

## A TRIP UP THE LINE

This account was extracted from my father's note book that he carried in the early days of the war . This is a first hand account of his experiences . He was later wounded in action at Polygon Wood and evacuated back to England .

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An account of the movements of a platoon of infantrymen going up to the front line in the trenches in France in the First World War as recorded by Private H.J.Allison , No. 1353 , 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion , A.I.F.

“ Another quarter of an hour, chaps” says the sergeant . There is much looking at packs and equipment to see that everything is fixed and nothing forgotten . Time passes .

“Fall in ” Then after much bandying of all correct , all correct , sir , the company moves off by platoons at fifty paces . Their thoughts are strange as they move up . They are wondering who will go out to it this time , and whether it will be their turn also . Here and there one of the old boys shouts out some cheery words to others in his section , others of these are quiet and thoughtful for they remember their previous trips and the cobbles that are no more . Ever present in the minds of all lurks the fear of shells , of the demoralizing effect of bombard . Still they plod on but there is a set expression in their rugged faces – a certain determination in their actions . It is the courage of desperation , or rather the defiance of the spirit that is within them .

The pack begins to pull a bit . It is with the numerous other stuff that is banging around them , begins to get heavy . They are traveling at intervals of sections now—also they are in a different country . No longer do they see dugouts protruding over the surface of the earth . Here and there are batteries and dumps camouflaged and sunk deep into the mud . Pieces of broken limbers stick up at different points . Everywhere off the track are shell holes , old and new , some filled with water , it being a work of art almost , to walk between them without falling in .

In the distance can be seen an old tank which has been gutted by a lucky shot of Fritz . They are on the duckboard track which winds like a snake into the unknown . It is dusk . There is much holding up of hands in the rear of sections , and they flop down on the side of the track , thankful for the short respite that is given them . Cigarettes are stealthily lit . Here and there a pipe glows filled with the vile weed that army contractors so considerately provide for His Majesty's Forces . They are content for the time being and think not of the future . Each one gets into the habit of thinking of the present , since at any time , he may be no more . It is good to be on ones back again, think they , why worry about the future .

Suddenly , there is much passing of orders and scrambling to feet . Once more they trudge on , their thoughts on the weight that they carry , which seems to increase at every stride . A shell screeches in the distance , then another , but it is only the desultory firing of a few miles back . They draw nearer . It is dark , save for the flashes of batteries here and there in gullies , which at intervals light up the track beneath their feet .

They pass a dump . Rifle sections pick up ammunition at fifty rounds a man , bombers load themselves with bombs . They struggle afresh under their increased burdens . They are more silent for they are nearing the danger zone and Fritz has very acute ears . There is a temporary halt and whispered orders are passed from mouth to mouth , such as “pass the ram on to number 3” . Muttered curses and odd jokes are everywhere . Then is passed along the order for strict silence . There is generally more noise in passing this order than any other . Why , I know not , except that each man is careful to impress the order on those behind them . The shells are more frequent now . They pass on silently , their packs cutting deeper into their shoulders , their breath short and quick after the manner of men , who are sorely exerted .

They would not dare to stop now if they could , for the shells fall thick and heavy , and stretcher bearers are ever on the alert . They look around them at their mates in the section , each with such a feeling toward his fellow men that surely cannot be found elsewhere , for there is nothing that endears man to his fellow like common hardship and common danger .

In the distance over the ridge can be seen flares from the enemy’s and our front line , lighting up the sky at intervals like an old time Guy Fawkes night . A party of men appear like ghosts out of the darkness . A ration party or pioneers perhaps on their return trip from the front line . One of our party asked “How far is it , digger ?” and they disappear as silently and suddenly as they came . They enter a sap . Here and there on the sides of the sap are dead men in various attitudes – some perhaps leaning on posts or stumps with an arm outstretched pointing like a signpost the way up the sap – some with their gas masks still on – relics of a former hell .

The way is difficult and muddy leading them at times over corpses long since dead . They stumble and stagger on , the weight dragging them down , the shells falling thicker around them , the k-k Rupp of the German explosive and the Whiz-z-z-bang of his light artillery . They reach supports . What animals are these that they see leaning against the parapet , covered in , not mud , but slime . The hair is long on their faces and they look as if they have not washed for years . A whispered “What sort of a time , diggers” , from our boys , and a harsh reply from the others , and our lads move on , some relieving supports and others moving a few hundred yards ahead , perhaps overland , to relieve the front line . This does not look like a trench but a connection of shell holes and shows signs of much bombardment . They hasten to relieve the drowned rats that are in it , and to throw the weight off their backs , at least some of it for always do they wear equipment sleeping or waking . They relieve the posts by sections , thankful that they have at last got the first ordeal over .

