

WWI Primary Source

Accession Number 1986.2655: This is an excerpt from diaries and memoirs held by the National Army Museum Te Mata Toa and protected by copyright law

Labourer, Tapanui, Otago, NZ

Private Arthur James Gordon

Service Number: 35013

14th Company, Otago Infantry Regiment

Served: Western Front

Discharged from war service due to wounds

Died 1978 in Brisbane



Look for further information:

Papers Past (natlib.govt.nz) | Online Cenotaph - Auckland War Memorial Museum (aucklandmuseum.com)
Archives New Zealand (archives.govt.nz)

Reinforcement: 20th

HISTORY-SHEET. SEE FILES

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION (E.F. Form No. 34)

Unit: <i>2nd Bat. (A. & B. Coy.)</i>	Rank: Pte	Surname: Gordon	Christian Name: Arthur James	No.:
<i>J Coy</i>			Authority to Headquarters:	35013

Occupation: **Labourer** Religion: *Pres* Last New Zealand address: **Tapanui**

Last employer: */* *21-6-95*

Name, relationship, and address of next-of-kin (if not resident in New Zealand, insert also name and address of nearest relative in New Zealand):

Mr John Gordon (Father)
Tapanui Otago Tapanui Otago

No. **35013** Rank: *Pte*

Name: **Arthur James Gordon**

Address: *67 Forbury Crescent, St. Clair Dunedin 29.11.23*

Periods of Service.	Theatres of Operation.
In New Zealand: <i>158</i> days	Australasian
Overseas: <i>3</i> years	Egyptian
Total service: <i>3</i> years <i>165</i> days	Egyptian E.F.
Date commenced duty: <i>8.16.1917</i>	Balkan
Date finally discharged: <i>4.2.20</i>	Western European } <i>1917. 1918</i>
	Asiatic

Decorations:

BRITISH WAR MEDAL
VICTORY MEDAL ... /

The foregoing particulars are correct.

Signature: _____

N.B.—Do not omit to advise this office of any future change of address.

Periods of Service.	Theatres of Operation.
In New Zealand: <i>158</i> days	Australasian
Overseas: <i>3</i> years <i>4</i> days	Egyptian
Total service: <i>3</i> years <i>165</i> days	Egyptian E.F.
Date commenced duty: <i>24.8.16</i>	Balkan
Date finally discharged: <i>4.2.20</i>	Western European } <i>1917. 1918</i>
	Asiatic

Decorations:

BRITISH WAR MEDAL <i>29/4/20</i>
VICTORY MEDAL <i>MAY 1920</i>

The foregoing particulars are correct.

Signature: *A. J. Gordon*

N.B.—Do not omit to advise this office of any future change of address.

SM

35013 Gordon A.J.

MEDAL ACTION COMPLETE

express ed
1st-17.6.19
mgr 1st-17.6.19

B.

ENTERED HISTORY SHEET
26/10/20

JUNE 6th, 1917.

Had a fairly lively time during the night between shells and gas. Old Fritz sent over a good many gas shells but we got our helmets on and so were secure. He kept the gas and tear gas on for about two hours, then at 3.30 a.m. sent over a regular barrage of whiz bang shells around us. Some very close. These are much smaller than the 5.9 but one gets no warning of them coming. All morning he kept us heavily shelled until close on 11 a.m. We could not get time between the shells to make our breakfast. Early in the afternoon he sent over a heavy bombardment, several of them landing very close to us and finally one found the back of our bivvy making a duce of a mess, we didn't get a scratch. Shortly our Officer came up and had us relieved. We are now posted to Neuve Englishe close to a large church. Fritz shells this church and the town every few hours making a mess of the buildings. Hardly one has escaped. Caught a transport, killed five men and two mules.

JUNE, 7th, 1917.

Advance on Messines. Exactly at 3 a.m. a mine blew up Messines and the report and concussion shook buildings many miles back. A barrage of our guns opened up on a nine mile front, each gun had five feet to fire on. The roar was almost deafening, then a lull, the boys had gone over the top. The artillery played on the next line of trenches. The greatest battle in progress ever fought. News coming back that the boys are doing great work. At 4.30 N.Z.'s with prisoners start to arrive and by 6 a.m. over 500 have passed my beat which is only a small portion of what must be going along some of the other roads. The Anzacs have gone through Messines, many wounded arriving all cheerful. N.Z.'s capture a German Staff two Generals and Officers. Rumours of Otago having got smacked up in the early part. Prisoners arrive all day. In the afternoon the artillery teams went out and I believe shifted many of the guns up a considerable distance. News of the boys still advancing. The Huns counter attacked three times but had to retire. Aussies met them in the open in a bayonet charge and smashed them up.

JUNE, 8th, 1917

A very quiet day in Neuve Englishe, no shells have come our way all day. Good news is coming in as to the progress our boys have made, over two miles past Messines, their objective, the prisoners taken by the N.Z.'s for one day are over 1000. All day the guns are moving up drawn by horses and lorries while the larger ones are drawn by Caterpillar engines. The Otago Batt. 4th Brigade is camped between this beat and our previous one. They are engaged in making roads up to the line after the advance and today came under Fritz's shell fire. One man was killed and two wounded. The shell landed where our platoon was working. In the evening went up to see the boys, saw Herb, Tom, Jack, Charlie, Ronny, they all got a bit of a shake up under fire for the first time. A terrific barrage by our guns on the left has started and lasted well on to morning.

JUNE, 9th, 1917.

Weather continues very good, could not be more favourable for an advance. Reports of last night's bombardment are that Fritz counter attacked to regain some of the lost ground in close formation, the guns straight away got on to him and the slaughter was awful. The dead lay in heaps. Some regiments of Irish and Tommies went over on an attack and did some good work. on every side Fritz is being beaten, their casualties must run into many thousands. The pioneers tell us that in elaborate cellars and dug outs in Messines the German dead are lying heaped up having taken refuge from our awful bombardment but couldn't get away so were trapped. The boys are continually bringing in souvenirs from the battlefield in the way of German belts, rifles, daggers etc.

JUNE, 10th, 1917

Foggy morning but cleared off by 10 a.m. and turned out a very warm day. Still on the same job but may be shifted any time. Our battalion went back this morning having finished their time at fatigue work, where their destination is now I don't know. A very quiet day all round, nothing doing, the big guns are sending a shell over at times to let Fritz know they are still going as strong as ever. In the evening all was quiet until 11.30 when our guns opened up a fearful barrage and kept going for over an hour. It must have been hell on earth with old Fritz. Now that the Germans have been driven back several of the civillians are flocking back to the village to take up their shell riddled homes.

JUNE, 11th, 1917.

Weather continuing very good but at times exceedingly sultry and tiresome and tells on the troops who are all day making to and from the firing line. Old Fritz seems to have taken his guns out of range of this township as never a shell lands here now and things seem to be dreadfully quiet. The pioneers left here today for a camp not far from here, amongst them I saw Jack Moore. As a result of last night's bombardment two divisions went over and took their objective. Fritz seems to be getting a sorry time of it. We are being relieved this afternoon for twenty-four hours so will have all day tomorrow until 6 p.n. to ourselves - some good. Sent away letters home containing handkerchiefs.

JUNE, 12th, 1917.

All night in bed which was some good instead of having to get out in the middle of ones sleep to go on duty. Had breakfast and about 10 a.m. set out for Messines to have a look at the result of our bombardment. Got as far as our corner at Milveringham when old Fritz sent over a few shells and some schrapnel which landed some distance away, the result was that my two mates got the wind up and made for home. Of course I had to return too much against my will. Had a row at dinner time over lazyness on the part of one of the mob. Put in the afternoon in doing some writing and watching very vivid lightning and loud thunder on also heavy thunder shower.

JUNE, 21st, 1917.

Awoke early in my nest in the straw in the old barn to find everyone astir. Word had come around for an early stir, something on. Fatigue work up in the trenches so 5 a.m. saw us at breakfast then we fell in for parade and all us traffic men were called out and left behind, the rest went up to the trenches for fatigue work. At 7.30 we left for the baths in Nieppe where we had a very decent bath in the vats in an old brewery. I came in contact with a hot steam pipe and got a nasty scald on the arm. Got back from the baths, some shells landing close. At dinner I managed to cut two of my fingers opening a tin of bully beef - more wounds. Did nothing all afternoon except cleaning gear. In the evening went for a stroll down the city of Brune Gaye and when having a feed of custard and citron discovered I had left my money below the floor of the barn - rushed back and found it - great rejoicing. A troublesome day for my 22nd birthday.

JUNE, 22nd, 1917.

Had a good sleep in the old barn and awoke to hear it raining pretty solidly and continued on till 8 a.m. Paraded to the doctor to have my arm bandaged, third time paraded to doctor since joining forces. Morning has turned out fresh and bright after the rain, expect a warm day. Packed up all our gear and handed in our valises with extra clothing to store, going in to the trenches tonight, expect to be 8 days in the front line, 8 in the subsidiary trenches back from the front then out for a few days. At 8.30 we packed up and started up the road for the trenches which proved to be a two hour solid march having one halt before going into a long sap landing up to the firing line. Our party got isolated from the rest of the Company but afterwards found ourselves and were posted to our post about 11.30 p.m. Everything round about very quiet.

JUNE, 23rd, 1917.

My first watch was from 1.30 to 3.30 a.m. and had a good look over the parapet towards no mans' land but Fritz interrupted my gazing by sending over a few whizz bangs landing very close to the post. Was relieved at 4a.m. and went to the dug out for a sleep, no blankets, only overcoat to lie on on board floor, was pretty tired and slept at times until 7a.m. when had breakfast. Word afterwards came around that we were to be shifted from our post to another in our line so had the rest of the day to ourselves. I was picked out for Platoon runner having to visit all the posts with our Sergeant and Officer. My duties started at 6.30 and between then and 10.30 p.m. we had a wander through the trenches and out into no mans' land where we inspected some of Fritz's strong points, being forts made of ferro concrete about 3ft thick with loop-holes for machine guns and rifles. We had blown them up when we caused him to retreat about 2 weeks ago.

JUNE, 24th, 1917

Had a few hours sleep during the night after coming back from a tour of the posts at 10.30. Our dug out is of cement about a foot thick on the walls and about two feet on top, the dimensions are 6ft x 2ft x 4ft wide like a cement box let into the wall, big enough for two to sleep in but cannot sit up in it. On duty from 6.30 to 10.30 as usual doing the rounds. A fine day and not a great deal of shelling by both sides. from what we can make out Fritz is about 2 miles away across a canal.

Back from work at 4 a.m., had breakfast then laid down and slept off and on till dinner time when I got up, had a wash etc. and had dinner. Seems peculiar getting out of bed and the sun at its highest, one can hardly realise that the best part of the day has passed. After dinner washed my socks etc. as one needs a change very nearly every day to keep the feet in good order when doing so much walking. Played cards and lay about all afternoon having a rest as we will have to go up again on fatigue tonight. Corp. Newlands (Roxburgh) has been up before the officers for criticising them in some of his letters over the food. We are not well fed here. Today we got 4 loaves 2 lb. each amongst 14 men for 24 hours, 2 tins of jam 1lb. each amongst same and we get a small allowance of bully beef stew at tea, mostly bully beef and water. The food is anything but sufficient. A great many fellows are buying bread in the towns. Went out again to the trenches arriving there about 10.30, a very quiet night.

JULY, 18th, 1917.

Worked pretty solidly in the trenches making a large dug out till 1.30 when we knocked off and made for home arriving about 3.30a.m. Altogether we had a very quiet night, no shells coming our way during the time we were in except a few machine bullets whizzing overhead at times. It started to rain about half an hour before we came out making the duck boards very slippery and the darkness did not make the going any easier. The worst part of the work is the walking to and from the trenches and one arrives home very tired and fatigued. Had breakfast at 4 a.m. and turned into bed sleeping and dozing till mid-day when I got out for dinner. Afterwards lay down and read a book, the first I have read since I left the boat. The day is very dull and damp. Went out again at 8.30, rain started to fall and continued until we reached our work.

JULY, 19th, 1917.

The most miserable night I have put in for some considerable time. It rained from the time we left camp until we arrived back in camp at 3.30 a.m. Our work up in the trenches was filling sand bags and building up parapets, not a very nice job on a wet night. It was deadly dark and we slipped and fell on the duckboards getting into a terrible mess. Also coming across country on the road home fell into shell holes every few yards arriving home mud from top to bottom. Had breakfast and went to bed until mid-day, had dinner and went down to the baths for a clean but turned back. Fritz was shelling the baths, killed three women and wounded a N.Z. Afterwards I went down to the town for a walk and bought a table centre which I sent home. Up in the trenches again at usual time on fatigues. A lovely evening.

JULY, 30th, 1917

Back from wiring party at 1.30a.m. got into bed but had to turn out again at 3.30a.m. for stand to which was pretty rough on us as we only got back at 1.30. Only another couple of hours in bed and we had to get out for breakfast but got some of our own back as we had not to go out to work until after dinner so spent the morning in bed. Can now sleep any time during the day and night and pretty well any place. In the afternoon went up to the front line and continued our work on Officers bivvy, trenches are horribly wet and muddy after the rain. Have been warned to go out for wiring same time tonight as last night. Hope to have as quiet a time as last night. Got a N.Z. mail tonight, two letters from home. Up to June 4th received feathers and parcels from London. Went out on wiring again, had a good spin getting home an hour earlier than last night.

JULY, 31st, 1917.

Back from wiring at mid-night, went to bed for three hours, up again 3.30 stand to till 4.30. About 4 a.m. our guns opened up right along the line in a terrific barrage, a sight will worth seeing, looked as if there was some advance on. The bombardment continued until about 10 a.m. Heard later that our boys took Sugar Refining Works at Warneton which they took from Fritz a few nights ago but he put up a strong counter attack two nights later and retook. Put the morning in bed until dinner time. In the afternoon did some work up in the front line digging up the duck boards and cleaning them. About 3.30 Fritz put up a strong artillery barrage and looks as if he is counter attacking to get back the sugar works. At 6.30 p.m. our machine guns opened up on a terrific barrage, looks as if another move is on, the shelling is awful.

AUGUST, 1st, 1917.

Rained all night, trenches in an awful mess. Heavy barrages went up several times during the night. Heard that Fritz counter attacked on Warneton but his attack proved a failure and immediately afterwards the boys hopped over and advanced right through Warneton and dug in. News has arrived of a great advance right up to the coast. It is certainly the greatest bombardment since the war started. Our trenches got heavily shelled during the night. Afternoon still raining. We change over with Wellington West Coast Coy today. I have been ordered to go down and pilot them through the trenches, the same game and same sort of day as the last time we came out of the trenches. Got the relieving lot up safely and made out, still raining. Landed at Le Biset where we are billeted in an old estaminet close up to the line. One of the boys remarked that the buildings round here must be the Froggies summer residences - no roofs on them.

AUGUST, 2nd, 1917.

Put in a fairly good night in a top story in the old estaminet. Reveille at 5.45a.m., left for fatigue work in the trenches at 6.30, still raining, has hardly stopped for the past 48 hours. A ceaseless drizzle. We puddled our way up to our work. Put on pushing trolley loads of cement up a light trolley line and then carrying the blocks about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile up the trench where they are making a new bivvy on an extensive scale. Arrived back at our billets at 10 a.m., rather early owing to the rain, not allowed out of our billets so will put in the afternoon writing up past correspondence.

AUGUST, 6th, 1917

Up early to start cleaning gear, buttons, rifle etc. everything spick and span before going on parade. At 8 a.m. we were paraded down to the baths where I had a good bath, first one for over a fortnight. We always look forward to a bath when coming out of the trenches. Squad drill was the next item for the morning. At 11 a.m. we were dismissed and told to pack up our gear ready to move out. Moved out after dinner further down the street to another school, a much worse billet than we left, the floor being covered with water. Anyway it is all in the life so we will have to make the best of it. Just received a parcel from home, long looked for, almost given up hope of getting it, also received a very decent parcel from Scotland so am right for food for a day or two. Received a letter from Bill Isteed in Brockenhurst, England. Warned for guard so had to stay in camp all night.

AUGUST, 7th, 1917.

On guard during the night, not much rest about these rest camps, one gets more rest in the line. All about the camp doing very little. Wrote a few letters so forth having a generally easy time for once in a while. Came off guard at 7 in the evening, not sorry either. For the rest of the evening knocked around the billets and streets. Herb and Tom came along, had usual old gab and look at the couriers. They have both been on school for Lewis Gun instruction. Posted letters, one to Scotland containing handkerchief souvenir. Received letter from Scotland announcing death of Kate's Brother-in-law. Did not go down city, stayed in billets for the remainder of the night.

AUGUST, 8th, 1918.

A beautiful morning, typical Southland harvest morning but grew duller later in the morning. At 7 a.m. we paraded down to the baths where I had a decent bath in one of the old beer vats. After bathing parade we fell in and we snipers and observers with new luminous sights on our rifles went out to some butts just outside Pont du Nieppe and tried our sights, adjusting them properly which occupied the whole of the forenoon. In the afternoon we were given a lecture on taking strong points in open warfare. Later on in the afternoon we practised taking a strong point supposed to contain an enemy machine gun, the platoon was divided into three squads, one with machine gun, one firing rifle bombs and an attacking party which proved very interesting. In the evening Jack and I went down to Nieppe to get in a stock of provisions before going into the trenches. A heavy thunder shower spoilt a decent evening.

AUGUST, 9th, 1917.

A fairly decent but dull morning. Although crops are ripening up fast, many of them dead ripe, the weather is anything but harvesting weather. Today we go into the trenches again for another spin and the morning is occupied in packing up our valises or packs which are stored until we come out, all we take into the trenches is oil sheet, overcoat, towel, shaving gear etc. I take in an extra change of underpants and singlet but many do not bother, also 2 pairs of socks. This time I have an extra load in the way of provisions, scored a French loaf, also tin of stuff from home and part of the parcel from Scotland, so will be set for food for a few days. At 2 p.m. we moved out of our billets for the line.

AUGUST, 12th, 1917 - continued.

About 3 p.m. Fritz opened up a barrage on our left, for about half an hour he shelled the trenches heavily.

AUGUST, 13th, 1917.

Morning cold and drizzly but brightened up later on. Nothing much doing and things fairly quiet. Fritz seems to be fully occupied further up towards the coast to bother us too much in this salient of the line. The aeroplanes have been very active and numerous over us all day. Fritz fired hundreds of shells at them but so far has not registered a hit, although they come very close at times. Most of the day has been engaged in running about, messages etc. The last few days drizzle has made things very muddy and miserable in the trenches. I only hope I have not to put in the winter in these ditches, if so I hope it is an exceedingly mild one. Our trench mortar batteries got on to one of Fritz's machine guns last night and gave it to all accounts a rough time. Fritz was using the flashlight morse code from one of his balloons.

AUGUST, 14th, 1917.

Had a fairly rough night of it. About 11 p.m. Fritz sent over a fair number of gas shells keeping us awake with our masks on. Did gas guard for one hour at mid-night the gas was still in the air but very slight, a dense fog also kept things very dark and miserable. The morning broke fairly bright and looks as if we are going to have a very decent day. Called on at 6 a.m. to act as runner for the General or Colonel one of the two - General Godley and Hart, Colonel Colquhoun and other staff men came around on a tour of inspection. About 10 a.m. Fritz sent over some fairly heavy shells in the shape of 5.9's, the first of their sort I have seen here since we left the traffic post at Wolveringham. Things throughout the day were fairly quiet. Our aeroplanes seemed to cause him some considerable annoyance, all day he shelled them fiercely but did not bring any down. Very fair evening but looks much like rain. Only hope he does not send over gas tonight.

AUGUST, 15th, 1917

Morning wet and dull, looks as if we are in for a wet day. Was on gas guard for an hour and a quarter early morning but Fritz did not bother us by sending over any. The atmosphere was quiet as ever this morning, very little doing on either sides. One of our Sergeants got wounded pretty severely this morning. Fred Murray from Gore. One would not have wished to meet a finer fellow. Rain has again made its appearance at midday. The duck boards have not been dry since we came in. This is an awful country for rain. Jack has just been up from Coy. Headquarters where he is running and tells me there is another N.Z. mail in so I hope to score some within the next few days. The evening was much the same as throughout the day. Fritz sent a few shells over just as a reminder that he was somewhere not too far away to make himself an annoyance. Did one hour gas guard during the night but no gas came over. Things pretty quiet.

AUGUST, 16th, 1917.

Morning bright and sunny such as an Autumn morning ought to be. Early in the morning an intense bombardment opened from Warneton on our left right up to the coast and has rather increased in violence during intervals throughout the day. Looks as if there is going to be another general advance all along the line - it is to be hoped it is even more successful than the last one which was held up by the rain. Rations seem to be unusually short - we received this morning for 24 hours 1/3 of 2lb. loaf and one biscuit. In the evening we will get a small allowance of stew - no butter, no jam, no cheese. Yesterday we got an allowance of jam but two wasps ate it on us during the night. Early this morning Fritz sent over a good number of shells on some of our posts but did little damage - no one being hurt. The mosquitoes are the chief pest here. I have several bites, one of my arms being almost as thick as two caused by two bites. The day has been one of the best but is growing chilly in the evening. I think the evenings will begin to grow colder from now on. Sent a letter to Jim today to try to find out his whereabouts.

AUGUST, 17th, 1917.

A morning much the same as the preceeding one, fairly bright and sunny. Did an hours gas guard during the early hours but things were unusually quiet nothing doing either in the way of gas or shells. Today we go out of the ditches for 8 days, four of which we put on fatigue going up to the lines for 8 hours every day building building up parapets with sandbags etc. Filling France into sandbags as the boys put it. All morning has been put in cleaning up and packing up gear getting ready to move out. The move came late in the afternoon and 5 p.m. found us straggling into billets between Brune Gaye and Nieppe. I have taken up my abode for eight days in the corner of a one time elaborate cow shed but now Fritz has put a few of his fresh air holes in it. On the way out he tried to get on to us with the few shells putting some uncomfortably close. I thought my number was up on one of them. Received a N.Z. mail as soon as we arrived in billets. Mail seems to come more regularly now. Went to rest in a nest of straw.

AUGUST, 18th, 1917.

Woke up at 5.30a.m. to get breakfast and go up on fatigue by 6.30. The morning, well it is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen over here and to see all the ripe crops stooked and standing put one in mind of an ideal harvest morning in N.Z. On every side on the way up to the lines one sees Froggies at toil cutting the crops or stooking them, seem to work from daylight to dark in crops all marked by shell holes no matter how small the piece of crop a shell is sure to have found its way to it, acres and acres are torn up by Fritz's shells his gunners searching for our batteries. He is now wreaking his vengeance on Armentieres and Nieppe, the civil population have been ordered to evacuate both towns which are fairly large ones. Hardly a day passes but his shells kill some civvies. We did our eight hours getting back to our billets by 1 p.m. I am putting in the rest of the afternoon cleaning up after coming out of the trenches. Rain has made its appearance again just to make things miserable. I only hope it has a limit to its amount.

OCTOBER, 1st, 1917.

Up at usual time in the morning, not a bad sort of morning, fairly bright and warm. We are to move out carrying battle order, our kits, blanket and overcoat are to be left behind. Orders came around that we are moving out directly after breakfast. After dinner we moved out and marched about two miles then got into lorries travelling for about four hours, then disembarked near Ypres, from there we marched about six miles, it was very slow going owing to the congested state of the traffic. We did not get to our destination until mid-night, then we had to dig a hole to lie in for the night, dig in anywhere so long as we were out of sight from Fritz. No overcoat or blankets and a frosty night, cold was no name for it. We passed through the town of Ypres on the way up, a one time beautiful city, larger than Dunedin, but now whole blocks are levelled down, one place the crucifix of a large cathedral remained standing.

OCTOBER, 2nd, 1917.

Could not sleep at all during the remaining few hours of the morning. As far as one can see all round is nothing but shell holes touching each other, the ground is stirred up something awful, everything is blown to pieces. The day turned out very warm. The weather is perfect for a push if it only keeps up until we get it over. All day we were lying about in the shell holes. I expect we will move out and up to the front line sometime tonight. A few heavy shells came over close to us and a few casualties are reported. The shell holes are full of men, if he only knew he could wipe hundreds of them out. Orders have come around that we are to move up after dark and take over the front line from our Second Brigade. We move up carrying our battle order and shovel to dig in. Soon we will be into it and it will be all over.

OCTOBER, 3rd, 1917.

Moved up to the front line during the night and dug in trying to make a bivvy for ourselves but the ground is so stirred up that the sides fall in as fast as we can dig down. At last we get one dug and enough covering to keep the rain off. Fritz is sending a few shells over and the ground rocks. Have a bit of a sleep and wake up to hear our guns giving old Fritz a time in the way of a trial barrage. Fritz replies landing a hail of shells close around our bivvies, every minute I expect our bivvy to go up any minute, the firing ceases and we crawl out, a shell has landed in a bivvy close to ours killing one of our men and wounding two seriously. All day we keep down. Fritz is not far away from here. We have to hop out tomorrow morning and go for old Fritz, our objective being a ridge with three concrete forts on the top about 800 yards away. We will stir old Fritz up in the morning. Will one come through it? My job is to carry orders so I will be on the move all the time.

OCTOBER, 4th, 1917

THE BATTLE OF YPRES

Fritz bombarded us all night with heavy stuff, the ground all around was one quiver. Blew up another dug out, killed one, wounded two seriously. Woke up twice dreaming of being at home only to be disappointed on finding myself in a hole. Orders came around at 3a.m. that we had to be ready to move at four, a cold sleety morning, we are to hop over at six. The minutes pass like hours, slowly the hands go round, close on two hours waiting finds us lying quiet in shell holes. I am chewing biscuits. 6 a.m. what anxiety, everybody is confident of coming through. Suddenly our guns open up, what a roar, the shells are landing just in front of us - now up they get as one man and move forward behind the barrage of shells. The barrage stops and plays for a certain time every 100 yards. It is to take us 40 minutes to get to our objective. Fritz is sending over a fair number of shells. I am busy running back and forwards along our lines carrying orders. The din is awful. A machine gun is playing on us from the forts on top of the hill, men are falling, we are getting nearer the forts, bullets are whistling about, no one seems to care, on we go, right through our own barrage and storm the machine guns killing most of the crews, capture the three guns, we have gone past our objective. I have to muster up the company and dig in. Another wave of men pass us and go on to take another objective 800 yards further on, it is taken. The rest of the day we are busy digging tunnels.

OCTOBER 5th, 1917.

Another day dawns but not a day like yesterday. It all seems like a dream. Where are some of my mates - some are wounded and away back to hospital, the others thank God there are only two of our platoon who lie out there. They lie within a few yards of those machine guns, one, our section Sergeant, lying there with a death grip on his rifle, the other Harry Dickson (Kuri Bush) who has been with me since we first started on this life - one of the finest of fellows. The rifle the Sergeant held in his hand was mine taken in a mistake that morning when we left the dugouts in the dark. Several others on different platoons of the company whom I have known for a long time are wounded and a few killed. The day is fairly cold, a few shells coming over at times but not doing much harm. It is fairly big stuff but he does not seem to have many guns in front of us. I believe we are to be relieved tonight. I am glad of this as it is intensely cold here without overcoats or anything. Today I have gathered up a few Hun souvenirs from the battle field. Some buckles, Hun pannikins and buckles off belts. A good few Hun dead are lying about, all ours are buried.

OCTOBER, 6th, 1917.

We expected to be relieved early in the night but the relieving troops did not come up until about two in the morning keeping us waiting about throughout the night in the bitter cold which was worse than half a dozen stunts. Early in the evening Fritz put up a very fierce counter attack but was eventually beaten off by our artillery and machine gun fire. After being relieved we had to march about six miles, mostly across shell holed ground for about two miles. We ploughed through mud in places almost up to our knees, it was deadly, especially after the strain we had gone through and no sleep for a week.

OCTOBER, 6th, 1917 - continued

We passed guns, caterpillar tractors and waggons bogged up to the axle all on the move up to new positions after the advance. We eventually got to our destination tired out, about half way we got a hot cup of cocoa and biscuits or we would never have lasted it out. On arrival we got a rum issue which made us all feel pretty rum too, then we had hot stew, next thing to dig in. We got our overcoats and blankets and laid down to a tired out sleep.

OCTOBER, 7th, 1917.

We moved off again in the night, we were not sorry either as it had been raining all day and was deadly miserable. We marched with full pack up for about two miles then another march for over three miles, the cold was intense and everyone was properly fatigued out, many of the men staggered along walking in their sleep, we eventually landed at our destination Eecke a place where we stopped at on the march up. We tumbled down and made out beds in an old straw barn at four in the morning, tired out we slept till ten then had breakfast, into bed again and slept until two when we were ordered to dress and attend church parade in a hall up the city. A very impressive sermon was given by Capt. Chaplain Lopdell based on the past few days events. One of our officers slept up against the leg of the Chaplain so more than the men were fatigued out. It has been a miserable cold, wet day. I dont like the prospects of putting a winter in here.

OCTOBER, 8th, 1917

Went to bed early in the old straw barn. Ted and I are sleeping together, two blankets and two overcoats on top of us, one feels inclined to sleep for a week after being up in the line with no covering whatever. Woke up in time to get some breakfast. A bitter cold wind is blowing, makes one shiver somewhat. After breakfast I washed a couple of pairs of socks then cleaned my gear as an inspection was due at 10 a.m. One is not long out of the lines when they start their inspections of rifles, ammunition etc. Got paid just before dinner. In the afternoon a Battalion parade was held and a very small Battalion it was and made one think somewhat, one does not notice the thinned out ranks in a platoon or company but when one sees a Battalion about half size - well of course it's war. Colonel Colquhoun addressed us and gave us great praise for our work during past few days. We have made a name for the 4th Brigade which will be remembered. In the evening I went down to Castre and bought some Christmas gifts which I sent home in a green envelope to Ina, Ethel and Ada, also cards to Mum, Dad and May. It is raining again tonight.

OCTOBER, 9th, 1917.

Morning very bright but still cold. Today we expect to do some drill, can't keep us out long without giving us squad drill etc. makes one wish he was back again in the line away from all such annoyances. See in the English papers great screed and praise for the British troops, very little is said about the Anzacs although it was almost wholly an Anzac battle, the 2nd Anzac Army Corps being engaged, only a division or two of Tommies being engaged. Part of the ground we took was taken a week or so previously by the Tommies. Fritz put up a bit of a counter attack and they retreated further than they gained. The day has been occupied in drill etc. putting in a very easy but monotonous day. We received reinforcements today to fill up the gaps made in our ranks during the past

OCTOBER, 9th, 1917 - continued

week. Have received orders to move out in the morning with the transports. I don't know what for but I hope I have not to leave the mob.

OCTOBER, 10th, 1917.

An exceedingly cold night and a cold morning. I am busy packing up ready to move out. I don't think the Coy. moves until tomorrow. Word has come around that I am not to leave until mid-day. I expect we are going into ... where the staff is flying in a few days. I believe this is the turning point in this Great War, a great many of the Tommies are of the opinion that the war will end about Christmas but the N.Z.'s do not voice any opinions on the subject. Certainly if the whole army (Allied) was of Anzacs it would not last long. It has started to rain and a real miserable day. After dinner I reported to the transport lines and soon after with packs up started out marching behind the waggons. I believe the work is to go up ahead of the troops to pick a place for them to camp. Marched all afternoon behind the waggons at a fairly stiff pace and six in the evening found us in a camp near Ypres tired out. Here we are to spend the night then on again tomorrow.

OCTOBER, 11th, 1917

Went to bed early as I was properly tired out after the march of over twelve miles yesterday. At breakfast orders came round to be packed up ready to move up to the line carrying battle order with overcoat. Eight of us with an Officer in charge started out for the line. We had a fairly stiff march in front of us taking us until mid-day before we reached the part of ground allotted to the Battalion. It was further up than where we halted for the first night on the previous occasion. What a place to camp troops on in the winter time, a low lying piece of ground smashed up with shell holes and almost totally covered with water. It is well seen that someone with a map in front of him away back where shells are never heard picks out such places as these to put troops down in. Word has come through that the Battalion is not coming up until tomorrow morning so I have all afternoon to myself. Took a stroll over the start of this battlefield. About beginning of September the Tommies seem to have got horribly cut up, their dead lying in hundreds scattered about unburied.

OCTOBER, 12th, 1917.

Put in a dreadful cold night in one of old Fritz's concrete dug outs with about a foot of water on the floor. It was impossible to sleep for the cold and to heap more annoyance on top of our misery he amused himself by throwing over gas shells for close on two hours. The Battalion arrived about seven a.m. and set to to make the best of things digging in etc. and making themselves as comfortable as possible for no one knows how long we may be here. We are to be in reserve for a battle which came off this morning, the 2nd and 3rd Brigades being engaged. So far we have heard very little about how the boys got on. Three of us put the morning in very busily digging a home for ourselves and got just nicely fixed up when word came round that we had to pack up and move on up to the line. The boys could not have got on as well as what we did last Thursday. We halted on a low wet piece of flat near where we hopped over and dug in once more. It is raining and bitterly cold.

OCTOBER, 13th, 1917

What a night in a hole in a wet piece of ground, three of us with a couple of oil sheets over us sat the night out huddled up shivering with the cold and a miserable drizzle which has poured down all night. We almost worshipped the daylight when it came. Orders came round to pack up and move back, were not we glad to get out of that bog. We went a good distance back to Fritz's old front line where we bivvied in some of his old concrete dug outs, build some fires and made for ourselves some hot tea, the first for several days. Had a little rest during the night although it was not much owing to the cold etc. We are all wondering what our next move will be, whether we will have to go up the line to help the troops who we have heard did not get on too well yesterday morning or whether we will go back out. It seems from what we can gather that the battle yesterday was not the success it was expected to be. Fritz was ready for them with massed machine guns and pretty well cut them up. Two of our Officers have gone out gassed, also a Sergeant.

OCTOBER, 14th, 1917.

Had a little rest in the old concrete fort, the night like most of the preceeding ones was bitterly cold. Got up day break and made a large fire, filled the billy with fairly dirty water from a shell hole and made some tea which sort of gives one fresh life.. All morning we have put in around the fire anxiously waiting for word to move up to the line or out back to camp. We all dreaded having to move up to that wet cold shell holed area. Was just having dinner when word came round that we were to get ready to move up to the front line. Sand bags and shovels were given out. Looks as if we are in for another hard time. We start off about three and reach a ridge not far from our front line where we stay until dark and then move up again through the mud, it is awfully downheartening. We reach our place, our company is to be in reserve so we have to dig in once again. Four of us were standing together discussing the situation our Corporal now in charge of the platoon in the centre when 'thud' a bullet caught him in the next. The stretcher bearers carried him away, a pretty bad case.

OCTOBER, 15th, 1917

Dug a deep narrow trench in fairly wet ground then laid down for the night tired out and much upset by the loss of our Corporal, (A.G. Newlands from Rosburgh) he was a fine fellow, -- we can only hope that he pulls through. Since last Thursday we have lost in our platoon our officer, two sergeants and one corporal also several men, the ranks are getting thinned out. After digging in I laid down but did not sleep much owing to the cold and shells sent over from Fritz. One of our officers got badly wounded and four men in the night. All day we have put in our open trench crouching down from Fritz shells also from view of his aeroplanes which seem to be very consistent in coming over to search for our line and perhaps drop bombs. At times we get fairly heavily shelled which does not help to make things any more comfortable. The food is the worst thing - we get about 10 oz. of bread and a tin of bully beef per day and about a quart of water, we also get a small issue of jam or butter but so small that it is hardly worth mentioning.

OCTOBER, 19th, 1917.

Another night in the shell hole, could hardly sleep for rheumatism, the pain was awful, nearly as bad as the cold and it was intense. Got out of bed early, had a walk around the shell holes to straighten my stiffened limbs then lit a fire and made some more shell hole tea and some soup from packets which are issued to us at times. Bully beef is lying around in tins in the mud, mix the beef with the soup and make a fancy stew. Fritz must have got the range of where our guns were before we moved them up for he has put up a terrific barrage of heavy shells on to the old positions, a few men scattered around go for their lives but I don't think he can do much damage unless he catches a few odd batteries not yet moved up. Later on about twenty of his large bombing planes came over and dropped scores of bombs but one can't tell from here what damage is done. The day has been much the same as yesterday, we are to move further back again tonight, this time we will have duck boards to walk on.

OCTOBER, 20th, 1917.

Packed up and moved back again last night. This time we had duck boards to walk on although very slippery and in places blown to pieces, still it was better than floundering over shell holes, getting bogged and having to get the assistance of half a dozen men to pull you out - such is the privilege of this life. This time we went about a mile and a half back to Fritz's old front line before this advance started, where we crawled into some damp dugouts. Would make a little shelter from the sun and that's about all. Our cooks were on the road close to our bivvies and hot stew was on the menu soon after we arrived which was some good. The day has been dull and miserable. Some mail came up to us but not N.Z. mail. I received one from Scotland. N.Z. parcels arrived, I got two from May, one with a piece of wedding cake in and the other with underpants and socks. The Company all received a parcel each from the N.Z. Patriotic Ass. containing socks, a tin of milk, cocoa and a tin of sardines, also a handkerchief.

OCTOBER, 21st, 1917.

Put a fair night in the old Bivvy, my sleeping partner is Ted Strong. Up a little earlier than usual this morning, have breakfast and have to march down to the baths at Ypres, a fairly long march. Did not get much of a bath but got a complete change of new underclothes which was some good after being close on two months with the same underclothing on. On my way back to the trenches I called in at the transport lines to see what had become of my valise pack with all clothing which was missing. I was told there was some doubt about me being alive and it was sent away half an hour before with the dead and missing mens' kits to a dump where they were emptied out and any letters etc sent home. The kits were on their way to the salvage store at Popperinge about 12 miles from Ypres so I jumped on to a bicycle and rode down to the store just getting my pack in time. It was a long ride there and back for the first time in about 18 months. I arrived home tired out but glad I got my pack. Word came around that we are to be up at 3 a.m. and march off.

OCTOBER, 28th, 1917

Got a pleasant surprise when I got home from Licques last night. Two parcels and a letter lying waiting for me, the letter was from Jack giving a detailed account of his travels after getting wounded. His wound is now nearly healed and he is now in a convalescent camp in Hornchurch. The parcels were the chief topic for a while between Ted and I as the handwriting on both. Ted guessed one right, from Eliza Cleghorn, a very nice parcel containing tinned goods, all very useful. The other was from Fan Borland, containing a pair of socks, tinned milk etc. I have been well off for parcels for the past week. Today is Sunday, the first for some time we paraded down to the Y.M.C.A. tent about a mile from our camp where church service was held, a very good little service by our Chaplain Capt. Lopdell (formally from Orepuki). The afternoon has been put in filling up an 18 pounder shell fired in Battle of Ypres and taken from some battlefield with some souvenirs which I am going to try to send home. I hope I have the luck to get it away.

OCTOBER, 29th, 1917.

Still living up in the loft like old sundowners but it is a long way better than being up in those shell holes with the smell of dead bodies all around. Today they seem to be starting work once more with their squad drill, rifle exercises, to say nothing of the polishing gear and minor annoyances. It does annoy a person at times especially in cold weather such as we are having at present. This morning we have done three hours squad drill, rifle exercises etc. In the afternoon we did an hour and a half drill then had the remainder of the afternoon to ourselves. Did some writing etc. A N.Z. mail has arrived which causes some excitement amongst the boys. I received half a dozen letters, some of which should have arrived last mail. Today's papers announce a great loss by Italy. It must be the greatest loss by an allied nation since the war started, probably caused by Russia not playing the part thereby allowing Germany to transport all her surplus troops across to the Italian front.

OCTOBER, 30th, 1917.

Heavy rain fell during the night, consequently much slush all around. This morning orders came around late that we were to parade with full packs up for a Battalion parade in the morning. Fell in at 8.15 a.m. and marched down to the parade ground about half a mile away where we went through Battalion movements in a bitter wind. The Colonel (decoration up) did not hold an inspection owing, I suppose, to the cold. We marched back again and just arrived when it started to rain and has continued all day being beastly cold. Rumours came round that the Brigade is to be broken up to reinforce the other three Brigades and orders came around that all those previously in the Rifle Brigade could go back to their old unit or any others wishing to transfer to the Rifle Brigade could do so. Things were looking very black as regards the existence of the 4th Brigade any longer when word came around that the military authorities had decided not to break up the 4th Brigade which was a relief to us I must say. I have just written to Mrs. Arthur and Beans. Not feeling too well.

OCTOBER, 31st, 1917

A home away from home as the boys say. The old loft still keeps us comfortable at night. Last night Herb and I took our 18 pounder shells which we brought down from Ypres down to the Y.M.C.A. to get them sent to N.Z. for us but we do not know how

NOVEMBER, 17th, 1917.

Settled down in the bivvies for the night and made the best of it, had a fair sleep, one can sleep anywhere now days in mud or anything. A heavy thick fog is hanging around and fairly cold making one feel that snow is not far away. Word came around just after breakfast that we had to pack up and be ready to move out at midday. Packed up and hung around in the mud all morning. Had dinner at 11.30 a.m. which consisted of a drink of tea with a piece of our 10ozs. of bread then on with out packs and start off for another camp along a muddy loose metalled road with stones sticking up into my feet and the pack making ones' shoulders ache, one tramps along. We marched for nearly the whole afternoon trying to find the camp we were supposed to occupy and finally reached one not many miles from where we started. We were crammed like sardines into a small hut however it was much better than the place we were dumped down in last night.

NOVEMBER, 18th, 1917.

Although packed like sardines I managed to put in a fair nights' rest. Our camp is situated about two miles away from a fairly large city called Popperinge. Fritz pays a good deal of attention to it with his bombing planes and has knocked about some very fine buildings in it. He also plays on it with some of his long range guns. Church parade was held in the morning but I had to go on another parade for my boots so missed it. We have struck a fairly decent camp here and I only hope we stay here until the rest of the company comes down from the line which ought to be in about ten days time.. Most of the afternoon has been occupied in sitting around a fire in an old oil can just outside the hut reading etc. The days are drawing in now, in about another four weeks we will have out shortest day upon us. It is dark now by 4.45 p.m. As yet we have had no snow but there is plenty time for that yet.

NOVEMBER, 19th, 1917.

As far as we can learn we are to occupy this camp for a fortnight which I am glad of as I hate shifting about and the hut we have, although only a shell, is comfortable. Along the outside is a sod wall running right round the hut to protect us at night from flying splinters from any bomb that might burst some distance away. I am excused all parades while my boots are bad or until I get new ones which I hope wont be long as it is deadly miserable going about in weather like this with wet cold feet. They are carrying on parades, squad drill, bayonet fighting, physical exercises etc. much the same as in the camps in N.Z. and England. It is deadly annoying and stale stuff, absolutely of no use to us but seems to amuse the heads, however, it helps to fill in time. Our troops by the papers seem to be doing good work in Palestine but the Italians seem to be still in a fix and by the accounts Venice is likely to fall any day. Such news is anything but heartening over here.

The original diaries are in two parts.

The first from August, 23rd, 1916, when Arthur left his parents home at Manse Bush, Tapanui, for Featherston Military Camp until February 8th, 1918, by which date he had been in France 9 months.

The second diary consists of a series of small Y.M.C.A. papers and a small pad. The last entry being dated 25th June, 1918. It is recorded in his writings that he was awaiting arrival of a new diary; presumably it arrived and Arthur used it. Presumably it was lost either when he became a casualty or at some later date.

From other papers we have been able to form the following picture.

19th July, 1918, Arthur proceeded on 14 days leave to the United Kingdom. It is believed he returned to his unit prior to expiration of his leave as he felt he had little in common with civilians and healthwise was far from being well. In any case he was with his Unit by 5th August, 1918 and drew pay In The Field on 28th August, 1918. He was transferred to 1st Battalion Otago Infantry Regt.

3rd. September, 1918, he was critically wounded. From the little he mentioned of the incident in later years it is understood that the incident occurred in the evening. He was being used as a runner to convey an army message to probably a Company Headquarters. He had a mate with him as it was a pleasant evening weatherwise. They were crossing a field when a shell landed pretty close - they remarked on the closeness - the next shell caught them. Arthur's mate was killed.

15th. September, 1918, Arthur was transferred to England for surgery. He had lost both legs and was wounded in arm and neck. Hospitalized at Walton-on-Thames (probably Otlands Park Hospital).

28th. October, 1918 - Some 55 days since being wounded he was still classified as Dangerously Ill.

9th November, 1918 - Removed to the Seriously Ill list.

23rd November, 1918 - Removed from the Seriously Ill list.

20th June, 1919 - Arthur was sufficiently mobile to travel to Inverness in Scotland from where his Father, John Gordon, migrated to New Zealand as a lad of seven years in 1878.

19th August, 1919, he was still at Walton-on-Thames having now been there for 11 months.

18th November, 1919, Arthur was on the ship Rimutaka en-route to home.

2nd January, 1920, he was still at sea.

10th February, 1920. Prior to this date he had arrived home at Tapanui.

He had served with 3rd Battalion Otago Infantry Regiment; 2nd Entrenching Battalion and 1st Battalion Otago Infantry Regiment.

Within two or three years of his homecoming Arthur was again hospitalized for further surgery relating to his leg wounds.

POST WAR - His employment was as a draughtsman with the Lands and Survey Department, Dunedin, except for a period of about 1 year during the 1930's economic depression when he was seconded to another Government Department for the purpose of establishing what was then known as The Disabled Returned Soldiers Leather Factory. This was to give employment to disabled returned soldiers in the manufacture of leather suit-cases etc.

Arthur was heavily involved in Returned Soldiers affairs, especially in matters relating to War Pensions which he always considered inadequate. He was President of the Returned Services Association, Dunedin, about 1933 and was later awarded the Gold Star by the R.S.A. He was a foundation member of the N.Z. War Amputees Association and later was given recognition by that Association for his efforts on behalf of amputees.

During the Second World War he commanded two companies of The Home Guard at Green Island near Dunedin. He spent considerable time during the war years making available to returning amputees his practical knowledge of the use of artificial limbs.

In World War II his youngest brother Jack was killed while training for aircrew with the R.N.Z.A.F., as were two cousins, one in the Airforce and one with the 2nd N.Z.E.F. in North Africa.

In spite of his severe disability from war wounds he maintained an active life up to the time of his death at Brisbane, Australia on 27th August, 1978.

It was only following his death that we began to look into his time in the Army and come to slightly comprehend the burden he and many others carried for the greater part of their lives.

Jack Nicholson, the comentator on a musical cassette tape, "The Anzacs", and himself a veteran of Gallipoli and France states -

'The Western Front was shocking, just shocking. Mud, rain, sleet, and millions killed. We thought we had seen slaughter at Gallipoli, but in France and Flanders it was worse. Some of our boys were maimed for the rest of their lives - They were the real casualties.'