

Wigan Archives Service
The Edward Hall Diary Collection

**The Diary of Captain Walker,
Royal Flying Corps Pilot,
First World War**

March – April 1915

EHC/191



Edward Hall, c.1932

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

Transcript produced by Celia Miller, Archives Volunteer and Alex Miller, Archivist

1

Wednesday Feb 24th A fine clear day with N. wind. Left Gosport at 9.45am with my luggage in the front seat. My engine got worse and worse so I came down at Shoreham and repaired two broken high tension leads, after being 1½ hours in the air.

Over the Downs I ran into thick mist, with a stiff wind blowing out to sea. It was interesting to speculate at times whether I was over Sussex or the Channel! There were some pretty lusty bumps too. Next my engine began to peter out, letting me drop about 100 feet a minute. After a while I struck a clear patch and descended in a field by a cemetery on the west side of Eastbourne. I repaired another broken lead, sent my luggage by taxi to the Eastbourne Aerodrome, and tried to get out of my field, which sloped up wind with telegraph wires and a hill at the top.

I got up across wind: the machine just rose off the ground and I was blown over the cemetery and the roofs of the houses with the thing absolutely out of control. After brushing over the chimney pots she got some way on, and I flew East. I couldn't find the hangars, so landed on the beach. Commander Shepherd appeared and was very kind in helping me. I lunched with him put my kit on board, and got off along a road down wind, as the machine would not run over the shingles.

The wind was now pretty strong, & progress slow.

2

By Hastings I ran into a thick storm. The engine was too feeble to get over it, so I tried to get through. Twice I found myself after ten minutes flying in the snow, heading back the way I had come with the storm behind. The third attempt I lost my way, & it was getting dusk. I alighted and found I was at Battle. I just got out of the field by luck: the woods round made some queer currents and I just shaved over the trees. I cut back to Eastbourne with the wind behind, and got down before dark. A beastly drain twisted my tyre off before I stopped.

I spent the night at the Queen's with Shepherd, a most

excellent fellow. Telephoned to C. who told me to go ahead and get a new engine at aircraft Park at the base. Slept like a top!

Thursday Feb 25th Bright cloudless day. N.W. wind. Rather misty. I dug Shepherd out of bed at 7.0am, and he took me down to the aerodrome in his Rolls Royce. The engine still went round, so I pushed off. She was in a better mood today, so I flew at 3000 in the sunshine & felt happy.

I intended to circle over Ewhurst by way of a farewell to Gen B.P.- but over Robertsbridge my engine again got very tired, so I came down at Ewhurst and mended the fourth high tension lead that had broken, also the weak tyre burst. I had a second excellent breakfast with the General & Lady B.P. -who seemed quite pleased to be visited by air! The Gen had cut his knee, but hobbled out on two sticks to see the machine.

3

After saying goodbye to them I flew to F. without further adventure. I passed over a fort, and saw the soldiers running about like ants in an ant-heap that has been stirred up with a stick. As I was evidently the object of interest I wondered if they were going to fire, but I don't think they did.

On landing I found the engine exuding oil in every crack, & rather tired of going round.

The other three who started from S. with me were there: C had smashed his machine while landing on account of engine trouble: N. had got into a snow storm and found himself at Ashford where he spent the night and came on: E. alone had fetched up without incident the previous day.

It was too thick to cross, so we spent the night at the Metropole, & hoped for a clear tomorrow.

We all went to a music-hall after dinner: it was very very, and I was bored & wished I had gone to bed!

At dinner we were joined by another R.F.C. man who seemed very twitchy as to the nerves: I found he had been flying incessantly since the war began, and the other day did a spinning dive from 3000 feet on a Vickers fun-bus,- by a miracle flattening out just before he hit the ground,- lucky for him.

Fri Feb 26 A thick mist over the Channel. I spent the morning pottering about with my engine. In the after

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

noon we all four pushed over to Dover and put up at the naval sheds. My engine was so groggy that I decided to send my kit over by boat and chance finding it:- thus lightening the machine.

4

While I was in the sheds, a stout edition of Captain Kettle blew in, after flying the Channel on a B.E. at 500 feet in the mist. I recognised him from his pictures in the papers as Commander S. He has a large, straight, unblinking, blue eye, - or to be more accurate,- two of them,- and it was clear he was absolutely fearless, and a leader. I liked him, in spite of the endless cries of 'advertiser' that are hurled against him.

A R.N.A.S. mechanic made a comprehensive report on my engine,- main bearings gone; gudgeon pin broken in piston head: cylinders blowing: joints leaking: etc etc,- but I think if she is flown light she should get me across the channel all right.

N. & C. very kindly promised to take part of my kit in their machines, so that I should be less likely to lose it.

N's wife came over, and dined with us: a most charming little woman,- and clever too. I hope he gets through all right.

Sat Feb 27th Spent the day waiting for the weather to clear. It began by blowing a gale from the S.W. but got better as the day grew older.

A Captain T. telephoned that he was also on his way over & that we were under his orders, & were not to start today.

In the evening we all, for the fourth time, drank to a successful crossing,- a toast I am getting rather weary of!

In the evening we all went to a low music hall in the purlieu of Dover. It was so bad that it was really amusing.

5

Sunday Feb 28th We all went up to the aerodrome at 8 o'clock, & Capt T. flew over. He decided it was too bad to start,- it was blowing half a gale from the N.W. He made me take my engine down, and I found that two big-end bearings had melted quite away,- in addition to other things. Todd wired to F. for a new engine,- but I expect it won't come for a long time! There are now six of us waiting here,- Txxx & Dxxx, who

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

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have been at the front since August, & the four of us also left Gosport together. It is interesting to notice how little enthusiasm the two old hands show about going back, while we four newly-fledged ones,- for after endless delays, waitings and apparent waste of time during the last six months I have taught myself to live for the present and the next half-hour,- but no more. It saves a world of trouble!

We spent the afternoon by the sheds, but it didn't clear up enough to cross,- it looks as though I shall be left behind, for a time at any rate.

Telephoned to S. in the evening,- who is in bed with a chill:- the car arrives at the end of next week,- and if it does, and I am still here,- it may go to the New Forest via Dover! I hope I shall not be here then,- but if I am still marooned, it will be something to look forward to & will compensate for the ten days wait in this rotten hotel,- (the Burlington) The waiters, all English, are shockingly bad & inattentive,- so much so that more than one officer has been heard to sigh for the return of the deft-handed Tenton,- who was at any rate civil,- which these men are not.

6

Monday March 1st We all rolled up to the sheds at 7.30am and never expected a start:- bright blue sky with a 30 mile an hour wind from the N.W. However D. C. E. & N. all four pushed off; they made little headway against the wind, which at 2000 must have been about 55 or 60m.p.h. We could clearly see the French Coast. The difficulty was that if they were unable to tackle the wind they would be blown onto German-infested land.

[map of terrain drawn]

They all disappeared from sight steering a course about due W. Mrs N. was there:- a brave little lady, who shed but one tear as N. rose into the air and then chatted cheerily all the way back to the hotel.

I am left stranded here waiting for a new engine which seems as likely to come from F as from heaven. T seems to think it his duty to stay by me! He looks as though a few days rest won't do him any harm. I have never seen two men so apathetic about life in general as these two men back from the front.

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

T. actually asked me to buy him a pipe this morning!- about on a par with asking someone to chose (sic) a suit of clothes or a wife!

I saw Mrs N. off from the Harbour station,- she was still cheery! But I expect she will pipe her eye in the train!

7

I spent the rest of the day waiting for the engine to arrive There is a very pleasant General T. in the Hotel. He looks about 36 and has nine medals, and his wife, who looks about 30,- they are rather older than that, but both bear years well.

Started to cut my blankets up to make flea bags, & Mrs T came up and did it for me and also taught me the blanket stitch. She wanted me to bring the blankets down to the lounge, and sew them there but I hadn't the pluck! However I got one finished in my room. Wrote letters in the evening.

Tues March 2nd T. pushed off across the channel by air with a clear sky and N.W. wind.

My engine arrived and I got the five mechanics who came with it to work on it. It has already run 124 hours since it was born so it was no chicken!

About 11.0pm the engine was in but only showed 1600 revs. as the men were nearly falling asleep, we chucked work for the day.

Wed March 3rd Got up at 5.30 and went up to the aerdrome with the five men at 6.30. After tinkering with the engine for three hours we got another 25 or 50 revs. and about 11.0 we came down. The clouds were right down on the cliff and it was drizzling hard:- a hopeless day. Had breakfast at 11.30. Went to sleep. Talked to Mrs. T. Wrote this diary. Smoked cheap cigarettes. Watched the weather. Talked to Commander S.

8

Prayed for a fine day. Read the Daily Mail. Smoked a pipe. Brushed the mud off my clothes. Went a walk. Had tea. Talked to Mrs T. Had dinner, Talked to General T. Read a book. Went to bed.

Thur March 4th Went up to the sheds at 6.30. Thick fog again. Tinkered with the engine, but didn't improve her much. Came back to the hotel at 10.0 o'clock Sent the mechanics back to Farnborough. Had tea with Mrs T. Besides the General there was a Colonel, a Major, a woman whose only son was in the trenches and another whose husband is a prisoner of war. Everyone is interested in the war in some way or other!

Colonel and Mrs Henry occurred at the Hotel,- both as young and good looking as usual! he has a S.R. battalion down here.

A Zeppelin has been dropping bombs on Dunkirk this evening at dinner time, and we are hoping she will come over here,- but no luck so far!

A submarine has been captured close by here today. Went to bed hoping for a fine tomorrow.

Fri March 5th A windy day with the clouds low. I went up about half past eight to try the car, but found the clouds too bad, so came down.

Mrs T. took me down to the docks to see the German submarine prisoners landed. When we got down there I found myself among a crowd of people's wives, Mrs Sturdee & Mrs Hood,- whose husbands are the sailors of the mane and others.

9

There were four officers & twenty men,- all very small and dejected looking, especially when seen beside the guard of huge soldiers with fixed bayonets who strode beside them.

I went over a hospital ship with Mrs T.- it all seemed very well organised, but I have no special desire to test its efficiency!

It got rather clearer about midday, so I decided to push off. General & Mrs T and Mrs S walked up to see me off. I got away at 2.35 with a stiff S.W. wind and clouds at 1500 feet. Steered due S.

After ten minutes flying just below the clouds Dover was out of sight, and there was nothing but sea below and clouds above. The engine was running very well indeed.

Twenty minutes after leaving I ran into a dense fog, which seemed to reach right down to the water. It was very bumpy, and I got swung about with the compass pointing at all four points in succession

so that I didn't know whether I was going N. S. E. or W. The fog seemed to affect the engine, which dropped from 1800 to 1600 revs. and at times the machine was completely out of control.

I took great comfort when I looked at the fat inner-tube of a motor tyre I had brought to act as a lifebelt.

It is a quaint feeling to have fog above, below & everywhere,- the channel 1000 feet below, & the engine behaving as tho' tired, & not to know whether the machine is heading for the channel, the

10

north sea, England, France or Germany; it gives that sense of uncertainty that makes flying the sport that it is!

After tossing about for twenty minutes the engine picked up, and I started to climb: suddenly a thin sickly sun appeared on the right, and at 3500ft I popped out of the mist into the sunshine.

Above there was clear blue sky & brilliant sun, below an endless field of white cotton-woolly clouds, apparently absolutely still, and in all sorts of fantastic shapes, like a great snow field over which the wind has swept.

Very nice, but what was below?

For ten minutes I flew due south, hoping to get clear of the sea. It was very pleasant & calm, and the thought of plunging down into the mist and bumps was like standing by a cold bath on a winter day.

However, I thought it best to come down & see what was below, so I throttled down, and made the plunge:- a good thing I did, as will be seen later. The sun was blotted out and for five or ten minutes I kept plunging down, with the rain and mist and wind making things quite lively. When the aneroid showed I was only 600 feet above sea-level I began to look out for the sea, which I fully expected to find below. suddenly just below there appeared a red-brown ploughed field. How pleasant it looked, much more cheerful than the green

11

waves! I never knew a ploughed field could look so delightful! There was a glimpse of a villiage (sic) & a red-roofed church, unmistakeably French. Then it was all wiped out by a cloud.

Having found terra firma I determined not to lose it, so I put my nose down, did a sharp turn and after being blown about by some big gusts I came to earth on a stubble field.

There was a man near carting manure, who looked at me casually and went on with his work after beckoning to him he came up, and I asked where I was. He seemed very vague about it, so I asked how far it was to Calais. He did not seem to have heard of Calais, & I wondered if I was in Brittany or Belgium or some such outlandish spot.

A crowd of people came running up from the villiage and I made the first four men hold onto the machine, for it was blowing pretty hard.

Then I saw a sight as welcome as the red ploughed field,- a kharki figure running like a hare,- a brown face and big turban.

Soon there was a crowd of Indian lancers all chattering and pointing like excited children and mixed up with them French people equally talkative. Then appeared a large good natured major, followed by half a dozen other officers.

I found I was inland some 40 miles, & had passed my destination. If I had stayed another ten minutes above the clouds I would have landed

12

behind the German lines. Lucky I took the plunge when I did!

I got the machine under the lee of a haystack and tied her down. I was asked to come & have lunch at the mess, and caused some surprise & envy when I said I had lunched at the Burlington just over an hour ago!

The – Lancers were extraordinarily hospitable, and I had tea & dinner with them, and slept in a tent by my machine, which had a guard of troopers over it. It was a picturesque sight when I went to turn in: a dead black night: a fire blazing away by the side of a wood: an Indian squatting on his haunches warming his

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

hands. The flames just showed up the outline of the aeroplane with an Indian standing solemnly by each wing with fixed bayonets.

The sight of the Indians in the French villiage was very amusing: I heard one having a heated argument with a Frenchman about a lantern each went in for elaborate pantomime, accompanied by a voluable chatter in his own tongue.

Sat March 6 A gusty night, but the pegs and ropes held the machine tight. I could hear guns booming in the far distance before I got up.

It was a miserable drizzly day, & I spent the morning in the Lancers mess writing up this diary, hoping it would clear later.

13

It improved a little in the afternoon, so I pushed off,- the whole regiment and the entire villiage turning out to see the start. The Indians called the machine in their language 'the ship' and looked at me apparently very much in the way that we should look upon someone who had dropped from Mars. There were Sheiks and one or two other races in the regiment. Their manners were delightful, & I have never come across a more courteous lot of men. They seemed to be extraordinarily highly strung, & when speaking to an officer their eyes looked like a spaniel's when he is waiting for an order.

I flew at about 400 feet, and had a rather rough, but uneventful trip to – , lasting about 20 minutes. The Fat Boy was the first to greet me, beaming all over his chubby face. I was glad to see him again.

All the people who had left on Monday had arrived safely. I reported my arrival at various places. There was a note from Billy saying he \too/ was at – , -an extraordinarily good piece of luck.

We dined together once more, and drank our own and Tommies good health in the bubbly.

B. was looking very tired. He had been having a pretty thick time in the trenches. Only one officer is left of those who were with the regiment when he was attached in October. However, he's safe enough in – for the next fortnight,- doing a machine gun

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

course.

14

Sunday March 7th I found that I was in the 16th squadron of the R.F.C. My flight commander is P. & the other two officers in the flight C & E. They all three left for their destination about 7.0am, and left me to tinker with my engine and follow when she was ready. I waited with B and he got a half holiday from his he spent the afternoon with me at the aerodrome. A number of machines arrived, containing some old acquaintances. Mathers, F---- full, Barnes Parker and others.

B & I tea at a tea shop, and dined at his hotel. It was quaint to buy today's paper from at dinner time, - quick work somewhere.

B. says it is amusing to read of the usual 'capture of German trenches by British troops' - it always omits to mention that the British lost them the previous day!

Ran across Rex Farrington from March. He has a very comfortable billet in a new machine gun brigade.

Monday March 8th My engine was not ready until 2.30pm. It was a poor sort of day, with a gusty N.E. wind blowing about 35 m.p.h so I decided not to start. Lunched with B. in the hotel.

The town is extraordinarily quiet: no theatres: no cinema shows: nothing doing. I am all by myself in my billet, so only have breakfast there. I haven't had Billie's luck; he was once billeted on a baker:- beautiful hot rolls at all meals, - also seven beautiful baker's daughters, each more charming than the others!

15

Tuesday March 9th A fairly good day with a moderate N.E. breeze. I pushed off to M. and there found my new squadron. There were only two or three men there I had not met before.

Our headquarters are in a big farm built in the usual hollow square with a vast muck heap in the middle where all the rubbish & refuse of the farm & house is thrown and left, - I wonder what it smells like in the summer.

We are a few miles behind the firing line, and

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

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can hear the guns booming away all day. We are quite out of range of the enemies guns, however, We all sleep in an indcredibly untidy loft; but I have made a corner clean & tidy, & as it is quite dry, I make myself thoroughly comfortable.

Most of the officers here have been out some time, & treat the whole affair in an entirely matter of course manner, there is never the least trace of hurry or excitement, whatever happens.

As my engine was in poor form I tinkered with it from lunch time until 3.30am next day, but with no success.

Wednesday March 10th Tinkered again at the engine until 3.30pm then started to put in a new one. Knocked off work at 11.0pm. I am fortunate in having a first class sergeant on the engine.

Thurs March 11th Got the new engine in and running well by 6.0pm

Fri March 12th Spent the whole day tinkering away at my infernal engine which won't go properly. Started for a reconaissance with Capt N. when I thought she was going properly but she wouldn't lift, and I only just managed to scrape over the trees and flop back to earth.

I have orders to go my first reconaissance at dawn tomorrow. Got the engine running properly at last.

Sat March 13th Up at 5 o'clock. My engine refused to go again, (the old -----!) so I took another machine. My observer is Capt N. – a knowing old hand who has been at the game for some time, and won't run unnecessary risks!

There was a thick ground mist we couldn't see through, so we came down again, after 40 minutes in the air. However it was not time wasted as I got some idea of the country.

When I got down, I met the inimitable Blacker, fur coat, turban, magazine, field gloves, telescope, goggles, fur gloves, rifle and other things slung round him like a Christmas tree. He had just returned from a flight and was grumbling heartily because Archibald (or rather a bit of Archibald) had hit his eyeglass & broken it

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

while flying at 6000feet. However he had another eyeglass in his kit so soon forgot his grievance.

In the afternoon I again started on a trip with

17

Capt N, but a thick storm-cloud rolled up from the N.W. so we had to return after half an hour. I saw the trenches in the distance and shells bursting near the Bois de -----.

On Wednesday little E. and an observer went on a reconnaissance, & returned not. We all thought then had been done in, & their kit was packed, & letters written to E's matar.

However on Friday we heard they had come down in Holland and had been interred: how in the world did they get there?

but its an ill wind-----: E had a large box of most excellent chocolates sent to him & as he would not be able to use them, or rather get them, we made good use of them ourselves, also of sundry cigarettes & other things sent to them.

A big show has been on during the last two days,- plenty of popping and banging and booming to the eastward.

It is extraordinary how apathetic everyone seems about the war: it has become a sort of everyday occupation & is looked upon as being a bit of a bore very often, but a business that has got to be seen right through. There is no hatred or enthusiasm or excitement as far as I have seen. People have their jobs, & do them. If they get done in its all part of the ordinary way of

18

things, and if they don't get done in, they express a sort of mild satisfaction at finding themselves still alive. However, I've only seen a small corner of things so far, so can't say whether this is universal, but I expect it is.

Another early morning trench tomorrow, so no time for moralizing. bedtime!

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

Sun March 14 Spent the day tinkering with my old engine with the usual result,- nil! I went with Capt N. on a reconnaissance, but as the clouds were low we potted up and down behind the trenches for about a quarter of an hour and returned after three quarters of an hour in the air,- all this on another machine.

My engine got going more or less in the evening, so I took up Capt P. as a passenger to test her. She wouldn't pull, and I only just managed to get down successfully.

There was a tremendous bombardment to the N.E. in the evening: the Germans kept firing star shells which lit up the whole sky. Old Tommy is probably in the thick of it from what I can hear about his contingent

I Got ~~Fxxx~~ to tell me how he came down among the Boches some months ago! He was observer and D. piloting. They were in the clouds some twelve miles behind the German lines when the machine began to dive down Freeman signed to D. to come down more gently

19

but D. shook his head to show he couldn't control her. F. then saw something had gone, and the tail was wagging about from side to side. They both thought they were for it, when they came out of the clouds about 2000 feet above the ground, and the machine gradually flattened out. D. was for going on and risking it but F. signed to him to come down, preferring to meet the enemy on the ground to running the double risk of being shot while flying low or coming down with a [run] on the remains of a broken machine. They landed on a ploughed field and went full belt into a wood, smashing the aeroplane to bits.

They heard a shout and found a squad of German infantry hareing after them. They cut off and hid in a wood, in which the Germans searched for some time. They lay with their faces on the ground, and although the German came within a few yards they were not seen. After lying all day in the wood

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

they walked across country for [12] miles, dodging various Germans on the way. About dawn they struck the Aisne, and swam across, losing their boots & revolvers in the process. They crept along for some way and eventually fetched up at some British trenches. They did a long trek in transport wagons, & returned to their squadron dead beat around breakfast time one morning, two days after they had left

20

on their reconnaissance. They fell asleep just about played out, and after an hour were woken up by an orderly from their C.O. to say he would not want them for further duty until the afternoon! Language!

Monday March 15th Spent the morning tinkering with my engine, & went up on a trial flight but found it no go. Started putting in a new engine.

There is a big barge unloading on the canal, and as we passed the bargee invited us in for a drink. He is a most courteous soul. He poured out four tiny glasses of the most excruciating rum and insisted on us drinking with him. While so doing I discovered more about the position and length of my induction pipe than I had ever known before! He had a little blue-eyed yellow haired girl who was clambering about the barge & he said she often fell in, but was usually pulled out before she drowned. He apologised for the untidy state of his cabin, he ran his finger over a looking glass & showed us the dust, lying thick on it; shrugging his shoulders in the way only a Frenchman can, he explained he was happier dirty and dusty than he was when clean and tidy,- because the latter \state/ meant the presence of his wife!

21

Tues March 16th N. and I with great fear in our hearts, put on our spare set of clean clothes and sent those we had been wearing into [M] by our sergeant to be washed

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

says I,- 'as soon as they go we shall get an order to go hastily to F'

says N. 'Probably'

I put the fourth engine in my machine, & at last she was in working order.

B. (-- he of the eyeglass incident) got very excited at tea time and flourishing a huge gurka cookerie knife round his head chased S. round and xxx round the mess. S. was terrified & leaped over chairs and tables. B. caught him up, there was a fierce scuffle which ended in poor B. slicing a big gash in his finger! The mess was soon swimming in gore, but we sent for the ambulance man & tied him up all right.

There was some feeling in the mess when it became known that the two members of it who were shot down the other day had appeared in the casualty list as 'accidentally killed.' Surely the ways of the war office are queer, for how could a man be more truthfully said to have died in action? It might easily be inferred that they had died from fooling about at the business end of a transport mule or in some other futile way.

22

In the evening, sure enough, orders to move! What of our washing? But we are consoled by rumours of billets in a chateau with usable bathrooms for each bedroom, pianos too and other luxuries.

There have been very big doings to the East lately. I wonder how much of it will appear in the papers at home? One tenth perhaps.

Today two captured German officers managed to keep their revolvers and shot an unsuspecting British officer as he walked down the street. They were dealt with in a suitable manner.

Wed. March 17th A perfect dawn with sun & blue sky. I started off to our new station with Capt N. on board and as usual my engine gave out. Three cylinder heads cracked. I am now sitting in my aeroplane while the mechanics fit new ones. Everyone else has left.

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

There is a good deal of firing to the S.E., & the shells can be heard whirring through the air,- a long way off. There is an old buffer quietly ploughing close by with two white horses: several larks are singing: and things seem altogether too pleasant & sunny for people to be killing one another by the tens of thousand so close by. But they are! I saw some English papers today giving an account of the fighting that has just taken place: about what we expected! I censored letters today. I don't like the idea of reading them: but when one does, they are most amusing!

23

One man began five letters,- 'hoping this finds you in good health as it leaves me in the pink at present.'
 About 4.15 I got away, and after twenty minutes fly over a very murky country I found our new place and landed.
 The 'chateau' rumour is true! more or less! – there is only one bathroom, and the owner has removed all the rolls for the pianola,- still its very comfortable after a stuffy old loft.
 There is a distillery twenty yards from the house and the distiller lives in the house which he built by the side of his works. It is the most aggressively nouveau riche edifice I have struck this side of the channel,- as may be seen from the picture.
 At dinner there were some interesting yarns from people who had been in the trenches:-
 Some Saxons who were entrenched forty yards in front of our troops & were on quite friendly terms with them one day saw the staff cap of a new staff officer moving along our trench. Instead of shooting they yelled,- 'look out, you English: your general is coming along!'

The people in this house are not enthusiastic over our arrival. The hideous old cook said she would prefer to have the Uhlans here again to us! I found seven strapping soldier servants in the kitchen terrified out of their lives by the old vixen,

24

March 18th Went two short flights to test my engine, which is wrong again. I spent the next of the day pottering about trying to improve it. About twenty letters came today,- the second batch I have received since leaving Dover.

The War Office are trying to dun me for 2/4 ½ for two gallons of petrol I never had,- and the Income tax collector for income tax I have already paid. This is the first time in my life I have paid my Income tax on the nail, and they have been trying to make me pay it again ever since:- they now threaten to sell up my goods and chattels, the rascals! Let them:- they wouldn't get a fiver for the lot, even if they knew where to find them, which they don't!

We get four course dinners now: the cook has a repertoire of four savouries which he gives on four different nights:

<u>1st night</u>	Sardine on toast.	Hot sardine	cold toast
<u>2nd night</u>	" " "	Cold "	hot "
<u>3rd night</u>	" " "	Cold "	cold "
<u>4th night</u>	" " "	hot "	hot "

I am going to suggest the addition of butter on the toast and red pepper on the sardines. If he adds these I should imagine that arithmetical progression would prove he could make variety enough to go on for the rest of the war without repeating himself.

A terrific row took place in the kitchen tonight between the old woman & our servants.

25

Altho' the odds were four to one against, the old woman won. If we were Germans we would tie one of her own puddings round her neck and chuck her in the fountain.

The Germans have a neat way of taking photo from an aeroplane: they poke the nose of a camera through the floor: take the picture; descend: develop it in ten minutes: throw it on a magic lantern screen: experts spot the exact locality on the maps: copies are made, and in an incredibly short time after the machine has flown over, the company commanders in the trenches have photos of their own & the enemies trenches viewed from

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

above. But whatever the boches can do, we can do as well, if not better! if we are given long enough: there is plenty of time in this war, so we shall score in the end all right.

Fri March 19. Sat March 20. Sun March 21

After two days futile pottering with my engine I started to put in a new one. As all the Bosch plugs bear the words 'Made in Germany' perhaps I shall have better luck with it.

On Friday I had my hair cut, & watched an astonished Tommy being shaved by a woman!

Letters arrive regularly now, on the third day from being posted in London.

(No page 26)

27

Monday March 22 My engine finished at last a good one. I took my sergeant for a flight and she went perfectly.

I heard today of two R.F.C. men \in a British machine/ having a duel in the

air with a German aeroplane. Our man had fired all his ammunition at the Boshe, & then instead of signing to his pilot to sheer off,- he raised his camera and took a snapshot of the German : whereupon the enemy dived downwards and flew for his life. I wonder what he thought it was?

Tues March 23rd I started on a reconnaissance with Capt H. at six o'clock. My beautiful new engine began to make a noise like ten steam-rollers after ten minutes so I had to come back & take out another machine.

There were a lot of clouds about, but we got above one layer and crossed the trenches at about 5500 feet. The whole country for miles looked a perfect network of them,- while there was the 'dead' land between the two lines,- in some places fifty yards or less, & in others a mile or more. It looked something like the non-picture side of a jig-saw puzzle. we couldn't see the men in the trenches because the light wasn't right, but we knew the Germans at any rate were there, for 'Archibald' barked,- but as usual failed to bite.

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

The villiages below looked rather the worse for wear, with the roofs blown off many of the buildings

28

In a short time we came to an unbroken layer of clouds below us, so had to return without doing the round he had intended.

Yesterday a German aeroplane appeared over the Headquarters of the R.F.C.: dropped a bomb just to call attention to the fact that it was there, and then let loose a message bag. In the message bag were letters from the Flying Corps Officer who had been posted as missing, saying they were prisoners, but alive and well. The Bosches had braved anti-aircraft guns: aeroplanes, weather, and the chance of breakdown, just to bring this message! Possibly they had some other motives, but they may as well have the credit for a goodnatured and plucky act until we know they don't deserve it.

In the town near by I was saluted by a great broad, tanned, transport driver with a large fair moustache, who stopped & smiled all across his face. I couldn't recognise him at first, but he turned out to be Cant,- General B.P.'s chauffeur. He has put on about four stone in weight & I don't suppose his own side will recognise him when he gets back to Ewhurst. N. & I have given up all hopes of our washing! As I sent everything washable except what I stood up in, & that a week ago,- I am in a parlous state!

29

Wed March 24th My engine still out of action. A pouring wet day: at the aerodrome things were so desperately dull that we were reduced to playing pitch and toss with one frame bits in the mud. I won two francs & stopped playing!

Howell told us at lunch time of a visit he once paid to a friend of his who lived in a large institution. They had long & interesting talk on many matters when suddenly his friend struck an attitude like this:-

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

and said 'Pour me out! Pour me out!'
He thought he was a tea-pot.

I wrote home for more clothes to replace the lost ones sent to be washed. within an hour the wandering garments turned up beautifully washed, darned & mended.

Thurs March 25th Spent the day pottering about with my engine which won't go.

Fri March 26th In the evening I got my engine going at last, and took her up for two trial flights.

I have to go with S. tomorrow at 5.0am to a corner where there is plenty doing!

Sat March 27th A clear morning. I started with S. before sunrise, & all went well until we were about 3000 feet, when an omenous (sic) knock

30

began in my engine, & the revs dropped. Down I had to come, & S. had to go off with another pilot. They found Archie wide awake and came back with hits in four places, but none of them serious enough to prevent them from finishing their job.

My luck with engines had become a standing joke in the squadron, and nobody expects any machine to finish a flight without trouble.

Once more I tinkered with the engine and got her going once more.

Sun March 28th A sunny cloudless day with a biting North-Easter. At half past six I started with Stringer as observer. After half an hours climbing my aneroid showed the height at which our sort of work is done, -6000, so we pushed off to the spot over the line where our job waited to be done. It is a place where aeroplanes go every day, & the Germans have a unique collection of archibalds stationed there. While we were still a mile or two from the spot, four little compact balls of white blue smoke suddenly appeared and came floating down wind towards us, quickly followed by four

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

more. they had seen us coming & had sent them up to get the range.

Below us was the ground on which the famous battle was fought not long ago,- described in the papers as the victory (!!!) of ----- . The ground was a perfect network of trenches which

31

showed up extraordinarily clearly in the early morning sun;- for some forty or fifty miles all round the country stretched away dead flat, thickly studded with little farms and villiages; it all looked so sunny & peaceful that it was difficult to realise all the wholesale killing & pilliage (sic) that had been going on so recently.

As soon as we had crossed our trenches and were over the Germans, the merry fusilade began; some burst with white smoke, some with flame and black smoke, while others have no smoke at all. Not only was archie at work, but also howitzers with H.E. Our work was such that we had to fly up and down in a straight line and at the same level, so the gunners had plenty of chances of correcting their errors! They made plenty of hits, including one which went through the fusilage & cut an elevator wire,- but luckily it was duplicated to provide for such a case, so there was still one left. After about twenty five minutes of cruising up and down one really fine bang came just overhead, the engine was hit & began to clatter like a broken down motor-bus & a chunk of shell fell by my foot.

Stringer waved to me to turn back,- but it wasn't necessary, for I had already done it! The engine was still going round, but not quite enough to support us,- however as the wind was in the East we were safe to come down over our own lines.

32

S. had moved uneasily in his seat when the burst came, & as he had never turned a hair at the others I thought he might be hit, so I yelled down the speaking tube to ask if he was hurt, 'I'm all right' he shouted, &

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

then started telling me a story more humorous than printable: but I only caught part of it, as the engine was making such an infernal din. I meant to come down in a town we passed over just behind our lines, but couldn't find the landing ground, so determined to make a shot at getting back to our headquarters. We managed it in rather a lame duck sort of fashion, & when we fetched up S. said he had practically the whole of the information we had set out for,- which was cheering.

We were both frozen nearly solid! I climbed out & noticed Stringer seemed stiffer even than I was, so two men helped him down. Then we saw a big hole in the back of his coat, and another lower down, & found that a piece of shell after going through the top plane, down through the fusilage, & the wicker seat, had gone through the skin of his back for about ten or twelve inches out again and after making a hole in the petrol tank had dropped by my foot.

As he lay on his face on his bed with the RAMC orderly picked bits of leather coat and

33

mauve vest out of \the hole in/ his back, he dictated the details of what he had seen. It was a pretty bad hit and very painful, but not dangerous. We shoved him in an ambulance van and sent him off to hospital. – A loss to our mess, I only hope he will be sent back \to us/ & not rejoin his regiment,- the 5th Lancers.

No more flying for the day: it will take some little time to replace the petrol tank, elevator wire, frontstrut, cylinder head & put patches on the various holes made by the twenty six hits.

The machine caused some merriment among the other pilots, and I got well chaffed in mess when it was discovered that my aneroid was wrong, & I had been flying about 1500 or 2000 feet too low! – It was anew instrument and I ventured to mention the subject to the officer who issued it to me. However, he disclaimed all responsibility, and as he is four inches taller

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

& four stone heavier than I am, the subject was not carried any further however. But I am writing for another instrument of my own with which to check the official one. they are fickle things & a very small thing can put them out.

I walked into the town with two other men in the evening with the avowed purpose of going to church. Much to their relief they found the doors locked, so they betook themselves to the one decent pub in the town where the only pretty girl within many miles dispensed vermouth behind the counter.

34

Monday March 29th The day was spent in watching my machine being patched up, & she was finished in the evening.

N came out with one of his stories at lunch time of the Irishman who was seen mixing his beer & whiskey together. When asked why he did it, he explained that if he drank beer alone, he was full before he was drunk, and if he drank whiskey alone, he was drunk before he was full; a mixture resulted in the two desirable (sic) states arriving simultaneously.

Tuesday March 30th I started on a reconnaissance with Capt H. as observer at 5.30. As usual there was a stiff N.E. wind, with a blue sky. My engine was going badly, & finally gave up trying over B. ---- , at 6500 feet. One of our squadrons had a landing ground just there, so I came down & they tinkered with my engine. The squadron there need never be bored, for they can see their machines \going out and/ coming back over the lines and being shelled: we watched one:- it was a good description that the Daily Mail gave the other day of the sight,- 'a butterfly being snowballed' Little balls of white smoke suddenly appear all round the machine,- about four or six at a time: then another bunch of them, & so on until the machine is out of range: - an interesting sight,- from below.

After an hour we pushed off again, but my engine would not get us high enough, so we flew back home again. My luck with engines has become a regular bye-word in the squadron!

35

Wed March 31st I started on a reconnaissance at 5.30

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

with Capt H. As usual, my engine petered out & I had to come down after 20 minutes flying. I took another machine,- which was running well, we climbed up to 6000 feet in half an hour, and crossed the line about eight o'clock at the comfortable height of 7000 feet. for three quarters of an hour we flew over various places behind the German line,- H. making careful notes as we went.

We passed over ---- , which is by way of being the biggest manufacturing town in this part of France. It looked strangely deserted. Two solitary people were walking across the great sun lit square in the middle of the town, and bar a few strange carts & cars the streets seemed empty. I wonder what has happened to everybody?

Beyond a battalion of German infantry little movement could be/seen on the roads. But every factory in the countryside seemed to be working, for the chimneys were all smoking hard.

The whole country is so thickly covered with towns and villiages and canals and roads that it is very difficult to find the way about, one place is so much like another We saw a German aeroplane start up from an aerodrome below, but as it would take jolly good care not to get within scrapping distance of a British machine, we took no notice of it.

One watches the revolution counter of the engine with considerable interest when flying over

36

the enemies country; any sort of stoppage means a descent and capture, - an ignominious ending to ones career for the time being!

Archibald was in very poor form this morning; he had a few desultory shots at us from one or two places, but didn't score a single hit. But one mustn't brag! but bear in mind the case of L---- who went out one day when Archibald shot rang vigorously at him, but always wide of the mark. The next day he dropped a message as he passed over to tell Archie he was no good & had better go and learn how to hit a church with a pea-shooter. However A. scored the following day by getting a piece of shrapnel into the contemptuous L----'s lung!

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

Thurs April 1st A perfect day,- blue sky and sunshine from sunrise to sunset.

I spent the day trying to make my engine go, and with rather better success than usual.

Fri April 2nd I got my engine going again, & went for a trial flight in the morning: she went moderately well,- rather erratic.

In the afternoon I had to take on a reconnaissance an observer who has just been sent to us:- young, conceited & no good at his job;- very different from the steady old stager I took round on Wednesday.

A nasty West wind had sprung up, and my

37

engine behaved very queerly, and there was a thick haze over the ground in spite of the wind. It was not a pleasure trip, but after half an hour my engine refused to take me higher than 3500 feet, and was so bad that I had to turn back without having done our work.

Sat April 3 – Wed April 7th nothing particular doing. We had news from N. who went to hospital a week or two ago. He had a pretty rough eight months in the trenches, and his throat had gone wrong. He said he was in a sumptuous Parisian hotel, which had been turned into a hospital, and had the most charming nurse who would bring him a whiskey and soda at any hour of the day or night. He seemed to be bearing up under his affliction with great fortitude.

Also there were letters from Stringer, who is in for a good many weeks in bed lying on his face; even when he gets out I expect he will be eating his breakfast off the mantelpiece for some time to come.

On Wednesday I smashed a machine by running on some plough while getting off the ground. I had a good telling off by those in authority, but no more than I deserved. Two seconds carelessness which lost over a thousand pounds. On the same day I got another engine in my own machine,- the sixth.

The observer I took up on the 2nd has 'left France for the purpose of rejoining his unit,'- thank goodness.

Wigan Archives Service, 2011

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