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[1027]

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."



Left 3rd A.G. Hospital on 22/3/1918 with five other Australian sisters, met seven other Sisters at Station, thirteen in all including Matron, forming the 38th C.C.S. Train left Abbeyville for Amiens at 10.40 a.m. arrived at 1pm. had dinner 42nd British Stationary and left Amiens at 2.15 pm by ambulance for Mericourt, a distance of 30 miles. Arrived Mericourt about 4.30 pm. we were not expected, but were made very welcome by the staff; had a cup of tea, put up our beds and went on duty by 6 pm. I was put in the Dressing Station with another Sister and Medical Officer, the wounded just pouring in, Abd. Chest and almost every kind of wound, men walked in with. In a good number of cases the men collapsed and fainted as soon as they got inside. Every wound was dressed; the rush was so great that the Colonel gave us permission to mark up the cards as the men were dressed, except in cases where the Chest, Abd. or severe ~~haemorrhage~~ haemorrhage was involved, then the medical man sent as many as possible to the pre Op. Ward for operation, we had brandy which we gave freely to the men and hot drinks of tea, all that could walk went outside where they had good given to them.

After we had been there about thirtysix hours food gave out, splints were finished and we had very little dressings. In many cases of broken limbs and in some cases where the limbs were just hanging on by muscle, all we could do was to bandage as firmly as possible, given an injection of Morphia and turn the case into the paddock with a couple of blankets over the patient. The men were splendid, not one of them complained, their only trouble was to get away before the Germans took them prisoners; in many cases as soon they were dressed they started to walk hoping that some of the transport or an ambulance would pick them up. We ~~xxxx~~ had very little accommodation, six marquees and two huts in all, from seven hundred to one thousand stretcher cases in the paddock.

On the evening of the 23rd between 5 and 6, soldiers, guns and transport of every kind started to pass our C.C.S. retreating from the front lines, all the soldiers looked absolutely tired out, even the horses looked done; mingled with the ~~xxxxx~~ Army were Civilians, in many cases the very old folk and children in carts, all absolutely panic stricken flying for their lives, the firing and bombardment was terrific.

About 2 a.m. on the 24th Colonel said he could not take in any more wounded as we had over 1000 stretcher cases and very little dressings left and we could not get a train ~~in~~ or any transport to take away our wounded. We had no food and very little water and the enemy were on the railway and only then five miles away. It was terrible to see the distress of the patients, their one cry was would they get away before the Huns took them prisoners.

We were all terribly busy, which was really a very good thing, as we had no time to think, just doing our best, which seemed so very little.

On the morning of the 24th about 4.30 am. the Colonel told us all to get a small hand case and be in the Ambulance in a quarter of an hour's time to go to Abbeyville, that they hoped to get a train in shortly and get all the patients away, if not, they were going to stay with them.

We arrived in Abbeyville about midday, reported at the Nurses Home and then back at No. 3 about 1 pm. Left the Hospital again 25th 8 am. reported at Club and at Station 10 a.m. - waiting on Station for train till 12.45 m.d. arrived at Amiens 3 pm. reported at No. 42 British Stationary then had a good tea at the Buffet at Station. Left by ambulance about 6.30 for Corbie. Arrived there about 8 p.m. were told that we would have to fly next day, but hoped the Huns would be stopped, were overjoyed to find our baggage there, mine was quite all right, some of the girls had theirs looted, one little English Sister lost all her luggage.

We put our bed down and some of the girls went on duty. I went to bed and was called at 3 a.m. we were very busy, the wounded were coming in fast, some of the cases had a pad tied over their wounds with ties, putties, handkerchiefs. There was no Field Dressing Station in front of us, every man had to have an injection of A.T.S. and in many cases Morphia was injected also. One case, a severe abd. case was carried in by four of his pals a distance of ten miles, the case was hopeless, we packed him with hot water bags, inj. Morphia: he died shortly after being admitted.

The hospital this time was pitched near the ruins of some old mill, we had our dressing station in a large room appeared to be a barn, another two storey place we had for our Theatre and where we put our severe cases

We had seven bell tents for our use, but were told not to unpack anything but our beds as we might have to go at any time, our tents were pitched on a very pretty site - among gum trees on the bank of a canal; the officers' tents were pitched the other side of the canal.

At 5 p.m. on the 26th an Ambulance train came and took all our cases away and we were told to get ready to leave for Abbeville at very short notice; almost immediately two ambulances came along to take us away. We were told that we could take two pieces of luggage each. Luckily I had some uniforms, aprons and other clothing in one case and some collars, stockings, handkerchiefs and writing case in the other, but had to leave all my treasures, such as photos, snaps I've collected from all parts, books, boots, bed and bedding and all my summer uniform. Still we were very thankful to have got away with what we have as we were told by some wounded that just came in that the Germans were coming over the ridge just two miles behind us, and that all the bridges were to be blown up immediately. As we came through Corbie the village was deserted by all the civilians, only soldiers, guns and ammunition to be seen; all the bridges we crossed were ready to be blown up at any moment, one Tommy rushed to our car and gave us a little canary in a cage which Miss McCarthy claimed when we reached Abbeville.

We met quite a number of New Zealand boys on the outskirts of Corbie, it was lovely to see these big fellows helping the old women and their bundles along. They were all so cheery and assured is that the Germans would not get any further.

As we flew along towards Amiens we could see huge explosions and fires, ~~but~~ did not go through Amiens - just the outlying parts; seemed quite deserted. About 8.45 pm. we could see the aeroplanes over Amiens and the explosions in the air.

Reached Abbeyville about midnight, reported at the Club where we stayed the night; we were terribly dusty, ~~and~~ tired and all feeling rather miserable. Our matron, Miss Grieves, an Australian, was splendid all through it all she was here, there and everywhere, helping in every way and always so cheerful.

Our colonel and the Medical Officers were splendid, they never rested day or night, when they were not dressing or attending the wounded they were round the paddock giving drinks and tucking in the stretcher cases.

The orderlies were splendid, they never had any rest, day or night, the work they did was splendid, and were prepared for anything.

We had a surgical team of Canadians and two Canadians - they were shelled out of their own station.

At Mericourt our staff consisted of twelve medical officers, sixteen sister, matron and sixty odd men and N.C.O.'s. At Corbie twelve Medical Officers, Matron and twelve sisters and some staff of men and N.C.O.'s.

(Sgd) Ella M. Redman.



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