

**MS 2004/76**

**AHIER, WILLIAM ROLAND**

Private S.N. 10284 - machinegunner, sniper.

**Physical Description:** Diary - MS holograph 1 Jan – 5 May 1917 – when killed. Full page of mostly clear, small print per day. (Full digital slideshow available.)

**Time Period:** World War One, 1917.

**Locations:** France and Belgium: Estaires, Sailly, Fleurbaix, Armentieres, Pont de Nieppe, De Seule, Ploegsteert, Le Bizet, Neuve Eglise.

**Points of Interest:** Entertainment, sport, games, frolics, bathing, lice, de-lousing, rats, route marches, drill, trenches, equipment, alcohol, food, billets, bivvies, bedding, weather, ice, snow, mud, water, footrot, mail, letter writing, parcels, machine guns, bombardments, strafing, snipers, high explosives, shrapnel, fatigues, trench raids, YMCA, guard duties, illness, medical treatment, aerial dogfights.

**Description of Diary Contents:**

**January 1917**

1 – 7. New Year. To Estaires. Activities at estaminet. Wrestling. Description of bathing and de-lousing. Larrikin behaviour at billet. Bayonet exercises & squad drill. Bath. Football.

8 – 31. To Fleurbaix. Fatigues in trenches - shelled – shrapnel hit trouser leg. Football. Corrugated iron 'bivvy'. Heavy snow. Bitterly cold. Snowball fights. Ice slides. Organised games and drill. Played football in 4 inches of snow. Ground frozen. Tried to shave, but so cold could not feel razor in hand. For lunch crunched frozen bully beef. Saw a movie. Sleeping on straw on floor. Received 37 letters in one day. Problems with lice – little sleep. Bath – waiting round in the cold naked. Practice with Lewis Gun. Heavy bombardments – hit on head by falling object. Dreamt he was blown to bits. Bomb-throwing practice. Rifle grenade instruction. Strafed going through town. Slippery duckwalks.

## February 1917

- 1) Moved bivvy – to front line – bombardment, strafing all afternoon. Hard to pick up shells in the air. On duty 8-11 – very cold. Hot Oxo at 10 o'clock.
- 2) Out again 4-7. Coldest morning ever put in. Rum. Rations seldom sufficient. A page on death of Mr Thomas, beloved officer – killed by sniper when he stood up in a trench.
- 3) 5.30am German trenches raided – 3 prisoners, no casualties. Machine guns very active, unpleasant.
- 4) Quiet. 3pm mortar, 'whizzbang' exchange. 4.30 strafed. Hope to get out tomorrow.
- 5) Relieved. Saw horses capsized through ice into drain.
- 6) Coldest & most miserable night ever. Had temperature, took medicine. Visited YMCA, Estaminet - had mulled wine. Sliding on ice a foot thick.
- 7) Boots freeze at night. Water & tea get frozen almost immediately. To billet at Rue Bataille. Pictures and 'Pierrots' at Kapai theatre.
- 8) Slept well without straw. Fatigues filling sandbags. Led to believe could go early if worked hard, but kept on. Sat by fire. Little girl ironed his hat.
- 9) Took 4 men all afternoon to dig a foot down. Pictures and Pierrots again.
- 10) All morning 4 digging rubbish hole. Good parcels. Caught 20 lice.
- 11) Fatigues, played bridge, fight at bedtime with socks etc.
- 12) Bath at Sailly - great relief. Drinking. Had fun back at billet with little girl.
- 13) Warmer. Inspection by Major McKenzie. Long route march. Kapai theatre and Pierrots again.
- 14) Dreamt was gassed. easy fatigue. YMCA, cards.
- 15) Fatigue. Cleaned guns. Fritz shelling Fleurbaix. Gas drill. Route march. Kapai theatre.
- 16) Fatigue party to trenches. Estaminet for beer. Great sport when got home.
- 17) Mess orderly. Football match – good for spirits. Drank beer.
- 18) Took party of 10 up on fatigue. Drank beer. Had good fun when got back. Ground muddy and sticky but warm.
- 19) Fatigue – sandbags. Football in muddy morass. Concert at YMCA - sang.
- 20) Fatigues. Wet. Played cards.
- 21) Raiding party left at 3am. Terrific bombardment at 5.45. Our boys over the top. Stragglers in at 8.30. Casualties seemed very great. Names of missing, killed and wounded (including William Herbert King in Slodel, Daisy 2002/108 ? ). All exhausted & covered with mud. Battalion had about 180 casualties. Rum after tea.
- 22) Left for Estaires. Felt very ill. 3 companies billeted in one old factory – dirty, stuffy rooms. Estaminet.
- 23) Left early pulling heavy carts to Nieppe. Company's casualties in raid over 40.
- 24) No sign of friend Cosh - must have gone to a hospital. Asked to join snipers. Concert.
- 25) Moved again to Pont de Nieppe. Good food, beer, Moet & Chandon
- 26) Parade. Long route march. Went to Armentieres. Had a few bottles of bock. Some trouble with the police about being late home.
- 27) Cleaned gun. Route march. Moved carts. Dead tired. Played bridge.
- 28) Wakened by big minnie bombardment. Getting ready for General's inspection. Inspected at 11 and generally found fault with. Played two up. General Plumer's inspection – congratulated – told that Germans feared them. German raid in the morning – beaten back.

## March 1917

- 1) To trenches without carts – long way, just about dead beat when reached possie. Miserable. Took some shots and shut the German gunner up. German snipers.
- 2) Fritz pineapples. Bivvy badly infected with lice – killed thousands of them. Couldn't sleep. Hard frost.
- 3) Too cold to sleep 1-7am. On duty 7-10am. Foggy. Burnt bully beef stew for breakfast. No letters from home. Snipers. Duty 4-7pm. Need to be careful looking over the top.
- 4) Very little sleep from cold. Duty 1-4am - cold, miserable shift. Bivvy accommodation only for 6 men & one bivvy full of lice. Need to kill lice before able to get rest. Snipers. Terribly cold.
- 5) 4-7am shift again. Snow 6.30am. Rice & tough raisins for breakfast. Letter from Cosh in hospital.
- 6) Cleaning gun a deadly job in cold. Icy wind blowing.
- 7) Burnt bully beef stew for breakfast. Very cold took a few shots at German snipers
- 8) 4-7am shift. Minnies. 1-4 pm shift. Snowing heavily. Exchange of fire. Looking forward to getting out of trenches.
- 9) Bread & cheese breakfast. Relieved – to Le Bizet.
- 10) Bath at Pont de Nieppe – much needed. Drill. Bock.
- 11) Church. Reading. Bridge. Digging ditch for cable – 6ft deep and 6ft long per man. Machine-gunned– had to crawl back.
- 12) Rain onto bed. Carrying bricks. YMCA for cocoa.
- 13) Bath. Drill & bayonet fighting. To Armentieres. Estaminet.
- 14) Drill – tedious. Route march – got muddy and deliberately splashed officers.
- 15) Marched to De Seule. Huts. Bock. Two-up. Crown & Anchor. Estaminet.
- 16) Physical drill. Dug out mud from around huts. Parade. Football.
- 17) Drill. Had helmets inspected then battalion put through gas cloud - helmets worked alright. More drill. Bayoneting. Bocks with Irishmen – St Patrick's Day.
- 18) Rotten dreams. Church parade in open air. One loaf of bread for 16 men. Pitch & Toss. Football. Aeroplanes thick as mosquitoes on a summer's eve. Stout.
- 19) Sick - mumps – paraded sick but got pills & duty. Parade & drill. Others have mumps.
- 20) Navvying on railway line in snow & sleet. Too late for sick parade. Wet through unloading sleepers. Sore throat. Good war news. Pitch & toss.
- 21) Paraded sick – light duties. Estaminet.
- 22) Ill. Missed sick parade. Musketry. Admonished for criticisms in letter to friend Cosh. Rifle drill. March in snowstorm. Trench digging towards the front line in a snow storm – exhausting.
- 23) Could scarcely stand – back so stiff. Played football pm. Kicked in ankle, but scored try.
- 24) Couldn't rest all night – sore leg. Heavy bombardment. Paraded sick – Ankle painted with iodine & hip rubbed with liniment. Letter from Cosh – had received none of 7 letters written.
- 25) Paraded sick – same treatment. Rested. Others doing wiring – rotten job.
- 26) Paraded sick. Rest.
- 27) Paraded sick. Light duties. Bock after tea.
- 28) March. Bayonet practice. Watched football. Bath at Bailleul. Officers had reserved every decent show in town. Got home about 10 minutes after roll-call.

- 29) In trouble for being absent at roll-call – 2 days C.B. (confined to barracks). C.B. duties – digging drains etc. Cross-country race. After 6pm had to answer C.B. whistle every half hour.
- 30) Told had got into snipers. Fatigue unloading rails. Got tin of peaches. C.B. calls.
- 31) Working party – no rations issued. Filling levels for railway. Estaminet for lunch. Missed bath again – lousey.

## April 1917

- 1) Moved off. Told to go with snipers. Heavy packs. Nearly dropped after a couple of miles. In a hut with shrapnel holes – will have to get out if Fritz starts again.
- 2) Rotten night. Heavy snow. To trenches – couldn't see much and no Germans about. Hun aeroplanes and 'big stuff'. Pitch and toss. Heavy snow. Preferable life to that of an ordinary infantryman.
- 3) Better night. Guns woke in morning. Heavy snow. No-one on duty morning. Sardines & bread for lunch – not appreciated. On duty 3.30pm. Relieved a group chased out by High explosives. Retaliatory shell fire
- 4) Good night's sleep although guns annoying. Description of repeated shell fire attack on possie when on duty. Close calls. Cleared out twice. Very poor rations.
- 5) Uneventful early shift. Big evening bombardment of Fritz. Flares for 2 hours.
- 6) Supposed to move. Letters. Tiresome writing the same thing in every letter. Censor must get fed up. Played pitch & toss.
- 7) Easy day. Rumours of advance. Belief might be going over the top any time. Description of very large air battle – downing of planes.
- 8) Easy day. 2 Hun planes & balloon dropped. Cards & two-up. Narrow escape from shells after tea.
- 9) Great thunder of big guns down the line - German offensive. Has heard of general advance. Shooting with telescopic sights. Cut up by news of friend Wray Wilson's death – desire for revenge. Went for bread and eggs.
- 10) Easy day. Found Wray's grave - description. Great news of an advance. Great aeroplane battles. Stew just about pure water. Cards. Heavy snowstorm.
- 11) Walked to baths through Ploegsteert & Le Bizet (both in Belgium) to Pont de Nieppe – 4-5 miles. Old clothes thickly inhabited with lice. Good food. Great war news – thousands of prisoners. Cards. Rum.
- 12) Army provides no bath for 2 months, then every day – to keep up averages. Shelling near hut – moved quickly. Cards. Wants to find out who is opening his parcels.
- 13) Mess orderly. Warm. Pitch & Toss – getting expert. Wrote letters. Difficulty of writing for most especially having to repeat the same news to everyone. But letter-writing and receiving links to the old life – links that binding to home and friends. Digging new trench – hard work. Home through mud & slush 12.15am. Rum and then bed.
- 14) Up at lunchtime – breakfast in bed. Pitch & toss. Not enough bread – very poor rations. Parcels from NZ - note enclosed for pilferers. Hun helmet received in NZ.
- 15) Moved to new possie - like the hold of a ship – 4 tiers of bunks. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour's walking to go down the sap. Went out over the parapet to fix up the opening in front.
- 16) Too cold to sleep. Dreamt back at school in Tokanui. Trench work. Parcel. Sketches.
- 17) Wet and misty. Duty 12 to 3.30pm. 2 machinegunners shot by accident last night. Trench very wet – over boot tops. Was shelled, but no direct hits.
- 18) Breakfast very light. Cards. PM at post – wet and miserable. First good meal since joining snipers. A good parcel.
- 19) Very poor night's rest. Kept awake for hours by rats and lice. Chased out of post by shelling. Dark, gloomy & cramped quarters – but feeling of security in them. Good news from Somme – but German burning & looting.
- 20) Cold, damp possie – cheerless before breakfast. Much shelling both sides. Good tot of rum in bed.

- 21) Good sleep – rats didn't worry. Nothing much doing at the post. German plane flew round and round very low – repeatedly fired at it with his rifle. Tragic accident – a carried bomb exploded – 1 killed, 3 wounded. Row after kept awake by gramophone.
- 22) Fine, clear, no Germans about. Letter, photos, parcel. A lot of German planes – very high & looking like anaemic mosquitoes. Much shelling. Stories of atrocities - hun corpse factories.
- 23) Early shift alone. Frost, planes, no Germans. Met hundreds of infantry going back through saps –hopped out & walked along the top to avoid them. Hun shelled dump alongside possie.
- 24) Packed up early. Germans shelled the dump alongside. To Pont de Nieppe. Decent meal. Artillery. Poker. Tents crowded and feeling of being vulnerable. Spring blossom.
- 25) Anzac Day. Packed in so tight couldn't sleep. Fatigue. Shell over head – 30 yds past. Carried sandbags. Home via Gas Trench. Received lemon cheese.
- 26) Sandbags. Went to Pont de Nieppe for a bath, but Germans shelling baths. Close shave with shell on way back.
- 27) Preparing for departure. Lift on Australian lorry to De Seule. Draughts and cards. Paraded sick – stomach troubles.
- 28) Great bombardment 3.30am. Paraded sick – light duties – cookhouse guard. Cards. Bocks. Warm.
- 29) Paraded sick – pills and light duties. 'Cornflour stuff' as medicine. Afternoon stroll. Things lively on return.
- 30) Ready to move. Polished gear. Aerial battles. Billeted in old school house at Neuve Eglise - stone floor & no straw. Cut hair. Cards. Fatigue.

## May 1917

- 1) Road-making fatigue. German plane brought down. Cloudless sky. Sun, coffee, cards.
- 2) Paraded sick in order to get boots mended. Shower & change of clothes. Beautiful day – watched swallow building nest.
- 3) Road digging – 23 yds to 2 men. 6 ft wide, 1ft deep. Hands blistered. When finished the Tommy Corporal wanted them to sit about waiting for the engineer. Told him off and moved away. Work not so bad, but too hard for the food - a slice of bread & a fragment of bacon for breakfast, a slice of bread & jam for lunch & stew for tea. A beautiful spring day.
- 4) Carrying things to front line. – difficult, hot work. H.E's, minnies & pineapples flying around all day. Aerial activity. Carried bags of bricks till 2pm. Hot & sultry. Wanted to stop for water at pump, but not allowed. After tea a few bocks and cards.
- 5) Germans put up a minnie bombardment in the morning then came over. Didn't get in the trench. 1 prisoner taken. About 8 wounded by the minnies. Went up near the front line in a working party digging a dugout. Got piece-work, & by working hard got away at about lunch time. Home early. Had a couple of glasses of French beer.

*'Dick was killed about 9 o'clock at night at Neuve Eglise. Bert Glinch 5/5/17'*