

First World War diaries published

'I was dressing the wounded in the trenches – enough said. Worse than Hell...'

That's the recollection of 'Frontline Medic' Captain George Pirie who, as one of 'Kitchener's Army', bravely volunteered for a Royal Army Medical Corps Special Reserve commission in December 1914.



It was a selfless decision that would take him to the casualty-strewn fields of Gallipoli (where he too was wounded), the Somme and finally Ypres where he was tragically killed in action in July 1917.

Now, to honour the Regimental Medical Officer (R.M.O.) who was said to have an 'indefatigable' devotion to duty, editor Michael Lucas has brought Pirie's war diaries to a centenary audience with the support of publisher Helion & Company Ltd.

Lucas said: "Unlike so many accounts, written decades after the war and distorted by fading memories and hindsight, Pirie's diary is fresh. It tells things how they were and, rightly or wrongly, how they were perceived at the time."

Lucas has also authored 'The 'Journey's End' Battalion – 9th East Surrey in the Great War'.

"Often fortunately, Pirie did not know what tomorrow would bring for him and his companions."

South African-born, the gregarious captain 'loved by both officers and men' graduated with a Distinction in Medicine from the University of Edinburgh. He would go on to fight with

the British Army – serving with infantry battalions including the 9th East Surrey Regiment, which he shared with ‘Journey’s End’ playwright R.C. Sherriff.

Redressing the wounds of ‘mangled men’ was a daily occurrence – his own mortality under threat while sniper bullets, mortar bombs and shells (the biggest killers) whistled by. Casualties among R.M.Os were high. During the Somme battles between 1 July to mid-November 1916, 43 were killed or died of wounds; 149 were wounded; and four were missing. The East Surrey officers were ‘like family’ to him, however it was the loss of his Corporal Halliday that reduced Pirie to tears.

He wrote in his diary: “He was mortally wounded in the abdomen whilst getting away the second last stretcher case. That finished me off; I wept then. He’s an awful loss to me.”

Little over 12 months later, Pirie would be reunited with the fallen – killed by a shell on his 29th birthday. Only three days before he had written of his reluctance to go to the front line: ‘It’s a beast of an area’.

Lucas explained: “My greatest thanks must go to the family of Captain Pirie, who have given me permission to edit the diary for publication. Of them, I am especially grateful to Peter Strasheim from Johannesburg, South Africa, for so generously sending me a copy of the diary some years ago because of my interest in the captain’s service with 9th Battalion East Surrey Regiment.

“Whilst Pirie and his comrades saw a lot of horror on the frontline, what struck me is that he also gave a comprehensive view of their lives away from it – including their recreations and even Christmas celebrations.”

Profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and contemporary caricatures, including some of Pirie and his friends – the diaries have been reproduced complete and unabridged with

introductions to the man and his diary; his campaigns; and with extensive notes.



The founder of Helion & Company, Duncan Rogers, said: "Pirie's humanity shines through when reading his diaries, despite the often inhuman conditions he was working under. This is a unique opportunity to read about multiple theatres of war and to see how medical services operated in Gallipoli and on the Western Front through the eyes of one courageous man."