

*War Diary – Probably of Cpl Fred Pickett, 1889-1951 born in Sandford.*

“Joined the Army Nov 19 1915 at Barnstaple.

In the 3/6 Battalion Devonshire Regiment.

Sent to Exmouth Nov 22 for training. Went in a billet at Mrs Avery in Fore Street where we were treated very well – in the same billet was Fred Norman of Barnstaple Fred[?] Ginger[?] of Bideford. Spent the Christmas there. On the Christmas Day we took a boat and went across to Dawlish Warren and went into Dawlish. Came back and had a nice party at the billet. On the 26 Dec went to Dance at Thorns.

The first week in January 1916.

We left Exmouth at 11 o'clock in the night for Boscombe in Hampshire. We got there about 6 a.m. in the morning at Bournemouth West and marched on to Boscombe. Went into a billet with Mrs Lillywhite at Darr[?]... Road with Alf S[?] , Fred Snell , Barnstaple, Len Phillips, Crediton, Leslie Ralph, London. Shifted to Mrs Rackmanns in Partwood Road. Boscombe is a very pretty place. During the time I was there I went to Christchurch. Visited the Priory there, a very fine piece of old work.

Went to Bournemouth several times – a lovely place. Had some nice times there.

Left Boscombe March 13 for Devonport bound for India to join the 2/6 Batt. Devonshire Regiment. Got to Devonport 3 a.m. (in the Dock)

Left England March 14 at 12 a.m. on the Transport ship[....]Saturnia. With 25000 men on board.

Had a rough time going through the outskirts of the Bay of Biscay.

First saw land on the coast of Portugal. We could also see Morocco in Africa. We passed the Rock of Gibraltar at 12.30 am the following Saturday. Saw some British battleships then. It's a very fine Rock with a good command to the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea. Entered the Mediterranean about 1 pm the same day. On March 24 we could see Algeria on the North Coast of Africa. It was Sunday and we had service on deck. Sang the hymn For Those in Peril on the Sea – a very fine and touching sight when on board.

We passed Malta March 21 Could see several steeples as we passed there, also the flat top of buildings. On March 22 a man of the 6 Hants died and was buried at sea. We got to Port Said on the 24<sup>th</sup>. It is a very fine port very much like an English Port. Saw several French battleships there. Stopped in the port for the night for coaling.

Left Port Said on the 25 and entered the Suez Canal. There we saw the Egyptian and Arabian class of people. We could see the coast of Egypt in Africa on our right. On our left we could see the Arabian coast of Asia. We saw several Armenians in the Arabian side of the canal and a small party of North Devon Hussars on the banks .

The night before we got to Port Said we had rather a narrow escape from a German submarine, but as luck would have it we were on a fast boat so she couldn't get at us to catch us broadside.

I might say it was a very pretty sight coming through the Suez and one of the loveliest sunrises I have seen.

March 28 we entered the Red Sea. We had our first touch of the Eastern sun. It was very hot but the sea was nice and calm.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of March we passed some land on our right called the Apostles Island, a very barren and rough looking country.

The same day we passed another island called Erin Island or the Gates of Hell. There it is very hot. Another man of the 6 Hants died and was buried at sea. It was rather a sad sight. He was sewn up in sail cloth and let down over the side of the boat.

Then we went through the Indian Ocean to India, landing at Bombay on April 5<sup>th</sup>

We spent a day there and had a look around and had our first glimpse of Indian life. We thought it very funny to see oxen drawing the heavy carts. Fruit was plentiful and cheap.

April the 7<sup>th</sup> we left for Muttra in Central India. It took two nights and a day and a half travelling by a train to get there. It was a pretty and interesting ride but very hot.

Got to Muttra on a Sunday morning after a month's travelling day and night.

April 28 I went and saw the River Jumna. One of India's sacred rivers. There we saw some young crocodiles and bamboo growing

On May the 5<sup>th</sup> I saw a native wedding the boy was about 12 years and the girl about 10. They do not see one another for some years after they are married.

June the 13 we had a memorial service for Lord Kitchener in Muttra Church.

June the 30<sup>th</sup> saw the bodies of a certain caste of Indian in the Jumna. When they die they are thrown in the river.

When I was at Muttra I went to Agra for the purpose of seeing the Taj Mahal. Supposed to be one of the wonders of the world. It's the finest building I have seen with a large dome on the top all built of pure white marble and inlaid with coloured stones in flowers with four large towers one of which I went up to the top. It is Italian work [?] built in memory of one of the Indian Kings.

We left Muttra Nov 15 for Peshawar on the North West Frontier of India. On our way there we stopped at Delhi for breakfast and had dinner at Lahore. Got to Peshawar on the 18<sup>th</sup> about 10 p.m. Went to the barracks. Slept all night on the floor. There was fighting 40 miles off on the frontier. That is the Afghanistan Frontier. We could hear the guns. These fights only last a few days. The different tribes come down and have a go at it and go back again.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> we went to the fort for duty inside – about 50 of us had a nice time there. Spent Christmas there. We were isolated at the time owing to one of our men having smallpox. But still had a jolly fine Christmas with George Reeves, Arthur Westlake and Gay Boy.

We left the fort to rejoin the Regiment on the 6 January 1917. On the 11<sup>th</sup> we had a Field Day with the Kings and Borders Regt and marched to the famous Khyber Pass! The place where the British got out up in the Afghanistan campaign.

March 13 went to Camp at a place called Matinee about 16 miles from Peshawar. Its near Kohar and Cherat. Returned to Peshawar April the 7<sup>th</sup>.

April 8<sup>th</sup> I was transferred to A Coy

Left Peshawar Saturday Night April 14. Got to Lahore on the Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup> Arrived at Delhi at 12 o'clock on the Monday. Had dinner. Next day at a place called Bahopal. Arrived at Deolali on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Left Deolali May 7. Got to a place called Poona on the 8<sup>th</sup>. It was a very pretty train ride over hilly country. Poona is rather a pretty place –the Bunn Gardens and the Empress Gardens and two very pretty spots.

During the time I was there I went to Hirpee (?) a place two miles from Poona. It's a small military place with an arsenal there.

I also visited the Towers of Silence, a place where the Parsees place their dead to be eaten by birds. Left Poona Sept 7 to proceed to Mesopotamia arriving at Bombay on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Got on board the Transport ship Edwana and sailed from India at 12.30 am the same day.

The first day at sea was a little rough as we met with the monsoon weather. On the 12<sup>th</sup> we passed through the Straits of Omad (Hormuz?).

We entered the River Tigris on about 8.00 am on the 14<sup>th</sup> September and got to Basra at 3 pm in the afternoon.

It was lovely scenery up the river. Could see the Date Trees, also the Oil Fields.

Left Basra Sept 21 proceed to Sheik Saad some miles up river. During the journey we passed what was supposed to be the Garden of Eden. I also had a touch of malaria. We passed Armana.

It took us a week on the small river boat to get to Sheik Saad. It was a slow journey and the river is very winding.

December 20 had rain at Sheik Saad. I was on support duty covered in mud. The camp was in an awful mess. Spent Christmas day there, it was a very quiet time. I was on guard Xmas Night and Boxing Day.

Feb 15 Went on a mobile column to Lotts Mound, or what is supposed to be. Nothing much to see. There's only an ordinary mound of earth.

Feb 28<sup>th</sup> Left Sheikh Saad with A Coy to proceed to Gharbi on Marching Post Duty on the left bank of the river. It was a day's trip on the river and we slept the night on board.

March 12. Had a general holiday owing to the fall of Baghdad. Cpl Eddy Veau and myself went out about 4 miles from Camp at Ali Gharbi. Shot 2 wild ducks in the marshes under the Persian hills.

March 31<sup>st</sup> (Easter day) I was on Quarter Guard No. 6 Marching Post on the River Tigris

April 2. Had Sand Fly fever went into the Camp Hos. No 6 Post – Came out on the 7<sup>th</sup>

16<sup>th</sup> Temperature 100 degrees in the shade at 12 noon

24<sup>th</sup> On Guard No 6 Post. Couldn't have any rest all night. The mosquitos was something awful. Received parcel from home.

30<sup>th</sup> Left No 6 Post to proceed to Ilut. Crossed the river to Ali Gharbi, slept in the YMCA for the night.

May 1<sup>st</sup> Got on board the river boat at 3.30am for Ilut

2<sup>nd</sup> Passed Sunni Yat where the British had a big battle. Got to Ilut at 4.30 in the afternoon.

Marched to camp about 2 miles – finished up eleven in the night.

May 9<sup>th</sup> Had another attack of Malaria Fever. Went into the camp hospital. It was a very hot day and was 109 deg. in the tents.

May 13<sup>th</sup> Came out of hospital Very hot. Temperature 100 in tent,

May 24<sup>th</sup> Ern Arvis came up to see me at our camp at Ilut.

June 10 Visited Old Ilut. Saw the Mosque Gen. Townset used as a look out. Also went through the Bazaar,[and?] the British cemetery there.

June 13<sup>th</sup> Down again with Sand Fly Fever. Went into the 133 British General Hospital at Kut. Came out again on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

June 27. On Guard at Kut over three Indians that killed 2 Indian Officers.

July 2 Admitted to 133 B.G.Hosp at Ilut. Another dose of Sand Fly Fever. Came out on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Aug 11<sup>th</sup> Will Davy of my section died of Heat Stroke at 133 B.G.Hospital at Kut

Aug 31 Got aboard a river boat to proceed to Ali Gharbi. Left Kut Sept 1 at 5 am arrived at Ali Gharbi 2 pm

Sept 3 Went in the post hospital at Ali Gharbi suffering from gastro-enteritis. Was a bit rough for a fortnight.

Sept 18 Left the Post Hospital and sent to Amara. No 2 Hospital. Went down stream on the P.A.5 Got there at 5 pm in the evening.

Sept 30 came out of hospital and sent to the British Convalescent Depot

Oct 4<sup>th</sup> Left the B-C-D for the British Advance Depot.

Oct 5<sup>th</sup> Left the B-A-D to rejoin the regiment.

Nov 22. I was on the Parade at Amara for all Troops. Gen Marchal [Martial?] Proclamation was read out in three languages. First in English and Indian then in Arabic by a Sheikh dressed in long white silk robes. The salutes was fired of 21 guns and a Ferdesuar [Feu de Joie?] in which the 2/6 fired three rounds It was quite an interesting event [Presumably to celebrate the armistice in Europe, though it was not the end of the hostilities in Mesopotamia]

January 5<sup>th</sup> Left Amara for duty at Ali Gharbi. Got there on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Slept 2 nights on a river boat. Spent Xmas at Amara

Dec 31 Cpls' dinner and smoking concert

Jan 10 On Prisoners of War Guard over a party working on Guard farm. Had a mixture of all nations – 5 British, Turks, Arabs, Indians, Austrians

Left Ali Gharbi March 11<sup>th</sup> to join the Company that were going to join the 1/4 Dorset Regiment. Got to Kut Rest Camp on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup>. Left there in the evening for Baghdad. Travelled by rail in trucks. Arrived at Baghdad in the 14<sup>th</sup>. Left on the 15<sup>th</sup> for Hillah. Another night in the Trucks. Got there early in the morning of 16<sup>th</sup>.

Hillah is a small station 4 ½ miles from Babylon.

March 18 went to Babylon for the purpose of seeing the ruins. The first place was the old Ishtar Gateway and then the statue of the lion with his paws resting on the figure of a man.

Then we went on to the Sacred Way where Nebuchadnezzar used to go to the Temple. Then we came to the remains of the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Then we visited the scene of the Parthian graves i.e. after the abandonment of Babylon under the successors of Alexander. The ruined Palace was used as a graveyard by the Parthians. The blue fragments are pieces of their coffins. We saw the remains of the coffins. I brought away a piece with me.

Then we went on to the remains of the Throne Room of Nebuchadnezzar. This hall was probably the scene of Belshazzar's feast.

Then we came to the remains of the Temple of Ishtar. On the mound of Merkes. From there we went to the base of the Tower of Babylon. It's only a mound left. And then on to the Mound of Amman.

Then we left Babylon for a march to Hillah 4 ½ miles

Left Hillah March 18<sup>th</sup> for Najaf. Went by train as far as Iiffie about 3 hours ride. From then we went by river (Balham) boat to Huba – another 3 hours ride. From Huba we went by Arab Horse Trams to Najaf. Arrived there in the evening and found D Coy 1/4 Dorset Regt.

Left Najaf March 24 for Detachment Duty in the Fort at Hillah.

Copy from the Sunday Companion Feb 1<sup>st</sup> 1919

“Between Najaf and Hillah is a small township of Hufa. It possesses a mosque built upon the supposed spot where Jonah was cast up by the whale. Half an hour run by motor or longer by the soldier marching takes one to Hifi where a spire in a palm clump denotes the tomb of Ezekiel. It is a shrine revered by Muslim and Jew and Christians are allowed to visit it. The traveller continuing passes Pers Nimrod a mound of debris with brick foundation which is the traditional remains of the Tower of Babel built by Nimrod the mighty hunter. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel (Gen x.10) Therefore is the name of it called Babel because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth (Gen x.19) Hillah mentioned above is an offshoot of Babylon and its bricks may even date to the time of Nebuchadnezzar. It is said that the identical room in which Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall is to be found in Hillah. “

“The story of the flood is very common in Mesopotamia and the tradition has made the story stretch between Hut and Ali Gharbi the place where Noah's dove sought a resting place but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her feet and she returned to the ark (Gen vi.11.9)”

“Some miles above Kurna (junction of Euphrates and Tigris) is El Ozien the site of Ezra's Tomb which all the British troops passed on the way to Hut. Ezra it will be recalled was one of the exiles in Babylon (Ez vii.1)”

April 11 Left Hillah to join the Batt at Nijaj. Stopped there until the 21<sup>st</sup>. Left Nijaj to make a new camp at Chufa with No 9 Platoon.

May 15. The camp was swept with a great hurricane. I have never seen anything like it. It struck the camp about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. A darkness came over, the sky turned a dark bronze colour. Rain and hail fell. And the wind blew the tents in all directions. It made us wonder what was up. The Arabs say they had a storm like it about 8 years ago.

June 29 Sunday Received news that Peace Treaty signed a day and most of the night to the King [?]

Days holiday Monday

Huja

July 25 Two cases of Typhus break out in Camp. C.Coy isolated for 10 days. Everything disinfected. “

*Diary ends. The diary was found amongst Pickett family papers in 2006, written in pencil in a small notebook. Fred's son had no knowledge of the diary, but confirmed that his father had served in India and Mesopotamia. Fred was a butcher then a joiner. He appears in the 2nd/6th Devons Nominal Roll as Cpl. F.J. Pickett - Regimental Nos Old - 3560. & New - 266761*



### **2/6th Battalion Devonshire Regiment**

Formed at Barnstaple in September 1914. Became part of 2nd Devon and Cornwall Brigade, 2nd Wessex Division. 12 December 1914: sailed for India, and eventually left for Mesopotamia, landing at Basra on 14 September 1917, remaining until the end of the war.

*Transcribed by Nick Heard, Dec 2006.*