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[1041]

C.C.S.

Dr. A. N. Smith

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France

1914 Jan - To 2 Accs

after explosion. Redgs taken
2,300 cases, deliv with in 19
hours - magnific operation.

July, Hosp. bombed at 10 p.m.
2 patients, 2 orderlies killed,
15 others wounded.

Hosp not built for sisters -
working hard all day, in day
and all night - damp and
miserable, sister working
at 5 a.m.

The Official War Historian of the Commonwealth Government (Dr. C. E. W. Bean), after his study of the collection of private war records preserved in the Australian War Memorial Library, wrote :-

"The private diaries in this collection furnish some of its most valuable historical records, but, like all private memoirs which were not compiled with any historical purpose, they should not be regarded as first-hand evidence except where it is certain that they are so. The diarist is almost always sincere in his desire to record accurately, but he is subject to no obligation or inducement to indicate whether he is recording his own observations or incidents told him by friends or heard at third or fourth hand at the mess-table. Thus, in some of the diaries in this collection, scenes described with vivid detail, and without any warning that they are told at second or third hand, have been found to be completely inaccurate in important details. A certain number also have been written up or revised long after the events, though doubtless usually from notes made at the time. In most cases the student must rely on his experience and on internal evidence to guide him in judging what is and what is not likely to be historically accurate."

Spare copies 60
98

Experiences during Messines Ridge Battle, and the 9 months dating from 4th January 1917, to October 4th 1917, in The 2nd Australian Casualty Clearing Station.

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Of course, we were used to Bombardment, that the noise which preceded Messines Ridge Battle was little noticed. For the bombardment had seemed perpetual for weeks and weeks. Shells had been bursting above us in the daytime, and with the noise of bombs a short distance away, and anti air craft guns, we had little to learn of noise.

I was sleeping in a tent at this time, and it was from here, I heard the noise of the mines blowing up, and felt the concussion of the earth which preceded the Messines Battle. We could not sleep after this wondering how the Australians and other troops were faring. Wondering if they had won the hill, or were being slaughtered, and knowing which ever way it happened, we were bound to have hundreds of wounded coming in shortly. About 7 a.m. we heard the Ridge had been taken with light casualties, and shortly after the first wounded started to arrive. I could not see where the light casualties came in, as all those strong healthy men came in dead, dying, unconscious and moaning. We had a large marquee erected near the entrance much like a circus tent in its size. These the wounded were received, examined by an M.O., who ordered their further disposal. After he had examined their condition, they were stripped of their bloodstained dusty khaki - parts of which had often been slit up or cut away to allow the doctors in the forward areas to dress their wounds and give them injections of Anti Tetanic Serum. Their various private belongings were collected into a Dorothy bag bearing their name and rank. The men were dressed in Red Cross Pyjamas and carried on stretchers to the dressing room and put on one of the ten tables, which were constantly kept going during the days which succeeded the battle.

Again they were seen by another Med.Off. who ordered their special dressing and often dressed them if time permitted, and sent them to different wards I may say the wards were many and varied.

Perhaps it was straight to the Operating Theatre - in case of haemorrhage or abdominal wounds. Many of the boys coming in with a leg blown off. It was dressed in the Aid Posts, a Tourniquet applied to stop bleeding, and sent hurriedly to the C.C.S. in charge of an A.M.C. man, for immediate operation. Sometimes they died on the way, and never reached the hospital alive. Then we had a post operative ward, a tre-operative ward, resuscitation, chest, abdominal, jaw, multiple wound, and lastly a moribund or dying ward.

Each patient was sent to a ward, sorted according to his wound and all necessary treatment and dressing done. We had no time to think of the hundreds of casualties. We only knew that work was waiting to be done everywhere, and men were suffering - waiting to be dressed, or to have an injection of morphia, strychnine or other stimulant, and that many of them had not had a drink or food for hours.

Everybody worked many hours at a stretch. We had a day and night staff, but how could anyone go off duty with dying and wounded men all waiting for their turn to be next, and you know that it would be for hours, before the night or day staff as it happened to be, could cope with the crowded wards. Everybody tried to have enough sleep to keep them going, without interfering with the way they did their work, realizing the best work could not be done without some sleep. But how could anyone sleep, with our big guns firing a short distance from us. Shells bursting overhead, anti air craft and machine guns going continually with the noise of the general bombardment and the screech of shells overhead on their way to Bailleul, or Neuve Eglise. Colonel received great praise, afterwards, for putting through 2,300 cases in 19 hours - the greater part of whom were operated on, and the foreign bodies removed. Everything must have been well planned. We had all we wanted and everything went very smoothly. All working very cheerfully together, from the Padre who served the patients with the tea, if we were busy, to the stretcher bearer who looked, judging by appearances as if he were just about fit to be carried out on a stretcher himself, instead of carrying others.

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Everybody worked many hours at a stretch. We had a day and night staff, but how could anyone go off duty with dying and wounded men all waiting for their turn to be next, and you know that it would be for hours, before the night or day staff as it happened to be, could cope with the crowded wards. Everybody tried to have enough sleep to keep them going, without interfering with the way they did their work, realizing the best work could not be done without some sleep. But how could anyone sleep, with our big guns firing a short distance from us. Shells bursting overhead, anti air craft and machine guns going continually with the noise of the general bombardment and the scream of shells overhead on their way to Baillieu, or Neuve Eglise. Colonel received great praise, afterwards, for putting through 2,300 cases in 19 hours - the greater part of whom were operated on, and the foreign bodies removed. Everything must have been well planned. We had all we wanted and everything went very smoothly. All working very cheerfully together, from the Padre who served the patients with the tea, if we were busy, to the stretcher bearer who looked, judging by appearance as if he were just about fit to be carried out on a stretcher himself, instead of carrying others.

Disposal of patients.

Many patients on admittance were sent to the pre Operative Ward, there to await their turn for the X Ray room and theatre. There was little time for preparation, only that which was necessary being done. Many of them were too badly wounded to know they were going to the theatre. Others less wounded were remarkably bright, and only seemed to want a cigarette, and for you to look after someone who was worse hit than themselves. Occasionally a doctor came in, and left list of names as they were to go to the theatre, or a padre came in to see someone who had not long to live. From the theatre, the very serious cases were sent to wards for further treatment, and to wait till they would have recovered from shock and haemorrhage, sufficiently to go down the line to the Base. The lesser wounded we put in a tent till the effects of the anesthetic had passed off, they were then put on the train which ran beside the C.C.S. When one hospital train was full, it pulled out and an empty hospital train pulled in, waiting to be filled. I worked in various parts of the hospital, sometimes in the Operating Room, Abdominal ward or Dressing Room, or perhaps the Resuscitation Ward assisting the doctors with the various methods of combating shock and haemorrhage, and trying to help the patients over this critical time, by giving injections, and special feeding, to prepare them for the operating theatre, their only hope.

Often we were successful, sometimes our best efforts failed, sometimes it was hopeless from the beginning.

For some time I had charge of the Moribund or Dying Ward. It was a hopeless heartbreaking place, Rows of dying men, mostly Australians and New Zealanders, nearly all headcases and unconscious, semi unconscious or else raving in delirium, and pulling their bandages off. None likely to live more than a few hours, and pronounced hopeless by the doctors. Each on a mattress on a stretcher, mostly in their khaki. They were the only cases not undressed in the admitting tent. Every hour or so, someone dying and being taken out, only to be followed by someone else in an hour or so. All we could do was try and get them to take nourishment, give injections to deaden pain, undress them and make them comfortable. Many of them wore discs with their rank and unit on one side and their next-of-kin's address on the other, seemingly asking for some one to write to their people and tell them how and when they died.

German Prisoners (Wounded).

In a tent next to these were German prisoners, mostly wounded, and needing quick operative attention if they were to live. Our own men were attended to first, unless the Germans were very seriously wounded.

Some of them had been lying out some time, and gas gangrene had been developed very quickly, where otherwise the wound was not very serious. They were operated on as quickly as possible and sent ~~ix~~ down the line to make room for others. Very few could speak a word of English, but as I had an orderly who could speak German it did not matter much. Our own men were wonderfully brave about their wounds, seldom complaining, now and then a groan bursting from them which told how they were suffering. The Germans seldom complained, either, they were good patients. Only once, and officer complained to me in broken English, but it was not of his wound. It was to speak of the degradation of the officers being "put" as he expressed it "to lie with the common soldiers". The officers were afterwards screened off and their stretchers put on trestles. Shelling and Bombing of the Gas Clearing Station.

During all this time of severe work and for weeks after Messines the C.C.S. had been receiving shells, parts of shells or shrapnel. Sometimes directed at a balloon between us and the boshe. Sometimes the Germans were shelling the railway line and trucks hoping to find a 12in gun which was kept on a line very close to us, camouflaged as a truck, and was generally sent up the line at night, at other times it seemed to be just the shelling of back areas. The staff and patients had sometimes an anxious time. Numerous narrow escapes occurred, but no one was seriously wounded. For three days and nights after Messines the night staff worked hours, later than their usual hours and were kept awake by the noise, until they got so tired they would have slept through anything. Bombs were continually being dropped on different camps, and on the Bailleul-Nieppe road. No one bothered much about them. We all had the idea that we were safe, because we were a hospital.

However in July 1917 a taube dropped several bombs just outside a tent, killing two patients, two orderlies, and wounding 14 or 15 other men. This happened about 10 o'clock at night.

On the afternoon of this same day, the Germans had been shelling the balloon pretty frequently and pieces were falling in different parts of the camp. One large piece came down and buried itself in a tent between two patients, who were side by side on stretchers. It missed both and one of the patients was an elderly man, and was very much terrified, and practically suffered from shellshock all the afternoon.

This luck was further out however, as he was one of the patients killed by the bomb that night.

After this the sisters peace was at an end, a dugout was built for them. It did not matter where we were working, if a taube appeared we had to leave our tash and go to a dugout, and perhaps remain hours there. At the time I speak of, the taubes were kept out of the sky by our machine guns and anti air-craft guns during the day, but always came over us at night, generally on their way to bomb Hazebrouck and Bailleul. So we spent most of the day working, and spent most of the night in the dugout - not sleeping. It was underground, and pretty damp and miserable - until a new one was built above ground for us. We arose at 5 a.m. to dress the patients to leave by the hospital train at 8 a.m.

To give some idea of the uncertainty of life surrounding the C.C.S.

One evening a man was admitted, badly wounded by a shell which exploded in a motor transport waggon on the Bailleul Armentiers Road. Two friends in his unit hearing he was wounded, rode 14 miles to see him, on horseback, arriving at 10 p.m. at night just as lights were to be put out. I spoke to the two men, and told them they need not hurry away, as their friend was to go down on the hospital train, and they would not see him again. I left the two men with him and went to supper. I was not away $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour, when I returned to another ward. As I entered the stretcher Bearers were taking another man out of a red cross waggon, I went up to have a look at the patient, as I did so, he exclaimed "Why, we must be in the same hospital, this is the sister we were talking to". They were the two men I left talking to their friend. They had got their horses, rode a few hundred yards from the camp. A bomb fell between them, killing both horses and wounding pretty badly the two men - one having his foot blown off. They were so dazed they did not recognise that it was the same hospital,

they had just left, till they saw me. All three went down on the train the next morning.

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Australian War Memorial

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