

## EPISODES OF A FORTY-NINER.

**T**HE following is a humble endeavour in trying to describe some of the experiences of the average soldier out here at the front. As you no doubt already know, we spent a few months at a military camp in England, after which we sailed for the Continent here. On arrival, after disembarking, we had some distance to march to where we billeted at a rest camp for a short time. We then marched to a point where we entrained for a then unknown destination. It was rather an unusual train journey for most of us, as we travelled in box-cars for the best part of the day. We arrived at our destination, so far as the railway part of it went. Our troubles only seemed to be starting, as they seemed to gradually but surely increase at every stage. After having marched for several hours in the darkness we finally found a resting-place (or billet) for the balance of the night on the floor of a barn at a French farmhouse about 2 a.m. Poor accommodation as it seemed, it looked pretty good to the most of us, as we were all very tired from carrying our full packs so long and so far, and the darkness added to the tiresomeness of our march. It was not very long before we were all sleeping the sleep of the just. We spent a few days here, and in the meantime discovered we were only a few miles behind the firing line. A few days before our battalion entered the firing line, or trenches, we moved up from our back billets to where we were actually within range of the enemy's artillery. That night we got our first glimpse of war conditions. Away in the distance the booming of big guns attracted our attention. On the following morning our gaze was drawn in the direction, where we saw two aeroplanes high up in the heavens and shells bursting around them on every side. It was a fascinating sight to one seeing it for the first time. I could not take my eyes off the aerial drama. I then saw the flash of a bursting shell, then a small, dense, dark-coloured cloud form and expand and float away, and next, some seconds later, came the report of the anti-aircraft gun. In a few minutes clouds had formed, and still the aeroplanes circled round in the archipelago of exploded shells, carrying out their work of reconnaissance apparently as

unconcernedly as if they were moving in the serenest of space, and then, having completed their observations, they sped back behind their lines, and were soon lost to view. At this same place a few days later we were treated to an unusually exciting and interesting sight. Two aeroplanes were engaged in battle, and were almost right over us; they were going through some great manoeuvres in the air, presumably to obtain an advantageous position. They were exchanging shots rapidly with their machine guns, when suddenly one of them started dipping towards terra firma, but when a short distance from the ground the pilot managed to right his machine. It was only then we were able to realise it was an enemy plane, for as he neared our front line in trying to alight safely on his own side our machine guns and rifles fusilladed and brought him down not a great distance from where we were watching the fight. We spent several weeks at this place; in the meantime receiving our baptism of rifle and shell fire. We got broken into trench warfare here also. We then moved to another part of the line, where our duty was largely that of forming work parties. The duties of those parties were mostly performed in the night-time, when they repaired trenches and parapets and dug others that might be necessary. It was far from being a pleasant kind of work, as it rained nearly every night, and the work had all to be done in the darkness. For months the boys were wet, and had no means of drying their clothes, which made matters very uncomfortable for them. A large percentage of this repair work had to be done almost under the nose of the enemy. Many times work of this nature would be carried out at places where, when the enemy would throw up star shells, which illuminate for a considerable radius, every man had to remain perfectly still until the flare had burned itself out. The discovery of one of those working parties in such close proximity to the enemy would mean that machine guns would immediately be turned on them and a few shrapnel shells burst overhead. After having taken our share in this kind of work, we then took up active duty in the firing line, which we still continue to do, and have made an enviable reputation for ourselves through the good work we have done, often under very trying circumstances. The 49th Battalion is known along a considerable extent of the line, and have become very popular