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Paitry, Dawn

Papers relating to the war service of Harold Edward
Burrows and Michael Joseph Paitry

Auckland War Memorial Museum – Tāmaki Paenga Hira

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For God, For King & For Country



PATRON
Y.M.C.A. NATIONAL COUNCIL
H.M. THE KING.



PATRON
MILITARY CAMP DEPT
H.R.H. DUKE OF CONNAUGHT.

Reply to _____ Company 16th West^{shire} Regt.

Stationed at _____
Hope you are settled alright now & in a good job & all well. H.

Lt J. Soldiers Club. 191
26-8-17

Dear Will,

I am now in London on ten days furlough & am going to Scotland tonight. I am going as far as Edinburgh to see my folks.

I am having a great time. I suppose you will not have found my letters very interesting in the post twelve months as one cannot put much in them when they are read by your Platoon Officers. So I am writing this one to describe what warfare is really like these times. I get the Lt J papers occasionally & you get a very poor idea of what it is really like. Of course what I am about to write about I am not going to put in any other letters I write so anything fit to tell them or the girls I will leave to you to tell them as I would not like to put anything in their letters to worry them.

Don't think that I am sick of the game or anything like that from the description I am about to give you. Well to begin with I joined the Company at the Somme on the 29th of Sept but did not see any fighting there that is I was not in the firing line. We left there a fortnight after & went to Saily & Laventie front. That is a few miles south of Arras. There we remained till the 24th of February when we went to Hill 63. Pleguez Wood. It was from there we attacked Messines. While in the Saily front (winter time) it was very quiet with only slight bombardments & occasional raids but when we

went to Hill 63 the trouble came. We were a Tommy Division who had the "west" & of course Fritz knew it, but when we went there & our constant fire began (blowing up his trenches with trench mortars) he knew there was a charge & of course he resisted. It was there that I had my first damnable feeling for he straffed us with ~~mine~~ whoppers (a heavy trench mortar, about the size of an oil-drum ~~and~~ with a thin casing & full of high explosive) for an hour & then attempted to enter our trenches. This he found difficult as only one man fell dead into our trench. It was there I lost my mate Jim Leckie. He was cut to pieces by a shell.

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191

now take the Messines battle. We worked all night & slept in the day time to fix our trenches for the attack for several weeks before it took place. Then on the night of the 7th of June we marched to our assembly trenches for 10 miles. This had to be done with gas masks on. I might mention before this happened all the wire both his & ours had been blown to atoms, & his trenches also to say nothing of ours as our artillery did not shell his batteries although they had located them. This they left till the last moment as for had they blown them up previously they would have replaced them & they would not have known their position or range. So we reached our assembly trenches about half past two in the morning of the seventh & waited till 3-15 AM when the earth began to move first to the left

then to the right then up & down & side to side
then the whole of his territory seemed to be on fire
You can't imagine the feelings wondering if we
were going up or him. By this time there were
hundreds or rather thousands of guns barking.
Then our O.C. a chap called Tildy no doubt you
heard of him, he has risen from the ranks to a
Captain, with a P.C.M. & as for a gentleman well
words can't express my meaning. He puts more time
with the men than the Officers & gives cigarettes
away galore. About we are winning these times & then
we left our trench. Then there was men falling
about me some for help which we must ignore
I am sure you know your trench you don't stop
till you reach your objective unless your shot
Well I need not tell you anything blood-thirsty
about it but I never lost my reasoning through out
of it. There were pitiful sights of the enemy.
One such as this I saw a small dog lying alongside
of two bodies which were more or less mutilated
& looked nervously at us as we passed. On reaching
our objective about a ^{half} quarter of a mile past
what was once the town of Incauco we dug in
& remained there for eighty hours. This time
was occupied by carrying trench stores to
the various companies. (Overland of course)

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*How had you
been
from
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From here on the first day the Australians passed
us & dug in further on. Well so much for Messers
The next time we went into the trenches (eight days

expecting to be relieved but instead of that
we got orders at nine o'clock at night that
our whole company & eighty out of another
company were to raid to a depth of six hundred
yards. This was to take forty minutes. Here is
the excitement. We left our trenches under
a heavy barrage of fire from Fritz who was to
raid us five minutes after as we learned
from his prisoners. We met his men in "No
man's land" in shell holes & then there was hand
& hand fighting not with bayonets so much as bombs.
Of course the bayonets were used also.
The greatest surprise I got was when we first

met them for I was going along calmly when there
was a flash of a rifle about five yards in front
of me & I noticed one of our men fall that was next
to me on my left & saw a figure crawling in a shell
hole. This of course was all in a second. What followed
need not be explained but there was panic in
shell hole. Well we reached our objective &
came back but did not bother much of prisoners.
Well we started with about 160 men & finished
with ninety odd. Well Well this will give you
some sort of an idea of what modern warfare is like
I have been in charge of a section for the past

the officers that I am going through for stripes
but I don't know whether I will get them
or not as there is a corporal joined the
Company & keeping his stripes though he came
with the 4th Reinforcement. Now see if I don't
I will stand a chance of getting a good job
Well Well I must close now as I will
have to get ready to catch the train for
Leathers. I will write to the other later.
Don't let ~~Tom~~ Tom see this letter
as I will not tell her anything about the war
but about my holiday. Kiss - love
Your loving Brother
Harold.