

## Diary of Thomas Allan Filby, Pte, 10515.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Regt South African Infantry

*By John Filby, a Filby Association Researcher*

Thomas Allan Filby was born in Wynberg, Cape Town, SA on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1892, the eldest son of William Filby from Hardingham, Norfolk, England. At the beginning of WW1 he enlisted in the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment (SA Scottish) which was raised from the Transvaal Scottish and Cape Town Highlanders and wore the Atholl Murray tartan.

Like many service recruits he set out with ambitions to keep an account of his daily military activities. In this he largely failed since, although his diary physically survived 4 ½ years of WW1 locations and conditions, there are many large gaps. However, what remains is a personal account of the day to day frustrations and movements of just one of the unsung millions of service personnel involved in WW1 with no attempt to cover the “bigger picture”.

His first WW1 entry records his attendance from 18<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1913 at “Defence Force Camp”, Worcester.

There is then a 2 year gap in the diary during which time the South African Army would have been fighting the Germans in South West German Africa, now Namibia. What involvement Thomas had is not known but his next group of diary entries, which follow the German surrender on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915, record his journeys in the period 6<sup>th</sup> October to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1915 between the Internment Camp, Aus, the capital Windhoek and finally Cape Town.

The next section of the diary jumps a year to Thomas’ transfer to the European Theatre of WW1:-

**6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1916 – Signed on for Overseas Duty.**

**8th Nov. 1916 – Left for Potchefstroom, Transvaal.**

**10th Nov. 1916 – Arrived Potchefstroom at 4 am marched to camp about 3 miles away.**

**1st Dec. 1916 – Left Potchefstroom for Cape Town, arrived 3rd Dec 1916.**

**7th Dec. 1916 – Should have left for England on S.S. Saxon but was cancelled until 8th Dec when we were all lined up ready to go and it was cancelled to await further orders.**

**28th Dec. 1916 – Left at last on the S.S. Briton.**

**Had a nice voyage as far as St Helena where we picked up 7 other boats and the cruiser Glasgow. It was very warm as far as Sierra Leone after that we had to put on the warmest clothes we had.**

**Had 2 months training at Aldershot and Woking.**

**14<sup>th</sup> April, 1917 – Left for France and arrived Le Havre on 15<sup>th</sup>.**

**15<sup>th</sup> April, 1917 – Left for Rouen and onwards to the line.**

**3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1917 - Arrived at Savy where we went into camp for about a week. Joined the Regiment at Monchy-Bretion. Had a nice time there for about a month before moving**

**with a working party to Arras. Assisted in bringing wounded down not a very pleasant job. From Arras we went to Berneville where we did Divisional training.**

At this point one or more pages have been torn from the diary and the next entry is for two months later.

**3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1917 – Left for the trenches about 8 o'clock by rail, weather very bad, rain and wind altogether a rotten night. Duties Mess Orderly.**

This is the last entry in this part the diary

*According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Pte Thomas Allan Filby was severely wounded on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 1917. Although no details are known of where this occurred it was probably during the South African Infantry involvement in the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge at Ypres.*

*It appears that Thomas was returned to England to recover and his next attempt at keeping a diary started again in March 1918.*

**Continued:**

**Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1918 – Left Woking for Southampton, stayed a day at rest camp.**

**Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> March – Left Southampton for France about 8pm, rough voyage reached Le Havre about 4am.**

**Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> March - Marched to rest camp about 5 miles from Le Havre docks.**

**Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup> – Stayed at rest camp. Broke, raffled watch, got 4/6d. Had no pay for a fortnight. Marched to docks about 8-30 to go to Rouen. Boat sailed about 5 o'clock Saturday morning.**

**Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup> – Sailed up the river arrived Rouen about 2 o'clock, marched to the JBD medical inspection at 4 o'clock. Time put back 1 hour.**

**Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup> – Fell in about 9 o'clock for kit inspection. Spent rest of day resting. Broke.**

**Monday, March 11<sup>th</sup> – Hospital fatigue No 11 “American” had a bon time and nothing much to do. Broke, no smokes.**

**Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> – Route march from 10 to 12 nothing doing the rest of the day.**

**Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> – Fatigues.**

**Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup> – Route march and pay.**

**Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup> – Medical inspection, kit inspection entrained about 4 o'clock proceeding up the line.**

**Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup> – Still in the truck about 40 men to a truck. Arrived Per.... billets about 7pm had a good night's sleep.**

**Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup> – Cookhouse fatigue, dinner at 11.30 marching to rest camp about 3 miles away.**

**Final Undated Entry – Please do a brother-in-arms a last favour and return this book to Mrs W Filby, Beccles, Suffolk. (his stepmother)**

*According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Thomas Allan Filby was killed in action on 24 March.*

This was probably towards the end of the South African Infantry's fighting withdrawal from Gauche Wood, near Villers Guislair, to Marriers Wood, near Boachavesnes, in response to "Operation Michael", part of the German 1918 Spring Somme Offensive. After 5 days fighting with no support the S A Brigade remnant of some 100 men, many of them wounded, surrendered on 25 March when out of ammunition.

Thomas Allan Filby has no grave and is commemorated, amongst 320 South African soldiers with no grave, on the Pozieres Memorial along with nearly 15,000 other Somme dead with no known grave. He is also remembered, far from his South African home, on the War Memorial, Beccles, Suffolk.

WW1 Memorial Plaque for Thomas Allan Filby.

