags of gold. During the night one of our dare-devil boys crawled out to the dead body of a German, and secured his helmet and several other curios, and when daylight appeared several were doing a little comicopera acting "a la Kaiser" up and down the lines. I may say this helmet has been given to me, and I am only awaiting a favourable opportunity to send it home.

## OFFICER'S HIGH TRADITIONS.

There is a little incident that almost seems like fiction, but I can vouch for its truth. A little on the right one of the boys crawled out to the dead body of a German officer of high rank, and taking his sword off as a curio, he brought it back into the trench. Our Captain Fisher got to

hear of it, and the private was given a very nice lecture as regards the honour of an officer's sword, and was told never to do a thing like that again; also he was to go back and take the sword and in some way make it fast to the German officer's body. It all seems tawdry, as that same officer who ordered this was shot at daylight by a German sniper! It's a strange, strange world we live in. After all the excitement, the afternoon remained very quiet. At 4 p.m. I was given a party to go with for ammunition, and that dread drain had to be gone through again, but we duly delivered our 30,000 rounds after much work through these slushy places. The night was very dark and dull, and nothing of importance, but the sentries were on the alert for a counter-attack, and several times we had to all "Stand to," but they were all what the Tommies call "a wash-out." There was a small attack to be done at 5 a.m., but our evergreen officer could not get through with the saphead, so this too was a "'wash-out."

BILLETED AT BETHUNE.

Thursday, December 17th.—Same trench, "Stood to" at 4 a.m.—bayonets fixed, and had to await that long, long wait until daylight, which made its appearance with a dull grey sky. The snipers (ours), are very busy, but otherwise all is quiet. Breakfast, cheese and bacon, and after that rifle cleaning, and then we had the pleasant news we are to be relieved by the Connaught Rangers, and marched to Bethune to a billet. All is merry and bright, and we have been having quite a comic-opera performance by the ring of East End comedians. Shag Cooper— l wish I could write his history as he is "some" kid, and what he has not gone through as regards devilment would not be worth doing. In the middle of all this concert I was warned—seem fated for that old drain—to take a relief party to the church with tools and spare equipment, etc. This took me nearly the whole of the morning, and I arrived back just in time for Jock's "bully" stew. He had mixed with the onions and potatoes some rice—the Lord knows where he got it from but it tasted very good, and would have been perfect had not Jock done "the old woman's trick"—talking too much and letting it get "caught."' Anyway, it was very nice. I received a big mail and had a quiet read for an hour. Read the latest paper, but the news seems so mixed up I seem to have lost the thread of the whole thing. The word has just come along the line we are to be relieved at 3 p.m.

THE FRENCH ARTILLERY.

3.30 p.m.—Sitting already dressed awaiting our relief party. Ever since 2.45 p.m. there has been a terrific artillery duel, and the screech and thud of the bursting shells, shaking our little dugouts, still keep up their deafening noise. The French have beautiful artillery. As I write this, guns are going almost quick-fire, and the shells landing with wonderful precision right in amongst the enemy's trenches. The awfulness over there I cannot picture, and although enemies I felt sorry for them. The long range guns of the Germans have just come into action. Yon do not hear the actual report of the gun itself, but the loud screeching of the shells overhead, and then a tremendous bang, and you will hear the boys say "That's a 'Jack Johnson.'"

Just received the delightful order "Stand to ready to file out quickly," so will have a talk to you later, I hope in a billet at Bethune.

9 p.m.—Girl's [sic] Collegiate School, Bethune. About 4 p.m. we got the delightful order to file on—down that fearful drain again, but somehow it did not seem nearly so far. We landed at the old church, and although several stray shots were humming about, we called the roll-call and were "all present." The march to this place was without incident, but a dreary walk with weary and tired legs—we dragged one leg after the other—and reached here about 8.30 p.m. On our march from the trenches we passed through two little villages, the first named Givenchy and the second Beuvry. Both places were in darkness save for a little light from the cellar windows which told of the frightened people inside trying to make themselves safe from the enemy's shells. The billet we are in to-night is a great place, and we have just got the order "All parade to-morrow at noon for a hot bath" — so I am looking forward to it and

longing for that bath. I feel quite happy although tired, and am sitting up in my bunk, which consists of an oil sheet on the floor, my boots off, and half-wet blanket over me, we are well away from the danger zone, so here's for a good old restful sleep.

(To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 27 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

### STILL MERRY AND BRIGHT.

Friday, December 18th.—In the convent school, Bethune.—9 a.m.—Here we are again, and still merry and bright. Had such a lovely sleep, with nothing on my mind such as "Stand to," "changing," "Enemy advancing," and such like, in fact I had a peaceful sleep until daylight, then my next pleasure—a shave mind you! The shave was no pleasure until it was over—and then a wash after 14 days! You people will never understand that mental feeling one has after a shave and a wash, and even your hair brushed. Breakfast consisted of bacon and cheese and a quarter ration of bread, but we were clean, so what matters. I gave my pack a little clean up, and then we were ordered to get ready for the bath.

### A BATH AND CLOTHES STEAMED.

9 p.m.—Most of the boys have got down to it, and the chatting is not so great, so I will try and finish my doings of this lovely day. About 11 the rain came on fairly heavily. We fell in at noon and marched along a side street to the English hospital, where we were to have our bath. This place (Bethune) is a fair sized town, and on the march down I saw a fine building (the Opera House), some really well-built shops and also some beautiful residences, but the town was very quiet, only the poorer people about—those who could get away, were well out of the danger zone. These continental towns are noted for their wide streets, beautiful walks and drives under the trees. Well Bethune is no exception, but oh! what a change from the gaily dressed crowds in the streets there! You would see khaki-clad soldiers everywhere, the transport wagons, hundreds of them, reaching for miles along the streets, and the Indian natives in their strange dress of khaki mingled with the French, made a queer picture. The town has not escaped the German shells, and the large holes in walls and the quantity of broken glass about are all too common now. Well, let's get back to the hospital. We were marched into the courtyard and were met by a medical officer, who said "First 40 file on upstairs." We were conducted by a native into a room where stood a pile of red blankets, and told to strip off everything, leaving anything valuable in your caps, and tie our clothes into a loose bundle and give them to one of the natives. This done, we all marched into the passage in "native" dress, and a comedian started singing "I want to see more of you." We were directed to the bathrooms—how lovely—two to a bath, beautiful enamel baths, and as I lad a large piece of strong carbolic soap, I spent a glorious 20 minutes. This over, and feeling gloriously fresh, we got back to our room and put on our red blankets, squatted native fashion, some paring their toe-nails, etc., and awaited the return of oar clothes. "Here they come," and about a dozen natives with arms full of steaming clothes threw them on to the floor. To look at, they were not prepossessing, and I thought they were wet through, but it was a delusion, and after a general sort out and shaking each article, we found to our surprise they were bone dry. Getting dressed and feeling clean—what a feeling. Nobody can ever

understand what this is like unless they have been through it all. On going downstairs again we were to await the arrival of the other half of our company from the “order of the bath.”
The fumigator was outside. It looked like a big engine of the oldest type, with a big circular boiler arrangement. Into this our clothes are put and steamed up to a big temperature, then dried by a special process. When all this is over they are supposed to be rid of all vermin—I only hope so!

## CHILD-LIKE INDIANS.

During our wait I amused myself by watching the antics of the native troops, some 200, who were billeted in the basement of the hospital. What a strange sight and this in France, it looked so Eastern. In one corner near a little fire there were some three or four squatting down as only natives can, making their favourite “"gepatties” in the little copper and brass bowls. In the centre a few were evidently issued with some new “Burberry” looking overcoats, and they were trying them on and handling them almost child-like. One with leather cuffs was quite “it.” He swanked about as if he was “some” fellow, but it was laughable to see a poor native who had evidently commandeered a boy's pants and vest. He got the pants on all right over those spindle shanks of his, but seemed at a loss to understand why that vest was so tight. It must have been most uncomfortable, as it was almost the shape of a woman's waist, but he seemed satisfied in his attempt to imitate the white man. Along a little gutter an old chap with a little mirror was trimming his beard and hair, and in the other corner around a bucket with the top out, and a fire of two sticks (the native seems to get a fire when others would fail), sat about 20 natives—I said sat, but I mean squatted, in a circle, and you could see the poor devils felt the cold the way they huddled together. They were all smoking, and seemed evidently happy by the amount of laughter that came from that quarter. It was a strange sight, especially to see it in this country. This hospital is a huge place, and in the courtyard stood some 30 or 40 Red Cross wagons and motors, which by the mud-stained appearance had been doing all too much work near those dreaded trenches. “Fall in,” and we were all marched back to our school, all feeling happy, clean and' merry and bright. We had some rather fine stew for dinner and then a “chin up” (talk).

## A WASH OUT.

Saturday, December 19th.—Still in the school at Bethune. 8.30 a.m. We “stood to” at 4.30 a.m., and ordered “all blankets to be folded and all packed ready to move off at 5.30 a.m.” All was bustle, but to use a soldier's expression, it was a “'wash out,”' and these “stand to’s” are only in the event of something big happening. It has just become daylight, and I am writing this on the window-case of the fourth storey of this huge building. Looking out it is almost like a barrack square—the lines of horses tied up under the cover of the communicating verandahs, the continuing blaze of myriads of camp fires with the khaki-clad figures going to and fro, a big church steeple, and here and there dotted about the skyline, huge chimney stacks that tell the tale of some big manufacturing works, and they are all smoking away, so evidently working. The morning although fine was decidedly dull and grey. The big pools of water lay about telling of rain that will cause a lot of discomforts to those poor devils in the trenches.

## HEAVY RAIN.

Outside it is raining in torrents and looking extremely miserable, but we are lucky to be under cover. All leave is cancelled, so we are in this great big barrack of a place all packed up ready to move off at a moment’s notice. The boys are amusing themselves by singing, some gambling, other writing, and the comedian of the crowd playing the fool, so you can imagine there is a good old row going on from these 300 men in one room!
Just received my mail—letter from the mater and a nice cake and chocolate, candles and matches from Mr and Mrs Prestwich, of Hove. I can tell you these little presents touch one up. The boys were highly delighted with the cake - iced over, and the wording was rather

good. Here it is: On the top was a battle-axe, then—"To Cecil Humphries, S.E., 207, of the 'kill-quick and oft-times.' Wishing you the best of luck in the trenches." I cut it up among the boys, and they were highly delighted. I sat down at once and sent them a letter straight away. All the afternoon I have put in writing letters and postcards to some of the dear friends of mine who have written me such nice and cheering letters. The boys are having an impromptu concert to-night, but I could not go, having arranged with the guard on stairs to sneak into the officers' quarters and have a real hot bath "on my own."

8 p.m. — Just made down my bed, which consists of some shavings of paper, three New Zealand weeklies, and an oil sheet, with one blanket and a pack for a pillow, so with heart full of thanks I am going to have a real good rest.

Sunday, December 20.—Still in the convent. Here we are again. Fancy, we were allowed to sleep in, and never got up until 7.30 a.m. It was really light, and we much appreciated someone's kindness in not getting us out on the "stand to" business at daylighit. I got up and had a good wash, then the order came along "C.O.'s inspection for 10.30 a.m. Well, all was bustle to get ready for the eyes of the colonel, packs packed on and all got ready. We all filed into the big courtyard of this school, and after the usual army routine in the drill, up all stood to attention while the colonel, with the usual followers—captains, lieutenants, majors and suchlike, wandered in and out of the lines finding fault here and there, and then we were dismissed, so after cleaning up our quarters here I am at noon writing up this diary again. All the boys are hard at work with their letter-card writing for Christmas Greetings to their folks at home. The rumour of the bombardment of the English towns is all too true—have just read a Daily Mail of the 17th, but we have great faith in our navy, and when the boys get going properly I think "Davy Jones' locker" will be pretty full up.

(To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 28 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

## HUMPHRIES WINS THE D.C.M.

Tuesday, December 22.—1n the remains of a home at Givenchy, by a coke fire. Room full of natives (Sikhs) —a candle, and here I am. 3 a.m.

How am I to relate my experiences since noon on Sunday I am at a loss to know. Well, here goes. After our inspection by the colonel on Sunday morning we all started to get together our dinner, but the order came "Fall in at once —

blankets to be left behind" (something doing!) So in a very short time a thousand men were massed in the courtyard, and with the quick movement of "the Red hat-band Brigade" (General Staff officers), there was something doing! All ready, and off we went through the town of Bethune, where we had had out brief rest, then on to the village of Beuvry. We could plainly see the shells, and the booming of the big guns told us we were "for it." We were marched or rather forced marched, and all along the rapid despatch carriers with their urgent messages would pass along the line. It was not until my friend Webster came along with a message and spotting me, gave me the following startling news: "Enemy broken through the natives. Captured small village. Moving towards Canal!" As soon as we heard this our packs seemed to get lighter and we all had our fighting blood started. On we passed, then we came

across the artillery gun reinforcements at the gallop! Along that slushy road at top, a quick swerve, and a few sharp words of command, round about the gun into position, the lamp alongside quickly lighting up the observers up a tree or building, and then the word “fire,” the big boom, and another message on its way. Along we went, and if I live to be a thousand years old will I ever forget that sight. The poor natives wounded, some slightly, others, poor wretches, with arms off, hands off, legs off. These were on the other side of the Canal, and it was a sight I could not picture to you by words or from a mere pen. Then the French seemed to me (about 500 or more of them), absolutely in retreat like a lot of lost sheep, making South as we were getting a move on as quickly as possible the other way! All were by this time fully aware we were in for a good “to-do,” but strength seems to come to one when it is a case of have to. A little further we came across a company of “little Johnnies”" (the Ghurkas). They were mud up to their eyes, and by their outward appearance had had a time of it. They were about waist deep in the Canal, washing their rifles to try and get them back to working order again. The other bank of that Canal will always remain a dreadful memory.

## TWO MURDEROUS SHELLS.

We were being pushed along with all speed until our arrival at the brewery, where we were told off in single file and worked from a big factory ready to go across a large field to take a small village at the point of the bayonet. As we were getting ready, the enemy spying our massing in the yard, put two well-directed shells plump into the yard, and oh! the sight! It is useless for me to try and picture the horror of it all, but I counted 7 beside wounded, where that dreaded shrapnel had taken effect. “File on,” and across that field at the double—run 25 yards, and then a breather, and on again, all the while the shrapnel making our line smaller every few yards, but on we went until the outskirts of the village were reached—then another breather, and, “Fix bayonets and charge!”—and now this will have to stop. I must, if God looks over me, tell yon the rest\by word of mouth. Suffice it is to say that we captured the village, and the heaps of dead of our enemy in hundreds told of the bayonet's deadly work. On we went, blood fully up! The first trench we took—up again, and the second—then again the third—and again the fourth, but our ranks were getting weaker, so we retired into the third and made a stand for it. Fighting like hell, we were going to try and make a general advance to absolutely rout the enemy in the morning, before daylight. My duty was to take charge of 10 men in the trench and guard all the communications—a very risky job!—and to bayonet anyone who came along! Then came the order to advance in a creeping position as near as possible to the enemy's trenches, ready for the charge. On our left the other half of the company could be seen plainly to us by the light of the two straw stacks lighted by the enemy. The Germans meanwhile by the aid of those dreadful night lights, spotted our position, and then a machine gun opened on that thin khaki line, and oh the sight!

## CAPTAIN MORTALLY WOUNDED.

The “supports” woke up to take the place of the fallen, and taking advantage of whatever cover we could, we crawled along. Our commands now were done by a whisper from one to the other, and as a message came along I touched the one next to me and gave him the order—no reply, dead—touched the next —no reply, dead! Then 1 realised the position. Crawling along, and it was now just breaking daylight, I worked my way in some mysterious fashion over to where our captain was, and what should I find! Our captain shot through the head! I dragged him under cover, and then made the startling discovery that I was right under the very nose of the German trenches, but getting down under the screen of a communication trench I did my best to get the captain along, but he was too heavy. I took off my scarf and tied it round his legs, then putting my head through, tried to drag him along that narrow and mucky trench. I got him along a bit until I came to a body of a dead native, and it was too much for me. I couldn't get his 13 stone dead weight along, so I left him, and poor devil, long ere this he has breathed his last.

## SAVES A BROTHER TOMMY.

Going along the trench a comrade by the name of Mick Hunt, noticed me and said "Charlie, you won't leave me here will you"—he was lying in the open on the opposite side of a hawthorne fence, with his leg absolutely shattered. I had to fell the hedge with the butt of my rifle (under fire all this time), and getting him to put his arms around my neck, dragged him with his shattered limb into the trench. Then with him on my back we struggled along, stopping every now and again for a breath. I got him out safely, and after taking him to the shelter of a house, cut off his boots, socks and puttees and did my best with a bandage. What a terrible leg—the bone was powdered and presented an awful sight. I had just got him finished and laid alongside the building to await the arrival of the stretcher-bearers, when another poor devil staggered along. I gave him a lift to a building near at hand, and his wounds were also gaping ones in the leg, and partly disembowelled. I got some wads of wool and did my best for him and gave him a little ease until the stretcher-bearers came for him. After this my time was taken up for the next hour in doing small wounds, such as wrists, shoulders, etc.—and the road, what a sight! Men limping along and staggering. I got back to the firing line, and had no sooner arrived there when we were opened on by the enemy, rapid fire and the booming of the guns—it was hell. We were expecting a reinforcement up at 2 p.m. ready for an attack at 2.30, and we were to hold on at all costs. The battle raged and raged, getting worse and worse. Two o'clock came—can we stand! No sight of the reinforcements, it was awful. The enemy broke through in several places, but we drove them out again and again at the point of the bayonet. 2.30, and no relief, then the enemy put all their forces against us on our right, our weakest place, and we did our best until 3 p.m., when we were forced to retire.

## BRITISH FORCED TO RETIRE.

Will I ever forget that awful sight as we struggled along—no food and fighting continually for two days. The enemy opened their deadly shrapnel, and mowed some of our poor chaps down. The only way I can describe it—it was like a hot blast of wind from hell. How I got through it all God only knows, but arrived back with a whole hide, and on our way we met the reinforcements going up to keep the position. The whistle went to try and bring that scattered little army together. My section "E," usually 200 strong, could only muster 50 now, and there we stood, asking where so-and-so had gone, and so on. What a sight! I could never picture to you the dreadfulness of all this. I am minus my rifle and all my kit, so only have my ragged clothes I stand up in. We were marched off to the Brewery to rest for the night, and I believe go into a billet for some days to reorganise, as we only have two officers left out of 14. It seems awful, this dreadful waste of human life. Now I have several things myself to-day I have not mentioned, as I do not like "blowing my own horn," but all I have done is nothing to my discredit or anyone belonging to me. During the whole performance I have been hit three times (most marvellous)—once through the puttees, cutting completely to the sock— through the seat of my pants (this done while I was bandaging a wounded man on the field—it went right through my pants and under-pants and two shirts, and never even drew blood). The third was through my helmet, and only raised a lump on my head. I have been lucky, and all I can say is "Thank God."

It is now 5 a.m.—The reinforcements will be forming up now to regain those trenches we vacated.

## THE ROLL CALL

In the old school at Bethune—22-12-14. 8 a.m. When I stopped off my diary I am at a loss to know, but events have been going along so quickly that I cannot keep pace with the times. Anyway, as far as I remember we were in the Brewery at Givenchy. After the battle the roll call. Will I ever forget! The picture of the "Roll Call" when I was a child always used to appeal to me, and now to see it in reality—what a sight! "Fall in," and there we stood,

everybody looking at one another, and you could hear on all sides: "Where is so-and-so"—"Oh he is wounded," "He is killed," and so on—it was awful. For my part, there I stood out of my section. I only had another beside me—l2 out of 14 dead, wounded, or missing. I looked a pretty looking object, mud up to the eyes, knees out of my pants, and blood all over me; but it was a sad, sad "Roll Call."

TERRIBLE LOSSES.

"All mustered; how many, sergeant," called our only officer. "380 sir." We started off 1150 strong, and there we stood, truly the remnant of an army. After the roll call we stood around in little knots discussing the news of our late situation. I met my friend Aylward, and again he acted as God's good angel to me, and taking me to the native quarters, I had some very fine tea and something to eat, but after all the excitement I could not possibly sleep, so hung over a charcoal fire nearly all night. After the native officer got off the table he was using as a bed, and after a little dumb show that he wanted me to take his bed and blankets, I lay down and had a couple of hours, and got up very much refreshed. Most of the morning we watched the dozens of regiments arriving. The wounded kept up their stream of suffering—in ones, twos, and threes they arrived. My heart always goes out to these poor devils. I worked hard bandaging and doing what I could for them.

One of the London Scottish who was wounded in the arm got me to bandage it for him, and I gave him my diary to take to London, and post for me. All the day was taken up hanging about a battered looking crowd, until 5 p.m. when we fell in ready to be marched off, when I was warned to take over two German prisoners (snipers), who had been caught at the back of our line. One was a Prussian Guard, and the other 56th Infantry. Fixing bayonets, and with an escort of five men, we started off for our 8-mile march to Bethune. The poor devils—I gave them some cigarettes and biscuits and a drink of tea. We tried to do a talk, but it was hard to get one understood. Anyway, we arrived at Bethune, and I duly handed over my charges to the Military Authorities, and then retraced my steps, to our billet, the school, where I arrived dead beat, so spreading my coat on the floor I lay down and slept until the morning.

Wednesday, December 23.—At the school, Bethune. Rose 6 a.m. Weather dull. All the place is alive with troops— natives, Scots Guards, and all those handsome Guardsmen—-why, they did look fine. After a little breakfast we "fell in," and off we went on the march to our resting quarters. There was nothing of importance happened, but snow began to fall fairly thickly. We struggled along and arrived at a little village about 4 miles from Sylliers at noon, where we are billeted in a barn. After cooking our lunch and a little walk round, we turned into our straw beds in the afternoon and slept. (To be continued.)

*Otago Daily Times.* 29 May 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# SERGEANT HUMPHRIES, D.C.M.

## NEW ZEALANDER'S EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

## A VALUABLE RECORD.

Christmas Eve, December 24.—Slept until 7.30 a.m. Roll call 8 a.m., and then breakfast—bacon and eggs mind you, bacon and eggs. After eating I went along to headquarters office and sorted out our mail, but it was heart-rendering in the extreme, the parcels, letters, etc., in four heaps, "dead," "wounded," "hospital," and "alive." I am sorry to say the first three heaps were bigger than the mail for delivery.

"THANK GOD I AM BRITISH."

Parade was ordered for noon, and at 11.30 we were all dressed ready, and marched to a parade ground where the colonel (Colonel Strickland) gave us a short address and said how proud he was of us for the way we held out on Sunday and Monday last. After this was over General Watkins and staff arrived, and the old man drew us up in a square, and getting close to us gave us one of the most touching lectures or addresses I have ever heard. The poor old chap almost broke down when he ended with "Thank God I am British, and you are fighting a noble cause. I am proud of all you men." After three ringing cheers, real British ones at that, he saluted, and with his native escorts, rode off. PROMOTED SERGEANT.

We had a wait of about 10 minutes, when we were drawn to attention to receive General Carnegie, who also spoke with great praise of our work on Sunday and Monday last, but being a much younger man than General Watkins, his words did not carry so much weight. All this over, we marched back to billets and dismissed. During the afternoon my time was taken up in sorting out comforts, presents, etc., to the troops by the deal friends in England. The boys have loads and loads of things now. Tea consisted of bread, cheese and cocoa. After a chat I walked round to see my friend Webster. Landed "home"' just before 8 p.m., and had the pleasure of hearing my name called out from orders "14/000—Lance-co-poral Humphries promoted to sergeant, promotion to take place from this date." We have all been issued out with big fur coats, and look more like teddy bears than soldiers just now.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Midnight, December 25.—1 have just finished a letter to my mother, and here I am, all the boys asleep in this cowshed, and with the aid of two candles writing here. Outside the sound of voices, carol singers, but of—how strange—French voices, and in a quaint little French village on Christmas Day. Just as I write the bells are pealing out their joyous messages. The sheep in the next field and such noises are all of peace; but there comes the rub—every few minutes the booming of the great cannon tells the tale of the awfulness that is not many miles from here. Good-night, and a merry Christmas to you all. Christmas day, a.m.

Friday, December 25.—1 awoke at daylight this Christmas morning, but how strange all things are—the village church bells ringing out, the ground white outside, and here I am in a bed of straw, and in rags, but I am proud just the same of it all. For breakfast we had some pig's liver and bacon, and then went out to visit the sergeant of the Suffolk Regiment (who are territorials), that are attached to us. After the usual handshaking and Christmas greetings, and partaking of several spots, we strolled back to our cowshed, and on the way we met our quartermaster-sergeant, who took me into his store and rigged me out afresh, so what with new khaki suit, puttees, cap, and the mater's new underclothes, I will feel altogether quite up to date.

Saturday, December .26.—Still in the cowshed at Allonagne. The night was very cold, with an exceptionally hard frost, and our one blanket was hardly good enough, but we did not get moving until well on 8 o'clock. Had a cup of tea and a sausage from mother's tuck box, and after several routine orders were attended to I went up to the village with the bundle of clean clothes under my arm to find the house I had arranged a bath for 10 a.m. How quaint—in their presumably "best room," stood a great tub steaming with hot water, the little house stove in the centre of the room giving a cheerful glow, and after tempering the water down to the light heat I got in it and had a glorious bath for half an hour. After getting dressed with my new clothes throughout (the only things I had on second-hand were my boots), I tell you I walked out feeling quite contented with my little lot. Going back to my billet I put on a "Maconachie" dinner, which was very nice. I had several things to see to after lunch in connection with my section.

Sunday., December 27.—Still in the cowshed at Allonagne. Rose at 7 a.m. Morning broke cold and miserable. Had a little cheese and bread, then ordered on parade to be inspected by the colonel. This did not take very long, and we were dismissed for the day. I warmed up a

tinned dinner—very nice too! After issuing some more tobacco to the boys, sergeant Taylor and myself wended our way to that little French cafe, and spent the afternoon in the warmth and wrote several letters, in fact got my correspondence right up to date. After sipping several "cafe au laite," then at 7 p.m. we had a grilled pork chop with fried potatoes. I do not think I have ever tasted a better dinner, but I suppose it was after what we had had lately. About 7.30 p.m. we put on our furs and off towards our uncomfortable cowshed. We arrived and looked over the half door again, and gave a shudder, as we were rudely brought hack to warfare again. . Called the roll, then got down to it.

Monday, December 28.—At Allonagne— still in the cowshed. Was awakened a good many times in the night. A horse in the loose box next to our sleeping quarters suffered with kicking in his sleep, and the old plastered partition suffered accordingly! The big pieces of plaster as they came off scattered among the crowded soldiers—Sergeant Nicholson was hit, and his language was "hoarse" —or "coarse" I should say, but after about half an hour of this "bombardment" all was quiet, save for a hole some 4ft square that lets extra draught in, as if we have not had plenty already. The morning outside was wet, mucky and miserable. Rifle parade for the armourers' inspection. We fell in and were marched up the road and left our rifles, and then returned to our billets. This over, Sergeant Taylor produced a fine breakfast of some cheese and bacon, and then we got busy cleaning our equipment of all the trench mud and bloodstains, etc., ready for the commanding officer's parade at noon. Sharp at 12 we fell in for parade and marched to a vacant section on the left of our billets.

After awaiting the arrival of the rest of the companies, the colonel, mounted on a beautiful black charger, and with the usual followers and attendants, arrived looking a real soldier and leader. After "dressing"' the boys up and making them smarten up a bit, we were given the order "You may smoke, and stand easy." Well, this "stand easy" business was rather lengthy as there we stood in the drizzling rain until 1.30, until someone said "Here they come,"' and a smart command from the colonel "Shun" and we all came up with a bang, and up the brow of the hill the red-hatted mounted men made their appearance, all mounted on beautiful chargers and brought up in the rear by a dozen of the pick of the 15th native lancers and a couple of 6th Dragoon Guards. The red and white little banner fluttering on the end of a lance told us we were in the presence of the General in charge of the whole Indian Contingents (Sir General James Wilcocks). Riding up to the lines, he made a sharp glance at the men and then ordered "stand easy."' Turning his charger about he traversed up and down the lines and gave every man a keen glance over. The inspection over, and after a chat to our colonel, he faced us all again, and in a clear voice spoke of the great work we had done on the 20th and 21st against great odds, and after congratulating the colonel and likewise his men, the sergeant-major called

for three cheers and the usual salutations, and the general with his long line of followers departed. All this over, we were quietly marched back to our billets, and warmed up a couple of "Maconachie's" and had just got half through when Webster and Aylward made a call. No more parades, so we made our way to the village pub and had a chat. After saying goodbye to Aylward and ordering a dinner for this evening, here I am sitting in this warm little cafe waiting for 6.30 p.m., when we eat.

9 p.m.—Had a very fine dinner, and a good old chat—why, it did not seem as if there was any war on. At about 7.30 p.m. we had to retrace our steps to the old cowshed, and then it brought us back to earth with a big bump. After calling the roll I got into my sack, and with a blanket around me, laid on the straw and slept.

Tuesday, December 29.—At Allonagne— still in the cowshed. Awoke at daylight, and the rain was coming down in torrents. I lay there and thanked my lucky stars we were not in the trenches. Had some cheese and bacon for breakfast, and then got my new equipment ready for a parade for a route march at 10 a.m.

3 p.m.—Returned from our route march near to “Sillers.” Nothing to report— but the country, how different! In place of burning straw stacks, houses blown to pieces, with the bursting shells, all was quiet and peaceful, and but for an aeroplane overhead and the marching of troops, there was nothing to suggest anything wrong. We returned about 1 o'clock and after a little “paste” (ham and tongue), and some bread, we received a new draft of men from Manchester to take the places of the missing. I have five more in my section, So have just been fixing them up with their equipment, etc.

Just heard of a friend of mine going to Perth, with some prisoners, so will take this out so that he can post it in England on to you. I hope long ere this you have received the diary, so you can piece this on. I am as fit as ever and rigged out afresh, so feel quite a soldier again. We will be here for at least a fortnight yet, so there is plenty of time to have replies. I must ask you not to be too critical with my diary as I was never too fond of writing, but kept it up thinking it would be interesting to you.

3 p.m.—l have just forwarded, per our Colour-sergeant Sutton, the balance of my diary on to London, so will have to start afresh again.

Wednesday, December 30.—Same place. I awoke well before daylight, the frost being extremely hard, and with my one blanket, try how I would, I could not keep warm. Roll call at 8 a.m. This over, Sergeant Taylor and I cooked a very fine breakfast of pork chops and bacon. All the morning was taken up in issuing long overcoats to the men. Lunch consisted of some stew and a piece of bread. This little cafe is very comfortable, and the old lady will do anything for me. I gave her some old clothes that the troops had thrown away when they had a new issue. I could not see them wasted on the dust heap when these poor unfortunates could be kept warm with them. About 6 p.m. Sergeants Nicholson and Taylor and myself sat down to some sausages and fried potatoes, with some salad— and the French are the ones to make salad! This was all most enjoyable, but the thing that capped the lot was “mother's Christmas pudding!” I had given it to the old girl to warm up, and in it came, steaming and looking very English and appetising. After sprinkling it over with two glasses of rum, and the match lighting it into a lovely blue flame, I tell you the little party of three ate with relish, and wished the sender all sorts of luck and good wishes.

The old cowshed looked dismal in the extreme, so after calling the roll, and feeling inwardly warm and contented, I rolled over in my straw bed and slept until daylight, when the first thing I heard was “Blanche,” the farmer's daughter (noted for her dirty neck), saying “cafe, cafe,”' and the old man with his canteen, holding it up while Blanche poured it out, at a penny a time. Another of the little incidents that happen whilo fighting for King and country.

Thursday. December 31— This morning was wet, but not nearly so cold. I went up to the village barber (by the way, he is a miner and in his spare time cuts hair and tries his heavy hand with the razor). Well, I endured a shave and a haircut, then a nice wash (hot water), and brush up, the whole lot costing 20 cents (in English money about 1½d).

Drill order parade. We were marched about three miles up the other side of the village to a big open field, and given some physical exercises including leap frog, then, falling in again, after a few sharp commands from the colonel, we were marched back to our quarters. Nothing else doing, so I wandered around to my cafe, and wrote several letters, then after having several “cafe au laits,” Sergeant Cummings called for me in one of the headquarter motors, and together with my friend Aylward, we had a delightful drive to Chateau. I may mention this is a lovely place, beautiful drive up with artificial lake in front, and in peace time under proper care, I could quite imagine it the home of a millionaire. The owner is a very rich coalmine proprietor, and I suppose is well away in London until all is well again. This beautiful home is now the headquarters of General Wilcocks and Generals Carnegie and Watkins. It seems a shame to see such a lovely place under these conditions.

7 p.m. — We all went along to have dinner, and oh, what a dinner! Soup, roast turkey and bread sauce, with roast potatoes, and some Christmas pudding and coffee. Now this was a treat I will not soon forget. We sat and yarned until about 9 p.m., and Aylward and myself had to start off to our billets and back to earth again. Arriving at the old cowshed and feeling very contented, I rolled over on my straw bed and slept.

Exit 1914.

***Cont.***

*Otago Daily Times.* 15 June 1915 (PP) [14/07/2018]

# NEUVE CHAPELLE

## SERGEANT HUMPHRIES'S DIARY.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, April 23.

Continuing his diary, written at the battle of Neuve Chapelle, Sergeant Humphries says: — After leaving the village of Neuve Chapelle for our charge we formed up on the road and marched along a dead cow lane to the Rue. All the time we were under the shell fire of the enemy, but, thank goodness, their aim was none too good. As soon as we arrived at what used to be the German trenches the awfulness of our deadly bombardment could be plainly seen. The dead were lying round in singles and in groups, and in a little trench just one hundred yards away was all the clothing, overcoats, and impedimenta belonging to the Gurkhas who had stripped themselves ready for their bayonet charge. After passing 'Port Arthur' we came into the German line again, where but a few days ago we were getting sniped.

"Rounding the road leading on the La Bassee road we came across six poor little Gurkhas, with their bayonets on their rifles, and still heading towards the enemy when they must all have been killed by a machine gun. When we came past what was left of a German fortification a Black Watch soldier was getting a wounded German from under a heap of five dead ones. I have seen some pathetic sights since the war started, but the look on that death-pale German, with his eyes staring and bulging out of his head, was one that will be hard to blot out."

### NARROW ESCAPES.

When they reached the ruined village, the New Zealander was hit on the head by a piece of tile, which gave him "a little headache." By this time the shell fire was very hot, the enemy having the range to an inch, and they were told that their boys a little further on were having a hot time. It was not long before the Germans planted shells on the general's headquarters, but the general and his staff managed to get away though three out of five signalmen were wounded. In consequence of the furious shelling, the men had to get close into the brick walls for protection. Sergeant Humphries had not been under shelter for more than two minutes before a shell came and knocked the wall on top of him. After a struggle he managed to get out, none the worse for his strange experience, save a little bleeding from the ears. Of course, he was covered with a thick coating of brick dust and mortar, and the black burnt powder of the shell. Next the order came to line an old German trench. All was silent for a short time, when, without warning, a shell burst in the trench alongside of Sergeant Humphries, but as this trench had about 4ft of water in it the force of the explosion was arrested, otherwise he would assuredly have "joined the aerial scouts." He was completely covered with mud and water, but as the position had to be got out of there was no time to think of such trifles.

"Before long, at a given signal from three aeroplanes, big guns opened fire, and the bombardment lasted for a long while. Our casualties were numerous—mostly shrapnel

wounds. At 3 sharp all was silent for a few moments and on our left three good old british cheers went up, and then the 'Jocks' (for the Seaforths were charging) came along with their bayonets flashing, and did the 20 yards dash in really good style. After a brief pause, on they rushed, the machine guns of the enemy accounting for a few. The first trench taken! Will they get another? I was greatly excited, and had my head well over the parapet—a silly thing, I know—watching it all, when the next line of Gurkhas started running on to the left line of trenches, but they were unfortunate, as a small field gun did great havoc among them, and the sight of men being blown skywards is not too nice. But when seething with excitement like this one does not think of things in that light. On and on they went, and the enemy s rifle fire died away to practically nothing. We knew all was well, as the boys had got there, and the bayonets were doing their work with what was left, if any showed fight. The first line was taken, so the supports and reserves moved up another trench."

After the first line of trenches was taken Sergeant Humphries saw rather an exciting chase of four Germans by two Ghurkas.

The Germans had no rifles, and apparently intended giving themselves up, but the sight of the Ghurkas decided them to run. "Into one trench, then out again, the four went, with the Johnnies and their knives drawn at their heels. This lasted for about a minute, when the Germans all went down into a trench. One Johnny jumped in at the head and another at the rear, so here ends that story." As soon as the rifle fire died down, the British set to work to improve the captured trenches and change their fronts. It was growing dusk, and stretcher-bearers were out bringing in the wounded. "While I was watching this my back started to ache, and I thought I had better look to see what was wrong. I was surprised to find that I had two flesh wounds by fragments of shell, one of them being about 3in long and ½in deep. The officer ordered me straight to the first-aid place. On my way I met wounded by the dozen. At one place a mule convoy of some 10 mules and two drivers was completely wiped out by one shell—a really sad sight in the road in the dull light of the moon."

To his surprise, Sergeant Humphries was ticketed for hospital, and he walked down the road a mile or two to meet the ambulance. He found himself that night in the village from which he had started out two days previously, waiting with 100 other wounded to go to Bethune. On a neighbouring stretcher in the cowshed was a German with a bullet through his hip, whose conversation gave the impression that the Germans were fed up with the war. The artillery bombardment especially was so severe that practically the whole of his regiment were killed or wounded.

## CARING FOR THE WOUNDED.

Sergeant Humphries says that the provision for the wounded was wonderfully efficient, even when they arrived at the cowshed they found a brazier burning comfortably and sweetened milk ready warmed up. All the cases were at once re-dressed, the two doctors and their assistants working all night on the continuous stream coming from the front. In the evening, about 40 motors arrived, and, without a hitch, the native stretcher-bearers shifted the sick and wounded into the motors and left in half an hour. At the receiving hospital at Lillers Sergeant Humphries enjoyed a good night's rest, having his boots off for the first time for 14 days. The following day he was taken down to Calais, when he met some of his regiment who had been at the base ill or wounded and were going back to the trenches. "It seems so strange to me," he writes, "to be here wounded. It was a very sad sight to see the wounded being carried and placed on beds, and my wound seems so small I almost feel ashamed to admit it. The last time I was on this line we were a merry band—40 odd in a truck— for four days, and anxious to get to work in the trenches; now here in the ambulance train, and everybody looking sad and miserable. All the country looks so lovely and peaceful, and none of the awful noise and devastation I have been used to"

During his short stay in Lady Hadfield's Anglo-American Hospital at Wimereux he found himself in bed No. 13, which he contends. is a lucky number. The doctor who examined him, more interested in Sergeant Humphries's history than in his wounds, granted him furlough, for which he was to leave on the following day. Before leaving the hospital, he discovered that one of the nurses came from Southland (Nurse M'Leod), and that he was the first New Zealand patient she had encountered. The hospital is a very large one, and in that rush was full, even to stretchers in the corridors. "And worse luck, this is only the start of the advance. God only knows what is before the boys in the near future."

## BUSINESS AS USUAL.

After having spent so many months at the front, and hearing so much of the German blockade, Sergeant Humphries was forcibly struck by the atmosphere of "business as usual" which the Channel presented. Merchantmen were passing to and fro, apparently quite at ease, and the mail boats were crossing the Channel as usual. The wonderful organisation for receiving the wounded at the pier and trans-shipping them to the trains greatly impressed him. The trains themselves were quite luxurious, nothing being spared that could conduce to the comfort of the wounded. When the train left the pier none of the occupants was aware of her destination, and early in the evening they arrived at Sevenoaks, in Kent, where they were received in the same methodical manner that characterises the whole of the R.A.M.C. work, by the Red Cross workers of the hospital, which is quite inappropriately called "Wilderness, V.A.D."