

2nd Can. Inf. Bde.
France, May 15th/17

From,
Captain G.P. Duncan.
Chaplain
2nd Can. Inf. Bde.

To,
Lieut.
Col. McGreer
A.D.C.S.
Canadian Corps.

Sir:-

I have the honour to submit the following report:-

I was detailed for duty at Ariane [artillery] dump to begin on Sunday the eighth of April. On Sunday evening I arrived there about nine o'clock. One man had been sent ahead with a few supplies for the Coffee stall. As no water had been arranged for, and the battle was to begin early on Monday morning, I asked Private Somerville and my batman McLean to assist me in carrying water. We had difficulty in locating the well in the darkness but finally succeeded. The mud was very deep along the road and the battalions were moving into the line in large numbers. As they went bravely along, I began to realize the opportunity for service. We succeeded in getting a fair supply of water, but were compelled to stop as the Germans were sending over a great many shells on the Arras-Bethune road.

I tried to sleep in a shack, but on account of a battery a few yards away I did not succeed. At three o'clock in the morning we began preparations for supplying coffee to the wounded. An hour and a half later, the barrage began. Major Devison – an Imperial Artillery Officer – said it was the most intense firing he had ever heard. As our shack was surrounded by our guns, the concussion smashed glasses and window panes. Col. Fraser O.C. [Officer Commanding] of the dressing station described the barrage as greater than any at the Somme.

At zero hour a pause. One big gun boomed out, a crash of machine guns a moment after, then the whole front was one blaze of light, our guns thundered over the hills and valleys. It was one constant roll and even to men accustomed to war, a scene never to be forgotten.

Early in the morning the wounded began to arrive at the dressing station. We gave them coffee, and as the day was cold, the men were very grateful. All day long we worked in the stall on the road, and in the dressing station. Snow fell during the day and poor wounded men were glad to have a drink of hot coffee.

In the afternoon, the Germans sent over a large number of gas shells. Many of them fell around the dump. In addition to the gas shells, one five point-nine landed near our coffee stall. One poor fellow was killed instantly, and three others were wounded. An officer in another part of our shack was gassed and died before he reached the hospital. Another man was hit, while he lay on a stretcher. His arm was blown off, and it was impossible for him to live.

Captain Gibson and I continued the work day and night for over a week. The men sent by the department to assist worked very strenuously, and many wounded and tired men were ready to express hearty thanks for the work done by the Chaplain Service.

We remained at the dump from the 9th of April to the second of May. During that time I was called upon to conduct funeral services near Farbus and other points. I also visited the dressing stations at the Nine Elms and Bois Carre.

On the 10th of April I responded to a call from the 10th Battalion. Col. Ormonde showed me over the battle field and evidence of the bravery of our men could be seen all around. It has been a privilege to do some little things in the great advance. I regret I was not able to do more.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient Servant
Geo. P. Duncan
Chaplain, 2nd Can. Inf. Bde.

[Transcribed from the original, which is held by Library and Archives Canada]

Textual: **Document written by Presbyterian Chaplain Rev. George Petrie Duncan**

© Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2017).

Source: Library and Archives Canada/Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada fonds/[e-number](#)