

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.
WAR MUSEUM LIBRARY.

RECORD FILE OF PAPERS.

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY.

Subject 1st. Australian Division. 5-8-18 to 12-8-18.

Referred to by.	Date.	Referred to by.	Date.	Referred to by.	Date.
		<i>JK Sullivan</i>			
		Statement made by Prisoner of War.			
		<i>[Plt A.A. KEATING]</i>	<i>AA 7.2.83.</i>		
		AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL ACCESS STATUS OPEN			

This File must be Kept Intact.

7th. Infantry Battalion.



C O N F I D E N T I A L .

STATEMENT BY ESCAPED PRISONER OF WAR .

Administrative Headquarters,
Australian Imperial Force,
"B" Records Section.

REG.NO. 1146. 16th September, 1918.

RANK. Private.

NAME. KEATING. Albert Herbert.

PLATOON. No 14.

COMPANY. "D" Company.

BATTALION 7th Battalion.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF CAPTURE.

- (a) Date. August 11 or 12, 1918.
(b) Place. Lihons, near Chaulnes (Somme).
(c) What Happened Immediately before Capture.

We had been lying to the left of the railway line on the Lihons side of Rosieres. A considerable body of Australians advanced against Lihons on the morning of August 11, the actual advance beginning at about 4 a.m. The 8th Battalion were advancing immediately ahead of us and we understood that they were to take the village of Lihons.

My Company-"D" Coy., of the 7th Battalion - was to act as support to the advancing 8th Battalion. We were spread out in extended order.

From where we had been camped on the left of the railway line, Lihons would be about two kilometres distant.

OFFICERS SEEN DURING ENGAGEMENT.

Lieut Smith - He was acting as O.C. Company and led the Company forward.

Lieut Wisewold - He was my Platoon Commander and he led the Platoon into action.

I cannot just now recall the name of our Platoon Sergeant, but I know he was in the advance with the rest of us.

As we got near our objective our own artillery dropped a protecting barrage ahead of us, but after we had advanced a few hundred yards we ran into fairly heavy machine gun and rifle fire. For a time we lay down, taking advantage of what cover we could find. An order came from the 8th Battalion in front of us. We understood that order to mean that we were to advance. We advanced accordingly but found out later that the order had been intended for a platoon from the 8th Battalion. It was a foggy morning and we could not see more than 20 yards ahead of us. As we advanced on the village of Lihons we were met with heavy machine gun and artillery fire. My Platoon entered the village immediately after the 8th Battalion, our particular job being the "cleaning up" of some houses on the left of the village.

The main resistance was from the machine guns in the houses but we did the job alright.

We met numbers of the enemy prisoners who had been sent back by the



8th Battalion. We went through the village and toward a wood that lay on our left. The enemy held the wood and encountered us with rifle and machine gun fire. However we entered the wood.

We had been split up into small parties of eight or 10 men. The party I was with was led by an N.C.O. from the 8th Battalion. As we advanced further through the wood, word came along from the right that the enemy were counter-attacking. We accordingly split up into still smaller parties. I found myself along with four or five others. I did not know the names of any of them. We spread out at intervals of four or five yards. I noticed some casualties happen on the left of our party. Eventually there were only two of us left, myself and a lad from the 8th Battalion. We were trying to get back and rejoin our own men, with whom we had lost touch, but as we turned round to retire we ran into a party of about 20 Germans who had got round behind us in the fog. My comrade fired his rifle and endeavoured to break away. He was immediately shot, I believe from the rear. Whether he was killed or not I cannot say. I surrendered. There was nothing else for it. I was unwounded. There were a few of our lads lying about in the wood - killed or wounded. The wood carried a fairly thick undergrowth.

What Happened Immediately After Capture.

I was immediately disarmed. I do not know of any other Australians who became prisoners just then and there. A German officer motioned that I was to be taken toward the rear. He pointed in the direction of Chaulnes. That night I spent in a wire-enclosed compound on the other side of Chaulnes. Next day I was removed to Nesle where I was placed in a compound with 80 or 90 other prisoners of war. There were other Australians there but they were in a different quarter of the compound and I got no chance to speak to them.

We were put to work - loading ammunition dumps into railway trucks. Later on we were put to loading small arms ammunition and "whizz-bangs" into horse-transport waggons and limbers. It was fairly heavy work and the hours were long - from daylight till dark.

Story of the Escape.

The working parties were being broken up every day. When I "left" the job there were only about 20 prisoners of war engaged on it. On August 24, we were handed out two days' ration - a piece of black bread and a tin of German "bully" beef. One of the German sentries told one of the prisoners that we were all to be moved back to St Quentin, but that night I escaped. On the night of August 24, our aeroplanes raided Nesle two or three times. Their bombs were dropping round the prisoners' compound. It was one of our old compounds. The German sentries took cover immediately the bombs began to drop. It was very dark and I cannot say how many of our planes took part in the raid. A bomb damaged the wire fence on one side of the cage and I immediately made my way through it. Two Canadian prisoners of war followed me immediately, but we scattered at once. I made directly for the road though I had no idea whither it led. I believe it must have been the road leading from Nesle to Ham. There was a considerable amount of traffic on the road and I slipped in behind a German transport waggon.

I found out later that this transport column was moving via Ham toward St Quentin. I hung on behind that transport waggon - unnoticed by any one - till we crossed a bridge near a large centre that I believe must have been Ham. As it was getting light I slipped the transport column and hid myself for the day in an old cellar. There I found an old German top-coat and a German "tin-hat". I appropriated both and wore them both when I again started out on my journey next night. I could see the flares of the ~~Wer~~ ^Werje lines and these guided me toward our lines. The enemy forces were moving rearward in considerable bodies and I had to make numerous detours



to avoid running into these bands. I spent next day (August 26) in an old dug-out in a disused trench. This plan i repeated every sudceeding night and day until I eventually ran into an outpost of the 58th Australians somewhere near Peronne - it was at La Maissonette, I believe. I got through the enemy support lines during the night of August 31. Heavy machine gun and rifle fire was raging from both sided all next day. I lay out in a shell hole all that day. A little after dark - say about 9 p.m. - that night I crossed the Somme River on a small foot bridge. I had discarded the German top-coat and helmet and was wearing an ^{ordinary thrapred helmet} Australian hat I had picked up. As I approached our lines I was halted but I got across to them safely. I was taken successively to Battalion, Brigade and Divisional Headquarters. Eventually I was sent across to England, arriving at Folkestone on September 11, 1918. In London I was quartered at Wellington Barracks.

Some Reflections.

It was somewhere about midnight when we got clear of the cage at Nesle. I never saw the Canadians after we scattered on leaving the compound, nor have I since heard whether they got through or not.

During my period of captivity I never noticed the German proops practising any training "stunts". So far as I could learn the troops on guard over the prisoners of war were German cavalry. They wore yellow bands round their caps.

While in the prison compound at Nesle, for days before I escaped, I saw enemy artillery retiring along the road leading toward Ham and St. Quentin. Our camp was behind Nesle but right alongside the road.

There also passed numerous transport waggons carrying enemy wounded. Numbers of "walking cases" also passed along the road.

The German guards bounced the prisoners about a good deal but I never experienced or witnessed any actual brutality. The food was very poor stuff - "coffee" and black bread, and a sort of watery gruel made of some sort of meal. At dinner time we had a tin of German "bully" beef to five men.

Back in the neighbourhood of Ham I noticed new trenches being built by the Germans.

Signature..... *1146 Pte. A. W. Heating*

Witness..... *559a H. Angel*

*Sgt 85
9
18.*