

An ordinary soldier

his account of service in the First World War

S. A. Bird

(of the 1st Surrey Rifles)

Published by the Carshalton and District History and Archaeology Society, www.cadhas.org.uk

First published January 2016

The copyright of the text is held by Brenda Allen.

ISBN 978 0 9501481 9 9 1st edition

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed by BookprintingUK, Remus House, Coltsfoot Drive, Woodston, Peterborough, PE2 9BF

Designed and typeset by Clive Orton using PagePlus X6 software

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Preface

Chapter 1	England	1
Chapter 2	France	15
Chapter 3	Macedonia	21
Chapter 4	Egypt and Palestine	31
Chapter 5	Hospital/convalescence in Egypt and Demob	43
Appendices		51
Index		55

Illustrations

Cover: 'Stretcher bearers' © Katie Thompson (sketchbuck.com)

Fig. 1: Stan Bird in 1914 in uniform 1

Fig. 2: Band Practice at Redhill 1915 6

Fig. 3: 2nd Battalion, 1st Surrey Rifles,
marching through Bishop's Stortford, August 1915 9

Fig. 4: Drum and Bugle Band of the 2nd Battalion,
1st Surrey Rifles, February 1916 10

Fig. 5: Bugle Band Drummers 1916 11

Fig. 6: A Company, 2nd Battalion,
1st Surrey Rifles, in March 1916 12

Fig. 7: map of Divisional Area in France 15

Fig. 8: St. Eloi, west of Arras 16

Fig. 9: restored WW1 trench at Arras (Vimy Ridge) 18

Fig. 10: R.M.S. Ivernia, the troopship which took
Stan Bird to Salonica in December 1916 20

Fig. 11: map of XII Corps Front, Macedonia 22

Fig. 12: map of Palestine in 1917-18 32

Fig. 13: Stan Bird in Helouan Hospital, Egypt, April 1918 44

Fig. 14: Stan Bird in Alexandria in 1918 46

Acknowledgements

The maps are from P.H. Dalbiac *History of the 60th Division*
George Allen & Unwin Ltd (1926).

Katie Hampson is thanked for permission to use her work *Stretcher Bearers* on the front cover.

Introduction to the first edition

This account of my father's service in the First World War is taken from a written account of his life which he entitled 'The Years have rolled by', and also from an article he wrote which he called 'The Lighter Side of Life on Active Service' covering his landing in France to his demob, plus some additional material from the account of his First World War experience which he recorded on audio tape during the last eight years of his life when in his 90s whilst he was living with me and my husband. Appendix 1 is a record he kept of places he was stationed in and visited both in England and on active service while a member of the 1st Surrey Rifles. It gives more detail of places than are mentioned in the account, some of which can be found on the maps, and, for instance, shows the regime in and out of the trenches.

In writing the account of his life my father was aware that he had lived through extraordinary times. In his lifetime he had seen the advent of the car, aeroplane, radio and television, and towards the end of his life, the computer, inventions which have transformed the way we live. He also lived through, and survived, two world wars. He did have a marvellous memory.

He was one of the volunteers who signed up in September 1914 soon after the outbreak of war, and served throughout the war, though ending it in hospital and convalescence in Egypt. Rather surprising to me is that it was not until June 1916 that he was posted to active service, maybe because he was a bandsman, and that it was not until March 1919, several months after the end of the war, that he was finally sent back to England and demobbed.

We hear so much about the Western Front, with perhaps a mention of Gallipoli, that it seems to be overlooked that there were other theatres of war in which British troops took a significant part, as is illustrated in his World War 1 career. Also unusual is that he was, first in his regiment's band, then, on active service, as was common with bandsmen, became a stretcher bearer. That he ended the war being struck down with malaria and rheumatic fever, which for a time he was not expected to survive, illustrates the point that many soldiers, especially in places such as Macedonia, died not from enemy action, but from disease and illness.

My father was born in April 1895 at the end of Queen Victoria's reign, and lived until he was 98, dying in August 1993 (so he lived through five monarchs' reigns). He married my mother, Doris, in June 1932, and had one daughter, me. After the war he finished his apprenticeship and

became a lithographer. He never pursued music after the war, indeed I can not remember him being at all musical, unlike my mother who was musical.

Brenda Allen
Banstead, Surrey
July 2015

Preface

I have often thought how interesting it would have been if more people in the past had put down in writing the various interesting events in the lives of themselves, and what exciting reading it would make perhaps some hundreds of years later. Maybe most people in the past could not read or write, so it seems to have been the habit to pass down one's lifetime stories by word of mouth from father to son. In the course of time, these stories were added to and became impossible yarns. I always think the account of "King Arthur's" life is a good example, it must have been a fact in the first place, but was afterwards enlarged and is now just a legend.

This is an attempt on my part to write down the most important event in my own life, my experience as a soldier in the First World War. It may perhaps interest some folk in future years, in any case I shall enjoy writing it.

Stan Bird
Carshalton, Surrey
November 1967

Chapter 1: England

This covers the period of my service in England as a drummer in the Drum & Bugle Band of the 1st Surrey Rifles, from my Joining up in September 1914 to Embarking for France in June 1916.

Joining Up and Camberwell

At the outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914 I was an apprentice lithographer in the printing trade, aged nineteen, living with my family in Brixton. Shortly afterwards there came the call for what is now known as 'The First Hundred Thousand', all volunteers (they had to be as conscription did not come in till 1916). I was in the habit of going out to meals with other young lads of my age, and the talk mostly turned to the fact that, as men from all parts of the country were joining up, it was about time we did something about it, and so several from my firm (including myself), decided we would do likewise. We tramped the streets for two days together, but every regiment was full up. We decided to split up, and in the end we all did get in, but none of us together. For myself it occurred to me that I did have a local regiment, so on the morning of September 3rd 1914 I found myself walking through the doors of the barracks in Flodden Road, Camberwell, and this time got in. Two hours later I once more passed through the doors, this time as a fully-fledged Rifleman in the 1st Surrey Rifles, Rifleman S.A. Bird, No. 2660. Little did I know what lay before me! For the next four years and eight months I was to earn the large sum of one shilling a day (old money), I was to learn what the word comrade meant, what it was to be really afraid, to live in waterlogged trenches, and the hot sands of the desert, to know what real hunger and thirst were like. I was also to meet



Fig. 1: Stan Bird in 1914 in uniform (age 19)

the finest man it has ever been my luck to know.

Those two hours had not been without their moments of humour. Stripping down to go in for the medical, a man much older than myself kept on and on about how he must at any cost get in. I told him that I also was very keen, and wanted to know why in his case was it so vital. I was then told that he could not hit it off with his wife, and that this was his golden opportunity to get away from it all. I never did find out if he did get in! After the medical, we went along to take the oath. An officer took charge of six of us, and produced a very very small Bible, which we were instructed to hold on to and then repeat the words of the oath after him. The whole of the six did manage to get a grip on that Bible, but with just our first finger and thumb. It all looked very strange, just we six in a circle holding on to that Bible! and as to be expected we all began to laugh. The officer in charge became annoyed, and in no uncertain terms told us that we were in the army now, and he was not standing for anything like that! He was not quite correct in saying such a thing because we had not yet taken the oath. However we became serious, and a few moments later we were most definitely in. I had been instructed to report next day at 9 o'clock, and, dead on time, along with fourteen hundred other lads, I found myself lined up in the ranks for the first time.

We were a motley crowd, fourteen hundred in all, men from all walks of life, some in good suits and even bowler hats, others in cloth caps and rough old clothes. Two of these next to me I did not like the look of at all; they turned out to be lads from Bethnal Green, and were to become my closest friends, and were very fine chaps.

Our first week in Flodden Road was more or less taken up with the rudiments of drill, but it did give us a chance to look around to see what we had walked into. The 1st Battalion had gone off to St. Albans, leaving behind some officers and NCOs, also a few other ranks, and a few older members of the Brass and Reed Band, who, augmented by other musicians who had joined with us, soon became very good indeed. This 2nd Battalion in the first phase was intended to provide drafts for the 1st Battalion, and indeed a few were sent off, but later on a 3rd Battalion was formed to take on this job. We had no arms and no equipment, because there just was not any to be had. We reported each day at the barracks, lived at home except for the midday meal, and drilled on the square. Our day started at 9 o'clock and mostly finished at 4 o'clock. Having no trained cooks, outside caterers had been obtained to provide the midday meal, also a high tea. A few with more money than I found they could buy uniforms on the black market, and did so. Indeed some of the bright

boys among us started up their own black market, as it was found that tunics, much the same as army ones but not quite, could be obtained, also webbing, belts (real army ones), and even bayonet frogs. These lads did a roaring trade, and all these years later it is unbelievable that recruits like us were willing to buy these things in order to look like soldiers. For those still living at home, as I was, we did receive various allowances: for wearing our own clothes, using our own boots, sleeping at home, certain meals at home, and a travel allowance. Although I could walk to the barracks in ten minutes, instead I devised a devious route by which I took two trams to reach the barracks for which I charged. These allowances were then added to one's pay. As an example, one day on parade my total pay came to 37s, in contrast as an apprentice I was paid only 14s a week plus much longer hours – I thought I was a millionaire! Later on when we left London, it certainly was a big blow to come down to 7s a week. Think of all the keenness of all of this. I wonder whether it could ever happen again! This state of affairs was to go on for four whole months.

I was very pleased to find no less than fourteen local lads who I had known, either at school, scouts, and various other things which I had been connected with. All came home except for one who was killed, though some were wounded, but not too badly. We were indeed lucky!

We had great times during these four months in London. We used to make up big parties and go to shows. One day we went to a place where a man came on the stage trying to get men to join the services, and pointing to our group of lads, he said, now what about some of you? Of course we were all in the army already but had no uniforms, but did get some black looks from the other people because none of us went up to join. Quite a number of our boys also had white feathers presented to them by girls, thinking they were afraid to join up.

We already had a Brass and Reed band (a very good one), and after about six weeks of our training, one day our sergeant major came on parade, and stated that it had been decided to form another band, and, being a rifle regiment it was to be a drum and bugle one, and would anyone who could play a bugle or beat a drum, please fall out on the left. Over half of them did so! It seemed to me all were after a soft job, and I believe few of them knew anything about it! Now this is where my scout training came in handy [he had been a scout in a scout troop which had a band of which he was a member], and after three days of testing I became a big drummer. I could in those days do what is called 'swinging the sticks', and, although not quite up to army standards, they seemed quite pleased with me, and I was accepted. I now became Bugler Bird, which

being a drummer may seem strange, so perhaps I had better explain. The army has two kinds of infantry regiments: one are called line regiments (dress uniform red coats), the others called rifle regiments (dress uniform green). These were started when rifles first came in, round about 1790 to 1800, and were first used as scouts to the main army. Now, strange to relate, if one plays a bugle in a line regiment, one is ranked as a drummer. If one plays a bugle or a drum in a rifle regiment one is ranked as a bugler. The drill is also different in the rifles, and we marched at a much quicker pace, almost a trot, at 140 steps to the minute. I remember at one band practice our regimental sergeant major came out with his stopwatch. "Bird" he said "you are a pace and a half behind!" One thing that always sticks in my mind is that you were never ordered to 'fix bayonets', it was always 'fix swords', why, well don't ask me! I expect it was all part of the feeling that we in the rifles were much above the run of the rest of the army! It was a marvellous band, well turned out – for instance we had silver-plated bugles. There were about 30 in the band – eight side-drums, and around 25 buglers, and of course me the big drummer. We practiced every day, and, unlike a boys' band, used to play all the time in relays.

From the barracks in Camberwell we marched to Ruskin Park, Dulwich, for drill where there was more room. Ruskin Park was a favourite place, and soon a song was made up about the battle of Ruskin Park. Route marches became a great favourite, and soon many miles of Camberwell, Dulwich, and Peckham had been covered by our marching feet. It was all very enjoyable, the more so as at that time we did not own such a thing as a pack. That was to come later. As a result of these marches we did however receive one black mark. A Camberwell ladies' organisation sent in a letter complaining about the naughty words of some of the songs we sang on the march. It made no difference!

Usually the big event of the week was a march to Wimbledon Common (which was quite a long way) for manoeuvres, in which the troops would spread out and do all sorts of mock fighting, most of which I don't think anyone knew much about. Whilst the troops were on manoeuvres, we chaps in the two bands adjourned to the café in Wimbledon Mill (where the café still is) for the day. Halfway through all these manoeuvres, a furniture removal van hired by the catering firm used to turn up full of the necessary food for our midday meal. All very acceptable in those cold and dreary days.

And so the days, weeks, and then months went by. Towards the end of November our uniforms started to arrive. Soon we began to at least look like the real thing; also we were spared the humiliation of girls presenting

us with white feathers as, owing to us wearing our civilian clothes, we looked as if we had not joined up.

Two days before Christmas we went to Wimbledon Common for what was to be our last time. On the way home we halted for the usual ten minutes rest on the south side of Clapham Common, where in those days there were some big detached houses, owned mostly by big business people. A few of the band chaps thought we would try our hand at carol singing, and started up in front of the door of one of them. Whether they did not like our singing I shall never know, but the door was soon opened and we were invited inside for drinks. The result was that we delayed rather longer than the statutory ten minutes! The rest of the troops though did not think it very funny, and we were later told off about it. As for us, we thought it a great idea!

We began to hear rumours that at last we were shortly to be moved, and this turned out to be true. Christmas was spent at home, and on the 31st of December 1914, with bands playing, we marched to Victoria Station, and en-trained for Redhill in Surrey. We were about to become real soldiers.

Redhill

1915 was to be a very enjoyable year. Most of us were in our teens, full of the joys of life and able to take advantage of our open-air life, the training, and all that went with it. I always look back on this year as the finest one I ever had. It was very cold, but we had a comfortable billet who looked after us as if we were lords! There were nine of us in this big Victorian house, and although we had meals out they provided us with a hot meal every evening, which they had no need to do as they were just paid for us to sleep there at 9d a night.

Each company in the Battalion had taken on an empty house which was used as Headquarters, also as accommodation for books and meals. A cooks' section had been formed at Flodden Road, and this was to be their first chance to really prove how good they were. At the back of my Company's empty house was a big tannery. To this day I cannot decide which was worse, the smell from the tannery, or the meals these new cooks served up! However in time they did improve.

We found that the first parade was very early in the morning, around 7 o'clock for physical drill and running. Strange to relate we found that the names of the nine in our billet (all specialists) were not on the Company Roll, so, after two mornings on this parade, we felt it would be much better to stay in bed, which we did. We were never found out, and it was

great to hear them run past our house on the way to Redhill Common!

Shortly after we had settled down, we had to go to Epsom Downs to take part in Lord Kitchener's review of 21,000 troops. Our colonel wished us to look very smart, and therefore would not allow us to wear our overcoats, which proved to be rather unfortunate, for very early in the morning when we paraded to march to Epsom Downs, it started snowing, and it snowed and snowed. To give you an idea of this, when not playing two chaps would carry the big drum between them, and snow accumulated on this drum several inches thick. Reaching Epsom Downs we stood there for several hours, needless to say getting very very frozen, and when Lord Kitchener did finally arrive he just drove past in a car. Some review! On the way home it was so cold that some of the stops in the brass band instruments froze and could not be played.

We stayed in Redhill for around about three months. For some time past we had been told that we were shortly to be issued with rifles, which came to pass except they turned out to be Japanese ones. I suppose they were better than none at all! We were also supplied with Japanese equipment, which turned out to be much the same as British equipment except the straps were leather instead of webbing. The rifles and equipment were later exchanged for English when this could be produced. It was this shortage of equipment which kept us in England until 1916.

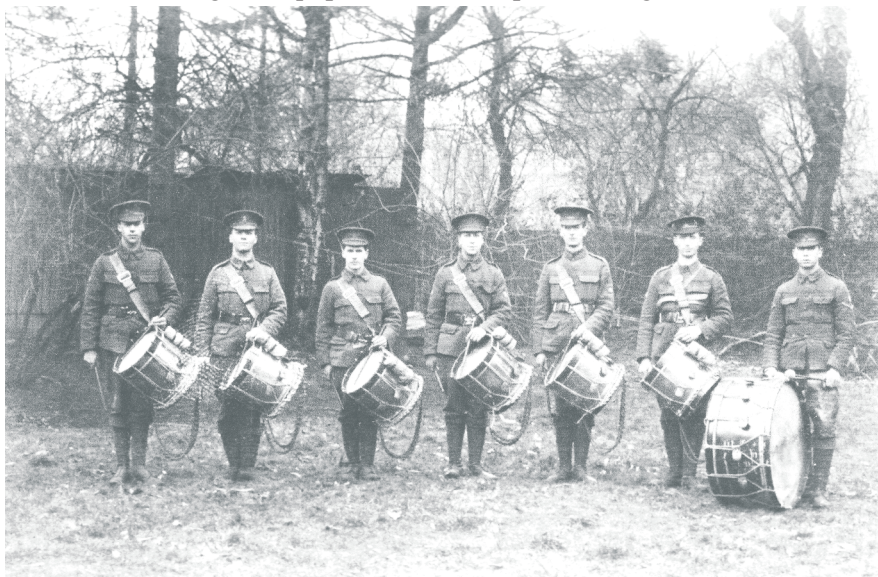


Fig. 2: Band Practice at Redhill 1915 (Stan Bird playing side drum last on the right)

All ranks were keen to go on active service. Little did we know how lucky we were that all this kept us back. However we now felt we were almost soldiers!

The arrival of these long-awaited items caused rather a nice break in our usual routine because some time in February 1915 it was decided to send us all to Hythe, in Kent, for about ten days, to try out these new rifles on the army firing ranges (which are still there). They turned out to be very accurate but only held five bullets in the breach, so were a long way off the standard of the British type. Although it was winter with snow on the ground, my few days spent in this delightful little town made me love the place, and in later life I was to spend many holidays in it, including my honeymoon. It became almost a second home to me.

St. Albans

After about three months there, near Easter time, we moved by troop train to St. Albans in Hertfordshire. Our 1st Battalion had been stationed in the town, and had only just left to go to France. As we marched in the inhabitants thought it was them coming back as we had the same badges. They must have been well liked as we got a great welcome. Here I was billeted in an old wooden building where you walked straight off the street into the living room, in which the landlady had put two beds in order to earn her 9d a day.

Our stay here was not very long, and consisted of just routine training, mostly drill, route marches, etc. I mostly remember church parade on Sundays at St. Albans Cathedral. The cathedral lies in a dip, and it was a grand sight to see our regiment and one other, swinging down the hills from different directions, both with two bands playing, and meeting at the cathedral gates. Notable for me was that whilst there I was visited by my father and two sisters.

Sawbridgeworth

Easter came and went, and shortly afterwards we were on the move again, this time to Sawbridgeworth, again in Hertfordshire. Unlike the Second World War, when motors were mostly used, whenever we moved (except sometimes by rail), we always had to march, and this journey took us two days, stopping one night in Hertford, where we went into billets for the night. We were supposed to have an evening meal provided, also breakfast the next morning. We got an evening meal of sorts, then our landlady went out to draw her billet money, and proceeded to get drunk on it, but all of us seven never let on, being good-natured kind of chaps, in fact we felt it was quite a joke!

Dear old Sawbridgeworth. We had a lovely time here over the very fine summer months in which we stayed in the village. I always look back upon it as one of the finest times of my life. We had boating on the river, swimming, also a sports field. "The Brass and Reed" band played on the village green two nights a week, and on the other night my band the "Drums and Bugles" beat retreat at 6 p.m. In those early days of the war, no such thing as bombing or blackouts had started, so one evening we laid on a Torchlight Tattoo. As was to be expected, both bands took a big part in this, sometimes each on its own, and sometimes combined. Several of the lads acted as torch bearers, and took part in intricate drill patterns. It all finished up with our thirty-six buglers sounding the Last Post, followed by "Lights Out". On the last notes of this the torch bearers plunged their torches into the ground and all was dark. After all these years I still cannot understand why after this we heard so many girlish squeaks and giggles! Another day we held "water sports", and a carnival in the evening, with decorated and lighted-up boats. I don't think the locals had ever had such exciting times before!

There was a special breed of cattle in a private park there. When starting out on manoeuvres the two bands would play the troops out into the countryside, then return to Sawbridgeworth and go to their billets, sleep overnight, and early the next morning march to a certain point to meet them coming back. In order to make better use of the bands it was decided to make them play the enemy. Picture the scene: several fields away, was the battalion advancing in battle order firing off blank shots, but between them and us, the enemy, was this herd of cattle, who, not unnaturally, stampeded, and it was towards us. Well, I can tell you that I bunked to the nearest tree! (Maybe part of their battle strategy?).

At times our Brass and Reed Band used to spend a week or so up in London on "recruiting drives", and it must have been about this time that the now famous march Colonel Bogey first came out. Our Brass and Reed Band came back from a trip to London and on our first route march afterwards this was the first march they played. No one had ever heard it before but immediately they began to sing some words to it. I have often wondered whether these were the correct words.

Bishop's Stortford

After two or three months there, later in the summer, we went into camp, under canvas, with all the other regiments in our Division, just outside Bishop's Stortford, known as Hockerill Camp. Whilst we were there, Zeppelins started coming over, and we had to camouflage all the tents.



Fig. 3: 2nd Battalion, 1st Surrey Rifles, marching through Bishop's Stortford August 1915 (Stan Bird marked with a X)

We had strict orders, if there was an air raid, to strike the tents flat on the ground, and then disperse over the countryside, which we did. Lots of the lads thought this was a jolly good idea, and kept on going, back to London! It took about a fortnight for the police to round them all up!

We spent the rest of the summer in that camp. Training was now becoming harder, and we were kept at it, going on very complicated manoeuvres of four to five days, sleeping in barns etc., in some cases cooking our own food etc., etc. No one seemed to know what it was all about. I remember one day my Company were taken prisoner (by whom no-one seemed to know) and we spent several hours sitting by the roadside outside Braintree Station, and whether in the end we were rescued I still don't know. However, it was great fun, and after four days of this we returned to Hockerill Camp. The next day our Brigadier came along and made a speech: "I have never seen anything so disgusting in my life, you will have to do it all over again!". Afterwards we found out that he went to every regiment and made this same speech.

Coggeshall

We stayed at Bishop's Stortford well into the autumn, and we began to wonder if we were going to spend the winter in tents, but on November 1st we once more set out on our travels. After spending the first night in Dunmow, after the second day's march we arrived in Coggeshall, another delightful place, with a few weeks at Clacton, and then back again to

Coggeshall. We stayed at Coggeshall for about three months, spending Christmas there. Here there were four of us in a billet, our landlady being a Manchester lady. After arrival at the billet, she said “you are all rather young” (which indeed we were). “Some of the women here are terrible, and I want to warn you against them. Actually one of them lives over the road”. Needless to say, upon which, I am ashamed to recount, the other three chaps surged to the window, eagerly asking “where, where? We want to know in which house she lives”.

Unlike the present day army, we were governed in the old-fashioned way by the bugle, and soon got to know the meaning of every call. A German landing in England was always possible, and as Coggeshall was so near the coast we started to be trained as to what to do if this occurred. At certain unknown times buglers were sent out to sound the alarm in the streets, and each Company had to get on parade in full marching order as soon as possible. One never knew when these calls would sound. Early one morning we heard a bugle call going and, thinking it to be the cookhouse one, we slowly dressed, grabbed our eating utensils, and at a slow walk made our way down to the dining rooms. On the way we had to pass Battalion Headquarters outside of which we found our R.S.M. standing. He did not say much but the



Fig. 4: Drum and Bugle Band of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Surrey Rifles, February 1916 (Stan Bird 4th from left in top row)



Fig. 5: Bugle Band Drummers 1916 (Stan Bird marked with a X)

expression on his face said everything which was necessary! We did indeed feel we had very much let the regiment down.

In Coggeshall we lost our Brass and Reed Band who were mainly older men. Also an order went out that everyone, of all ranks, even the band, were to wear packs when on the march. The only exception to be made was the Big Drummer, which was me. I had always thought that in some way or other I should be able to distinguish myself in the army. Well, this was it, and to make matters even better two of the buglers with full pack on had to carry the drum when we were not playing!

For some reason our colonel upset us, and we devised a scheme to take our revenge. He was very keen on church parades, and both bands had to go to church parade each Sunday, being a rifle regiment all very smartly dressed wearing black gloves and with black swagger sticks under the arm. We arranged between us that we would not put any money on the plate and would not sing, which we implemented. When a hymn came up the only people were the colonel and one or two officers in squeaky voices. The colonel could not do much about it, but gave us extra drill for the next fortnight or so!



Fig. 6: A Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Surrey Rifles, in March 1916

Warminster and Salisbury Plain

In the early part of 1916 we were sent for our final training to Warminster and Sutton Verney, a village on the edge of Salisbury Plain. I say village, but it was really one huge camp, actually a series of camps, composed of huts housing 60 to 70 men, surrounded on all sides by thousands and thousands of troops. Final overseas leave, of four days, was started, our Japanese equipment was replaced by English, and we were told that we would shortly be leaving for the front.

Embarking for France

I took my overseas leave early on, thinking that leaving for France was imminent. At this time my mother was very very ill with cancer, and we knew she would never recover, and still being in England at the end of March, I found that some men were getting week-end compassionate leave, so asked my sergeant if I could get one. For some reason he hated the sight of me, and his reply was that you have had your last leave and will not get any more. I tried again in April with the same result. Some days later I met our regimental sergeant major coming across the parade ground. Now, one never asks questions of the R.S.M., one always goes to one's sergeant, but, stuck with my problem, I thought, well here goes,

and, pulling myself up smartly to attention in front of him, I said ‘excuse me could I speak to you sir’. Looking me up and down, he said ‘yes my boy’, and I then explained everything to him. His answer was ‘Don’t you know you should go to your sergeant about such matters’. I explained that twice I had done so with the same result. His answer to this was ‘What’s the name of your sergeant?’ which I gave as Sergeant Grey. ‘Oh’ said our R.S.M., ‘I’ll give him Sergeant Grey, you come to me on Friday and you shall have your leave’, which he did. I never saw my mother again after that. He was an old pre-1914 soldier, who had spent a lifetime in the army, thirty-two years in all. He was a wonderful man, strict, but who understood his men and cared of them, and consequently was loved by them all. I can see him now striding on to the parade ground, with his usual remark ‘I am here’, and begin to drill the whole regiment of around nine hundred men, and if you made the slightest mistake, believe you me it was spotted! But we were his pride and joy. Later on in France, he used to be in a dugout in the reserve trenches, and it was my sad duty to bring down some of the first of our lads to be killed. He came over to us, asking who they were, and, though normally a stern man, I well remember his remark “Is this what I have brought my lads up for?” with tears in his eyes.

It is the rule in the army that when on active service members of the band become stretcher bearers. They do not come under the Red Cross, and are still armed, and, at times have to take their place as ordinary soldiers. Their job is to pick up wounded, render first aid, and transport them to the doctor, when they are then taken over by the R.A.M.C (Royal Army Medical Corps). As I understand it, they, like us in the band, were exempt from guard duties and fatigues. This being the case, and always keen on the soft job, I made up my mind that I was going to be one of the sixteen picked out from our fifty-strong band, and I was picked. How wrong I was! I can at times still hear that awful cry “Stretcher bearers at the double” ringing down the trenches, mostly when all hell was being let loose, and everybody trying their best to take what cover they could, but not us who had to go out in it all and pick up the lads who had been wounded. We were ‘on call’ all the time, and having delivered a patient to the first aid tent, it would be back to the trenches. We had received our training from the R.A.M.C. whilst at Sutton Verney. Our medical equipment as stretcher bearers was primitive, just a haversack full of basic first aid things such as bandages, tourniquets, and iodine. Our medical officer was particularly keen on iodine, and so became known as ‘Iodine Dick’!

Well, time was running on, and on a lovely summer day, June 7th 1916, we were paraded in full marching order, and, headed by a band playing a lively tune of the times called ‘We are on our way to Germany’, we marched down to Warminster station *en route* to Southampton to embark for France. It was a brave sight, but, oh the pity of it all! I suppose the average age of us all must have been about twenty, some a few years older, and a large number well under, with a few we called ‘old boys’, round about thirty or thirty-five. So many of these light-hearted lads were never to see dear old England again.

We embarked on of all things an old paddle-wheel steamer, called *La Margerite*, loaded down with well over two thousand troops, and, after dark, set out for France. It was an awful journey, no room to move, and at least more than half sea-sick on the way. I was not affected, and never have been. When daylight came we found we were moored up beside, of all places, a military hospital in Le Havre, loaded with wounded, which to me seemed a good start!

Chapter 2: France

This covers my period of active service as a stretcher bearer in France from Landing in France in June 1916 to Embarkation for Salonica in November 1916.

The 2nd Battalion landed in Le Havre on June 25th 1916. As we formed up to move off a group of French girls stood watching us and after a time one of them pointed a finger at us and shouted ‘Piccaninnies, Piccaninnies’. It was true that most of us were around the age of 20 but we had been thinking what a fine body of men we were! We were quite pleased when the order came to move off.

From Le Havre docks we marched to a camp where we stayed one night, and the next day entrained in cattle trucks (each holding 40 men) for St. Pol. From here we did a night march to a village just behind the lines. It was a new and strange experience to be so near the front. As we marched we could see the star shells bursting and very lights going up over the far-off trenches, and hear the sound of gun fire, then, at the side of our road a big flash and explosion occurred. Everyone scattered (including me), and for a moment we really thought they had got us, but as nothing else happened we formed up again and on we went. We found out later that at the side of the road a big Pavel Gun had been dug into a

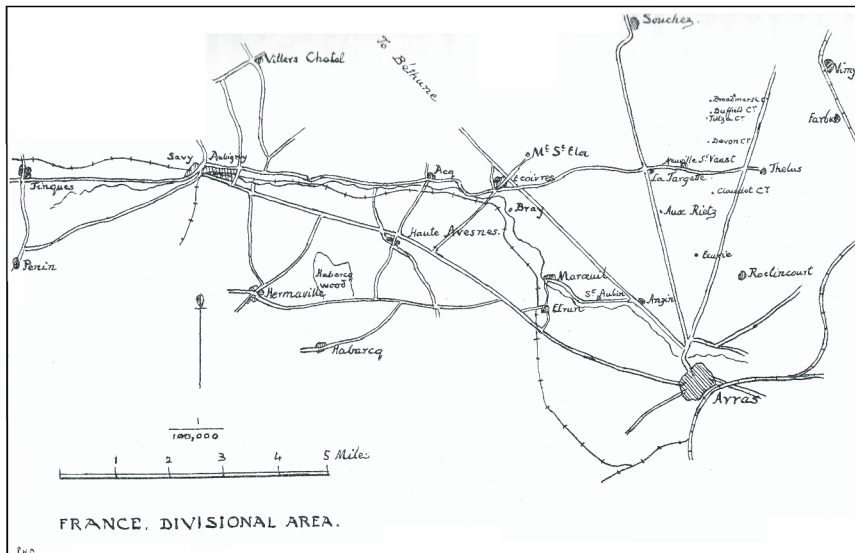


Fig. 7: map of Divisional Area in France (drawn by P.H. Dalbiac)

field for long-range firing, and now and again fired off a round, so it turned out to be one of ours.

Morning found us at a small ruined village called Louey just behind the trenches and a little to the left of Arras. After resting a few days, we were told we were to relieve the Seaforth Highlanders, and a few of us were picked out to go into the trenches with them to learn all about the routine and maintenance of them. So we set off for our first trip to the front. We were met at the start of the trenches by two Seaforth guides sent to conduct us all the way up to the front. It was a lovely summer's day as we entered the long communication trench. Here I must explain that from this point to the front line must have been at least three to four miles, consisting of very narrow winding and long communication trenches, but it was well signposted and we did have guides. Indeed I was to find out later on what a job it was to get a stretcher along them. In fact once, when we were bringing a wounded man down, in order to get him round a bend we had to lift the stretcher quickly over the top of the trench and he was again wounded by a sniper. It so happened that on this day everything was very quiet, not a shot being fired, and as we stumbled along, very interested in everything, our lads were saying "Well this is not too bad". First we came to reserve trenches, then onto support trenches, and on again to the front line. Things were still as quiet when we reached this, and quite a lot of loud talking was going on, until suddenly our guide in his broad Scottish accent said "You are only about 100 to 150 yards from the Germans, so pack up the noise a little". Believe me, I have never heard a group of people become silent in such a short time! For myself, I almost wanted to walk on tiptoe. Yes, we were really in the front line!



Fig. 8: St. Eloi, west of Arras

When sitting on a fire step talking to our guide we were shocked to see him starting to look through his clothes, to find and kill lice. Noting the look on our faces, he informed us that this was quite usual, and in a few days we would be the same. He was indeed correct, we never could get rid of the things, and it was quite normal to find and catch about forty a day. When out of the line big efforts were made to rid us of this curse, but back they would come. We tried applying lighted cigarettes along the seams of our clothes where they collected, but without a great deal of success. It was just one of those things you had to put up with!

It was not to remain quiet for long, and, and we started to settle down to our new life. Our short stay in the line with the Seaforths only lasted about four days after which we were joined by the rest of the battalion and they departed. For the next three months we stayed in this part of France and followed a more or less general routine, much on the following lines: a spell of about twenty to twenty-four days in the trenches, about four days in the front line, the same in support, and about eight days in reserve trenches, then another four in the front line, and another four in support, after which we came out for a week's rest.

Living rough as we had to do, the tendency among us was to form ourselves into small groups in order to help each other in such matters as cooking, sharing parcels, and in many other small ways. Ours was a group of six. We had three very useful chaps. One was very good at knocking up a meal out of nothing. Another, Jelot, was half French, and was to prove very useful with his command of the language in getting many little extras when we were in the villages behind the line. Then there was the third one, who was to prove a very big asset indeed. He was Lewis, or 'Lou' as we called him, and was at least ten to fifteen years older than us boys. According to what he told us, he must have spent most of his life as a burglar, and I can well believe it! Otherwise, apart from the fact that he had once been married, we never found out much about his background. He never received any post, and once I got some relations to send him an anonymous food parcel. I have never seen anyone so overjoyed. However, if we were ever short of any item, we had only to mention it to him and up it would come. Our officers had a habit of sending back to the village behind the line and having special food rations, such as cooked meals, also special drinks, sent along. Every night a ration party made the long walk back through the communication trenches to collect rations, which were all packed into sand bags and labelled, some with a tag for named officers. If he was on one of these parties he always seemed to manage to pick up some of these officers'



Fig. 9: restored WWI trench at Arras (Vimy Ridge)

and I soon found myself standing before him, with pack on and rifle over shoulder, reporting that two of my teeth were very bad etc. Never a man of many words, he strode across to a big case in the dugout and returned with what looked like a very big pair of pincers in his hand. With the order “open your mouth”, out came one of those teeth, without anaesthetic! Asked about the others, I hastily (very hastily!) informed him that they were not so bad. My vision of the seaside faded, but at least I had tried.

Battalion H.Q. was in a slight dip in the ground and in the form of a circle, and around this were several very big dugouts where lived the colonel, the doctor, our R.S.M., also the stores etc. Well back from the front line, it was fairly safe. I often had to bring down the wounded to it. It was a favourite place when going into and out of the trenches to sit down for a rest. I would mention that our R.S.M. used to mount a guard over the stores every day, almost as if it was Buckingham Palace! Yes, everything had to be just so, with the relief guard marching up to relieve the sentry etc., etc.

bags, then, on the way back, put one or even two over the trench top, and later on retrieve them. After the row about it being lost had died down, it always seemed to turn up in our dugout, and it was very nice to sometimes have a meal of perhaps a roast chicken or some other nicely cooked items.

One day a friend of mine went sick with bad teeth, and was sent back to a French seaside resort for three weeks to get them put right. Now, thinking this over, I thought what a good idea, and, having one or two bad teeth of my own, I one morning put my pack on, slung my rifle over my shoulder, and made the long walk back to reserve trenches where our doctor lived. His dugout was a huge affair, in fact one could stand upright in it,

Where we were was known as a quiet part of the line, not that any part was really quiet. We did have a number of casualties both killed and wounded, including one very good friend of mine, who was killed just before taking up a safe job behind the line to which he had been appointed, such bad luck! Our period in this part of France became routine, except for one raid on the German trenches which was not much of a success, and resulted in a number of killed and wounded. I was lucky to miss this. Having for some reason been diagnosed with rabies, I was sent to a camp for the cure of rabies, where I spent about ten days. By the time I returned, it having been decided I did not after all have rabies, the raid on the German trenches had taken place.

For some weeks now we had heard away to our right the guns going full pelt, both day and night. The great Battle of the Somme had started, a battle which has gone down in history as one of the longest and most costly in lives of any time, with thousands of men being killed on both sides. Our time came when our period of duty in this position came to an end, and on 26th October 1916 we left our part of the line, being relieved by the Canadians, and pulled out to a village just behind the line. As usual we came out in small parties, and, as was my custom, I sat down for a rest at Battalion H.Q., and noticed at once that a Canadian sentry was already on guard over the stores. Unlike our chaps all he had was just a rifle, not even a belt!, and, as I watched, another Canadian came out of the dugout, walked over to him and addressed him as follows – “Say guy, let’s have your rifle, its my turn on”. Not far away our R.S.M. was standing outside his dugout looking on. I could almost hear him wanting to say “That’s not good enough for me”, but the relief sentry being a Canadian of course he could not say anything. However frustration was written all over his face!

Well, the thing was, where were we going? No one knew, and when we asked, perhaps an officer who might know, all we got was a non-committal nod of the head in the direction of the intense gunfire in the distance. However, on October 26th, we started on a six-days march to a village called Villers-sous-Ailly some way behind the Somme front. The weather had turned very bad with snow at times, but we started very intense training, which more or less confirmed our suspicion that we were to be put into the Somme battle. After about a month of this, the order came to parade at nightfall in full marching order. We looked at each other and remarked “Well this is it”. Much to our surprise we were marched to a rail junction called Longpré, and entrained on the usual cattle truck train and off we went. In the early hours of the next morning we were on the way to Marseilles. Oh boy, oh boy!! The half-French

member of our gang started to tell us that we must stop in Paris, and as he had many relatives in the place, and if we had the time, he was really going to show us round. To our disappointment we never even saw the place, and after three days of travel arrived in Marseilles on 26th November 1916.

Marseilles was a welcome relief after our rough life in the trenches. We were to stay here only four days but we certainly made the most of this short holiday. On the 30th November 1916 we boarded the *Ivernia*, one of the Cunard crack liners of those days, but which had been converted into a troop transport ship (I still have a photo of her, and at the time she was some ship, but now looks rather out-of-date). We still did not know where we were going. That same evening we left Marseilles, but the next morning were back again in Marseilles!, but sailed again in the afternoon. The German U-boats were very active at this time, and the convey system had not as yet been started. In an effort to avoid them, we dodged about all over the Mediterranean. Strict orders were issued that no boots were to be worn, and life-belts were to be worn all the time. As these were the old type made of cork, you can imagine what this was like! One often got stuck in a corridor of the ship. After about five days we arrived in Malta, and after a day's stay, we started off again, and arrived in Salonica (present-day Thessaloniki) on the 8th December 1916, where we marched into camp just outside the town. The next day we heard that the *Ivernia* had been sunk as she left the harbour. About two thousand troops (including us) had been landed at the port, leaving only about three hundred on board. We were again so lucky!

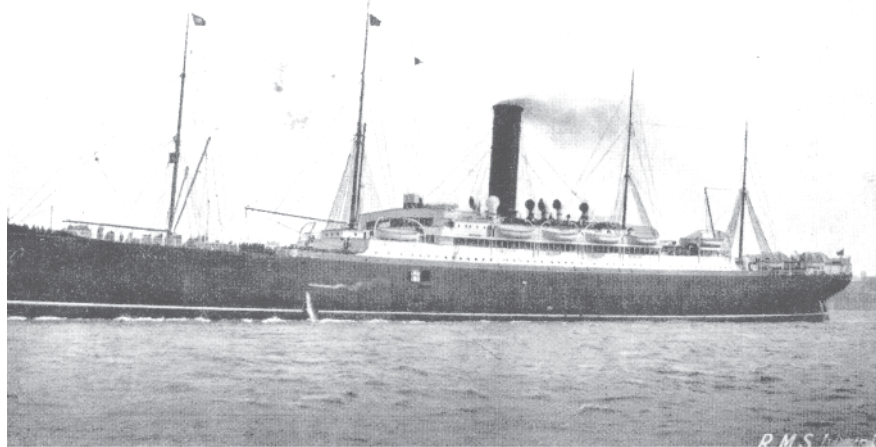


Fig. 10: R.M.S. Ivernia, the troopship which took Stan Bird to Salonica in December 1916

Chapter 3: Macedonia

This covers the period of my active service as a stretcher bearer in Macedonia from Landing in Salonica in December 1916 to Embarkation for Egypt in June 1917.

The reason why we had been sent to this part of the world was because at this time it was uncertain whether or not the Greeks would throw in their lot with the Germans, and so would have been in a position to attack our troops in the rear, who were already in the mountains on the borders of Bulgaria. As it turned out, the Greeks decided to come in on our side, but there we were, a whole division of us (about a thousand men) dumped down just outside Salonica town, with very little provision made for the supply of food and other items, plus the frequent sinking of ships which made things even worse. I well remember our 1916 Christmas. For our Christmas dinner we were issued with a quarter of a loaf of bread plus four figs, some stew, and very little else. Some Christmas!

We were to remain in this camp for about four weeks. As well as food being so short, the weather was terrible, cold and then hot sun, and then perhaps snow. During this time we were issued with clothing, shorts, bivouacs, and all the necessary equipment for mountain warfare, in which we were about to engage. This included some hundreds of untamed mules, fresh from South America. Those pesty mules! – they took a lot of getting used to, and we had great fun (if you can call it that) trying to tame them, and to learn how to put packs on them. I so well remember being told to take six of them to water at a river crossing close by. It started off all right, but when they smelt water off they went at full speed. I gave up at once, and whether I recovered them all I cannot recollect.

At the end of this time we started our long march up to the mountains and the front on the borders of Bulgaria. It was to take six days, and very hard going at that. The road was little more than a track, and it was strange to be marching in single file, added to which it all had to be done at night. The reason for this was that the Bulgars were entrenched, both at the foot, and also on top of high snow-capped mountains, and could see all movements of troops for miles around. Also they had plenty of German planes which they could send out if anything was spotted, whereas we had hardly any planes, also very few big guns. I am afraid it was not a very orderly march, and every night we camped down absolutely worn out. As we got nearer the front we were well into the mountains, and our track became just a mountain path. When we pitched



Fig. 11: map of XII Corps Front, Macedonia (drawn by P.H. Dalbiac)

‘bivvies’ it had to be on whatever level piece of ground we could find. I think that it must have been at this point that our fine R.S.M. began to give up. Used as he was to having everything in strict order, he became annoyed to find that we could not get those bivouacs in nice straight lines. Food was still very short with no chance of buying any extra. Owing to the recent Balkan wars, which had only ended in 1912, nearly all the mountain villages had been knocked about and were mostly deserted. One night we camped near one, and, being so short of food, set out to see, if by chance, we could find anything to eat in this deserted village, but nobody was met, and certainly no food was found. But our old friend Lou

had not been with us, and when we arrived back in camp, there he was, sitting in our bivouac, surrounded by three loaves of bread and two tins of bully. Asked where he had found them, we received his usual answer 'I met a friend of mine down the road'! What an asset this chap was to us six.

After those six days we arrived at the first position we were to hold on the front, where we were split up to man outposts on the edge of a seven to eight mile wide valley, known as the Dorian Front, one platoon (about forty to fifty men) to each outpost. This outpost was at the foot of very high hills or mountains, with the battalion headquarters based in a big concrete fort known as Dova Tepe Fort way up one of the highest hills. My platoon was posted to a section of the line which consisted of trenches in the form of a redoubt on the edge of the valley. The night march to this spot had been awful, just wandering around over mountain paths, getting lost at times, and when we did arrive we were too tired to even pitch our bivouacs. But when dawn broke we found we were in quite a pleasant position. We had a wonderful panorama. Away in front stretched the valley, about six to eight miles wide, consisting of woods, fields, streams, a few villages and odd houses, and even a main railway line which ran to what is now known as Istanbul, but being in no man's land had of course long been abandoned. In the far distance was a minaret showing above a small ruined town named Palmis. Behind, on the other side of the valley, rose the snow-capped Beles Mountains at the foot of which, and also the top, were the Bulgars. All of this countryside was of course deserted and just a no man's land. The foot-hills on our side were quite small but steep enough to make moving around a strenuous chore. Somehow or other the Macedonian countryside fascinated me. I liked the wildness of it all, and behind it the large amount of history with which it has been connected. We were to enjoy our stay in this part.

We had a few trenches which were kept manned, but we did not live in them. Believe it or not we had a real 'log cabin'. Just behind our trenches some predecessors of ours had built a big log cabin big enough to sleep all of us not on duty, in which we lived and slept. From the trenches wires had been laid ending up in the cabin, and to which a big cluster of tin cans had been fixed. If an attack took place the lads in the trenches pulled the wires and the rattle of the tin cans awakened the sleeping reserves. All rather crude but it worked. The trenches were always manned at night but by day most of us lived out in the open. We could see where the Bulgars had big guns mounted in the snow of the mountain tops. They showed up like black patches, and one could see through glasses the men working

them when they fired. But although they fired these, strangely enough on just two days a week, when they did most shells did not explode, and never hit us or indeed come anywhere near us. In fact we used to sit around and make bets as to where the next shell would fall. I do remember however that one day a shell fell about a mile away. Believe me, we retired to our trenches in haste. Well, you never know! We on the other hand did not have any guns which could reach them. Very often in the morning we would see out in no man's land a white flag waving. What was happening was that a number of Bulgarian soldiers wanted to desert, but being higher up the mountain than the Germans, this was quite a business as it involved passing through the German lines and then crossing no man's land in order to give themselves up.

Not having any wounded to attend to, my duties simply amounted to reporting to our officer if any man complained of being ill. If necessary I had to take him to see the doctor stationed in the battalion headquarters at Dova Tepe Fort, or if necessary arrange transport. The fort was about five or six miles away tucked away in the mountains, and was a delightful walk up hills and down, and, with spring in the air, it was most enjoyable. On the way back I used to take my time, sit down, pull out my beloved pipe, and really enjoy myself. Every day I hoped some lad would feel bad enough to enable me to walk him up to the fort! All in all, although the weather was terribly bad and food was still very very short, so at times we knew what real hunger was, it was a lovely enjoyable spot, and providing the powers on both sides let well alone we would not have minded remaining here for the rest of the war. Indeed I began to hope that they would forget about us. What a hope!, for we were soon to be moved on.

Whilst here, not having much stretcher-bearer work to do, I had taken to helping the cook. Just before daybreak everyone had to be on 'stand to' in the trenches, with the exception of the cook and myself, and we would set about cooking the breakfast ready for when it was 'stand down'. With food being so very short, the cook had to be careful when dishing up meals. If one chap got even a tiny bigger portion then there were complaints. Our log cabin was in a field of maize. I tried everything to make that maize edible! One night the cook woke up to find the cabin empty and concluded we had overslept. He woke me and we dashed out to the cookhouse and got the meal on the go. Thinking it strange that dawn did not break, I went back to the cabin, looked at my watch, and found it was just on 1 a.m., so there we were with the breakfast ready cooked. It appeared a practice alarm had taken place and the others had not troubled to wake us.

Just two weeks after taking up this position, a big raid had been arranged to go over to attack the Bulgars in Palmis, the village at the foot of the snow-capped mountains, to consist of some 170 men. They say 'never volunteer in the army'. A few of us, such as myself, a stretcher bearer, and other odd men, cooks, batmen, etc., were exempt from quite a number of duties, one being night guard in the trenches. The day before the raid our officer came along and explained that as most of the lads were going on the raid, would we volunteer to do sentry duty in the trenches that night so as to give them a good night's rest. To this we agreed and did take their place. The next day he came to me and said "Bird you are on that raid tonight as a stretcher bearer". Just my luck! Everything on this raid went wrong. On the night of the raid we all made our way up to Dova Tepe Fort from the scattered outposts being held by the battalion, and assembled outside after dark. It was a bright moonlit night, and the two hundred and fifty of us taking part were addressed by our colonel, in which he said how he wished he was much younger and could go with us but he would, when dawn broke, be watching from the watch tower of the fort. He was not much of a colonel and a very poor leader, and it was a great relief to us when shortly afterwards a new one was appointed. We spent the rest of the night crossing the six to eight miles of the wide valley, wading through streams, going over rough fields, and through woods, all of course deserted as it had for long been no man's land. About an hour before dawn we arrived not far from the Bulgar position, but then our luck changed. A two-man Bulgar patrol ran into some of our men in a wood, and although we got one, the other man ran away and started firing at us. The game was up, and, as dawn broke when we were supposed to have made our attack, we were faced with the sight of hundreds of Bulgars running down the mountain sides, and we had to defend ourselves as best we could. We stretcher bearers were ordered to take our places as riflemen and forget about the wounded. At one point we were almost surrounded, but after about an hour of this we retired to an arranged rallying point, where we were instructed to make our way back in small parties, which we did. I joined one of eight plus one wounded man on a stretcher. It was a long tramp back, plus the fact that although it was now daylight, we did not quite know our way or even where the Bulgars might be. One lad found a telephone cable on the ground and suggested that if we picked it up and ran it through our hands it would lead us home. This we did until someone suggested it might be a Bulgar cable. Had it been red hot I don't think the lad holding it could have dropped it more quickly! But in the end we did make it back safely,

including our wounded man. At the foot of the mountains we were met by our wonderful R.S.M.. and, on asking what our colonel thought about our bad luck, were informed that he was still asleep up at the fort. What a man!

Sometimes they would move us to another similar outpost. I remember that one day they shifted us to another outpost, as usual at night. By the time I got there I was dog tired, so just dropped down onto the ground, pulled my blanket over me, and dropped off to sleep. The next morning when I woke up my blanket was covered with snow! It just shows how variable the climate was. At this place we set up a cook house, but found the fire kept going out. Eventually we discovered that the fire had set off a stream on the mountain side and the water was coming down and through the fire. After all the trouble we had gone to, we decided to keep the cook house, but let the stream run underneath the fire.

After about six or seven weeks in this part of the line, rumours began to circulate that once more we were to be on the move. Finally orders came to leave this part of the front, and on March 3rd 1917 we were relieved, and packing up our kit the same night started to move out to make our way to another part of the front. The night before, when clearing up ready to move out, one of the lads went over all the rum bottles, drained them out, and managed to rescue quite a large amount which he promptly drank. By the time we moved off he was in quite a state. Our officer came to us stretcher bearers and told us the chap was ill and would we look after him on the march. This was to be a terrible night, and almost at the start we began to climb a mountain path. We were not taking too much note of our rum-drinking comrade as we knew what his supposed 'illness' was all about. Suddenly we missed him! He had fallen over the edge of the path, but fortunately only a fall of about eight feet. We got him back alright, and it seemed to have sobered him up as from then on we had no more trouble with him. I don't think any of us who took part in this march will ever forget it in after life. We went up and down mountain paths, and it rained and rained. And to make matters worse, having stretchers to carry, my pack was being carried on the mules so I could not get my great coat. I was soon soaked to the skin. We later struck a part of the route where we had to keep wading through a stream. Everyone was very glum and very very silent, until all of a sudden one bright lad started to sing in a high girlish voice. I have often noticed throughout my life that, when things are at their worst, something seems to happen to let in that spot of sunlight, and so it happened in this case. A

strange thing – human nature. Soon everyone was singing, laughing, making jokes, and so we continued to march and sing for the rest of the night, getting to a camp and under cover at about 4 o'clock in the morning, where all of us in our wet clothes dropped down and slept.

After a clean-up, a dry out, and a good sleep all the next day, we paraded in the evening for another night of marching. Our silly colonel insisted that we parade in mass formation just as if we were on parade in England. The result was that a Bulgar plane came over, spotted us, and dropped four bombs in the middle of our formation. As to be expected everyone scattered including myself, and then came that awful cry “stretcher bearers at the double”, so I had to go back and attend the wounded. As luck would have it no more bombs were dropped, and we only had 12 men wounded. Most of the bombs had fallen among the mules, about 40 of whom had been killed. By the time we had cleared up the mess and got the wounded away to hospital, the main body of the troops had left, leaving only a small body of men to follow. A very young officer had been left in charge of us, and it turned out to be a lovely night with a bright moon. We marched through various deserted villages, and at times stopped to consider where we were. Our young officer seemed entirely lost, and, as daylight began to break, he decided we might even be walking into the Bulgar lines, so we halted until a guide from the main force came along to escort us into camp. At this camp we slept on some rather bumpy ground. When we woke up in the morning we discovered we had bivouacked in the middle of a cemetery which dated from the Balkan Wars of 1912 between the Bulgarians and the Turks. After a good sleep some of us climbed a small hill which overlooked a long valley in which a large number of shells were bursting. We were told that this was known as ‘Happy Valley’, and that we were to go through this the same night. We did not quite like the sound of it! We had in fact arrived at what was known as the Varder Front, and which was to be our home for the next two months.

The position we had to man was a redoubt, the trenches and a few dugouts having been blasted out of solid rock. It was surrounded by very high mountains on which the Bulgars held positions. With big guns and overlooking us as they did, it was a simple job for them to open shell-fire, and they never never missed. All would be very very quite, then hell would be let loose, and we stood very little chance. In this mountain region thunderstorms occurred almost every day, and it was a habit of the Bulgars to open up with gunfire in the middle of one, so we did not get any warning until the shells began to drop. This was again real war, worse

I thought than France. Many of our lads were killed or wounded. Among those killed was one of our special six, Lou. We were to miss his cheerful personality, and the many items (no questions asked) which he used to obtain for us in our little group. On the same night that Lou was killed, another of our six was wounded and was sent off to hospital. Although his wound was not bad, he was never to return to us, as after leaving hospital he was posted to another unit. So, of the original six of us who got together in France, only four now remained. We were to remain on this front for about three months.

I recall one slightly funny incident. We had to go a long way to fetch water for which the mules were used, these mules having a pannier each side. One day, having been detailed to take a mule back to obtain water, shells started to drop on the path I was on. I tried to get that mule to move with me to cover under a cliff, but it would not budge, so I left it standing on its own and took cover myself. Luckily it was not killed and I was able to recover it later on. These days I laugh about it, but it was not so funny at the time!

Around about this time questions were being asked in Parliament as to what the troops in Macedonia were doing, such as “Had they been forgotten, and why were they not doing anything etc.?” So something was done. Our present position faced the Varder Valley Pass through which ran the river of that name. At the entrance to it was a high hill, very strongly held by the Bulgars, named on army maps as Hill 535. It was decided that the division on our right should attack this hill, take it, and then we would move forward, attack and perhaps get through the Pass and get behind the big range of mountains. What a big flop the whole thing was! This other division took the first line of trenches, the Bulgars then moved higher up the hill and dropped everything they had onto the captured trenches. It was all so impossible, and, after losing some hundreds of men killed and wounded, they had to retire, and our attack never took place. It was now decided to pull us out of our positions, give us a few weeks training, and then give us the job of trying to take the hill by perhaps some other method. We were pulled out and training started, and then one evening we were ordered to parade and move off, and, like the time in France when we had the same experience behind the Somme, we all started to say “well, this is it”. After a hard night’s march, we found we were moving away from the front line, which rather surprised us, and before the next night’s march, we found we were making for Salonica town, but what was to happen we did not know. What a bit of luck to get out of the awful job of taking that hill!

As we neared Salonica town, we found that a long stretch of what, just six months ago had been a rough track over which we had struggled, had been made by the Royal Engineers into a first-class road, along which it was a pleasure to march, in good order and able once more to do so in fours. As we marched many a good song was sung, some of which as was to be expected were rather on the rude side!. Also not far from the road a railway had also been built to take goods up to the front, and it was strange (and yet a reminder of home) to see engines with the original English markings still on them, such as G.W.R., L.B.&S.C.R., G.N.R.

After five days marching (or I should say nights) we arrived back at Salonica town on the 10th June 1917, and went into camp just outside the town. There for the next seven days we spent our time cleaning-up, handing over our mules which had been of such service to us up in the mountains, and, to our great surprise, being issued with tropical clothing. The big question was, where were we off to now? On the 17th June we again boarded a transport ship, for we knew not where.

So it was good-bye to Macedonia, and that part of the world where over thousands of years so much history had been made. One could almost feel it in one's bones, and what wonderful names the small towns and villages (mostly deserted by war) had: Spancovo, Hirsova, Mahmudli, Snevske (pronounced like a sneeze). From the war point of view we were very glad to get out of it as it was an awful front, and we were sad to leave so many of our comrades behind who would never again see dear old England again.

Chapter 4: Egypt and Palestine

This covers the period of my active service as a stretcher bearer from Landing in Egypt in June 1917 to Reaching Gaza in November 1917.

Unknown to us then, the Turks in Palestine had made a big attack, and had reached the banks of the Suez Canal, so we were being rushed over to Egypt as reinforcements. It did seem to us that our Division, the 60th, of which our regiment formed a part, was being used as a stop-gap division, first of all from France to Salonica, and now to Egypt. In fact other troops were saying, rather rudely, that Cooks Tours were running us!. Strangely enough towards the end of the war most of it (but not us) were once again moved back to France.

Our troopship was another converted liner, called the *Uinnetonka*. After two days sailing we arrived in Alexandria in Egypt, on 19th June 1917. I shall never forget the experience of landing in Egypt. It was all so different from the other two countries we had been in. We arrived late at night, and believe me nights in Egypt are wonderful, such a contrast to the rain, snow, and sometimes sun which we had been having in Macedonia. We entrained at once from the docks on what was to prove to be quite an interesting journey. At every stop loads of Egyptians came on the train selling all kinds of rubbishy souvenirs. One chap bought a bottle of whisky at a real knock-down price, only to find that it was coloured water! After a long night's journey, during which most of us slept, in the early hours of the morning we arrived at Ismailia, right out in the desert, and marched to a camp on the shores of Lake Timsah, really part of the Suez Canal, where we pitched 'bivvis' and slept the remainder of the night.

The next morning it was very strange to wake up to find ourselves in an entirely new world, just pure desert unrelieved by any sign of vegetation. After breakfast we were marched to a spot, told to sit down on the sand and await the arrival of a doctor who would give us a medical inspection. After a short wait he arrived and, halting in front of us, he remarked "If only your sweethearts, wives, sisters, or mothers could see you now, they would think you had all gone back to your childhood days". We looked at each other and could not make out what he was getting at, until he explained. Almost all of us were sitting scooping up the sand and letting it trickle through our fingers. One does seem to do this on a beach, and looking along the ranks his words were indeed true. It must have looked rather funny.

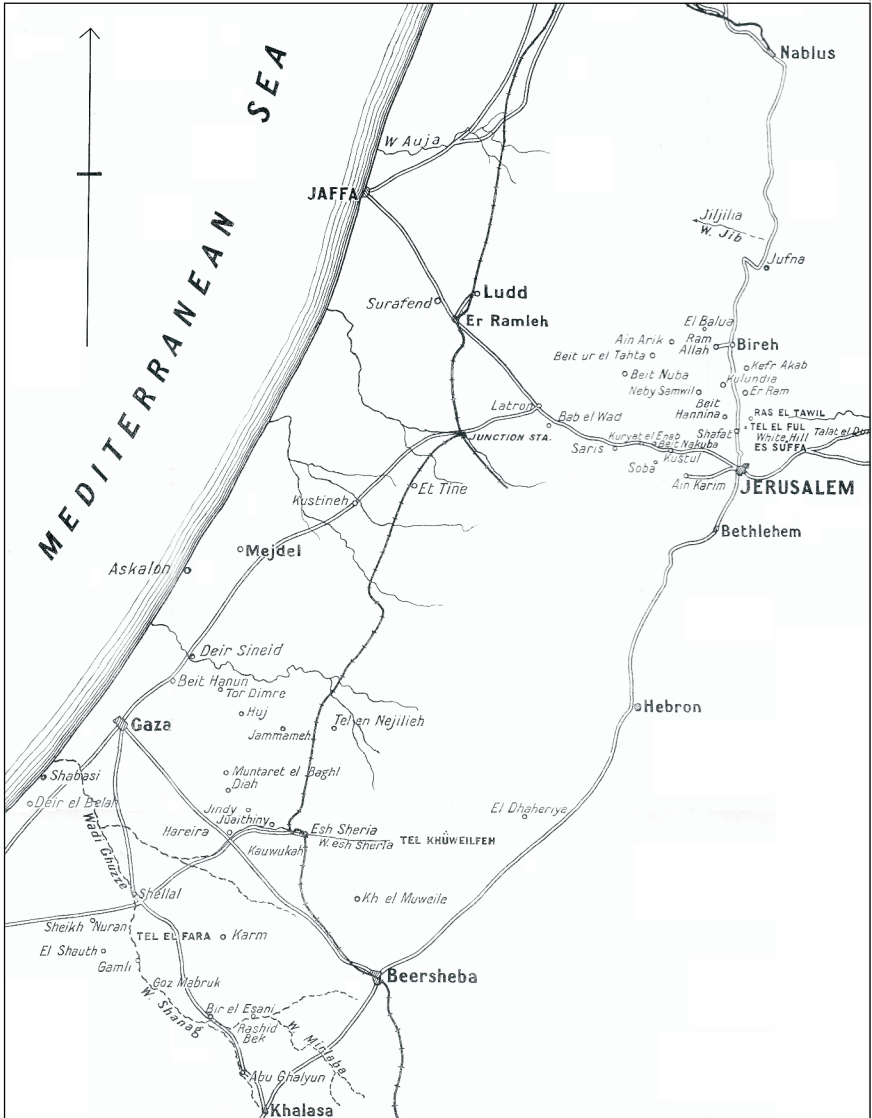


Fig. 12: map of Palestine in 1917–18 (drawn by P.H. Dalbiac)

We were to spend three lovely weeks in this camp, getting ourselves re-equipped and having a really lazy time of it, swimming in the lake, many visits to the canteen, and generally making a holiday of it. After our rough life and the awful climate in Macedonia, it was a very welcome

break. As was to be expected in Egypt, the weather was perfect, and though somewhat hot one got used to it.

By the time we had arrived in Egypt the Turks had retreated back to Palestine to a point not far from Gaza. After our 'holiday', we started a two days march along the banks of the Suez Canal to Kantara. I always remember crossing the sand on that march, because not being used to desert marching, we were flicking the sand up through our shorts, which made us quite sore. Kantara is I understand now quite a big town, but in those day was nothing more than a big army camp. From Kantara the army had built a single-track railway across the Sinai Desert and up into Palestine to the point where the Turks had retreated to. It was quite a simple job as it was all flat country, and I understand that they used to push ahead at the rate of a mile a day. It was all a rough-and-ready affair, but served the purpose of getting troops and material up to the front line. It improved very much as time went on, and I understand is still in use and now is double-track. Also a simple road had been laid alongside made of, believe it or not, just chicken wire laid flat on top of the desert sand, which stood up to quite heavy transport. A pipeline had also been laid alongside to bring water from Egypt, which was very necessary. It was a favourite trick of German planes to come over and blow parts of all this up at various times.

Two days later we entrained, as usual in cattle trucks, and were once again on our way to the front. Starting at nightfall it was a long journey, taking us two days, as being the makeshift railway that it was speed was out of the question. The countryside through which we passed was (being mostly flat) uninteresting. Some of the lads slept, others who included myself got down to a game of cards. In the middle of the night the train suddenly stopped. After a while we found out that the train had broken in half, the front half plus the engine steaming away on its own. We were not over concerned about this and continued with our game of cards which we had just started, until someone remarked "You know the railway is only single track, and it is quite possible for another train to come along and, not knowing what has happened, crash into this one". That carriage was cleared of its occupants in record time!, and the card game resumed sitting out in the desert, until in the early hours of the next day a relief engine arrived, picked us up and we were once more on our way.

Next day we found ourselves detrained at El Ballah, which was a few miles behind the front line and not far from Gaza, then held by the Turks. El Ballah itself was just a few mud huts in the desert, nevertheless our

stay there was a very pleasant one as our camp was almost on the seashore, and our time was mostly spent on routine matters and enjoying the swimming. But you had to be careful because of the huge breakers which kept rolling in, often much higher than oneself. In fact the only way to get a good swim was to dive through them and so out to calm water, but then it could be a bit of a job getting back. But these breakers were ideal for surfing. It was here that for the first time I tried my hand at surfing. Quite close to us was a battalion of Jamaican troops, who were real experts. They lent us boards and tried to teach us the knack of it all. Although we were in this camp for a fortnight none of us became in any sense of the word experts. After all they had been born to it. However it was great fun. Here we had concert parties. And there was one song in particular called 'Silent Melody' in two parts. The first part was ordinary music, but in the second part the Jamaicans would join in, and I can see them now sitting on the sand singing their hearts out, a wonderful sight. But they were never put in the front line, not considered reliable enough.

Our next move, at the end of July, was to a place called Hisea, which was simply an expanse of bare country, which unlike the real desert sand was just dried-up earth, and the dust from it got into everything – plus loads of flies! With hardly enough water to drink, a bath was out of the question. No wonder the Turks had retreated and left it to us! Owing to now and again having bombing raids, the camp was well spread out and we dug down into the dried-up earth and put our bivouacs over the top. In mine we even dug out and formed an armchair! Five miles away was the rail-head which we were told also had a canteen. Three of us one day walked over only to find hardly anything in stock, only toothpaste, boot laces and writing paper. Never again did we do that ten-mile walk in the hot sun over the desert sand for virtually nothing!

We settled down to really hard training, but owing to extreme heat this could only be done in the early morning and late afternoon, and sometimes went on into the night. So the routine was to get up early in the morning at about 5 o'clock, train until around 11 o'clock, then in the heat of the day to retire to our bivouacs to sleep and relax, and around 4 o'clock come out and put in more training. One of the big items of training was going out marching by night over the desert, making our way by compass and the stars, and each platoon used to be on its own. We had a remarkable sergeant who could always find his way back to camp without the aid of anything, but our very young officer was hopeless and mostly got us lost. With dark mutterings of "What again" from the troops, he always turned to our sergeant with "Sergeant, can you

lead us back to camp”, which he always did and we were back in camp in no time. This used to happen on dead flat desert, with no roads at all, and not a house or any other landmark. We always wondered how he did it, but none of us ever found out. Perhaps he did not know himself, but just trusted to instinct. This sergeant was a very nice sergeant, brave, who never gave a real order except on parade and got jobs done by suggestion and persuasion. We all loved him, and it was a great loss to us when later on he was killed in action.

Here we were to remain for almost three months. Knowing that we would be staying here for quite a time, a very young officer put up a notice which read ‘Anyone interested in rugby please report to him’. Several did respond to the call, and, assuming they were all players, he interviewed them one by one. On one being asked what position did he play in, replied ‘Oh I don’t play sir’. The very puzzled officer asked ‘Then why are you interested in rugby?’ To which came the reply, ‘Because that’s where I live, sir!’ Having made a start, the thing was to get more men to join and to really be able to form a team. So he went around trying to persuade people to become members. On one unlucky day he caught me, and I hand it to him he could talk, and in the end I said Yeah I would. In the meantime rugby gear had been a problem, and as the camp was mostly on dried earth and not sand, you can imagine what running about on it was like. It was now that our rugby fan got his brainwave. On one practice day he turned up with smiles all over his face and announced that he had the answer to all our troubles. All we had to do was to scrape the loose topsoil away down to hard ground, and there you would have a first-class pitch. After all it was only 6” to 8” in depth. Now we did not mind his players getting on with the job, but we had not reckoned on his persuasive powers. Soon almost all the battalion was dragged in and involved in this job. It was even rumoured that the colonel was seen having a go but I think this was only a morale booster! After many hours and days of really hard work, all done in our spare time, it was finished, goal posts put up and beautiful lines marked out over the ground. Three days later a sandstorm started which lasted two days, and when we crawled out from under our shelters the first thing we did was to look at our football ground. The goal posts were still up but all the rest was again covered with all that loose dust. This was almost the end of the rugby team as it was not long before we were on the move again, culminating in the battle of Beersheba, and all items not necessary for troops on the march were collected and taken away to a dump nearby, never to be seen again. In about another 3,000 to 4,000 years time I can

visualize archaeologists digging in this part of the world, finding the remains of this dump and even some of our rugby gear. Perhaps one of them, picking up one of the balls, would say to the others “Look at this strange object, it’s even got fingerprints on it. I wonder whose they could have been? Could they, could they be those of that legendary figure”

One day during our enforced midday rest out of the sun, the cry went up “Girls coming through the camp!” As we had not seen a girl or indeed any kind of female for months and months, in no time everyone in the bivvis were out and looking down the long lines of the camp. Sure enough in the distance we could see two very well dressed young ladies coming along. Disappointment was to be our lot as when they came closer they turned out to be two lads who took the girls’ parts in the divisional concert party ‘The Roosters’. They turned professional after the war and became well know on the radio for years.

This area of this camp was purely a training area, out of the fighting zone, but on August 15th we moved to a place on entrenchments to the right of the front line called Kent Fort. These were really only entrenchments for defence, with the Turks about twenty miles away, with our cavalry out on patrol in front by day and by night. Kent Fort had to be manned in case by chance the Turks attacked, so the next three months were spent in the usual routine of in and out of the line with whenever possible very strict training in between. Although nothing was said, we knew this meant some very serious business in the near future.

By this time General Allenby had been appointed to take charge in Palestine, who afterwards proved to be the right man for the job. He made two very good starts. Before this all General Staff had been stationed way back in Cairo miles away from the front. These were all sorted out, the duds replaced by new men, and all Field Headquarters moved up to just behind the front. He also demanded that he must have full backing in arms and men before he could make any move. He got all this. However, from our point of view, and what made him instantly popular with the troops, was the fact that he ordered a full train-load of beer to be forwarded to the railhead just behind the line, plus other canteen goods. Up to this time the few canteens that one could get to were very poorly stocked.

On October 20th the battalion was relieved by the 1st Hereford Regiment, and on the 21st we marched to Tel-el-Fara, a barren bump in the desert. It had been decided by General Allenby that he would attack the Turks’ left flank round about Beersheba, the last thing the Turks expected, as the town lay on the edge of the desert, in very difficult

country, with hardly any water to be had, and no roads at all. Our division had been picked to bear the worst part of the attack, and we became known as the Desert Column. In this attack on Beersheba our regiment was given the job of taking what was referred to on army maps as Hill 1070 (by coincidence just twice the number of the Salonica Hill 535). The operation of which Beersheba was the start was planned to take place and be finished before the rains came along, which as a rule started towards the end of October. So everything which we could do without was dumped before we started. Our tunics, overcoats, spare boots, and other odds and ends were handed in, and we were left with only our rifles and other arms, just shirts and shorts, plus in our packs one blanket and the usual half a bivouac sheet. This was later to be bitterly regretted. Hundreds of guns both heavy and light were massed under cover all ready for the big push. Well out in no-man's-land they even dug in the sands big containers of fresh water.

The attack on Beersheba was to take place on October 31st 1917. Great pains were being taken to make this a really great surprise attack, and orders were issued that on the march to Beersheba everything was to be as quiet as possible. This meant anything which might rattle had to be tied up. This even included our entrenching tool handles which on our equipment ran down the side of our bayonet scabbards and had to be tied up with string. Also, talking was not allowed. So in this order we set out one dark night two nights before October 31st in order to cover the twenty-odd miles between us and the Turks. As we marched, orders were being strictly obeyed, everything was silent, even the sound of our marching boots could hardly be heard. On the left of our column a motor dispatch cyclist was riding his bike, the engine of which was roaring away at full blast. So much for the orders about silence! After one long night's march we camped down in a well-hidden position in a wadi. The next night we made a short march to a point quite close to Hill 1070. Hundreds of guns of all sizes had been massed just behind us, and about 3 o'clock in the morning they all opened up, and as dawn came we went into action. This consisted of going down one hillside and up a very steep one on the other side, on top of which were the Turkish trenches. Although our guns had been firing for some hours, the wire in front of them had not been very well cut, and our wire-cutters had to be used quite often. However the Turks had had enough, and we could see them retreating as we came up to their trench. Where I was no resistance was put up at all. We then went right on to the second line of trenches, but this was not quite so easy, and we had more casualties than in the first attack.

Nonetheless the Turk really had had enough, and it was soon all over with many of them giving themselves up. I remember a tent camp in between the two lines of trenches in which were big cauldrons of maize porridge all ready for the Turks' breakfast which they had had to leave behind. Despite that motor cyclist chap the attack had been a complete surprise to the Turks. The rest of the day was spent getting away the wounded and preparing for perhaps a counter-attack, but by the next morning not a Turk could be seen, and Beersheba, which consisted of just a few mud brick houses, was in our hands. Some of the Turks who we did take prisoner in fact were obviously quite pleased to have been made a prisoner.

The next day was spent in cleaning up the mess. I would notice after battles Bedouin wandering over the battlefield to see what they could pick up. However by the day after, a big sand-storm had started which raged for four days, during which we could not move at all. Water was a big problem as we were not allowed to drink from the wells in Beersheba in case they had been poisoned. This is where those tanks of water which had been buried should have come in handy, but owing to the drifting sand during the storm they could not be found, so we had to depend on our own water bottles, although a little was brought up from somewhere, but in very small amounts. It proved to be a very thirsty time, and I do not think anything is quite so bad as lack of water, added to the fact that when one cannot get it one does not even want to eat, and in any case that also was in short supply. One has no choice though but to stick it out.

Before the dust storm was over we were on the move again, towards what was to become the Battle of Sheria. Although we did not know it at the time, we were about to enter what was to be one of the worst periods in our regiment's history. The route was over particularly difficult country, a stony wilderness of volcanic rock, very barren, very desolate, and almost featureless. The lack of water was still with us. I remember we came across a pool of water with two very dirty buffalos standing in it and a nice green scum on the top of the water. Most of us who could get to it just scraped this away with our hands and drank what at the time we thought one of the best drinks we had ever had. It tasted rather on the salt side but it was water. No doubt we took awful risks in drinking it, but again I repeat nothing is quite so bad as lack of water, and one does not stop to consider what harm contaminated water like this might do to one when one is really in need. It was known that at a place called Tel-el-Sheria the Turks held very big water wells, so on November 7th 1917 we were given the job of trying to take this place. The attack lasted most of

the day, and the worst part was, as we advanced at one place we had to pass an ammunition dump which had been set on fire by the retreating Turks. As we passed by bullets were flying in every direction and shells exploding, and we had more chaps hit by this than the fire the Turks were putting over. As we got near Sheria, we ran into trouble from the Turks, and soon we were advancing in open order until we reached the top of a ridge. Owing to the entire lack of artillery, and worried by hostile machine-gun fire, we could go no further and were halted on a hillside. It was at this point that the Australian Mounted Infantry were put in to help. I shall never forget seeing all those horses and mounted men charging down a slope in extended order at the rear of us, with shells bursting among them, and as was to be expected many of them, both horses and men, falling to the ground after being hit. They passed through our ranks, and we watched them fade away in the distance until they made contact with the Turks. What happened then we could not see, but it was this attack which in the finish took the wells. As far as we were concerned, though, this was the end of our part in the battle.

During the afternoon we arrived and fell out on the roadside to rest with high hopes of filling our water bottles and getting a good drink. Now the rule in the army is always that horses must be watered first and men afterwards, so you can imagine our comments when we had to wait some hours before being allowed to take our turn to drink and fill up! The next day we were on the move again, our objective being a place called Huj. The Turks were still retreating and were not putting up much resistance, but as the day wore on, in their efforts to get away using a large concentration of guns of all types and sizes they did make one last big stand. After a time it was found that we infantry would not catch up with them before they got away, so a big force of cavalry was put in to stop them. In the distance we saw them go into action, a brave sight, but oh what a lot of our lads were killed in this action. The Turks were firing point blanks at our troops right up to the time when our men finally captured the guns. We passed the spot sometime later, and it was not a very nice sight. It is thought by most people that this was the last cavalry charge ever made by the British Army, though some folks do claim that just one more was made later on in France, although a very small affair. But as there seems some doubt about this, I like to think that I indeed did see the very last cavalry charge made by the British Army!

We now moved on to a place called Jemmameh, but as the Turks were very much on the retreat, we were pulled out of the front line, and the job of keeping up with them was left to the cavalry. After five days here we

set out on the long march to Gaza, and with a rest now and again, eight days later reached Gaza, from where we were to set out on the long march which was to end in the capture of Jerusalem. We arrived at a very badly chosen camping site which speedily grew swampy, for it was on this day that the rains finally decided to start, a week early, no shower but a steady downfall. I have mentioned that this campaign was planned with the idea that it would be all over before the rains started, and also that we were without tunics, overcoats, and anything that could be done without, just in shorts and shirts. No one though can control the weather. By nightfall everyone was more or less soaked through, plus the fact we were all really exhausted after our long days of marching under bad conditions. However by dawn the weather had cleared up and we were once more on our way. For a start things went quite well but after midday the rain started again, and how it did rain, so soon we were again soaked. I shall always remember that evening scraping the wet topsoil off the ground in order to get a dry spot over which to erect our 'bivvies'. Indeed we were soaked through for most of the time on this march and had to sleep in our wet clothes at night, though occasionally the rain did leave off giving us a brief chance to dry out; eventually we were suddenly issued with winter clothing of trousers and tunics, not before time!

Day after day we continued the march to Jerusalem, until we were approaching a place called Nebi Samwil. For some days I had not been feeling all that fit, and on the next day I felt very ill so dropped out and sat on my pack hoping to be picked up by the R.A.M.C. A long column of troops (in this case many thousands) marching across trackless desert without roads does not keep in a straight line, and it was not long before it had taken a big curve leaving me isolated all on my own sitting on my pack in the middle of the desert. Fortunately an officer spotted me, and came over on his horse to ask me what was wrong. After explaining what was the matter, he advised me to make another effort to push on, as there were many roving Bedouin around who, if they found me on my own, would not hesitate to kill me, just to get my rifle, cash, kit, and anything else of value I had on me. You know, that bit of advice was as good as a few bottles of medicine. And indeed I did make the effort and later on managed to rejoin the battalion. The next day we reached Nebi Samwil, after whose capture it was said we would be able to see Jerusalem. However, I was not interested in this as I was feeling just as bad and once more I fell out on the march. This time I was picked up by the R.A.M.C., and passed the night with them. The day after it was decided to send me to hospital, and I was sent to the clearing station.

Little did I know at the time that I should never again return to my regiment and to the lads who over the years I had come to know so well. Some six months later after very heavy fighting and so few men being left, also owing to the fact that it was almost impossible to obtain new drafts of men from England, it was decided to disband the battalion and to place the remaining men in other regiments. It was a sad day and I was pleased that I was not there when it took place. Of we six pals who had started off together in France I was the third one to leave the battalion. By the time the battalion was disbanded only two out of the six remained, Jelot, the half Frenchman having been killed in action shortly before.

The mode of transport to the clearing station was by camel transport. This consisted of a stretcher on each side of the camel, one balancing the other. There was also an Egyptian attendant to each camel. Well, we set off alright but not long afterwards a lone German plane came over on a bombing raid as they so often did. The Egyptian attendant bunked, and the camel stopped, leaving us two chaps on the stretchers stranded, which prompted the question from the chap on the other stretcher as to what we should do. As the camel seemed quite unconcerned, I replied that it seemed best to remain put, which decided the matter for a time, until the other chap decided otherwise and got out, thus upsetting the balance and abruptly precipitating me onto the sand. At least he might have warned me! After all these years one has to laugh about it now, but it was not so funny at the time. Following the plane's departure, we collected ourselves together, and reached the clearing station.

After one night at the clearing station, we made the next part of the journey by sand cart. This was just a cart with two wheels pulled by mules or horses, and big enough to take a good load of stretchers. The wheels were very wide in order to get a good grip on the sand over which they were mostly used. During the afternoon of November 22nd 1917 we reached what had been named Gaza Hospital. This was not a hospital in the true sense but had been hastily made up of huts at the point at which the railway had then reached. We were sleeping on stretchers laid on the floor, but had plenty of blankets. To my surprise next to me was my pal Jelot. We were told that the next day two trains would be coming in, one for sitting patients, men who could walk down to the station. An old soldier working in the hospital advised us not to make the effort to walk down to the station as these trains did not always get as far as Egypt. However Jelot was all for getting away from the fighting line as soon as possible and did walk down to the station to get this train, and, as we had been advised it did not go as far as Egypt, but put everyone off at a

hospital about halfway down. After about a week poor old Jelot was sent back to the battalion, to be later killed in action. Myself I did wisely wait for the next train and had a comfortable sleep on it all the way to Kantara where we arrived on November 23rd 1917. After a night's rest in that hospital we were taken across the Suez Canal. On the other side was the main Egyptian railway to Cairo, where we were put on a train. It was a proper ambulance train, and whilst sitting waiting there some nurses came along. The cry went up 'girls, girls', and soon heads were sticking out of windows all along the train, for we had not seen girls for many months! Later that day we arrived in Cairo where we were taken by ambulance to our first real hospital, the 70th General Hospital.

Chapter 5: Hospital/convalescence in Egypt and demob

This covers the period of my Hospitalization and Convalescence in Egypt from November 1917 and transfer to the Labour Corps, to my Demob in March 1919.

We arrived at the 70th General Hospital in Cairo very late at night. First off we were looked over by the nurses. I was told by the nurse who attended me that I was in a filthy condition, and that I must go and get a bath. I rather resented this, as, after all the months that we had been out in the desert with hardly enough water even to drink, just what did she think we should have been like! However, off for a bath I went, and how lovely that was, the first time I had been in a real one for at least two years. Then to bed, again in a real one with real sheets. I thought I was in heaven!

The next morning the nurse asked me how I felt, and strangely I felt almost fit again, so I was told to get up, have breakfast and turn my bed. I should explain that my bed was in a corridor, where during the daytime the beds were turned flat against the wall, so I thought this meant doing that, whereas it meant making your bed. I was then told to wait for the doctor to come round, which he did later in the morning. He examined me, remarked that I seemed alright, and ordered a week's rest then back to the front. But after three days of this fine living I was taken very ill, packed off to bed and put into what is know these days as intensive care. They even got in touch with my father and informed him that I had little hope of recovery. Always one to do things on a grand scale, it appears I had contracted rheumatic fever and malaria. I can only suppose that, although I had seemed to be almost fit again, these germs must have really got a good hold of me. I have often thought since that, after living very rough and in hard conditions, the transfer to a comfortable way of life gave them a real chance to get going. I do not remember much about all this, being young I never had any idea it was all so serious. Ice packs were put on my back to cool me down, and I was even moved into what was known as the Death Ward (though I did not know this at the time). There I remained until I took a real turn for the better, and returned to my original ward. I spent the rest of November there, also December, and it was not until January 3rd 1918 that I was considered fit enough to be passed on to another hospital.

My new hospital was at Helouan, the 71st General Hospital, some twenty to thirty miles outside Cairo near the Nile. It really just consisted



Fig. 13: Stan Bird in Helouan Hospital, Egypt, April 1918 (age 23), with a pipe and marked with a X

of sulphur springs, round which had been built hotels equipped with everything necessary for the cure of rheumatic complaints. It seems it was quite a paying concern in pre-war days, and I expect is even more so now. I was lucky to have been able to go to this spot after the type of illness I had had. Our hospital had been a German hotel and had been taken over by the army. All the little rooms had been turned into wards, with six or seven people in each. Built on the three sides of a square, and the middle part filled in with a well-kept garden with palm trees etc., it was indeed a very pleasant place. The food was good, and later on when I was getting better I was put in charge of Red Cross food gifts for my section of wards, and believe me these were very very good, as was to be expected, and I looked after myself very well out of them. I remained here for over four months, and as all the patients were men who were well on the road to recovery, we had great fun. We had a ward sister whom we nicknamed 'shrapnel'. All the doors had been taken out, and they used to play a game with someone calling out "Shrapnel, shrapnel". She would dash in exclaiming "Who said that, who said that?", But it was impossible to find

out who was that. Now and again we were taken on visits to places of interest in and around Cairo. In later years I wished I had in those days been more interested and knew more about the fine things which Egypt has to offer, still I suppose I was very young and I suspect we had eyes more for any good-looking girl who we might pass. Yes, the stay in this hospital turned out to be one of the most pleasant times I ever spent in the army.

Altogether, with the time added that I had spent in Cairo Hospital, I had spent seven months in hospital. Well, all good things come to an end, and towards the end of April 1918 I found myself up for a Medical Board, and the thought went through my mind, well, this is it, and I shall shortly find myself back at the front. I should explain in those days you were marked A1, B1, B2, or B3. If A1 you were quite fit, B1 not so fit, B2 just a little more unfit, and if B3, well you were on your way to getting a discharge from the army. As I was now feeling quite well, I thought it would most certainly be A1, but much to my surprise I came out of it all marked B2 for four months, and, on May 6th 1918, I found myself discharged from hospital and posted to an army barracks in Abussia, Cairo, No. 2 Group A.E.C., where I was transferred to the Labour Corps, a unit which supplied men for all kinds of odd jobs in various parts of Egypt and Palestine, well behind the front line. I could not believe my good luck! However I did not quite like having to leave my old regiment after all those years, the more so as we had in a rifle regiment always worn black buttons and badges, and now I was issued with a new tunic, with brass buttons plus a great big brass badge, which all needed cleaning. Not liking all this I decided to go on wearing my old tunic, buttons and badge, and soon found myself in trouble and up in the orderly room on the crime list. However the officer was a very nice chap, and said that he understood how I felt, and suggested I wear the Labour Corps outfit while on duty, and my own regiment outfit when out on pleasure in the evening, to which I agreed. Thus I was let off which rather pleased me, as up to then I had managed to keep a clean crime sheet, and was able to do so for the rest of my service. But it has always annoyed me that when I was finally discharged from the army it was as a member of the Labour Corps and that was what was cited on my medals whereas most of my time in the army had been spent in a fighting regiment. At Abussia I almost learnt to drive a car. In the morning we were lined up and numbered from the left. The first 40 were selected to be sent to a transport camp, but I was not in that first 40 so missed out. It would have been useful in later life.

On the subject of health and fitness marking, whilst I was in the Cairo Helouan Hospital I found another 2nd Battalion lad there. When one went sick and sent away to hospital the regimental M.O. always put a written label on one stating what he thought was the trouble. In his case his legs had given way and he just could not walk. When he reached his first hospital the R.A.M.C. orderly who booked him in looked at his label and remarked that he had never head of that disease but that as it begins with 'A' I will put you down as asthma. His legs got better but being marked asthma, like me he was discharged B2 and transferred to the Labour Corps. In after life we became great pals and often laughed about this.

Much as I had begun to like Cairo, I soon found myself on the move again, this time bound for Alexandria, where I arrived on May 14th 1918. We were sent there by train, and, halfway on the journey, a lad in our carriage suddenly jumped up and made a clean dive through the open window out onto the track. We managed to pull the train up and three of us, including myself, walked back along the track, quite expecting to find him killed. However this was not so, but he was in very bad shape. However we managed to get him into a hospital in a small native town where we spent the rest of the day, mostly being followed round by some of the inhabitants none of whom seemed to have seen a soldier before. In fact it became a little uncomfortable as we were not armed, but the day passed and in the evening we caught another train for the rest of the journey, and were detailed to report to Mastapha Camp, Alexandria. Here we



Fig. 14: Stan Bird in Alexandria in 1918 (age 23)

were detained pending an inquiry into what had happened on the train, at which it appeared the chap concerned could not remember what had happened, and it was decided he had just had a black-out caused by the sun and had not made an attempt on his life. He was indeed lucky as he could well have been killed.

From Mastapha Camp, we moved to Victoria and Sida Bishr Camp, eight miles from Alexandria, outside in the desert but on the coast, where we could enjoy a swim whenever we felt like it, which in that hot sun was very often. Unknown to me at that time I was to remain here for the rest of the war, which was drawing to a close. I became a member of the camp staff, and was given a job in the Quarter Master's Stores, where the quartermaster sergeant was a Scotsman. There was always a lot of cigarettes and tobacco over the issue and I fancied some for myself, but they used to mysteriously disappear. After a few weeks there, wondering where they went to, I asked the quartermaster sergeant. His reply was "I did nee ken, I did nee ken". The next day I was chucked out of the job. Obviously he was running some sort of scam selling off the surplus. Thus I found myself reporting to the orderly room for another job. I was told to go to my tent and remain there until another one was given to me. It was such a lovely camp, being as it was almost on the seashore, in bell tents. Most of the other lads were fit men from various units in transit, and had to parade each morning, but not me as I was on the camp staff. Days and weeks went by and still no other job was assigned to me. And I was really enjoying life: a swim in the late mornings and late afternoons, in fact I spent hours in the water, and if I had enough cash might buy some orange juice and peanuts then rest in the afternoon, and, if cash would allow it, a trip into Alex in the evening. The camp food was also very good. One morning when sitting on my own in the tent a face appeared in the opening adorned with a wonderful military moustache, and a loud voice said "Why are you not on parade?". It was indeed the camp R.S.M.! I explained why I did not have to go on parade because of being on the camp staff. He then asked what job I did, so I explained that I was waiting for another one to be given me saying that I had been waiting for one about six weeks. "Cor" said he and went. A moment later he was back, "Did you say six weeks?". I said "Yes", and again he said "Cor" and a few words besides. Needless to say I had a job the next day! It was in the orderly room, a large marquee. I started at 6 am, filled and cleaned six oil lamps and tidied the place, including breakfast. I was finished by 9 am, so my usual day's routine was not much upset. A number of clerical chaps worked here booking in and out large drafts of troops, sometimes quite

late at night. One lad was posted and I was asked to take his place. Thinking quickly, I declined, the thought of losing that 6 am to 9 am job was too much for me! It was the ideal job which just suited my rather lazy nature!

In Alexandria there were several things one could do. One evening I went with a friend to Alexandria. Counting up our money, we found we had a piastre, which was about two and a half pence. There used to be a café near the terminus of the tramway (run like a railway) which ran from Victoria to Alexandria, which had variety turns. So we decide to go in there which we did, had a drink and sat down to watch the variety acts. After about an hour, perhaps two, we began to get some rather dirty looks from the waiters, so having no money to buy more drinks had to depart. We then decided to go to the Y.M.C.A., which had billiard tables etc. and sometimes a show, where we spent another hour or so before returning to camp. One evening I was roaming around the back streets of Alexandria and discovered a lithographic printers. I went in there, pulled a sheet out of the delivery box and scrutinized it. I don't know what the chap who was the owner thought of this!

Halfway through this ideal period I had to go for another Medical Board, and was again marked B2 for another four months, and after a further four months was yet again marked B2 for four months, by which time the war had ended, on November 11th 1918. I can assure you that was some night in Alexandria! The cry then went up "first in first out", and of course I was one of the first of these. Christmas came and went, and this time it was full of joy and expectation of shortly being home in dear old England. An officer came along and asked what we were doing for Christmas. He said get the cook to do you a super Christmas meal and if you want drinks go the officers' mess and order drinks in my name, which we did. By midnight I was felling awful, and I believe it was the only time in my life that I became drunk. I staggered out, flopped down onto the sand, and remembered nothing more until I woke up in the next morning to find I had been sleeping in the middle of the desert. About two months after, that officer came in one morning. 'By the way I had my mess bill in yesterday!' January and February went by, and still I was stuck in this camp. At last sometime in March I was posted to Kantara to a demob camp, but this was very badly organized. The routine was to watch for a chap to come out of the Orderly Room with papers in his hand. When this happened a big rush occurred, and surrounded by a big mob of the lads he proceeded to read out the names of those marked down for the next boat. If you managed to hear your name called out, you

were O.K., if not you waited until the next list was called out for the next boat. Had I been slightly deaf as I am now I honestly think I should still have been in that camp! However, eventually the great day did come when I did hear my name called out, and I can assure you that I heard it. Shortly afterwards I found myself on the way to Port Said where I boarded a transport ship. At long last I was on my way back to dear old Blighty!

Demob March/April 1919

We sailed from here, and after three days landed at Taranto in Italy, where, after about ten days stay, we boarded a train bound for Le Havre in France. WE WERE ON OUR WAY HOME. It was to prove a most enjoyable trip along the coastline of Italy (for the most of the way) with lovely views of the sea now and again, and then through the mountains to France. Believe it or not this train journey took nine days to get to Le Havre, as at times we came to a stop to allow main-line trains to go through, or were shunted into sidings and more or less forgotten about, and we also stopped from time to time for meals. But we had much to see and lots to enjoy, for we were in holiday mood and just did not mind. You see, unlike other times when we had landed in new countries, we did not have that awful fear as to whether we would come out of them alive, so we were able to sit back and enjoy it all, with the pleasant thought that we were on our way home. Our train, which had started off as just plain cattle trucks, was a sight to be seen by the time we finally arrived. You see whenever they shunted us into a siding, we set out to raid trains also waiting, and to pinch anything which might add to our comfort, even oil lamps.

Well, at long last we arrived at Le Havre, and, after a night's rest in a camp, boarded a boat bound for dear old Blighty, and on the 15th March 1919 landed at Southampton early in the morning, back once more to a 'Land fit for heroes' to live in! Strange how little things stick in one's memory. I often remember how the officer in charge of us asked us (in quite a nice way) to form up in line on the dockside, and added "This is my last order, and I don't care what you do tonight". We then boarded a train bound for Wimbledon Common (London) and the demob camp there, and as was to be expected in this dear old country, when we arrived in the late afternoon after dark it was pouring with rain!

We found that this demob business was quite a long affair. Papers had to be gone over and signed, kit handed in, then a good meal and more inspection. At long last after several hours, we were told that, with the

exception of an issue of spare underclothing, we were free to go. Most of us said “blow the underclothing” (or words to that effect), “let’s go”, and off we went. In after life I have often regretted not waiting that little bit longer in order to get that spare underclothing. After all the army does not give much away!

After leaving the camp I could not for the life of me remember how to get home to Brixton, which was not so far away. After all, I had been away for three years, and it was also pouring with rain which made things worse. I managed to get on the night bus, but believe it or not did not notice getting into Brixton, and indeed went right through it and found myself landed in Camberwell, which meant going back on my tracks. However, at long last I did, late on that well remembered Saturday, arrive home. These old-fashioned houses had ‘areas’, and we used to use the door in the area rather than the front door. So I went down the area steps and knocked on the door. A voice came from the other side “who is it, who is it?”. “Stan”, I replied. “Oh well, come in then” said my father. In addition my two sisters were out at the time. Such was my welcome home! My homecoming had rather come as a surprise to my father and sisters, as they had no way of knowing quite when I would return home. And so ended my army career. My official date of discharge was 13th April 1919, having served a total of four years 224 days in the British army throughout almost the whole of the First World War which with good reason has been termed the Great War. I was indeed fortunate and surprised to find myself still alive at the end of it!

War is an awful thing, and I have tried to record what it was like to be an ordinary soldier. Strange thing is, that in after life when I look back on those momentous years of my life, one does not remember much of the awful times which we most certainly had, but like to remember the wonderful comradeship of the jolly bunch of lads with whom I served and had the honour to know. Many have remained life-long friends, and we remember also those fine old pals of ours who never came back. And so my epistle ends.

Appendix 1

Places stationed in and visited both in England and on active service while a member of the 1st Surrey Rifles during the 1914–1918 war

31. 12. 1914	Redhill	11. 9. 1916	trenches
23. 2. 1915	Hythe	29. 9. 1916	Etrun
28. 2. 1915	Redhill	4. 10. 1916	trenches
28. 3. 1915	St. Albans	26. 10. 1916	Maroeuilx
14. 5. 1915	Hertford	27. 10. 1916	Izel-les-Hameau
15. 5. 1915	Sawbridgeworth	28. 10. 1916	Etree Wamin
23. 8. 1915	Hockerill Camp	29. 10. 1916	Neuville
5. 10. 1915	Felstead	30. 10. 1916	Authouse
6. 10. 1915	Braintree	3. 11. 1916	Bermeuil
7. 10. 1915	Felstead	4. 11. 1916	Villers-sous-Ailly
8. 10. 1915	Hockerill Camp	23. 11. 1916	Longpré
19. 10. 1915	Felstead	26. 11. 1916	Marseilles
20. 10. 1915	White Notley	30. 11. 1916	R.M.S. Ivernia
21. 10. 1915	Felstead	5. 12. 1916	Malta
22. 10. 1915	Hockerill Camp	8. 12. 1916	Salonica Uchanta
1. 11. 1915	Dunmow	10. 1. 1917	Nurich
2. 11. 1915	Coggeshall	11. 1. 1917	Ambraky
26. 11. 1915	Clacton-on-Sea	13. 1. 1917	Sarajol
7. 2. 1916	Warminster	15. 1. 1917	Snevce
24. 6. 1916	Southampton	16. 1. 1917	Dover Tepe Fort
25. 6. 1916	Le Havre	27. 3. 1917	Mahmudli
26. 6. 1916	Petit Hauvin (near St. Pol)	28. 3. 1917	Snevce
27. 6. 1916	Tinques	29. 3. 1917	Hirsova
26. 6. 1916	Louey	30. 3. 1917	Caussica
30. 6. 1916	trenches	31. 3. 1917	trenches Vardar
7. 7. 1916	Maroeuilx	17. 5. 1917	Spancovo
8. 7. 1916	Chelers	25. 5. 1917	Caussica
13. 7. 1916	Anzin	28. 5. 1917	Dead Man's Gulley
14. 7. 1916	Etrun	6. 6. 1917	Sarajol
15. 7. 1916	trenches	7. 6. 1917	Ambraky
4. 8. 1916	Etrun	8. 6. 1917	Nurich
12. 8. 1916	trenches	10. 6. 1917	Uchanta
5. 9. 1916	Etrun	17. 6. 1917	Salonica Docks
		19. 6. 1917	Alexandria

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--|
| 20. 6. 1917 | Ismailia | 19. 11. 1917 | Gaza |
| 9. 7. 1917 | El Ferdan | 20. 11. 1917 | Jullis |
| 10. 7. 1917 | El Ballah | 21. 11. 1917 | Clearing Station |
| 10. 7. 1917 | Kantara | 22. 11. 1917 | Gaza Hospital |
| 12. 7. 1917 | El Ballah | 23. 11. 1917 | Kantara Hospital |
| 29. 7. 1917 | Kent Fort | 24. 11. 1917 | 70th General Hospital,
Cairo |
| 13. 8. 1917 | Reserve | 3. 1. 1918 | Helouan (71st General
Hospital) |
| 13. 9. 1917 | Kent Fort | 6. 5. 1918 | No. 2 Group A.E.C.
(Abbassia Cairo) |
| 21. 9. 1917 | Reserve | 14. 5. 1918 | Mastapha Camp
(Alexandria) |
| 26. 10. 1917 | Gamli | 19. 6. 1918 | Sidi Bishr Camp
(Alexandria) |
| 31. 10. 1917 | Beersheba attack | | War ended while here |
| 7. 11. 1917 | Tel-el-Sheria attack | 15. 5. 1919 | Arrived home |
| 8. 11. 1917 | Huj; advanced with
cavalry | | |
| 11. 11. 1917 | 'Jemimer'
(Jemmameh) | | |

Serial No. T. 8/14/13.

Army Form B. 2079.

NOTE—This Certificate is to be issued without any alterations in the manuscript.

WARNING—If this Certificate is lost a duplicate cannot be issued. You should therefore on no account part with it or forward it by post when applying for a situation.

Certificate of discharge of No. 221859 Rank. Plt.

Name Bird Surname. Stanley Arthur Christian Names in full.

Unit* and Regiment or Corps from which discharged 800th Coy L. Inf. Bn.

* The unit of the Regiment or Corps such as Field Co. R.E., H.T., or M.T., A.S.C., etc., is invariably to be stated.

Regiment or Corps to which first posted. 70th London Regt

Also previously served in.....

Only Regiments or Corps in which the soldier served since August 4th, 1914, are to be stated. If inapplicable this space is to be ruled through in ink and initialled.

Specialist Qualifications (Military)..... Nil

Medals, Clasps, Decorations and Mentions in dispatches { * British War Medal Wound Stripes* Nil
Historical Medal. To be inserted in words.

Has served Overseas on Active Service

Enlisted at..... Camberwell on..... 2nd Sept 1914
*Each space is to be filled in and the word "nil" inserted where necessary.
†To be struck out in ink if not applicable.

He is discharged in consequence Being surplus to Military requirements (Having suffered impairments since entry into the Service.) Para 382 (XVI) K. R.

after serving*..... years*..... days with the Colours, and * Four years* 224 days in the Army Reserve Strike out * whichever is applicable. or Territorial Force†; inapplicable.

*Each space is to be filled in and the word "nil" inserted where necessary; number of years to be written in words.

†Service with Territorial Force to be shown only in cases of soldiers serving on a T.F. attestation.

Date of discharge.. 13th April 1919. Signature and Rank. Stanley Arthur

For Officer i/c..... Labour Corps Records. Nottingham (Place).

Description of the above-named soldier when he left the Colours.

Year of Birth..... 1892..... Marks or Scars.....

Height.....ft.....in.....

Complexion.....

Eyes..... Hair.....

(31817.) Wt. W1919/PP1138. 760m. 5/18. S. & C. (E3267.)

[P. T. O.]

Appendix 2: Stan Bird's Certificate of Discharge (above) and Certificate of Character (page 50)

Serial No. T 224/B Army Form B, 2067

NOTE.—The character given on this Certificate is based on holder's conduct throughout his military career.

WARNING.—If this Certificate is lost a duplicate cannot be issued. You should therefore on no account part with it, and should forward it to the proper authorities for cancellation, but should use a copy attested by a responsible person for the purpose.

Character Certificate of No. <u>521850</u> Rank <u>Sec.</u>	
Name.....	<u>Bird</u> <u>Stanley</u> <u>Arthur</u>
	<small>Surname Christian Names in full.</small>
Unit and Regiment or Corps from which discharged	<u>8th Bn. Labour Corps.</u>
<p>This is to certify that the ex-soldier named above has served with the Colours for <u>Four</u> years..... <u>22 1/2</u> months, and his character <small>To be inserted in words.</small> during this period..... <u>was</u></p> <p>..... <u>Good</u></p>	
<p>..... <u>Henry L</u> } Signature and Rank.</p>	
<p>Date of discharge <u>13th April 19</u> <u>1918</u> <u>Labour Corps</u> <u>Gettlingham</u> Place. <small>To Officer i/c. Records.</small></p>	
<p>To safeguard the holder of this Certificate from impersonation it should be noted that, in the event of any doubt arising as to the bona fides of the bearer, reference should be made to the description, when he left the Colours, of the soldier to whom this Certificate was given, which is recorded on his Discharge Certificate (Army Form B. 2079, Serial No. <u>T 224/B</u>), and should be in his possession.</p>	

NOTE.—This Certificate is to be issued without any alteration in the manuscript.

INDEX

A

Abussia, Cairo, No. 2 Group A.E.C. 45
Alexandria 31, 46, 48
Allenby, General 37
Arras (France) 16
Australian Mounted Infantry 39

B

Balkan Wars (1912) 22, 27
Beersheba, Battle of (Palestine) 35, 36-38
Belas Mountains (Macedonia) 23
billets
 Redhill 5-7
 St. Albans 7
 Sawbridgeworth 7-8
 Coggeshall 9-10
Bishop's Stortford 8-9
Brass and reed band 2, 3, 8, 11
Brixton 1, 50
bugle calls 10
bugle, drum and, band 3, 8
Bulgaria 21

C

Cairo, 70th General Hospital 43, 45
Camberwell 4, 50
camel transport (of stretchers) 41
Clacton 10
Clapham Common 5
Coggeshall 9-12
concert parties – Palestine 34
Cunard liner *Ivernia*, see troop-ships

D

demob camp
 Egypt 48-49
 Wimbledon Common 49
Dorian Front (Macedonia) 23
Dova Tepe Fort (Macedonia) 23-25
drum and bugle band 3, 8
Dulwich 4

E

El Ballah (Palestine) 33-34
Epsom Downs 6

F

fitness marking 45, 49

G

Gaza (Palestine) 33, 40
Gaza Hospital 41

H

Helouan (Egypt) 71st General Hospital
 43-44, 46
Hisea (Palestine) 34
Hockerill Camp 9
home-coming 49-50
Hospitals
 Gaza Hospital (Palestine) 41
 70th General Hospital, Cairo (Egypt)
 43-45
 71st General Hospital, Helouan
 (Egypt) 43-44, 46
Huj (Palestine) 39
Hythe (Kent), ranges 7

I

Ismaila (Egypt) 31
Ivernia see troop-ships

J

Jamaican troops 34
Japanese equipment 6-7, 8
Jemmameh (Palestine) 39
Jerusalem 40
joining up 1

K

Kantara (Egypt) 33, 42, 48
Kent Fort (Palestine) 36
Kitchener, Lord, review of troops 6

L

La Margerite see troop-ships
Le Havre (France) 14, 15, 49
Labour Corps 45, 46
Lake Timsah (Egypt) 35
lice (in the trenches) 17
line regiment 4
Longpré (France) 19
Louey (France) 16

M

- Macedonia
 - comments on: countryside 23
 - small towns and villages 24, 29
- Malta 20
- marching 4
 - (rifle regiment) 4
 - in Macedonia 21-23, 26-27, 28-29
 - in Palestine
 - the desert 33
 - to Beersheba 35-36
 - to Sheria 38
 - to Nebi Samwil 40
- Marseilles 19-20
- medical boards (on fitness) 45, 48
- Mastapha Camp (Egypt) 46-47
- mules (used in Macedonia) 21, 26-29

N

- Nebi Samwil (Palestine) 40

P

- Palmis (Macedonia) 23, 25
- Peckham 4
- Port Said 49

R

- railway – across Sinai Desert into Palestine 33, 41
- R.A.M.C. 13, 40, 46
- Red Cross, the 20, 44
- Redhill 5-7
- reed, brass and, band 2, 3, 8, 11
- regiments, type of 4
- rifle regiment 4
- rugby (in the desert) 35

S

- St. Albans 7
- St. Eloi (France) 16
- St. Pol (France) 15
- Salisbury Plain 12
- Salonica town 20, 21, 29
- sand cart transport (of stretchers) 41
- Sawbridgeworth 7-8
- Seaforth Highlanders 16, 17

- Sheria, Battle of (Palestine) 38-39
- Sida Bishr Camp (Egypt) 47
- Sinai Desert 33
- Somme, Battle of the 19
- Southampton 14, 49
- stretcher bearers 13
- Suez Canal 31, 33, 42
- surfing (in Palestine) 34
- Sutton Verney 12, 13

T

- Taranto (Italy) 49
- Tel-el-Fara (Palestine) 36
- Tel-el-Sheria (Palestine) 38
- trenches
 - in France 16-17
 - in Macedonia 23
 - in Palestine 36
- troop-ships
 - La Margerite* paddle steamer (England to France) 14
 - Ivernia* Cunard liner (France to Macedonia) 19-20
 - Uinnetonka* converted liner (Macedonia to Egypt) 31
- troop trains (usually in cattle trucks)
 - to Marseilles 19
 - Egypt 31, 33
 - Taranto (Italy) to Le Havre (France) 49

U

- U-boats 20
- Uinnetonka* see troop-ships

V

- Vardar Front (Macedonia) 27-28
- Victoria (Egypt) 47-48
- Villers-sous-Ailly (France) 19

W

- Warminster 12, 14
- Wimbledon Common 4, 48

Z

- Zeppelins 9