

Diary of Sidney Tarplee, 1st April 1918 - 25th May 1918

This war diary was written by Sidney Tarplee of the 2/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. Prior to his enlistment he lived at 73 Seymour Road, Gloucester. He joined the 1/5th Gloucester Territorial Force in 1914, aged 16, as a drummer and it wasn't until March 1918 that he was posted to France, as part of the 2/5th Battalion. Three months after this diary extract, on 2nd September 1918, Sydney was in the trenches near to the town of Estaires when the Germans launched a gas attack, the gas being delivered by artillery shells. Four men died and 29 were wounded with Sydney being one of the casualties. He was taken to hospital behind the lines and later sent home to England to recover. He survived the war and died in Gloucester in 1956 aged 57. This diary commences in March 1918. It has been edited to make it easier to read and to match the unit's war diary.

Sunday March 31st: Left Southampton 7 o'clock 31st. Weather very fine. Voyage rather rough, came across on SS Vera¹.

Monday April 1st: Arrived at Le Havre 6 o'clock. March to camp of 1½ hours. Dinner: 2.30 stew. Tea: 4.30 bread & butter. 9pm left camp for Rouen.

Tuesday April 2nd: Arrived at Rouen 7 o'clock. Breakfast nil. Dinner - 2.30pm Bully & biscuits & pickles (from Jn Stephens Gloucester²). Kit inspection 12.30pm all correct. Inspection by RO³ 9.00pm, then medical inspection 10.30pm.

¹ SS Vera was a cross-channel passenger ferry owned by London & South Western Railway Company, requisitioned for war work by the Admiralty.

² John Stephens & Son & Co. Ltd, vinegar manufacturers, St Catherine's Street, Gloucester

³ RO = Regimental Officer

[Date not given]: Breakfast: 7.15pm. Dinner: 1.10pm. Fatigues, 4.30 to 4.45pm. Tea: 5.30pm. It rained at night & we were soaked, to the point where everything had to be hung out to dry.

Friday April 5th: Stretcher bearing at No.5 General, 6am to 6pm, food very good.

Saturday April 6th: Route march afternoon.

Sunday April 7th: Church parade, feet and hair inspection. Afternoon wind up, warned for draft night. We paraded in full marching order, 7-00 till 9.00pm. I wrote letters to mother, Mary and Betty.

Monday April 8th: Entrained from Rouen to the line. Breakfast 4.30am, left camp 5.30am, left Rouen station 11.40am, arrived at Pont-Remy 12.15pm, left the station and marched about 3 miles, but got lost, returned to station for remainder of morning left. 1.30pm left there and went to Long-Pree en route to join the Battalion, Long-Pree being some five miles away & the pack being too heavy I was forced to fall out and arrived at the fore said place at 2.30pm.

Tuesday April 9th: Left here at 8.00am for Hangest. Arrived here at 12.30am.

Wednesday April 10th: After very warm and tiring march we joined the 2/5th Glosters & entrained with them, leaving the station at 1.30 we spent the night of April 10th in a loft attached to a fairly large house. There was a heavy bombardment near this place & I heard a couple of shells whistle over early in the morning. We had a 12hrs train journey & then a march of 7 kilometres we arrived at St Venant 4.00am this being April 11th.

Thursday April 11th: We got to sleep at 5.30am. There was a heavy bombardment all this morning shells bursting very near. Persons living here were forced to leave owing to the shelling. Portuguese soldiers ran from the trenches, this letting Jerry into Merville. Rations brought up 5.30pm. I undertook my first guard in France, from 8.30-10.00pm.

Friday April 12th: Jerry still advancing. We were forced to retire heavy shelling. Our artillery returning, took position on our right about 25 yrds away. Jerry found them with the result that he dropped one less than 10yrds from us, injuring three persons, one a Gloster soldier.

We now were forced to retire & took up positions on the bank of a canal awaiting the arrival of Jerry. It was here that the Battalion arrived. We are now between both shell fires, shrapnel falling thick, time being 12.00 Noon. We had tea about 5.30pm & then proceeded to dig ourselves in about 1½kms from St.Venant. 7pm, shrapnel still falling & we still retiring, many wounded cases, all bridges being mined. We were ordered into the forward positions & we are now in trenches dug by our chaps last night.

Saturday April 13th: Today, shells bursting all round us very near. I have been struck twice with shrapnel but not enough to hurt. William Lindsay has been wounded, but news of a relief force coming reached us at 9.20, we are all very tired and cold, dumps continue to fire, everything unpleasant. We were relieved at last by the Scots at 12.00am. Arrived back in St Venant, 2.15am.

Sunday April 14th: Rested in a cinema. Stand to 5.30am. Breakfast 8.30am, morning rather quiet. Afternoon Jerry continued to shell our village rather heavy, three of Glosters killed by shell at 4.30pm. From now, until 10.00pm, both sides are shelling, nothing but one continual roar of guns. 8.30pm, Jerry now quiet time but our guns are still firing. Village nought but ruins, church untouched, weather still fine but very cold. We moved our billet to the cellars under church. Every-thing in the church except altar & crucifix is smashed.

Monday April 15th: Stand-to 5.30am. Breakfast 7.30am. Rifle inspection then, later on, parade. I had duty in Orderly Room. Still quiet, nothing much doing.

Tuesday April 16th: Nothing much doing, Jerry retiring. Tuesday afternoon, warned for line, Tuesday night in front line.

Wednesday April 17th: Still in line rather quiet. At night Jerry attacks & takes Farm⁴ & held there. Drummer Upton killed by rifle fire, both sides shelling.

Thursday April 18th: Still shelling. We repulsed a Jerry attack and A company retook the farm. At 4pm we were ordered to launch an attack on another nearby farm. Jerry however must have caught wind of it and launched a heavy bombardment that broke up our attack.

Friday April 19th: Rather quiet until evening.

Sat April 20th: Relieved and returned to St Venant.

Sunday April 21st: Gas sent over, no casualties.

Monday April 22nd: Sent letter home, morning quiet. News of making a stunt⁵ reaches us.

Tuesday April 23rd: News true, we leave St Venant at 1am and into forward trenches. We go over the top at 4.30am & break through capturing 200 to 300 Jerry prisoners. We dig in & hold position.

Wednesday April 24th: Jerry puts in a strong counterattack but we repulsed it with artillery, rifle and MG fire, although we had lots of men killed and wounded.

Friday April 26th: We get relieved at 11pm and head back to the support billets at Laleau.

Saturday April 27th: Sent on Lewis Gun course and remain there near Aire, till May 12th.

Sunday May 12th: Came back to St Venant.

Wednesday May 15th: Went up to support front line, rather quiet.

Sunday May 19th: Came back to support at La Braisserie in reserve until 22/5/18.

Saturday May 25th: Return to line. Very quiet.

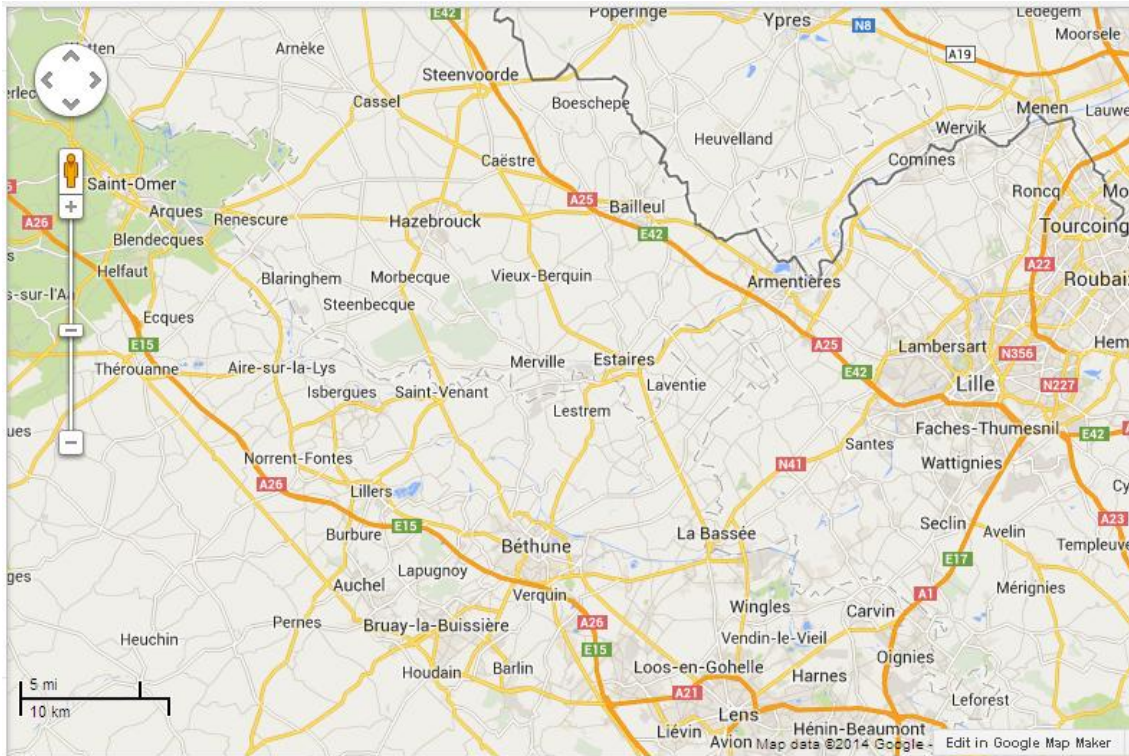
⁴ East Bacquerolles Farm

⁵ Stunt - Any performance of outstanding skill or effectiveness, on a large or small scale.

Maps - Courtesy of Google Maps

1) Estaires

(<https://maps.google.co.uk/maps?hl=en&ll=50.638139,2.738342&spn=0.45551,1.229095&t=m&z=10>)



2) North-East France

(<https://maps.google.co.uk/maps?hl=en&ll=50.028917,2.279663&spn=1.845535,4.916382&t=m&z=8>)

