



An extract from an informal record of events at Aisne, 16 September 1914, written by Lt Charles James Paterson of the South Wales Borderers, 1st battalion. Paterson was killed in action six weeks after he wrote these words.

I have never spent, and imagine that I can never spend, a more ghastly and heart-tearing 48 hours than the last. ...

Here I sit outside our headquarters trench in the sun. The rain which we have had without a break for the past two days has now stopped and the world should look glorious. The battle has stopped here for a bit although in the distance we can hear the 2nd English Army Corps guns.

As I say, all should be nice and peaceful and pretty. What it actually is, is beyond description. Trenches, bits of equipment, clothing (probably blood-stained), ammunition, tools, caps, etc etc, everywhere. Poor fellows shot dead are lying in all directions. Some of ours, some of the 1st Guards Brigade who passed over this ground before us, and many Germans.

All the hedges torn and trampled, all the grass trodden in the mud, holes where shells have struck, branches torn off trees by the explosion. Everywhere the same hard, grim, pitiless sign of battle and war.

I have had a belly full of it. Those who were in South Africa say that that was a picnic compared to this and the strain is terrific. No wonder if after a hundred shells have burst over us some of the men want to get back into the woods for rest.

Ghastly, absolutely ghastly, and whoever was in the wrong in the matter which brought this war to be, is deserving of more than he can ever get in the world.

Everyone very cheery and making the best of things. Men of course wonderful, as T. Atkins always is. I must try and write to mother now.