

Fred R. Wigglesworth



*7th Bn, The Prince of Wales's Own
(West Yorkshire) Regt.
(The Leeds Rifles)
1914-19*

Edited by George Wigglesworth

Born	27 Jan 1891
To France	15 April 1915
Letter	25 Sept 1915
Letter	22 Dec 1915
Letter Yser Canal	24 Dec 1915
Posted to Orderly Room	3 Jan 1916
Letter	23 Feb 1916
L Cpl	29 Mar 1916
Letter	24 June 1916
First day of The Somme	1 July 1916
Wounded, Authuille	15 July 1916
Postcard Etienne Hospital Train	17 July 1916
Whalley Hospital	26 July 1916
Discharged from Hospital	10 Nov 1916
Engaged	14 April 1917
France	1 May 1917
Rejoined 1/7 West Yorks Regt	26 May 1917
Gassed Passchendaele	20 Nov 1917
Posted 15 P.O.W Coy (Labour Corps)	29 Apr 1918
Letter from George	20 Oct 1918
Discharged	3 April 1919/7 May 1919
<i>ça ne faire rien</i>	
Married	3 June 1922
Died	4 Jan 1968



THE SALIENT

Newsletter of the Leeds Rifles 1914 Old Comrades' Association

Introduction

This account is composed from the few letters my father wrote to his mother which remain, together with one to him from his eldest brother. There is also a small notebook he kept with important information of all sorts, written in the indelible copying ink pencils of that time. He kept some documents from after the war about his pension. He was a member of the old comrades' association which has given some of the background recorded in "The Salient", their newsletter from the 1960's. As always one regrets not having encouraged him to reminisce. It was the case, however, he never himself chose to do so except to say of a particular day that it was the start of the Somme or when he was wounded or gassed.

It was Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate who said "... the fighting felt remote - all the more so because my father rarely talked about it. I used to think this was his modesty and reserve - and so it was. Now I realise it was also because he didn't want the shadow of what he'd been through to fall across my own life. I've always been grateful to him for this, but I've also wanted to know his story. It's been one of the shaping paradoxes of my life."

The recent scenes from actual documentary film regularly shown on television gives more than enough reality to those with any sensitivity, showing something of what front line soldiers experienced and helping me to understand why they did not want to articulate it. These letters can only hint.

Fred Rothwell Wigglesworth was born in 1891 in Embsay (near Skipton), going to school there and subsequently in Skipton, Wetherby and Leeds. Both his grandfathers were dead, his maternal grandfather Richard Metcalfe, a farmer coming Ingleton, age 38, of dropsy, his middle daughter having died before him probably from diphtheria. His paternal grandfather from Blackburn, George Wigglesworth, died of tuberculosis before his son was born.

His father, George Walsh Wigglesworth was a grocer, learning the trade in Embsay and for a limited time running his own shop in Skipton. His mother and mother-in-law had both married again and both to inn keepers, the one at The Elm Tree, Embsay, the other at the Devonshire Arms, Cracoe. The re-marriage of his mother seems to have led to him needing to seek paid employment, eventually managing a grocer's shop at 22 Royal Park Road, Leeds. The family consisted of 5 boys (Fred had an elder brother) and two girls, the elder girl dying of tuberculosis when she was twelve.

Among his recreations was running with St. Mark's Harriers and "The Salient" recalls how two other ex Harriers put their speed to good use when catching a French hen who made the ultimate sacrifice for the war effort.

From 1906 Fred worked in the warehouse of W.E. Yates, a worsted manufacturer on Aire Street, Leeds. War was declared on the 14th August and it was from that work he joined up on 8th Sept. 1914, serving in the 7th Bn, The Prince of Wales's Own, (West Yorkshire) Regt. (The Leeds Rifles).

Service

Pte. FRW had Regt. Number variously given as 612612 (or 265605) (or 2728). He did his initial training in York at Strensall camp, the scene of my own initial training doing National Service after the second world war. The Seventh left for France from Gainsborough (Lincs) by train at 2.15 on the 15th April 1915. They boarded RMSS Onward at Folkeston to sail at 11.15 pm. After disembarking in Boulogne at 12.45 they marched to a camp a couple of miles outside the town getting to sleep at 4 am.

The first letter we have is dated Sept 25th that year. It was no doubt characteristic, with perhaps more details of realism than in later letters, together with reports of post and family matters. George is FRW's elder brother, Harold, Frank and Dick (Richard) are all younger than he is. They all served in and survived the First World War thinking of themselves as "the lucky Wiggs." Margery is their sister. Nellie and Gertie are neighbours. Rifleman Graham is only known as a name in these letters. Elsie became his wife.

Sept 25/1915

My Dear Ma and Pa.

Thanks for your letter of 21st, the YEPs [Yorkshire Evening Post, Ed.] and George's letter.

I also got Auntie Annies parcel this morning. We did not get any parcels while we were in the trenches, it was too dangerous for ration carriers.

At one part on the trenches it was too low to pass during the day, you were under fire all the way.

Our trench was in front of the others and this was the only way out so you can guess it was a case of holding out at all costs if we were attacked, we couldn't get back.

I went up to see Herbert Jaques and Dick (Dickinson) one morning just before when dinner ought to have been, they were just behind us, I had to go on my hands and knees and then they saw me.



Elsie Hoyle

Will Margery send me a copy of Collinsons letter, I would like to see it. Got a letter from Nellie yesterday and sent her a letter.

Graham and I came out with the satisfaction of knowing we had hit one or two. A chap who had been in our trench went to Warburton who was in the telephone box at the second line with a harrowing story of how he had been peeping over the top and saw a German in front of their trench, all at once Graham fired and he went down.

I dont know whether he was killed or not but I fancy he was hit.

We had one or two nice shots and I think altogether our platoon did fairly well.

Margery said I had not mentioned about the Battalion coming back on Home Service, well I dont know that we are.

I am about the same over leave. One or two are getting it for special cases.

Dont bother about it, I know it is hard for you, but it can't be helped.

I think I once said let Frank join if he wishes, also George, but I dont think I would. Frank could not stand it, in an infantry Batt at any rate.

Keep them to look after you at home, 2 out of our house is enough.

I dont want any underclothing or things like that thanks.

We are going to get Cardigan Jackets and we have already got rubber boots up to the knee for the trenches. Sept and Oct are the warmest months they have out here and no one knows where we shall be at the end of October.

Anything I want I will tell you, but please dont send unless I ask, they would only be washed and are all to carry.

I will write to George tomorrow, I think the same as you do, also about Frank joining, it isnt right they should. Besides it would spoil Frank's trade
Pleased to hear Margery went to a concert with Elsie.

We are having a pudding today made of soaked biscuits and currants in.

Its a bit heavy, but still, its like pudding.

Hope you have a nice time when Harold comes home, he does get a fine lad.

I will write to Dick for his birthday.

My cough has got loose now, so it is a lot better, it was only a bit of one.

I am quite well, there is nothing to worry about. I feel more fit than I have done for a long time. Rather a warm time last time in, but its a toss up whether we would be sooner in than out. I think I told you we had Mr Calvert and Sergt Taylor wounded.

How does Dick like his work, and can he stick the early rising. I often think about him when I am on early morning sentry and think of Richard climbing out of bed. Nellie told me what fine lads they had both got.

We are as a rule on fatigues for the Battalion who are in the trenches at night and nothing more.

Sleep in our blanket oilsheet and coat with all off, it is fine to get things off at night. The trenches we were in had no dugouts.

How are Pa and you keeping, I hope you are not fretting, just take things easy and make the best of it.

God bless you all, best love Fred.

Fred writes in "The Salient" "One autumn day in 1915 there was a tragic occurrence near Brierlin. A young lad named Clarence was under close arrest accused of desertion. This was how it came about.

The previous day, being a stretcher bearer, he had been detailed to take some of the lads down to Poperinghe for dental treatment. When the work was done he let the sufferers make their own way back to camp because meanwhile a Belgian girl had invited him to a birthday party that was going to be held that night. [Invitation - yes, birthday party - hardly, Ed] He left the party very late and in the darkness took the wrong road out of "Pop". He trudged along the dark road, the guns were grumbling as usual over the Salient, the horizon was lit up by gun flashes and flares and he felt for all the world like Napoleon retreating from Moscow. He wouldn't have been surprised to hear a band burst forth into the "1812 overture".



Harold Frank Dick
Fred Madge (Margery) George
Wigglesworth

What he did hear however was a voice shouting "Halt!" and a bayonet was presented to his belt buckle. The guard turned out and after a lot of questions and unintelligible answers he was at last given a blanket and allowed to sleep, though still in the guardroom. The next morning they still didn't seem to accept (or was it understand) his answers and returned him to his unit in the care of a mounted escort of the South Irish (or was it Scottish) Horse. The horse (South Irish or Scottish, which ever) was about 16 hands and Clarence's head only reached his girth, him being the smallest chap in the Regiment. He could easily have butted the horse in the belly and made good his escape, but perhaps the escort might have shot him! He entered the Rifles camp a dramatic sight and all the spectators gave him a standing ovation. He was handed over to Sgt Bill Stead but it all ended happily though as Clarence got away with it, as was no doubt his habit.

December 22 1915

Dear Ma,

Thanks for Pa's letter of the 17th also YEPs and Pro Rege.

We are now in reserve trenches and have had a good night's sleep in a dugout.

Of course our Sheepskin Greatcoats etc were soaked but we were too tired to notice and being wet they were heavy and kept us warm. I took my boots and socks off and pushed my feet into Gerties muffler and had my feet warm for the first time in three days. As you will see by the papers we had an exciting time Sunday. They came over after the gas, but got messed up by our fire, since then it has been one continual stream of shells both ways.

They have been quiet today for a blessing but it the hottest time we have ever had.

We leave here tomorrow night (2nd line) and dont know if we are going to the 3rd or the tents. Shall get your parcel tomorrow night anyway.

Had a bad time in the front line for the two days. No shelter except 3 sheets of corrugated iron and three of us always in the wet.

The parapet was very low and water up to the knees everywhere, naturally our waders took wet after a while. No sleep at all. I did drop off for an hour once, but felt so rotten when I woke that I took care not to do it again. We had only about 5 yds to move about in and with water it was impossible to stamp our feet.

The Kompo came in handy, we tried a fire now and again and made some soup of it hot with sugar in.

As usual we came through all right and only had one man wounded in my platoon. A shell has just dropped behind this dugout and shook it up, it doesn't half jump.

Have always to be ready for Gas now, we had a whiff before it came off this time Am glad you like the souvenirs.

Graham is falling into the old way again, its a bad time for them first 2 days, they think of the warm fireside etc. Have you heard from Harold lately, I dropped him a line today.

Thanks for your loving letter of 15th I do love all your letters. It must be hard for both you and Pa to write and I appreciate them all the more for it, if that is possible.

Margery's came while we were in the front line and I couldn't wait for the morning light to read it so lit a candle. Its a bit risky shewing a light, it shows the sentry up with the parapet being so low.

Still it was worth it, she writes wonderful cheery letters like all of you and it took me away from it all, back to dear old home. I often get your old letters out of my pockets and read them. Bless you for them, I dont know what I should do without them.

I laughed, didn't know whether Margery said her costume would only want a yard or whether it was 6d a yard until I read it over.

Kind of a Maud Allen costume if it would come out of a yard, narrow.

Tell her I dont want a photo of her if all she has on is a yard of cloth, positively indecent.

I'll take her out when the pass comes through. Mornings I will sit and talk to Pa, afternoons I will take you out visiting and nights, well, I will make the most of them, there are plenty of claimants.

I hope you haven't been worrying and will have had a nice Christmas by the time this arrives.

Thanks Ma for praising Elsie's icing, she is very sensitive and I know likes you a lot.

As for Pa, well you know, or perhaps you dont know how genial he is with ladies. Now for a row, pull his hair Ma.

I think we boys have inherited his courteous ways with the opposite sex.

The cake will be fine for Christmas day, I will think of you all when I eat it.

Made for me by my mother, almonded by my sister, iced by my Sweetheart, and paid for by my dear daddy. Bless you all. Its all that I love best united.

By the way the streak on the other page was not a tear but a drop of water from the roof.

I think I cant cry if I want to, one sees too much and have to control their feelings.

Its only when I think of you at home when it seems hard.

The life itself doesn't bother me, I can stick that well enough, it is what you are all suffering at home , the anxiety for you all.

Thanks for the music, there is quite sufficient in these two copies. Tell Margery I would like some Mistletoe had we any girls to Kiss, but without girls it is like an Egg without salt.

By the way it was very indiscreet of Frank to have his photo in the Mercury, enlisting. Within 3 days of it appearing the Kaiser made his final(?) effort to get through.

Do you think by any chance a copy can have got into Germany, because he soon decided on a knock out blow, only it flew back like a punch ball and knocked him out.

I am proud of him for going but would rather he kept out of this lot if he can.

How are Pa's hands?

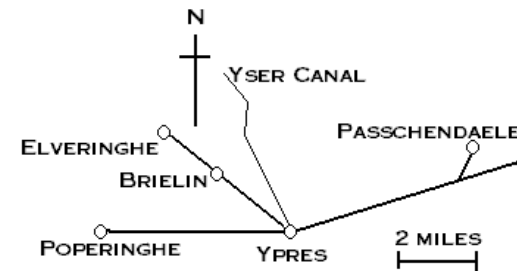
I asked Graham how you all were as soon as I saw him. Did my green envelope get through all right two days ago? It had got stuck up with my tunic being wet and I had to fasten it down with paper.

Now all keep cheerful until I come home, I will want you all to look bright and well. You must go into training for about three weeks and then you will be all smiles.

Will have to close now, it is dark and I am on a Ration Party to the front line.

Will finish it tomorrow if possible, Best love to you all,

Your loving son, Fred



Places referred to round Ypres

The Yser canal is at Ypres, Brielin was the last village they marched through on the way to the front, Elverdinghe some 5km further on and which was heavily shelled at times. Harold, his next brother, was taken prisoner, a Corporal, and Fred's notebook records his addresses, for example a soldier of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps at Gefangerenlager, Dulmen, as well as his girl, Gladys Todd in Surbiton. It records Hogarth's charge "when on Active Service deserting his post" although, gladly, he was not listed among prisoners shot. There were lists of names of soldiers with some crossed through.

It was at Poperinghe in the Ypres Salient that Toc H was founded as an all ranks club for the 6th Division. "Abandon rank all ye who enter here." A house was found in the Rue de l'Hospital to be called Talbot House. The Senior Chaplain of the Division was Neville Talbot and it was named after his brother Gilbert, killed in the Hooe sector. He appointed the renowned "Tubby" Clayton, the chaplain of 16th Infantry Brigade to run it. Tubby celebrated his 80th birthday in 1965 when a street in "Pop". was named after him. The club was still there that year, including the Chapel on the top floor and the writing room where letters home were written. It served for 2½ years until compelled to close because of the German advance in May 1918, to re-open when they withdrew. Notices still adorned the walls. One is notable - "If you spit on the carpets at home you can spit here." It was a time when disease of the chest and throat were common, alleviated, but also spread, by spitting; even in 1950 trams had notices upstairs saying "Spitting prohibited". The situation was exacerbated by war. In the front line, one is told, you resisted lighting up because the flame might silhouette the lookout on the palisade, mind you we are told Sgt Bill Stead stood there even when emitting sparks from his pipe. However many men chewed tobacco rather than smoke.

Many canteens were limited to a corps or regiment. One rifleman remembered being refused at a Royal Artillery canteen because he had a Leeds Rifles cap badge. A friendly gunner seeing his problem temporarily swapped caps.

Christmas Eve

Tunnel Dugouts

Yser Canal

My Dear Pa and Ma,

There has been no letter mail for a few days and there is no mail at all today.

We have a small plum pudding between two men and two mince pies, also a piece of cake and chocolate from Col. Kirk. Rather a dry do, I went into Brielin and bought 4 francs worth of candles to have a light on the scene at all events. There was a chap playing 'Peace, perfect peace' on the organ in Brielin.

It has had the steeple blown away and it seemed rather strange. Christmas Eve there wasn't a sound in the line only the star lights going up. The fields and part of the road under water and the village in ruins.

We had a real do last Sunday. We were in the Elverlinghe Woods in Tents.

At 5.30 the Officers came round and warned us that Gas was at Brielin.

We got dressed and put our equipment on, just pouches and bayonet with two extra bandoliers of five rounds each and gas helmets handy.

We were all ready to start when a heavy shell came tearing over the woods.

That did it, off we set down the road two platoons at a time.

It was dawn and we could see shells dropping all round and flying over.

Our artillery were in action and their ammunition limbers 6 horses in each came bearing down the road, bellys down to the floor.

We came through safely and got to the bank without losing a man I fancy we were first to get here. About half an hour after the Notts and Derbys came across country in extended order and lost about 8 men. Men were coming down nearly dead with gas. A dug out here had been hit and we could see 3 men partly buried with their gas helmets on.

We stayed on the Bank until night and then relieved the 8th in the front line.

Our Division lost 400 men gassed and wounded and 100 killed in the 24 hours.

Capt. Cox in "The Salient" Dec 1965 wrote "If I remember rightly, the 7th were the first troops to go to Elverdinghe Chateau after the family had been evacuated. I think we had just got there after the furniture vans had driven away. On going into the Chateau, and being allocated a room to sleep in, I immediately had a look round to see if there was anything to scrounge and found a small eiderdown that had been left behind. This went into my fleabag

and certainly contributed to my warmth during the winter. It came home and my wife used it to stuff four cushions."

Elverdinghe woods were full of singing nightingales until the Germans shelled it that is.

Letter written after FRW was posted on 3rd Jan 1916 to Company HQ Orderly Room from his Platoon.

Feb 23/1916

My Dear Pa and Ma.

I am afraid I have more bad news for us all.

A shell dropped in the traverse held by number 9 this morning.

Graham was rather badly smashed also another chap named Wood.

Dickenson (my pal Dickie) was killed by the shock of the explosion and Cox was killed by splinters.

It was what we call a Whizz Bang. Poor Graham was down here and away before I knew about it. I asked the Doctors Orderly and he said there was a good chance for him. I do hope so.

Am enclosing a letter for Mrs Graham but I can tell her nothing. Please read it and address it for me, I have forgotten where he lives.

Cox was the chap I met in the Empire while at home, Frank and Dick did not see him but will remember it. I came and went back on leave with him, I spoke to him on the station, tell Margery he was the party who had the Whiskey bottle, a young well built lad with a round face.

As soon as I hear news of Graham I will let his Mrs Graham know.

But as I told you the first news we get of men who have been wounded is from England when they write. I feel as though I cant write much tonight.

Birdsall and Dickie dead, Graham wounded and perhaps.... Bedford in England, Fred Neal with the Trench Mortar Section Everett and I left.

I dont think I want to go back to the Company now, the 8 of us always hung together ever since we came out.

Still I would like to get my own back. A lot took Dickie and I for brothers we are rather alike and I often got called Dickie. Its a million to one I would have been in it if I had not come to the Orderly Room. I have been up to see Graham and Dick every night since we came in.

Last night about 10.30 we were all three sat in their dugout, all the rest were on guard and they had just come off. I had taken a candle up as I had promised and a paper or two also a few things I had been able to pinch for them. Graham was in his blanket and Dick sat on his bed.

Just when I was going Graham thanked me for getting the things and trailing up with them; its a long lonely way and perhaps a trifle risky alone, because if anything happens you might lay there for a while.

I remember I answered "Its a pleasure boys, I only wish I could take you back with me, if there is anything you want, let me know and do take care of yourselves." Dickie chimed in with "We could do with you back wi' us Wiggy, chuck it up and come, we miss him a lot don't we Tim?"

He is the one I told you tales about, he talks very broad. I have seen him pull out his pipe just before we finished a lot of our marches and light up, the majority of us could hardly breathe let alone smoke. It was a vary big, French pipe and someone would shout "Dickie's kitchen is going". Then he would turn to Tim and me and say "get yours out and kid 'em up a bit."

He was a typical Yorkshireman, slow but he always got there. He never went sick since he joined and never missed a day in the trenches. He got more than his share of fatigues. The three of us were always together and very rarely had a quiet time.

Graham was a comical chap and Dickie the driest humorist I ever struck. I wish a record had been kept of his original remarks, he never lacked an answer. Between us we hadn't an enemy in the Battalion I am sure.

The last night we had together will always be one of my happiest memories and if only we had known. I don't think I have ever had a blow as hard as this in all the war and I have had a few. It's the fortunes of war and all we can expect but God it's hard. I am glad I went up last night, I was going up again tonight but they are both gone.

Now don't worry about me, I shall get over it and I know you feel for me.

God bless you all, Fred

PS Feb 24th 1916

Am all right now, we go out of the line tonight.

As Syd Appleyard said, writing about his return to the Salient in 1965 "Speaking to a pal one moment and then he was dead. Even soldiers can cry you know."

The back of the notebook has excerpts of poems transcribed, Walter Scott and Robert Browning together with less well known poets. The only writer I remember Fred recommending to me was Siegfried Sassoon, known for his "war" and the attitudes he developed against the bleak war, the contempt for war leaders and patriotic cant and which he expressed in poems, throwing away his Military Cross before being invalided out.

June 24th 1916

My Dear Ma & Pa

Thanks for Pa's letter of the 19th.

Sorry to hear Fred Todd is not himself again, rather a heavy penalty for the poor lad. I have not seen Ernest Pottage for an hour or so, we had a nice talk together, I was going to slip over and see him but have too much work on. Saw Roland Gooderidge the other day.

If you don't hear from me for a while don't get worried. I will write if I can but I don't think I shall have the chance.

Garnett came up with a Draft today but I have not had an opportunity to speak to him yet. Wrote to Harold and Vic Whitely today. The weather is grand

although we had a very heavy thunderstorm last night. I can't give you any news. Have a fair lot of work today & shall have for a while.

Tell Mrs Garnett I will look up her son and have a talk with him, he has been out before so knows his way about.

Will try and let you have another Green Envelope day after tomorrow if I can. Have just got the second edition of "Fragments from France", its as good as the first issue. Am afraid my letters are getting rather stale, but shall be able to describe new sensations to you soon.

Pottage looked very well indeed & so did Gooderidge. I fancy Reg has been missed off the Draft on account of his teeth. Washed two shirts a towel and 6 pairs of socks this morning so have been busy. Best to have all clean & am having a bath tomorrow. We are in Billets here for a day or two. The other Battalion who had their Orderly Room here got rather at loggerheads with the lady of the house who is slightly lacking in mental balance.

She chased the Regtl. Sergt. Major with a pitchfork and threw a billhook at him, he had to jump through the window into the street. However young Hudson & the RSM's batman and I are fluent linguists and she will not attack us now we have smoothed her. Just fancy going home with a gash across the face & when anyone says what charge were you wounded in you have to say a daft French woman did it with a pitchfork.

Hudson and I bought two quarts of milk last night & with a tin of Custard Powder commenced operations. When we had got it made we found we had no sugar & sent a little Frenchie for some. It came back with those sticky French sweets instead. Anyway we had to sweeten it with something so we put them in. If you were lucky you got a chocolate Cushion and a lump of congealed custard.

All my love Fred

This letter links up with memories recorded in “The Salient”

Harry Thackray told of marching to the bath house and using the big tubs. Their shirts were “running wick” with lice and they got nice clean fresh ones. The lice would be the many that avoided the candle treatment which many used to kill lice in the seams where thumb nails couldn’t do the job. The whole battalion came out in a rash which brass-hat doctors diagnosed as German measles. It only affected them above the waist and in fact was due to the fresh shirts being washed in too strong ‘creosol’ which caused a rash. Alas the quarantine was ended and they went once more into the line.

Fred, tongue in cheek, claims he is a fluent linguist, but the standards are fairly low. Toot sweet, dooze oofs, san fairy Ann were about the limits for many.

Ernest Kirkland wrote *“a small detachment in billets had received orders to move. The NCO in charge detailed one of the men to go and borrow a shovel from the nearby farm to bury the rubbish. The rifleman, who didn’t know French went to the house and asked “will yer lend us a shovel, missus?” Madame, who knew no foreign language either, looked puzzled for a moment, then suddenly brightened. She immediately went to the stable and led out a horse. “Voila! un cheval!” she cried. “Nay missus, I can’t dig a hoil wi’ a bloody horse.”*

The errors were not just between nations. There are sometimes misunderstandings between two English speakers. One day, coming out of the line, a warning was passed back “mind the hole”. The Leeds Rifles used the vernacular “mind the ‘oil” which the following southerners took literally and, looking for oil, fell into the hole. One “old comrade” had been to evening class to learn French which he used when on a visit to the old battlefields by Ypres. When he tried to use it, haltingly, in an estaminet, he was brought up short by Madame who, an ex-pat, said “ nay lad, speak English, I was born and brought up by Woodus Moor.” Royal Park Road and St Mark’s were both on the fringes of the Woodhouse Moor an urban open space then and now. Mind you I recall showing off my French to the family of a French collier on a Calais beach just before the start of yet another war - *un, deux, trois* etc and *va mouche* (go away fly).

The above letter has hints that something is ahead. *“If you don’t hear from me for a while don’t get worried. I will write if I can but I don’t think I shall have the chance.” “Am afraid my letters are getting rather stale, but shall be able to describe new sensations to you soon.”*

His note book records the casualties before he himself was wounded in July 1916 when the Somme campaign started on the first of the month:

	Officers	Other Ranks
Killed	2	32
Wounded	7	244
Missing	1	35



Fred in a tie signifying he was at that time hospitalised

The last communication we still have is the postcard he sent to his mother shortly after he was wounded.

Hospital Train July 17 1916

My Dear Ma,

I have been slightly bent but not broken. Stopped a piece of shell in the back & left shoulder.

Had a slight operation yesterday & am in the pink now. Will let you know when I get to Blighty. Don't worry

Best love Fred

He writes in the notebook that this was at Authuille (but the only one to be found on a map is about 100km South near Albert not Ypres). This proved to be a Blighty wound and he was hospitalised to Whalley in Lancashire. Some of his fellow riflemen, wounded earlier, had found themselves posted to the 2/5th and

2/6ths South Staffs with whom they went to Enniskillen and were engaged in 1916 in the Easter uprising in Eire. Even a later posting would probably have been a concern when Fred was visiting Eire to sell cloth W.E.Yates, his employers, had produced. He rejoined the Regt. in May 1917 only to be gassed at Passchendaele that November. In the next year he was posted to 15 Prisoner of War Coy, The Labour Corps. They were stationed at Rouen in 1918 and on

23rd April went to Rang du Fliers on the coast inland from Le Touquet. On the 21 Jan 1919 they moved to Etaples nearby.

This shoulder wound fascinated a niece at family holidays when it was revealed by his swimming costume. However the pain was an intermittent problem throughout his life. The removal of his disability pension, although small, was resented for many years. He was awarded £37.10.0 as a final payment in September 1920. The Local Committee of the Medical Appeal Board even spelt his name wrongly!

The final letter is to Fred from his elder brother George. I have got a copy of George's Army documents from the National Archives of Canada. Throughout his middle name is spelt 'Metcalf' even though his grandfather's name was Metcalfe and his mother's name was so spelt with this final 'e' when she left Casterton School in March 1881. [This was the school the Brontes went to.]

883583 Pte GMW attested to the 187 Bn of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on June 13th 1916 at Gadsby, Alberta when he was 27 years old. He was a slight, small man, 125 lbs, 5'3" with a 33½" chest, brown eyes and black hair. From his dental records he either had perfect teeth or 'remake' implies he had dentures. That he was recorded as Church of England will come as a surprise to those who knew him later, but knowing the conventions of army service this means little. [His mother gave him a bible when he went to Canada and dated April 12th 1913 which she had been given on leaving school. This bible gives the birth dates of his parents and siblings; does this give sign of a family trait of forgetfulness to be seen two generations on?] He was paid a dollar a day with 10 cents field allowance and assigned \$15 a month to his mother in Leeds. Having come from Milford camp in England he was discharged as fit from the 10th Infantry Bn on April 23rd 1919 at Calgary. Those who knew his later life will recall his poor sleep and suppose it was one of the effects of war service the army does not recognise.

He sailed from Halifax to Liverpool on the SS Olympic on the Dec 20th 1916 and joined the 202 Bn at Whitley camp, going to France on May 22nd 1917 with the 10th Bn. and getting 14 days leave in February. He was wounded twice, the first time in his left forearm on March 19th but on the March 23rd

more seriously in his right forearm. He reported to the 6th Casualty Clearing Station. He spent one month in hospital from March 31st 1918 at Ipswich, recovering from this wound variously described as caused by shrapnel or a bullet, but according to the army left no disability. He convalesced at Epsom for ten days and went to France again on Sept 5th. He was awarded the Military Medal on Nov 9th 1918 which was gazetted on August 5th 1919 for an action at the Canal du Nord in Sept 1918.

In a letter to his brother Fred he described an action such as might lead to this award.



George with Madge and Ma

Canada YMCA Oct 20 1918

My Dear Fred,

Well hows things. I did not get to write during the week as we were too busy. We did great work too boy know what I mean. Eight of us with the Officer took 48 Prussian infantry prisoner; like knocking pups off a log. It sure was great we got them asleep the whole shooting match with 5 machine guns. It happened this way. We were advancing in a town very early in the morning and there was a bit of a fog on when we ran onto a German Sentry and he hadn't an earthly, we were into him before he knew what was up. Well one of our fellows could

Spracken Zee Dutch and he asked him about his comrades. Heine told us there were 15 of them asleep in a house further down the road. So they were our meat:— we made him take us down there and then surrounded the house and invited them to come out in the usual way:— talk about a row; the Devil among the Tailors is a fool to it (A Scottish folk song. Ed). They yelled and grunted and started to come out in the true camarad style Hands at the high port. I thought they were never going to stop: Lord they were a crowd against us but we sure had them with their pants down that time: Luckily it was a broad street and we could keep them in the centre and there was no chance at all for them once we got them out. I guess they thought we were like the Yanks, 10 million strong instead of hardly a Corporals Guard. One had to laugh even then to see us stick them up and you can bet your life there was no bluff to use what came handy: I'll bet their arms ached before they got the all clear sign and were allowed to drop them. One fellow was trying to take a leak and our boys made him keep his hands up at the same time:— they were ugly looking bastards when we got them properly sorted out:— I didn't get a watch tho, I sure was anxious for one. But we were all alone and I had to go for an escort for them so I only got two of them frisked and they were blanks just a little money and a bunch of photos which I have sent home. Still I went through their outfit afterwards and got 4 pair of Heine field-glasses, 3 revolvers and two daggers. I would like to have sent you something down: I am getting a pair of glasses home by a fellow going on Leave. But the revolver will have to stay with me as there is too much risk that it might clutch his pass if they caught him with it. gave a pair of glasses and a small revolver to the officer. He had no luck you see and had to stick round and see that things went alright. May give the fellow a small gat to take my glasses home as he is going to Leeds, that leaves me with two pairs still one of which I will carry.

If only I had a chance to send you a pair. Do you think registered mail would be safe enough: let me know quick and I will hang onto them until I hear from you. They are the usual NCOs glasses but pretty good ones at that and well worth having. If you can think of a better way just let me know:— I have just written home a good long letter to give them the news. Now don't worry boy as I am quite alright and I guess we have a bit of rest coming to us. We took 3 Villages of a pretty fair size in under 12 hours so thats going some and casualties practically Nil. Its a sight better than trench warfare you know and ones chances are better as he is getting out all he knows how these days. We are in good billets and have plenty of good grub and sleep warm at nights. I also have a good time.

Dick will now be over here poor kid. I think he will be quite alright tho and when he gets used to it he will not mind much as like all of us he will make friends and it will be quite (illegible).... I think this is all just now. Dont worry I am quite alright.

Be good old man, Bless you,

Your affectionate brother George.



George Metcalfe Wigglesworth

The 1st/7th finished its fighting at Famars near Valenciennes. It was there, in 1794, it had got its regimental march *Ça ira*. The regiment was fighting with its allies against the French in the French Revolutionary Wars and the opposition was winning, singing *Ça ira* (That will go = it will succeed) to a tune by Bécourt. The Colonel told his band to play *Ça ira* saying "Come on lads, we'll beat them to their own damned tune."

The claim of Lloyd George that the Armed Forces would return to a land fit for heroes proved a very sick remark to many soldiers facing unemployment and little regard. Fred, however, was re-employed by Yates', who had a reputation as good employers, and eventually became a contracted salesman for them much respected by them and the customers in Ireland, Scotland and the North of England.

A Working Party

Three hours ago he blundered up the trench,
Sliding and poising, groping with his boots;
Sometimes he tripped and lurched against the walls
With hands that pawed the sodden bags of chalk.
He couldn't see the man who walked in front;
Only he heard the drum and rattle of feet
Stepping along barred trench boards, often splashing
Wretchedly where the sludge was ankle-deep.

Voices would grunt 'Keep to your right - make way!'
When squeezing past some men from the front-line:
White faces peered, puffing a point of red;
Candles and braziers glinted through the chinks
And curtain-flaps of dug-outs; then the gloom
Swallowed his sense of sight; he stooped and swore
Because a sagging wire had caught his neck.

A flare went up; the shining whiteness spread
And flickered upward, showing nimble rats
And mounds of glimmering sand-bags, bleached with rain;
Then the slow silver moment died in dark.
The wind came posting by with chilly gusts
And buffeting at corners, piping thin.
And dreary through the crannies; rifle shots
Would split and crack and sing along the night,
And shells came calmly through the drizzling air
To burst with hollow bang below the hill.

Three hours ago he stumbled up the trench;
Now he will never walk that road again:
He must be carried back, a jolting lump
Beyond all need of tenderness and care.
He was a young man with a meagre wife
And two small children in a Midland town;
He showed their photographs to all his mates,
And they considered him a decent chap
Who did his work and hadn't much to say,
And always laughed at other people's jokes
Because he hadn't any of his own.

That night when he was busy at his job
Of piling bags along the parapet,
He thought how slow time went, stamping his feet
And blowing on his fingers, pinched with cold.
He thought of getting back by half-past twelve,
And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep
In draughty dug-out frowsty with the fumes
Of coke, and full of snoring weary men.

He pushed another bag along the top,
Craning his body outward; then a flare
Gave one white glimpse of No Man's Land and wire;
And as he dropped his head the instant split
His startled life with lead, and all went out.

Siegfried Sassoon

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Toc H

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