

MY WAR EXPERIENCES

FROM PRIVATE 8294, ARTHUR ROBERT JENKINSON

2nd INFANTRY BATTALION, 1st BRIGADE

1st DIVISION CANADIAN CORPS.

In June, 1914, I went to camp in Petawawa with the 40th Northumberland Regiment from Cobourg, Ontario, the Militia Regiment for two weeks training. In August, war broke out and I got word they wanted men for service. I went to Brighton to enlist and was given a red coat and blue pants with a red stripe. I, with some more men, went to Cobourg where we slept in a hotel and then went to the Armouries to drill. After about ten days, some men arrived from Port Hope. We were put on a train to Belleville where some more men got on, my brother Albert being one of them. He had enlisted with the Argyle Light Infantry. Some more men from Picton, Madoc and Peterborough arrived, then we left for Kingston, Brockville and then to Watcatier, Quebec. There we were put in tents and given a medical check-up. Some men were turned down and sent back.

After a few days, we were given new uniforms and told to burn the old ones - that was the last of the red coats. After a few days at target practice and drill, we were put on a train and taken to the docks, where we were put on a ship and sent to Gaspé Bay. We waited there for some destroyers from Briton. After they arrived, we sailed. It was quite a convoy.

I had been a bugler in the Norfolk Regiment in England, so I was given a bugle as I knew all the bugle calls. We started to practice on the ship, but the Captain soon put a stop to that as the sound carried a long way.

We arrived in Plymouth, England about three weeks later and went to Salisbury Plains near Stonehenge. We spent the winter there in tents. It rained nearly all the time which meant plenty of mud. Quite a number of men were taken sick - some died - not much chance for drill.

About the first of February, King George V inspected us and gave his OK. As we were the originals, we were given a blue cloth for the first Brigade.

I forgot to mention, I was in the 2nd Battalion, first Brigade, 4 Battalions to a Brigade. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th had blue on their lapels. All the infantry of the originals could wear the blue, but any new men that came to the Battalions could not. The Artillery Transport, etc. wore other colours.

In February, 1915, we arrived at St. Nagare in France. We were put in box cars for two days and were moved around until we arrived in Merris, a small village. We stayed in a barn for two days, then moved to Arminitiers where we went into the trenches with British soldiers. They thought we had come to relieve them. We made two trips in three days.

We then moved to a different part of the line. The trenches were very muddy. The Germans fired a Minnewafer trench mortar shell into our trench. A boy named Richardson from Brighton was blown to pieces and another boy was blinded.

About the 20th of April, we went to Vlanmantighe, Belgium near Ypres. Our Battalion was going over plans to capture Hill 60; it had been tried before, but failed. We were sleeping in a flour mill at night.

About 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon of April 22, a yellow fog was seen near Ypres; then shells started to land in the village we were in. One shell hit a house, killing an old man, a woman and baby. Others landed close by.

A motorcycle messenger arrived with a message. I was told to sound 'Fall in on the Double'. I went to the end of the village and sounded it twice and then in the centre. The men fell in, got extra food, ammunition, etc., and marched toward Ypres. It was getting dark when we arrived near there.

We sent out scouts, but they did not return. We moved forward and a machine gun started to fire. One of our men had found a trench with Germans in it. We extended out in line. I was with Major Bolster, a South African Veteran. Our Colonel Watson came and told Major Bolster No. 1 company was going to attack and for No. 4, our company, to cover them. They attacked, but were met with machine gun fire. Thirteen men came back to our lines, three days later, ten more came back, some from hospitals with bandages on. Four men had been with other British soldiers who they had found. Altogether, 23 men out of 250. These men, or most of them, were from Ottawa - Governor-General's Foot Guards. Next morning we advanced and occupied an old trench.

I was sent with a message to Captain O'Flynn of Belleville to move his men up to join up with us. Ten minutes later, he sent word the Germans were trying to cut us off. We were to drop back.

We lost quite a few men. Major Bolster was killed also. I laid down my bugle to pick up a rifle as a bugler does not carry a rifle. I fired it into the Germans. They seemed so thick you could not miss. We dropped back to a barn which was full of wounded - some were in the barnyard waiting to get out. Juliet Farm was the name they gave it. We were told to hold it at all cost. I was sent into a ditch with five men. Six of us to hold about 50 yards. Sergeant Winterbottom of Peterborough was now in charge. Half our company officers were all gone.

A plane saw us and dropped a flare; a German gun opened up and a shell landed near, then another, closer this time. The men came towards me as I was in the deepest end of the ditch. Some fell on top of me - the shell burst close. I got up - 2 dead, 3 wounded. The wounded helped each other to get out leaving me alone. I got the rifles close and waited. The Germans had stopped.

I heard a noise behind and saw some double decked busses turning around - the men jumping off them and running towards me. They were Scottish soldiers. They took over the ditch and started to make a trench out of it.

About midnight, Captain Willis O'Connor came into the line and asked if any 2nd Battalion men were there. I went to him and he told me to go to the 7th line trench along the road behind me. There I found what was left of the Battalion. A Corporal told me to go to the cook wagon and get some food. I got some stew and bread. It sure was good. Then I laid down in the trench - it was wet, but I still had a short sleep.

We were told to fall in for roll call. Two hundred and twenty three men were left of about one thousand.

About 9:30 a.m., the four Battalions, 1, 2, 3 & 4 were put together to make one. We were sent about a mile away to stand by while some French soldiers took back some of the trenches they had lost. The 2nd and 3rd Brigades Canadian were in the line all the time. They lost heavy trying

to help the French and hold their own lines. Around midnight, we were sent up the line to help the Gurkhas Indian troops from India. While covering them, a German sniper shot two of our men. A British Officer in charge spoke to a sergeant of the Gurkhas. He sent out a man and the sniping stopped.

The next day, we moved back to Vlamontinghe. After a day's rest, we moved back up near the 7th line and stayed about 24 hours. Then we moved back to Vlamontinghe to get some more equipment, as we had lost most of ours.

Next we moved to Festubert, where we captured more trenches. We were nearly up to full strength as four Battalions that were left in England were sent here to help fill ours up in the three Brigades. Also some just from Canada were sent out.

We then moved to Givenchy where our Battalion and the Royal Canadian Dragoons without their horses helped to straighten out our lines.

We moved to Canaugh lines for a rest about 20 kilometers from the front. We just arrived there and had a meal, when a dispatch rider came with orders we had to go back as the 4th C.M.R. had lost their trench and General Mercer had been killed while inspecting the line. We marched back and got up close near a stone wall. The men had lost a hill. We were waiting for orders. At 4 o'clock we went over the top and got the trench at the bottom of the hill where we were told to stop. Our Artillery were shelling the hill all the time. While near the stone wall, a shell burst near me and a small piece of shrapnel just broke the skin on my back. It burned a little. After we settled down, a man next to me looked at my back and took a small piece of steel out. It had just entered a little. He put some iodine from my medical kit on and a pad. I never bothered to report it.

After 48 hours, I think it was the Highlanders who came to us that morning and at dawn went up the hill and captured it. We followed them up the hill to hold it. The Germans made two counter attacks, but we drove them back. We were relieved that night but were sent to some other trenches and did not get our rest.

While in these trenches, our Battalion was told to dig some reserve trenches in a hurry. Our officer took some of the men out of the front

line to dig a trench about 25 yards behind the front line. He left the sentrys about 10 or 12 yards apart. I was one he left on guard. He told me to fire one shot and they would come and that he would relieve me in about two hours. I had not had any sleep for over 24 hours. This was about 7:00 p.m. and at 10:00 p.m. I still had no relief. I was getting tired and could hardly keep my eyes open. I must have closed them for awhile but was awakened by a noise. We had thrown empty cans over the parapet and somebody had moved one. I had imagined seeing things, but I was pointing my rifle at a man. A German had crept up close, but when I said halt, he tried to get under our barbed wire. I fired at him. The men came over and found him dead. I told them I had seen him and told him to halt, but when he would not, I fired at him. My officer said if he had gone back and told them the trench was nearly empty, it might have been bad for us.

We had Captain Vanderwater from Belleville and a boy from Corbyville on our next trip. In the line, the officer asked me to look after the boy, Richard German, who said he was 17, but told them he was 18 years old. He was sent out on listening post with me.

We would crawl under our barbed wire to a shell hole near the German trench. We had a piece of cord fastened to a can in the front line, if anything was doing, we would pull on the cord and the men in the front line would watch out for us or a man would come out. I told Dick (that was what everybody called him) to keep quiet as the Germans were not far away. About six feet from us were some dead bodies and the rats were eating them. They sure did not smell very nice. One of the rats that had finished eating was running around and ran over Dick's neck. He said OH quite loud and I pushed his head down. A rifle fired and a machine gun opened up. For a while everybody was on the watch. After we got in, my Officer asked me what happened. I told him not to send Dick out again as he was nervous and too young. Two hours out there would get anybody's nerves.

Next we moved to trenches known as D3 and D4. About 9:00 a.m. the Germans started to shell our trenches with small and heavy shells and blew up parts of our trench. When our men started to repair them, their snipers got busy and shot some of our men. Sergeant Bill Briggs,

one of the originals was killed. He was throwing sand bags in to fill the holes. I was filling bags with a man named Williams. He said he came from Campbellford and was one of the originals. He was wounded at Ypres and came back with a bandaged leg. He said he could not stand the hospital and wanted to get back. Williams was shaking the dirt down in the bags and I was filling them. I told him to keep his head down, but he just laughed. When he stood up to shake the next bag, I heard the crack of a bullet and Williams dropped. The bullet had lifted his scalp and I could see his brains still moving. I called for a stretcher bearer and gently put the scalp back over the hole. The first-aid man put a bandage over it and he had to wait until dark to get him out. He was still unconscious. I heard a few days later that he lived for four days. He was different than some who wanted to get wounded to get out of it. If a man got a nice wound he would 'thank God', a nasty wound 'Oh my God', a bad wound, 'God Help Me'.

About this time we were making raids on German trenches with black faces, nothing bright showing. We were taking prisoners, killing some and then getting back to our lines. Sometimes it did not go so good. The Germans got wise and were waiting. There were plenty of patrols at night between the trenches in no man's land. In one of these raids, Captain George Richardson, who had a sports arena in Kingston named after him, was killed.

Next we went into a trench that had water in it. The Germans were on higher ground and they drained their water into our trench. We had to wear hip rubber boots, but they were no good for me because the water came in anyway. I was given a little higher place than some. We were in 24 hours, out 24 hours and another 24 hours in and that was all.

We went to another place where the Engineers were digging a mine. A tunnel 15 feet down and about 4' by 4' square. The officer came and asked for all the short men that could be spared to plug up the tunnel. I was one who went in first. I followed the officer in and carried a sandbag with me. The officer connected the wires and placed the sandbags. After the job was done, he told me to stay there and let nobody in as he had to get the men out of our line because our trench was being mined by the Germans and he did not know which would go up first. I waited about 10 or 15 minutes, it seemed longer, and I was glad when I saw him again.

I went back with him and he got the OK and up went the German trench. Our men waited for 10 minutes to see if the German mine would go up, but it did not. Next we moved to another part and had a new officer. He asked me if I would be his batman, cook his meals and look after his gear. I said I would.

We were in the dugout one morning when the Germans started to shell. One landed near us. I had been talking to another batman who was in the same dugout. It was a hole about 5' high, tin roof level with the ground and about 5' square. This man was from Ottawa and was showing me a letter he had just received from home and a picture of his wife and two boys. She said in the letter that she would be glad when he came home. Just then another shell came over and it was closer this time. It exploded near our dugout. I said that was close and he did not answer. His head was almost on the charcoal fire where he was frying some bacon for his officer. He was killed by concussion.

I picked up my rifle and went into the front line about ten feet away. As I got there a mine went up under our 15 platoon. Our officer and 60 of our men went up with it. The officer I was looking for sent me with some more men into the crater. The Germans were going to take it, but the officer fired his pistol into the air, a red light went up and our artillery opened fire. Our machine guns on the right fired into the Germans and our fire stopped them. I think they lost more men than we did. We lost about 60 men and two officers.

About August 31st, we moved to the Somme. On September 1st, we went to Mouguet Farm. On the right of the farm was a small hill which our Battalion took over. It was overlooking the farm. The attack took place on September 3rd, 1916. The 16th Battalion, 3rd Brigade attacked and were supported by the 2nd by us firing at the Germans. The Germans fired back at us with their field guns - whiz-bangs, a nasty, powerful shell that did a lot of damage.

Lieutenant Joe Richardson had his leg blown off with a shell. He died the next day.

Dick German who was still with us was buried by a shell. Another man and I dug him out. He was shell-shocked and we tied him up with his putties. He did not know what he was doing and he was taken out that night. We then

went to the town of Albert for a short rest.

On September 9th, we went back to the Somme in a different part to straighten out the line. We had to push the Germans back about 300 yards. The 2nd Battalion attacked at 4:45 p.m. Our guns opened up and blew their barbed wire and their trenches down. It was quite a fight. I went over close to Major Vanderwater, who was later decorated with the D.S.O. After about two hours, we had captured what we went after. The Germans made one counter attack, but were driven back. We were relieved that night. After a short rest and some more reinforcements, we went back to the Somme to support another Battalion to capture the Sugar Refinery.

On the way up, we saw a wagon stuck in the mud. The horses could not pull it out. Some of the men got on the wheels and I got behind to push. The wounded were lying on stretchers. I looked in and saw my brother Albert with his shoulder bandaged. I told him "good luck" and he said the same to me. Then they were moving. We moved up near the Sugar Refinery, but were told that we were not needed.

On the way out they asked for volunteers for the trench mortars. I went to the officer in charge, Captain Pym, a second Battalion man. I was put on a gun or mortar. We were Brigade Trench Mortars or Stokes Gunners. The gun was in three parts, base plate, tripod and barrel. Next time we went up, I carried the base plate, 4.5 lb. shells, and 50 rounds of 303 ammunition. We were to cover the 2nd Battalion. We were trying to find the front line. It was dark. A star shell was fired once in a while on both sides which lit up everything. We would stand still until it died down.

Corporal Ledger, who was an old original, told me to come with him. We worked together. We left the base plate and shells with the other men and crawled ahead. I had my rifle and he had a revolver. We went about 200 yards and saw some men working near a ruined house. They were putting sand bags in the cellar windows. I told Ledger to stop, they had to be Germans to work on that side. Then we heard them talking and crawled backwards for a while and then got up and walked. When we got back to the men, they had found the front line and were looking for us. We placed our gun in position and Ledger went to tell the officer where we had seen the Germans fixing their machine guns.

Next morning we set up our gun and some men brought us more ammunition. At daylight we fired a few shells into the ruins, but our Artillery blew it to pieces. The 2nd advanced and got their objective. We placed our gun about ten feet in the rear of the front, put sand bags around and had a little sleep, something to eat and a talk with the boys. We left our gun in the trench and another crew took over.

We dropped back to the Sugar Refinery and went down in the basement as that was all that was left. The cellars were quite deep and safe from shells; at least some shells. I found an old blanket and went to sleep. While I was asleep, a rat came to sleep with me. I must have scared it as it bit my arm. It was a little sore.

Next day I felt a bit sick. We were moving back to wait for our next job when I got feeling bad. Ledger told me to go to a first-aid post. The doctor there told me I had a fever and pinned a card on me and put me on a wagon. I was up front with the driver while the back of the wagon was all stretcher cases.

We made it out of Gausage Valley where all the mud was. We were then put in a motor ambulance and rushed to a field hospital where I was put in a tent and an orderly covered me up. The orderly told me another man in the same tent was in for the same reason as me. A doctor came in to give me a needle to put me to sleep. The next thing I remember is someone coming into the tent and asking me how I was feeling. When he left, a doctor came in to see how I was and asked me if I would like some chicken soup. I said yes and asked where the other fellow was. He said they buried him yesterday and that he had the same as me. After three days, I was sent to Etapes to rest up. It was full of men from all over who had been sick or wounded. I was there about a week and then asked them to send me back to my unit.

Around two days later about 20 of us were put on a train and sent back and I sure was glad to get away from that place. Nothing doing, no money, just walk or sleep. I got back just as they were leaving the Somme.

We put our stokes mortars on two wheel carts, and our equipment, about 200 shells, rifles, etc. One man in the shafts, one man on each side pulling a rope, the rest behind pushing. Corporal Ledger was walking in front, with one cart for each Battalion and one extra in case it was needed. Our officer was leading 5 carts for the 1st Brigade

Trench Mortars. We stayed someplace for the night, got our water bottles filled and got our rations.

Next day we moved to a quiet place. We had a nice dugout six feet under the ground to sleep in. It would hold about eight men close together and the gun pit was well protected with sand bags. We were there a day or two.

I went on duty about 10:00 p.m. alone. One man could fire the gun and if he wanted help he would just call into the dugout six feet away. The officer in the front line told me not to fire the gun until he gave me word as he had a patrol out. At 12 midnight, a new man on the trench mortars came to relieve me. His name was Kirkcaldry or something like that. We called him Kirk. I told him not to fire a shot until he got word from the officer on duty in the front line. He said he had just received a parcel from home sent up to the trenches with the mail. He had put a piece of cake and a chocolate bar in my mess tin so the rats could not get it. I went to lie down and eat the cake.

I thought I heard a shell explode, but I shut my eyes. A few minutes later a man called down and told us our gun had blown up and the man was killed. He had taken the first shell, the one I would have taken, and dropped it into the gun after pulling the pin, just as I would have done, if I had been told to fire the gun. The cartridge that fires the shell had been no good. There were some like that. You had five seconds to tip the barrel of the gun, grab the shell and throw it behind you. He was too late. Both legs were blown off close to his body. We took him out next day to be buried.

After a few days, we left that place and moved to Souche Valley, at the foot of the Vimy Ridge.

We had our gun about 25 feet behind the 2nd Battalion front line. We put a few shells over to cut the barbed wire. They had put up new wire during the night, so we had to blow it up. They must have seen where our shells were coming from as they sent over a minnewafer shell. It was headed for our gun pit. When we saw it, it was coming in our pit. We got out and it rolled in where our gun was. We got out in a hurry as their mortar shell was 10 times as big as ours and 10 times as powerful. It blew our gun to pieces. We were lying flat on the ground as it exploded. We waited a few seconds then started to go back to see what damage had been done.

German shell exploded near. It killed one of the gun crew and wounded one man.

We took two men from the 2nd Battalion. Our barrage was lifting. The first wave went over and we followed. The German front line was captured but a lot of men refused to come out of their dugouts which were 20 feet deep and would hold over 50 men each, so they had to get them out. An officer asked our officer for a bomb which he threw down. We could not wait to see what happened, we had to keep on the move to get our objective on time.

We followed the Battalion passed the second line of Germans' trenches cleaning them up as we went. Our place was left of the guns. We could see the barrels of them sticking out through the brush they were covered with. They were not firing but rifle fire was coming from there.

About 12 noon we had taken our objective. We dug in a good shell hole for our gun pit on the left flank of the Battalion front line. I went to look at the guns and could see for miles across the country. The city of DOUIA was quite a large place but we had control of it now.

Next morning I watched the British troops go over and drive the Germans out of their trenches. During the night we slept near our gun. When I awoke I was covered with snow. I saw a stretcher a few yards away. I had seen it before and I thought the man was dead, but now I saw him move. I told my officer and we went over. He was badly wounded. He could not speak English but the officer gave him some rum and water and got some men to take him out. He was a young German.

That evening we were relieved by another crew. On the way back I saw Dick German, the boy who had been shell shocked. He was picking up equipment that had been taken from the dead or dropped by the wounded, and placing it in piles for trucks to pick up. He said he had a good job with the Salvage Corp. No more trenches. As he was getting closer to the pile of equipment, a shell landed near him. I did not see him again. When they put up the memorial in the park at Belleville, I saw his name on it.

After moving around the country in and out of the trenches, my

feet began to swell up as we only took off our boots when we were out of the trenches. We sometimes had them on for six days and nights and then walk for miles.

Pulling the cart one night after being in the trenches and on a long march, I took off my boots and my feet were so swollen up I could not walk very well. My officer sent me to a doctor. He called in another doctor and they gave me a letter to take back to my officer. I was excused from further duty.

We were about a quarter of a mile from Camblain "L Abbe", Headquarters for the Canadian Corps. I was told to report there the next day as a messenger. I reported to Sergeant Thompson in charge of Signals and was put on the 4 to 12 shift. I went with another man to show me where the different Staff tents were and also headquarters for artillery transport, etc.

There were four men on each shift, 8 hours on, 16 off. My feet were feeling better now, but they said I had done my share. They would not send me back.

After I got used to it, we moved to 9 Elms headquarters for the Passchendale fighting which was very dirty and bad. At headquarters were General Sir A.W. Currie, Duke of Canaught, Major Willis O'Connor and many more Staff Officers. A RCMP man was always at the door when we took a message. We were let in as whoever took the message had to sign his name in a book.

After Pusschendale push we moved back to Camblain "L Abbe". I was there until near the end of May, 1915. When Major Willis O'Connor asked me if I was married, I told him yes. He said they were to send all married men who were Originals home and he would look into it for me. He was the officer who found me alone in with the Scottish soldiers at Ypres.

On the 1st or 2nd of June, he sent word to me to get ready as I was getting 60 days leave to go home to Canada. I was soon ready. Next morning three men were put on a truck with papers in our pockets and taken to the train back to England, Thorncliff, Bath, Liverpool, then put on a boat and sent to Canada. No lights at night.

One day we had a bad storm. Because of a number of wounded being on the ship, those men going on leave had to do the watch for submarines. The night of the storm, one man was washed overboard. I went on duty and had to untie the man I was relieving. He tied me up and held on to a rope until he reached the door and got inside below deck. We arrived at Halifax where the ship full of ammunition had blown up. It was a bad thing.

We arrived home about the end of June. I went to Kingston, and was there a short while. I had a medical and was found unfit for further overseas service. I was given my discharge about the end of July.

From February, 1915 to June, 1918, I served in France and Belgium. There is a few other things that happened but I cannot remember them now nor can I remember the names of the places we were in. They all looked alike. This is what I can remember of what happened; in fact I cannot forget it.

I should have mentioned, I carried the base plate around my neck, the one for the trench mortar gun. It was $3/4$ metal, about 12" by 15" with two holes and a rope through so it could be carried around the neck. It was rather heavy but I thought it might save me from getting hit. A Colonel Donnan who was Crown Attorney in Belleville was a Sergeant in our Battalion and one of the originals and was made Lieutenant in the field. Also Lieutenant Ponton was a lawyer I did not mention.

FROM PRIVATE 8294, ARTHUR ROBERT JENKINSON
2nd INFANTRY BATTALION, 1st BRIGADE
1st DIVISION CANADIAN CORPS.