

3/3/13

Maurice Rardon

- War office oak leaf letter + photograph.
- Imperial War Museum donation of Sims and Winter
- Dick Wyndham - First World War Letter.



*Imperial War Museum,
Lambeth Road,
London, S.E.1.*

10th May 1955.

Sir,

*I am directed by His Royal Highness
The Duke of Gloucester, President of the Board
of Trustees, to thank you for the gift mentioned
overleaf which you have presented to the Imperial
War Museum. I am to assure you that your
generosity is greatly appreciated by the Board
of Trustees.*

*I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,*

A. M. J. J. J.
Director General

Maurice Rowdon, Esq.

Presented to the Imperial War Museum.

"OF SINS AND WINTER".

By

Maurice Rowdon.

Tel. No Droitwich 2323

Any further communication on this
subject should be addressed to :-

The Under-Secretary of State,
The War Office,
[as opposite].

and the following number quoted.



A. G. 4. (Medals),
THE WAR OFFICE,
DROITWICH SPA,
Worcestershire.
June, 1947.

B.M.

15/47A. G. 4. (Medals).

Sir,

/ I am directed to forward the accompanying Oak Leaf Emblems denoting
Mention in Despatches ~~er-a-Kings-Commendation.~~

/ It is requested that you will be good enough to acknowledge receipt
on the enclosed Issue Voucher.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

H. H. Ewan
Director of Personal Services.

Capt. M.S. Rowdon.

.....

.....

V interesting letter
from Dick Wynnham

Same address - resting.

30/5/15.

J Marie

Darling Mud and Father,

Thanks so much for your letters. They all arrived in a bunch irrespective of date. It was rotten luck just missing Father, I think I must have dated my letter wrong as I came up here the same day I left hospital. I'm glad I told you we were resting as it stopped you "worrying"; but as a matter of fact it came to rather a sudden end! While you were thinking of "your darling Dick" snugly sleeping in a picturesque old Belgium farm house; he was really taking cover behind a half grown daisy, midst a rain of shot and shell!

Between 3 and 3.30 a.m. on the morning after I sent off my letter I was woken up by a heavy bombardment. I guessed we would probably be called out. At about 5 o'clock the order came to get dressed, and to be ready to move off. Half way between here and the firing line we sat down at the side of the road and waited for orders and news! Soon after lunch we were definitely told that the Germans, after heavily bombarding our lines, had used gas, and had thus succeeded in taking our first line of trenches. Our brigade was ordered to try and retake the trenches by a night attack. I'm sorry to say that this attack failed, but all the same it was pretty exciting.

We hadn't gone far before we entered the gas zone, and we soon both saw and felt its effects.

We were marching along a railway line. There was a beautiful crimson sunset behind us, with the shattered tower of Ypres Cathedral silhouetted against it, on either side of the embankment the "gassed" men were lying; some dead; the rest still struggling for breath. Others came staggering by like drunkards. Occasionally a 17" shell went roaring like a train overhead and fell with a crash in the city behind. Each time the ground seemed to shudder.

The gas gradually became stronger and I ordered my men to put on their respirators - (I am at present a company commander). Before long my eyes were streaming and my nose running as if I had been crying my heart out, one's throat and chest were burning while the whole time there was a horrible feeling of suffocation. Yet this was only the after effects of gas that had been used that morning. Then we suddenly passed out of the zone. I tore off my respirator and drew in the pure air with long deep breaths, Just like you doing your morning exercises. I can't tell you what a relief it was. After a long drink of water and a "specially selected" self-imported cigarette" I felt quite fit again. (I think it would be a good thing if you sent me out a pair of rubber motor goggles to protect the eyes.) We then got into a line of support trenches where we waited for about an hour while arrangements were made for the attack. I took the opportunity to get hold of a spare rifle and bayonet, (much the most useful weapon). Unfortunately I had no opportunity of using it. It must have been about 11 p.m. when we

started off advancing across country in two lines, extended to about 3 paces interval. It was frightfully difficult to keep touch, and a good deal of muddling went on; especially when another brigade, who should have been attacking elsewhere, came and blundered into us.

About 400 yards from the German trenches we lay down and waited for the moon to set. At about 1.30 it was sufficiently dark to continue the advance. Everything was so quiet and peaceful before dawn that it was hard to believe that the enemy were only a few yards off. But this didn't last long. To use the "Eye-Witness's" favourite expression - "Hell broke loose", although I wouldn't quite have called it that.

But let's go back to the facts.

As far as I can gather the battalion on our left was supposed to let us know when they were ready to attack, thus we could have all charged together. Instead of which they blundered right on to the enemy's trenches, came under a heavy fire and finally retired, leaving us stranded. The Germans in front of us promptly "got the wind up" and sent flares over us, making everything as light as day. As we flung ourselves on our faces they opened fire. They must have turned about 8 or 12 machine guns upon us. The noise made by the bullets going by was deafening - one continual and ear-splitting "crackle".

Then rumours came down that we were retiring; but it was in vain I passed up to know who had sent them down. I could find out nothing. Eventually I found myself alone with my two

platoons (the others were in support) and a few bomb-throwers. I hadn't the faintest notion what had happened to the rest of the battalion;- whether they had charged or retired. I was in rather an awkward position:- if I retreated when the others had gone on, it would have been a distinct "faux pas"; if on the other hand I went on and arrived all by myself we probably would not have been able to get back. Although I pretty well guessed we had gone back, I had no actual orders. Eventually in a lull of the firing I managed to send a couple of men back to find out. Apparently the 2nd in command had come down the line shouting that every one was to retire. This had never reached me. But all ended well and we got back with comparatively few losses, since the fire had abated by that time.

We retired on to a support where we spent the day.

That night we went up and dug ourselves in as close as possible to the enemy, luckily with very few casualties. The next night we were relieved and taken down here in motor buses.

In a day or two we are going down to another line of trenches which I think are rather good. We have suffered rather heavily from snipers lately; and the Colonel has asked every officer in the battalion who can afford it to buy a telescopic sighted rifle. They cost about £15. I haven't got the money in the bank, but do you think Charles Campbell would let me have it as I feel I ought to get one. Every one you have in the battalion saves so many lives. I believe you can get them at Beesley's, 2 St James Street. The bore should be .303.

I've just heard from Madge. Well I must stop now as I've got to go and play rugger against the P.P.'s. Love to Gan and Darling and all. Lots of love from Dick.

P.S. When I was wounded all my small kit was lost. Could you send me out

1. An auto-strop razor set tin metal box.
2. A sponge (small).
3. A hold all (can get it at Wilkinson).
4. Metal looking glass.
5. Air cushion.
6. Tooth powder.
7. Bit of soap.
8. Tube of hair grease.

You haven't sent me out my change of clothing lately.
(Enclose a face towel).

P.S.S. The glasses have just arrived. They are very good, much clearer than the first pair I had.

Dick.

Tel. No Droitwich 2323

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I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

H. E. W. Mayhew
Director of Personal Services.

Capt. M. S. Rowdon.