



Administrative Headquarters,  
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

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HISTORICAL RECORDS.

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26 <sup>TH</sup> AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTN.
No. <u>301</u> =
Date .....

ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS,  
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

No. AW.835.

AUSTRALIAN WAR RECORDS SECTION,  
Public Record Office,  
Chancery Lane,  
London, W.C.2.  
December 31st, 1917.

MEMORANDUM TO OFFICERS COMMANDING.

**HISTORICAL RECORDS.**

**War Diaries.**

1. Since the formation of the War Records Section, in May last, there has been a noticeable improvement—more marked in some cases than in others—in the diaries submitted. This is probably due as much as anything to the fact that units for the first time were brought to realise the objects of the war diary, which previously had, in too many cases, been looked upon merely as a disagreeable task which must be done in order to avoid correspondence with the authorities at the base.

While the objects have previously been explained, it is thought worth while, in view of

changes in personnel, etc., again to bring them to the notice of all concerned. Briefly, they are as follows :—

- (a) To furnish an accurate record of the operations from which the history of the war can subsequently be prepared.
- (b) To collect information for future reference with a view to effecting improvements in the organisation, training, equipment and administration of the Army for war.

A well-kept diary, therefore, is a duty which a unit owes, first, to itself, for the recognition it will receive in history depends largely (probably entirely in the case of the British Official History) on its diary ; and, secondly, to the Australian Military Forces generally.

It is important that units should realise this, for then it is certain that no unit will ever again be content to leave to future historians as the only permanent record of a gallant fight, an entry in its diary such as :—

“ 23/7/1916. Took part in attack. Captured all objectives.”

2. It is desired again to point out that the lack of sufficient copies, or means of making them, to complete the duplicate or triplicate copy of the diary, should in no case deter an officer from

attaching to the original copy any documents which he considers would help to make the diary more complete and valuable. The original copies become the property of the Australian Government, and it is in the interests of the history of the unit and of the A.I.F. as a whole, that they should be made as complete as possible.

Three copies of each diary are necessary—the original for Australia, the duplicate for the British Government, and the triplicate to complete a set required as a safeguard against total loss and at present being used for working purposes in order to preserve the originals as much as possible. Where necessary these copies are made by photostat ; this is an expensive method, and, in order that the cost may be reduced, units were asked to co-operate by making carbon copies wherever possible.

Every opportunity of emphasizing this has been taken, and it is hoped that, in view of the explanation given above, the present regrettable tendency to neglect attaching documents to the original, merely because copies are not available to complete the duplicate or triplicate, will entirely disappear, and that, in future, the originals will be made the best and most complete possible.

3. Reports on operations are perhaps the most important feature of diaries. Those written in

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France are considerably better than those compiled on Gallipoli. While the reports vary in their value, certain weaknesses are noticeable in nearly all:—

(i.) Indefinite statements, such as "daylight," "a little further," "heavy" or "slight casualties," are frequent. While it may be difficult to use exact terms, approximate statements can generally be given. In using the latter, however, it should be stated that they are approximate.

(ii.) It is seldom that information regarding the enemy's action is given. It is most desirable that this should be done. The information required is, for example:—

- (a) State of trenches attacked, and entanglements in front of them; whether intact or completely or partially destroyed.
- (b) Degree of resistance put up.
- (c) Approximate casualties inflicted upon enemy.
- (d) Identifications obtained from his dead and from prisoners.
- (e) Action of enemy during and after attack.
- (f) Counter-attacks.

(iii.) After a fight the position retained when fighting ceased should be indicated by map reference.

(iv.) No matter how complete a report, it should invariably be supplemented by the following:—

- (a) Orders received and issued.
- (b) Messages received and dispatched.
- (c) Reports by subordinate commanders from which the unit report is compiled. These and the messages frequently give important details which are unobtainable elsewhere.
- (d) Maps and air photos.

4. The following remarks apply to the majority of diaries:—

(i.) The location of the unit is not always clearly stated. A map reference, together with the description of the map, should, if necessary, be given, not "Belgium," or "France," or "In the field." When a unit is in the line the boundaries of its frontage should be mentioned.

(ii.) The daily disposition of unit when in the line should be stated.

- (iii.) The units on each flank should invariably be given. When these are British units the correct title should be given, *e.g.*, not "Manchesters," but "1st Battalion Manchesters." In this connection units should state the flanking unit equivalent to themselves, *e.g.*, a battalion diary should mention the flanking battalions not brigades, the brigade diary should mention the flanking brigades not the divisions or corps. The same principle applies in the case of reliefs, the orders for which should be attached to the diary.
- (iv.) A note of the weather conditions prevailing should be made each day. This is necessary in order that an historian may be able to form an idea of the difficulties of the ground over which operations were carried out.
- (v.) The strength of the unit, casualties sustained, and reinforcements received should invariably be recorded. Unless this is done it will not be possible for an historian to make allowances for failure, or give greater credit for success in the case of operations by units reduced in numbers.
- (vi.) Copies of unit intelligence reports are conspicuous by their absence. It is most desirable that these should be attached as appendices to the diary.

- (vii.) When patrols are sent out, the composition of the party (*i.e.*, names of officers and number of other ranks) and the object should be stated and the original copy of the patrol report attached to the diary. In this connection it is pointed out that entries in the diary regarding patrols frequently mention collisions with the enemy, but do not state what action the patrol took nor its result.
- (viii.) In order that the history of operations may include accounts of individual acts of gallantry, illustrative of the spirit of the troops, it is necessary that diaries should contain a record of all those brought to notice. While this might be done by attaching copies of recommendations for honours and rewards, this course is open to the objection that it is undesirable to place on record the fact that an individual has been recommended for a decoration which higher authority may not award. On the other hand, if units wait until the rewards are announced, the record, if the details are still available, will be included in the diary at a much later date than that on which the action was performed, and accounts of incidents where recommendations have not been approved will be lost. In future, therefore, units should include in their diaries (it is suggested the most con-

venient form would be as an appendix) a record of all acts of gallantry immediately they are brought to notice. This should include all deeds, irrespective of whether they have formed the subject of a recommendation or not, though this fact should not be indicated. It is important that the map reference and time of each incident should be given if possible.

In order, however, that some entry may be made in the unit's records of the honours and rewards it has gained, the diary should, in addition, include the names of officers and other ranks who have been awarded decorations. These should be entered as soon as the awards are announced, but, in view of the accounts which will already have been included, no details of the action need be added.

(ix.) Frequently the diary contains references to congratulatory messages having been received. It is important that the *originals* of these should be attached to the original copy of the diary. Apart from the original being of far greater value from an historical point of view, the document if attached in this way is preserved for the unit and for Australia.

(x.) Full particulars of training undergone should be given. This may be conveniently

done by attaching copies of training syllabi, of orders, etc., for schemes, reports on training, etc. In connection with the orders for schemes some units make a note at the head "For training purposes only"; this is not without advantages. Notes for lectures are sometimes very full; in these cases it would be an advantage if copies were attached to the war diary.

(xi.) No diary has yet been found to contain details of the Quartermaster's work. This means the loss of much valuable and interesting material, and in future this information should be given. It is suggested the Q.M. should be asked to write a report on his work during the month for attachment to the diary as an appendix. These remarks apply also to the work of the Transport Officer.

(xii.) It is desirable that diaries should contain a record of the discipline of the battalion. It is suggested this might be done by giving a monthly return showing numbers of orderly-room and court-martial cases. Each diary should also contain at the end of the month the C.O.'s appreciation of the general condition of the unit. This should be based on strength, health, discipline, moral, state of clothing, equipment, and transport, etc.

(xiii.) Copies of official correspondence of special interest, in connection both with operations and administration, should be attached.

5. In the pamphlet regarding official historical records issued under A.I.F. Order No. 758, a few simple rules for guidance in making up a diary were given. Their observance facilitates the work of the War Records Section, and will tend to preserve the records. Many units still neglect them, and they are repeated hereunder with a few additional remarks:—

- (a) Each volume should cover the period of one calendar month. When there is nothing to record on a day, an entry to this effect should be made in order that it may be clear that no sheet is missing. This is particularly necessary when the days in question are the first or last of the month.
- (b) The appendices should be attached at the end of the diary and numbered from 1 onwards throughout the month. As far as possible the original copies of orders, reports, etc., should be attached. At present the tendency in many units is to look upon the last carbon copy as being sufficient for the diary, with the result that many appendices are already undecipherable, and a very big number will become so in the course of a few years. While

at present the diary must give way to the needs of operations, its importance after the war cannot be over-estimated, but the life of many diaries will not be long owing to the reason already stated. It is thought that the importance of attaching original copies to the diary in order that the record may be as permanent as possible, will be recognised, and that in future this will be done, especially as carbon copies will meet equally well the objects for which the documents are prepared, and which are only temporary.

- (c) The officer keeping the diary should initial it after each day's entry, and, at the end of the month, before the diary is despatched to the base, it should be signed by the Commanding Officer.
- (d) The office stamp of the unit should be impressed on the top left-hand corner of each sheet of the diary to enable sheets which may become detached, to be replaced in the diary of the unit to which they belong.

#### Maps and Air Photos.

6. The maps and air photos received up to the present are very valuable and necessary supplements to the other historical records, and officers

commanding units are asked to neglect no opportunity of adding to the collection of these being formed by the War Records Section. It is realised that the need to hand such material over to relieving units prevents all being sent in, but a considerable quantity must, it is thought, become available for disposal in this way.

#### Correspondence Files.

7. (i.) Up to the present the War Records Section has received a large number of valuable documents, which have helped considerably in completing the records already held. This material, in addition to showing how important this source of information is, emphasises the fact that each unit must be in a position to send in a certain amount, yet such material has, up to the present, been received from a comparatively small proportion—not more than one-fifth—of the units of the A.I.F. This, it is thought, is due to the following reasons :—

- (a) Destruction.
- (b) Retention by individuals.
- (c) Retention by units.

(ii.) With regard to (a) units are urged to exercise the greatest care in deciding upon destruction of records. What to a unit in the field may seem of no importance is often a link essential to the building up of a complete record of the A.I.F. It is much preferable that units should not destroy papers, but should send them to the War Records Section, which is able to estimate their worth from the point of view of the records of the A.I.F. as a whole.

(iii.) With regard to (b), it is believed that this practice is, fortunately, not so prevalent as it was in the early days of the war, when no arrangements existed for the careful preservation of Australian historical records, and many officers undertook themselves the task of preserving the records of their units.

Now, however, arrangements have been made for the work of collecting and preserving the historical records of the A.I.F., officers who possess any such records are invited to



transfer them to the Australian War Records Section. The chief value of these documents is historical. If retained by an individual, however, their power to benefit the history of the unit is extremely limited; and the history of the unit and of the A.I.F. is too vital a matter to be subordinated to the desire to possess souvenirs. On the other hand, if given to the Australian War Records Section, not only will they assist in completing the records of the unit, but will help to make the history of the A.I.F. that complete and detailed work which it is the desire of all ranks it should be.

- (iv.) With regard to (c), it is thought the reason for the retention of documents by units is the same as that which, in other cases, has caused individuals to retain them, *i.e.*, the desire to preserve the historical records of the unit for subsequent handing over to some recognised authority.

Now that the Australian War Records Section has been formed, it is desired that these

records should be forwarded to it as soon as possible. While held by a unit in the field the risk of loss or destruction is great. Further, it is necessary that the War Records Section should know as soon as possible what material is available in order that nothing may be left undone to complete the records, and also in order that arrangements may be made to put them in a convenient form for reference by the historian.

It is asked, therefore, that upon receipt of this memorandum units should make a complete survey of the records they now hold, and send all those no longer required to the Australian War Records Section, where they will be carefully preserved, and will be available for reference by the unit, or any paper which the unit may subsequently find it needs will be forwarded if so desired.

#### Suggestions.

8. Several valuable suggestions regarding the work of the Australian War Records Section have

been received from units in the field, and it is desired to take this opportunity of inviting Commanding Officers to send any suggestions regarding this work, which they, or members of their units, may have to make, to the Officer i/c, Australian War Records Section.

The collection of the historical records and of material for the Australian War Museums is a responsibility undertaken in the interests of the Australian nation, and especially of the A.I.F., and its success depends entirely upon the co-operation of all ranks.

T. GRIFFITHS,  
Colonel.

DISTRIBUTION :    Commdt., Admin. H.Q., A.I.F.  
                  Officer Commanding, 1 copy.  
                  Officer compiling War Diary, 1 copy.

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