

Diary of William Dea of Juniper Green

Transcribed and introduced by Malcolm Fergusson

William Dea was born in 1876 son of William and Charlotte (nee Maxwell) Dea of Redthorne, Juniper Green. He was married in 1912 to Jane Hogarth Mutter Reid and they had 3 children. A son William and two daughters, Jean and Charlotte.

When the Great War started only the regulars and reservists were called up. In 1916 general conscription for those aged 18 to 40 was introduced. After the attrition of 1916 and early 1917 the age limit was extended to 45 and consequently at 41 William was conscripted. In December 1917 men of 49 and 50 were called up.

It appears he entered 3rd Royal Scots which was the training battalion stationed at Glencorse Barracks, nr Penicuik in March 1917 according to his diary which lists all his pay dates.

The diary is not a daily record as such but a jotting down of occurrences from his finishing basic training at Glencorse and his consequent move to France for battle training after which he was drafted to the 9th Royal Scots – the Dandy Ninth Highlanders Battalion. This was a kilted Battalion in 51st Highland Division.

His diary is a leather bound 1907 Oliver and Boyd Almanac and Diary. It contained: His identity disc from 3rd training battalion, the tartan square from behind his cap badge, three postcards one a photograph of a soldier with a civilian the other two of Carl Hagenbeck's Tierpark, a season ticket for the 1908 Scottish Exhibition, seven blank field postcards, and a musketry course score. Also in his diary is a torn copy of the poem 'The Inn of a Thousand Dreams' by Gilbert Frankau from a newspaper which bears the date July 5th 1917 and which obviously meant something to him.

The diary has a bullet hole 1 inch up on the outside edge.

The first entry is a listing of his pay received and the naming of parts for a Lewis Gun. It appears from the diary that he was selected for the Lewis Gun team when he arrived at the 9th Battalion at the beginning of July 1917. There are then some details of stoppages for the Lewis Gun and the action to take. There were 40 listed causes for stoppages but the diary only lists Nos 1 to 3 which shows the extent of his training!

The diary was written in pencil, transcribed with punctuation as written. Lines with are indecipherable or where the bullet which probably killed him, tore the diary.

Page 1:

Apl 27 May 11 May 25

J R

11th July 1908

W Dea

Redthorne

Juniper Green

Page 3:

Alex Maxwell

Dermid PO (scored out and substituted with) *Burreos PO*

Via Devlin (also scored out)

Ontatio

Canada

Another page shows his pay details:

<i>Date</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>d</i>	
<i>Mar 15</i>		2	9	<i>1 day ration depot</i>
<i>Mar 23</i>		3	-	
<i>Mar 31</i>		4		
<i>Apl 7</i>		3		
<i>Apl 14</i>		3		
<i>Apl 21</i>		3		
<i>Apl 28</i>		3		
<i>May 5</i>		3		
<i>May 12</i>		4		
<i>May 19</i>		10	5	<i>Dys rations</i>
<i>May 25</i>		3		
<i>June 1</i>		4		
<i>June 15</i>				<i>5 francs</i>
<i>June 22</i>				<i>5 francs</i>
<i>June 28</i>				<i>10 francs Wulverdinghe</i>
<i>July 9</i>				<i>10 Wulverdinghe</i>
<i>July 19</i>				<i>5 - Houtkerque</i>

The next few pages give details of a Lewis Gun. Several pages after is the main body.

The Diary

Left Glencorse **June 5th 1917** what a train journey Waverley Station was a great relief no women folk to see my going away. I did not envy J. Michie one bit the heat was just too bad it cooled down after a bit. Rations were issued at Newcastle bully & bread we were getting bad for want of a hot drink when York arrived and tea and sandwiches were a God send. After York about 10 we went on to St Pancras and got our train on to the railway for the coast we arrived at Folkstone atam after a tiresome journey.had a cup of tea on the street at one of the blocks of streets taken over for billets we got on the transport about 8 and then across the channel with 3 others convoyed by 5 torpedo boats it was a lovely morning the sea was like a pond.

France **June 6 1917**

Boulogne a dirty seaport town no comparison with the clean natty streets of Folkstone we marched to St Martin rest camp for the night and what a night of thunder the morning of the explosion at Messines Ridge next morning we were off to the base at Etaples what a tramp a perfect nightmare we halted at midday for dinner and a rest which we badly needed on again for the last half before reaching our camp we were walking on our knees about 1/3 arrived the rest were coming up. Etaples what a name from many. A horrid nightmare which after a fortnight I was glad to see the last of for some time

The work was never hard

But neither was the sand and the sun was awful just making it a hell the tent life here was a thing to be forgotten between one thing and another will close it with a curse. Friday we were on draft and told to join up with Dandy Ninth Gracious what a drop a kilt I laughed and thought of Alec and his lot however I did not take it so bad either. Sat we were off to join our new batt at front we passed thro Boulogne Calais and left train at Watten and marched toverdinge a delightfultry place which coming from such a place as Etaples is a delightful change the only drawback to this place is the utter lack of water which both for drinking and washing can't be got, so we have recourse to an estimat or pub which we have given the name of the 'Spotted Frog' the French beer is wet but that's about all that can be said about it, it's like the people just wet. Those leeches who held on to the draft all the way from Boulogne to Etaples selling oranges at 2d each to men who had left their all to save their scurvy lot from Huns, In their drouth to buy oranges at 2d and 3d each does not say much for the polite French people who received our soldiers at the begging with open arms the only thing that opens their miserable hearts is money nowadays. no one here that I have met have a good word for them. We have Griffiths a delightful soul a Glesca carter swears like a trooper and his dear chum Pirie who he curses up and down and who only smiles and sets Mills a good example neither smokes nor swears reads is chapter every night and is a real good sort. We met Mills at Penicuik mimicking the instructors which he was good at. He is the only one I have had a good laugh at since coming here to this life. Then Crean another carter who had a good stock of stories and who never repeated his swear words twice of a night always had a change on an honest carter. It was so queer coming here and meeting so many local lads from home G More C Peggie W Dickson Wynne C Sheils W Sheils Stenhouse R Stuart J Johnstone A Tweedie N Haston . . J Johnstone Michie Grosset J McGuigan T Henderson J Ferguson many more came from our parts whom I did not know these lads I met in France in three weeks of course many more are here but I have not been lucky enough to meet them yet. I do hope some day to see them all in better circumstances than at present what stories went at Etaples men dying under the strain 5 one Sat one suicide it was depressing then those hospital case..... continually on..... road trains etc the troop trains cattle wagons to hold 40 hommes or 8 chevaux 20 men were put in our train but I saw 8 chevaux in others this is a life which I can't say I like it has its drawbacks and the great thing is the scarcity of bread in fact rations are very short at Etaples. A slice of bread or two hard biscuits a mug of tea for breakfast a slice for dinner and cheese and tea then home for bully pickles and tea. How

on earth we lived this it I don't know. Glencorse was bad but here its hellish. What like the line will be I don't know. We have been going from bad to worse all the time surely the last ...ek will be a little than this as regards grub this is the limit out for days at a time folks must know or feel they can stand it. The instructors here or at Glencourse are all alike clinging on to their jobs with the desperation of despair. Those who were permanent drove. But the poor souls who were there for a rest dodged all they knew how. They groaned under their load. so did the souls with me who were forced into this cursed war. The whole world is at it now at least the world that matters nowadays those with men and money to put into the desparate gamble. I have written few folks what has one to say to anyone but those who are my all. Outsiders never did count with me some day perhaps I will write some but .. at present homesickness makes me too sulky to write much to anyone. I was always going to write up my views on this life but have never felt inclined till today. We are now well rested and I feel well if a little bit better fed I would be all right. I think a dirty loathsome trick to do a mate was done by Stenhouse on Todd. Stenhouse burned a pair of boots Todd wanted an exchange Stenhouse knew Todds boots fitted him and got him to swop the result was Todd had to pay £1. The great thing here is buckshee rations "spare meat" ! I remember Penicuik I went there for musketry and to be a marksman but oh dear the mad minute upset all my dear schemes as regards that ...It was a good fortnight we Then a week at Service camp a rotten hole then the draft leave and off to the Great Stunt with its Etaples of cursed memory not one thing stands out in my mind to relieve the misery of that dirty hole the town lay at the bottom of our lines but during the 15 days we were so near it I never entered its streets. I told of the sea bathe we had but never of the cold I got this it The work was nothing but the heat was awful fancy standing on the square of a morning with a drop of sweat at your nose and it was supposed to be cool. One night we went to our pet estimanet "The Spotted Frog" what a cheery lot was there everyone had a smile and a shout for his neighbour the remark went round what a difference from Etaples where a smile was one of pity and resignation to ones fate. After all a kilt is not so very bad I have been here now 6 days and don't feel it so draughty. I had a letter from Andrew yesterday **June 27** he expects home shortly. I would like to see before he goes but don't suppose he would care to lose a day when he has his nose pointed north. What a rare old time we are having here Sunday was church Parade as usual and tobacco rations. Mondays drill Reveille at 5.30 out on parade at 6 Physical jerks till 7 this is called adjutants parade. Breakfast at 7.45 Parde again at 9 till 12.30 then finished for the day. Tuesday I got a shift to the Lewis Guns the sergeant is very painstaking man and is teaching a lot of duffers its very interesting I never saw a machine gun before let alone handle one. Since coming here I have seen more rain falling in an hour than fell at home in a week Thunderstorms are just as common as a shower in Scotland. At home everyone would be watching here they just jog along as usual. One night during a pretty heavy rattle silence fell on the Billet but it wasn't the thunder that stopped the laughing and shouting, the orderly sergeant reading out the orders for next day. One week today since arriving at Wulverdinghe and a miserable day an east haar its likely will last 3 days its miserable cold in the billets a bath parade on Friday was good a spray which did the trick was all right we get at last half a chance to be clean

Sunday 1st July After a week this Wulverdinghe one looks back and no wonder the soldier is a poor worker at home. This is my weeks work Monday I was picked out for Lewis Gun and paraded with the class at 9am we had the naming of parts of gun explained and the working of the gun every hour we had a smoke then finished at 12.30 for the day a few fatigues the next day 5.30am parade 6.15 till 7. then home for breakfast. Pay one afternoon baths another Kit inspection put in the rest of the time for the week cleaning buttons none washing suits yourself and shaving of course we do that every day for our own sake. No letters have arrived so far but one must have patience its just 7 days since writing ...ndrew doesn't hold out much promise of a transfer so I will go on and take my chance which as far as I hear and see are mighty slim. If things do get that way I will face it no dodging my fate get your back up and shoot out your neck and on you go I would liked to have given the boy at the very least a sporting chance for a start in life however if it does not come off we can only hope that Jeannie will be spared in life health and strength to help him on the strait road to lead a clean healthy and manly life. I was always vexed about Jean but perhaps this time she will pull round and be a rare lassie another Jeannie then the baby she will never perhaps know her daddy the bairns when they grow up will perhaps never remember such a soul and their birthdays which I remembered I was wild that Sat of his birthday not bringing that badge for him. D and Jeannie that wife. I have loved one of the best produced. If I go, it will go hard with her but I have no fear for her she is a pearl and I never ??? had all the time we were together anything but sweet thoughts for that sweet little girl who met me that July night at the Exhibition married five years three children and as much in love as those happy courting days well we will have to look up and hope it may come again.

Sunday church parade

I am orderly for the platoon an easy day just like a lazy Sunday at home Monday was a corker a tramp of 4 mls then a buckshee day through wheat corn barley and beans ripening for the harvest Fields of crops ripening beautiful trampled flat for what use a miserable buckshee attack

Tuesday on guard a cushy job tho nearly hungered at it first night. I heard the shells from anti-aircraft guns going searchlights and all for half an hour. I missed two heavy days received a letter from Andrew his luck seem to hold on the Lens front. my transfer does not seem to make much headway however I do hope it comes soon. I am sick of this infantry work. Wednesday off Guard at ten o'clock the Batt did not arrive till 3 so we did a parade that day. Thursday paraded for scabies at 7 physical jerks at 9 amusements or sports till 11 then dinner till 3 paraded again for a crack and so finished the day. Friday breakfast at 6 parade at 7 for buckshee attack a practice for our work up the line a hard day the usual tramping of wheat barley corn marigold and French beans and usual broad beans what a waste of it goes on this way on all fronts no wonder the war costs so much. I don't know how long the line was but we had about 1 ½ mls to walk and it took an aeroplane to keep us all right. Word is going that we leave this place on Monday I hope our next billet is as good as this is for mates up the line. I took off my shirt on Thursday night and well it was a mess the rest were no better Donaldsons shirt was a moving mass Grosset came out and het a drop he was no betteran Donaldson. I wonder if I will be as bad as some who say they cant keep them down fancy being lousy lice hunting tonight again I was pleased to find not one. Taking it all over this has a hard day breakfast 6 o'clock dinner at 3 was just too much we are looking forward to shifting

camp soon a bottle of stout tonight 2 francs for 3 bottles a dear drink I do wish Andrews promised transfer would turn up this is a beautiful night and I think I will soon turn in, the band is playing retreat. we passed on Friday some German prisoners sawing wood there were some fine looking men among them. Sat **July 7** Another buckshee stunt we had the aircraft gr..... guns bursting shrapnel overhead I did not see the German however. Sunday a dull cold day after thunder nothing doing at all preparations to move on Monday morning opened cold and rain.....we got our packs ready for shift breakfast at 7 dinner 11 we left at 12 and tramped thro St Momelin to St Omer where we entrained for the trenches we had a halt for the night outside Poperinghe our arrival was heralded by a munitions dump on fire the rattle and boom of the guns and bursting shells was not exactly a lullaby for tired men however we managed to sleep somehow. reveille went at six I was busy getting my boots on which was all the clothes I had on when a shell burst outside a hut 20 yds off killed 2 and injured 3 not a bad start for the ninth we are fairly in it now the guns are never silent continually going. we go into trenches tonight its getting a hot shop this the shelling is still going on. starved one hand and butchered on the other. the smiles here this morning are rather sickly and no wonder 5 casualties the first morning. Tuesday night we marched off for our first turn in the line we arrived about 11 and releived 7th Argyles we were quiet for a good job. Wednesday was a hell of a day shelled the whole day what a day diving for shelter every wee while our planes humming all day. Midnight was no better Jerry kept it up all night all kinds of stuff. Thursday broke quiet for a little then some aircraft fights started the Germans put up a barrage of all sorts it was near eleven before the releif arrived and our guns were going like hell. Jerry got quiet we then got away down the communication trench in a scurry. We got away all right but half way home we got shelled the first landed 20 yards away and didn't we drop down in a ditch th.....wasn't so near. I got off by myself and couldn't get away from them an aircraft overhead dropping lights showing the direction I was fairly stuck when one dropped in front of me. I lay in the ditch for a little waiting the next which was a distant one. I took to my heels into a wood and no more was heard. I walked on till I got to a railway got on to a waggon and got a ride down to near the camp dead beat we got there about 4am had a cup of tea and a snooze till six breakfast at 7.15 and getting ready for our next billet one oclock ready for the road shells still going round we tramped off thro Poperinghe and other villages to our present billet it was a hell of a tramp tired thirsty footsore deadbeat we dropped our packs and got water what a washwhat a drink and a shift of sox and clothes first time I had anything off or a wash since the preceding Sunday night. Sat a rest thank goodness altho not of of range of hearing the guns we are safe talk about getting wind up it was fairly blowing with our crowd well I got safely over my first tour in the trenches and didn't feel worried but the carrying party at night was rather trying carrying those heavy cylinders over shell torn tracks in the dark. carrying rifle and equipment was a devil we got over it with a sigh and was glad to get back to our dugout and our drumming up in safety, how those shells came over on Thursday night. Gas and those horrid helmets. What a relief to write here in the comfort of a tent and look back on it all. Hope I am lucky all the time. Away from those trenches on Sat we left that well shelled camp coming down thro Poperinghe 11 Kilos and on this place called Houterque to our present bil..... 9 Kilos it was a..... heavy tramp the heat was great and the roads awful just like all the French roads not one like our roads at home except the new roads made by the

British for their motors carrying up munitions to the firing line. We had a bath parade on Sunday to the other side of Houterque on the Franco-Belgian frontier. It was a Turkish bath on a simple scale a sweat and a spray bath quite good tho not enough of it. We are on the buckshee attacks yet practising for a grand show over the bags its on everyones mind word came that no guns would fire on Sunday and none were heard tho Sat night in a pouring rain it was a continual roar and another rumour is that Poperinghe is shelled t... hell. Its not stopping our ...ractise for going over and all are very anxious to have it all stopped. Houterque for a week not so very bad time either. Sunday 22 we had parade early Reveille 3am and parade at 5am we were well on the road to Poperinghe by 6am and a long detour thro bye roads took us to a camp about 11am very hot dusty and no water to have a wash with too bad it does freshen one up so. Our days here have been very quiet a 20 minute physical jerks then done for the day which is spent lice hunting and sleeping in bivouac a polite way of saying dossing outside one day was a thunderstorm which nearly washed us all out. The bivouacs are situated in a hop grove the sheets stretched across sticks and pegged down the worst of the place is the thunder of those guns which thro the night especially never cease the rammie has never ceased today

.... last night it was like a side drum going so soon we will know our lot we have had a jolly easy time at this place. I had a turn of billet guard and done nothing today everyone is quite hopeful of our time when the rush starts I am often afraid they are too sure but time will tell. Friday 27th July what an evening an air raid over here with little damage bullets in plenty and shrapnel from our guns but no casualties. Sat another quiet day a work party up the line from D coy tonight hope I am lucky the others were not so good.

Postscript

On the last two pages are the following in large letters.

Pte A Dea
277117
B Coy
2/6 A & S H
Signal Section
Faversham
By Norwich

Last page:
13 Maybank Villas
Corstorphine

A B Dea
O Section
No4 Special Company
Mortar

Royal Engineers
B.E.F.

Here the diary ends. On Tuesday 31st July the 51st Division went into the Battle of Pilkem, the opening battle of 3rd Ypres. The 9th Royal Scots were in support on that day. Some elements of 8th A&S and 6th Gordons had crossed the stream but were pulled back and posts established about 50 to 100 yards back from the stream. The 154th Brigade in reserve (9th Royal Scots) were not employed in the main attack on 31st July but took over the line on the 1st August. On the 1st August they held their positions and watched while German counter attacks were broken up by artillery. On the 2nd August similar attacks happened and were dealt with. On the 3rd August the 51st Division established machine gun posts across the Steenbeck. During this action William Dea was killed by sniper fire according to information given to his family. Thirteen others also died during this operation.

Transcribed in Memory of William Dea and the thousands like him who died during 3rd Ypres.

M Fergusson
Balerno 2001